TONY EVANS

EMBRACING YOUR PURPOSE,
POWER, AND POSSIBILITIES

KINGDOM MARRIAGE

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
PRAISE FOR

Kingdom Marriage

One of the major pillars of our research at the National Center for Fathering is modeling. Tony and Lois are not only great communicators on the message of marriage, they truly model kingdom marriage. I love how Tony defines kingdom marriage as, “connecting God’s purpose with your pleasure.” This book is a most excellent blueprint for building a strong marriage—and God loves marriage.

CAREY AND MELANIE CASEY
National Center for Fathering

What exactly does it mean to have a “kingdom perspective” on marriage? Dr. Tony Evans answers that question with pastoral insight and biblical wisdom in this engaging new book. Kingdom Marriage is essential reading for husbands and wives who want to make their relationship the best it can be for the sake of the Kingdom.

DR. GREG SMALLEY
Vice president of Marriage and Family Formation, Focus on the Family

In the midst of a cultural battle on marriage, Dr. Tony Evans has clearly identified the importance of reorienting our hearts toward God’s kingdom. This fresh biblical perspective is like a much needed “realignment” for our relationships.

TIM POPADIC
President, Relationship Enrichment Collaborative and executive producer of the Date Night Comedy Tour

Kingdom Marriage is a book that’ll influence my own marriage for a very long time! When it comes to our marriage, there’s so much more going on than meets the eye. Pastor Evans unveils scripturally so much of what we cannot see, and he does it in a way that somehow leaves you convicted but motivated to act, all at the same time. Get the angels summoned on your behalf. Find the true purpose of what your marriage was meant to be. Be more fulfilled in your marriage than you ever dreamed possible. That’s a legacy worth leaving to your kids.

JOSHUA STRAUB, PH.D.
Author, Safe House: How Emotional Safety Is the Key to Raising Kids Who Live, Love, and Lead Well
Tony Evans is without a doubt truly one of the greatest communicators of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries! The reason he speaks and writes so well is because his heart is 100 percent committed to serving Jesus and making Him known to the world. I highly recommend this book because any part of Tony Evans that you or I can receive will make us a much better person, a better spouse, and a greater person of knowing a relationship with Jesus Christ.

JOE WHITE
President, Kanakuk Ministries

I daresay Kingdom Marriage will be unlike any marriage book you’ve read all year. Ninety percent of marriage books focus on the human element; Kingdom Marriage takes you where very few marriage books go: straight into the spiritual realm. Dr. Tony Evans talks about spiritual warfare, spiritual purpose, spiritual strongholds, and much, much more. If you’ve read fifty marriage books, you still need to read this one, as it is unlike all the others. The chapter on restoration alone is worth the price of the entire book. Masterfully done, prophetically alive, and biblically true, Kingdom Marriage is a tour de force for couples who want to become more spiritually aware in their marriage.

GARY THOMAS
Author, Sacred Marriage and A Lifelong Love

We love this book! Kingdom Marriage is perfect for couples like us who need to be reminded of the biblical, historical, and current truth about how marriage was designed by God. Every couple should read this book and give it as a gift to others they care about.

SCOTT AND BETHANY PALMER
The Money Couple

Whether you are engaged to be married or you’ve been married for sixty years, you should read this book with your spouse. Kingdom Marriage will give you the wisdom and practical insight to make your marriage what God intended it to be—not just a social contract, but a sacred covenant.

RACHEL CRUZE
New York Times best-selling author and personal finance expert
CONNECTING GOD’S PURPOSE
WITH YOUR PLEASURE
This book is gratefully and lovingly dedicated to my wife, Lois, for all
the love, support, skill, sacrifice, and encouragement she has given me.
This has served as the foundation for all that God has allowed me to
accomplish. You are most certainly the wind beneath my wings.
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PART I

The Foundation of a

KINGDOM MARRIAGE
A KINGDOM MARRIAGE not only shares passion, but more important, it has a purpose.

Passion matters and happiness is great, but rather than being the purposes for marriage, they are benefits. Marriage exists to glorify God by expanding His rule and reach. It uniquely reflects His image like nothing else. When you pursue God’s purpose as a couple, then everything else you value in life—such as happiness, love, and satisfaction—will fall into place.

The absence of a kingdom purpose for marriage makes it appear as if many couples have been married by the secretary of war rather than the justice of the peace. A passenger on a plane one day noticed that the man sitting next to him had his wedding ring on the wrong hand, so he asked him why. The husband replied, “Because I married the wrong woman.”

Far too many couples today feel that marriage has turned into too much trouble, like the man who said, “My wife and I were happy for twenty years. And then we got married.”

Friend, when God established marriage, He established it to last. It is
only when we have removed ourselves from His purpose for our relationships that we face the untimely unraveling of what was meant to be permanently satisfying.

A young girl was entertaining herself by playing with her grandmother’s hands. When she asked why her grandmother’s wedding ring was so large and gaudy, the grandmother sighed and then smiled and said, “Child, it’s because when I got married, rings were made to last.”

The problem today is that we have transposed the benefit of marriage with the goal, so that when the benefit—happiness—is not working out, we quit and move on, or we resign ourselves to living a life of unhappiness. A large percentage of marriages end in divorce, and many couples who remain together do so out of economic or practical constraints, not love and a shared purpose. Again, kingdom couples share a purpose, not just passion. Emotions change, but the purpose remains and is what can tie two people together until death do they part.

Most people subscribe to the popular notion of marriage that begins when two people fall in love and share an emotional experience identified by chills, thrills, and butterflies. With eyes only for each other, the infatuated pair promise undying love at the altar only to discover that after they say “I do,” they just don’t anymore. Divorce seems like the only way to forge a truce. In fact, many men and women tell their biggest lies on their wedding days. They promise to “love, honor, and cherish” in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, for as long as they both shall live. Then, before long, they are divorced or wish they were.

If religion is part and parcel of the relationship, many couples will stay together for the sake of the kids. Yet they do so in loveless environments punctuated by conflict, selfishness, and the opposite of the true image of God.

When children grow up in loveless homes, they don’t learn the crucial lessons necessary to develop good self-images now and to build strong marriages.
for themselves later. When kids witness their dads coercing or demanding submission from their moms, they take on a warped definition of manhood and womanhood, which often results in poor behavior and communication later in life.

Our marriages today are crumbling at such a high rate not because we no longer get along but because we have lost sight of the blessing tied to biblical marriage. Marriage is not merely a social contract; it is a sacred covenant. It is not simply a means of looking for love, happiness, and fulfillment. Those things are important; in fact, they are critical. But they are not the most important or the most critical. Yet because we have put second things first, as important as second things are, we are having trouble living out either. When God’s purpose and principles for marriage are undermined, His image becomes distorted, and our ability to influence others on God’s behalf erodes.

