

MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY ONE

This Is Not Your Grandfather's Family

Selected Scriptures

In God's plan for marriage, God joins a man and a woman for life. Sin has messed things up, of course, but don't forget the original plan. It is so lovely and fulfilling.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE don't have to look far to see sin's damage in our culture. Images of unimaginable violence flood movies and TV shows. With just a few clicks on a computer, someone can encounter graphic pornography. Abortion is available "on demand," and stories of hate crimes fill the news cycle.

We may shudder at atrocities like these and think, *This isn't how things were even just a few decades ago.* Yet, in every era of history, sin has held the world tightly in its grip. While modern technology has made sin more accessible, sin has enticed human beings since the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed God by taking a bite of that forbidden fruit.

Today, however, one piece of God's handiwork bears the scars of sin's damages quite visibly:

THE FAMILY

This *Searching the Scriptures* series on marriage kicks off by focusing on God's good, original design for the family. Sin may continue to shift the moral tide of our culture, but God's plan for families—and marriages—hasn't changed. His design, laid out from the very beginning, offers the only anchor of truth to hold our families firm amid the storms of an ever-hostile world.



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This Is Not Your Grandfather's Family

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Whether you're married or single, childless or a parent, God has placed each of us in our present circumstances in accordance with His good purpose. As you prepare to dig into what Scripture has to say about the family, offer this prayer to God:

Father, thank You for welcoming me into Your eternal family through the death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Guide me as I study Your Word today and help me see how I can live for You in this sinful world. In Jesus' good name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As God crafted His creation in Genesis 1, He affirmed that each component of His work was *good*. The light, the land and the sea, the vegetation, the sun and the moon, the animals—all *good*. The account crescendos to Genesis 1:31: "Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!"

But, sadly, this perfection would not last. Adam and Eve's sin corrupted God's good design. Because we humans have betrayed our Creator, sin continues to infect our world and to pollute our hearts today.

The heart of humanity hasn't changed. It's as bad off as it can possibly be before God. We are by nature, by choice, and by birth depraved. Without the redeeming power of Christ, we cannot pull ourselves out of a moral nosedive. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

This study will focus on two passages. Genesis 2:18–23 presents God's good picture for marriage. And Deuteronomy 6:4–13, 24 reveals how God intends for His people to have godly families amid a sinful world.



Observation: God's Ideal Family

Every time Pastor Chuck Swindoll studies a passage of Scripture, he follows the same four steps:

1. **Observation:** *What does this biblical passage say?*
2. **Interpretation:** *What does this biblical passage mean?*
3. **Correlation:** *How does this biblical passage relate to other similar biblical passages?*
4. **Application:** *How should I respond to the truth of this biblical passage?*¹



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Because the Bible speaks into our lives in powerful ways, it may be hard to resist the urge to jump straight to application. But good Bible study always begins by looking at the bare words of the text only.

Establishing the Union of Man and Woman—Genesis 2:18–23

Read [Genesis 2:18–23](#) and observe the steps God took to establish the union between the man and the woman. These words may sound familiar to you, so try to read them slowly and carefully, looking for details you may have never noticed.

Genesis 1 repeats the refrain, “God saw that it was good.” In [2:18](#), however, God broke this pattern and paused to point out something *not* good. What was it?

What task did God give the man to accomplish in [2:19–20](#)?

According to [2:21–22](#), who would become the man’s “helper”? How did God provide this helper? (Note the contrast between how God “formed” the animals in [2:19](#) and how he “made” the helper in [2:22](#).)



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Passing the Faith to the Next Generation—Deuteronomy 6:4–13, 24

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is more commonly known as the *Shema*—a name derived from the opening Hebrew verb which means “to hear” or “to listen.” The Shema stood as a pillar of ancient Jewish theology—a key confession of faith. Jewish families would recite these words daily to remind themselves of their relationship with God and of the centrality of His law in their lives.

What is the fundamental command of the Shema noted in *6:5*?

A key purpose of the Shema was to pass down God’s truth from generation to generation. According to *6:7*, when were the Israelites to teach their children God’s commandments?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Whether at home or away, whether morning or evening, God’s people were to teach their children about Him and His goodness . . . *always*. There is no better antidote to the poison of sin than an intimate relationship with our holy, just, and pure God.



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Interpretation: Restoring God's Goodness to the Family

Good application always is rooted in a sound understanding of a passage of Scripture. We interpret a passage by reviewing our observations and asking what a passage *means*.

The man's assignment of naming all the animals in [Genesis 2:18–20](#) may seem strange, but the context shows *why* God gave the man this task. What did God intend to do by parading all the animals before the man? Hint: notice the last line of [2:20](#).

Genesis 2:20 doesn't use the term "helper" to depict the woman as a servant or a slave. In fact, Scripture often uses this same term to refer to God as a "helper" for His people (see [Exodus 18:4](#); [Psalm 115:9–11](#)). What timeless principle does this model teach about God's design for marriage?

The man sings the melody, and the woman sings the harmony. It's a beautiful duet that's put together by God. "All alone your voice can't carry it, Adam." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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According to [Deuteronomy 6:5–6](#), how do God's people demonstrate their love for Him? Why would the Israelites need to heed the Shema in the future? See [6:10–13](#). For some guidance, check out [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).

Even though the filth of sin soiled the world around God's people, God reminded them of His own purity and goodness. By reminding ourselves of God's character and by loving Him, we too can work against the damaging effects of sin in our lives. Sadly, though, Israel did not always follow the commands of the Shema, and the wickedness of the surrounding world polluted them.



Correlation: God's Response to Israel's Disobedience

The moral decline we perceive in our modern culture occurred in ancient cultures as well. We read about ancient Israel's drift into disobedience in the book of the prophet Hosea. Throughout his writings, Hosea showed that the brokenness of the family was a symptom of the sin infecting the entire nation. In other words, Hosea's point was that Israel had not followed the Shema!

Read [Hosea 4:1–9](#), and record a few key observations in the chart below. Then do the same for [14:1–9](#). Pay careful attention to the contrasts between these two passages.

Israel's Sin and Guilt Hosea 4:1–9	God's Forgiveness and Restoration Hosea 14:1–9



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"I will heal you of your faithlessness," the Lord promised His people, adding a most reassuring truth, "my love knows no bounds" (Hosea 14:4) The world around us may feel like it is cracking under the pressure of sin. But our God is a God of *love*, and He can heal even the most faithless of people. He can even heal our broken families and marriages today.



Application: Godly Families in a Godless World

As our culture drifts further away from God's design for marriage and family, how can we stand against the tide? Pastor Chuck shares four application principles:

1. *Wake up!* Complacency blinds us from seeing realistically.
2. *Listen up!* Knowledge frees us to think clearly.
3. *Step up!* Discernment prompts us to act courageously.
4. *Look up!* God loves us unconditionally.

Think of this as a three-step process. First, *wake up*. Then, *listen up*. Finally, *step up*. All the while, we should continually *look up* to God for His goodness, wisdom, and grace.

As you consider your own family and marriage, which of these steps do you sense God leading you to take with boldness? Are you a victim of complacency? Do you need more biblical knowledge or discernment? Record your thoughts below.



This Is Not Your Grandfather's Family

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For married couples, how can you and your spouse restore more of God's original design for marriage in your relationship? If you have children, how can you follow the ancient Shema and pass on the faith to the next generation?

