

CALLED 2 LOVE
DEVOTIONS
FOR
Couples



David
& Teresa
Ferguson

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How to Get the Most Out of This Book

We believe that marriage is one of the most exhilarating relationships God has created. But sometimes marriage can be exhausting because it takes work to keep a marriage alive and flourishing. However, we can tell you—from personal experience and from our observations of others—that it’s well worth the effort it takes to deepen the intimacy of marriage.

God has uniquely called a husband and wife to meet each other’s “aleness” needs. When God created Adam, He said that it was not good for him to be alone, so He created Eve to fill his emptiness. We believe that God calls husbands and wives to be His companions in meeting each other’s needs for things like acceptance, affection, appreciation, approval, attention, comfort, encouragement, respect, security, and support.

What Will This Book Help Me to Do?

This daily devotional tool will help you grow in your ability to join with God in meeting your spouse’s needs. We have divided the book into fifty-two themes, each one covered in a seven-day block. The themes are arranged alphabetically. For example, the meditations for January 1 through January 7 address the theme of acceptance, and the meditations for January 8 through January 14 discuss admonition (constructive feedback). We have arranged this book this way because we believe that studying an aspect of marriage for a seven-day period will help you to understand more fully the things that make a marriage all that it can be.

What Are the Themes Covered?

During the course of a year, you will cover these themes in seven-day blocks:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>1. acceptance</i> | <i>27. happiness</i> |
| <i>2. admonition</i> | <i>28. harmony</i> |
| <i>3. affection</i> | <i>29. honor</i> |
| <i>4. appreciation</i> | <i>30. hospitality</i> |
| <i>5. approval</i> | <i>31. instruction</i> |
| <i>6. attention</i> | <i>32. intimacy</i> |
| <i>7. care</i> | <i>33. kindness</i> |
| <i>8. comfort</i> | <i>34. leadership</i> |
| <i>9. compassion</i> | <i>35. love</i> |
| <i>10. confession</i> | <i>36. mercy</i> |
| <i>11. consideration</i> | <i>37. peace</i> |
| <i>12. counsel</i> | <i>38. praise</i> |
| <i>13. courting</i> | <i>39. prayer</i> |
| <i>14. deference</i> | <i>40. protection</i> |
| <i>15. devotion</i> | <i>41. rebuke</i> |
| <i>16. discipline</i> | <i>42. reproof</i> |
| <i>17. edification</i> | <i>43. respect</i> |
| <i>18. encouragement</i> | <i>44. security</i> |
| <i>19. enjoyment</i> | <i>45. service</i> |
| <i>20. entreaty</i> | <i>46. support</i> |
| <i>21. exalting</i> | <i>47. sympathy</i> |
| <i>22. exhortation</i> | <i>48. teaching</i> |
| <i>23. forgiveness</i> | <i>49. tolerance</i> |
| <i>24. freedom</i> | <i>50. training</i> |
| <i>25. gentleness</i> | <i>51. trust</i> |
| <i>26. grace</i> | <i>52. understanding</i> |

When you finish the year, you will have spent focused time learning how to deepen your intimacy through each of these areas.

How Should I Approach the Book?

Each day includes a *Scripture verse*, a *meditation* that often builds on a personal story from our marriage and family life, a *prayer*, and a *commitment question* that will help you put into practice what you have learned through the meditation. The best way to go through this book is to read it together as a couple, but not everyone will choose to do that. You and your marriage can grow even if only one of you reads the book. We suspect that as you practice what you learn in these pages, your spouse will notice the difference and may even ask to join you in reading the rest of the book. Then, when you finish the book on December 31, start again on January 1 and deepen your understanding of how to partner with God in what He wants to do in your marriage.

Encouragement for the Journey

As you read through this year-long devotional, you will see real struggles in marriage—in our marriage, in the marriages of people we know, and maybe even in your own. But you will also see real and lasting triumphs. You will see that God gives us everything we need to deepen our marriages in the way He wants to shape them.

