

Volume 3
***Building Resilient
Marriages &
Families***



Daily
Strength
for the
Battle®

You,
God's Word,
5 minutes

By Scott & Judy McChrystal

***Daily Strength for the Battle:
Building Resilient Marriages and Families***
By Scott & Judy McChrystal

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Dedication

This devotional is dedicated to the courageous men, women, and families of our military community. Their sacrifices on a daily basis enable our nation, under God, to remain as the “land of the free and home of the brave.”

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Endorsements

Chaplain Scott McChrystal is a combat veteran and Spiritual Warrior who has captured the essence of winning the daily fight against mankind's spiritual enemy. This is a good field manual for every Christian who wants to be prepared for battle."

— LTG Jerry Boykin, USA (RET), former Commander of Delta Force and Commander of USASOC

Scott McChrystal's Strength for the Battle is a compact and inspiring volume. It connects the precious promises and truths of God's Word with the real world. This is straightforward talk from a soldier who has been in the heat of battle. But it is also the heart of a chaplain's message: encouragement and empowerment from God's unfailing love in Jesus Christ.

— Chaplain(Major General) Kermit D. Johnson, USA (Ret.)

Your books are excellent - both are currently on my night stand and the first book has made two TDY trips and is serving its purpose.

— Senior Officer in the USA Special Operations Community

I just led the young Airmen on a rafting trip and the young Airman used Vol 1 for nightly devotionals and all the attendees wanted the devo! Thanks for blessings us. Looking forward to getting these in the hands of our Airmen!

— USAF Chaplain

I received the devotionals! It's already halfway distributed throughout the FOB here. Thank you!

— US Army Chaplain in Iraq

Chaplain Scott McChrystal served as one of the most beloved chaplains ever at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Standing behind Chaplain McChrystal is a plethora of experiences in touching the lives of thousands of America's magnificent warriors. My personal experience with Chaplain McChrystal at West Point and during other opportunities verifies my confidence, for I have seen the excellence of his ministry in operation."

— Rev. Dave Roeber, Decorated Vietnam veteran;
military speaker

Chaplain Scott McChrystal's Daily Strength for the Battle is a powerful devotional tool for military men, women, and families.

This inspirational guide, drawn from Chaplain McChrystal's significant experience as a infantry leader and a Chaplain spiritual leader, is a very practical means by which we might all "put on the armor of God" on a daily basis

— Major General Bob Dees, US Army, Retired,
Executive Director, CCCI Military Ministry

Introduction

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.
(1 Corinthians 15:58)

Military marriages and families are under attack. Some have already crumbled; others are barely hanging on. This trend needs to change and can change.

This devotional is designed to assist warriors and their families in building resilient marriages and families.

According to Merriam-Webster, resiliency can be defined as: (1) the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens; (2) the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc.

As part of the military community, you have firsthand experience with many things that have pulled, stretched, and pressed your marriage and family relationships. You are doubtlessly aware that since 9/11 many marriages have not survived and families have been torn apart as well. But the stressors and factors that are so damaging are not just those associated with deployment and combat. There are many others.

Warriors and families face a myriad of challenges, but one thing is certain. We have a choice as to how we respond. Some choose to remain passive and simply let life run over them like a freight train. And it will.

Fortunately, others are making a different choice. Their decision is to become proactive in taking measures to protect their marriages and families. This makes a lot more sense.

My wife Judy and I believe that your marriage and family can attain a level of resiliency that will get you through whatever life may throw at you. How? By trusting in God and following his plan for your marriage and family. You don't have to sit back and be a victim. God wants to help you and He can provide all of the resources necessary to achieve resilience in your marriage and family.

Marriage and family are the building blocks of society. God is for you, your marriage, and your family.

But we all know that marriages and families are struggling to survive. This has always been the case, but perhaps the situation has worsened in the 21st century. Personally I believe the cosmic clock is winding down. Jesus is coming soon.