What would it look like to keep the love of Jesus Christ as the central focus of your life? How would making this shift in perspective affect your family for its own good?

The world has drifted far from the ideals of creation. Thankfully, the Father is in the process of restoring creation through the sacrifice and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Anyone can experience God's grace, and God can restore any family to a state of goodness. Because of Him, **no** family is too far gone.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I thank You for the way You have restored my life and allowed me to experience Your goodness. I ask that You give me the strength to serve You as a godly spouse, parent, child, or sibling so that my family can shine the light of Your goodness in a dark and sinful world. I pray these things in Jesus' good name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. For helpful instruction from Pastor Chuck, consult our online instructional web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)." This page provides you an introduction to four important skills in Bible study—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—along with other helpful study tips. You can also follow the link to purchase a copy of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, on which our studies are based.



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY TWO

Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13

As long as there has been marriage, there have been four principles that hold spouses together. Every time I work with people who struggle in their marriage, one or more of these principles has been ignored or disobeyed. When I find happy marriages, I find all four at work.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

I*t wasn't me!* What child hasn't uttered these words? Even after multiple warnings, Mom approaches the scene only to find her favorite vase smashed to pieces. When confronted, the child tries to deflect the attention away from himself or herself. However, the look of guilt on that young face betrays any attempt to cover up the wrong.

Some adults play the blame-game just as much as little children. They just play at a higher level. Through years of practice, they've fine-tuned the skill of shifting responsibility of their wrongs to others.

Whenever we lie and blame others for our actions, we simply follow the example of the first married couple: Adam and Eve. When God approached them for breaking the only command He had given them, they all but uttered that exact refrain: *It wasn't me!*

Our habit of hiding sin and pointing fingers undermines God's foundational principles of marriage. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll examine the four cornerstones of God's design, and we'll trace our marital troubles to their sinful source. Let's get our relationships back on target with God's plan, while avoiding pitfalls along the way!



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Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you open your Bible today, remember that you are about to handle the Word of God. Embedded within these pages are timeless truths that lead us into abundant life. Say this prayer as you begin your study:

Thank You, Father, for revealing Your truth to me through Your Word. I know that receiving the truth isn't always easy, but please grant me the wisdom to understand Scripture and the humility to accept its teaching. I pray in Jesus' true name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As God put the finishing touches on the beautiful artwork of His creation, He sat back in rest and declared His masterpiece to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31). God’s creation had everything it needed to thrive. The garden of Eden was a pristine setting, an idyllic environment. No sin, no guilt, no shame, no fear, no death.

Despite this glorious depiction of creation, something remained “not good” (2:18). The man, the pinnacle of God’s creation, was alone. He needed a companion, a counterpart. So God created the woman. For a time, creation was flawless.

But it would not be long before the humans disobeyed their Creator. In an instant, things went from “very good” to very bad. With this context in mind, turn now to Genesis 2:21–25 and 3:8–13.



Observation: Good Couple, Bad Decisions

According to the Bible study method outlined in *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll always begins by *observing* a passage of Scripture. He writes, “Pay attention to the sounds in the Scriptures. . . . Listen to the words, and feel the emotions.”¹ Read [Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13](#). As you read, pay careful attention to the words each person in the account says.



Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13

Marriage On Target—Genesis 2:21–25

In your own words, summarize what the man exclaimed in [Genesis 2:23](#) after God brought the woman to him?

[Genesis 2:24](#) uses the account of God’s creation of the woman to explain a practice that has occurred in marriage throughout time. What practice does 2:24 explain?

According to [2:25](#), how did the man and the woman feel about their own nakedness?



Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13

Marriage Missing the Mark—Genesis 3:8–13

According to [Genesis 3:8](#), what did the man and the woman do when they heard God walking in the garden?

According to the man's answer to God in [3:10](#), why did he hide?

What did the man say in [3:12](#) when God asked him about eating the fruit? What did the woman say in [3:13](#)?

They ran and hid from their Creator. How dumb is that? You can't hide from omniscience. They're hiding behind the trees God made. Sin has entered, and fear replaces joy. Now there's distance and alienation and discomfort and uneasiness and a whole sense of shame.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13



Interpretation: Making and Breaking a Healthy Marriage

In Pastor Chuck's interpretation of these passages, he draws out four foundational principles of a biblical marriage.

1. *Severance*—husbands and wives separate from their parents physically and emotionally to form a new family unit.
2. *Permanence*—God joins the couple together in a secure, unbreakable bond. “Till death do us part.”
3. *Unity*—through mutual acceptance, husbands and wives operate as one by affirming each other's strengths and gifts.
4. *Intimacy*—complete trust and transparency characterize the couple's sexual union and unconditional love for one another.

Take a moment to reflect on the meaning of these four terms. Then, reread [Genesis 2:21–25](#), and explain how you see each of these four principles presented in this passage. For some information on the technical details of these verses, see [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#). What other principles does this example provide for those who seek to have a godly marriage today?

When we sin, we experience more than just *guilt*. Yes, we stand guilty before God when we transgress His law. However, we also experience *shame* and *fear* because of sin. Shame comes when we dishonor our good and gracious heavenly Father through wrong actions. And as the beloved disciple said, “If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment” (1 John 4:18).



Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13

Now, look back to Genesis 2:25. Notice how it *doesn't* say, “They were both naked, but they felt no *guilt*.” Rather, they felt no *shame*. How did the couple’s sinful actions lead them to experience shame? What about fear? How did they respond to these feelings in [3:8–13](#)?

Before, there was this harmony and unity and intimacy and cleaving. Now, there’s the withdrawing from one another instead of enjoying each other’s company. There’s no reason for shame. But their minds are darkened. Their wills are changed. Their emotions are different. And they pull back. They withdraw from each other. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In what ways did the man and the woman show dishonesty when God confronted them in [3:8–13](#)? Remember, dishonesty can be more than flat-out lying. It also can involve withholding the whole truth.

The man and the woman’s dishonesty not only damaged their relationship with God, but it also undermined the principles on which their marriage was built and fractured their trust in one another. How do we get back to God’s original ideal? Jesus can guide the way.

We are experienced as liars and blamers. We learned how to do it from our parents. They learned it from theirs. We all have learned it from Adam. We’d rather lie and blame and tell a half-truth than the whole truth. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13



Correlation: Jesus' Affirmation of the Principles of Marriage

When asked about His views on divorce, Jesus unrolled the biblical scroll to this same section of Genesis we've been studying to give His answer. What principles of marriage did Jesus affirm in [Matthew 19:4–5](#)?

Then Jesus applied God's original design for marriage with a principle that gets to the heart of God's intention for marriage. What did Jesus say in [19:6](#)?

When sin threatens to weaken the joints that God formed, we must call upon the original builder to patch the cracks and repair the damage. Who is more qualified to restore a couple's marital union than the One who created it? Invite the Lord right now to mend the fractures in your relationship with your spouse. He can forgive sins, restore hope, and reunite a broken marriage.



Application: Owning Our Actions

Marriages by God's design are like beautiful homes built on a solid foundation of love, unity, loyalty, and intimacy. Sturdy beams of trust make the walls secure, and soaring rafters of devotion keep those who live inside safe from harm.



Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13

Think back over the recent months to a time when things felt especially *difficult*. Maybe a loved one hurt you. Maybe you acted wrongly toward someone close. In this instance, did you feel tempted to lie or cast blame? How did the natural inclination to cover up and point fingers undermine your relationship?

