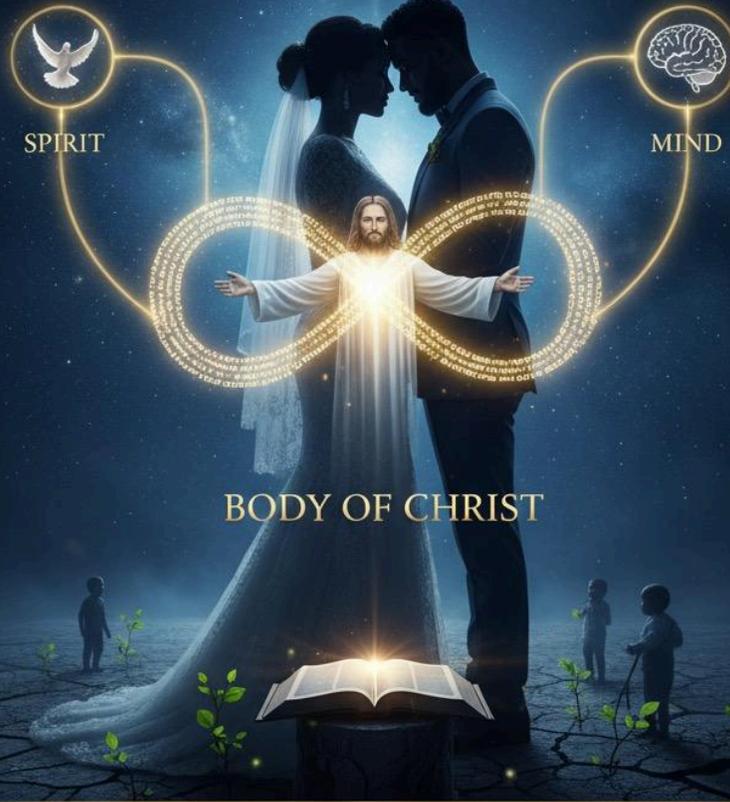


#MARRIED

BY JASON HAYWARD



BODY OF CHRIST

GOD'S COVENANT. OUR COMPLETION.
A JOURNEY OF ONENESS



“You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”

Isaiah 62:3-5 ESV

Table of contents

Introduction

1: Marriage rooted in human nature

2: Marriage as model relationship with God

3: Marriage as covenant

4: Wholeness in marriage

5: The focus of marriage

6: Selfless love in marriage

7: Procreation in marriage

8: Fully united in marriage

9: Co-workers together

10: Cherish your spouse

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Introduction

This book talks about marriage between a man and a woman, as well as our relationship with God as a marriage. What follows are ten brief thoughts about marriage that I will develop more fully in this book.

First, a desire to marry and for the faithfulness of a spouse are rooted within human nature by our Creator.

Second, there is no closer relationship to what God intends for us with Himself than the marriage of a man and a woman.

Third, God is a faithful, covenant-keeping God. He cannot break His Word. Marriage is based on a covenant designed by God. It is first and foremost a lifelong commitment. Likewise, God is steadfastly committed to us and our good when we have committed ourselves to love Him for life and we remain faithful.

Fourth, just as the woman of God completes the man of God, and vice versa, as far as any human being could— in an incomplete way— the union of God with each of us *actually* completes us. As St. Augustine said about God, “Our heart is restless until it finds rest in you.” You were made for what the Apostle Paul called “Christ in you.”

Fifth, just as in marriage, it’s not about the individual, so it is in relationship with God. It’s not about you, so you must get your focus off of yourself. In your own life, it’s about yielding your interests and your will to the other. In your life together, it’s about yielding your interests and will together to God’s interests and His will.

Sixth, we can only love selflessly as God intends when we’ve died to our own selfishness. Marriage, wherein two become one, is intended to be a vehicle to help accomplish that death to self. Newly married people do not get along when self interest is high, ultimately resulting in the death of the marriage if no change comes.

Seventh, while marriage results in children, those children belong to the family of God, not to the man and the woman. The focus is not to be the children’s interests but God’s interests and will. We are to multiply and to make disciples of our children for the glory of God. God delights in His children, you included, more than we do our children.

Eighth, while marriage brings two together in the flesh, it does not bring them together in soul (mind, will, emotions) nor in spirit. The only way to complete the unity that God intended is for each person to unite themselves fully to God, Christ in them.