As you begin, we want to give you a final word of encouragement. We want you always to remember that marriage is God's idea, and as such, He is the one who knows what it takes to help marriages not only survive but also flourish. God wants to bring you deeper intimacy with Him and your spouse through your marriage. Lend Him an ear, and let Him do what it takes to bring you that intimacy.



JANUARY

acceptance
admonition
affection
appreciation
approval

acceptance

JANUARY 1

A Deliberate, Unconditional, and Positive Response

Accept one another. Romans 15:7, NIV

My (Teresa's) ability to show acceptance of another is contingent upon my deep knowledge of a loving and accepting Christ. If I am to accept my spouse as Christ has accepted me, then I need to understand His wonderful love for me.



God, please help me to “look beyond” my spouse’s flaws and imperfections and unconditionally and deliberately love this person, just as You have unconditionally and deliberately loved me.

God made a deliberate choice to allow Christ to die on my behalf. It wasn't a convenient or easy choice, either. It was a choice that prioritized the relationship between my heavenly Father and me, His child. Christ took the initiative when He came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He didn't wait for me to “get my act together.” Rather, He looked beyond my actions and sins and accepted me as I was. This acceptance is unconditional and permanent. There is nothing I can do to earn it or lose it.

God demonstrated this unconditional acceptance when He looked beyond my faults to see my need. He didn't excuse my sin but instead gave the best He had as a remedy for that sin.

This kind of “looking beyond” makes marriage work, too.

Accepting my spouse as Christ has accepted me means making a choice. It won't be convenient or easy. It will mean taking some initiative. It may mean being the first to say, “Honey, I love you.” It may mean not waiting until he changes to tell him how glad I am to be his wife.

Unconditionally accepting my spouse means looking beyond differences, disagreements, and disputes. It means looking beyond irritations, personality flaws, and idiosyncrasies. It even means looking beyond wrongs and sins committed—not to excuse these things, but to see his worth in spite of them.

In what ways can you daily demonstrate your deliberate and unconditional love for your spouse?

Acceptance Begins with Him

Accept one another, then, just as Christ has accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. Romans 15:7, NIV

My wife is so different from me. I (David) am laid back and tend to go with the flow, while she's very punctual, even to the point of being compulsive about being on time. I'm flexible—maybe even a little oblivious to details—while she's a perfectionist. I'm quiet and reserved, while she's outgoing and likes lots of attention.

When my life gets stressful, these differences between us can make my wife seem—from my perspective—impatient, critical, and loud. Those character traits are difficult for me to accept.

I have learned, however, that acceptance doesn't mean condoning someone's behavior. It simply means looking deeper than someone's actions to see that person's true worth, just as God does with me when He sees my sin. Christ looked beyond Zacchaeus's selfishness and greed and offered kindness and warmth. Jesus separated Peter's impulsiveness and cowardly betrayal from his worth. Christ talked with the woman at the well, a woman who lived year after year in habitual sin, and offered her freedom because He saw her need for unconditional love.

Have I ever been selfish or greedy in my marriage? Undoubtedly! I've even cheated my wife out of undivided attention and stolen her joy at times. Have I ever acted without thinking or spoken without caution? Absolutely! Have I ever betrayed a confidence or trust? Are there sins I live with year after year? Yes!

And yet, despite these imperfections and sins, God still accepts me and offers me kindness and compassion.

As I look beyond Teresa's manner, my gratitude for her as a special and loving helpmate continues to grow. But that happens only as I remind myself of how Christ accepts me despite my own shortcomings.



*Lord, may my
gratitude for Your
unconditional
acceptance of me
prompt within
me today a joyful
acceptance of
my spouse.*

In what ways can you continually remind yourself of your spouse's true worth, despite that person's imperfections?

I'm a 10!

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. Hebrews 10:14, NASB

I (Teresa) had always been critical of myself—and of everyone else, for that matter.