As we learned from Adam and Eve, these behaviors simply are attempts to hide our own sin. But these attempts only hurt others and distance us from God. So Pastor Chuck desires:

1. *All of us would tell the truth—hard as it is.*
2. *None of us would ever again blame somebody else—ever.*

Nothing builds back trust faster than telling the truth and taking responsibility. How would the difficult situation you mentioned above been different if you had been honest and taken ownership of your actions?



Getting Back on Target

Genesis 2:21–25; 3:8–13

How can you reverse the lying and blaming trend and rebuild trust by applying the principles of severance, permanence, unity, and intimacy within your marriage today? Even small gestures of love help restore trust. What's one way you can show your trustworthiness to your spouse?

We can't do the work of repairing sin's damage by ourselves. We need God's healing touch. Pray right now for the Lord to restore any fractures in your marriage and reunite you with your spouse. Share your prayer with your spouse and communicate your desire to fully embrace God's design for your marriage.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, You are the Lover of my soul who cares about me when I stray from Your good path. My sin not only grieves You, but it also hurts those I love the most. I confess to You my habit of blaming others. Forgive my sin. Heal the fractures I have caused in my closest relationships and, specifically, with my spouse. I need Your help to rejoin what sin has torn apart! Thank You for Your powerful work of grace in my life and marriage. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 96.



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY THREE

Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures

You may find yourself in the backwash of a set of circumstances—harsh circumstances. You may carry with you painful and deep scars from abuse and mistreatment. You may have had a horrific set of parents who cared nothing for you. You may have never seen a model of a marriage, so you didn't even know where to start, and harsh consequences followed. Marriage can survive that.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A couple seeking marital advice doesn't need to look far. Friends, family, and pastors will gladly share their own experience with a couple. Marriage conferences offer them a chance to retreat and to learn together. Or by just perusing the bookshelves in a local library, they could find volumes—each boasting to reveal the long unknown “secret” to a healthy relationship.

Yes, finding marital advice is easy. *Discerning* the advice, however, isn't. Sadly, much of the advice available today isn't rooted in Scripture. And a piece of advice should be considered good only if it aligns with the timeless truths preserved in the Word of God.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will consider the accounts of three marriages from Scripture. These couples endured some of the harshest, most extreme, and strangest situations imaginable, and we today have much to learn from the examples of these ancient marriages.



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Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Some of the best advice ever offered is found in a letter from the apostle Paul: “Never stop praying” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This advice applies in all of life’s circumstances—from small moments of joy to long seasons of conflict. Offer this prayer as you prepare to open God’s Word:

Father, thank You for sharing Your wisdom with Your people through Scripture. Grant me understanding today to heed the commandments and warnings, as well as to receive the encouragement contained in Your Word. I pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

After God established the original marriage between Adam and Eve, Genesis 2:24–25 says, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.”

From these verses, Pastor Chuck identifies four principles on which a biblical marriage is based: severance, permanence, unity, and intimacy. We build our marriage on these principles using biblical values such as trust, love, affection, self-giving, affirmation, and an additional vital element that is the focus of this study: *commitment*.

Let’s now turn to three separate accounts to see how Adam and Eve, Hosea and Gomer, and Joseph and Mary all endured life’s most difficult circumstances through their commitment—both to God and to their spouse.





Searching the Scriptures Study Tip: Topical Studies

Every *Searching the Scriptures* study follows Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s Bible study method.¹ This study, however, looks different because it focuses on a broad topic rather than a single passage. Instead of answering correlation questions, we will first observe and then interpret three separate passages that each teach an important truth about marital survival. Finally, we’ll develop applications based on all three passages.



Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures



Adam and Eve Genesis 3:16–24	
Although Adam and Eve enjoyed for a time the untainted beauty of marriage as God designed it, their sin would soon spoil their pure relationship. When they stood in defiance against their Creator, God judged them for their actions, resulting in a friction-filled marriage. Nevertheless, Adam and Eve’s story has a very important lesson for us.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
According to Genesis 3:16 , what curses would the woman face for her disobedience?	How do these curses threaten to damage God’s four principles for marriage?
According to 3:17–19 , what curses would the man face for his disobedience?	How did God provide for them despite their sin and His judgment? (See 2:25 ; 3:7–10 .)
Marriage can survive the harshest of circumstances.	

Look at the odds against them. They’re married by God in a context of perfection. And it isn’t long before they both sin, and the fall has incredible ramifications. Their perfect environment stops. Both of them are cursed—she with the pain of childbearing, he with working by the sweat of his brow. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures



Hosea and Gomer Hosea 1:2–3; 3:1–3	
Whenever God’s people drifted into idolatry, He sent prophets to confront their sin. But they often just didn’t listen. In one instance, God taught His people a lesson about unfaithfulness by using a shocking marriage between a prophet and a prostitute. And today, we have much to learn from the example of this challenging marriage.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
What command did God give to Hosea in Hosea 1:2 ?	According to 1:2 and 3:1 , What do the images of Hosea, Gomer, and prostitution represent?
According to 3:2–3 , what did Hosea do after Gomer went back into prostitution?	What theological truth or truths sprout from the example of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer?
Marriage can overcome the most extreme of challenges.	

Maybe you’ve gone through unfaithfulness with your partner. Maybe the public heard about it, and you’ve known the embarrassment and the feeling of rejection and the horror of all that goes with that. You may have gone through some other extreme challenge as a couple. A marriage can overcome the most extreme challenges. It can survive by the grace of God.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures

Joseph and Mary Matthew 1:18–25	
Hundreds of years after the time of Hosea and Gomer, when Israel felt more hopeless than ever, a young virgin named Mary received some strange news. She would become pregnant, and her child would be the Son of God. Imagine her reaction! Or the reaction of her fiancé Joseph! Let's see what timeless truths we can learn from Joseph's perspective on these events.	
 Observation	 Interpretation
According to Matthew 1:19 , what did Joseph plan to do in response to the news of Mary's pregnancy?	Read Deuteronomy 22:13–14, 20–21 . Based on Jewish law, what could a man do if he found out the woman he married was not a virgin?
In your own words, summarize the angel's message to Joseph in 1:20–21 .	What sort of social challenges would this family have faced throughout Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' upbringing? (See John 8:41 .)
According to 1:24–25 , how did Joseph respond to the angel's message?	
Marriage can endure the strangest of circumstances.	

Could you imagine the gossip? It would follow him like a snake all his life. But Joseph was a hero. Joseph still married her and didn't touch her. That is quite a man. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures



Application: Commitment in Marriage

In Pastor Chuck's application of this passage, he addresses the necessity of commitment in a Christ-centered message. He discusses two application principles:

First, if a marriage is going to survive, commitment is the key.

Take a moment to consider your cultural context. What kind of marriage would non-Christians around you consider successful? What would they say is the “secret” or essential ingredient to having this successful relationship?

In what ways are your culture's standards for marriage similar or different from the biblical ideal that commitment is foundational for a healthy marriage?

Second, if commitment is the key, Christ is the lock.

A key without a lock has no purpose. Likewise, a marriage without Christ at its center misses God's ideal—no matter how committed the couple.



Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures

As you think about your own marriage or another close relationship, what is the glue that binds the relationship together? What steps can you take to move Christ toward the center to complement your commitment?