Ninth, just as we help each other and submit to each other in marriage, Christ in us helps us. We are co-workers together. We share great responsibility in this life. We are to function together as one.

Tenth, you should daily cherish your spouse above all other people. They are a beautiful gift of God. Much more so, you should cherish your God more than your spouse and any other good gift He has given you. The greatest thing in life is love, God's way.

God's design for relationships is so good! Let's jump in together.

1. Marriage rooted in human nature

Many of the underlying aspects that marriage provides are rooted in human nature. We don't want to live alone; it's bad for us. We desire companionship and belonging. We want to be known. We are attracted to the opposite sex. We have a desire for love, intimacy and sex. We have a need to play, even as adults. We desire to be happy and have our needs met. We have a desire for long-term bonds, and we tend toward monogamy. Generally speaking, we desire for our sexual partners to be faithful to us, women especially. Women especially tend to dream of getting married. Women especially tend to have a desire to love and care for others. We desire to have children and to leave a legacy. We desire partnership in the raising of those children, which is difficult work. We want to provide a wonderful, stable home and opportunity for those children. We desire safety and comfort. We desire to be appreciated and needed. We want to matter and to be important to other people.

Scripture explains it this way: "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ...So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.""

Genesis 2:18, 21-23 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gen.2.18-23.ESV>

In Christian teaching, the analog of marriage is relationship with God. Relationship with God is also rooted in human nature. We are born believers, naturally inclined to find religious explanations attractive, and to fluently use them. We are naturally inclined to believe in the afterlife. We believe that some part of us lives on after death. We tend to believe in the supernatural. Children especially find it easy to believe in superhuman properties and are readily able to think religiously. Children are primed to see God at work all around them. We think there is purpose in this life. We also tend to adhere to morality. At least for these reasons, attempts to suppress religion have been and will always be short-lived.

Scripture explains it this way: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world..."

Romans 1:19-20a ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.1.19-20.ESV>

2. Marriage as model relationship with God

There is no closer relationship to what God intends for us with Himself than the marriage of a man and a woman. Scripture explains it this way:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”

Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gen.2.24.ESV>

<https://bible.com/bible/59/mat.19.5.ESV>

God has always longed for intimacy with His children and their intimacy with each other. It's what He created us for. He desired that we would be willing for it, so He gave us a will, including the ability to choose otherwise. His desire was for us to see the goodness He had given us and His good intent toward us always, not holding anything back. But we doubted His good intent and sought for more outside of Him and His ways, just as some of His created angels had. Being God, He already had a plan to restore the relationship to something even better than Eden. God would put the evil we had subjected ourselves to under His feet, first through the judges and prophets, the Spirit of God with them, then through Christ's ministry, and, finally, through Christ in us (Colossians 1:27), His church. Through Christ in us, we may not only have every good thing Adam had, but as co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17) and co-workers together with God (1 Corinthians 3:9), we have been blessed even more, including the potential for greater intimacy with God.

Marriage is the model of our relationship with God, especially the faithfulness expected and the intimacy that may come from it, given also to us because God is good to all. Intimacy can only be successfully built when there is faithfulness, commitment, and very regular communication.

Christ's marriage is not just to one person, of course, but to His bride, the worldwide church:

“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Ephesians 5:29-32 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/eph.5.29-32.KJV>

God's word is reality. If we are in Christ, we are members of Christ's body together in the world – His body, His flesh, His bones. Let us see ourselves connected to Christ in this way. Let us see ourselves as connected to His body in this way.

3. Marriage as covenant

Marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman: “until death do us part.” This comes after God’s own nature, for He is a covenant keeping God (e.g., Genesis 12:2-3, 15:5, 17:1-8, 22:16-18). When He speaks something, that is what is done (Isaiah 55:11). He is always faithful to His word (Jeremiah 1:12). It’s unbreakable (Hebrews 6:18).

