

STEADFAST LEADERSHIP

A dramatic photograph of a lighthouse on a rocky island. The lighthouse has a red lantern room and a white base with a red door. It is being battered by massive, crashing waves that are white with foam. The sky is dark and stormy. The overall mood is one of resilience and steadfastness.

LEAD LIKE YOUR MARRIAGE
DEPENDS ON IT. BECAUSE IT DOES.

BY MARIO GENEROSO

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Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior, without whom I would never have been able to complete these past three years of the Training Center. He has saved me from eternal damnation and has given me a heart to serve Him in all I do.

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In Christ,

Mario Generoso

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INTRODUCTION

Men, when you arrive home from work do you enter a “sanctuary” or a “battlefield”? For most men, they believe that when they arrive home from work they have entered their own personal place of comfort and relaxation. Unfortunately, to the dismay of many, this is not the case. Your home is a battlefield. You are the only soldier, and you are in command. The battles you face are ones that men often fail to see. I am referring to the hidden battles that exist beneath the surface in your marriage. Battles that are subtle, confusing and for most men, non-existent. But they are so powerful, they can cause destruction in a marriage before one even realizes they exist. They are the quiet assassins, and they must be addressed. You must learn to look for them, prepare for them and most importantly engage them! Your marriage does not run on autopilot.

I wrote this short book to help you learn to navigate some of the unknown difficulties in marriage. My hope is that you will learn to reject passivity and engage in the areas that are hardest to engage in.

The hidden battles that exist are, to name a few, fear, anxiety, anger, depression and discontentment. Before you can be ready to engage these battles you need a solid foundation for your marriage. You need to be a Steadfast Leader!

PART I

STEADFAST

CHAPTER 1

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. Genesis 2:24

“This is the greatest day ever!” exclaimed Ashlee, my six-year-old daughter, while we were out running some errands. It certainly does not seem to take much to excite a six-year-old. However, I do remember “the” greatest day ever. I remember the feeling. I’ve only experienced it once in my life. A feeling of excitement and anticipation that was almost too much to bear. If I had to try to describe it, I would say it was like all my childhood Christmas mornings packaged up and arriving on the same day. It was truly the happiest day of my life. This was the day that I got to marry the woman I love. I could not believe I was going to get to spend the rest of my life loving and being loved by this precious gift that the Lord had given to me. She is a gift that I did not deserve. I was completely overcome with emotion and one hundred percent blinded to the future.

As you read this, you may be remembering that day as well or you may be experiencing those same feelings of anticipation and excitement as your day approaches. One thing is for certain, marriage will continue to march on after your blissful wedding day. The wedding day is the celebration of God joining two people together to become one. The marriage ceremony is the beginning of worshipping the Lord together with your lives; it sets in motion God’s biblical plan for your marriage. Have you thought about what that looks like? Do you know what His plan for your marriage is? Do you know what to expect after you say, “I do”? Your wedding day is filled with excitement and exhilaration. Hidden behind your romanticized views of “happily ever after” exists a beautiful relationship joined together by God that is forever engaged in a war that fights against its very existence. This war has a battlefield—a war-torn landscape that many have traveled and many have perished on. Men have lost this battle because they had an unbiblical view of marriage. They lost because they failed to see the battle, they failed to engage, they failed to care, and they didn’t have the weapons necessary to fight.

I want you to see clearly what it takes to win this battle. I want to illustrate what the necessary weapons are to win this war. I want you to see the hidden enemies that creep into your homes and wage war on your marriage through a new lens. We need to begin by building the foundation of a biblical marriage. It is critically important that you have a biblical understanding of marriage because our culture's view of marriage is anything but biblical.

The Culture Battle

There is no question that today the institution of marriage is under vicious attack. It is being redefined by our politicians, ridiculed by the media, eliminated by television, and ignored by our schools. According to a U.S. News report, marriage is at its lowest level in one hundred and eighteen years, at a rate of 6.5 per 1000.¹ In 2010, one survey found that almost half of Americans aged between 18 and 29 believed that marriage was already becoming obsolete.² A quick Google search of marriage will show some astounding statistics, but should we be surprised? Look at what the Bible has to say regarding the days we are living in.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power; avoid such people as these. For among them are those who slip into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, worthless in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their foolishness will be obvious to all, just as was that also of Jannes and Jambres.
(2 Timothy 3:1-9)

¹ Gaby Galvin, "U.S. Marriage Rate Hits Historic Low," U.S. News, April 19, 2020, accessed November 25, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2020-04-29/us-marriage-rate-drops-to-record-low>

² Arthur Zuckerman, "56 Marriage Statistics: 2019/2020 Global Data, Analysis & Trends," Compare Camp, May 31, 2020, accessed November 25, 2020, <https://comparecamp.com/marriage-statistics/>

It should be no surprise that God's design for marriage is under attack, considering the times that we are living in.

Why even bother to point out what is obvious to the casual observer? Because even though Christian men know that entering into a godly marriage is at odds with the popular culture, they still continue to act with passivity regarding their marriage. You need to engage in this battle! Marriage does not run on autopilot! Repeatedly throughout the New Testament, we are called to put off and to put on. You are called to put off "being a lover of self" and put on "loving your wife as Christ loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25). For some men, the only reason they go to church on Sunday is that their wives urge them to. If this is you, turn this pattern upside down and lead your family to church. The next time there is a big event on Sunday, such as family in town and everyone wants to go to Disneyland instead of church, lead courageously and show your family you are not willing to compromise church. You are called to put off "being a lover of money" and put on "giving generously to all" (1 Timothy 6:18-19). For some men, their primary focus is making enough money. They will sacrifice anything in order to work an overtime day for that extra dollar. If this is you, let it go and trust the Lord to meet your needs. You are called to put off "being boastful, arrogant, slanderers, gossips" and to put on "letting no unwholesome word come out of your mouth" (Ephesians 4:29). For some men this pattern of speech has become so common they do not even recognize it. Your speech is contagious. If you speak this way at work, you will speak this way at home. Your words will change the temperature of your household. It will happen so subtly, you will not even realize it. Cut this out before it is too late. You are called to put off "having no self-control" and put on "disciplining your bodies" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Do you love pleasure more than you love your wife? You need to engage this battle by going on the offense and becoming a steadfast leader who is actively pursuing a biblical marriage.

A Biblical Marriage

I have to admit when I got married, I did not think about what a biblical marriage was, nor did I even think it was important. I thought that, as long as my wife and I both loved the Lord, our marriage would be great. We did go to marriage counseling and briefly went through a book called *Covenant Marriage*. However, I was so excited and focused on the immediate future, the wedding, and the honeymoon, that I did not pay much attention to the book. My state of mind was, “I got this.”

It is an unfortunate reality that the problem of unbiblical marriage exists in every church in America. Nearly 65-70% of biblical counseling revolves around unhealthy and unbiblical marriages. What is God’s design for marriage? We can start by setting a foundation based on Romans 12:9, “*Love must be free of hypocrisy, detest what is evil; cling to what is good.*” Therefore, we must know that if we are violating God’s purpose in marriage, we need to run from that. We need to “detest what is evil and cling to what is good.”

It is not by chance that the creation of marriage and the existence of family has been at the core of our civilization from the beginning of time. God designed it this way. Marriage is uniquely created by God because within it exists unity, sacrifice, and intimacy all woven together to glorify God. Genesis 2:24 says, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*” In this verse, God established the pattern for marriage for all mankind to follow. God brought Adam and Eve together; it was His idea. Marriage is God’s sacred plan for humanity designed to display His glory.

My job in the fire department lends me a unique perspective. The place where firemen spend the most amount of time is the firehouse kitchen table. Volumes of wisdom, both good and bad, are dispensed freely there. Since an average of 6 to 18 guys work each shift, there is always a steady flow of complaining and advice given at all hours of the day. When it comes to marriage, there is no shortage of “wisdom” available. I have found over the years that the dominant view of marriage in the firehouse is that “marriage is bondage.” Guys are quick to joke and refer to their wives in a negative way. They say things such as, “Before marriage a man ‘yearns’ for the woman he loves; after marriage the y is silent.” Or you may hear, “A happy marriage is a matter of giving

and taking, the husband gives, and the wife takes.” I’m sure the firehouse is not the only workplace where an unhealthy view of marriage is the banter of the day. When we are exposed to this type of thinking, we need to run from it. It is the subtle banter that can begin the erosion process in marriage. You need to hate what is evil and cling to what is good, (Romans 12:9.) God designed marriage for His glory.

The Marriage Unity

There is nothing more foreign at a firehouse kitchen table than talking about the unity of marriage—that a husband and wife become one in Christ. This is the foundation of a biblical marriage. Genesis 2:24 says a man shall leave his father and be joined to his wife. Paul drives this point home in Ephesians 5:31 where he says, *"For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh."* He not only solidifies the unity of marriage but also the permanence of marriage; therefore, to say that a husband is one with his wife is to say that a husband is indivisible from her. When two become one, they can no longer be separated. Your wives need to know that you believe this. This is not something that is said by the pastor at the altar and then long forgotten after your wedding day. It must be repeated throughout your marriage and lived out in your daily life. Be bold and proclaim this to those around you. Your wife must feel secure in the unity of your marriage. Your marriage exists as a public witness of the oneness that you and your wife have in Christ. It is a living example of the unity that Christ has with his bride, the church. Look at what Paul says next in Ephesians 5:32, *"This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church"*. You and your wife do not become “one” so that you can “feel good” or so that you can join in worldly banter about how miserable marriage is. You become one so that Christ is put on display.

The Marriage Sacrifice

I’ve heard it said many times about marriage, “Marriage is 50/50, I give fifty percent and she gives fifty percent.” Men, that’s not marriage, that’s business. Marriage is not a corporation. Even worse, many men believe they are not responsible to give their measly fifty percent when their wife doesn’t give hers. This is a recipe for disaster. This mentality quickly leads to marriages

spiraling out of control. The number one issue in marriage is sin, and the greatest sin in marriage is selfishness. James 4:1 says, *“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is the source not your pleasures that wage war in your body’s parts?”* The cause of the failure in your marriage may not be the other person, but your own sin. Paul gives us clear instructions on how we are to sacrifice in our marriages. Ephesians 5:25 says, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church.”* The command given in this verse, “love your wives” has enormous importance when we look closer. He says, “just as Christ also loved the church...” Men, Christ died for the church! It’s hard to make the argument for the secular world’s 50/50 formula when we are faced with the command for that type of sacrifice. A husband who loves his wife this way will give up everything he has for her, even his life. This is not optional or conditional. This is not something that you work your way up to as your marriage progresses. This must be you on day one of marriage. On my wedding day, all I could think about was the honeymoon. However, I should have been thinking about how I would immediately begin to sacrifice for my wife. I soon discovered why.