The way I understood God, He was up in heaven with a great big magnifying glass and tally sheet, inspecting every move I made. When I went to church or did a good deed, He'd make a mark on His tally sheet. But on that same sheet, He'd make a mark for every blunder, sin, or imperfection. I believed that my net number of "good" marks determined how much of God's love and acceptance I would receive.



*Lord, help me
put down the
tally sheet and
magnifying glass
I hold over my
spouse.*

This faulty perception of God had a huge impact on my marriage. I believed that since God was constantly inspecting me and looking for faults, then surely I should inspect my husband just as closely.

In the midst of one of my inspections, I said some really hurtful things to David. Immediately, I knew I needed to confess this sin to God and ask for forgiveness.

In times past, as I confessed my sins to God and told Him how bad I'd been, I would have expected a halfhearted response: "Okay, Teresa," I could hear God reluctantly saying. "I'll forgive you. I'll mark your confession on the tally sheet, and we'll let it go this time."

But this time, my heavenly Father very gently said, "I know what you've done. You're forgiven, Teresa."

When I heard God's truth—that He already knows my sins and accepts me anyway—a burden was lifted. I realized that God doesn't hold a magnifying glass and tally sheet over me. Instead, He holds the crown of thorns that His Son wore and the nails that pierced His hands and feet.

I saw God as He really is: the heavenly Father who sees me as one being perfected because of the Cross.

How have your wrong perceptions of God affected your relationship with your spouse?

Acceptance in a Sycamore Tree

Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. Luke 19:5, NIV

Zacchaeus—a hated tax collector, a traitor to his own people, and a thief—was no doubt often ridiculed and attacked for his sins. Lonely and curious, he climbed a tree to get a good look at this “Messiah.” He had to wonder if Jesus would notice him. And if He did, would He too reject him?

What a miracle Christ’s call must have been to this outcast!

Our Savior called Zacchaeus to fellowship with Him by the sharing of a meal, which was one of the most intimate social settings of the day. This was a deliberate offer of welcome, reception, and loving relationship.

In the midst of Zacchaeus’s failures, Jesus offered compassion, companionship, and acceptance. It’s interesting to note what Jesus didn’t do that day: He didn’t attack the tax collector’s behavior, point out things that were wrong with him, or even give helpful advice. He didn’t remind Zacchaeus of what he should be doing or criticize him for not taking more responsibility. Jesus didn’t quote Scripture to Zacchaeus or make comparisons with other tax collectors in town. He didn’t try to manipulate change or withhold affection.

I (Teresa) want to respond to David the way Christ responded to Zacchaeus. As I encounter David’s inevitable failures, I want to be free from the impulse to be critical and give advice. I want to say words that are tender and welcoming, rather than judgmental and comparing. I want to make certain that the “welcome mat” is always out. To be like Christ will mean that I consistently invite David to fellowship with me.

I want to respond to David with words and actions that invite him to “come down out of the tree.” After all, it gets awfully lonely up there!



*God, remind me
to look to You
as my example
as I respond to
the imperfections
of others.*

What steps can you take today to replace words of judgment, comparison, complaint, and criticism with words of unconditional acceptance and love?

Welcome Home!

Anyone who welcomes you is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me. Matthew 10:40, NLT

When Jesus returns to His hometown with His disciples, they file into the back of the Nazareth synagogue where He had worshiped as a child. The priest has just finished his closing remarks, and the musicians begin to lead the people in a song of worship: “Praises to Jehovah! Hosanna to the Lord our God!”



***Lord, remind me
daily to welcome
You by welcoming
the spouse You
have sent to me.***

The Savior is overwhelmed with feelings of joy and gratitude. He is in the company of His family and friends, and together they are worshiping the one true God.

Before anyone has a chance to move, Jesus begins to speak. He teaches with uncommon boldness and clarity about the God they have just studied in the Scriptures.