Why the struggle? There are a host of reasons, but at the foundation of the matter is the struggle between good and evil. God is for us. Satan is not. There is a spiritual war raging for control of this planet. Satan's strategy is straightforward: "to steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10a). And just to be clear, the Devil's goals are extensive, touching not only this life, but extending into eternity. He wants to destroy everything to include our souls.

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In the words of Jesus, God's mission is clear: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b). Saving the human race was so important to our Creator that he became involved at a most personal level. He sent His Son to win victory and make salvation possible for all of mankind.

Save us from what? From our sins. We live in a fallen world. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Ever since the devil enticed Adam and Eve to sin back in the Garden of Eden, all humanity has followed in that sinful path.

Over the thousands of years since the Fall, mankind has tried to save itself. But the attempts have fallen short — all of them. If you want proof, just consider our planet. Things are in a mess. And it's not getting better. We're trying, but it's just not happening. Our hope must be in God, and in Him alone.

Let's get back to God's personal involvement. Two thousand years ago, God launched Operation Bethlehem, a rescue mission designed to achieve eternal salvation for all who choose to believe. It started by introducing his Son, Jesus, into the world as a little infant. He was born in a small town called Bethlehem in very humble circumstances. Jesus walked the planet for about 33 years, teaching us how to live by word and deed.

Paradoxically, this same Jesus through whom the universe was built, didn't come to us simply to show

us how to live. He showed us how to die. Why? God's justice had to be satisfied. The sins of the world and all humanity needed to be punished. This could only happen through a blood sacrifice. In God's plan, Jesus was that sacrifice.

On a hill called Calvary, the enemies of Jesus crucified Him. They put him in a grave and guarded it with Roman soldiers because they heard a "rumor" that Jesus would be raised from the dead. Try as they might, they couldn't stop it. On the third day after the crucifixion, God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

By His resurrection, Jesus conquered death, hell, and the grave. He is our eternal High Priest by virtue of His indestructible life.

The promise of Scripture is clear. We may inherit eternal life by believing in His name. By asking His forgiveness and inviting the Lord into our lives, we are cleansed from our sins and given the promise of eternal life. Incredible — but true!

But God's rule and reign has not yet been consummated. In other words, the battle between good and evil has not yet ended. Though defeat for Satan is certain, the enemy of our souls has been allowed by God to remain on earth until Jesus returns.

Until that time, earth is still a very dangerous place for you, for marriages, and for families. Why? Satan's time is short, so his strategy has to be geared to be as

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destructive as possible in the time he has left. Since marriage and family constitute the foundation of our society, guess what he has designated as his main targets? Marriages and families. From the enemy's standpoint, this actually makes good sense.

So what difference does this make and what actions can you take? Let me deal with this at two levels — personal relationship with God and relationship with your spouse and family. For each individual, we must make sure we are covered by the Lord's victory plan. As powerful as God is, He will not force you to believe in His Son. That must be your individual choice. If you have not yet made that decision, we hope and pray you will choose to follow Jesus. It's all about entering into a personal relationship with Jesus.

If you want some help in the steps to follow to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, please refer to pages 128-131 in the back of this devotional.

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the starting point for the Christian life. But this relationship must grow. For the entire time we continue to live on planet earth, the Lord wants to transform us into the person He has created us to become.

This process has several names. One is sanctification — being set aside for the work of God. Another way to put it is to say that God wants to make us more like Christ. Regardless of what you call it, the process brings growth and maturity in your journey as a Christian.

The Christian life, though, is more than one's personal relationship with God. God has made us to live in community. Life includes other people, and most likely there is no greater challenge to your Christian growth and maturity than in your relationships at home. Your relationships with your spouse and family are the most important of all relationships between people. They can also be some of the most difficult, even for mature Christians. Let me illustrate.

Judy and I were in a supermarket a few years ago. Upon entering, we spotted a minister friend doing some grocery shopping with his family. More accurately, his wife and kids were shopping. He was just there, a prisoner of sorts against his will. My friend did not see us enter the store.

We shopped for a few minutes. As we rounded the corner of one aisle headed toward the next one, I heard my friend talking nearby. As he came into sight, I could see he was apparently talking to himself. He still didn't see me and kept talking.