For those of us who are married, it’s not ok with our spouses if we are faithful six days out of every seven, or even 355 days out of 356. It’s not acceptable if we are unfaithful to them even for one day of our relationship. We are married every day, and we may not deceive or cheat sexually on our spouse. Trust is the foundation of the relationship. This is the same in our relationship with God. He expects daily faithfulness: “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Romans 8:7-8 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.8.7-8.ESV>

God works for the good only of those who love Him on His terms:

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Romans 8:28-29 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.8.28-29.ESV>

We are to seek to please God by obeying His commandments and calling while aligning ourselves to His purpose. The alignment of repentance must be ongoing, for He has purposed us to be conformed to the nature and character of Jesus by way of the same Spirit dwelling in us that dwells in Jesus:

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

Romans 8:11 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/rom.8.11.ESV>

We are to commit ourselves steadfastly to knowing God, fellowship, repentance, the lordship of Christ, and love in action. The symbol of our commitment is our baptism, which should be followed by our public proclamation of our faith in Jesus Christ. We are His and He is ours. We have been fully identified with Jesus Christ, and, as such, we

also are directly connected to God by the same Spirit. We belong to God, having been bought at the price of Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28). We are now sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, having God's divine nature attributes (dna, 2 Peter 1:3-4). Our commitment to God will keep our relationship through hard times that are sure to come our way; we must know that He is good. We need to remind ourselves we are directly connected to Him.

With our spouses, we commit also to know them, to maintain fellowship, to stay aligned, to submit to each other, and to love each other with action to back up our words. The ceremony that solidifies the commitment is the wedding ceremony, and the symbol of this is the wedding ring. As partners, we now belong to each other, yoked together for life. We are now family, and our families are legally joined together. Additionally, it is our commitment to each other that will keep us together through the hard times that are sure to come. We need to remind ourselves we are one flesh; no one and nothing is to divide us.

Those who are uncommitted, unrepentant, or unfaithful to God are not His. It is certainly possible to lose a relationship once held, just as the prodigal son left His father. God still loves all of us unconditionally, also in the sense of the father of the prodigal son. He is waiting for our return so that He can generously share His love, goodness, and riches with us.

The words of commitment that we speak to God to enter into covenant relationship with Him and the vow of commitment that we speak to our spouse as we enter into marriage are heard not only on earth but in heaven, and they bring about legal and spiritual change in heaven and on earth. What God has joined together, let no man separate or even try to separate (Matthew 19:6). We are to be committed to unity and to the necessary conditions that keep accord. This applies also to Christ and His body, the church (Philippians 2:1-5, Ephesians 4:1-6).

4. Wholeness in marriage

The woman of God completes the man of God, and vice versa, as far as any human being could – in an incomplete way. The work of parenting and of doing God’s word, taking responsibility for others, is hard work. It is holy work. They are to be for each other what the Holy Spirit is to us as well, a paraclete (parakētos, G3875). They are helpers for each other, called to each other’s side, advocates of each other, intercessors for each other, comforters for each other. They are both to give each other strength and to be strong for each other.

Christ followers who desire to marry should seek a spouse that complements them, considering personality, strengths and weaknesses, abilities, and spiritual gifts, if they are known. This is the nature already of brothers and sisters in the wider body of Christ: two are better than one (1 Corinthians 12). Christ always sent disciples out into the world to do His word two by two (Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1). Where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is in the midst of them; if two agree about anything they ask, it will be done for them by the Father (Matthew 18:19-20).

For the man of God truly submitted to God’s will and the good of His wife, the man should be head of the family, just as Christ is the church (Ephesians 5:23). Unfortunately, as a general practice, too many men abuse positions of headship, so women and churches should be cautious. God’s general command to Christ followers is to submit “to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21), and marriage doesn’t negate this between a husband and a wife.

In general, we would do well to lower our expectations of our spouse. Marriage is a gift from God, but no spouse can meet all of your needs; nor should they have to. And it’s not about you anyway. The world without God has lied to us, setting us up with false expectations that lead to disappointment and failure. If you were not happy before you married your spouse, you will not be happy afterward either.

It is the union of God with each of us that actually completes us. As St. Augustine said about God, “Our heart is restless until it finds rest in you.” You need to personally know the goodness and the love of God. Further, you were made to be completed by what the Apostle Paul called “Christ in you” (Col 1:27). You have been fully identified with Jesus Christ your Lord in His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension (Ephesians 2:4-7). You have received the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). This makes you directly connected to God. You are now right with God and have fellowship with Him as Jesus does. You have been set free from sin and death. You have been set free to do God’s will and to love as He loves.

