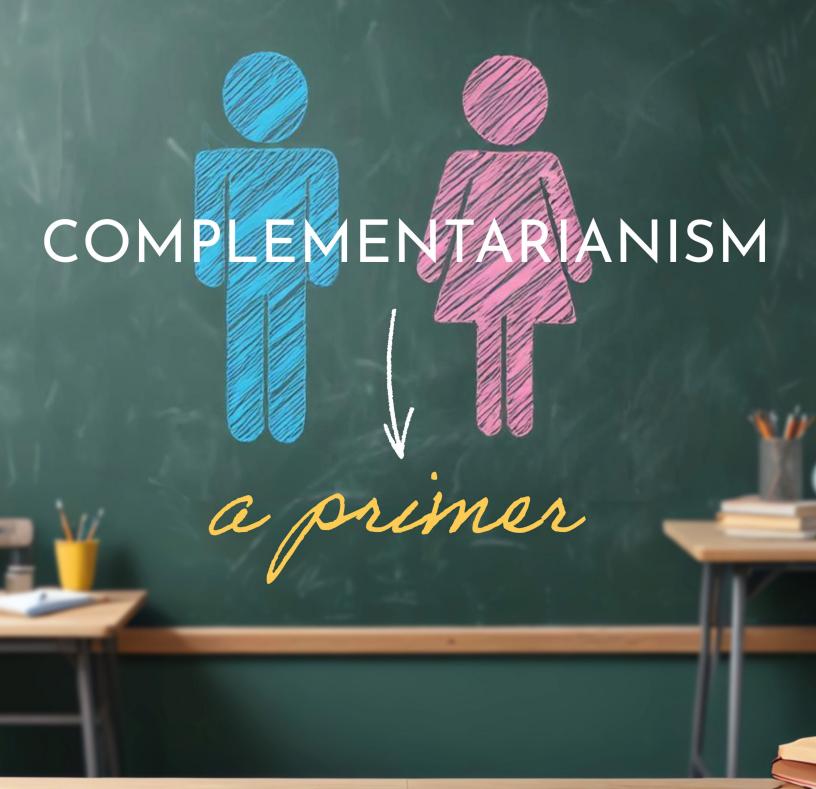
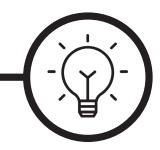
# PERSPECTIVE

FEBRUARY 2025



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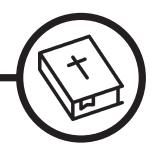
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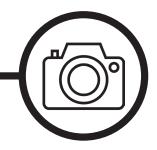
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#### **Complementarianism: A Primer**

It's difficult being a complementarian today.

For instance, how do we make sense of the culture's images of manhood and womanhood? As I write, an album cover on Spotify shows a woman looking off-camera with a powerful gaze. She wears a man's black suit and collared dress shirt with short hair styled like a '90s punk rocker. One hand adjusts her black tie's knot, and the other rests on her hip like she's about to step forward to take charge. This image—a beautiful, vulnerable woman adorned with the attire of a man's authority—makes sense by today's standards. But the androgyny depicted makes a moral statement about gender that's difficult for complementarians to appreciate.

The difficulty doesn't end there. Complementarianism has fallen on hard times in its own camp. Like it or not, all complementarians can get lumped with abusers who have used male headship as a cover for their sin. Personally, it's hard seeing Christians, who were once aligned on this topic, become divided.

In my twenty-plus years of ministry, it used to be easier to be a complementarian. Distinctions between men and women were more culturally acceptable, and Christians agreed on much. But, as Dorothy told Toto in *The Wizard of Oz*, "We're not in Kansas anymore." We've traveled to a new time and now face bewildering characters. Scripture's authority and sufficiency must be our guide. The Bible may not detail every command for living as a man or woman, but it sufficiently provides what we need to live according to God's design.

This is a primer on complementarianism, an introduction to the theological framework of God's good design: "male and female he made them" (Gen. 1:27).

#### TO THE HURT AND THE CYNICAL

Some of you may bristle at this topic.

Maybe you've been hurt by professing Christians who taught complementarianism. You've seen through their thinly veiled hypocrisy and are haunted by the visions. Your pastor bullied others in violation of biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:2–3; 1 Pet. 5:30). Your mother bears the wounds inflicted by your father who treated her as though Ephesians 5:28–30 was torn from his Bible. Your trusted camp counselor groomed you so he or she could abuse you. Oh, the judgment that awaits (Mt. 18:6)! Whatever it was, I'm truly sorry for the pain you've endured! I pray "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" will comfort you in "all [your] afflictions" (2 Cor. 1:4). Or as one author says, "Perhaps it is in these traumatic times that God, in his providence, sows the seeds of a passion for righteous living and healing found in Christ."