Soon I realized he wasn't talking to himself, but rather praying out loud to the Lord. I clearly heard him say, "Lord, please get me out of here. I just want to go home and read your Word."

My friend was dead serious, but I was amused. This man was a dedicated Christian and incredible student of the Word. He could quote large sections of Scripture and

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was an outstanding Bible teacher. Still, however, he had not fully embraced the importance of taking his family with along with him on his Christian journey.

Did he love his family? Certainly! But did he give his family anywhere near the care and attention that he devoted to his ministry. No, he did not.

But my friend is not alone. I have been in that boat many times. I suspect most of you have as well.

What to do? I will use an expression that says it well: “Men, we need to put on our ‘big-boy pants’ and lead in our marriages and families, just like we do in our jobs at work. Women, the same goes for you. Put on your ‘big-girl panties’ and take the initiative.

Many of us have wonderful children, but we can’t expect them to do this. It’s our responsibility. We lead them, not the other way around.

Husbands, we are to lead our wives, which is precisely what Scripture teaches. This doesn’t mean “lording” over them, but simply means to take the role God has assigned to us to lead our marriages and families. And we are to do this in the same love that Christ leads the Church, his bride.

Wives, marriages and families need what you bring. God has gifted you uniquely to do this. And you can!

Single adults, you can take the lead as well. God has

blessed you with the ability to fulfill your role. If you have children, you can lead them even without a mate. The God of this Universe says you can. I know He's right.

This devotional is not for wimps, and certainly not for those who feel they are perpetual 'victims' of society. Rather, this devotional is for those who will exercise faith to believe that things can get better — much better. Whether you have been a Christian for 30 years, 3 years, or 3 days, I assure you that you can succeed.

You can have a vibrant personal life, a strong marriage, and an awesome family. And when the winds of adversity blow, you can be resilient. You can bounce back. You can stand and keep standing.

*If God is for us, who can be against us?
(Romans 8:31) ■*

Note: Judy and I have collaborated extensively in writing this devotional. All references to 'I' or 'we' represent our collective efforts and opinions.

Maximizing Your Minutes

Christian growth and maturity require consistent effort. If you make this book part of your spiritual fitness plan, you will find it is most useful when read each day. Reading times should take about five minutes.

Each volume of *Daily Strength for the Battle*:

- Contains seven weeks of devotions, one devotion per day.
- Each week relates to one theme.
- Each weekly theme begins with a practical illustration designed to demonstrate the relevance and importance of each theme.
- All daily devotions incorporate topics related to the weekly theme.
- All daily devotions begin with a Bible verse related to the topic.

A suggested way to approach your devotional time could include the following:

- Prayer: ask the Lord to open your heart and mind to the truth of His Word.
- Read the verse at the beginning of the devotion and then paraphrase it in your own words.
- Read the devotional.
- Try to answer the following questions:
What biblical truth does this devotion talk about?
How is the truth applied in the devotion?

*Do I believe this truth could be important for my own life?
How can I apply this truth to my own life?*

- Close in prayer: ask God to help you integrate this truth into your own life.

Five minutes a day may not seem like much, but you can experience wonderful growth in your Christian life by consistently using these short devotions. The Lord will honor your efforts to honor Him. ■

Trust, Truth, and Advice

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
(Genesis 2:23,24)

Perhaps the toughest aspect about writing a devotional about marriage and family is choosing what material to include and what to leave out. As you read through each section and the daily devotionals that support the major topic, we hope you will find this material to be helpful.

But before get any further, we need to deal with a topic that is foundational for any marriage — trust. Throughout the remainder of this devotional we will speak much about the need to trust God. However, the focus in this section is a different trust: the trust between husband and wife. We want to spend some time talking about the relationship of truth to trust in a marriage relationship. We will conclude by sharing a few practical tips related to building, maintaining, and restoring trust in marriage.

Trust and Truth:

Merriam-Webster defines trust as: “the assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.” In the marriage relationship,

this obviously speaks to the assured reliance a husband and wife have to trust in each other.