In a world where advice like “follow your heart” dominates, commitment may sound like a *bad* idea. However, this is a *biblical* idea. And following God is always better than following our own broken and sinful hearts. Truly committing to a spouse may be difficult, but it is essential to surviving and ultimately thriving in marriage.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for never giving up on me. Even though I was a wholly sinful person, You sent Your Son to die for me and welcomed me into Your family. Give me the strength, courage, and wisdom to show this kind of commitment to those closest to me—especially when things are so hard I just want to give up. I pray these things in Jesus’ unshakeable name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY FOUR

Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

What are some biblical tips we can apply to help our marriage stick? Five of them are tucked away in the last few verses of Ephesians 4. Based on the commands in this passage, I draw five principles that give us practical advice for keeping a marriage together.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A wise guy once said, “The most difficult years of marriage are those following the wedding.” With a prevailing attitude like this, it’s no wonder the divorce rate soars higher than ever before. Sadly, many couples struggle through their marriage, as they often face arguments, unmet desires, and an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction.

Shouldn’t marriage be *better* than this? It doesn’t make sense that years of high expectation and excitement for marriage would be followed by many more years of disappointment and conflict.

The good news is that God *did* design marriage to be better than this. He intended a man and a woman to join to one another in a beautiful relationship characterized by commitment, unity, and intimacy. Yet every man and every woman are sinful, which means that sin has tainted every marriage. And where sin abounds in marriage, hardship abounds all the more.

To expose the sins that destroy marriages, this *Searching the Scriptures* study will look at Ephesians 4:25–32. Though not a typical “marriage” passage, these few verses will reveal what kinds of actions tear apart unity and will provide guidance on how to glue it back together—both among believers *and* between spouses.



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Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to enter into God's Word today, first enter into His presence using this prayer:

Father, I know that life is not easy. But thank You for the hope You've given me—that one day, I will live a renewed life with You for eternity. As I journey this earth, help me see the sin that pollutes my life so that I can allow You to cleanse it from within me. Do that today as I study Your Word. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians reads like a Christian “how-to” manual that masterfully lays out both essential truths and practices. The first half of the letter focuses on key truths such as salvation being available by grace *alone* and through faith *alone* in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9).

As he moves to the second section of the letter focusing on proper behavior, Paul heavily emphasizes the theme of *unity*. In your own words, summarize Paul's exhortation in [4:1–3](#).

“Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit.” Paul knew his readers would wonder, *How can I do this?* And thankfully for us, he answered that question in 4:25–32 by addressing those actions that will tear apart even the closest of bonds—like those between spouses.



Observation: Behaviors That Untie Unity

Before we can apply the truths preserved in the pages of Scripture, we must understand what a passage *means*. And to know what a passage means, we must first observe what a passage says.¹



Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

Read *Ephesians 4:25–32*. This passage is chock-full of parallel commands. Don't do *that*. Instead, do *this*. Using the chart below, record the kinds of *negative* behaviors that damage the unity of the body of Christ and the corresponding *positive* responses (if any are given).

Verses	Don't do <i>that</i>	Instead, do <i>this</i>
4:25		
4:26–27		
4:28		
4:29		
4:30–31		

What back-to-back commands did Paul give in the first part of 4:26? (Hint: looking at a more word-for-word translation like the New American Standard Bible can help you see these commands more clearly.)

1. _____
2. _____



Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

According to [Ephesians 4:29](#), in what two ways can a person use his or her words?

The tongue is the most powerful enemy in your home. With it you can rip apart, you can murder, you can assault, and never bring blood. Every time we open our mouths, we either build up or tear down. We either affirm or we assault. It's just that simple.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

According to [4:32](#), whose example should we follow when extending forgiveness?

The apostle Paul never minced words. The commands are direct and convicting. Yet, these kinds of sins often creep into our lives without us ever realizing their presence. When we finally notice them, they've planted their roots, and a one-off sinful act has grown into a full-blown habit.



Interpretation: The Subtleties of Sin

Certain sins are blatant and egregious. Some people, however, sin with such finesse that they cause subtle damage to their victims. Occasionally, we commit sins so slight that we don't even realize we're doing something wrong. Ephesians 4:25–32 addresses three particularly covert sins: deceit, theft, and sinful anger.



Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

According to Paul in [Ephesians 4:25](#) why should believers tell the truth instead of lying? How can one person's deceit harm his or her broader community?

Lying wears many faces: diplomatic hedging, stretching the facts, not telling the whole story, staying silent when we should speak, flattery—very common in marriages. But marriage is built on trust, and trust is built on truth. No marriage is more in bondage than a marriage that is wrapped in lies. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In what ways can a person steal from another without taking material possessions?

There's more to marriage than material possessions. There's time, there's trust, there are promises, there are expectations. I steal from my partner when I steal time I promised her. I steal from her when I take a secret she may have shared with me and announce it. Partners can steal from each other in the way they spend money. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Many people wrongly teach that experiencing the emotion of anger is sinful. But this passage teaches the opposite (see also [Psalm 4:4](#)). In fact, Paul *commands* his readers to be angry in [Ephesians 4:26](#)! This emotion sometimes is referred to as “righteous indignation.” (Check [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#) for a more detailed discussion of this term.)



Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

What does non-sinful anger look like? What kinds of things deserve our anger? How can we respond to such anger *without* sinning, as Paul commands?

How easy is it to welcome these subtle sins into the home! Given enough time, these unwelcomed guests will squat down and will join every meal, every conversation, and every interaction. If we don't expel them from our lives, they will tear apart any family. However, after they're gone, we should fill their vacancy with something much better.



Correlation: The Fruit of the Spirit

The well-known “Fruit of the Spirit” from Galatians 5:22–23 sounds similar to Ephesians 4:25–32. While Paul instructed the Ephesians on correcting specific behaviors, he aimed to adjust the Galatians' attitudes. In Galatians 5:19–23, he contrasts the virtues of the fruit of the Spirit with the vices of the sinful flesh.

What are the vices, or the “desires of your sinful nature,” listed in [5:19–21](#)?



Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

What are the virtues, or the “fruit” of the Holy Spirit, listed in *Galatians 5:22–23*?

How do these virtues and vices relate to the dos and do-nots of *Ephesians 4:25–32*? Which virtue would you like to cultivate more deeply and how might you go about doing so?

Through Paul’s commands and exhortations, he creates a beautiful image of a truly unified and harmonious relationship. Some of these ideas may still feel abstract, so let’s move to application and allow the concrete truths of Scripture to solidify in our lives.



Application: Learning to Grow

In Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s application of this passage, he candidly shares five lessons he and his wife Cynthia are learning as two Christ-followers seeking to live out a godly marriage:

1. *We’re learning to cultivate complete honesty in our relationship.* No more telling lies. No more pretense. Just the truth.
2. *We’re learning to express our anger in appropriate ways.* Don’t use bitterness as fuel for revenge. Don’t stay angry. Express your anger the right way and at the right time.
3. *We’re learning to stop stealing from each other.* Don’t steal time that belongs to your spouse. Don’t make promises you won’t keep. Don’t betray his or her trust.



Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32

4. *We're learning to be very careful with our words.* There is no weapon more dangerous to a marriage than a sharp tongue. Use your words to build up, not to tear down.
5. *We're learning to demonstrate grace and to continually forgive.* Continually rub the salve of forgiveness on your relationship. Forgiveness is the ointment that can heal a scarred marriage.

Which of these five lessons do you need to apply to your relationship first? Why? How can you do so, starting today?