Please don't jettison the teaching you once held dear. The wounds of bad authority are healed by the salve of good authority, not the rejection of authority or promotion of unbiblical equality. Consider God's lifegiving promise to King David—a man who repented of his sinful use of authority to commit adultery and murder. These are his final words: "The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth" (2 Sam. 23:3–4).

Maybe you're cynical about complementarianism. You've seen the schism it can cause among Christians, and you want this topic put in the closet for a bit of a rest. You question, "Why draw lines? Why burden consciences over gender distinctions while the dust settles from other issues that have recently divided like-minded Christians?"

Have you considered the urgency of this cultural moment? When a secular world does everything to eradicate gender distinctions, Christian discipleship urgently calls us to uphold God's design. Individuals, marriages, families, and churches flourish when they live according to God's plan for making us male and female. And though biblical manhood and womanhood are not the gospel, they are a litmus test for our commitment to the Bible's authority and the gospel. We can't be silent when anti-biblical and anti-Christian messages about being a man or woman are heralded around us.

So to the hurt and the cynical, give these complementarian principles another prayerful look, starting with God's good design.

#### **GOD'S GOOD DESIGN**

If you want proof of sin, look no further than humanity's willful refusal to live according to God's design. Men and women uniquely bear God's image and were created for a divine purpose. Yet, the height of rebellion is to suppress our knowledge of God and live contrary to his design (Rom. 1:20–26). This is and will always be to our peril.

We need the gospel. The gospel transforms sinners. God's Spirit makes us new creations. New life brings new aspirations and the power to live according to God's design as male and female.

God's purposeful design is captured in the teaching of complementarianism. Complementarianism doesn't mean to be polite by offering a compliment (with an "i"); it means to be fitting to or correspond to. My living room curtains are a different color than the rug, but they complement each other; they're well-suited together.

Complementarianism teaches that God created us equal in his image as male and female but with distinct identities and roles that are well-suited to one another,

enabling us to fulfill his good design to represent him. Here are five principles to help us understand and apply this important topic.

#### IN THE BEGINNING AND ON INTO TIME

The animosity that can exist between men and women, even a husband and wife, is a sad reality. I've seen it first-hand. I've watched spouses argue in court the merits of their claims for a restraining order against one another. The conflict and disharmony that can exist today was not part of God's original design. To know how to live as male and female, we need to go back to God's plan from the beginning.

Everything the Bible teaches about being a man and woman makes sense once we understand how God created different but complementary imagebearers "in the beginning." Jesus and the New Testament authors took their cues for manhood and womanhood from creation. Jesus and Paul quoted Genesis 1 and 2 to explain God's original and unchanging plan for marriage (Mt. 19:4-5; Eph. 5:31-32). Paul referenced God's created order as the foundation for gender-specific commands in the church (1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13). He described his ministry among the Thessalonians using the natural demeanors that correspond to one's gender as a mother or father (1 Thess. 2:7-8, 11-12). He also said homosexual relations are "contrary to nature" (Rom. 1:26–28), which implies an innate knowledge that such relations and acts are wrong in light of God making us male and female.

This gets at the first principle: God's design for manhood and womanhood existed from the beginning of creation and constitutes the abiding standard for malefemale relationships even after the fall. The early church needed to know how to live as a community distinct from its pagan neighbors. Jesus and the apostles set before them the goal of living by the Spirit according to God's plan "in the beginning."

Complementarianism upholds God's good design in the beginning and on into time.

#### THE EQUALITY WE NEED

Satan deceived Eve into believing that by disobeying God she would "be like God" (Gen. 2:5). She should have cried out, "Liar! I am already like God!"

God declared he would make man "in our image, after our likeness . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26–27). That leads to the <u>second principle</u> of complementarianism: Men and women are created equal in worth and dignity because both bear the image of God. Though maleness and femaleness are not the same, and though men and women have different roles within God's authority structure, they possess equality because they are made in God's image. Mankind is singular—"in the image of God he created him"—and plural—"male and female he created them." There are only two

identities for humanity—male and female—and both genders are of equal value because both are in the likeness of God.