My wife became pregnant right after we were married. Things had been going well. My career in the Los Angeles City Fire Department was beginning. We purchased our first house, a three-bedroom townhome in the same city I grew up in, only a few miles from the beach. We were involved in a large church, making friends as a married couple, and enjoying our new life together. Suddenly, things changed. My wife’s emotions changed. Things were not okay. She had grown up in the small town of Walla Walla, Washington. Her rather large family was still there. Most importantly, her mom was there. There are certain chemical changes that occur in some women when they become pregnant. Those chemical hormones affect how they think, feel and respond to life. Suddenly, my wife began to express serious concern that we move to Washington. She felt that being close to parents, siblings, and grandparents would be much better for us as a new, growing family. While her concerns were valid, this news hit me like a ton of bricks, and I did not handle it well. I had been dreaming of becoming a firefighter for nearly ten years. Getting hired by the fire department was a monumental challenge; graduating from the fire academy and finishing a year of probation was even harder. The thought of forfeiting the financial, medical, and future retirement benefits was too much to bear. Nevertheless, her feelings were strong, and her reasons were valid. I remember having difficult conversations about my career and saying things

to her such as, “What do you want me to do, quit and work for Costco?” I started asking people for advice. I was told over and over, “You need to just tell her no.”

I weighed the advice I was given with Paul’s command in Ephesians 5. It didn’t seem to match up. Would I be loving my wife as Christ loved the church if I “just told her no”? I certainly wanted to. First Peter 3:1 says that *“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”* If I was to love my wife as Christ loved the church and to live with her in an understanding way, then I needed to go well beyond the shallow advice of “just tell her no”. Over time, I began to soften my approach. I chose to take her thoughts and feelings into serious consideration and actually look for ways that we could move to Washington. I sought out opportunities to support my family in Washington. I pursued the fire department there. I began to see for myself some valid reasons to move. This softened the “he wants/she wants” argument and brought us closer to common ground, enabling us to take our concerns to the Lord in prayer. We found ourselves seeking God in prayer without having ulterior motives or hidden agendas. We both began to look earnestly to the Lord for His wisdom and guidance in our circumstance. As a result, God helped us both. He softened my heart, and He helped us make the decision to stay in California.

Men, dying to yourself means putting aside your own likes, desires, opinions, preferences, and welfare to please your wife and meet her needs. I should have realized this on day one of marriage. Our trial would not have been so difficult had I been looking through the biblical lens of marriage sacrifice.

The Marriage Intimacy

Intimacy in marriage is often the intersection where expectations and reality collide head on. Because marriage is designed by God for His glory, intimacy in marriage is also designed by God for His glory. Unfortunately, on day one of marriage, many men do not have a correct biblical view of intimacy. Selfish desires can overwhelm a man and expectations are left out in the cold. Men, we need to reorient those God-given desires to the biblical standard for marriage. Hebrews 13:4 says, *“Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.”* The Greek word “undefiled” means the sin

of idolatry. Men have ruined God's gift of sexual intimacy by turning it into an idol. James 4:1-2 teaches us that even something that is good can become sinfully idolatrous when we desire it more than God.

Sexual idolatry occurs subtly and quickly in a marriage. Some examples of this are: "I must have a thrilling sexual relationship with my wife" or "I must have sex a certain number of times per week." I also heard men say things such as, "I must be able to have sex whenever I want," or "My wife must stay in shape and look a certain way." These are all forms of immoral sexual idolatry and have no business existing in a biblical marriage. If you do not think these thoughts pertain to you, but you find yourself getting angry when your expectations aren't being met, you are most likely guilty of sexual idolatry. These are not minor issues. They often result from the influence of TV, movies, and pornography. Sexual idolatry within a marriage, no matter how subtle, often leads to sexual sins outside the marriage.

The key to healthy intimacy in your marriage is to begin by pursuing a deeper, intimate relationship with God. Look at how 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 illustrates this perfectly,

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶and that no one violate the rights and take advantage of his brother or sister in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you previously and solemnly warned you. ⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in sanctification. ⁸Therefore, the one who rejects this is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you."

God has not called us to be impure but to be sanctified. Therefore, to avoid sexual sin, pursue sanctification in Christ. Men, you need to put off the idolatrous expectations of the world and put on a deeper, more intimate relationship with Christ. This means you are spending time in His word. You are continuing to renew your mind as Romans 12:1-2 says. You are also purposeful in your prayer life, setting time aside each day to come before the Lord in prayer. This is the correct biblical pattern for your life. Seeking the Lord will help you avoid looking to your spouse to meet the needs that only the Lord can meet. You are also seeking godly relationships with other men who will

keep you accountable. Choose these men wisely. You need men in your life who are bold enough to tell you the truth regardless of how it makes you feel.

The Battle

Marriage is both the sweetest and hardest battle that most men will ever face. In the chapters ahead, I want to illustrate what steadfast leadership looks like. You need to get dressed and get trained to be ready for this battle. When I was in the military, I went through over two years of training before I was sent to Kuwait, at the border of Iraq. I needed training in everything from how to wear my uniform to how to fight the enemy. There were countless hours of briefings. The U.S. government did not send us overseas hoping that we would find a way to respond to whatever happens. No, we were prepared for specific circumstances, given the right gear for our environment, and trained with unique weapons. In the same way, men, you cannot march into marriage hoping to be ready for whatever happens. You need to be prepared. You must become a steadfast leader.

It is marital unity, sacrifice, and intimacy that get attacked in marriage. As we look deeper, beyond the surface of these three critical elements of marriage, we will see the hidden battles that men face. These hidden enemies are not external, but internal. They often go unchecked and are given the freedom to wage war in married households. In order to be a steadfast leader, you not only need to be engaged in the obvious external battles, but you must put to death passivity and engage the difficult, hidden, internal battles.

CHAPTER 2

STEADFAST TO VICTORY

*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.
Proverbs 4:23*

Victory may seem like an extreme word when discussing marriage. For most men, the only battle they know regarding their marriage is the one they fight to get the girl. Therefore, from their standpoint, they have already won the victory. Unfortunately, the battle you face before you are married is nothing like the battle faced after. The difference is the battle before is selfish and the battle after is selfless. We will discuss this more in Chapter 3 regarding sacrificial leadership. Men, to win the battle after you are married, you need to become a steadfast leader. Steadfast leadership is necessary for victory. Steadfast means “to be firmly fixed.” A leader cannot be double-minded, wavering from one decision to the next. James 1:8 describes this type of man as “unstable in all his ways.” The opposite of one who is double-minded is one who is steadfast. This is the type of required leadership that achieves success in the hidden battles of marriages. If your definition of leadership is inaccurate, then you may not be a steadfast leader.

The greatest honor bestowed upon any man is to be blessed with the title “husband.” This unique title comes from God alone (Genesis 2:24). God designed the union of the husband and wife according to His will for His glory. This is a perfect picture of Christ’s relationship to His bride, the church. In His divine arrangement, He also created roles and responsibilities. The cornerstone of those roles is for the husband to be a leader. Leadership is not optional in marriage. A husband does not get to choose when and where he wants to lead. The husband is the leader of his home. God has appointed him to be the head of his household. This appointment is for life and does not come with vacation days.

*“For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church,
He Himself being the Savior of the body.” Ephesians 5:23*

“Leadership” brings to mind images that are both good and bad. We are inundated with countless examples of unhealthy leaders in the home. Therefore, it is not sufficient to say a husband must be a leader. We have to expound on that and define biblical leadership in the home. It is critical that we get this right. God designed it this way so that your marriage would be an example to the watching world of the love between Christ and the church. Those who are watching will see that a godly husband leads both in his personal life and public life.

PERSONAL LIFE

Before a soldier can set foot on the battlefield, he must take care of his personal and home responsibilities. A soldier is no good if he is distracted by personal affairs. In the same way, before you lead in public you must take care of your personal and home responsibilities.

Personal responsibilities are those private duties that are done by you alone—reading God’s word and prayer. Both of these disciplines can be done in the presence of others, but there is also a conviction and duty to spend time alone in these two areas. In both areas, nearly every Christian man says he should do better. They are often the first to get set aside when life gets busy or complicated. As a firefighter, my primary responsibility is to drive the fire engine. My rank is Engineer; therefore, I am responsible for everything concerning the fire engine at my station. This requires me to learn a lot about the apparatus I drive. One particular feature is the “load manager.” This is a system built into the wiring of the fire engine designed to recognize when the voltage is low. When this happens, the system starts shutting things off systematically in an effort to conserve power. For example, the first item to get shut off is the air conditioner. Men, you also have an internal load manager. You need to be sure that the first thing that is shut off when life gets complicated is NOT reading God’s word and prayer. Too often men have their internal “load manager” set upside down. When your life becomes complicated, your time in the Word and prayer should increase all the more...not get shut off.

Your private devotional time, prayer and reading the word, has a significant impact on your spiritual growth. When you pray, you are submitting yourself to God’s will. You are aligning your desires with His purpose for your life. Prayer is much more than just asking God for the things you want and need. You must be disciplined to purposely spend time with God in prayer.

In addition to prayer, we need to spend time feeding on God's word. This means that we are doing more than just reading it. We are hungry for it, Peter describes it like this in 1 Peter 2:1-3, "*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,² and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*" We need to discipline and train ourselves to long for God's word so that we will grow in maturity in Christ. Do you want to know God's will for your life? Read His word. Everything God wants to say to you is written in His word. You must be disciplined to spend time in the Word every day.

In addition to prayer and spending time in God's word, you must be able to manage your household well. There are "Christian" husbands who lead their homes like a dictatorship. They confidently quote Ephesians 5:22-23 to justify their behavior. "*Wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife.*" They have caused their wives to enter into a state of mindless obedience. Since your marriage is a living example of the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, there is no room to say this type of leadership is biblically accurate in a marriage. Christ does not require mindless obedience from us. God *is* sovereign in our salvation, yet we are responsible, not mindless.

A good husband will recognize that his wife is to be treasured, not controlled. Her intellect should be desired, and he should draw upon it at every opportunity. There is tremendous joy in a marriage when a wife freely commits to following her husband. Likewise, there is a true oneness in marriage when a husband lovingly leads with understanding rather than a heavy hand.

The dictator example may be a bit extreme. You may be feeling as though this particular aspect of leadership is unnecessary to define here. Maybe you are confident that it does not apply to you. Before you are too quick to move on, let me highlight another example of a marriage that lacks freedom. Husbands can easily fall into the subtle trap of playing the role of the Holy Spirit for their wives. I have made this mistake many times myself. Let me give an example.

My wife and I were fairly new to our church at the time. I thought that a particular Bible study was absolutely *the* thing my wife needed during this new season. Therefore, in the days leading up to the Bible study, I made several leading comments. I said things such as, "Are you sure you want to do that (event) on Wednesday night? You know you have a Bible study first thing

Thursday morning.” On the surface, it appears that I’m a caring husband. It sounds as though I’m just trying to help my wife accomplish her goals. At least, that’s what I hear when I’m speaking. What she hears is completely different. She hears, “You had better get to that Bible study or I will be really disappointed.” She may have changed her mind, or she may just want to try out the Bible study, but now she is trapped and feels as though she has no opportunity to make her own decisions.

It was not a biblical command for her to be at that particular Bible study, but I had created an environment that felt that way. It is the Holy Spirit’s role to convict our wives, not ours. John 16:8 says, “*And He, when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment.*” She is now not only trapped into doing something that she may not want to do, but will also feel an overwhelming sense of guilt for not accomplishing “my goal” for her.