Kingdom couples must view marriage through God’s kingdom lens. A kingdom marriage is defined as “a covenental union between a man and a woman who commit themselves to function in unison under divine authority in order to replicate God’s image and expand His rule in the world through both their individual and joint callings.”

**A Lasting Tribute**

Victoria’s father died when she was only one. Raised in a single-parent household, Victoria didn’t have a model of marriage to follow. Her relationship with her mom was strained at the best of times, and they were completely estranged as she grew older. Tossed here and there to different places and people, Victoria grew up in a contradictory world that provided little direction and consistency. What hope would she have of finding a happy home?

At the age of eighteen, Victoria faced new responsibilities. She was crowned Queen of England, something few people expected, since she wasn’t first in line for the throne. However, the two men before her had died, and she found herself receiving a title at a time when it meant precious little. The English monarchy was in question, carried no real influence, and sat precariously on a line between honor and contempt. It was the early 1800s,
and one of the wealthiest and most powerful nations in the world had a teenager as its queen.

Yet just a few years later, Victoria married the man who would help her change the face of the monarchy for good. His name was Albert, and funny enough, she proposed to him. (Since she was the queen, he was not allowed to propose to her.) They soon married, and her diary and accounts reveal that they were deeply in love from the start. Later she wrote, “Without him everything loses its interest.”

Their marriage stayed strong and lasted until Albert’s untimely death in his early forties. Yet even though it was short, what their marriage produced was nothing short of remarkable. It not only strengthened Victoria’s rule, as Albert became his wife’s chief adviser and promoter, but it also expanded the dominion and rule of their nation throughout the rest of the continent through their children. Victoria and Albert raised their children with a kingdom mind-set.

German by birth, Prince Albert was considered an invading foreigner and “British interloper” by most. Yet he became a respected leader in the nation as he honored Victoria’s position and strength while seeking the good of her career and nation through his influence in political and domestic issues. The view of the monarchy completely changed by the end of Queen Victoria’s reign, and it came to be known as a powerful tool for good for the land. The nine children the couple raised likewise went on to increase the reach of that good into countries near and far.

Each of their nine children, and many of their forty-two grandchildren, married into royal families. This included a German empress and queen of Prussia, a king of England, a grand duchess who was a champion of women’s causes and a promoter of female nursing, a cofounder of the Red Cross who also married into German royalty, the wife of a governor general of Canada, a Canadian commander in chief, and various other influential leaders.

While it is widely purported that Victoria valued her marriage far more than she valued her parenting role, she and Albert took their duties to pass on their dominion and legacy seriously, and they were effective. In that, and much more, their marital success contributed to the success not only of England’s
citizens but also of people throughout the world who were positively impacted by the improvements in women’s rights, social services, and the attention to peace their leaders sought.

But what happened after their marriage ended impresses me most about the love and strength of their union. Following Albert’s untimely death, the queen showed him the greatest honor any wife could give. Victoria was still young when widowed, and she could have had any royal suitor in the world. Yet she chose to remain in mourning over the loss of the love of her life. For four decades, Queen Victoria clothed herself daily in black, staying true to the memory of her marriage even after death had parted them. Many thought her grief was excessive, but Victoria’s love for Albert demanded nothing less. I have found no greater testament to a spouse’s love than what the queen unwaveringly gave to her prince.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert shared the fruit of happiness in marriage despite the obvious challenges of a large family, the pressures of duty and office, and certain male-female sensitivities resulting from her superior role. Yet they did it all successfully while carrying out the mission of expanding their dominion and influence upon the world.

As followers of the one true King over all, we should seek to honor each other no less, to love each other no less, and to expand God’s dominion and rule no less through all we do in our marriages.

The King and His Kingdom

The key to influencing our society and world with lasting impact is found in solidifying biblical marriage in the way God intended. It starts with both wife and husband reflecting God and His image and modeling that reflection within the roles and responsibilities of their union. This begins with a correct understanding of God’s kingdom and their responsibilities in it.
Yet because the body of Christ in America has focused much more heavily on buildings, programs, and entertainment, far too few have a full understanding of God’s kingdom or what biblical commitment looks like.

To gain some background, let me begin by stating that if you are an American, you are most likely an American because you were born here. If you are a part of the kingdom of God, it is because you have been born again into His kingdom through personal faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the sinless Savior, Jesus Christ.

Understanding the Kingdom with regard to your marriage is the key to understanding the Bible. The unifying, central theme throughout the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—is the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom.

When we lack an integration of the kingdom theme in our Bible study and application, the Bible becomes a collection of disconnected stories that are great for information and inspiration but seem unrelated in purpose, direction, and contemporary relevance. Scripture exists to highlight God’s movement in history. It shows us the connection of the Kingdom. Fully grasping this concept makes this several-thousand-year-old manuscript relevant to our day-to-day decisions. The Kingdom is not only then; it is also now.

The closer God and His rule are tied to the definition of marriage, the more order, productivity, and fulfillment are experienced in our marriages. The further away God and His rule are, the more chaos occurs in the home.

What is the kingdom? Throughout the Bible, the kingdom of God is His rule. The Greek word used for “kingdom” is basileia, translated “rule” or “authority.” Any kingdom consists of three crucial components: First, there is a ruler; second, a realm of subjects who fall underneath this rule; and third, the rules of governance. God’s kingdom is the authoritative execution of His comprehensive governance over all creation. His kingdom is all-encompassing. It covers everything that exists.

The universe we live in is a theocracy. Theos refers to God, and ocracy
refers to rule. A kingdom perspective means that the rule of God (theocracy) trumps the rule of man (homocracy). Scripture expresses it this way: “The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19, NIV).

God’s kingdom is larger than the temporal, governmental, and social realms that make up our world. It is not confined to the walls of the church in which we call on His name in a corporate setting. The kingdom is both now (Mark 1:15) and not yet (Matthew 16:28). It is not only near (Luke 17:21) but also far (Matthew 7:21). Jesus spoke to the heavenly origin of His earthly kingdom shortly before His crucifixion, when He responded to Pilate,

My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm. (John 18:36)

God’s kingdom consists of covenantal institutions that include the family, the church, and civil government (the state). God rules them all, and each is accountable to Him and His standards as their sovereign, regardless of whether they recognize that rule. Failure to function under His authority produces chaos and consequences similar to what Adam and Eve experienced in the garden and what we see all around us today.

The foundation of civilization is the family, and the foundation of the family is marriage. Therefore the destruction of marriage naturally results in the destruction of civilization, which is why it is critical that we make strengthening marriages and families an integral part of the church’s mission.