In the space below, share some things you are in the process of learning with your spouse or someone close to you. Feel free to restate some of Pastor Chuck's examples or to come up with your own. As you write these down, commit yourself to working on these things in the coming days and weeks.

So long as sin still inhabits our lives, friction will still inhabit our marriages. But King Jesus sits on the throne, and those who are citizens of His kingdom have the power to break sin's grip. The challenges of marriage won't simply disappear, but by God's grace, two believers can navigate the struggles and experience the joys of marriage as He designed it.



Practical Advice on Making a Marriage Stick

Ephesians 4:25–32



A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study, offer this prayer adapted from Pastor Chuck:

Father, I hail Your name because You are the one who originated marriage. You brought me together with my spouse. Forgive me for working so stupidly to push us apart. Do the serious work of surgery in my life in areas that need to be addressed. Start with me. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY FIVE

Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8

Love is one of those few essentials for life. It is absolutely basic, indispensable, vital. It is the glue that when applied will bond a couple regardless of what they're going through.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN scientists determine whether a habitat is suitable for life, they always look for one thing first: a source of clean water. While a thriving ecosystem requires other features like sunlight, a food chain, and shelter, *nothing* is as essential as water. Drain the water from an environment, and all life drains away with it.

In the same way that water is essential to life, *love* is essential to *relationships*. Without love, even the most flourishing relationships wither. When love thrives, however, couples thrive. Love acts like a glue that tightly joins spouses to one another—even through those dry spells when the struggles of life threaten to tear them apart.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will explore the biblical understanding of love and will show how followers of Jesus today can apply this essential glue to their relationships and form stronger bonds than ever before.



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Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Since our God is a God of love, He desires to have a close relationship with us and to communicate with us. Say this prayer before you interact with God through His Word:

Father, thank You for Your love. I ask that You teach me through Your Word what true, Christlike love looks like so that I might love others as You have loved me. In Jesus' loving name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

First Corinthians 13 contains the greatest treatise on love ever written, and its words have echoed from generation to generation. While many are familiar with this passage, few realize that this chapter on love sits in the context of a longer letter penned by the apostle Paul.

The Christians in Corinth had drifted far from the teachings of Jesus. They measured spiritual greatness solely based on a person's ability to do supernatural things, like speaking in tongues, uttering prophecies, or performing miracles. Yet Paul revealed that this mentality was misguided, and he showed them “a way of life that is best of all” (1 Corinthians 12:31).



Observation: The Essential Nature of Love

In the first step of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, we read a passage slowly and carefully to observe what the passage says.¹ One way we make observations is by noting *repetition* of key words or phrases.

Read [1 Corinthians 13:1–8](#), and every time you see the word “love,” either take a note or mark it in your Bible. How many times does Paul use the word “love” in this passage?

The Priority Love Represents—1 Corinthians 13:1–3

According to [1 Corinthians 13:1–3](#), what four gifts does Paul decry as “nothing” if they are not exercised with a posture of love? (Hint: Look for the word “if.”)

13:1: _____



Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8

13:2a: _____

13:2b: _____

13:3: _____

Love is more valuable than prophetic knowledge and utterance. Love is more valuable than biblical awareness. Love is more valuable than personal faith. Love is the one essential. Believe it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Characteristics Love Displays—1 Corinthians 13:4–8

Paul opens this chapter showing *why* love is important, but he leaves open the question of *what* love actually is until [1 Corinthians 13:4–7](#). In these verses, Paul defines love by listing both its positive and its negative characteristics—what it is or *does* and what it is *not* or does *not* do. Fill in the chart below to see how Paul characterizes the all-important concept of love:

Verse	What Love <i>Is</i> or <i>Does</i>	What Love <i>Is Not</i> or Does <i>Not</i> Do
13:4		
13:5		
13:6		
13:7		



Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8

What powerful truth does Paul proclaim to conclude His discussion of love in the first half of [13:8](#)?

Possessions and wealth will eventually fail us. Others can fail us, and we often fail ourselves. But true love—love rooted in the character of God—has blanketed creation from the very beginning and will continue to protect and shelter us until Jesus returns. That kind of love will *never* fail us.



Interpretation: Biblical Love

Paul introduced the concept of love by describing how it is far greater than what many consider to be desirable spiritual gifts. What other kinds of things does our society place above love? Based on 1 Corinthians 13:1–8, why is love superior to these things?

What contrast did Paul make in [1 Corinthians 13:6](#)? What does this verse claim is an essential companion of love? How do these two concepts complement one another in a thriving relationship?



Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8

Truth and love have been lifelong friends. Where you find love, you find truth. Love thrives on truth. Love always speaks truth. When you seek the highest good of another person, it requires truth. Where there is love, you will find transparent and unguarded honesty, even if the honesty is not easy to express. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Write a brief definition of *biblical* love based on your study of this passage so far. How does this definition differ from the world's standards for love today? Feel free to use a [Bible study tool](#) like a [Bible dictionary](#) to guide your answers.

Libraries across the globe are lined with books that attempt to define this single term. However, none has accomplished this task quite as eloquently and accurately as Paul. The reason is that Paul recognizes that love is incomplete without one central factor: *God Himself*.



Correlation: God Is Love

If 1 Corinthians 13 is the greatest treatise on love ever written, [1 John 4:7–21](#) follows closely behind. While Paul's discussion of love focuses on love's characteristics, John addressed the importance of love as an essential characteristic of God. As he says, "God is love" (4:16, emphasis added).

According to [4:9–10](#), how did God reveal His love for humankind? What was loving about this action in particular?



Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8

According to [1 John 4:11–12, 19](#), what is the basis of our love for others? In other words, *why* are we able to love others?

How do the theological truths discussed in John’s letter complement the teachings of Paul to provide a fuller perspective on biblical love?

We love because God first loved us. Before you move on, pause, and reflect on all the ways you’ve experienced God’s love this year, this month, this week, and even today.

Now, let’s move to application to see how we can channel this love God has poured out upon us and, in turn, channel it to those dearest to us.



Application: Applying the “Glue of Love”

Paul’s discussion on love describes *what* the glue of love is, and Pastor Chuck explains how we can apply this glue to our own relationships today with three simple exhortations:

1. *Write it down:* Express your love for another in your own handwriting. You’ll never know how much a physical reminder of your love could mean to someone.
2. *Risk it often:* By offering love to another, we risk disappointment, rejection, and heartbreak. Yet without vulnerability, we will never experience the true joy love offers.



Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8

3. *Do it now:* Don't wait until it's too late to tell another you love him or her. Children grow up. Friends move. Parents pass away. Don't just tell, but *show* your love.

Reread *1 Corinthians 13:4–7*. Which of the negative characteristics that Paul addresses do you find yourself showing most? How do you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you to shed this quality and put on one of the positive characteristics of biblical love? How will cultivating this positive characteristic strengthen your relational bond with others?

Think about those closest to you: your spouse, your children, your parents, your siblings, your best friends. In what way has one of these people shown his or her love for you recently? What practical steps can you take this week to both tell and show this person you love him or her?

Just as water can revive a dying body, so also can love revive the soul of a relationship that might have felt dead for years. All of humankind was once dead in its sin until God displayed the greatest act of love ever—offering His own Son to die so that we might live. Receive that gift of love, and experience in your relationships the closeness that only God-given love can create.



