

LIVING AS ONE

BUILDING A HEALTHY MARRIAGE



B. J. HAMILTON

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Living as One: Building a Healthy Marriage
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*This book is dedicated for the Glory of God
who created marriage and is the example to follow.*

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FOUNDATIONS FOR MARRIAGE

The Bible is the Word of the living God. The God of the Bible created all things, including love and marriage. Thus, the Bible is the correct place to learn about marriage. Let's see what we can learn from the following passages.

Genesis 1:27–28

*²⁷So God created man **in his own image**, in the image of God he created him; **male and female he created them**. ²⁸God blessed **them** and said to **them**, “**be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over** the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

In the beginning God created people. They were created male or female according to God's purpose and plan and not their own. Both were made in the image of God, and both were blessed. They were given the task to rule the earth on behalf of God and to “be fruitful and increase in number”. This instruction was as simple as it sounds. The first two people were created as a married couple, and therefore God gave them the instruction to populate the earth by having children.¹ Filling the earth with people glorifies God because they are made in his image.

Genesis 2:18–24

*¹⁸The Lord God said, “**It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.**”*

¹ We know that the first man and woman (Adam and Eve) were married from Genesis 2:24–25 where Eve is referred to as Adam's “wife”, and later in 3:6 where Adam is referred to as Eve's “husband”. In addition, since Adam and Eve were the only two people on earth and expected to multiply, then we can safely conclude that they were certainly married in the practical sense of the word. God had brought them together.

¹⁹Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹*So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

²³*The man said,
"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."*

²⁴*That is why **a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.***

Single men struggle in many areas of life. The Bible says that it is not good for a man to be alone. So God created a "suitable helper" for him. The husband and wife were to be partners in the role God had given them to do.



A husband and a wife are of equal importance, but they have unique roles in the family: the husband as the "head", and the wife as the "helper". Helping implies working together on the things God has given the couple to do. Together they glorify God and raise a family.

The husband is always male, and the "suitable helper" is always female by God's design. Their differences are designed to complement one other.

When a man and a woman are joined together in marriage, they should leave their parents (both physically and emotionally) and become united as “one flesh” with one another. They should now act as “one” with unity and purpose. The marriage relationship is an exclusive relationship, between one man and one woman only.

Ephesians 5:21–33

²¹ **Submit to one another** out of reverence for Christ.

²² **Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands** as you do to the Lord. ²³ **For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.** ²⁴ **Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands** in everything.

²⁵ **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church** and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ **In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives** as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church — ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”** ³² This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, **each one of you also must love his wife** as he loves himself, and **the wife must respect her husband.**

The marriage relationship between a man and a woman is designed to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church. The husband should mirror Christ’s sacrificial love for his bride (the church) and the wife should mirror the church’s respect and service for Christ in response.

Christ is the head of the church, he loves it, cares for it, serves it, and wants to see it grow up to be the best it can be. Christ gave his life for the church. Husbands should therefore love their wives in the same way by giving their life for them through sacrificial protection, care, and service. The husband's role is to lead his wife and family by considering their needs before his.

Wives, like the church, are to submit to their husbands willingly and out of respect towards the husband who is the head of the family. The marriage relationship provides us with a beautiful glimpse of what is to come.

A NOTE ON SUBMISSION:

All of us must submit to someone: parents, leaders, police, government, and God. Even Jesus submitted to God the Father. Therefore, submission is not a bad thing, it is part of God's created order for the good of family and society.

Submission in marriage is not a wife losing her voice of opinion, or a wife being ruled by a husband, and it is certainly not slavery. Submission does not mean a wife must automatically agree to everything the husband says, or that she should not think for herself. Submission does not mean obeying the will of a husband over the will of God or following a spouse into sin.

Submission rather, is the willing choice to accept the husband's leadership over the family. A Christian marriage should always be built on love, which has no place for dominance, selfish desire, or control. Marriage must be a loving partnership built on mutual care and trust. In practice, both the husband and the wife will submit (give priority) to one another's needs each day, because you cannot serve one another without submitting.

A healthy couple will almost always discuss and make decisions together: they will listen to one another and work through different opinions until a consensus is reached. Very rarely will

a husband need to take a course of action that his wife does not agree with. In these cases, the husband must be very sure it is in obedience to God and in the best interests of his family.

Colossians 3:18–19

¹⁸***Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the LORD.***

¹⁹***Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them.***

1 Peter 3:7

⁷*Husbands, in the same way **be considerate** as you live with your wives, and **treat them with respect** as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

Therefore, husbands should love their wives, treating them with respect, kindness, and gentleness. Husbands should keep in mind that they are often physically stronger than their wives. Therefore they should use their strength to help and protect and not to hurt or dominate. They should use their strength for good and not evil. Wives are to submit to the husbands. Marriage is a relationship where the husband sacrificially loves his wife, and where the wife accepts his leadership with respect and support. He has her interests in mind, and she has his. They put their partner's needs ahead of their own. Together, they make decisions to lead their family.