All three covenantal institutions (family, church, and civil government) were designed to operate on a standard of absolute truth.
from any tree except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God wanted His revelation and not human opinion to be the basis and foundation for their relationship. When they ate of this tree, they removed themselves from the absolute nature of God’s command, ushering reason into their future equations. As a result, today we must be careful to always place our reasoning underneath the umbrella of absolute, revealed truth. Truth is fundamentally God-based knowledge. This standard of truth is nonnegotiable, transcending cultural, economic, belief-based, and situational lines.

Not only does the Kingdom agenda operate on this foundation of absolute truth, but it also operates under the only all-inclusive principle presented to us for understanding the work of God and His kingdom. This principle is His glory. Romans 11:36 says that “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Glory denotes significance and value. Since everything originates from God, takes place through God, and goes to God, God’s glory exists intrinsically in Himself. Whether we ascribe glory to God or not is irrelevant to the amount of glory God has. His glory is already fully present in Him. Yet the degree to which we personally experience and access God’s glory in our lives, our marriages, and our homes is found in the extent to which we align ourselves under His comprehensive rule. When we align our lives under God and His rule, He radiates and magnifies His glory to, in, and through us. We experience the abundant life and abundant marriages Christ came to secure on our behalf (John 10:10).

The number one way to bring God glory is by surrendering to His sovereign rule. This acknowledges His supremacy over every area of our lives. When we operate in our marriages based on these principles of the Kingdom agenda, we are free to experience God’s hand of blessing and His promise to work all things together for good (Romans 8:28).

Conversely, when we do not operate according to God’s kingdom and His rule over our lives, we limit our opportunity to experience His hand working

For the Kingdom agenda to be made manifest in your marriage, it calls for aligning all you do, think, and say under God’s rule.
all things together for good. This is because we have chosen to define God according to our purpose rather than His. But God will be defined by no one but Himself. It is the rule of God (theocracy) and not the rule of man (homocracy) that is paramount. If God’s kingdom is comprehensive, as we have seen, so is His Kingdom agenda. The Kingdom agenda may be defined as “the visible manifestation of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life.” For the Kingdom agenda to be made manifest in your marriage, it calls for aligning all you do, think, and say under God’s rule. When that is done, you will experience the fruit of all the good that God has planned for you.

The reason so many of us are struggling as believers is that instead of fulfilling His agenda, we want God to bless our agendas for our marriages. We want God to okay our plans rather than our fulfilling His. We want God to bring us glory rather than our bringing Him glory through honoring the marriage covenant as He intended it.

*The Purpose of Marriage*

God established marriage in a perfect environment. In fact, marriage came before sin. God created the first family and gave them His blessing, His commission, and His image:

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26–28)

As we see from the outset of this foundational passage on marriage, Adam and Eve were to reflect the triune image of God—unity in the midst of diversity. An image mirrors that which it reflects; it doesn’t add to, take away from,
or distort. God created humanity as His mirror and called for that mirror to reproduce more mirrors through marriage. The marriage union—made up of male and female—most fully expresses who God truly is, and it is the most comprehensive manifestation of His image.

Our goal as married couples is not only to mirror God in the visible realm predicated on His reality in the invisible realm, but also to transfer the perfection of that image to our children as we raise kingdom kids. Simply put, the mission of marriage is to manifest and replicate the image of God in history, as well as to carry out His divinely mandated dominion (“let them rule”). Dominion essentially means ruling on God’s behalf in history so that history comes underneath God’s authority. The blessings God promised, and that we so desire to experience in marriage, were to be the outgrowth of men and women fulfilling God’s purpose of reflecting His image and managing together His creation under His rule. Happiness is to be a benefit of a strong marriage but not the goal. The goal of marriage is to reflect God through the advancement of His kingdom on earth. Happiness occurs as an organic outgrowth when this goal is pursued.

The Dominion of Husband and Wife

In Genesis 1:28, God gave Adam and Eve the commission to rule. Understanding this passage is critical to the success of a kingdom marriage. To do so, let’s look at the historical context within which the family was first placed.

God’s creation of humanity came after the rebellion of Satan as a way of setting the human race to rule over God’s created order. We see this in Psalm 8:3–6:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet.
The commission to “let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth” (Genesis 1:26) was partnered with the command to “subdue” the earth (verse 28). In formal theology we refer to this as the Dominion Covenant.

The backstory to this covenant was the rebellion of Satan against the kingdom of God, which resulted in the banishment of Satan and his fallen angels to earth prior to their permanent incarceration in hell. Humankind, and the institution of marriage, was specially created for people to have a relationship with God and each other that would result in a demonstration of God’s greater glory and the superiority of His kingdom through humanity. This goal and the blessings connected to it could only be achieved, however, if the marriage relationship operated according to its divine design, which explains why Satan didn’t attack Adam until he was married.

God established a kingdom on earth that would rule over and defeat the kingdom of Satan. When Christ comes to create His millennial kingdom, it will be the final, triumphant declaration of God’s glory. Satan will then be locked up during that time to reveal his ultimate defeat and judgment (Revelation 20:1–3).

Yet, for now, God has issued a purpose for you and me—and for married couples especially—to harness and rule a part of His creation. Every person was created with that divine intent, and every marital union exists to pass down that intent to the next generation. In summary, the marriage relationship is to rule and replicate the image and kingdom of God in history.

When God established the first family and gave them dominion to rule, He stated that He would not rule independently of them. Our decisions on earth would impact His decisions from heaven (Ephesians 3:10). God did this for one reason: to demonstrate to Satan and his minions that He can do more to manifest His glory through lesser creatures than through the once shining star.

We often think that a battle is taking place between God and Satan these days. But there is no battle going on between them. No battle can exist between the Creator and a created one. That would be similar to me saying I’ll take on
Manny Pacquiao in the ring. Sure, we both might step forward to fight, but I’d be out like a light at the first punch.

Satan, a created creature, is no match for the all-powerful Creator. That’s no fight. Yet what God did establish was the opportunity for inferior creatures—human beings (Psalm 8:5)—to demonstrate that in this spiritual battle, even we can win when we operate according to God’s kingdom rule. We are in an ongoing battle, and Satan has had thousands of years to perfect his punches. He likes to target married couples first, since we ultimately reflect the union of Christ with the church, as well as pass down the image of God to the next generation. As kingdom couples, we have been cast in a cosmic conflict to manifest God’s rule in history for the advancement of His kingdom and the reflection of His glory.