Essential Glue for Every Couple to Apply

1 Corinthians 13:1–8



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I praise You because You are love. Thank You for the perfect example of love You've shown me through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for my sins. Give me the strength to extend this kind of love to others. I ask that You would cultivate these characteristics of love in my life so I might be closely bound to those I care about most. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY SIX

What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

My hope is that this message will not just remain as notes on your page, but it will become guidelines for you when nobody's looking—when pressure grows and you sense your family needing something to thrive. It's never too late to start.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

To determine the spiritual health of a family, you only need to look at the heads of the home. If the parents walk closely with God, then the children naturally will follow their path. When the love of Christ unites a husband and wife, that same love will permeate the rest of the family. Yes, as the parents go, so goes the family . . . for good or for bad

Of course, we all want to see our families go down the *right* road. But we sometimes lose our sense of direction and lead our families into dangerous territory. Only Scripture can guide us to the godly values and habits that allow families to thrive.

The next three *Searching the Scriptures* studies will focus on the topic of family. We will look at behaviors that damage a family and the right attitudes that will carry through generations of families. This study, however, will focus on values that Scripture teaches, which will allow families to thrive today.



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What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God welcomes into His family those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. As members of the family of God, we approach our caring heavenly Father offering our praise, thanksgiving, confession, and requests. Say this prayer to Him before you turn to His Word today:

Father, thank You for welcoming a broken sinner like me into Your eternal family. As I await the day that I am reunited with You and all my Christian brothers and sisters, use my time here on earth to glorify Your name. Equip me to do this through my study of Scripture today. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus was an essential treatise on the family of God. He begins by explaining how someone is adopted into this family—by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And then he transitions to how a member of God's family should act in light of their newfound union with God in Christ.

Turn now to Ephesians 4 to see what Paul has to say about the family of God and to learn the timeless truths that will guide godly families today.



Observation: Commands for Thriving Families

Observation is the foundation of good Bible study.¹ Upon our observations of Scripture, we build accurate interpretation and, ultimately, practical application. Most of the time, we study one passage to see what truths a smaller section of Scripture teaches us. Sometimes, though, we look at bigger discourses to glean broader theological principles.

If you have time, read all of [Ephesians 4–6](#) to get the big picture of Paul's prescription for the family of God that we can apply to marriage and family. If time is limited, just read [4:25, 29–32; 5:21–22, 25; 6:1–4, 10–11, 18](#).



What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

Using the chart below, list the command(s) Paul extends to the Ephesians. Be careful to check whether each command is *general* (for everyone) or *particular* (for a specific group of people). Then, note any additional observations about these verses. You could note a *contrast* between two commands, a *reason* for a command, a *clarification* about a command, or something else.

Verses	Commands	Additional Observations
4:25		
4:29–32		
5:21–22, 33		
5:25		
6:1–3		
6:4		
6:10–11		



What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

This set of commands is much more than a spiritual to-do list. Rather, by following these instructions, the Ephesians would strengthen the bond of unity among their Christian brothers and sisters. And the timeless truths embedded in these words show any nuclear family how to cultivate thriving relationships.



Interpretation: Principles for Thriving as a Family

To interpret Scripture, we consider the meaning of the text to determine timeless biblical principles that apply to all Christians. Review the key verse from each section, and complete the principle following this formula: “To thrive, Christian families should . . . by”

Family Value, Number One

Key verse: “So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth” (*Ephesians 4:25*).

Principle: *To thrive, Christian families should . . . by*

Family Value, Number Two

Key verse: “Don’t use foul or abusive language . . . so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them” (*Ephesians 4:29*).

Principle: *To thrive, Christian families should . . . by*



What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

Family Value, Number Three

Key verses: “For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. . . . So again I say . . . the wife must respect her husband” (*Ephesians 5:22, 33*).

Principle: *To thrive, Christian wives should . . . by . . .*

Family Value, Number Four

Key verse: “For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church” (*Ephesians 5:25*).

Principle: *To thrive, Christian husbands should . . . by . . .*



What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

Family Value, Number Five

Key verse: “Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do” (*Ephesians 6:1*).

Principle: *To thrive, Christian children should . . . by . . .*

Family Value, Number Six

Key verse: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them” (*Ephesians 6:4*).

Principle: *To thrive, Christian parents should . . . by . . .*



What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

Family Value, Number Seven

Key verse: “Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil” (*Ephesians 6:11*).

Principle: *To thrive, Christian families should . . . by . . .*

Family is where we learn to share, to relate, to treat other people. It’s where we learn to view our surroundings correctly. It’s where we determine the line between good and evil. It’s where we learn to make great decisions and to stand by our convictions. It’s all of that and so much more. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Thriving through Prayer

Prayer is the most important practice of the Christian life because it strengthens our relational bond with God, which then strengthens our marriage and family.

Read *Ephesians 6:18*. What truths does this verse teach about prayer?

Prevailing prayer. Pray for your family members. Name them every day. That’s praying without ceasing. That’s persisting in prayer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

How can persistent prayer with your spouse and within your family help facilitate thriving relationships?

Practice persistent awareness. Stay awake. Pay attention. Watch for signs. Listen sensitively. Speak. Say something when you're concerned. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Thriving as a Family Today

From each of the seven parts of Ephesians we've studied today, Pastor Chuck Swindoll develops seven points of application—seven values of a godly family.

A thriving family:

- *Tells the truth*
- *Models restraint and courtesy*
- *Is willing to cooperate and adapt*
- *Demonstrates Christlike love*
- *Shows respect for authority*
- *Gives others space and encouragement*
- *Stands strong against the real enemy*



What Families Need to Thrive

Selections from Ephesians

Which of these seven values does your family already uphold? How have you seen this value produce healthy habits that have led your family to thrive?

Which of these seven values do you sense God leading your family to embrace more fully? If you are a spouse or a parent, how can you practically set an example as a pattern for the rest of your family to follow?

Satan wants nothing more than to rip apart godly families. By subtly assaulting the spiritual strength of even one member, he can fray the bonds that unite the whole family. The values discussed in this study work as a defense against Satan's attacks. And when we punctuate these values with persistent prayer, they will lead a family to thrive and to be healthier than ever before.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving me Your Word that contains the words of life—not just eternal life after I die but abundant life for today. Lead my family into this abundant life, starting with me. Protect my family from the schemes of Satan, and help us embrace the values you've laid out in Scripture so that we might thrive. I ask these things in Jesus' victorious name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY SEVEN

Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

Erosion is a treacherous thing because you don't know it's going on. All the while, it is eating away, disintegrating, destroying—slowly, silently, subtly. Domestic erosion is never fast or loud or alarming. It just quietly works its subtle ways. And it's not a new phenomenon. It's happened since time immemorial.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

NO building can stand forever—not even wonders like the Egyptian pyramids, the Roman Colosseum, or the Great Wall of China. While these monuments may survive today, they represent faded memories of former glory. It may take millennia, but the heavy hand of time will gradually break down these structures until they join the dust of the earth.

The great buildings of history have delayed their inevitable decay only through the meticulous planning and careful attention of their architects and builders. Without protection against erosion early on, these structures would have deteriorated centuries ago.

Strong marriages and families likewise must take special care to watch out for the danger signs of *domestic* erosion and to address them before the damage becomes severe. Families who ignore Scripture's godly counsel inevitably will face relational, spiritual, and moral erosion without realizing the subtle and gradual damage.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will turn back the clock 3,000 years to examine Israel's judge Eli and his family. The danger signs of this family's domestic erosion flashed like blinking beacons until they faced their judgment and downfall. Their story acts as a warning for those today who desire to build families that will carry a legacy of love and faithfulness that will endure forever.