Let me be quick to say, I am not advocating a passive type of leadership where a husband never engages in his wife’s activities. For example, if the scenario were different and my wife was not going to church, spending time in the word, or praying, then as a spiritual leader, I would engage and encourage her to do those things. Men need to refrain from trying to control their wives because they are given the role of husband, not a father, and definitely not the Holy Spirit. Husbands have the responsibility to deal with sin in the home. This is the expectation of him as his wife’s brother in Christ. Look at what John MacArthur says on this very subject in *The Family*, “If a man really loves his wife, he seeks that which keeps her feet clean from the dust of this world, doing everything within his power to maintain her holiness, her virtue, and her purity. Husbands have the responsibility in the home to provide for their wives every purifying influence that will make them holy.”³ Husbands, study your wives, learn how to provide for them by being a purifying influence, instead of forcing them to do things as a dictator would.

PUBLIC LIFE

The steadfast leader must publicly worship Christ alone and be a good steward. The most important commitment the Christian husband has is to worship God. When he begins to worship other things in place of God, he sets his family on course for destruction. His checkbook and

³ John MacArthur, *The Family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 65-6

calendar are great indications of what he worships. Time is precious; you will never get back what you spend. How you spend your time illuminates what you worship. I would go even further to say that what you think about defines your worship. Your heart is always worshipping something. Proverbs 23:7 *“For as he thinks in his heart so is he.”* Men, we are talking about the idols of the heart. An idol is anything that we regularly make equal or more important than God. There are many common idols of the heart that men worship in place of God, some of which are security, material things, comfort, health, affirmation, and ambition.

A common trap that men fall into is the “temporary idol” mindset. This type of thinking convinces a man that for a season he must be completely focused on one of the above idols. He tells himself the lie that as soon as he gets through this, or as soon as he obtains what he is going after, then he will reorient his heart and mind back toward God full time. Men, you cannot take time off of worshipping Christ. No matter how critically important you believe your idol is, your primary responsibility as a steadfast leader is to worship Christ. James 1:7-8 calls this type of man double-minded and unstable, *“For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”*

One common example of this occurs in the workplace. When a man is studying or preparing for a promotion, he may be compelled to feel he must focus all his attention on the task at hand. This fear-based idol has no room in the life of a steadfast leader. In 2008-2009 this was me. I was studying for a promotion at work. The process required long hours of intense studying. The library of information that I needed to go through was massive and often felt overwhelming. I made a commitment early on that I would start each day in God’s Word for at least 30 minutes before engaging the study material. I believe that tremendously helped me through the promotional process.

Another idol that is quick to take a man away from worshipping the Lord temporarily is the pursuit of material things. Men, if you are justifying your next purchase by explaining that it is necessary for your family, but you have to sacrifice your worship of the Lord for it, then it is an idol that must be removed. Examples of these types of purchases might be a bigger house (every child *needs* their own room), a pool (for exercise and outdoor time), a new “safer” car. These are the type of purchases, when coupled with sacrificing your worship of the Lord, that lead a family

to ruin. When men fall into this trap, they begin to believe the lie that these things are no longer a desire, but a need. Instead of recognizing their hard work as foolish, it is now recognized as admirable. This foolish type of effort has its roots in the sin of not trusting God. You are saying, “Lord, I know you have provided a three-bedroom house for my family, but we need a five-bedroom house,” or “My kids are not safe in this car, we need a new one.”

A steadfast leader trusts that God will meet his needs. He rests confidently on God’s word. Matthew 6:25-27 says, “*For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing?*”²⁶ *Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more important than they?*”²⁷ *And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life’s span?”* Do not give in to the temptation to manage your family’s needs apart from trusting the Lord. Do not give in to the lie that says, “I need to handle this my way.” Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*” God’s word says to acknowledge Him in *all* your ways. This verse does not give the steadfast leader room to do things in his own strength. You must trust the Lord with every area of your life in order to be a steadfast leader.

The steadfast leader must exercise stewardship. For most men, when they hear *stewardship*, they instinctively think about money, finances, and giving. The steadfast leader has a greater understanding of stewardship. If men do not learn to become faithful stewards, they will not be able to fulfill their responsibilities. The word “steward” by definition means to be concerned with someone else’s interests. Unfortunately, today men think of stewardship as being concerned with what belongs to them. This type of thinking sends men down the wrong path. All that you have does not actually belong to you. When you think your gifts and treasures belong to you, then you think you can do with them as you please. Psalm 24:1 says otherwise, “*The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.*” God not only owns all things, but He is also in control of all things. Colossians 1:16-17 says, “*For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible, and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*” The things the Lord has given us are primarily for His glory. 1

Corinthians 10:31 says, *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God.”*

The two gifts that give us the most concern regarding stewardship are time and money. A steadfast leader manages both time and money with conviction. These two precious gifts must be viewed through the lens of eternity.

Regarding time, we must remember that our days are numbered by God. Hebrews 9:27 says, *“And just as it is destined for people to die once, and after this comes judgment.”* Psalm 139:16 says, *“Your eyes have seen my formless substance; And in Your book were written all the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.”* It is God’s desire that we use the days given to us to spend time with Him in prayer and in His word. God commands us to make the most use of our time in Ephesians 5:15-16, *“So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”* Time is the one resource that you can never replace, you can never get back. Choose carefully how you spend it. It is a grave error to view your time as limitless. Keep the eternal perspective when choosing how to spend it and discipline yourself to use it for God’s glory. One area you can work on would be to not procrastinate. It is often said that if you want something done, ask a busy person to do it. A busy person will always find time to get things done.

On the other hand, when someone has tons of time available, it is common that they keep just putting things off always thinking they have plenty of time. I found this to be true one day at work. They moved my Engine Company to a very slow fire station for the day. I thought this would be a great opportunity to get a lot of reading done and finish some papers. After twelve hours, I found I actually accomplished nothing. This was a stark contrast to my normal routine where I am fighting for every minute to accomplish tasks. Men, if you are a husband and a father, then you *are* a “busy person,” you have plenty to do, much to pray for, and no time to procrastinate. Your leadership depends on it.

Regarding money, it is not yours. The foundational principle with money is to trust God for it and with it (Matthew 6:25-30). Your desire should be to work hard so that the money given to you is for you to give to others. Proverbs 3:9 says, *“Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce.”* You should save for the future, not out of fear, but out of diligence.

Proverbs 6:6-8 says, “*Go to the ant, you lazy one, observe its ways and be wise,⁷ which, having no chief, officer, or ruler,⁸ prepares its food in the summer and gathers its provision in the harvest.*” You should not foolishly enter into debt which you cannot pay off (Proverbs 22:6). You should carefully consider every purchase and financial decision to be sure you are honoring God with your finances. Unfortunately, while working as a firefighter, I have had the grim honor of telling a loved one their family member has passed. With that, I have seen a wide range of reactions and emotions. On one particular night, a husband had lost his wife. His reaction was heartbreaking, he kept screaming, “ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD...” They were very wealthy and had lived a lavish lifestyle. It was painfully clear that a lifetime of chasing money rather than following Christ culminated in despair.

You need to be faithful with what the Lord has entrusted you. This is the mark of a steadfast leader. You must evaluate each and every day whether you are seeking to use what God has given you for His kingdom or for your pleasures.

A steadfast leader is well balanced between his personal and public responsibilities. Both are necessary to lead well. Your private time in the word and prayer keeps your heart and mind oriented eternally. Colossians 3:2 says, “*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*” Your public worship of Christ and stewardship over your time and money should display the work that Christ has done in you. Therefore, you can walk in a manner worthy to be imitated. 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, “*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*” Lastly, your responsibility in your home brings your leadership to full circle. 1 Timothy 3:4 must be the goal of every Christian man, “*He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity.*” All three components are dependent on each other to present a man complete in Christ. If a man is a good husband but never spends time in the Word...he is not a steadfast leader. If a man spends much time in the Word but rules over his wife like a dictator, then he has failed. Lastly, if a man treats his wife well, but worships his possessions over the Lord, he is headed for failure.

CHAPTER 3

SACRIFICE FOR VICTORY

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Romans 12:1

On September 29, 2006, Navy SEAL Michael Monsoor was engaged in a firefight in Ramadi, Iraq. There were four insurgents; he killed one and injured another. Anticipating further attacks, Michael Monsoor, three SEAL snipers, and three Iraqi Army soldiers climbed up to a rooftop to get a better position. Iraqi civilians were aiding the enemy by blocking off the streets. They even had a mosque nearby broadcast a message calling for people to fight against the Americans and the Iraqi soldiers. Monsoor's job was to protect other SEALs, two of whom were 15 feet away from him. His position made him the only SEAL on the rooftop with quick access to an escape route.

A grenade was thrown onto the rooftop by an insurgent on the street below. The grenade hit Monsoor in the chest and fell onto the floor. Immediately, Monsoor yelled "Grenade!" and jumped on the grenade smothering it with his body. The grenade exploded seconds later and Monsoor's body absorbed most of the force of the blast. Monsoor was severely wounded and although evacuated immediately, he died 30 minutes later. The other SEALs who were with him at the time were injured by the explosion but survived.

Michael Monsoor did not have to jump on that grenade. He had an escape route and could easily have saved himself. John 15:13 says, "*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*" Ephesians 5:25 says, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the*



church and gave Himself up for her." Both of these verses are referring to the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross. Christians are called to imitate Christ's love for the church by sacrificing for

one another. Husbands are commanded to sacrificially love their wives in the same way that Christ sacrificially loved the church.

According to Meriam-Webster, there are two definitions of sacrifice. One says sacrifice means “to suffer the loss of, give up, renounce, injure, or destroy especially for an ideal, belief, or end.” This essentially means to give up something to get something. It is likened to the image of sacrificing something on an altar to appease God. But there is another definition of sacrifice, which is simply to give something up and to gain nothing.

It is critically important that you understand that marital sacrifice has no business mixing with the first definition. Sacrifice in your marriage means to give up something with zero regard for any possible reward. This is what Monsoor did; he gave up his life, freely and unconditionally. Monsoor loved his guys. He demonstrated that by dying for them. If you love your wife with that same type of sacrificial love, you will be willing to give up everything for her. Most men would agree that they would be willing to die for their wives, as the possibility seems ridiculous and most unlikely. But will you make the more difficult, more common, everyday sacrifices for her? Will, you set aside your desires, opinions, time, hobbies, preferences, and well-being to meet your wife’s needs? It is easy to answer this question before you are married since there is a great reward looming on the horizon. You are pursuing your wife; therefore, the reward is you get her. But, after you are married, years down the road, will you still sacrifice for her?

Sacrificial love in marriage makes up the core of the marriage unity. The marriage sacrifice can simply be summed up as total commitment and unconditional sacrifice. In other words, you need to be fully committed to loving your wife and resolved to unconditionally sacrifice for your wife.

Total Commitment

My wife and I were married in 2003. I must admit I was not the spiritual leader that God had called me to be early on in our marriage. In fact, I was terrible. I was not reading the word or encouraging my wife in the Word. But there was one thing I was steadfastly consistent at, and that was prayer. I prayed nearly every day that God would continue to strengthen and grow my love for my wife. I was NOT struggling in this area. I loved my wife with all my heart, unconditionally,

but I knew that marriages crumble and people grow apart. I had a healthy fear of that. I can honestly say, over all these years that I never once ever wavered in my love for my wife. In fact, my love for her has continued to grow exponentially. I love my wife more today than when we were first married.

