

*Studies for  
Building  
Strong  
Marriages*



Paul J. Bucknell



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## Studies for Building Strong Marriages

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# Foreword

There is no flaw in God's creation or in marriage. The world is upset, foolishly believing that God's design is anything other than good, glorious and joyous. They have been duped and so have many other believers. These Bible studies attempt to delve deeper into some marriage issues of roles, expectations, resolving differences and more positively helping the couples understand God's glorious design of marriage, encouraging them to trust God for His design and run deeper and deeper into experiencing a wonderful marriage.

The world has persuaded us, much like the serpent Adam and Eve, that His design cannot be trusted. These studies fully reflect the beauty of God's design. Enjoy!

Note each study has an audio introduction so you can catch the thrust for each study and see what is most important. We hope to add new studies in the future but these will certainly get you going in the right direction. Reach out for the great marriages that God designed you to have!

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# #1 The Design of Marriage



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## Starter Question

- How long have you been married? What is one interesting aspect, funny or serious, of your wedding ceremony/banquet (one per couple)?

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).*

## Bible Passage: Genesis 2:18-25

*Gen 2:18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” 19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.*

*21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. 22 And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*  
(Genesis 2:18-25 NASB).

## **Marriage Questions**

1. What is one reason God created marriage (Gen 2:18)?
2. Define the word 'design' and then describe the sections from Genesis 2:18-25 that reveal marriage's design?
3. If God sensed the need for a helper (2:18), why didn't He just create more men rather than design women?
4. What are some modern day implications that come from stating that marriage is designed?
5. Why do you think that God doesn't use the word love or compatibility to describe marriage here in Genesis 2?

6. What are some key components of God–designed marriage (Use this passage and others)?
  
7. Would you agree or disagree that crippled marriages depart from acceptance and practice of one or more of these key components of marriage that God gives in His Word? Please explain.
  
8. Pick out three problems that couples face. See if you can trace their root causes back to how they ignore or disobey God’s Word at some point.

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## **Conclusion**

Marriage is by design. When we seek God’s truth and word, we see how God’s design is best and helps us in our marriages. Frustrations and difficulties will still arise, but by God’s grace, God can and will work His loving design through your lives.

# #2 Commitment in Marriage



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## Starter Question

- What are some common unhealthy habits in conflicts?  
*(Mention: One most unhealthy habit is to undermine the solidity of one's marriage either by speaking about divorce or threatening one another or going to the past, "Why did I ever choose you.")*

## Bible Passage: Matthew 19:4-6

*4 Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning "made them male and female" 5 and said, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh"? 6 Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. (Matthew 19:4-6 NASB).*

## Marriage Questions

1. How does Jesus describe marriage in Matthew 19:4-5? Why does He describe it so?

2. The phrase from Mat 19:5, “The two shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24) has strong implications. Which implications does Jesus mention in verse 6?
  
3. How did the couple become ‘one flesh’? Is it from physical oneness?
  
4. Is it okay to think of a couple as two—you and me rather than one? How far should we take this oneness?
  
5. Do you believe romantic fantasy outside your marriage, including erotic mental play, undermines the oneness of marriage? If so, why and how?
  
6. Based on these verses, how should a spouse think if he or she secretly believes that he or she married the wrong person?
  
7. Is it always wrong to threaten to abandon a marriage? Use Mat 19:4-6 to back up your answer?
  
8. Use Mat 19:4-6 to identify two to three practical things a couple can do to strengthen their marriage.

9. What should we do if we have undermined the solidity of our marriage such as saying, “I should never have married you”?

## **Conclusion**

Once married, a couple’s choice of a mate is gone (except death), but as the spouses deepen the depth of his or her commitment, one’s marriage and affection will grow stronger. God does something special and divine at the marriage ceremony, whether in a church or a barn, that requires each spouse to work toward affirming the oneness of the marriage. Anytime a spouse questions this basic oneness, or lessens one’s devotion and commitment to his/her spouse, he/she is defying truth and implanting poisonous dark lies that lessen one’s commitment.