Both men and women are also equally distinct from the rest of creation and have a special relationship to God. They are endowed with God-like characteristics. He sets his redeeming love on them indiscriminately, and they are equally coheirs of God's grace as seen in the church (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:7).

Man and woman equally represent God by ruling over creation. God gave them a job: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over" it (Gen. 1:28). The man and woman were like statues or icons in the garden showing the world what God was like. They were to image him by doing like he did—filling and ruling over the earth. They had joint responsibility to create life and to rule over creation under God's rulership.

Complementarians should not downplay equality. It's not a passing chord. It's central to the beautiful medley God wrote for men and women—humble servants esteeming the other gender's worth and purpose as they fulfill God's design.

As a matter of fact, humanity can't thrive without both genders, which leads to the third principle.

#### A PROBLEM WITH LONELINESS

Adam was alone in the garden. God pointed out this problem: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). This reveals a third principle: God created men and women with important differences that are well-suited for one another to fulfill his purposes.

Genesis 2 quickly unveils the important differences between the man and woman. These imply something about God's plan for making us male and female, especially for marriage. The man's need for a "helper fit for him," brings two important things to our attention.

First, we have different roles for different realms in fulfilling God's purposes. Men and women are jointly responsible for the creation mandate, but their responsibilities and realms are "asymmetrical." The man was to "work and keep" the garden (Gen. 2:15). God gave him a body with strength to till the soil and clear the brush. He worked to provide for his family and served like a priest for their spiritual protection ensuring God's commands were obeyed. From being made first to naming the animals, the man was endowed with leadership responsibility and authority over his family and creation.

The woman was created as his "helper," but not merely as an extra set of hands to make light work. She was made uniquely different for the task of being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the earth. Adam couldn't do this "alone." He needed the woman, and

enthusiastically received her as God's gift (2:23–25). God made her with a body able to conceive, carry, and nurture children. She was called "Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (3:20). Furthermore, man left his family and clung to his wife because life and community come from the family and within the family from the woman. The woman helped the man fulfill God's purposes by cultivating and nurturing life in the family to fill creation.

Second, these differences are well-suited for one another. Creation had a complementary pattern: Light and darkness, night and day, water and land, male and female. And there were complementary patterns in the male-female relationship. The woman is a helper "fit for him." She's different but corresponds to him. Her body, demeanor, character, and roles are different but "fit for him" and vice versa. He can't do his job without her. She can't do hers without him.

Take the most obvious example—the body. Our bodies reveal our gender identity and purpose as male and female. They were created differently but correspond to one another for procreation. Adam and Eve saw one another naked before sin and "were not ashamed" (2:25). It was pure innocence seeing, knowing, and enjoying their God-designed, sexually fitted differences.

If only men and women still accepted those differences. So what's the problem today?

### SUBVERSION, REVERSAL, STRUGGLE, AND ENMITY

Satan hates complementarianism, and our sinful nature isn't a fan either. This provides a <u>fourth principle</u>: Satan and our sinful nature tempt us to subvert and corrupt God's design for manhood and womanhood, marriage, and family, leaving it in need of redemption.

In the fall, Satan reverse-engineered God's authority structure (Gen. 3:1–13). The serpent, a created being, took the Creator's place, telling Adam and Eve what was right and wrong. He tempted Eve to question God's word and generosity. She listened to him while the man passively sat by letting it unfold. They both disobeyed. Roles were reversed, and God's design was subverted. When called to an account, the man had the nerve to blame God.

God judged them for it. Struggle and enmity were introduced to humanity (Gen. 3:14–19). Continual, spiritual warfare now exists between Satan and mankind. Men and women experience conflict in their respective roles and relationships. Childbearing is hard and painful and can be full of sorrow. Loving unity and harmony in marriage was replaced with a pattern of struggle for authority and control. The woman developed a taste for usurping her husband's authority, and he developed one for being passive and domineering. Working to provide and exercise dominion is laborious and hard for the man. His

work can be unfruitful. His garden has become his burial plot.

Things only got worse after Genesis 3. Humanity falls short of God's design time and time again. Polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, fornication, prostitution, sexual assault, and more are contrary to being made male and female. Our different, Godgiven roles have been corrupted and tainted by the fall. We need redemption to live out God's design.