Wholeness comes not from marriage, but rather by cooperating with the saving work of God in our lives, which restores us to His image and likeness:

“...be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Ephesians 4:23-24 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.4.23-24.ESV>

In marriage, we have many opportunities to put God’s work in us into practice in our home and in our world. It is absolutely essential that we take these opportunities. Further, those who are married are to encourage each other, stirring each other up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Married partners must also not forsake to meet together with Christ’s body, His church, for they were meant also to live and function as members of this larger community. His church is composed of small groups of Christ followers that regularly assemble in order to lift up Jesus together and to do God's word together. Disciples are those who put God's word into practice. Putting His word into practice brings wholeness to the world around us, making things right that were wrong.

5: The focus of marriage

In marriage, it's not about you. You must get your focus off of yourself if your marriage is going to be successful. Marriage is about two becoming one – one unlike the ones they were before. Marriage calls for you to “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Philippians 2:3-4 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/php.2.3-4.ESV>

When it comes to your marriage, the focus of your attention is to be your spouse. What does your spouse like? What interests them? How do they best receive love? “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”

Luke 6:31 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/luk.6.31.ESV>

The first year of marriage is difficult because the individuals who have come together are so used to doing their own thing and looking out for themselves. Changing old thinking and habits to adjust to life together is difficult work. Day by day, you need to work to continue to align yourself with this new way of married life that you are creating together. Meanwhile, you get to know your spouse as they are when you live with them and give them your time, energy, and attention. Keeping your focus on that which is good and that which is beautiful in them (Philippians 4:8), you also will do well to keep the same attitude of love toward your spouse that led you to marry them in the first place. The way you think of your spouse, the way you speak to and of your spouse, and the way you treat your spouse will shape your lives together.

In your relationship with God, it's not about you. It's not about your interests. It's about God, and you need to adjust yourself to your new life: the Spirit of God lives in you. You have become directly connected to God, and you have submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Therefore, you are not to set your mind on the things of the flesh, but instead on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8:5, Colossians 3:1-2). You have committed also to repentance, or thinking in a new way. You are to think differently about God, about yourself, about the world, and those in the world; all according to what has been revealed to be true in the scriptures. Day by day, you need to work to continue to align yourself with the way of Christ and His new creation within you. Meanwhile, you are to get to know the God who made you as He is revealed in scripture, giving Him your time, energy, and attention. In doing this, you will come to know the depth of His goodness.

Further, God requires that you love all others as He loves them (John 15:12). God's love is not a feeling, but rather, it always results in action. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."
Galatians 6:10 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/gal.6.10.ESV>

As followers of Christ, we are to concern ourselves with the interests of others in the household of faith, and we are to meet their needs. This love is to be directed not only toward Christ's body, but toward all, including the least of these:

"...Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:40b ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/mat.25.40.ESV>

In relationship with God, we need to align ourselves with Christ's own attitude:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."

John 6:38 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jhn.6.38.ESV>

In your new life together with God, it's about yielding your interests and will to God's interests and His will. If you continue together along this path, God will cause you to stand mature and complete in all the will of God for you (Colossians 4:12).

6: Selfless love in marriage

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... in the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

Ephesians 5:25,28

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.5.25-28.ESV>

Selfless love is key to a successful marriage.

We can only love selflessly when we've died to our own selfishness. A selfish person makes for a bad person to date, a bad person to be married to, and a bad parent. Marriage, wherein two become one, is designed by God to be a vehicle toward death to the self-life.

Self-life makes us unable to find life in God, as Jesus said:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

John 12:24-25 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jhn.12.24-25.ESV>

The only way to be able to take on new life in Christ is through the death of our old life in the world. Our old life is the grain of wheat that needs to fall into the earth and die. By nature, we lead self-directed, self-centered lives. This nature is a fallen nature. It's a nature characterized by some combination of active rebellion and passive indifference toward the God who created us. Out of this nature, we sin as a lifestyle. God created a legal system, and we are all law breakers in this system. Our sin causes separation from God and from relationship with Him, like a chasm we can never cross. We sense this separation; we sense something is not right in our lives. We experience a need for something or someone to fill some gap within us and make things right. Disconnected from God and from right thinking, and trying to meet our own needs in the ways we think best, we are subject to the slavery of sin. We are prisoners to it, unable to break free in our own power. Yet, the things that we try to use to satisfy us are all as a vapor, quickly vanishing just after we reach for them. Many people try to use dating and marriage relationships as a means to try to satisfy what they need.