1 Corinthians 7:3–5

³***The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.*** ⁴*The wife's body does not belong to her **alone** but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him **alone** but also to his wife.* ⁵*Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

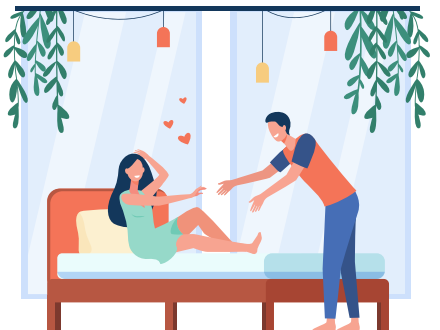
God has created all good things. When a couple are married, their bodies now belong to their spouse as well as themselves. They willingly share themselves with one another out of love.

Sexual union is a good gift from God for married couples. It is an important part of a healthy marriage and reduces the temptation for either partner to look for sexual satisfaction outside of their marriage. Sex has been given for one another's enjoyment, and as the way to conceive children. Sex is to be enjoyed exclusively, regularly, and privately, between a husband and wife. They should not deprive one another unless it is mutually agreed.²

When a man and a woman leave their families and commit to live together in marriage, they become united and one flesh. Sex is one way that this calling is fulfilled. It is a beautiful thing when it is between one husband and (his) wife, but immoral when it extends outside of this special relationship.

Sex in marriage is to be enjoyed without shame, guilt, or fear. It should never be forced, always be mutually given out of love for one another, and enjoyed together in a way that is physically, emotionally, and spiritually uplifting.

Sex leads to children, which are a gift from God for the married couple to receive with joy.



² There are also times when sex will need to be "on hold", such as after childbirth when the wife needs time to recover.

PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

There are several things that we can do before we become married to help prepare well.

- **Set boundaries before you are married.** Get to know each other but protect yourself from going too far and becoming sexually intimate before you are married. It may be helpful to discuss and create some rules or boundaries for your pre-marriage relationship. For example, this may include deciding not to stay overnight together anywhere without others being present. You may decide that being together and talking together in a public place is fine, but not kissing or touching certain parts of each other's body. Discuss your boundaries and stick to them.
- **Take the time to discuss the following questions together.** You do not need to agree on everything, but if you don't, then decide if and how you can move forward. (These questions can be helpful to discuss both before and after you are married).

Foundational

1. Have you been married before or had intimate physical relations with another person?
2. Is it important that you and your partner are well matched or like-minded? Or is it more important to commit and learn to love sacrificially?
3. Are you committed to being married "as long as you both shall live"? How do you know this?
4. Are you committed to loving each other "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health"? (This means when your spouse is grumpy, or when life is

- hard, or if you are financially rich or poor, or if one of you becomes chronically sick or mentally unwell.)
5. What does it mean to “love and to cherish” one another (value, treasure, appreciate...)?
 6. Is a healthy marriage more important to you than other things in life (such as your work, ministry, image, relationships with others)?
 7. What are you willing to give up for your marriage?
 8. What does it mean to put your partner’s needs above your own?
 9. Are you committed to forgiving one another again and again and again? Just as Jesus forgives us.
 10. What does it mean for the husband to be the “head” of the home?
 11. How do you understand “submission” in marriage as defined in the Bible? What should this look like in a marriage relationship?
 12. Are there any things that could stop you from fully leaving your mother and father and fully joining with you husband or wife?
 13. What things hinder your relationship now?
 14. What things may hinder your relationship in the future?
 15. Does it matter what others think about you, your marriage, or your family?
 16. Do you see your marriage partner as a gift from God and someone to be thankful for?
 17. Is there ever a suitable reason for divorce?

Expectations

1. What are your expectations for your future wife/husband? (These probably will reflect your own family dynamics when you were growing up).
2. Should your spouse be your best friend, the first person you want to talk to each day and the one you want to share good and bad news with first?
3. Do you think it is fine to keep secrets from each other, or should everything be shared?

4. Is there anything you can't discuss with each other?
5. How will you make important decisions in your relationship? Will these be based on what is easy, what is reasonable, what the husband decides, or what God's Word says? Or is it a mix of these?
6. What will you do if you no longer feel romantic love for one another? Are you willing to seek help in your marriage?

Children

1. Do you believe children are a gift from God, or an interruption to avoid, or something else?
2. How many children do you hope to have?
3. What do you think about contraception? How will you decide if (and when) you should use contraception? What would you do if you "accidentally" became pregnant? Remember that emergency "contraceptive" pills and abortions *both* kill a conceived baby inside the mother and therefore are not biblically suitable options.
4. If you have children, how do you plan to raise them? Will one of you stay at home to care for the children?
5. What do you think about discipline, childcare, and schooling?