This is not the norm in our culture. The meaning of love has been cheapened. Ungodly examples of marriage exist all around us. One woman in England was married 23 times, making it into the Guinness Book of World Records. Celebrities seem to enjoy leading this charge as several have had multiple spouses. Zsa Zsa Gabor and Jennifer O’Neil both boast they have had nine husbands. In 2020, Larry King divorced his 7th wife! This cheap type of love is not something new. In 2 Samuel 13, the story of Ammon raping his sister Tamar gives us a graphic illustration of how sin corrupts and cheapens love. Ammon professed that he loved his sister Tamar, but his sinful heart cheapened that love and led to him raping her and then hating her.

Jesus presents us with a different view. Christlike love is a commitment to the good of the other person regardless if they deserve it or not. Romans 2:4 says, *“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”* Christ’s example shows us that He loved us even though we do not deserve it and that love leads us into repentance. We must model that same love for our wives. Be resolved to reflect Jesus’ love for us. This type of love is detailed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, *“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”* Think about it this way: According to Philippians 3:9 God, for the sake of Christ, looks at you as if you are perfect; you, therefore, treat your wife, for the sake of Christ, as if she is perfect.

It is your responsibility to initiate Christlike love for your wife. 1 John 4:19 says, *“We love, because He first loved us.”* This is our example, to initiate love so that our wives may respond. It is critical throughout your marriage that you live this out. A practical way to do this is to be committed to studying your wife. Learn what brings her joy. I have learned over the years that just by simply taking care of things around the house such as cleaning, feeding the kids, or making

dinner, my wife is greatly blessed and feels loved by me. You must be fully committed to loving your wife.

Unconditional Sacrifice

Sacrificial love must be unconditional. We have to learn to sacrifice our own interests to meet her needs. In the same way that Jesus demonstrated His sacrificial love for us on the cross, we are to be imitators of Christ in our marriage. We have to sacrifice our rights and interests for her good. The attitude of your heart should be to always do more than your expected share. When you exhibit this type of sacrificial love for your wife God uses that to help her respond with much greater love and respect towards you.

The Bible paints a clear picture of what sacrificial love looks like. In order for us to be resolved to sacrifice unconditionally, we must be clothed in humility and eliminate our pride. Additionally, there is one more component that must be addressed, and that is fear. Fear will cause a man to elevate his own needs at the expense of his wife's, thus dissolving any resolve to sacrifice for her.

It does not take long for us to come across a terrible example in the Bible of a husband not sacrificing for his wife. Abraham and Sarai in Genesis 12 illustrate this for us. God told Abraham to take his wife and depart Haran to go to the land which the Lord will show him. During the journey, Abraham had to go down to Egypt due to the famine in the land. Crossing through this foreign area caused Abraham to fear. The presence of fear will debilitate even the strongest leaders. His fear caused him to doubt, which led him to drift from the security of trusting in God to the insecurity of trusting in man. He formulated a plan and the further he drifted from trusting God, the more he justified his plan in his mind. He committed an unthinkable crime against his wife. Instead of sacrificing for her, she became the sacrifice for him. Furthermore, he lied to both her and the Egyptians.

It is unimaginable to think that any of us would ever put our wives in a position like that. Most men do not realize that they sacrifice their wives every day. Every time they look lustfully at another woman, watch something inappropriate, joke with the guys at the workplace about their

marriages, or grumble inside about something she has asked them to do, they are bringing sin into their marriage and compromising the marital unity that God has created. These decisions will slowly dissolve their marriages.

It was fear that caused Abraham to sacrifice his wife for his own safety; it is fear that causes men to do the same. When you are traveling with your co-workers and someone points out a pretty girl in graphic detail, do you join the chorus? Your fear of not being accepted prompts you to do so. You have got to resolve to be set apart from this regardless of the outcome. I will challenge you to take moments like these to do more than passively be quiet, but rather speak about the love you have for your wife. You can change the temperature in the room. You may not be successful, but you will have been honorable.

There is one more example from the Bible that I want to highlight. That is the Apostle Peter. We know that Peter was married because Matthew 8:14 mentions his mother-in-law. Historians also speculate that his wife was with him when he was martyred. Some writers even say that his wife was executed first and that he was encouraging her through the process.

In Peter's example, I want us to be so motivated to sacrifice for Christ in such a way that our wives are compelled to follow. Our role as a husband is to lead our wives in their sanctification. We have this image of presenting them back to the Lord better than when he brought them to us. 1 Peter 3:7 says to live with your wife in an understanding way, as with someone weaker. This is what it means to be the spiritual leader in the home.

We do not know the specific circumstances regarding Peter's marriage, but we do know what kind of life he lived, and if historians are correct, his wife was with him till the end. This means that from when he started following Christ in 30AD till his death in 70AD his wife was with him. Think about how hard this must have been for him in Acts 12 when Herod executed James and placed Peter in prison. I know that personally, it's a greater fear for me to leave my wife helpless than for me to suffer persecution, but to truly sacrifice for your wife means to put the gospel first. If you contrast that type of sacrificial love with the opposite, you are left with a man that seeks to save himself before serving the Lord. What kind of man is that for a woman to follow? I want to glorify God with my life more than I want to breathe, and I want my wife to follow me as I follow Christ. This is the ultimate sacrificial love for our wives.

Peter's life doesn't get easier. From 55AD till 68AD, when he was martyred, he and his wife lived through the horrific persecution by Nero. We cannot comprehend the magnitude of what living during that time must have been like. He would have been faced with the possibility of torture each and every day. That alone would be hard enough, but to think that your precious wife is also facing the same fate would be agonizing. Yet, regardless of his own life and feelings, he continued to serve Christ.

We have opportunities to model sacrifice for our wives each and every day. I would implore you to pursue Christ in every opportunity. Maybe this means being bold at work and speaking up for the gospel. Do you fear repercussions that may cost your livelihood? Would it be better to stand for Christ and lead your wife into poverty or reject Christ and provide a lavish life for your wife with all the comforts this world provides? Being the spiritual leader doesn't just mean saying the right things. You have to do them as well. A steadfast leader makes the sacrifice!

PART II

THE BATTLES

CHAPTER 4

THE FEAR BATTLE

*“For my father and mother have forsaken me, But the Lord will take me up.”
Psalm 27:10*

Mark and Denise are Christians who have been married for 15 years. They live in the suburbs and have fairly routine lives. They have occasional fights like many other married couples, but sometimes their fights get extremely heated. This led them to seek out counseling. Most of their fights were about the children or in-laws, but there was one particular issue that really set Denise off. Mark refused to stop eating junk food. He enjoyed fast food and a lot of it. On one particular occasion, Denise found the remnants of a local fast-food establishment in the garbage. She became very upset, which led to a loud argument. When they came in for counseling their counselor asked Denise why she was so bothered by Mark’s eating. She responded that it is bad for his health.

“And why is that an issue?” the counselor asked.

“Because I don’t want him to have a heart attack!” she responded.

The counselor further probed, “And why would that be an issue?”

“Because we won’t be able to eat and there will be no one to pay the bills!” she exclaimed.

“And why would that be a problem?” The counselor continued to ask.

“Because I’ll starve, we will become homeless and I will be all alone!” And with that response Denise showed what the real issue was: she was terrified of becoming poor and alone. Naturally, she *was* afraid of something happening to her husband, but ultimately her greater fear was being alone. She began to describe her feelings of being poor, personal stories from her childhood, and all the pressure she would face in this world. At the heart of her distress was fear.

What Causes Fear

Fear is a universal emotion that affects every single human being on the planet. For as long as mankind has existed there have always been efforts to overcome fear. When someone admits their fear, it is common for them to be looked upon as weak. There are over 3000 related book titles to overcoming fear on Amazon alone. Fear is paralyzing and debilitating, and when fear enters a marriage it can silently and slowly detonate the marriage and the family unit. This is because when fear creeps in, it brings along its partner, anxiety. Fear and anxiety are silent assassins whose only purpose is to cripple and destroy. These two set up their battlefield in the mind and never take a break. And when they set up in the mind of your spouse, they have now entered your home and are impacting your family. This happens quickly, without warning, and with no mercy. There is no room for passivity on your part. If you approach passively and “hope” things get better you will be failing your mission and losing the battle.

Over the past twenty years as a paramedic in the fire department in Los Angeles, I have seen fear and anxiety present themselves in hundreds of different ways. Most commonly, the sudden anxiety attack leaves a person with a feeling of impending doom, helpless and unable to cope. They are unable to catch their breath and usually do not resolve their symptoms till after a considerable amount of time or medication. Family members are left confused, unable to fix the problem. It is scary and requires a lot of patience for those who are administering care.

The type of fear and anxiety that I am describing in marriage is not the type that results in a 911 call. This is more subtle. It is disguised. It presents itself in changes in behavior and attitude. This person may be unable to attend certain events or maybe they are sleeping more throughout the day to escape the pain of fear and worry. They may be irritable or act irrationally toward normal problems. There are often triggers that occur that stimulate an anxious response such as a difficult interaction with a friend or co-worker, someone not meeting an expectation as simple as calling on your birthday, or an unexpected bill arriving in the mail. Sometimes these types of anxieties take months to develop.

My wife and I had an experience such as this in 2011. It started in June when she began to feel more tired. She had wanted to do some vacation-type things early in the summer and I kept

saying we could not afford it. I did not realize it then, but my comments were provoking fear and anxiety. Over the course of the summer, she started feeling worse. There was one time where we actually thought she might be allergic to our dog. By the time August came, she was experiencing full-blown anxiety. It was crippling; she was not even able to leave the house. Fortunately, by God's grace, through prayer and counseling, she slowly came through it. The entire process consumed nearly a year of our lives.

Before we can address how to deal with fear and anxiety in our wives, we must first address our own fears and worries. Fear and anxiety is a sin. The Bible commands us to not be afraid nearly three hundred times. I must confess that I am not immune to fear and worry. There have been countless times in the fire department when responding to a large incident, maybe a large commercial fire or brush fire, that I've felt a tinge of worry well up within. My mind sometimes races to thoughts of, "Maybe I'll be hurt or killed." These types of fears usually go away quickly just by their very nature, but when it comes to my kid's safety, I can be an emotional, fearful wreck for hours. If they are out at an event and my daughter will have to drive on the freeway late at night, I have trouble sleeping until I know they are home safe. The comfort we must cling to is the fact that God says, "Do not worry." Because He says, "Do not worry" there is hope that we can change. We do have the ability to rely on Him and change.

In marriage, there are many common causes of anxiety. Money, health, comfort, and relational issues are a few of the most common. Ultimately, fear is a result of not trusting God. In the scenario that opened this chapter Denise's counselor began to discuss what it means to trust God through all these understandable worries. "If the worst-case scenario actually happened the way it is happening in your mind, is God big enough to love you, care for you, provide for you, and protect you? Would He be big enough for your children? Would you and your kids really be all alone?"