God has delegated the managerial responsibility for ruling on earth. We hold that responsibility. Yet keep in mind that He has not turned over absolute ownership of the earth to us. By turning over the management to us, He has established a process, within certain boundaries, wherein He respects our decisions even if they go against His own, or even if those decisions are not in the best interest of that which is being managed. As a result, we either experience blessing or the consequences of poor decisions.

God is the ultimate owner over all. But He has delegated management duties, under His sovereignty, to us. Your decisions as a couple regarding both how you relate to each other and how you reflect God to others through your union directly affect the quality of life you experience. The tragedy for most couples is that they have followed suit with Satan, seeking ownership rights, not just management responsibilities. As owners, couples go outside of God’s rule and make decisions based on their preferred will or desires. And like Satan, they experience the distance and conflict he did when he was booted from God’s presence.

What that means is that you can have a happy marriage or a miserable marriage depending on whether or not you exercise your rule as a reflection
of God’s image. God isn’t going to make you rule according to His rule. He isn’t going to force you to have a productive and fulfilling relationship. He established marriage and its purposes, but you have the option of living by those purposes or not.

Frequently the well-being of a marriage is determined by whether a man and a woman are reflecting God’s image in their individual roles. Once that mirror shatters or even cracks, the reflection of the relationship breaks with it. Nearly every time there’s a family breakdown, it is the result of one or both spouses operating outside the covenantal bonds of marriage. They are modeling a broken mirror. As a result, they experience less of God’s favor.

Satan either tries to get us to relinquish our management and hand it over to him by deceiving us into believing that he has authority, or he tries to get us to manage poorly based on our own judgments and distorted worldviews. He often does this through the promotion of conflict in our relationships, or through the enticement of ungodly choices.

When we as couples fail to align ourselves under God’s kingdom rule, the battle lines are drawn.

Self-centered viewpoints like those create tension in a marriage. But the problems and challenges that marriages face should cause us to seek and apply the power of God, not divorce our spouses.

I’ve been the chaplain for the NBA’s Dallas Mavericks for more than three decades. I enjoy a good game of basketball as much as the next person. And I’m pretty good at playing basketball—pretty much unstoppable . . . when I play alone. When unopposed, I can make any play and grab nothing but net. Yet in my younger days when I had an opportunity to play against the former Mavs star forward, Mark Aguirre, I quickly discovered I wasn’t that great at basketball after all. The true test of my ball skills came only when I faced opposition.

So it is with marriage. But conflict, struggle, challenge, and differences shouldn’t destroy our union; they should show the power of Christ within us. Jesus never asks you as a married couple to do what He has not already given
you the ability to do (Philippians 4:13). Marriage is one of the greatest ways you can show the difference that Jesus Christ makes. You can reflect the glory of God and the unity of the Trinity through your shared purpose, honor, and love as a true kingdom couple. When you do that, you will not only have a love story for the ages, like Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, but you will also expand God’s dominion and rule on earth through your marriage and your legacy. The bottom line is that marriage is a kingdom concept, not merely a social one.

When my wife, Lois, and I met, fell in love, and began to discuss marriage, a large part of our planning revolved around how God could use our relationship to bring Him glory and serve His kingdom. Since we were both committed to Christ and were called to serve Him, it was natural to include God’s kingdom purpose as the defining centerpiece of our relationship. This is the orientation God wants every couple to enter marriage with. The key question is this: How can our marriages reflect God’s image and advance His kingdom? As that question is answered, our marriages can expect the blessings and joy that we so deeply long for.

It was clear in the establishment of marriage that God wanted the institution sovereignly under His control and existing for His purpose. Thus, it was God who created man. It was God who communicated to man His Word. It was God who revealed the need in man for a woman. It was God who created the woman from the man. It was God who brought the woman to the man. So it was clearly God’s intent that He never be left out of marriage, but rather be the definition of it.
I’VE NEVER LIVED OVERSEAS, but I know Americans who have, and
I’ve had the opportunity to travel abroad extensively over the past several
decades. One thing always startles me more than anything else in some of the
underdeveloped countries I have visited: the way people drive.

In some places it feels as though everyone has been cast in the latest *Fast
and Furious* film. In other places, I’m not sure who owns the roads—bicycles,
vehicles, or animals. More often than not, it is difficult for me to even deter-
mine where the lanes are. Sometimes they aren’t marked, and cars, public-
transportation vehicles, and bikes swerve in and out of each other’s way. Toss
a few pedestrians in there, and it’s a recipe for chaos.

Having experienced this firsthand, I’m not surprised that, according to
government reports, car accidents rather than terrorism, crime, or even natural
disasters claimed more American lives abroad from 2011 through 2013 than
anything else.¹ Between twenty and fifty million people suffer from nonfatal
injuries as a result of car accidents each year. And road accidents are considered
to be the eighth leading cause of death globally, right up there with diseases
like malaria.² A lack of clear lane delineation, as well as a lack of adherence to
the lanes, causes many of these accidents.

Take a moment to imagine yourself driving in rush-hour traffic in the
largest city near you. It’s stressful enough just driving in that, isn’t it? Toss in
some construction barrels, as well as a few potholes, and now it’s even more
stressful. But remove the lanes markers altogether? Now, would driving even be possible? I doubt it. There would probably be a pileup within a matter of minutes, and a traffic jam for miles on end.

Without order there is chaos, which is why Satan continually tries to stir things up in our marriages. As long as chaos reigns, we can never move into a place of order, peace, harmony, and progress. God has ordained a rulership for you and your spouse to carry out. He has intentionally brought the two of you together to fulfill His purpose for your lives. Yet just as you wouldn’t be able to drive in rush-hour traffic without following clearly marked lanes, neither can you move forward to carry out all God has in store for you as a couple without following the lanes of His prescribed order. Satan knows that if he is going to cancel out your capacity to rule, he has to disrupt order by creating dissension and division.

Whatever Satan can divide, he can control. That’s especially true in our marriages. This is exactly the approach he took when dividing Adam and Eve from each other and removing them from God’s blessings. He got Eve to move outside her lane by questioning God’s Word, and then he got Adam to move outside his lane by taking part in eating the fruit. When they removed themselves from their prescribed positions of alignment under God, they lost their ability to rule their world. Instead of enjoying the blessings God had promised, they now lived under a curse. The very things that had been designed to bring them good now brought them pain.

Many couples today are living under the effects of a curse. They are no longer enjoying the blessings of God’s favor but instead are suffering the consequences of their disobedience. Over the years God’s Word has been so watered down and twisted to fit our cultural norms that many couples don’t even realize why things are in the mess they’re in. But if you will commit to applying God’s prescribed order to your marriage relationship, you will begin to see the fruit of blessing showing up not only in your partnership but in other areas
connected to your family as well. This happens as you open up the opportunity for greater favor to flow.