Work and Calling

1. How will you decide where to work (paid or voluntary)? If both of you have a good job/role but they are in different locations, how will you decide which to pursue? Are you open to one of you working abroad for a long period?
2. What if you feel "called" to do something or live somewhere but your spouse does not?
3. Are you committed to following Jesus wherever he leads?

What about to a foreign mission field? What about to a life of poverty, or a life with few comforts?

4. Where do you hope or expect to live?
5. What are your expectations for a future home? (Big, small, tidy, practical, open to visitors, private?)

Faith

1. What is most important to you? (This relationship, your relationship with God, your relationship with your wider family...?)
2. What is your relationship with God like now? How important should this be in your marriage relationship?
3. How significant (central) should Bible reading and praying together be as part of your relationship?
4. What is "church", and to what extent will you be a part of that community?
5. Do you believe that the Bible gives us helpful instructions for life? Do you plan to use it for guidance throughout life?

Sex

1. What are your expectations of sex? How will you decide when and how often to have sex?
2. Do you believe that sex should be given out of love to one another? If so, to what extent?
3. What kind of sex or sexual play is appropriate? What is not? How will you decide?
4. What role should communication play in your sexual relationship?
5. How can you create a relationship where either spouse has the freedom to say, "not now" or "stop"?

Finances

1. How will you manage finances? Will you share everything and join your bank accounts? Who will pay the bills, and manage the money?

2. Do you have financial goals? (Buy a house before we are 35, save for a....)
3. How will you get the finances to live? (Rent, food, utilities...) Do you have expectations about who should work and earn the money?
4. What do you think about loans, credit cards, debt, and buying things but paying later?

Other

1. How do you feel about the family members of your partner? What do you like about them? Is there anything that concerns you? Are there significant similarities or differences with your family? Is that comforting or concerning?
2. How do you define time well spent? What feels like a waste of time to you?
3. Is it okay to spend time away from each other with friends on a regular basis? (Playing sport or games, spending time at a café, watching movies, chatting...)
4. What do you think about smoking, alcohol, tattoos, body piercings, beards, clothes...?
5. How will you resolve conflict in your marriage? How can the Bible and prayer help?
6. How important is it to have a "perfect" wedding day? What if it does not go to plan? Does it matter?



BUILDING A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

Beautiful marriages don't just happen. They take work to become that way. Being a good musician or football player takes regular time and practice. A good marriage is built in the same way. What we give our attention to, we get better at.

It is essential that you learn to love one another. Love is not just a romantic feeling, but rather a commitment to serve and care for one another. The Bible contains a list of some things that love is, and some things that love is not.¹

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

From this we can see that...

Love is...	Love is not...
✓ patient	× envious
✓ kind	× boastful
	× proud
Love...	× rude
✓ keeps no record of wrongs	× self-seeking
✓ rejoices in the truth	× easily angered

¹ While the author, Paul, is focussing primarily on the relationship between believers in Corinth, it can be applied to married couples as well.

✓ always protects	✗ delighting in evil
✓ always trusts	
✓ always hopes	
✓ always perseveres	

Love therefore is a conscious decision that leads to action. It takes sacrifice and effort. Don't give up on your spouse; God did not give up on you despite your weaknesses and sin. Throughout your marriage you can continually grow in each of these areas.

Here are some further ideas that may help you to grow and improve your marriage.

Spend time together

- Spend some quality time together each day (no phones!)
- Pray together each day, especially for each other's needs and your family.
- Read the Bible together each day and discuss what you read.
- Plan a weekly "date" to do something fun together. Walk together, play a game, go out for a drink or some food, watch a good movie or just talk... But don't look at your phones!
- Plan something special for the two of you to do on your wedding anniversary. Celebrate it every year because every year together is special.

Communicate well

- Regularly set aside times to talk about your marriage and things in your life.
- Communication is very important in any relationship. Be quick to listen and slow to speak. Listen with your eyes (by looking at your spouse) and not just your ears. Don't interrupt your spouse as they share, especially if they are emotional. Listen with the goal of understanding what they are saying (and not what you think they will say) and keep listening until they have finished what they have to say. Ask clarifying questions if you don't

understand, for example, “Are you saying that you would like me to...?” Only give advice and solutions if it is welcome. When you do speak, speak kindly.

- When discussing a problem, talk about the problem, not the person. Remember you are on the same team.
- Don’t try to deal with a challenging issue late at night. Work through it another time when you are not tired. But do not leave it more than a few days.
- Be the first to say sorry and forgive, even when you don’t want to. Always forgive and make peace before you go to sleep.
- Never say things to others that will tear down your husband or wife such as “She is not a very good cook” or “He is lazy and easily gets angry...” Build one another up in front of others. The only suitable time to share these things is when you are trying to seek help for your spouse and your marriage from a counsellor, mentor, or friend.
- Once a year or more, ask each other “What should I *start* doing, *stop* doing, and *keep* doing?” Then listen to the answer carefully.