When it comes to dealing with fear and anxiety in our home we must dig deep to the root of the issue. This usually leads us to discover that the real issue is a lack of trust in the Lord. When we uncover this, we need to reorient our minds to look at our circumstances through the lens of Scripture. Psalm 27:10 says, "*For my father and mother have forsaken me, But the Lord will take me up.*" The psalmist here is pleading with us to put our trust in the Lord. God promises to provide

for all his children who rely on Him. Denise needed to face the contrast of trusting ultimately in God versus fearing the death of her husband. Jesus, when facing His death and anticipating the disciples would abandon Him, explains in John 16:32 that He would not be alone because the Father will be with him, *“Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”* The presence of God our Father must be more valuable to us than any earthly person, even our spouse. Paul faced a similar example in 2 Timothy 4:16-17, *“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.”* Paul was on trial for his life, he had no lawyer team, no one was fighting for him. But Paul was not alone, Christ was standing by his side. We must help our wives remember that they are never alone, Christ will always be by their side.

How Do We Help

“What do I do?” My cry for help in 2011 was late in the game. I was desperate, confused, and helpless. I called many people pleading for some type of advice that would magically fix everything. As our situation grew worse, I was unable to go to work. I found myself taking on the responsibility of homeschooling our kids and providing for all the household needs. I was indeed desperate and there were no signs of hope on the horizon. Since that difficult year, my wife and I have faced many smaller anxiety episodes. My response now is always the same. The following seven steps are some practical ways I now navigate through an impending anxiety attack. I think they may be helpful for you as well. The first three are “do not” and the next four are “do.”

1) Do not let your emotions dictate your response

You must recognize that just as your wife is emotional so are you. You are not immune to emotion. This is your opportunity to consciously set aside your personal desires, wants, and needs and sacrifice for your wife. In 2011, right about the time my wife’s anxiety started to get worse, I had just transferred to a new fire station. I was preparing to meet my new crew and get adjusted. I had to make the difficult decision to call work and explain that I couldn’t come in because my wife had anxiety. Furthermore, I had to tell them that I didn’t know when I would be able to show up. Naturally, this caused some personal emotions and fear. I was

worried that my new crew would think less of me. I was afraid I would not fit in. Nevertheless, my number one concern was for my wife. I had to set my personal emotions and needs aside. Remember Philippians 4:7, *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

There have been many times when my emotions led me to react quickly without thinking about my words first. This is oftentimes a disaster. When you are faced with anxiety in your home make sure the first thought that comes through your mind is not “how is this going to affect me?” If it is, then you better be slow to speak and quick to listen. James says it well, *“But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.”*

2) Do not avoid it

The easiest response for many husbands may be to just avoid it. They see something is wrong, but they figure it will just go away. Sometimes that may be the case, but this selfish type of approach is not consistent with God’s role for a husband in marriage. Your passivity says you do not care. We need to confront the fact, that as men, we are very good at engaging all the things that do not really matter and becoming habitually passive when it comes to engaging the things that do matter. This has been our nature since the Fall. Adam leads the way in Genesis 3:6, *“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”* Adam was with her, just standing there! Adam was passively standing there while his wife was being attacked by Satan. He could have courageously defended her and protected her, but he didn’t. We must courageously engage our wives when they are struggling with fear and anxiety.

3) Do not fix it

Now you may be thinking, “Wait a minute, you just said to engage, now you are saying don’t fix it!” Which is it? While it is true that many men struggle with being passive as I just previously stated, there are many men who are the opposite of passive and they just want “to fix it.” As men, we are fixers by nature. We see something that is broken, and our first response is to just fix it. While this may be a noble approach, it is not always the best approach. In fact, oftentimes it can lead to terrible results. Proverbs 18:13 says, *“He who gives an answer before*

he hears, it is folly and shame to him.” Yes, you must engage, but you must first listen and understand. It is most likely not your job to fix it as much as it is your job to walk alongside her and encourage her while God restores her.

4) Pray

Prayer is essential. You do not have the cure for anxiety in your back pocket. Your response will help. Your prayers are critical. When you fall into the trap of trying to fix things on your own understanding you fall into one of the above three categories. You have controlled your emotions, you have resolved to not be passive, you recognize you cannot fix it, now you must go to the Lord in prayer. James 5:16 says, *“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”* When my wife was sick in 2011, I was at the point where all I could do was pray and read the word. I actually read from Genesis all the way to Mark on my knees in my living room.

5) Understand Be Patient

I hinted at this point in number three when I was explaining how we are not to try to fix it. For anyone walking alongside a loved one dealing with anxiety, patience and understanding are the most difficult components. It is hard to understand why they feel the way they do. You cannot relate. Anxiety does not make sense. Ultimately, it is a sin rather than a disease. Since culturally we see it as a disease, thanks to psychology, we have an even more difficult time understanding it. It is also important to remember that anxiety can present itself many days after something triggers it. Sometimes a difficult conversation about our finances can trigger anxiety nearly a week later. When trying to understand what your wife is going through be diligent to look at all events that have taken place recently.

6) Encourage

We must remember that anxiety is taking place in the mind. That is where the battlefield is. Encourage your wife through her difficulty. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, *“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”* Remind her of what is true. Help her take her eyes off of what is false. Help her set her mind on things above. Help her see the eternal perspective rather than the temporal. We

must think about what is true. Philippians 4:8 says, *“Finally brethren, whatever is true...dwell on these things.”* Anxiety, when not dealt with in the mind will continue to grow and affect one’s physical body. This can present itself in many ways and tempt you to draw your attention away from the mind. Stay the course, the mind is still where the battlefield is. Yes, address the physical, but never ignore the mind.

7) Scripture

Lastly, flood her with the truth of Scripture. In our house, Philippians 4:8 is a great starting point. We are always telling each other to “tell yourself the truth”. Whatever is true, dwell on these things. My wife and I are also greatly encouraged by the Psalms. A great way to do this is to pray with her, aloud, with your Bible open. Reference Scripture in your prayer with your wife. Help her to meditate on the truth of God’s word. It will not return void. This means you need to daily, diligently study God’s word. Memorize Scripture so that it will pour out of you. You are an instrument in the Redeemer’s hand. Be ready to play your part!

CHAPTER 5

THE ANGER BATTLE

One who is slow to anger has great understanding; But one who is quick-tempered exalts foolishness. Proverbs 14:29

“Jesse!” I yelled throughout the house. “Get down here now!” I was furious. It was just a phone charger, but I knew what really happened. Jesse had been vacuuming upstairs and he had carelessly run over his iPhone charger and destroyed it. Realizing that he might get in trouble for this he went into his brother’s room, took his brother’s phone charger, and replaced the one he ruined. The events began to unravel when his brother was unable to find his charger. I confronted Jesse, but he denied everything. My anger grew by the minute. I knew he was responsible, but I could not get him to confess. I began to pummel Jesse with accusatory questions. I did not approach the situation with love. I was more concerned with the events than my son’s heart. My anger overshadowed my fatherly responsibility. My anger took over. I unleashed on him a barrage of potential disciplinary action if he did not tell me the truth. Finally, the next day, Jesse confessed to what he did. I disciplined him and we all moved on as a family. The events of these two days were absolute parenting failures. My quest for moral excellence in my ten-year-old son resulted in forfeiting my own moral judgment. My righteous indignation over my son’s sin was overshadowed by my more egregious sin. I was acting as though my anger was in response to a sin against God, but in reality, I internalized the sin and made it against me. Rather than forgiving little because I have been forgiven much, I forgave nothing and showed my son exactly how not to act when sinned against.

Anger is a deceitful enemy that likes to disguise itself in righteousness. We’ve all used the term “righteous anger,” but we are not righteous apart from Christ and neither is our anger. The reason why anger is considered a hidden battle that we face in our marriages is because most anger comes and goes so quickly that many deny they have an anger problem. I read my Bible and pray every day, I attend church, I serve in the church, I am involved in a Bible study during the week, my kids are obedient, and my friends always see me as a happy, good-natured guy. Yeah, I get a

little frustrated here and there, but isn't that normal? My frustration comes and goes so quickly, I'm sure there are no long-term effects. The dog barks and I snap at it, then quickly go back to normal. That's not a big deal, right? Well, it is a big deal, we must control our anger. These patterns of angry spats quickly become habitual and wear on our families over time. They begin to feel like they are walking on eggshells around us. When this cycle of fear and destruction begins in a family it is extremely difficult to reverse. It reminds me of a time when a co-worker was cleaning his fire engine in the back alley behind the fire station. Lunch was called inside, so he left his engine to eat. Unfortunately, he forgot to set the parking brake and the fire engine began to roll. He chased after it, but there was nothing he could do. Even if he grabbed on to it, he would not be able to stop it. It came to a crashing halt when it rammed into a 99 cent store a block away. The same is true for the damage we do to our families when our anger becomes normality. It will take your family coming to a crashing halt with much confession and forgiveness to begin to reverse the damage done by an angry dad.

Before we move forward, I want to circle back and address what is commonly called "righteous anger." It is very common for some people to justify their anger as righteous. Therefore, how do we know if our anger is righteous? If you are truly experiencing righteous anger, then your anger will be purely directed at some type of evil that violates God's law. You will be focused on Him and not yourself. Also, you will have self-control. Righteous anger never loses its temper or acts out in vengeance. Ultimately, righteous anger is very rare. Most of the Bible's instructions on anger are geared toward our sinful reactions to other people. Even when we are reacting to someone else's sin, we are most likely doing so because we are concerned with the impact on ourselves, not toward the Lord.

There is another type of anger that I want to mention and quickly set aside since it does not fall into the category of a hidden battle. This is the person who is extremely angry and abusive all the time. This is not a hidden battle that needs addressing. This is a person who needs serious biblical counseling. For the purpose of this paper, we are concerned with the subtle angry person who does not even realize he is angry. This is the person who is causing destruction in his home but thinks he is upright, moral, and leading well.

The anger battle is not one that is won and then over. It is an ongoing battle that arises each day. It is often when we believe that we have overcome anger that we find ourselves face to face with it yet once again. Never let your guard down when it comes to your emotions. It is also critical to remember that while you can ask for forgiveness, you can never take back your anger. There is no delete button on your emotional outbursts. Just like any other sin, you can be forgiven, but you cannot remove the consequences. The problem with the anger battle is that we do not recognize the severity of the consequences.

Our subtle, hidden anger falls into one of three categories. The first is anger over things that are meaningless. When God gets angry His anger is holy because it is based on things that matter. When God says something is wrong, it is wrong. Therefore, His anger makes a wrong right. Our anger does the opposite; oftentimes it repays a wrong with another wrong. Galatians 5:16-17 says, *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want.”* Paul describes our anger as “the desire of the flesh.” This is where our anger comes from. Secondly, we get angry when we desire something that is good more than God. Often times the things we desire are good, even righteous or biblical. An example would be when we want our kids to be obedient. But if you are desiring your kid’s obedience more than the Lord then you find yourself becoming angry and not trusting the Lord for their well-being. We must remember that the Lord cares for them more than we do. James in chapter 4 explains that our anger comes from within us. Third, we get angry when we respond to things that are wrong in the wrong way. In this situation, it is right to be angry, but our expression of that anger is wrong. When my son lied to me, I was right to be angry. I was angry over his sin. I was wrong in how I expressed my anger by yelling at him.

What Can We Do?