# #3 Roles in Marriage, 1/2



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## Starter Question

- What was one or two things you did as a husband or wife because you thought it to be your role?

## Introduction to Discussion

Much confusion stands between spouses on what they expect from one another. We might think God lays out a clear plan of what husbands and wives should do in a marriage, but this is not easily found! For example, where in the Bible do we find verses that speak about roles for husbands and wives? While the church is generally quiet about this, in recent years the world has become more vocal in asserting how husbands and wives should or should not behave. Let's see what the Bible says!

## Bible Passage: Genesis

*Gen 1:27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:27-28 NASB).*

*Gen 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18 NASB).*

## **Marriage Questions**

1. There are two main verses that speak on roles that God created for couples. What things did God do in Genesis 1:27? What is significant about each aspect?
  - a. What are the different aspects of God's image relating to mankind? How might these reflect on a husband or wife's roles?
  - b. What does our gender, male or female, have to do with marital roles?
  - c. God certainly did not make the man stronger so that he could coldly boss his wife around and get what he wants. But why did He make man different from the woman?
  - d. Nor did God make the woman desirable and beautiful to her husband so that she is able to get what she wants through the attention she offers him. But why then did He make woman so different from the man?
  
2. Read Genesis 1:28 and define as clearly as you can what roles God gave the human race? How do these larger

shaping roles relate to specific roles between husbands and wives?

3. Genesis 2:18 brings out other aspects to marital roles. Read the verse and identify any unique roles or purposes for a spouse depending upon his or her gender and design?
  - a. What does it say about men as husbands?
  - b. What does it say about women as wives?
4. What are some things that the world states about marital roles defined by one's gender?
5. Evaluate each result from the former question in light of the passages we discussed today.
6. Although we have not found details as to what a husband or wife should do in different situations in light of their roles (later study), we have identified certain general factors that affect our approach to understanding our marital roles. Identify them.

## Conclusion

Although we tend to think of roles as points of contention, God has made male and female not to fight with each other but to fully complement each other (the 2 are 1). Each spouse has his and her special contributions. We need each other to fulfill God's mission for our lives. Our roles are larger than what we feel comfortable with for God calls us all to expand His kingdom to create a godly legacy, reflecting His purpose and order here on earth.

# #4 Specific Roles in Marriage, 2/2



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## Starter Questions

- What was one recent tension point that developed from what you expected of your spouse?  
(For example, I expected my husband to fix that light bulb.)  
Why did you come to that expectation?

## Introduction to Discussion

Part I provided the necessary understanding to see God's wisdom of uniquely creating the two sexes and charging them to jointly carry out His purposes, the basis of marital roles. This followup Bible study seeks to lessen the tension points that arise between spouses due to their different expectations of each other. Our concepts of roles no doubt differ at many levels, but our purpose is to see what the scripture says to help us improve our marriages and to be able to more effectively work together as a happy team purposed on getting God's work done.

## Bible Passage: Genesis

*“She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen. 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future. 26 She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her*

*household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also” (Pr 31:24-28).*

*“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them” (Col 3:18-19 NASB).*

*“But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. 8 Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Th 2:7-8).*

## **Marriage Questions**

1. Genesis 1 and 2 (reviewing part 1) help us get a general understanding of our male and female unique giftedness that influence marital roles and values. Do you think God considers non-paying jobs around the home or carrying for the children as of less value or importance compared to being in the professional workforce? Use Genesis 1 and 2 to provide your answer.
2. What does Proverbs 31:24-28 break the stereotype that women should stay at home changing diapers?
3. How does Proverbs 31 suggest a way for a woman to balance the caring for home and husband with outside job and ministry opportunities?
4. Read Colossians 3:19 and consider if the husband should do everything around the home because he loves his wife?
5. For both husband and wife, how does love help smooth over our frustrated expectations, such as, “Why doesn’t

she do that?” From another angle, how can love keep someone from carrying out their responsibilities?