Love one another

- Find out how your husband or wife feels loved (ask them). And try to love them in that way. There are five general ways that people can feel loved.²

1. With **encouraging words** (“This food is delicious, thanks for making it.” “You look very pretty/handsome today.” “I really like the way you encourage others.”).
2. With **quality time** together (talking, walking, playing a game, eating a meal...).
3. With **acts of service** (helping them with the dishes and the washing, bringing them a cup of tea, cooking for them, or doing something else for them).



² According to the book *The Five Love Languages — How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*, (Gary Chapman, 1992).

4. With **physical touch** (holding hands, hugging, putting your arm around them, physical intimacy including sex...).
5. With **gifts** (a present, some special food, a handwritten card...).

Set boundaries

- Avoid questionable or risky situations. Should a married man travel alone with a woman who is not his wife? Should a married woman visit the home of a man (who is not her husband) when he is alone? Should a man and a woman (who are married but not to each other) regularly chat on social media?...
- Don't make big purchases, take loans, give loans, or give significant donations without first discussing them with your spouse. The money you have belongs to both of you; it should be managed together.
- Do not look at pornography, ever! It is addictive and is a sure way to lose your desire for your spouse and ruin your marriage. Reduce the chance of temptation by setting boundaries.³

Be aware of bad examples and be sure not to follow them

For example...

- A husband who does not love his wife and care for her.
- A husband who dominates his wife and orders her around.
- A husband who speaks down to his wife or yells at her.
- A husband who does not help with household tasks.
- A husband who does not seek employment and work to provide for his family.
- A husband who is generally absent because he is wasting time with others gossiping, drinking, or playing games.
- A husband who gets drunk on alcohol.
- A husband who gets aggressive by yelling, hitting, or forcing his wife to do something.
- A husband who cheats on his wife by looking at pornography or having a physical relationship with another woman.

³ Setting boundaries here may be helpful. Don't look at your phone late at night, or when you are alone in your bedroom. Allow your spouse to know your password and use your phone as needed. Take serious action, cut off anything that causes you to sin (Matthew 18:8-9).

- A wife who rules her husband and orders him around.
- A wife who does not respect her husband's thoughts and opinions.
- A wife who does not work to build her husband up.
- A wife who constantly complains.
- A wife who is lazy and does very little.
- A wife who gossips with others.
- A wife who flirts with other men or fantasizes about them.
- And many more....

Please don't be like them!⁴ Take responsibility for your marriage and family.⁵ Love as Christ loved the church. Give yourself up for your family.

A good husband loves his wife and helps her with practical tasks both in and out of the home.⁶ He works hard to provide for his family and loves his wife and children by spending time with them and speaking kindly to them.



A good wife respects and serves her husband and family with practical tasks both in and out of the home.⁷ She works hard to provide a loving and caring home environment for her husband and family.

⁴ If you are like any of these examples, ask God to change you, and invite others to help in that also. Be quick to cut off the things that cause you to sin, like alcohol, bad friends, your phone...

⁵ Both the husband and the wife are to work in unity and partnership to take responsibility for their family and home.

⁶ For example, cooking, cleaning, and caring for their children.

⁷ Often these are the daily home duties of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children, but may vary due to differing cultural or family situations. The Bible does not forbid a wife from working outside the home to provide finances for the family. There is freedom in Christ. Yet in doing so, she should be careful not to neglect her more important role as a wife and mother. If a Christian woman can work outside the home and still provide a loving, caring environment for her children and husband, then it is perfectly acceptable.

CLOSING

I hope that you have found this little book helpful.

Your marriage can continue to improve throughout your life if you take the time to work on it regularly. A healthy marriage is certainly worth the effort!

Enjoy creating one!

Further passages to study

- Genesis 2:25 — A perfect marriage without shame.
- Proverbs 5:15–23 — Passionate marriage love.
- Proverbs 31:10–31 — A wife of noble character
- Matthew 19:4–9 — People should not separate a husband and wife.
- 2 Corinthians 6:14 — Christians should not be joined together with unbelievers.





A HEALTHY MARRIAGE IS BEAUTIFUL!

Marriage is designed to be the most special and intimate relationship you will have on earth.

This book has been prepared to help couples build a healthy marriage by:

- Providing a biblical foundation for marriage.
- Helping prepare couples for marriage.
- Providing ideas to build a healthy marriage.

If you're preparing for marriage or are already married, then this book is for you! You can work through this book together with your fiancé, fiancée, husband, or wife.

It pleases God when marriages reflect Jesus' relationship with his bride, the Church.

May God be glorified through your marriage!