Headship Applies to Both Husband and Wife

We read about God’s prescribed order in Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth. If you know the history of the Corinthian church, you know that it was a church in chaos and disorder. Paul spoke into this chaos with a principle to set things straight: “I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:3). In this one verse we find the spiritual key to covering and authority that, when followed, can save any marriage. It can turn any deflated and defeated marriage into a victorious, productive one. Or it can give an already functioning relationship the power to pull off even greater exploits for the Lord.

When I counsel couples who are struggling in their marriages, without fail one or both of the spouses are no longer applying this principle in their lives. Get this one thing right, and all else will align underneath it.

Let’s quickly walk through this principle, and then we’ll talk about the rationale behind it as well as the ramifications. Whenever I teach on this subject, I always like to start from the end because it is the quickest point of tangible identification: God is the head of Christ.

Now we know theologically that Jesus is equal to God, so this reference to God as the head of Christ is inferring position rather than inequality. After all, Jesus is the eternal Son of God, and He possesses the full divine essence of all that makes God God. Christ’s ontological being is the same as God in makeup; however, when it comes to functioning, Jesus comes underneath God in the order of carrying out the divine design and plan.

That’s why when Jesus was on earth, He prayed, “Not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). The work of redemption was accomplished because Jesus came underneath the headship of the Father, thus securing forgiveness, salvation, glorification, and eternal life for all who believe on Him.

Had Jesus rebelled as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane because He felt that His rights were being infringed upon or His goals were being impeded, we would all be in a world of hurt right now. Rather, He submitted,
and as a result we now have access to God through Him, as well as the abundant life He died to secure on our behalf.

Just as Christ is under God, we discover in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that every man is under Christ. Because Paul was writing to the church, he was referencing believers. Every Christian man has Jesus Christ in headship over him. This is a biblical truth as well as a foundational part of a healthy marriage that is rarely taught or addressed. So much teaching on the concept of submission focuses on the wife’s submission to her husband, and yet in the very same verse is found the mandate for the husband’s submission under Jesus Christ. No Christian man is autonomous. Every man is answerable to Christ. In fact, a *man* is defined biblically as “a male who has learned to submit his maleness to the lordship of Jesus Christ.”

If a husband expects his wife to answer to him, she should also see that modeled in her husband as he answers to Christ. Far too many men get out of their lanes with respect to Christ but expect their wives to be in their lanes with respect to them. No one should be shocked if a marriage ends in disarray when a man is not operating according to the principles of God. He’s out of his lane. And if he’s out of his lane, more than likely his wife is also out of her lane. A crash is going to occur when two people are not living in alignment with the divine order God has established.

Headship is often an area of confusion and questions for the couples I counsel. For the wife, there is a tangible human being to whom she is to submit. Yet for the husband, while Christ is real, He doesn’t speak audibly, and much is left to the man’s interpretation. This is unfortunate, and I believe that we have missed our calling as a church body to provide the accountability men need to both teach and guide as spiritual leaders in the church.

One couple I was recently counseling complained of arguing about nearly everything. While they sat in my office, I could see the distrust and defenses they had both put up. One said something, and the other corrected it. They seemed to be at an impasse on a lot of levels. I’ve known this couple for some
time, and I truly wanted to see their marriage restored. I’m not able to do this for everyone I counsel, but I gave them my personal cell number and asked if they would agree to one thing: The next time they argued and couldn’t reach a conclusion to their conflict, they would call me and allow me to hold them accountable in the situation based on God’s Word.

Immediately after I said that, the wife broke down in tears. It was as if relief flooded over her. I’m not sure why, but based on my experience with many other couples I’ve counseled, I assume that she felt her husband’s accountability to Christ meant nothing because no one was holding him to it. But now there would be an equal hearing between them both. The couple agreed, and I was grateful for the opportunity to intervene in a positive way.

The church exists to provide that sounding board in conflict situations. At the church where I pastor, we have a ministry of marriage mentors. These are couples who have demonstrated a healthy relationship and level of commitment to each other and to the Lord over the years and who now volunteer to provide that accountability for Christ’s headship in marriages that are faltering. The church is to be about so much more than simply preaching and singing on Sunday. The church was established as God’s governing body on earth to strengthen its members so that we might advance His Kingdom agenda. Unfortunately, we’ve turned the church into a club or coffeehouse, and much of the significance of why it exists has been lost.

Husbands, you are accountable to God under Christ. I’ve seen marriages destroyed because the husband turned a blind eye to his own responsibility as protector, provider, nurturer, and preserver of the home while blaming his wife for any and all things. Had the husband stepped up and stayed in his lane, I have no doubt that God would have restored the marriage. Men, there is no excuse for holding your wife to a standard that you won’t hold yourself to as well.

Have you ever driven a car that was out of alignment? A whole lot of shaking

The church was established as God’s governing body on earth to strengthen its members so that we might advance His Kingdom agenda.
goes on when things are not lined up right. In addition, there’s a whole lot of unnecessary wear and tear on the tires. The fundamental problem we face today in marriages is that men are out of alignment and then get upset because the ones following them (their wives and children) are out of line as well. You must be in alignment spiritually if you want those who are following you to be in line. To put it another way: Husbands, if you want your wives to call you “lord,” then they need to see you calling Jesus Christ “Lord” and modeling Him.

Last, we read in 1 Corinthians that “the man is the head of a woman” (11:3). Since I’ll be covering this in another chapter, I’ll only touch on it briefly here. First, I want to point out that it says “a” woman. This is not a blanket declaration of male-over-female rule. This refers to the order of a marriage, and nothing more. The husband is over his wife in final authority, not in equality, ability, or even contribution. As a result of the man’s headship, the wife comes under his provision, protection, and guidance. Headship carries with it a responsibility. The wife is to look to the husband (her head) for these things. She is to follow the husband’s lead as her husband follows Christ’s lead. This is the divine order.

This is exactly what Satan shifted in the garden to bring about the curse. He went straight to Eve first because Adam had abdicated his role. This made it easy for Eve to abdicate hers as well when she took over the lead and gave instruction to Adam to eat the fruit. All hell broke loose in the garden because Adam and Eve got out of order.

As we see from their example, when headship is broken, authority is lost. Without spiritual authority, it is difficult to accomplish anything worthwhile, let alone experience a thriving marriage. The problems we are facing in our homes and marriages are not fundamentally tied to our personalities, worldviews, or backgrounds. They come from giving the garden over to the Devil and allowing him to take advantage of our lack of spiritual covering and authority by exploiting our personalities, worldviews, and backgrounds.