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Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4



PREPARE YOUR HEART

God Himself sets the foundation for a strong family. As each member grows in his or her relationship with God, their collective strength will only increase, and the family will be able to withstand the harshest storms of life. Say this prayer to your heavenly Father as you open His Word today:

Father, thank You for being a compassionate, gracious, and loving God. I thank You that I can call You “Father.” As I study the Scriptures today, help me see Your character so that I can demonstrate it within my own earthly family. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When the people of Israel first settled the promised land, they had no king. Before God established the kingdom of Israel, He raised up leaders called judges to oversee the political, judicial, and spiritual welfare of the people (see [Deuteronomy 16:18–20](#)).

For forty years, Eli functioned, not only as a judge, but also as Israel’s high priest ([1 Samuel 4:18](#)). First Samuel 1–4 documents his life. The man had much to commend, but a close study of the Scriptures reveals certain areas he neglected—and such neglect would cost him dearly.



Observation: Eli’s Wicked Sons

The first step in the journey of sound Bible study is observation. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll says, “To observe means ‘to inspect or to take note of; to look carefully, with attention to detail.’”¹ Read [1 Samuel 2:12–36](#), and pay special attention to the writer’s description of each character.

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were also priests ([1 Samuel 1:3](#)). What word does [2:12](#) use to describe Eli’s sons? Why did the narrator describe them this way?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

First Samuel 2:13–16 provides an explanation for the character assessment of Hophni and Phinehas in *2:12*. As you read these verses, don't get too bogged down by the details. If you want to learn more about Jewish sacrificial customs, see *Constable's Notes* at netbible.org.

The narrative summarizes the sins of these brothers in *2:17*. What indictment does the text make against them? According to *2:22*, what other wicked acts did these scoundrels commit?

Eli was aware of the actions of his sons, and in *2:23–25*, he confronted them. In your own words, summarize what Eli said to his sons. According to *2:25*, how did they respond to their father?

What accusation did the mysterious man of God give against Eli in *2:29*? According to *2:30–34*, how would God judge Eli's family for the actions of his sons?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

In the following passages, Israel goes to war with the Philistines. What was the result of the battle mentioned in [4:10–11](#)? According to [4:14–18](#), how did Eli respond to the news of this battle?

The events prophesied to Eli came to pass just as God had said. God would not allow sin to fester among the spiritual leaders of Israel and so infect the rest of His flock. Even though Eli's sons acted most wickedly, God held Eli responsible. The danger signs weren't hidden in Eli's life, and neither will they be in ours.



Interpretation: Eli's Righteous, Spiritual Son

Interpretation requires asking, “What does this passage mean?” This passage contains timeless truths about domestic erosion from the example of Eli and his sons.

While Hophni and Phinehas were Eli's *biological* sons, he had another son—a *spiritual* son named Samuel. Samuel later assumed Eli's high-priestly post after his death.

Read [1 Samuel 1:28; 2:21, 26; 3:1, 8–10](#). How do these verses describe Samuel? How does Samuel's character contrast with that of Eli's biological sons?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

Even though this passage highlights the wickedness of Eli's sons, the mysterious man of God confronts Eli in [1 Samuel 2:29–35](#). In fact, the Hebrew wording of the accusation is plural, meaning the man lumped Eli together with his sons. Why did Eli receive judgment along with his sons? In what ways was Eli culpable for the sinful actions of his sons?

Eli did not know his family was eroding. It's silent. It's slow. It's subtle. There were no blasts of trumpets. There was not a voice from heaven. He was just a daddy—just busy about his work. He hadn't become deadened to the things of God. He was just out of touch with his boys at home. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Wisdom for Avoiding Erosion

The book of Proverbs contains dozens of invaluable gems of wisdom for families seeking to avoid erosion. As you read these verses, remember that these are *proverbs*, not *promises*. They offer wise counsel, not rock-solid guarantees. Proverbs reveal how human affairs in a broken world typically unfold under God's divine order.

Read [Proverbs 3:11–12](#). According to these verses, why does God discipline us? What example does this set for parents seeking to discipline their children? In other words, what should be the motivation behind discipline?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

Read [Proverbs 19:18](#). According to this verse, why should parents discipline their children? What will be the result if they do not discipline?

Read [22:6](#). Summarize in your own words the timeless truth contained in this proverb.

Let me pause for a caveat. Sometimes a dad does what he ought to be doing, and the kids just go bad. Kids have a will of their own. Let me just set that straight lest you think I'm not aware of it. Often, however, the dad is too busy, too involved, and therefore, out of touch.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Taking Action While We Can

In his application of this passage, Pastor Chuck identifies four danger signs of erosion displayed in the life of Eli. He was . . .

1. *Too busy.* Although he passionately served God, Eli grew preoccupied in his own work as the spiritual needs of his own family gradually slipped down the priority list.
2. *Too dull.* Eli lacked the awareness to acknowledge the sinfulness of his sons.
3. *Too slow.* By the time Eli listened to the warnings of those who knew of the evil deeds of his sons, it was too late to intervene.



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

4. *Too easy.* Eli's rebuke to his sons was nothing more than a slap on the hand. Ultimately, Eli rationalized the wrongs of his sons and thereby became part of the problem.

No family is perfect, and every family will go through seasons when these dangers might start to chip away at the health of the family. Consider your family and marriage. In its current state, do any of these warning signs flash before you?

Pastor Chuck offers three solutions:

1. *Wake up! This will keep you alert.* Recognize your own responsibility as a parent and spouse. Listen. Observe. Think. Pray.
2. *Talk straight! This will uphold your authority.* Are you concerned? Confront those concerns. Ask hard questions. If you don't say something, who will?
3. *Stay close! This will say you care.* Make your interactions frequent. Apologize for any distance. Laugh with them more. Pray with them more. Be deliberate.

This may be a wake-up message. Rise to your responsibilities as a parent. Your children long for boundaries. They long for your love. They long to know the security of your life. They just don't know how to put it into words. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Which of these solutions do you sense the Holy Spirit urging you to apply in your own family? How might you address the danger signs you explored in the previous question?



Danger Signs of Marital Erosion

Selections from 1 Samuel 1–4

You may look at your family and think, *It's too late*. It may seem like domestic erosion already has taken its toll—as if your family is on the verge of collapse. But no family is so broken that the grace and power of Jesus Christ cannot rebuild it. It's *never* too late to address erosion and to build your family upon a biblical foundation, moment by moment, one interaction at a time.

You might be asking, *When?* Right now. Start today.



A FINAL PRAYER

End your time in God's Word by writing your own prayer in the space below. Ask God to protect and to restore your family by His grace, and to use you to prevent future erosion.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 80.



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY EIGHT

Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14

There's something delightful and carefree about being young. My question is: why must that stop? Where's the culprit who passed the edict that growing older is a plague? It isn't your age. It's your attitude. The secret of staying young as we add up the years rests within us and nobody else. It's attitude, and that's a choice.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SOMEONE once said, “None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm.”¹ Sadly, this describes the experience of many who find the sun setting on their own lives. Though many search for purpose as the light of life fades, few find enjoyment in growing old.