Trust in marriage is absolutely essential if the relationship is to last. Let's review why, and to do so we go back to the first book of the Bible. In the verses cited above from Genesis 2, marriage is God's idea, not man's. The union God desires in the marriage relationship has several intended attributes. One of them is permanence. God has instituted marriage to last as long as both husband and wife are alive.

Obviously, God's ideal for marriage has not panned out so well, especially in American society today. On average, fifty percent of marriages fail. While we can cite many reasons, the lack of trust between husband and wife is a huge reason for the failure of many marriages.

So what is required to have trust in a marriage relationship? We believe it starts with truth. By nature, we are all sinful, imperfect people desperately in need of a Savior. When we become Christians, we have the Spirit of God working in our lives. He does many things, but one of the most important is to guide us into truth — the truth about God, others, and ourselves.

As we learn to submit to God and His Word, our new nature begins to grow. Our old nature — known

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as “the flesh” — diminishes. The Book of Ephesians tells believers “to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24).

We gradually think, speak, and act more in the ways God desires. Among the needed changes is that we stop lying. Obviously, husbands and wives must speak truthfully to one another if trust is to exist in the relationship. Granted, this may sound simple, but it is not easy. Why? Because even though we are Christians and have the Spirit of God working in our lives, we still have freedom of choice. We can still choose to sin.

Okay — so we know we aren’t perfect. How does this work? Here’s how: although we will fail many times at not being truthful, we seek God’s help to be more truthful, especially in our relationship with our spouse. We ask Him to convict us of all lying, and we set about building a reputation of being a truthful person. Every time we manipulate a situation for our gain, every time we tell a little “white lie” to cover our actions, every time we exaggerate to make ourselves look better, we want God to convict us in our conscience. We must work especially hard to put truth at the center of our marriage relationships.

Practically speaking, we may be able to fool others, but we can never fool God. He sees through our

lies. Even other people eventually see through our untruthfulness. But as we genuinely seek to become more like Christ, He helps us to speak the truth more and more.

And when we do lie, we must confess our sins to God and each other, and we must forgive each other. Little by little, we will win the battle over lying. Trust can thrive in a marriage relationship where truth reigns. Conversely, if willful lying is the norm in your marriage, you will be tearing down your marriage with your own hands.

Some Practical Advice About Building and Maintaining Trust:

Trust is not something any couple should take for granted. It takes years to build trust in a marriage, but it can be lost in a careless moment. Regardless of how strong you believe your marriage is, know that every marriage is vulnerable. We offer the following thoughts as some wisdom to help you guard trust in your marriage:

- Building trust needs to be intentional. It just doesn't happen by accident. Check frequently to find out if your spouse views you as a trustworthy person. Don't be defensive. Explore areas where trust seems to be lacking.

- Don't lie to your spouse. As "minor" as a "little white lie" might seem, get in the habit of telling the whole truth. Do this in all areas of life — no exceptions.

Trust, Truth, and Advice

- Be sensitive to your spouse's concerns about trust. If your spouse is uncomfortable about your contact on Facebook with an old high school classmate of the opposite sex, listen to the concerns. Work to resolve any trust issues that bother you or your spouse. Tackle the little problems before they become big ones.

- Talk, talk, talk with your spouse. Problems don't get better with age. If you are dissatisfied or unhappy in your marriage relationship, speak with your mate about it. Accept short term pain to prevent greater problems if issues are not discussed. Talk issues without destroying each other.

- Guard yourself against the Internet and all forms of social networking. Virtual affairs, adultery, and a myriad of other disasters have begun through the Internet. Couples should help each other stay accountable and discuss appropriate rules of engagement for using these means of interaction. Many appear "innocent" but are far from it.

- Be aware of factors that can lead to marital unfaithfulness. No person is immune from wrongful behavior. Know the factors that typically lead to "stepping out" on your mate:

- Spending too much time apart. (Obviously, deployment can be a challenge.)
- Looking outside of your marriage to boost your ego.