How do we deal with our anger? We must begin with the heart. Anger arises from the heart of the Christian. Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23 *“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these*

evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'” The Bible repeatedly uses the term “heart” to reference what comes from within us as well as a description of us. The heart is the control center of the person from which his thoughts, attitudes, motivations, and actions originate from. From the heart flow “the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23). According to the Bible, our intentions come from the heart (Daniel 5:20). Our conscience is linked to our heart (1 Samuel 24:5). Our actions come from our heart. Isaiah 32:6 says, “*For the fool speaks folly, and his heart is busy with iniquity.*” Robert D. Jones in his book *Uprooting Anger* explains it this way, “Sinful anger arises from the sinful beliefs and motives that reign in the unbeliever and remain in the Christian.”⁴ Proverbs sums up the heart well in chapter 4 verse 23, “*Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.*” We must ask ourselves, “Where is our heart?” Look for patterns of anger in your life. I noticed that I have become short-tempered and impatient with my six-year-old daughter. As I look back over several weeks, I can see a pattern. If I did not purposefully evaluate myself or look, I would not recognize this. No one is bringing it up to me. Next, I need to search my heart. What is driving my short temper? My heart is becoming more selfish, I’m focused on myself more than others. I need to pray. I need to pray as David prayed in Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” If you want to be a steadfast leader who controls his anger, this must be your prayer.

What are our wives supposed to do with our anger? How are they supposed to handle it? They do not know what is going on in your heart. They only see outward expression. Proverbs says the angry husband is behaving like a fool that does not respond well to correction (Proverbs 9:7-8; 29:9.) Look at how much the Bible has to say about responding to an angry person. The wife should react to her husband’s anger:

With Gentleness (Proverbs 15:1,18)

With a controlled temper (Proverbs 29:11)

With hospitality, not complaining (1 Peter 4:8)

⁴ Robert D. Jones, *Uprooting Anger* (P & R Publishing Company, 2005), 48

With forgiveness (Mark 11:25)

With peacefulness, and without vengeance (Romans 12:18-21)

With love (Colossians 3:14)

The Bible also gives our wives biblical examples to look to when dealing with an angry husband. One such story is that of Abigail and Nabal in 1 Samuel 25. Abigail employed wisdom when she courageously stepped in to protect her family from the consequences of an angry abusive husband.

The next time you find yourself short-tempered in your home, take a moment to examine your heart. Pray that the Lord will cleanse your heart of this wicked unrighteousness. Then practically speaking, reflect on all the Lord has said regarding how your wife must respond to your anger. Is your frustration worth putting your wife through that? You took the liberty to yell at the dog or be short with a child and now your wife has to respond with gentleness, not lose her own temper, be hospitable to you, not complain, forgive you, not seek vengeance, and lastly still love you! Was it worth it?

CHAPTER 6

THE DEPRESSION BATTLE

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:17-18

On October 19, 1856, Surrey Music Hall was packed with people. It was so full that many people had to stand outside. The Royal Surrey Gardens was London's largest and most beautiful building. It was built for public events such as carnivals and theatres. It is recorded that this hall held somewhere between ten to twelve thousand people. The event on this day was not a wild carnival or theatre. It was not a popular music performance or the most famous singer at the time. No, it was church, and the preacher received much criticism for renting such a large, worldly venue. One of his own deacons pleaded with him not to preach in "that devil's house." That preacher was Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

The service that day began as any other Lord's day. After a few words of greeting, there was a prayer and a hymn. Then Spurgeon read the Scriptures with a running commentary. They sang another hymn and Spurgeon prayed. After the "Amen" it happened. "Fire! Fire! Fire! The galleries are giving way! The place is falling! The place is falling!" some yelled from different parts of the crowd. Insane chaos ensued. Thousands panicked as people fled from all over the building. They crushed each other, jumped over railings, trampled downstairs. One of the banisters even gave way. A witness described the crazy scene.

The cries and shrieks at this period were truly terrific, to which was added the already pent-up excitement of those who had not been able to make their exit. They pressed on, treading furiously over the dead and dying, tearing frantically at each other. Hundreds had their clothes torn from their backs in their endeavors to escape; masses of men and women were driven down and trodden over heedless of their cries.

While the people panicked inside trying to get out, thousands outside continued to try to get in. This resulted in a wild scene.

Spurgeon tried to calm the people. "Please be seated," he bellowed. "There is no cause for alarm! Please be seated!" Almost miraculously, at the sound of his voice, people began to compose themselves and they began to settle down. Spurgeon did not know that a tragedy had occurred, but he felt compelled to dismiss the service. People shouted, "Preach! Preach!" At their request, he tried to preach still not realizing there were injured and dying in the midst. He quickly chose Proverbs 3:33, "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just." He was trying to help the situation by speaking directly to it through scripture, but this was a terrible mistake. Many more people joined the mob still fighting to get out or get in. He spoke a few words, sang the hymn "His Sovereign Power Without Our Aid" and dismissed the crowd. There were shouts until the service concluded. Charles said to the crowd, "My brain is in a whirl, and I scarcely know where I am, so great are my apprehensions that many persons must have been injured by rushing out. I would rather that you retired gradually and may God Almighty dismiss you with His blessings and carry you in safety to your home!" Sensing now that something serious must have happened, although he knew nothing of the extent of the tragedy, Charles was taken away by his friends.

The newspapers following the tragedy crucified him. As a result, he fell into a deep depression. He became so seriously depressed that he almost wished himself dead. The thought that he had played a part in the death and injury of several people absolutely devastated him. He described his agony this way:

Strong amid danger, I battled against the storm; nor did my spirit yield to the overwhelming pressure while my courage could reassure the wavering, or confirm the bold; but when, like a whirlwind, the destruction was overpast, when the whole of its devastation was visible to my eye, who can conceive the anguish of my sad spirit? I refused to be comforted; tears were my meat by day and dreams my terror by night. I felt as I had never felt before. "My thoughts were all a case of knives," cutting my heart in pieces, until a kind of stupor of grief ministered a mournful medicine to me. I could have truly said, "I am not mad, but surely I have had enough to madden me, if I should

indulge in meditation on it.” I sought and found a solitude which seemed congenial to me. I could tell my griefs to the flowers, and the dews could weep with me. Here my mind lay, like a wreck upon the sand, incapable of its usual motion. I was in a strange land, and a stranger in it. My Bible, once my daily food, was but a hand to lift the sluices of my woe. Prayer yielded no balm to me; in fact, my soul was like an infant’s soul, and I could not rise to the dignity of supplication. “Broke in pieces all asunder,” my thoughts which had been to me a cup of delights, were like pieces of broken glass, the piercing and cutting miseries of my pilgrimage. There came the “slander of many”—bare faced fabrications, libelous slanders, and barbarous accusations. These alone might have scooped out the last drop of consolation from my cup of happiness, but the worst had come to the worst, and the utmost knowledge of the enemy could do no more.⁵

Charles H. Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers history has ever known. He was the “Prince of Preachers” and he fought through a lifetime of deep depression. What would you say to him? How would you comfort him? If you were living in his household would you “try to fix it”? What *can* we do to help the severely depressed?

Depression is not uncommon to man. Throughout the Bible, the Lord gives many comforting words of encouragement to the down-trodden and the faint of heart. He knows this is our common struggle. But how would *you* respond? Would you exhort him with Scripture in your attempt to “fix it”? May I suggest that we begin to shift our thoughts from “How do I fix your struggle?” to “How can I be present during your struggle?”

It is not wrong to be sad about sad things. If you believe sadness over sad things is a sin, you have no biblical foundation for that. In fact, it is good to be sad about what makes us sad. You would not say to someone who has lost a loved one, “Cheer up! God has a wonderful plan for your life!” Proverbs 25:20 says of this person, “*Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda, is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.*” It is more important that you understand depression than try to fix it. Ecclesiastes 7 says there is a time to mourn. Speak little and be present much. Say few words. A depressed person will not handle a long theological

⁵ Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Saint and His Savior*. Christian Heritage; Reprint edition, November 20, 2005

treatise. Similar to someone who is sick and cannot eat a whole meal, but needs to eat only small bites of a cracker, so is the depressed person unable to hear a whole sermon. Be the friend that is just present. Romans 12:15b, “*weep with those who weep.*” This means you are with them, shedding like tears. You feel their ache. You are not like someone who stands off in the distance and speaks at them, but like someone who enters into their world and weeps with them. When someone is weeping and feeling sorrow God expects a fellow friend to come alongside and weep with them.

How long should someone be sad? Their sadness should be in proportion to whatever it is that is causing them to be sad. Appropriate depression is when they experience things that mimic the larger darker thing. They may experience loss of appetite, loss of energy, loss of purpose and hope, and nightmares. Understand that these are normal responses to normal sadness. Sometimes in our impatience to resist weeping with those who weep we want to throw Bible verses at them. We think this will help. It is as if we are yelling at them, “Stop!” “Cheer-up!” This is a terrible way to respond and results from our own selfishness. Selfishly, as a husband, I want my wife to be happy. Life is hard when she is sad. Especially when what is causing her to be sad is not causing me to be sad.

So far, we have been referring to depression that is normal. This is what we call ‘little d’ depression. Sometimes normal depression progresses past the normal stage and becomes abnormal. Depression that is abnormal is ordinary sadness that gets stuck. This is when depression moves from being sad to fear. An example of this could be a past experience that has caused someone to become sad all over again years later.

It was twenty-five years later when Spurgeon’s flashback occurred. Preaching for a vast crowd, the sweat and anxiety suddenly overcame him so that he felt unable to preach. Leaning his head on his hand, the terrible scenes of years before flashed into his mind. He was not able to fully recover from this painful ordeal. The rest of his life was marked with pain and depression. It may be difficult to read that such a robust, powerful preacher suffered from so much dark depression. Depression is always difficult to understand regardless of who it is who is struggling. We can be quick to try to explain why, but this endeavor may lead us down hopeless paths with no answers.

We never want to be like Job's friends and offer hurtful comments. We want to carefully understand and lovingly walk alongside the hurting and downtrodden.

What Causes Depression

Generally speaking, we can separate depression into four potential causes. Depression is sometimes related to a person's natural tendency to be melancholy. Underlying sin may be the cause. Depression is sometimes related to circumstances. Lastly, depression can have an underlying spiritual cause.

Melancholy Disposition

First of all, some people are naturally melancholy. This may be normal. It does not always mean something is wrong. Biblical theology teaches us that we are both body and soul. Matthew 10:28 says, *“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”* Therefore, when we are redeemed it is both our body and souls that are redeemed. We naturally accept all other forms of brokenness regarding our bodies; we should also be ready to accept this one as well. Spurgeon said, “There are certain forms of disease which seem rather to increase the sufferer's joy than to diminish it, while there are others which so affect the brain and the whole nervous system that depression is a melancholy symptom of the disease.”⁶ Therefore it is important that we understand that some people have a natural tendency to become melancholy. We have all known someone whose disposition is melancholy.

Underlying Sin

It is important to mention that even though a person's melancholy temperament may play a part in depression, the possibility still exists that their depression is related to a sin issue. In Psalm 32 David illustrates this well for us. When I first discovered Psalm 32, I began to use it as my starting point whenever someone was dealing with depression, prompting me to explore the

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon: Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 58 (1912; repr. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2021)

possibility of sin causing the depression. I have since learned that I should take a more patient approach and not immediately assume everyone's depression is related to sin. Some people are naturally melancholy.

When it is a sin issue there are a couple of ways this presents itself:

Someone may experience depression because they are sad over sin they can no longer commit. This person is wishing they could still continue in the sin that they got caught doing and they are struggling with temptation. Lamenting over sin is never okay. We want to confront this scenario with boldness, Scripture, and in love.