When Christ calls His disciples to lose their old life, or to die, He is calling them to repentance. To repent means to think in a new way. The new way of thinking is to hate evil and to hate your old life enough to voluntarily put it to death by the continued action

of your will. Having been made clean by God, you should also know that you have been empowered to stay clean. In repentance, you commit to turn away from your natural orientation toward sin and toward yourself, orienting yourself daily instead toward God. You commit yourself to the renewing of your mind to the word of God. With any particular word of His, your mind is not renewed to that word from God until you are consistently doing what it says. You commit yourself to be conformed to Christ's own character and nature by your cooperation with the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you.

To bear fruit is to have your nature change toward God's own nature and to have good works flow from that nature. The death of your old life is the fertilizer that enables this fruit to come from your new life.

The chief characteristic of God's nature is agapē love. It's an unselfish love. It's love that gives. It's a love that acts.

Agapē love is Christ's own love that prompted Him to give Himself up for His bride, His church. Husbands are commanded to have this love toward their wives, but agapē love is rare. It only comes from God's own nature living in a man or living in a woman (Romans 5:5).

Even sex cannot be enjoyed as God intended it until a partner is truly focused on the good and the service of the other. To really connect, partners need to show love, concern, and care for their spouse all of the time. They need to have deep connection and intimacy outside of their sexual relationship. They should be regularly affectionate with each other. They need to clearly communicate about what they like in sex and what they don't like. They need to patiently wait until their partner is ready and interested in physical intimacy that leads to sex. (Further, they need to only seek sexual satisfaction with their lover and in no other ways.) When their partner is interested in sex, they need to concern themselves with everything their partner likes and their partner's timeline, rather than their own satisfaction. Moreover, we can only truly enjoy sex as God intended it when we know we have pleased our partner as much as possible. Our attention should always be on them. As such, sex itself should be an exercise in selflessness. What's best for your partner is actually what's best for you, it turns out.

Agapē love is Christ's own love. Jesus' love moved Him to action; love in action is called compassion. Compassion considers what you would have done for you if you were in their situation, then does it for them (Matthew 7:12). Agapē love calls you now to do even more than you are doing for others, if your life doesn't yet look like Jesus' life.

We are meant to learn to love each other as God loves us: generously.

7: Procreation in marriage

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth.”

Psalms 127:3-4 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/psa.127.3-4.ESV>

God blessed Adam and Eve when he made them, saying to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...” (Genesis 1:28). Children are part of that fruit from God, an inheritance from Him. Yet, we are to obey the voice of the Lord in all things (Deuteronomy 28:2). Our children are to be fashioned like arrows in the hand of a warrior. We are to plant the living word of God in them, water it, and see that it is watered by others as well (1 Corinthians 3:7-9). They must also be disciplined as a part of love.

Most importantly, we are to teach them and show them what it is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). We are to make disciples of them (Matthew 28:19). Because our children will be drawn to imitate us, they should be drawn to follow us as we follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). In so doing, they come to believe scripture as we do and to commit their lives to God just as we have: fully. They commit to know God, to the lordship of Christ, to repentance, to fellowship, and to love in action; and they are baptized. Meanwhile, we should model what it is to keep ourselves unstained by the world (James 1:27). We are also to come alongside them as they are brought up to maturity in Christ and equipped for His work in the world (Ephesians 4:11-16). And now they are arrows in the hand of Christ, fighting against the realm of darkness, putting evil under their feet, just as you are. Christ lives in them, and now they are the light of the world. More lamps have been added to the lampstand (Zechariah 4:2); glory to God!

As such, our children belong to the family of God, not to the married couple. Children are a trust from the Lord. The focus of our parenting is not to be the children’s interests or making their dreams come true; it is to be God’s interests and God’s will and God’s dream. The focus of our parenting is not our children’s happiness; it is to be their holiness. Their obedience to God and His word will result in His blessing, which will bring them happiness. Your steadfast love for your spouse will also bring them happiness; you are home to them.

In this holy and difficult work of parenting, the married couple are helpers for each other, called to each other’s side, advocates of each other, intercessors for each other, comforters for each other. They are both to give each other strength and to be strong for

each other. They need to be on the same page. They also do well to daily remember that the paraclete lives in them as Helper, Comforter, advocate, intercessor, and the strength of God.