- Not taking enough time for fun and relaxation with spouse.
- Failure to resolve conflicts in your relationship as they arise.
- Giving too much attention to work, or even children.
- Not talking openly and candidly with each other.
- Ignoring anger issues in your relationship.
- Neglecting intimacy in your marriage — too busy, too tired, etc.
- Sharing info with someone of the opposite sex that ought to be reserved for your spouse only.
- Developing an “exit strategy” to leave your marriage rather than working to resolve the problems.
- Making yourself too available to temptations: pornography, night clubs, Internet chat sites, etc.

Rebuilding Trust: Building and maintaining trust is a cumulative process. The more deposits you and your spouse put into your trust bank, the easier it becomes to maintain. However, withdrawals can quickly deplete your trust account. Adultery is one example of a major

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withdrawal that can end your marriage, but certainly not the only one. Lying to your mate, irresponsible handling of money, poor work habits, and many other behaviors can put your marriage on the rocks in a hurry.

However, trust can be restored, and marriages put back on solid footing. We have seen it time and again. But it takes you and your spouse doing your best along with the Lord doing what neither of you can do yourselves.

Here are a few observations we've made over the years about rebuilding trust.

- With God's help, trust can be restored. No situation is impossible.
- Avoid extremes with your emotions and feelings. Keep "hate language/feelings" out of the equation.
- Avoid premature decisions. Don't make blanket statements like, "If he commits adultery, this marriage is finished."
- Don't assume it's one person's fault. This is usually not the case.
- Building trust is not a matter of feelings. It's a willful decision. Don't let feelings rule what you know you should do toward restoring trust.

- Seek the help of others — chaplains, pastors, Christian counselors.
- Rebuilding trust is usually harder and takes longer than we expect. Don't give up!
- Be willing to forgive. Every one of us needs forgiveness at times in our marriage relationships. And remember: while we were yet sinners, Christ forgave us.

Forgiveness is a good note on which to end this discussion. Regardless of how hard we try to build and maintain trust with our mate, we make mistakes — every one of us. This is where forgiveness comes into the picture. Trust simply cannot exist without forgiveness. It just can't.

Just as Jesus Christ forgave you of your sins, each of us must forgive our spouse. It's the right thing to do. And God commands it.

Marriage requires trust. And trust must have truth. And when things break down and sin prevails, forgiveness provides another chance.

It works this way by God's design. ■

Marriage Built on the Rock

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

(Matthew 7:24–27)

More straight talk from Jesus. He is winding up his message known as The Sermon on the Mount. His words have penetrated the hearts of his listeners as no message ever had. And now he is nailing it with a metaphor using two kinds of houses, one built on sand and the other on rock.

The houses experience identical circumstances: heavy rains, rising water, and heavy winds. The house built on the sand collapsed with a great crash. The house built on the rock stood.

Jesus brings home the point. Like the houses, listeners fall into two groups. Those who listen to Jesus' words and put them into practice are like the house built on the rock.

Those who hear the message but don't put the words into practice are like the house built on sand. Like that house, they won't stand when times get tough.

Jesus' teaching about these two houses contains truth that certainly applies to marriage and family. Let's take a closer look.

By way of background, let's examine the state of marriage in this country. The institution of marriage in the United States has been weakening over the past several decades. Approximately 50 percent of all marriages wind up in divorce. The failure rate for second marriages is even higher, coming in at about 67 percent. Nearly three quarters of all third marriages fail.

Divorce rates for military couples generally match those of the rest of American society. We do know that since 9/11 the huge numbers of married soldiers deploying has resulted in a noticeable spike in divorce within the military. Despite focused attention by military leaders, efforts have not achieved the desired outcomes. In matters relating to marriage and family, brave warriors and their families seem to succumb to the same issues that plague the rest of American society.



Commitment

Statistics fail to tell the whole story. What about the quality of life that exists within marriages and families that do survive? Are couples happily married and raising healthy families, or are husbands and wives simply holding on for dear life in an effort to get the children raised?

Marriage is challenging, and so is raising a family. It has always been this way. I encourage you, however, to set your goals much higher than mere survival and to believe that you can succeed in both areas far beyond your present level. God says you can! More than that, He is ready to help you.