Another may respond sinfully as a result of their sadness. This is the husband who is depressed because he is struggling at work. His workplace distress comes home with him and gets unloaded on his wife. His speech is abrasive and abusive. He yells, then quickly tries to explain that he has had a hard day at work. Unfortunately, his "hard days at work" have become normal in their everyday lives.

Circumstances

Another common cause for our depression is our circumstances. Circumstantial sadness is the most common form of depression. There are countless examples of this such as bereavement, job loss, disappointments, relationship failures, and many more. When you encounter a loved one who is experiencing this type of depression, be patient. It is okay to be sad about what makes you sad. We have a hard time being patient. We cannot even wait for a cup of coffee these days; we want everything instantly and that is especially true when it comes to fixing our loved ones' problems.

I have been guilty of this many times throughout my marriage. When a family member is dealing with a difficult circumstance my instant response is to keep my wife from experiencing sadness or depression over it. I would say things such as, "Do not absorb it," or "There's nothing you can do." I was trying to help my wife stay out of the battlefield. I was trying to keep her from entering in. I was acting in sin and preventing her from "weeping with those who weep." Romans 12:15 says, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*" At the heart of my

sin was a selfish desire to care for my own needs. If my wife became sad or depressed, then that would instantly affect our household and more specifically my comfort.

Do not forget that there is a great chance that your wife is better at “weeping with those who weep” than you are. This may be her gift. Regardless, in the specific circumstances that occur in your lives, she is called to action. Do not prevent her from serving the Lord because you are selfish.

Spiritual Causes

Lastly, depression may have a spiritual cause. Sometimes someone who believes in God begins to believe the lie that God is against them. They feel isolated from God with no hope of reconciliation. Rather than feeling God’s love they only feel accusation, judgment and condemnation. This type of depression is more than one can bear. It can only be remedied with the truth of God’s word. Scripture is essential. Without God’s word, one will never overcome this type of depression in their own reasoning. Paul helps us understand the truth of God’s wrath in Romans 5:9, “*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*” We must understand that Christ, on the cross not only took all of our sins, He took the full wrath of God on our behalf. There is no wrath left for us.

Peter’s words are also helpful:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

Peter helps us understand that the sorrowful feeling, “God has abandoned me” is common. It is even an important part of our spiritual growth. Even though it may feel like God has abandoned you, He has not. Peter tells us that this distress is temporary, “even though for a little while.” Without this understanding the trial appears to have no end. This feeling will crush an individual; this is why we must cover them with the truth of God’s word. Believers must also understand that this trial has a purpose. Peter says, “tested by fire, may be found to result in praise.” You can find

rest in knowing that God has a purpose in your trial. God is committed to making you holy, even if it means taking away your comfort for a period of time.

How Do We Help

I have already made the point that we need to patiently weep with those who weep. We must be understanding and gentle. We minister best by being present. But we must also understand that God's word is more powerful than our presence. Gently and patiently we can walk alongside someone with Scripture. A great example of this is Psalm 77.

Psalm 77 begins with the Psalmist describing his despair. He paints a picture of one who is deeply downtrodden and depressed.

*My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud;
My voice rises to God, and He will listen to me.
In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;
In the night my hand was stretched out and did not grow weary;
My soul refused to be comforted.
When I remember God, then I am restless;
When I sigh, then my spirit feels weak. Selah
You have held my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak. (Psalm 77:1-4)*

He is so troubled that he cannot even speak. He is crying out to God but receives no comfort. Many who are depressed feel this way. Their depression gives no relief regardless of their cries in despair. He describes how it feels to think about God and not feel comfort. He is not getting the results he wanted. He is hurting and feeling hopeless.

The Psalmist goes on:

*Will the Lord reject forever?
And will He never be favorable again?*

*Has His favor ceased forever?
Has His promise come to an end forever?
Has God forgotten to be gracious,
Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion? Selah
Then I said, "It is my grief,
That the right hand of the Most High has changed." (Psalm 77:7-10)*

He continues to paint a hopeless picture. He feels abandoned by God. He feels as if God has forgotten him. Depression feels this way. At the moment there seems to be no way out. It is hard for the depressed to run to God for help when they do not get the immediate help they desire. But notice how the Psalmist begins to turn a corner in verse 10. He acknowledges that God *has* changed His grief. He begins the healing process by remembering what God has done in the past.

*I shall remember the deeds of the Lord;
I will certainly remember Your wonders of old.
I will meditate on all Your work,
And on Your deeds with thanksgiving.
Your way, God, is holy;
What god is great like our God?
You are the God who works wonders;
You have made known Your strength among the peoples.
By Your power You have redeemed Your people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. (Psalm 77:11-15)*

In verses 11-15 he has changed the temperature in the room from despair to remember. He switches his focus from how he feels to what God has done. He is remembering the Exodus. He remembers how God rescued the Israelites.

*The waters saw You, God;
The waters saw You, they were in anguish;
The ocean depths also trembled.
The clouds poured out water;*

*The skies sounded out;
Your arrows flashed here and there.
The sound of Your thunder was in the whirlwind;
The lightning lit up the world;
The earth trembled and shook.
Your way was in the sea
And Your paths in the mighty waters,
And Your footprints were not known.
You led Your people like a flock
By the hand of Moses and Aaron. (Psalm 77:16-20)*

In this last section, he describes in detail how God rescued the Israelites. In this example, God saves His people when they are in distress and completely beyond any human help. The psalmist gives the waters a personification. They represent our trouble and distress. God controls the waters and defeats them. In the same way, God controls the chaos and distress that encumbers us. He defeats our struggles when we are unable to defeat them ourselves. The picture is that of the Israelites calmly walking through the sea following their shepherds Moses and Aaron as they themselves are following God. God's footprints are not seen.

When we are in distress, we must remember what God has done. We must read his Word and remember how He has rescued others. Psalm 77 is a great example of a Psalm we can turn to in times of trouble. There are many more. Psalm 25, 27, 46, 49, and 139 are also great for times of distress.

In addition to reading His word and remembering how He has rescued others, we must also remember the times when He has rescued us. Make it a habit to practice remembering what God has done in your life. When you are out on that date with your wife, be purposeful to reflect on how God has blessed you and brought you through times of trouble. My wife and I regularly reflect on all that God has done in our lives. It is always a joy to walk through the memories and remember all the times He has poured out His mercy and His tender loving care in our lives.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm. (Deuteronomy 5:15)

I hope and pray you may never face the battle of depression in your marriage. Unfortunately, most likely depression will creep into your marriage in some form or another. If it does you need to remember to reject passivity and patiently walk alongside. Die to yourself and sacrificially be present. Understand sadness can be normal, but watch for signs of abnormality. Study your wife. Learn what types of things make her sad. Learn how she deals with them. Find ways to strengthen her during the good times, such as reflecting on all God has done. Lastly, do not be afraid to ask for help. Seek help from a godly biblical counselor. Most importantly, do not stop praying!

CHAPTER 7

THE DISCONTENTMENT BATTLE

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever abandon you," Hebrews 13:5

It was around 2 pm when the call came in: "A man on a bridge threatening to jump." I was assigned to a Ladder Truck in east Los Angeles. In the city there are 49 Truck Companies. Of those 49, there are a select few scattered throughout the city that carry an "Air Rescue Cushion." This is a large inflatable bag 20' x 20' by 10' high, that can be inflated underneath someone threatening to jump. On this October afternoon, we were called out to a bridge in Pasadena known as the suicide bridge.

We arrived on the scene to find Pasadena Fire and Police trying to negotiate with a man standing on the outside of the bridge. Over the next 5 hours, we collectively tried to talk him down from the bridge. We deployed our Air Rescue Cushion under the bridge. When we began to move it into place, he became agitated. He shook his finger at us indicating not to move it any closer or he would jump.

After more negotiations with no results the chief on scene made the call. He announced that we would quickly move the cushion into place regardless of the patient's agitations. We began to move, I locked eyes with the man on the bridge, he shook his finger at me, we moved the cushion. He jumped.

I will never forget the moment I watched the famous British MTV star leap to his death. He lay there on the ground just a few feet away. I learned his name, Sam Sarpong.

I have often wondered, over the last 3 years, what led this man who had all the world had to offer at his fingertips to jump? The family naturally claims he was not in his right mind, he was hallucinating. This may be true; we will never know for sure. Or maybe he was discontent?

Discontentment is the lie that just around the next corner we will find happiness, but because of our fallen sinful nature, we never find the utopia we are looking for. No one on this fallen planet is exempt from feeling some form of discontentment. It is our natural, fallen sinful nature that yearns for more. It presents itself as a normal frustration that seems harmless. Many people talk openly about it as if it is no big deal. But left unchecked discontentment becomes a silent assassin. It destroys lives before they even realize there is a problem.

Discontentment in a marriage can take off like a wind-driven wildfire that never gets put out. It only takes a few poignant words to open the floodgates of discontentment. For example, I can mention a dissatisfaction with something about our house and completely uproot my wife's stability. As husbands we have to take into consideration every word we speak.

Years ago, we lived in a small house south of Los Angeles near the harbor. The house was only one thousand square feet. My wife really liked the house when we bought it, but over the years my constant discontentment and desire to remodel the house was contagious. When we finally did remodel the house, the floodgates opened, and we spent nearly twice the money that we budgeted. Looking back, over the twelve years we lived there, I do not think I was ever content and as a result my wife lived in a constant state of anxiety and unsettlement.

So, why a chapter on contentment? Does this just seem like a contentment lesson that really doesn't have anything to do with marriage? As a leader in your home, you have to learn to guard your speech. You cannot frivolously throw words around and expect them not to incur consequences. You have to gain a biblical understanding of true contentment, and you must understand the disastrous consequences your discontentment has on your wife. Finances are one of the leading causes of divorce in America today. This is not because people are poor and can't cope; it is because they are rich yet still discontent. Years ago I confronted a friend of mine who was working a ridiculous amount of overtime. He was never home. I asked him why he was working so much. He replied that his he and his wife were purchasing a three hundred-thousand-dollar house. Several years later our paths crossed again. I quickly noticed he was still working unimaginable overtime hours. I asked again what he was doing. This time he replied they were buying a 1.2-million-dollar house. Two years later we had the same interaction. He was still working every day. I asked what his latest plans were. He said they were selling the 1.2-million-

dollar house and purchasing a 2.2-million-dollar house, closer to the beach. They were also remodeling the house, installing a second floor which included a movie theatre. We have continued to keep in touch over the years. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned. Today he is divorced and living in a rental. He lost everything.

You may think his story is extreme, but how many of us today are the same way, just on a smaller scale? It does not have to be material possessions that cause this. We can become discontent with how we look, who our friends are, the church we belong to, or even our own family members. In 2018 Americans spent an astonishing 16.5 billion dollars on plastic surgery.⁷

One reason why discontentment is so poisonous to marriages is because it can become habitual. It gets to the point where someone begins to look at everything in their lives through the pessimistic lens of discontentment. They are never satisfied, and they subconsciously try to bring as many people down with them as possible. Do not let this type of thinking gain a foothold in your life. Look at what God's word has to say regarding our contentment.

Godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. (1 Timothy 6:6)

Paul says if you want to gain anything in this life pursue godliness with contentment. If you want to win the battle over discontentment in your marriage pursue godliness with contentment.