One final thought on this passage. A man doesn’t have absolute authority
over a woman. She is to come under him only as his authority aligns underneath the lordship of Christ. In other words, a husband cannot ask or require his wife to do something that violates a divine mandate in Scripture.

**Because of the Angels**

Again, when you are living out of alignment, you’re living under the consequences of the curse, and you’ve lost your capacity to rule. When you are in alignment, you are living under the blessing and have regained your rule. So the question regarding your marriage is not so much whether he (or she) annoys you, or whether you disagree about certain things; it’s whether or not you want to rule your world or lose that rule. It’s up to you because God has established a certain positional framework within which we all must abide. And He has done it for a purpose.

This often-overlooked purpose for hierarchy is found in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul began this passage by talking about a woman’s hair as her covering, since she is the glory of a man, and he also talked about a man being the glory of God (verses 4–7). Paul reminds us after this that the woman originated from the man and was created for the man’s sake, but neither is independent of the other, since the man is now birthed from the woman (verses 8–9, 11–12). Sandwiched in between these statements is found the reason behind Paul’s emphasis on a symbolic covering that represents the covering of headship: “Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (verse 10).

What does “because of the angels” mean? The Devil is an angel. His name was Lucifer. God created Lucifer to be the archangel. He was an angel of incredible glory, as well as unparalleled power and strength. There was only one caveat to Lucifer’s control: It needed to come underneath God’s order. But Lucifer didn’t like that. He wanted to be equal to God, to be like the Most High, and he didn’t want to have to answer to anyone. In fact, he wanted everyone to have to answer to him.

Lucifer didn’t like God’s prescribed order; he wanted to run his own show. So Lucifer rebelled. He found those who would follow him, and he sought to take a place above God Himself. Yet when he rebelled, he was cursed, and a
third of the angels, those who rebelled with him, were also cursed. They were placed on planet earth, which served as a holding cell until the time God set for their eternal destruction.

In the meantime, God created man—Adam—and from Adam He created Eve. When Lucifer tempted Adam and Eve to also break the divine order, he turned their blessing and rule into a curse. In other words, they got cursed because of an angel. Satan, an angel turned bad, brought about pain in employment, pain in finances, pain in childbirth, pain in the ground, and pain in families.

In other words, angels aren’t just sitting around doing nothing. They are either supporting the divine order (God’s angels) or seeking to twist it with another order (Satan’s followers). Angels are very involved in our lives and marriages. The good angels we call angels; the bad ones we call demons. Demons seek to take their own spirit of rebellion and create chaos in our homes by playing on differences in personalities, desires, and weaknesses. When we give in to these differences in our marriages and place ourselves outside our lanes—men in the lane of God and His rule, and women in the lane of men as their final authority—we lose the capacity to rule our homes, our children, our careers, and more.

Ephesians 3:10 states, “. . . so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.” The angels are waiting for their instructions by looking at how you and I as members of the body of Christ—the church—choose to operate. When we are operating correctly, there is a signal to the angels to bring God’s will to bear on earth. When we are operating out of alignment, the doors are open and the signal is given for the demons to bring even greater chaos.

Angels are available to all of us to provide protection, guidance, and more. But a lot of our angels are taking a break because they don’t see the order that grants them permission to enter our world and invoke our rule. If you’re not
in order, in alignment, then the angels won’t move, because that’s what got the
first group cast out of heaven to begin with—operating out of order.

When Jesus called Nathanael to follow him, Jesus told him that He saw Nathanael
sitting under a fig tree. Because of this, Nathanael believed that Jesus was the Son
of God. But Jesus told him that he would see even greater things than these: “Truly,
truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and
descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

Jesus was sharing the image of a ladder
coming down out of heaven bringing God’s rule—“Your kingdom come. Your
will be done” (Matthew 6:10)—from heaven to earth. This is similar to the
ladder Jacob saw at Bethel, where he witnessed the angels descending from and
ascending to heaven (Genesis 28:12).

The reason many of us aren’t witnessing God’s hand of intervention,
favor, and blessing in our marriages is because we are limiting positive angelic
involvement. Our ladders are strewn across our yards—lying flat or leaning up
against the wrong walls. Order is critical because it reveals a heart of obedience
and trust. Disorder embodies rebellion and pride.

As a couple, you can regain your right to rule and exercise the
dominion God has called you to live out.
A HEALTHY, VIBRANT MARRIAGE is all about focus. Is your focus on God and His purpose and power, or is it on yourself and what you want?

A couple came to my office for counseling not too long ago, and they brought a list with them. This list must have had at least thirty or more things written on it. I remember feeling instantly depressed as I watched them pull out that list. It was as if I was a balloon, and someone had taken a needle and deflated me. How am I going to help them solve so many issues? I thought as they began to read each and every item on the list.

On and on they read, naming what sounded like legitimate sources of conflict. These were real issues, and I could see why they were not getting along. Once the couple finished reading the list, the husband handed it to me. In a split second, I had to make a decision. Was I going to go through this list with them and provide input on each issue they’d written down, or was I going to address the source of their conflict?

I looked at the list. Then I looked at the couple, both of whom had hopelessness and even anger written all over their faces. Then I looked back at the list, carefully and thoughtfully penned. And I tore it up. Right there in front of them. You can imagine what their faces looked like then. They

A healthy, vibrant marriage is all about focus.
had taken quite a bit of time to prepare this list for our meeting, and I had just shredded it.

I leaned toward them and said in a soft but firm tone, “What you just gave me is the fruit. It’s real, but it’s the fruit. It’s like a firecracker that shoots up into the sky and explodes. Only one thing is shot up there, but when it explodes, it goes into all of these other directions. What I want to talk to you about is the ‘one thing,’ not the explosion.

“We could talk about these thirty things on your list, but nothing will ultimately change in your marriage, because this one thing is missing: the spiritual foundation of your relationship. Without establishing and maintaining a solid spiritual relationship, your list of thirty things, once solved, will just morph into another thirty, and you’ll wind up back in here the same time next year with another list of thirty things to solve.”

I could tell they were both listening intently, so I continued. “Get this one thing right, and all the other things will fall into place. Get a divine perspective on your marriage as the foundation for your home, and you’ll discover who your true enemy is—and it is not each other.”

When we fight in our marriages, we assume that our spouses are the problem. And that’s exactly what the Devil wants. He wants you to believe that your spouse is the problem—not you. He knows you will never fix the real problem if you believe that the person you are fighting with is the problem. But your spouse is not the problem. The problem is a spiritual one brought on by your own sinful flesh or by a rebellious and clever enemy of God.