#### MORE THAN A COMEBACK

By now, you may be wondering about those sharpedged, New Testament passages. You know—the ones that make people whence: head coverings (1 Cor. 11:6–9); male headship (Eph. 5:23); women being silent and not teaching (1 Cor. 14:33–35; 1 Tim. 2:11–14); and more (cf. Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:1–7).

Read them closely, and you'll clearly see the familiar story of male-female distinctions from creation. It's hard to overstate the importance of Genesis 1–2 for the New Testament's theology of gender. Why? Because Jesus's death and resurrection dawned a new creation where God restores and fully reveals his plan for humanity. This leads to my final principle: In Christ, we are a new creation seeking to live according to God's design for being made male and female, especially in the home and the church. Gender differences are not eradicated but restored for God's beautiful, flourishing purposes.

Here are three ways the complementarianism established at creation is lived out among believers:

First, regardless of whether one is married or a parent, all Christians fill the earth with spiritual children through disciple-making. It's tempting to conclude that being single or childless makes one unnecessary for fulfilling God's design. But in Christ, all are part of a family regardless of their marital or parental status. When we follow Jesus, we "receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands" (Mk. 10:29–30). The Great Commission commands us to make disciples, to make spiritual children. God's design to be fruitful and fill the earth is restored and expanded through the spiritual rebirth, with every Christian playing the role of spiritual father or mother.

Second, in the church, God's design is displayed when qualified men humbly teach and exercise authority and where godly men and women humbly follow such leadership and use their gifts for others' good. A local church's leadership should reflect the authority structure God established at creation. That's why Paul prohibited women from teaching or exercising authority over men. God created Adam first, then Eve, showing that male pastoral authority is an enduring principle for the church. For a woman to teach or exercise such authority reverses our gender roles, like Adam and Eve did when they transgressed God's command (1 Tim. 2:12–14).

But not just any man can or should take up such authority. Only qualified men should be or function as elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). They should do so humbly, modeling the strong and tender characteristics of the great Shepherd, who spiritually knows, leads, protects, and provides for his flock.

In response, the church (men and women alike) humbly submits to such leadership (Heb. 3:7, 17). God gives elders and deacons to model godly behavior that's to be emulated (1 Tim. 3:15; 4:11–16). Furthermore, the Spirit graciously gives everyone gifts to be used for others' good (1 Cor. 12). And it doesn't matter how great or public our gifts are. They're a distraction and annoyance if they aren't exercised in love and humility (1 Cor. 13:1–3).

Women are also to conduct themselves in a way that publicly recognizes God's design for good, male authority in the church. That's implied in the passages about head coverings and women being silent (1 Cor. 11:1–16; 14:33–35; 1 Tim. 2:11–14). And Paul does not command women to never speak in church (see 1 Cor. 11:4–5). Rather, they're to do so with a humble posture toward male authority, whether it's her husband, an elder, or a qualified man teaching Scripture at the moment.

Lastly, in marriage, the husband lovingly leads and the wife respectfully submits, thereby displaying the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22–33). "Lead" and "submit" can be vague, so let me elaborate: A husband is to exercise benevolent, sacrificial authority that honors his wife. A wife should have a willful posture and voluntarily yield to his authority as an act of faith in the Lord. This leading and submitting displays the relationship between Christ and the church, unveiling God's mysterious plan from the beginning.

Husbands are the head of the family with a position of authority. There is no mechanism to enforce such authority over his wife. Rather, he commends its lifegiving goodness when he exercises it with Christ-like, benevolent, sacrificial love. A husband who lives with his wife in an understanding way and sacrifices for her well-being will often find a wife joyfully submitting to him and following his leadership.

A wife's responsibility to "submit" can be characterized in different ways. I find it helpful to understand it as both a posture (meaning she's ready and wanting to follow) and a yielding (meaning she decidedly chooses to follow). That's what characterizes Christ's church. We want and decide to follow Jesus. And like the church, a wife's submission is an act of faith. It's no small thing for a person to submit themselves to another sinful person, especially in the vulnerable relationship of marriage. She must have great faith in the Lord. She trusts that God's commands are good and right. She trusts that submission is "as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:24). If her husband is a Christian, she

can trust he will endeavor to lead her for her good, even if done imperfectly.

When Paul gave these commands for gender roles in marriage, Jesus's death and resurrection had dawned a new creation. God's mysterious plan for marriage, hidden from the dawn of time, had now been fully revealed. Complementarian marriages do more than restore God's design. They are more than a comeback for being made male and female. They display the gospel.