What is the Source of Discontentment?

Discontentment can be traced back to Genesis 3. Adam and Eve had everything but the availability of one tree. The Deceiver stirred up their thoughts and overwhelmed Eve's desires. She lost sight of all that God had blessed her with and as a result succumbed to the temptation of eating the forbidden fruit. In the same way, we lose sight of all that God has blessed us with and

⁷ "Americans Spent More Than \$16.5 Billion On Cosmetic Plastic Surgery In 2018," American Society of Plastic Surgeons, April 10, 2019, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.plasticsurgery.org/news/press-releases/americans-spent-more-than-16-billion-on-cosmetic-plastic-surgery-in-2018>.

camp our thoughts on things we do not have. Ultimately, discontentment is the result of wrong thinking and wrong beliefs.

Wrong thinking kicks off our pathway down the road to discontentment. Wrong thinking exists when you allow yourself the freedom to desire better things or better circumstances. Maybe this is the person who has a desire for a backyard pool but cannot afford it. Instead of letting it go because he cannot afford it, he continues to dream and let his thoughts imagine a beautiful new pool. He begins to contemplate ways to obtain this pool even though he cannot afford it. The same can be true in a marriage. Maybe a husband or wife is dreaming that their spouse would act or look a certain way. They begin to let their thoughts continue to dream of something better. They start telling themselves the lie that “things could be better.”

Once this lie settles in, their discontentment evolves from wrong thinking to wrong beliefs. We begin to truly believe the lie that that “I will not be happy unless I have that backyard pool.”

“My kids will not have the childhood they deserve unless we have this pool.”

“My marriage will not be great unless my spouse looks or acts a certain way.” These are all lies that led to false beliefs.

How the Bible Deals with Discontentment?

To win the battle over discontentment we must look at our contentment through the biblical lens. Winning the battle over discontentment does not mean that we learn to deal with the things we cannot have. It means that we can have contentment in all that we *do* have through Jesus. Look at how the Psalmist paints a different picture.

Because your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will laud you. Thus, I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul is satisfied as with fatness and richness, and my mouth offers praises with lips of joyful songs. (Psalm 63:3-5)

We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple. (Psalm 65:4b)

For he has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good. (Psalm 107:9)

The Psalmist is showing us that true contentment can be found in belonging to the Lord. When you are under His care and provision there is no discontentment.

True godly contentment is clearly evident in the popular Psalm, Psalm 23. *“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.”* This is another way of saying, “I’m content. I’m satisfied.” I do not need anything more than simply knowing that the Lord is my shepherd. Every need I have is evident to Him and He is more than capable of meeting each and every one of them. The Psalmist goes on to describe God’s protection. He talks about how in the green pastures I will be fed and by the waters my thirst will be quenched. Most importantly the Lord will lead me into eternity.

Jesus teaches us a great lesson on contentment in the Sermon on the Mount.

For this reason, I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more important than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life’s span? And why are you worried about clothing? Notice how the lilies of the field grow; they do not labor nor do they spin thread for cloth, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you. (Matthew 6:25-33)

Jesus is telling us to be satisfied with today. When tomorrow comes be confident that the same provision God gave you today will be here tomorrow. Discontentment is a sin. It is a sin because when we are discontent, we are saying that we do not believe that all we are blessed with is God’s

best for us. We believe the lie that there is something better. When this type of belief enters into a marriage the results are disastrous.

This is a tough battle because often times when it creeps in it attacks both spouses at the same time. You will feed off each other. This is a terrible combination. The best practical way to combat this battle is be on guard and watch for it before it arrives. Biblically, stand firm on God's word. Hunger and thirst for His word like newborn babes desire milk. Find your satisfaction in the Lord and not your material possessions. Proper theology teaches us that all we have will eventually be burned up.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be discovered. (2 Peter 3:10)

This battle is one that must not be taken lightly. It is a path to destruction. Just like the famous MTV actor, discontentment left unchecked can lead someone to a place where there is no return. Do not be passive about your discontentment. Cut it off before it grows. Cut it off before it infects those around you. Cling to God's word for your satisfaction.

“For His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:3)

PART III

HOPE

CHAPTER 8

HOPE

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

This side of heaven our lives are simply a dot on an eternal line. But within that tiny dot our lives are inundated with battles. We battle our flesh. We battle diets, laziness, passivity, sickness, broken relationships, career challenges and much more. Our marriages are not exempt from battles. The home can be both a sanctuary and a battlefield. Most people are quick to highlight common struggles that every marriage faces such as sex, money, parenting, and in-laws. These struggles are real, and it is critically important that they are addressed. Oftentimes it is these struggles that lead an ungodly marriage to divorce. As a result, there has been much written about these struggles and much more that needs to be written about them. But, on the other side of the coin it is possible that those struggles get so much attention that the hidden battles receive none. It is possible that left unchecked, the hidden battles can cause more damage in a marriage than the obvious battles. They are rarely addressed in books and conferences. Usually, by the time they are uncovered, we are sitting in the counseling room, and much damage has already been done. I hope that over the past few chapters I've opened your eyes to just how dangerous these hidden battles can be. More importantly, you need to understand how disastrous a passive attempt to fight these battles can be. Passivity and marriage cannot cohabitate.

Ultimately, we have hope! Without hope, all I've written about seems to paint a picture of marriage that no one would want. I do not know if you will experience fear, anxiety, anger, depression or discontentment in your marriage, but I do know the chances are nearly 99% you will experience one of these. If you are married for any length of time, and I pray you will be, you will most assuredly experience many of the hidden battles I've described. Remember, it is not only

your wife who may struggle, your children will be faced with these battles also. It is critically important that you lead your *entire* household well.

In order for there to be hope, leadership in the home must be biblical. This brings us back to the first three chapters. We must sacrifice, we must be humble, we must lead courageously, but most importantly our leadership must be biblical. This means that we live each and every day with the eternal perspective on the forefront of our thoughts.

Often when I am teaching a younger fireman the job, much of what I am saying does not make sense until I explain the “why” behind the “what” we do. When someone understands “why” they usually never forget the “what.”

The same is true for why we, as husbands, need to lead biblically in marriage. When I am trying to remember to sacrifice for my wife it may be hard to think this way all the time. Quite honestly, I forget sometimes. But when I look at my wife through the eternal perspective it forces me to sacrifice for her. The “why” quickly evolves into the “what” and my heart naturally gives in to sacrifice for her.

Set your mind on things above, not on things that are of the earth. (Colossians 3:2)

It happens naturally without me even thinking about it. The eternal perspective is the “why.”

Colossians 3:18-21 unpacks the “why” and the “what” for us husbands.

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. (Colossians 3:18-21)

Colossians 3 is God’s plan for how believers should live their relationships. It is the Lordship of Christ that motivates believers to live out their relationships according to His plan for His glory. Relationships are hard whether they are in the home or not. Paul begins chapter three by instructing believers how to live out their relationships outside the home. He says they must set their minds on things above and die to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed in

verses 1-5. He then goes on to say, “Put aside anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive speech in verse 8. Believers are not to lie to one another in verse 9. They must put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience in verse 12. They must bear with one another and forgive each other in verse 13. And most importantly they need to put on love in verse 14.

Then, after he explains all that detail outside the home, he then shifts gears from our relationships with all people outside the home to specifically our relationships inside the home. In the home there are two pairs of relationships, wives and husbands and children and parents.

This is where our hope begins, in the biblical standard of what the home should look like. In the home wives are to submit to their own husbands. This “submission” that wives are called to is not a command that they must obey like a child to a parent or an employee to an employer. This is different. A wife will submit to her husband as an equal. You are not to treat your wife as a servant, but as your equal. She is your helpmate. Your primary responsibility is to serve your wife, not lord over her. The word submit, *hupotasso*, does not mean inferior. Both the husband and wife were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Biblical submission is when the wife submits to her husband and her husband submits to Christ. She is voluntarily placing herself under your authority and leadership. This enables a unique Christian harmony that is based on God’s perfect design. Your job is to be a husband that your wife can submit to. She is called to submit regardless. Her calling is to submit as to the Lord. A wife who is Spirit-filled will submit regardless of how thoughtless or inconsiderate you may be. So be a husband worth submitting to!

A wife submits to her husband because he is the head of the family just as Christ is head of the church. Her example of submission is a testimony of the Lord to the world around her. In 1 Peter chapter 3, Peter explains that wives are to submit even when their husbands are disobedient. This is so that the disobedient husband may be won over to Christ by the kindness of their wife. Romans 2:4 says, “*The kindness of God leads you to repentance.*” Once again, be the husband your wife can submit to! When Christ is displayed in the marriage unity in this way, there is hope in times of difficulty. A marriage that is built on biblical submission can handle the trials that come with the hidden battles every marriage faces.

Peter goes on to charge the husbands, “Husbands love your wives.” When you love your wife with pure biblical love you set the stage to endure through all the trials that may come your

way in your marriage. A godly husband who loves his wife this way will love with humility, purpose, compassion, steadfastness by the Spirit.

With Humility

Christ was the supreme example of this. John 13:15 says, *“For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”* You are not chosen by God to exercise dominion over your wife, but to lead and guide her in spiritual matters under the lordship of Christ.

With Purpose

Our job as a husbands is to present our wives back to the Lord better than when we first met them. This means their love for the Lord has grown. This means their walk with the Lord has grown. It means they are living with an eternal mindset and aiming to please the Lord in all they do. You must love your wife with a purifying love. Ephesians 5:26 illustrates this, *“...that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”*

With Compassion

A husband cares for his wife so much that he cares as much for her well-being as he does for his own body. *“So husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself,”* Ephesians 5:28. Practically, this means when our wives need strength, we give them strength. When our wives need encouragement, we give them encouragement. Never stop thinking about the needs of your wife. Remember, marriage does not run on autopilot. She needs you in the driver’s seat taking control, not asleep at the wheel.

With Steadfastness

The bond between a husband and wife should be unbreakable. She should never doubt your commitment to her even for one second. Two have become one and that marriage unity should never be in danger of being broken. Genesis 2:24 says, *“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”* The marriage relationship is established in Genesis as the first and most intimate of all relationships. Genesis describes two becoming one flesh, a uniting bond that is designed to supersede every other relationship, no matter how close, even a mother and father. The unique bond between a husband

and wife was created to last forever, to be unbreakable, and to be intimate. This is what it means that a “man shall be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

Led by the Spirit

Since God is the creator of the family, it makes sense that for a husband to be an effective leader in his home he must be filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells within the believer, but the believer is not always filled with the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit means that a believer walks in the Spirit. Practically speaking this means that you are obedient. The command in Ephesians 5:18 is to be continually filled, this means you live an obedient life. You are living a life that is set apart from sin. You are committed to learning God’s Word and obeying it. Ultimately to become a steadfast leader in your home you must be continually filled with the Spirit.

There are many joys that accompany the Christian life. You can serve in mighty ways in your local church. You can go across nations and spread the gospel. You can minister to the poor in your community. One of the greatest joys a Christian husband can have is to lead his family well. One of my greatest desires is to hear from my heavenly Father, “Well done, faithful servant, you were faithful with what I have given you.” This is my desire for you also. May God be glorified, and may the victory be yours as you engage the battle as a faithful, steadfast leader.