Think about it: Much of what you end up fighting about in your marriage has nothing to do with what you are really fighting about, does it? There’s something deeper—an unmet need, a lack of trust, a lack of respect, or any number of other things. These are the root of the problem and the fights. However, what makes a marriage strong is loving with a biblical love grounded in patience, kindness, loyalty, grace, and more, which is in alignment with God’s covenantal purpose for marriage.
in patience, kindness, loyalty, grace, and more, which is in alignment with God’s covenantal purpose for marriage.

Yet a lot of the things we end up fighting about have to do with the consequences of our own choices, as well as the demonic realm working against us. One little thing can easily turn into a conflict that puts us on a path to divorce court. And we end up wondering how something so small could destroy something so big.

It can do that because, again, it’s not that one little thing. It’s about breaking the marriage covenant through a lack of submission (by both parties) under the transcendence of God, a lack of alignment with each other and God, or violating the covenantal rules of love and respect.

It’s like asking how one small piece of fruit in the garden of Eden could have caused so much pain. It caused so much pain for all future generations because it wasn’t just about a piece of fruit. It was about the effect: the curse, which came from the cause, which was disobedience to God’s rule.

If you are unable to truly comprehend and correct your focus by making a spiritual connection to everything that goes on in your marriage, you will continue to rant and rave about whatever the current issue is. You will continue to focus on the thing that’s happening without realizing that the core issue is to blame: a failure to align under the fundamentals of a covenant in order to be in a position to receive the blessings God has promised. After all, isn’t that what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden?

Again, it really wasn’t about the fruit, was it? Rather, it was a failure to abide by God’s covenantal provisions. It was a failure to take God at His Word. Once God’s Word begins to get twisted and warped, all hell breaks loose. We witnessed that not only with Adam and Eve but also with their children, when Cain went on to kill Abel. Adam and Eve’s marriage eventually affected the entire world, as God ultimately destroyed it in a flood. Even to this day, we live under the curse of what they did in the garden.

Satan showed up to get Adam and Eve to do more than simply take a bite out of some fruit. He showed up to destroy the family so that he could regain a portion of the rule he lost at his fall. Satan showed up to distort God’s image, since male and female were created in the image of God and together were the most complete manifestation of God’s image. He did this by challenging and
changing God’s Word, reversing the roles of men and women, and introducing a demonic presence into their life decisions. Satan wants to destroy your marriage not just because he wants to destroy your marriage but because he knows that in doing so, he’ll also destroy your legacy. He’ll mess up the future of your children and their children. Whoever owns the family owns the future. The best way for Satan to get to the family is to target your marriage. That’s why he approached Eve in the garden the way he did, seeking to subtly turn her heart and her mind from God.

God is referenced in a distinct way in Scripture regarding His relationship with humanity before Satan appeared to Eve and tempted her to eat of the forbidden fruit. Every time God is spoken of in conjunction with Adam, He is called “the Lord God.” Whenever we read the word “Lord” written in all caps, it stands for the name of God, which is translated from the word Yahweh. This name in the original language reflects God’s character and covenantal relationship as “master and absolute ruler.”

However, when Satan approached Eve to persuade her to do that which she shouldn’t do, Satan didn’t refer to God the way God referred to Himself. Rather, Satan removed the name “Lord” altogether and simply said, “Indeed, has God said . . . ?” (Genesis 3:1). In this subtle reduction of terms, Satan sought to strip from the conversation any association with God’s rulership over and relationship with humanity. In doing so, he kept the concept of religion intact. After all, he did say “God.” But he removed the relational element of divine authority. Satan chose to bypass Adam and approach Eve in a way that would get her to believe that the authority was actually hers to have. In addition, the Evil One spoke to Eve only about the good that the Tree of Knowledge had to offer, not the evil that would result from it. Satan is good at giving only half the story.

In biting the fruit that had been forbidden by the One who had the right to forbid it, both Adam and Eve changed their view of their creator from that of “Lord God” to “God.” This then ended the intimate fellowship with Him that they had once shared, and it also ended the freedom of intimacy they had
once shared with each other. Not only that, but it pruned the power of their
dominion, which had flowed to and through them from the ultimate Ruler.

The primary reason Satan stirs up conflict in our marital relationships is
because he wants to flip the rulership in our lives. He is seeking to dethrone the
one true King, who reigns over both partners
in a marriage, and then Satan wants to offer
each partner the misguided notion that he
or she has the wisdom and the ability to live
apart from God. As we learned from Adam
and Eve, and as I’m sure you can testify in
your own life and marriage, decisions made
apart from God’s wisdom notoriously wind
up causing more harm than good.

When Satan is allowed to stoke the fires of
discontent and contempt in our homes, he distorts the image of God through
us as married couples and keeps us from accomplishing our own dominion
purposes. Essentially, when you view your spouse as your enemy and fail to rec-
ognize the true enemy, Satan, you are getting hoodwinked. Satan is playing the
end against the middle to limit your ability to carry out all that God desires to do
in and through both of you. When you don’t see your enemy for who he is—a
clever manipulator and deceiver who knows just the right buttons to push to
turn you against each other—you will forever be reacting to your spouse rather
than recognizing that Satan is just the vehicle to stop what God is trying to do.

By destroying your marriage, Satan destroys the future of your family and
negatively impacts society at large. That’s why you must commit your marriage
to prayer and cultivate a real relationship in humility while seeking God’s wis-
dom and guidance and asking for His love, grace, and mercy in all things.

I’m happy to say that when the couple I mentioned earlier with the long list
of issues sought to view each other and their relationship through the lens of
God’s purposes, they made every attempt to cultivate and keep that which they
were given. Over time I literally saw the wife’s countenance lift as if she were
becoming a brand-new woman. I also saw the husband enjoy a relationship
with his wife that used to bring him dread. To this day they are living out the
fullness of a life together, in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Identify Your True Enemy

A number of years ago, a well-known football player named Conrad Dobler was featured in a popular Miller Lite television commercial. Perhaps you remember it; in a matter of a few seconds, he managed to incite a near riot among a group of spectators. At his urging, one side claimed, “Tastes great!” “Less filling!” the other retorted.

As the controversy was about to turn into a fight, the camera cut to Dobler, who was sneaking out a back exit. Believe it or not, this tongue-in-cheek tactic concocted by Madison Avenue to sell beer is a vital spiritual lesson for marriage: It’s important to identify your true enemy.

The fans in the bleachers thought their opponents were those who disagreed with them. In truth, the entire audience had only one enemy: Conrad Dobler.

