

MARRIAGE: FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

STUDY THREE

Symphony of Survival in the Key of C

Selected Scriptures

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

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

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

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

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



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

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

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



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

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

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

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





Searching the Scriptures Study Tip: Topical Studies

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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Application: Commitment in Marriage

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



A FINAL PRAYER

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

ENDNOTE

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