Some adopt an attitude of uselessness as they age, focusing on years gone by instead of looking to what's ahead. Or they experience self-pity, wondering whether anyone cares about them anymore. Many live out their final days with a fear of death. Not to mention how easy it is to reflect on a long life, letting mistakes and failures overshadow moments of success and joy.

But . . . God offers a different way.

No person can control all the circumstances he or she faces. But anyone can control how to *respond* to a circumstance. Those who choose to have a good attitude can face down even the most devastating of circumstances with spiritual confidence and optimism.

The Israelite Caleb lived eighty-five arduous years. He spent much of his life as a slave under the oppressive Egyptians. He wandered in the wilderness for decades. He watched the Canaanites murder his fellow Israelites in battle. *If anyone should have outlived enthusiasm, it was Caleb.*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will explore the example of Caleb, the elder statesman, to consider how he managed to stay young and maintain enthusiasm even as he neared his last days. God used this man to display how someone can choose a good attitude amid dire situations.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is the hotline, the joy-line, the strength-line, the love-line, the guidance-line . . . the *lifeline* that connects everyone—young and old alike—to God. Bible study is incomplete without it. So, take time to pray to God before you begin. Ask to encounter Him in new ways, and then keep your praying going throughout your study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The book of Joshua tells the story of the Israelites experiencing victory in the promised land because of their trust in God's promises. The opening verses of the book introduce this theme. Read *Joshua 1:2–3*, and summarize the promise God made to Joshua.

The rest of the narrative tells of the Israelites who neglected to believe in the God who brought His people out of captivity. And just as God promised, these people did not inherit the land. As the story progresses, it introduces others, however, who held unwavering trust in their God, and God blessed these people richly. One such person was a man named Caleb.



Observation: The Youthful Elder

When Pastor Chuck Swindoll studies the Bible, he always starts by reading the passage and asking, “What does this passage say?” As a detective looks carefully at every detail of a case, a student of Scripture also must closely examine every detail of a passage. One of the most important clues to understanding is *repetition*.



Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14

In *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Pastor Chuck writes: “A repetition . . . means, ‘This is important!’ Often the repetition is intended to build to a climax.”² Read [Joshua 14:6–14](#), and look carefully for repeated phrases.

Caleb’s Recollection—Joshua 14:6–9

In Joshua 14:6–7, Caleb recalls a story from the time when Israel first approached the land of Canaan after their escape from Egypt. According to [14:8](#), how did those who explored the land of Canaan react to what they saw? How did Caleb’s response differ?

According to [14:9](#), what promise did Moses make to Caleb? Why?

Caleb followed the Lord God of Israel fully. That’s the secret. To him, the Lord was his partner. He was the source of strength. He was the reason for the positive spirit. He was the reason he could look above decisions made by someone else and say, “God’s hand is in this.” His eyes weren’t on himself. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14

Caleb's Request—Joshua 14:10–14

How did Caleb describe himself in *Joshua 14:10–11*?

What request did Caleb make of Joshua in *14:12*?

According to *14:13–14*, how did Joshua respond to Caleb's request? Why?

Three times this passage says that Caleb “wholeheartedly followed God.” His devotion to the Lord and confidence in the Lord motivated him throughout his entire life and fueled his enthusiasm to the very end. What an example!



Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14



Interpretation: The Example of Caleb's Enthusiasm

The interpretation phase of Bible study looks more closely at this story about Caleb to see what timeless truths the narrative contains in his example of faith and enthusiasm—even as an old man.

The book of Joshua is a story about God's *faithfulness* to His promises and Israel's *faith* in those promises. How does *Joshua 14:6–14* reveal that God kept His promises to His people? How does Caleb demonstrate his faith in these promises?

What kind of attitude did Caleb show throughout this passage? How is this instructive for those who trust in Jesus today?

Maybe it's time for an attitude adjustment. Maybe it's time for us to take an attitude like Caleb's. It was an attitude of fortitude. An attitude of gratitude. An attitude of faith. A "can do" spirit. The majority of others around him said, "We can't." He said, "We can." They said, "We ought not." He said, "We must." They said, "It's impossible." He said, "There is no such word with God." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14



Correlation: The Faithful Youth

Caleb displayed wholehearted devotion to God not just at the *end* of his life but for his *entire* life. In [Numbers 13:25–33](#), Caleb’s faith and enthusiasm were evident decades before he and Joshua had conquered the land. These events set the backdrop for the drama of Joshua 14:9–14.

Summarize the report the spies gave to Moses in [Numbers 13:27–29](#) about the land of Canaan. Be sure to discuss both the positive and negative aspects they addressed.

According to [13:30–31](#), how did Caleb’s reaction to the report differ from that of the rest of the spies?

According to this passage, how did Caleb show that he “wholeheartedly followed God” even in his youth?



Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14

Caleb didn't simply wake up on his eighty-fifth birthday with a new sense of faith in God and an enthusiasm for His purposes. Rather, he cultivated these attributes in his youth, allowing them to grow throughout his lifetime. Caleb's character reveals that, no matter one's age, it's never too late to adopt an attitude of enthusiasm and fortitude.



Application: Maintaining Youthful Enthusiasm

As Pastor Chuck reflects on the life of Caleb, he draws out four application principles that both younger and older people would be wise to heed.

1. *Your mind is not old. Keep stretching it!*
2. *Your life is not over. Keep enjoying it!*
3. *Your strength is not gone. Keep developing it!*
4. *Your opportunities have not vanished. Keep pursuing them!*

Have you felt your once-youthful attitude of enthusiasm for and devotion to Jesus Christ slipping away in recent years? In what ways? Is there some circumstance, relationship, or perspective shift that has led you to have this less-than-positive attitude?



Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14

Growth is not for the young only. Rather, Christians should grow in Christlikeness from the moment they trust Jesus until their dying breaths. In what practical ways do you sense God calling you to grow in your walk with Him? What can you do to rekindle the embers of enthusiasm?

Proverbs 16:31 says, “Gray hair is a crown of glory.” Aging provides a person with a treasure trove of benefits: knowledge, experience, wisdom, long-term relationships. How can you use the blessing of age, as well as the gifts God has cultivated within you, to serve Jesus Christ?

An attitude like Caleb’s awaits us all—an attitude of positivity, an attitude of determination, confidence, and spiritual resilience. Caleb embraced a timeless mind-set that made his devotion to God evergreen. It’s never too late, and no one is too old to have a fiery devotion to Jesus Christ.



Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the example of the heroes of faith whose lives You've presented in Scripture. Though I may be growing older, help me have an enthusiastic attitude like Caleb's. My deepest desire is to serve You passionately to the very end so I can hear You say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Quotation commonly attributed to Henry David Thoreau.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 100.



MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY EIGHT

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

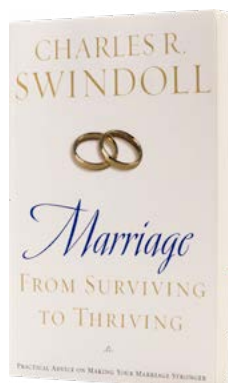
STUDY

Staying Young as Your Family Grows Older

Joshua 14:6–14



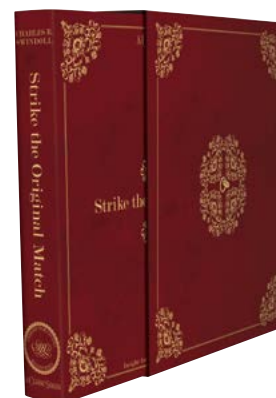
Tools for Digging Deeper



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