We do well to remember that God delights in His children, you included, more than we do our children. God says to His children, “You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”

Isaiah 62:3 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/isa.62.3.ESV>

This is God’s attitude toward us as His children:

“The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Zephaniah 3:17 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/zep.3.17.ESV>

Similarly, we must teach and show our children that the Lord God is to be our delight, and is worthy of such. He is good! And we come to understand His goodness even more because He has given us His own experience as a parent! In particular, we come to know how He thinks of us, even when we make mistakes, and we come to know the depths of His love for us.

8: Fully united in marriage

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

Philippians 2:1-2 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/php.2.1-2.ESV>

While marriage brings two together in the flesh, it does not bring them together in soul (mind, will, emotions) nor in spirit. The only way to complete the unity that God intended is for each person to unite themselves fully to God, Christ in them. This recipe of God for unity in marriage is the same as His recipe for unity in His church at large.

According to the Apostle Paul, the great mystery hidden from the ages, yet revealed through Jesus Christ, was that Christ comes to live in you (Colossians 1:26-27). This was the message Jesus gave to Paul to proclaim to His church.

Because the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:19) lives in you and you are directly connected to God (1 Corinthians 6:17), you have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), which is the mind of the Spirit of God. Yet, we also have our own minds, our ways of old thinking from before we were married and from before we were made new in Christ. This division makes us double-minded (James 1:8).

Double-mindedness in marriage leads to instability and immaturity, just as double-mindedness in the life of the church, which is the body of Christ in the world, leads to its instability and improper function in the world. As such, double-mindedness is grievous to God, and it should draw us to repentance so that God can purify us (James 4:8). We need to take a step down, a step to our knees before God, as those poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3). It's time to get plastic, broken, like metal in the fire that our Lord Jesus can mold (Matthew 5:4). Our sin is not a little thing to our holy, righteous God. Laid low at God's feet, we must orient ourselves toward Him, surrendered, ready and willing to be molded (Matthew 5:5). When we become like metal in a fire, we are only then able to be conformed into Christ's image and to His thinking, as God has intended for each of us (Romans 8:29). This is what we should hunger and thirst for (Matthew 5:6): to be pure, having God's own nature and heart and thinking.

Rather than allowing our own mind, self-will and emotions drive us, we are to be led by the mind, will and emotions of Christ. This is true in Christian marriage, and it is true in God's church. We are to let God's indwelling Spirit lead us to singleness of mind and purpose. This is what leads to our unity: each of us conforming ourselves to Jesus Christ our Lord. Our Lord!

After all, God is driven not by emotion but instead by His glorious nature of righteousness (i.e., doing that which is right) and love. Our emotions, mind, and will are to come in line with those of God. This is daily work. It's the main purpose of prayer.

This is God's will for us as His bride:

“that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

Ephesians 5:26-27 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.5.26-27.ESV>

After all, God's kingdom is His government. It's His rule in your life. It's anywhere that God's will is done.

Let God reign in your marriage. Let God reign in His church.

Let us be unified in that God Himself becomes our treasure, “for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

Matthew 6:21-22 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/mat.6.21-22.KJV>

Let the eye of our mind become single — single in mind and purpose, conformed to that of Christ in us. So shall we be unified to be the light of the world. Glory to God!

9: Co-workers together

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour... for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”

Ephesians 5:1-2, 30 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/eph.5.1-30.KJV>

As a married couple, you are co-workers together in life, in parenting, and as ministers. As a disciple of Christ and as part of Christ's new body, you are co-workers together with God!

Jesus Christ asked the twelve to follow Him in order to train them in what He did, for He could do much more through Him than He could do on His own (Matthew 9:35-10:15). Then He sent out seventy-two to work on his behalf in thirty six towns He was about to enter, for He could do even more through them than through the twelve. Jesus told the seventy-two to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers (Luke 10:1-2). After Jesus' ascension, Jesus' apostles were obedient to His commission to proclaim the gospel everywhere, and “the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20).