#### MAYBE IT'S NOT SO DIFFICULT

I began by saying that being a complementarian is difficult today. But, after considering these five principles, maybe it isn't so difficult after all. As a matter of fact, it's good.

When we live according to our God-given gender identities and roles, we flourish and others flourish because of us. Men, have you been encouraged to see others follow your example and seek your counsel when you show godly leadership among your friends, in your home, or at church? Women, have you found indescribable joy from others flourishing under your nourishing words and caring deeds? Do your friends, family, and fellow church members seek your help? Others grow, mature, and are equipped as men and women as they see our examples of godly manhood and womanhood.

And when you're tempted to neglect your role or question how God ordered authority, remember God is good. We see his goodness in his design for men and women and in the grace he gives us each day to live as men and women that honor him. So yes complementarianism is good—it's good for you and others because God is good.

Brad Thayer

<sup>1</sup>Andreas & Margaret Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 13–14.

<sup>2</sup>Kevin DeYoung, Men and Women in The Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019),

<sup>3</sup>I commend the two resources in the endnotes. Both are very accessible. The Köstenbergers' work deals with these passages

<sup>4</sup>I believe head coverings were the culturally specific expression of such authority in the early church that is not a required symbol today.

# Infertility Comfort for Your Empty Arms and Heavy Heart

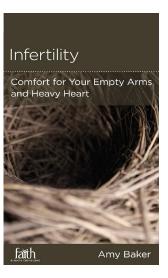
#### Written by Amy Baker

Infertility affects more couples than you might think. According to the National Institutes of Health, between 12-15% of couples are unable to conceive within their first year of trying. Approximately 10% are unable to conceive after two years of trying. Those are significant percentages. They become more significant when translated to groups we know and love. At Mount Vernon, for example, those percentages translate to approximately twenty-one couples who know first-hand the pain and sorrow of infertility. Maybe you are among those couples and looking for hope and help. Maybe you aren't, but you'd like to know how to care for them better. If so, Amy Baker and Daniel Wickert's booklet, Infertility: Comfort for Your Empty Arms and Heavy Heart, is a good place to start.

Baker, a seasoned biblical counselor, and Wickert, a biblical counselor and OBGYN, understand the heartache of infertility. They also know the hope and help found only in knowing and trusting Christ through the disappointment and pain. The booklet begins by acknowledging the reality that infertility can bring with it intense suffering—deep sadness, strained relationships, expensive medical interventions. Baker and Wickert then assert the life-giving truth that we worship "the one who makes a way through the barren desert of your life, and provides streams to refresh you as you travel through this desert" (p. 9). The primary stream to which they point is the life-giving Word of God, particularly the truths found in 1 Peter 1:3–13. Peter's words to suffering Christians provide comfort and challenge in the face of infertility, fixing our eyes on Christ and urging us to set our hope on him in the midst of our grief.

Baker and Wickert's counsel is tender, pointed, practical, and Christ-centered. They gently encourage struggling couples to press into Christ, their spouse, and ministry to others while also offering sage counsel about pursuing medical interventions. Given the prevalence of infertility in the church and in the world, all Christians will be helped by reading this little book. In a year in which there will be much talk about the command to "be fruitful and multiply," I trust it will help those in the trial by pointing them to Christ's compassion and surpassing worth. I also trust it will help those who aren't by opening their eyes to the pain of infertility, encouraging them to lovingly and tenderly point the suffering to Christ.

Recommended by Dustin Butts



Excerpts from the Book



God's ways and comfort do not always take the form we expect. Rather than giving us exactly what we want at the moment we want it, God offers himself as a superior desire.

- "God Speaks to Your Suffering," p. 8

### 2

The suffering of infertility offers a taste of Christ's suffering and creates an opportunity to be devoted to him, his glory, and his kingdom. The greatest gift of all is not having a child, but being a child, *his* child.

- "God Speaks to Your Suffering," p. 10

## 3

When the weight of suffering threatens to suck the life from your spouse, you can softly remind your hurting lover of the faith that is of greater worth than gold. . . . You can quietly live out your hope in front of your spouse, knowing that next week it may be that you will need your spouse to do the same for you.