The whole of the universe is divided into two rival kingdoms. The first is the kingdom of light or righteousness, ruled by God. The other is the kingdom of darkness or evil, commanded by Satan. He is our enemy—our only enemy—and our world is the battleground where his efforts to compete with God are played out. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Calvary was the definitive blow that sealed the Devil’s fate. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, a cataclysmic thing happened: Satan was soundly and completely defeated.
Satan has been defeated. But like a person beaten in life, he doesn’t want to go down alone. As chaplain for the Dallas Mavericks, I’ve definitely seen some basketball in my day. During a recent season, the Mavericks missed the play-offs by a country mile. They were defeated long before the season ended. Still, during their final game, they played with a passion for victory. Why? Because dealing a late-season loss to a rival team would affect that team’s chances of becoming champions.

In other words, “We may not be going to the play-offs, but neither are you!” In the sports world, that’s the way the game is played. Marriage is no different when it comes to Satan. He’s no longer looking to win the final victory, but if he can defeat and disable you to prevent you from achieving yours, he will have accomplished his goal. Satan’s goal for you and your spouse is to rob you of your own spiritual championship bid and drag you down to his defeatist level. If you’re saved, he can’t drag either of you into hell, but he can try to render you ineffective and miserable on earth.

Satan knows what the apostle Paul knew, that God has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). The Devil understands your potential individually and as a couple under the Dominion Covenant. He wants to revoke your rule so that God’s name won’t be glorified and God’s kingdom won’t be advanced on earth. Satan is committed to seeing to it that you never reach your potential.

One of the reasons God allows hell to be hell on earth and the Devil to wage war is so that each of us can know God’s name and recognize the power that comes from Him. Because we will never know His name if there is no war. We will never know His power if there is no temptation. We will never know His strength if there is no opportunity to use His armor. So He lets the war rage on, often in ways that cause us to get on our knees and seek Him so that we will grow closer to Him.
The Enemy’s Strategy

Satan is most effective when he works secretly, behind the scenes. Like Conrad Dobler in the commercial I mentioned earlier, Satan would prefer that others get the credit for his work. In fact, Satan would be perfectly happy to convince you that he doesn’t exist and that your true problem is your spouse. That’s why most of his attacks seem to come from other sources, most notably from the person you married.

Do you think at times that your marriage would be wonderful if it were not for your spouse? Most of the problems in marriage can be traced to relational issues. You may think that your mate is making your life miserable. Or perhaps you think your children or your coworkers are causing friction in your marriage.

But look closer, and you’re bound to see Satan behind the scenes pulling the strings and pushing the buttons. He uses people to engineer your spiritual downfall by driving wedges between you and your spouse that shatter your unity and draw your focus away from God.

The Christian life is like wood in a fireplace. Try lighting a single log, and you will find out that it won’t burn for long. Logs burn best in the presence of other logs. In the same way, your ability to remain spiritually on fire is a function of your relationships with the other “logs” in your life and how closely you relate to them. Your ability as a couple to remain spiritually strong is a function of your relationship with each other before the Lord. How often do you pray together? It should be daily.

How often do you pray for your marriage? Again, it should be daily, if not several times throughout the day. Do you worship together? Go to church together? Talk about the messages together? Read God’s Word together? I understand that life is busy, but if you want the ability to go through this life together “till death do us part,” then the spiritual component of life must be an integral part of who you are as a couple.

God supplies the strength we need to successfully do battle with the Devil. That may seem obvious. But judging from the way we treat this truth, it bears repeating: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10–11).
Many of us tend to swing toward one of two extremes when it comes to the Devil. Some overestimate him. They become fearful and timid, lest Satan leap on them. Remember, “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Others underestimate the Devil. Yes, Satan is a defeated foe. But even though he is nothing more than a condemned death-row inmate awaiting execution, it is not wise to sleep in his cell.

Notice that in our text, the apostle Paul tells us to be strong in the Lord. In our humanity, we haven’t the power to overcome angels, even fallen ones like the Devil and his legions. Psalm 8:4–5 (KJV) makes it clear that God created us a little lower than the angels.

The bottom line is this: You can’t beat the Devil on your own. God Himself is the only one capable of putting the Devil in his place, and that’s exactly what He’ll do someday. (That place is described for us in Revelation 20.) In the meantime, the Lord limits Satan’s reach. In addition, He empowers us to achieve victory in our day-to-day encounters with darkness.

In Acts 19:13–17, we read about some nonbelieving Jewish exorcists who decided to try expelling demons by magically chanting the name of Jesus. “I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches,” they’d say. And one day a spirit answered them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” The spirit leaped on them, thrashed them soundly, and sent them away stripped and wounded. Jesus’s name is not a magic formula, though some people have used it that way over the years. Paul’s strength and ours is the product of an abiding, growing personal intimacy with the Lord, not some high-sounding chant or incantation. Recall that the people called on “Jesus whom Paul preaches.”

Victory in your marriage requires your personal relationship with Jesus Christ to be close, not piggybacked on someone else’s. That’s a surefire pathway to defeat if you have to borrow from the faith of another to fight for your marriage. Your strength is not accumulated or earned. It is supplied by the
grace of God, who equips you to live the life to which He has called you, but it is accessed through direct communion with Him.

The apostle Paul wrote,

Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. (2 Corinthians 10:3–4)

Doing battle with Satan in your home requires more than a New Year’s resolution and a dose of willpower. Spiritual warfare requires spiritual weaponry, such as those items described for us in Ephesians 6:13–17. I discuss spiritual warfare in more depth in a book on that subject titled *Victory in Spiritual Warfare*, but let’s touch briefly on it here.

I can envision Paul in a prison cell dictating his letter to the Ephesian church. Perhaps he paused, searching for a proper illustration to help him communicate this vital truth. Suddenly his gaze fell on the Roman centurion to whom he was chained. Noticing the various components of the guard’s uniform, Paul set about to describe six vital pieces of armor considered “standard issue” in God’s army:

Take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in additional to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (verses 13–17)

You will experience the victory that is yours for the taking only when you put on and use the full armor of God. God makes these battle instruments available to you, but He won’t force you to wear them or take them up. He won’t have faith for you. He won’t lift your shield for you. He won’t force peace, truth, or righteousness on you. In your marriage and your life, you must
do battle God’s way, with His armor, against an enemy who is seeking daily, even hourly, to take you down.

A young boy once went to the zoo with his dad. As they passed by the lions’ den, one of the lions let out a ferocious roar. Startled, the young boy grabbed on to his father, covered his face, and began to cry. His father asked him, “What’s wrong?”

The young boy replied, “Don’t you see the lion?”

“Yes,” his father answered, “but I also see the cage.”

Married couple, Satan is a defeated foe. He is a caged lion. Victory in your marriage must rest on the reality that God has given you everything that you need to live in light of this truth in order to experience all that He has planned for you and become all He created you to be. But God won’t dress you. You have to put on the armor of God every day in order to experience the victory that is yours.