The Holy Spirit was then given to all disciples of Christ so that they could become co-workers together with God (Acts 1:8, 2:38-39, 4:29-30, 5:32; Hebrews 2:3-4). We are now God's fellow workers, some planting seeds, some watering, while God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). As fellow workers, we are also compared to builders; some lay the foundation of Jesus Christ, while some build what is eternal upon that foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). We are the ambassadors of Christ, acting on His behalf to reconcile the world to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20); in this too we work together with Him (2 Corinthians 6:1), since Christ continually dwells in us and walks in us (2 Corinthians 6:16, KJV). Having the Holy Spirit in us, we are together the temple of the living God.

God has given us all the time, energy, and attention to work. Our occupation is how we choose to spend our availability. It's the totality of how we choose to make ourselves busy.

If Jesus Christ is Lord, our main occupation is to be doers of God's word:

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

James 1:22 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jas.1.22.ESV>

Doing God's word is to be the vocation of every member of God's family, according to Jesus, who said:

"...“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.””

Luke 8:21 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/luk.8.21.ESV>

As disciples, we are all to occupy our days with bearing fruit that brings glory to God:

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

John 15:8 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/jhn.15.8.ESV>

The fruit includes making disciples of our children and extends beyond it, for God has prepared other good works for us to do:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.2.10.ESV>

The good works are those God has put in our life and those we will encounter each day. We are to choose to see what would be good for them and do it. We are to occupy ourselves doing God's word, causing His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

As married couples, we are to walk in love with each other, working together with God to bring His love to the world, meeting spiritual and physical needs. We are Christ's eyes, ears, hands, arms, legs, feet. We are His flesh and bones.

We are further enabled and strengthened when we work together with His church, connected to the rest of Christ's functioning body. As workers together with God, we are to “... consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/heb.10.24-25.ESV>

10: Cherish your spouse

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.”

Ephesians 5:29-30 ESV

<https://bible.com/bible/59/eph.5.29-30.ESV>

There is nothing more cherished by God than His church. For us, there should be no one more cherished outside of God than our spouse. Our partner should be the first one to see and experience the fullness of the Spirit of God’s fruit in our character: love, joy, peace, longsuffering or patience, gentleness, goodness, faith and faithfulness, meekness, temperance and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Our words and actions toward our spouse should always convey warmth and tender care.

Yet we are also growing together into fullness and maturity (Ephesians 4:13-16), and in so doing, we should nurture each other in this growth. We should be for each other iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17). We should lift each other up when one falls (Ecclesiastes 4:10) so that together we can stand firm (Ephesians 6:13).

We should also delight in our spouse, our gift from God, as we did as first, or even more than we did at first (Proverbs 5:18-19, Song of Solomon 7:6-9). Your partner is God’s goodness and love in the flesh to you. Your husband or wife is a foretaste of the pleasures and immeasurable riches of our inheritance in heaven, if you will cherish and do right by him or her.

We are to delight in our spouse as partner, as best friend, as lover, as parent of the children we love, as helper and co-worker. We are to delight in the opportunities to be generous to our husband or wife in every way we can think.

As married Christian people, let’s learn to be who our partners adore and to do what our partners love. This will stir up the fire you had together at first until it burns brightly. The world longs to see such love.

As disciples of Christ who receive God’s own love in our hearts (Romans 5:5, 2 Corinthians 5:14), we should also cherish what Christ cherishes: His sheep and His lambs. Christ’s conversation with Peter after His ascension is a direction to us as disciples too. If we love Him, we will tend His sheep. If we love Him, we will feed His sheep (John 21:15-17). We are to pay careful attention to His flock, feeding and caring for the church of God, which God purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). His people are dear to Him, so they should be to us as well. So if we are to strive to excel in

anything in this life, let us together strive to excel in building up His church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

We should also learn to cherish the Spirit of God that abides with us, day in and day out, our paraclete. This Spirit is the fire of God, the very breath and life of God, in us, directly connecting us to Christ and to our Father. This Spirit is our Helper; our Comforter; our advocate, intercessor, and our strength.

Let's learn what the Spirit of God living in us loves and do it. This will stir up the flame within us (2 Timothy 1:6), setting us on fire (Jeremiah 20:9). Our Lord Jesus seeks those who are on fire for Him (Mark 12:28-31, Revelation 2:4-5, Revelation 3:15-20). Further, the needy world wants to come and watch the fire of those who burn. They need to see Christ living in a man; they need to see Christ living in a woman. They need to see Christ living in married Christians.