- "Turning from Blame," p. 12

Available for checkout from the Church Library or purchase in the Bookstall

# Love That Lasts When Marraige Meets Grace

#### Written by Gary & Betsy Ricucci

Have you ever been in the kitchen working to slice some vegetables for dinner and notice that the knife you are using is a bit dull? When that happens, we tend to stubbornly keep trying by force of will to make the knife work better, but what we need to do is pause and take the time needed to sharpen the knife so the task of slicing the vegetables becomes more efficient. Knives only stay sharp when we take time to sharpen them. The same ordinary principle applies to our marriages. The ordinary and regular course of our lives tends to bring with it a dulling of our attention and intentionality in our marriages. As a result, we can find ourselves in marital malaise or worse. In their book Love that Lasts: When Marriage Meets Grace, Gary & Betsy Ricucci give us a good sharpening. There is nothing flashy or novel in this book which is why it is so helpful.

They begin by reminding us, "A truly Christian marriage starts with the reality that the institution of marriage does not belong to us. It belongs to God. He designed marriage, and his purposes for it are paramount" (19). They remind us of the gospel and refocus our hearts toward what is true and ultimate in our lives and in our marriages. The message is simple, clear, and a great refresh to our hearts. The next chapters follow with excellent sections describing the roles of a husband and wife within the context of a biblical marriage. They give simple and clear guidance on how to grow in our respective roles without leaving you filled with shame or guilt for areas of struggle. I found myself continually commenting to myself, "that is helpful," "that is useful," "that makes sense," and "that is a good reminder."

The book moves from these good reminders of our roles to helping us think through communication and conflict and then relational and physical intimacy. The lessons flow with a simplicity and commonality just like the ordinary means of grace in other areas of our lives. There is nothing earth-shattering nor is there a silver bullet, just simple and practical reminders of what a good, godly, and biblical marriage looks like. Whether you are preparing for marriage or you've been married for years, your marriage will be sharpened by this book. I encourage you to read it on your own and walk through it with your spouse to help identify and sharpen the dull edges of your marriage.

— Recommended by Denny Crosby

When Marriage Meets Graci





GARY & BETSY RICUCCI FOREWORD BY C. J. & CAROLYN MAHANEY

## Excerpts from the Book

# 1

When I offer counsel to Gary, ask him questions, or make an appeal, these are key expressions of my God-given role as his helper, and as such they are a deep honor. It gives me joy to do these things for Gary because it places me squarely in the middle of God's good and perfect will for my life. What a privilege to participate in making the one I love most on earth a successful leader.

- Walking in Wisdom, p. 59

### 2

When we try, in humility, to address what sin has done in our spouse, God approves and extends grace. But when we try to change our spouse into our own image, we stand in opposition to God and miss out on the breadth and depth of fellowship and intimacy that he wants to produce in each marriage.

-Grace to Those Who Hear, p. 84

## 3

Because God is sovereign and ever at work for our good and our growth in godliness, conflict can always be redemptive. The storms of conflict actually test how we're building our marriages. You can think of conflicts as spiritual pop quizzes from God.

- The Heart of Conflict, p. 104

Available for checkout from the Church Library or purchase in the Bookstall

# FEBRUARY

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

February 1	2 Kings 5:15-27
February 2	Luke 7:1-10
February 3	Romans 15:22-29
February 4	Philippians 1:3–11
February 5	2 Corinthians 8:1–15
February 6	Acts 11:27-30
February 7	Proverbs 19:1–17
February 8	Proverbs 19:18–29
February 9	Romans 15:22-29
<b>February 9</b> February 10	Romans 15:22–29 Romans 15:30–33
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February 10	Romans 15:30–33
February 10 February 11	Romans 15:30–33 Acts 27:1–12
February 10 February 11 February 12	Romans 15:30–33 Acts 27:1–12 Acts 27:13–38
February 10 February 11 February 12 February 13	Romans 15:30–33 Acts 27:1–12 Acts 27:13–38 Acts 27:39–44

February 17	John 21:15-19
February 18	John 21:1-14
February 19	John 21:20-25
February 20	John 18:15–27
February 21	Isaiah 40:1-11
February 22	Isaiah 40:12-31
February 23	John 21:15–19
February 24	John 21:15–19 Romans 16:1–2
•	
February 24	Romans 16:1–2
February 24 February 25	Romans 16:1–2 Acts 28:1–10
February 24 February 25 February 26	Romans 16:1–2 Acts 28:1–10 Acts 28:11–16



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# NEW MEMBERS



Olivia Davis



Gabrielle Disanza



Sandra Edge Adam Hewitt







Collin Ireland Ryan Lavender



Courtney Sizemore



Michael & **Brooke Tice** 