6. Why do you think Paul only gave the husbands this command to love (Col 3:19; Eph 5:25)?
7. Similarly, how does Colossians 3:18 work out in a marriage? Should the wife do everything around the home that the husband doesn't care to do? What is the right approach to this?
8. Why does the wife have this one command from the Lord to be submissive to her husband and how should it relate to roles and expectations (Col 3:18; Eph 5:22)?
9. Is it proper to find ways to 'squeeze' out of your responsibilities to each other? Why? When would it be permissible?
10. In conclusion, identify the most troublesome area where you face disappointment or confusion about expectations between you and your spouse. Make sure you pray and later discuss this with your spouse. (Caution: Don't discuss these things when an argument is in process or you think your spouse is taking advantage of you.)

## Conclusion

Since many arguments come from expectations of what he or she should be doing, it is safe to state that a clearer understanding of each other's roles will help a marriage move forward. Modern couples, thinking they have a greater handle on teamwork and roles, create conflict by not creating clear roles guided by their unique gifting from their Creator. God's creation of male and female, along with marriage, is specially

designed to form a couple who works together  
accomplishing His purposes for them.

# #5 Understanding Marital Arguments



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Audio: [mp3](#)

## Starter Question

- What do married couples sometimes argue about?

## Introduction to Discussion

The scriptures are quite clear about the oneness of the married couple, “The two are one.” If we just consider God’s design for marriage, one would think couples would always live in harmony and never argue, especially Christian couples. But that is not quite what happens, is it? Let us try to understand more about why this happens, those mild disagreements to major arguments.

## Bible Passage: Genesis

*“24 Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, “You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.” 26 So He let him alone. At that time she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood”—because of the circumcision” (Ex 4:24-26).*

*“10 Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 “Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you” (Gen 12:10-13).*

*“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, “Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. 3 And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram’s wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. 5 And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms; but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me” (Gen 16:1-5).*

*“Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart” (2Sa 6:16).*

## **Marriage Questions**

1. Let’s start by reading about a few troubled marriages in the Bible and understand the problems these couples had. Read Exodus 4:14-16 and explain what Zipporah was upset about. Was it a legitimate complaint? Why did they

argue? You might need to refer to Ex 2: 16-21 if your Bible knowledge is inadequate. How did it end up?

2. What did God think about this incident (Ex 2:26)? Why was it so important to the Lord? How many arguments between a couple are related to issues that God is concerned about? Explain.
3. What would you conclude about Abram and Sarai's relationship from Gen 16:1-5? What was the conflict? Did it have a good ending? Why or why not?
4. Read 2 Samuel 6:16 and answer what did Michal, the daughter of King Saul David's wife, despise David for? How should she have responded? What Bible verse would have given her if you were counseling her here today?
5. Many couples are using divorce, or the threat of divorce, to settle arguments. Is this a legitimate way of solving deep-seated arguments? Why or why not? What does the Bible say about this?
6. State what wisdom God gives from each Bible verse below on how one might properly handle a potential marital argument.
  - Proverbs 9:8, "Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, Reprove a wise man, and he will love you."
  - Proverbs 9:9, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man, and he will increase his learning."

- Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”
  - Proverbs 10:12, “Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.”
  - Proverbs 10:13, “On the lips of the discerning, wisdom is found, But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding.”
  - Proverbs 10:14, “Wise men store up knowledge, But with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.”
  - Proverbs 10:19, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.”
  - Proverbs 12:25, “Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down, But a good word makes it glad.”
7. In closing, think of one way that you can be more amiable when seeking your spouse’s ideas about matters you might disagree upon.

## Conclusion

God’s design clearly leads couples down the path of making harmonious decisions. We should, despite our past failures, keep on going down that path. Forgiveness in Christ makes a wonderful difference in going forward. Meanwhile, it is okay for couples to disagree, but not okay to be ignorant of our differences. Arguing is not the most successful way to understand each other and seek God’s will together as it

brings more confusion and sin into the marriage. This is the reason God made the husband oversee all final decisions.