Enough background. Let's get to the present. I need to ask you some very direct questions. Are you ready?

1. With marriages and families crumbling all around you, do you believe your situation can be different?
2. Do you believe that God can help you have a stronger marriage and family?
3. Is a stronger marriage and family something you genuinely desire?
4. Are you willing to take the necessary steps to strengthen your marriage and family?

Let me tell you what we believe regarding marriage and family. Bottom line up front: marriages and families who

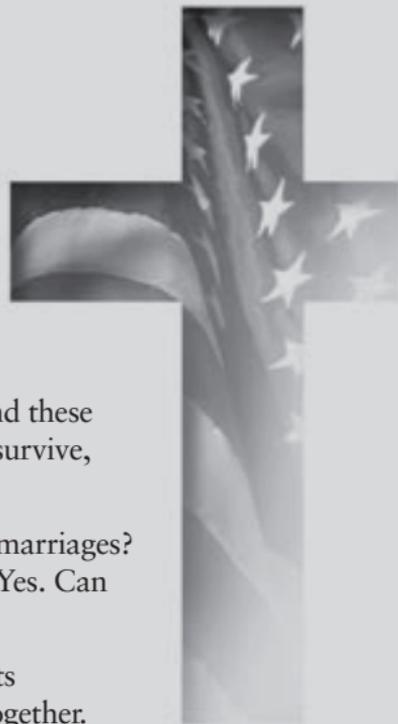
put their trust in Christ and make a sincere effort to apply biblical truth in their lives are like the house built on the rock. Though the rains will come, the waters will rise, and the winds will blow, these marriages and these families will stand. They will not only survive, but will actually thrive.

Does this apply to second and third marriages? Yes. Will this work for single parents? Yes. Can this work in blended families? Yes.

Are you getting the point? God wants marriages to last and families to stay together. That's His plan. Fortunately, He provides the resources to back up His plan. It starts with a relationship with Jesus Christ. It progresses as couples and family members, empowered by the Holy Spirit, follow the principles set forth in Scripture.

Back to the house built on sand. There are no guarantees for marriages and families who merely hear God's words but do not put them into practice. Granted, there are some marriages built on sand that may last, but we don't recommend going that route. Even the best human wisdom and effort, without God's enabling power, is hit-and-miss. It's risky, it's uncertain, it's unwise.

Let me close with a personal testimony. Judy and I



Commitment

have been married for 37 years. These years haven't always been easy ones, but we have chosen to center our relationship on Jesus Christ and His Word. The Lord has sustained us in amazing ways through the years and has blessed us with four wonderful children who have chosen to follow Christ. We're privileged as well to be grandparents of six beautiful grandkids kids.

In our testimony, we must also make mention of the hundreds, if not thousands, of Christian marriages and families we have known and observed as part of the military. They have trusted God and tried to follow His Word to the best of their ability. In turn, the Lord has responded by helping them to experience strong marriages and resilient families even through the toughest of challenges. These marriages and families constitute a great cloud of witnesses to the fact that our God supports and honors those who honor Him.

If you are not there already, you can join and be part of this great cloud of witnesses who can testify to love and power of Jesus Christ in all areas of life, but especially in marriages and families.

So keep reading, keep working, and keep praying. You are warriors whose marriages and families will stand as living witness to the greatness of our God. ■

Marriage Is God's Idea

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Families are disintegrating before our eyes. Divorce is rampant. Children are hurting.

Why? What's going on? One cause is obvious. Many no longer view marriage as a lasting bond between husband and wife. The divorce rate these days is holding steady at about 50 percent.

In Genesis 2, the Bible tells us that God put man and women together to become "one flesh." In practical terms, this means the marriage relationship is intended to be permanent.

So where do we go from here? If you have experienced a divorce, know that God is the God of a second chance. Don't beat yourself up.

If you are presently married, take steps to strengthen your relationship to your mate. Regardless of the issues that may make staying in the marriage difficult, don't give up. The Lord can help you.

So, will you honor God and his Word? Start today. ■