When Jesus finishes teaching, the people leave the synagogue a little bewildered. A few of the neighbors come to shake His hand. Some of the synagogue officials extend to Him an uncomfortable, “Thanks for being with us today.” But the Savior reads their hearts, which are filled with questions such as, “Who does He think He is? Isn’t He just a carpenter’s son?” Scripture puts it this way: “And they took offense at Him” (Matthew 13:57, NASB).

Can you feel the rejection? Jesus is in His hometown, the place where He should be most accepted, yet His friends and neighbors take offense at Him and in their hearts put up a sign that clearly reads, “Unwelcome.”

Would you have offered Jesus acceptance and welcome in that situation, or would you have put up the “Unwelcome” sign? Before you answer that question, think about these words of Jesus: “Anyone who welcomes you is welcoming me.”

When I (Teresa) accept my husband, I am accepting Christ, who sent him to me. Every time I welcome David, I am saying, “Welcome” to the Lord.

In what ways can you daily accept and welcome your spouse into your life?

Just As I Am

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? Matthew 7:3, NIV

I (Teresa) grew up in a family that valued routine and schedules. However, my husband's family was much more laid back. Both of his parents worked, and their routines were never the same each day.

Because of this difference in upbringing, when David and I married, our expectations clashed like brown shoes with a tuxedo. For example, I'd cook David's favorite dishes for dinner, just certain that he'd come through the door promptly at 5:30 each day, kiss the kids and me on the cheek, and sit down to a family dinner. But on more nights than I care to count, I'd end up with a tapping foot, a disgusted look on my face, and a cold dinner in the oven as I waited for my husband to come home.

Looking back, I have realized that I didn't respond well to the situation. In fact, I was pretty intolerant. I had come to view David's seeming lack of appreciation for my cooking as absolutely unacceptable. But God showed me that this wasn't necessarily David's problem. In His gentle voice, He prompted me with these thoughts one day: *Teresa, could it be that the intolerance you have for David's schedule has actually become a "plank in your eye"? Don't worry about the speck in his. Your lack of acceptance of David's differences is a part of the conflict between the two of you.*

I still need David to keep me informed about when he's coming home, and I need some "thank you's" every now and then. But each late dinner is a reminder to me to accept David as he is rather than trying to change him to be like me.



*God, help me
accept my spouse
as he or she is,
focusing instead
on the changes
I need to make
in my own life.*

What changes might God be trying to make in you, using your spouse's flaws and shortcomings as the tools to make those changes?

Accepting an Imperfect Person

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

This verse tells us that Christ died for us even though we were sinners. The best word in this verse is “while.” He died for me *while* I (David) was still rebellious and hostile to the things of God.



***Heavenly Father,
keep me aware
that real love is
an unconditional
commitment to an
imperfect person.***

We are to love our spouses in the same way Christ loved us. We are to love them even though they are imperfect and sinful. How do we do that, you ask? By reflecting on the fact that He first loved us.

Most couples go through several stages in their marriage before they reach the ability to commit to loving a real and admittedly imperfect person. It takes a while for some couples to stop trying to change one another and to choose to accept one another **WHILE** both are still sinners.

Which stage are you in?

Romantic Stage: You see your spouse as perfect, as everything you need.

Bargaining Stage: Your spouse surely isn't perfect, and you will change if your spouse does.

Coercive Stage: You will change your spouse, whether or not he or she likes it.

Desperation Stage: You give up trying to change your spouse, believing that person will never change.

Romantic Realism: You are finally at a point where you can live out Romans 5:8 and love your spouse, who sees and admits his or her own imperfections. This stage of marriage is summed up with this kind of vow:

“I take you to be my spouse with full knowledge that you will sometimes disappoint me gravely and hurt me deeply. In spite of all your weaknesses and failures, I commit myself to loving you. I am able to do this because of the acceptance of Christ, who loved me and died for me while I was still a sinner.”

In what ways can you demonstrate unconditional love for your spouse?