# #6 Resolving Marital Arguments



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Audio: [mp3](#)

## Starter Questions

- How long does it take to make-up (be reconciled) after an argument? Has the time needed for healing been reduced over the period of your marriage?

## Introduction to Discussion

In the previous study, we tried to understand the nature of marital arguments and how to create harmonious marriages. We are on the same team! Here, however, we are focused on resolving marital arguments. Here, our thinking is: "I've been tricked and now I find myself opposing my spouse. I need to straighten things out." We never allow ourselves to support the notion that we are on opposite teams. Let's look at a few passages from the point of reconciliation.

## Bible Passage: Reconciliation

*"Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (Mr 9:50).*

*"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Ro 12:18).*

*“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-19).*

*“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.” (Mark 11:25-26).*

## **Marriage Questions**

1. What does Jesus mean by saying, “Have salt in yourselves?” (Mark 9:50)
2. How might “have salt in your yourselves” work in a marriage (Mark 9:50)?
3. Paul and Jesus agree with each other to be at peace with one another (Mark 9:50; Ro 12:18). What does it mean to be at peace with others? With your spouse?
4. Read 2 Cor 5:18-19 and define reconciliation. Have you ever thought of yourself being responsible for bringing reconciliation between you and your spouse?
5. How would being a reconciler work in your marriage? For example, what are some thoughts to think or words to say?

6. Read Mark 11:25-26. What is forgiveness?
7. How important is forgiveness in the process of making peace or bringing reconciliation? Why?
8. Can you make peace without forgiving and being forgiven? Explain.
9. In closing, identify one of the biggest things that slows down the process of reconciliation between you and your spouse. What step(s) can you take to minimize it?

## **Conclusion**

Our Heavenly Father has made a way to forgive and be forgiven through Jesus. We can see what sacrifice He took to go beyond the way we offended Him to reconcile us. It is urgent that we live in peace with one another. The concept of success in our marriages must include as a high priority being at peace with one another. Strive to be at complete peace with your spouse. Dig up the 'ole bones as needed but then put them to complete rest. Gain and retain that peace for which Christ died.

# #7 Delving Into the Fabric of Marriage



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Audio: [mp3](#)

## Starter Questions

- What was the last mistake you made or thing that was broken? Did you fix it? How?  
(Marriages also need to be fixed!)

## Introduction to Discussion

Spouses need to become experts on resolving problems with each other. The belief that we can enjoy a harmonious marriage is good and necessary, but we must go far beyond this. We need to work at creating that harmonious marriage. Spats and arguments reveal that we have not yet properly discovered this faith (Song 5:2). The former lesson taught us how each spouse is called to be a reconciler and peacemaker requiring that we pursue this harmony. Having deposed our suspicious-like attitudes, we can go deeper observing the very fabric of our marriages where this harmony is found.

## Scripture Passages

*“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).*

*“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not*

*be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Mat 6:33-34).*

## **Marriage Questions**

1. How can a couple be one when the spouses have two sets of opinions and preferences?
2. Let’s dig deeper here and see what can unify our hearts and minds. Read 2 Peter 3:18 together and discover at least two of the three things from this verse that each Christian spouse can agree on as being very important to him or her.
3. Discuss if the husband and wife can agree to the overriding importance of the goals mentioned above. Why or why not?

As couples, our common values serve as our common foundation. This establishes the importance of a Christian marrying a Christian, a commitment to one that shares the same belief and values to God and His values.

4. So how will our varying opinions and preferences relate to these deeper values? Which is of higher or lower importance?
5. List five specific things on which spouses have differing opinions over which they are willing to argue.
6. Read Matthew 6:33-34. Worries are closely related to our own valued preference—wanting it to happen our way and fearful if it doesn’t. Discuss how Jesus states our own preferences and opinions relate to deeper kingdom values.

Our focus in this study is to work on this oneness and make it practical. In the next study, we will show how it works out in the difficult situations where husband and wife disagree.

7. There is a danger of abstract thinking. We can know all this is true and even right but not succumb our wishes and preferences to God's greater purposes. Suggest several practical ways couples can emphasize their oneness of values. Are you willing to do this?

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8. In closing, think of one step that you can take to be more amiable when seeking your spouse's ideas about matters on which you disagree.

## Conclusion

Once we have solidified our hearts on the most fundamental matter of living for God according to the scripture in the spirit of love, then these other matters—our opinions and choices, become secondary. They are much more easily resolved because we are working together as one! Only by focusing on our one set of values based on the truth can we unlock the door to strengthening the foundation of our marriage and work out our differences in a harmonious way.

# #8 Our Secret Confidence



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## Starter Questions

- Share something that other people don't know about you or your family.

God's commands are meant to lead us to the best lives possible. (Only a secret because people don't believe—its blessing is hidden from them!)

## Introduction to Discussion

In the former study from Matthew 6:33-34 we were reminded how to find harmony even when we have disagreements, that is, we prioritize righteousness, carrying things out in the right way. God's greater values are meant to touch, affect, sanctify all our decisions and discussions. In essence, we are changed as we allow our preferences to be touched by His person and ways. In this particular study, we focus on how the one command for husbands and the one command for wives are to preserve harmony even when they disagree. As we trust our preferences and interests to God, we take a big step in our obedience to our Lord (i.e., seeking Him first), assuring us that He will bring yet greater blessings into our lives even when if we might not, at the time, get what we believe to be best, important or vital.

## Scripture Passages

*“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not*

*be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Mat 6:33-34).*

*“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph 5:22).*

*“So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself” (Eph 5:28).*

## **Marriage Questions**

(This study could be separated into two studies (husbands and wives) as time allows as each can be expanded.)

1. What is the command that God gives to husbands in their treatment towards their wives? Where is it found?
2. What is the command the Lord has given to wives to govern their responses to their husbands? Likewise, where is that found?
3. Why do you think there is only this one extra command for husbands and wives?
4. Knowing what God says about the husband’s authority and his call to be loving, how should the husband practically treat his wife when she disagrees with him? Similarly, how would the wife like him to love her?
5. Is it always right for a husband to do what his wife desires? First, discuss and then after reading Genesis 3:1-6 discuss what should guide the husband’s caution.
6. What should the husband do if he finds himself angry or impatient towards his wife? Why might that be difficult to do?

7. Knowing that the wife should submit to her husband's authority and respect him, how should she emotionally, verbally, and physically treat him when she disagrees with him over important matters?
8. What if the wife thinks she knows better?
9. What should the wife do if she is convinced that the husband will make a wrong decision?
10. Would you say that when husbands or wives disobey these commands that they are essentially saying their own opinion is wiser than God's command? Is it?
11. In closing, in light of what has been discussed above, consider what you personally need most to live as a faithful husband or wife.

## **Conclusion**

Through these two commands, God enables husbands and wives to confidently live as one. It is the secret of living in harmony even when tested by different opinions and varying ideas such as on child raising, personal habits, spending, running the home, moving, etc. Trust God's commands to lead you when your feelings or rationale might lead you otherwise. Hopefully, the husband will be more sensitive to his wife—knowing he could make a mistake. Hopefully, the wife will be more gentle and trusting, knowing her interference might bring about a wrong decision and a hardened husband.

## About the Author: Paul J. Bucknell

Paul has worked as an overseas church planter during the 1980s and pastored in America during the 1990s. God called him to establish *Biblical Foundations for Freedom* in 2000 and since then has been actively writing, holding international Christian leadership training seminars and serving in the local church.

Paul's wide range of books on Christian life, discipleship, godly living, leadership training, marriage, parenting, anxiety, Old and New Testament and other spiritual life topics provide special insights that are blended into his many books and media-rich training resources.

Paul has been married for more than thirty-eight wonderful years. With eight children and four grandchildren, Paul and his wife Linda continually see God's blessings unfold in their lives.

For more on Paul and Linda and the BFF ministry, check online at:  
[www.foundationsforfreedom.net](http://www.foundationsforfreedom.net)