



THE  
UNCOMMON  
MARRIAGE  
*adventure*

*a daily journey to draw you closer  
to God and each other*

TONY &  
LAUREN  
DUNGY

WITH NATHAN WHITAKER

# THE UNCOMMON MARRIAGE ADVENTURE

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*The Uncommon Marriage Adventure: A Daily Journey to Draw You Closer to God and Each Other*

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Designed by Dean H. Renninger

Published in association with the literary agency of Legacy, LLC, Winter Park, Florida 32789.

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ISBN 978-1-4143-8372-9

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16 15 14  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## INTRODUCTION

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Before we married, we made a simple choice that has had a profound impact on our lives.

Rather than looking to the world for wisdom on building a strong marriage, we chose to listen to God. That one decision has enabled us to endure—and even thrive—through the best and worst of times. And considering how much society’s views on marriage have changed in the thirty-plus years we’ve been married, we’re thankful for biblical principles that are both unchanging and unassailable.

That’s why, when we agreed to tell our story in our earlier book *Uncommon Marriage*, we chose to think about it from a couple of different angles. Yes, we spent hours reminiscing and telling stories about our years together. But once the chronological events had been laid out, we decided to look at our story in another way—by considering the core biblical principles behind it.

From those discussions, we developed “The Core Principles of an Uncommon Marriage,” which you’ll find on page ix. When we examined those principles further, we realized that a number of practices—specific actions we’ve taken to live out those principles—emerged as well.

As we said in *Uncommon Marriage*, we don’t claim that our

list is exhaustive. However, we believe it may be a helpful tool for any couple who wants to explore the biblical principles related to marriage.

Those core principles and practices also provide the framework for this devotional, which is designed to be used over sixteen weeks and can be started any time of the year. We spend two weeks considering each of the eight core principles. Days 1 through 6 take a closer look at one of the practices related to that principle. Each of those devotionals ends with what we call an Adventure Application—a conversation starter or a simple activity you can do to explore that practice further.

Day 7 allows you to reflect and use the prayer prompts to ask for God's help in a particular area. You'll also be encouraged to choose one of the Adventure Applications to concentrate on further that week. You might find you'd like to work on several things, but we urge you to choose just one. If you'd like, jot a note to the side to remind you of another practice you'd like to try. Then feel free to come back to it in the fifth month, or to go through the book again and try other action items.

We wrote this book to encourage you not to give up hope on your marriage, no matter what shape it's in today. Perhaps you're looking just to tweak a good relationship. We're thrilled and hope you find an idea or two in these pages to help.

Or you may have picked up this book because you're discouraged. You've lost the spark in your marriage. You're bored. Your spouse is busy. (Or vice versa.) If that describes you, remember that *you are not alone*. Use this book as a tool to help you work together to make your marriage stronger. As you do, remember this promise in Scripture: "Let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up" (Galatians 6:9).

Maybe you are engaged or thinking about it, but you wonder if marriage is even a big deal. *I love her; who cares if it's official?*

We've found the concept of commitment to be incredibly powerful. It helps us remember: *We're in this together. For better or worse. Now let's press on.* As you use this devotional, we think you'll better understand why the vows we make in marriage fortify our resolve to persevere when the going gets tough.

No matter where you are in your relationship, you (like us) need God's grace and direction every day. After all, the gospel of Jesus Christ says we are to be transformed . . . but it doesn't say that change will be immediate. And it doesn't promise that we won't make the same mistakes as a husband—or a wife—over and over.

But Scripture does promise a new life when we decide to follow Christ. A life of abundance . . . and grace. As some of you may recognize, *grace* in this context means “the unmerited—unearned—favor of God.” All we need to do is ask for it.

Remember this—life is an adventure. If it were easy, we'd have it figured out, and we wouldn't be sharing our challenges here in these pages. And like any undertaking, the joy and fulfillment that come from working together will make the hard work worthwhile.

So press on.

Pray together.

Don't give up.

Our prayer is that as you read *The Uncommon Marriage Adventure*, you will rejoice over your partnership even as you wrestle with ways you might improve it—just as we did as we wrote this devotional.

May the Lord bless and keep you *and* your marriage.

*Tony and Lauren Dungy*  
*June 2014*



# THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF AN UNCOMMON MARRIAGE

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**1. Look to the Bible as your guidebook  
and to Christ as your living example.**

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**2. Stay in sync spiritually.**

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**3. Manage expectations and appreciate  
your differences.**

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**4. Work as a team.**

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**5. Practice committed love.**

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**6. Communicate well and often.**

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**7. Don't run away from conflict.**

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**8. Support each other in serving others.**

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day 1

## AT THE CENTER

### CORE PRACTICE #1:

#### **Make Christ the center of your marriage.**

*Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. —PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2*

*Lauren*

When Tony served as a head coach in the NFL, the coaches' wives often visited classrooms in inner-city schools to read to and talk with students. This practice continues to be one of my priorities, and now that Tony is retired, he has joined me. We have visited two third-grade classrooms in the heart of Tampa almost every Tuesday since 2009.

After we finish reading one of our books to the students, we take their questions. At first, some of the inquiries surprised us. "Are you two married? To each other?" We've learned to expect surprised looks or exclamations like, "Wow, you're kidding me!" when we tell them that, yes, we've been married for more than thirty years.

My favorite question came from a boy who eagerly raised his hand and asked, "Are you guys Christians?" I felt such joy that a third grader recognized our love for God and desire to follow His plan.

Tony and I have fulfilled many roles during our marriage: spouse, parent, coach, teacher, speaker, and broadcaster, to

name just a few. Yet nothing is more important than being Christ followers. Christ is also the center of our marriage—the source of love, grace, forgiveness, and perseverance we need to make it through each day.

During most of my single life I hadn't been focused on getting married. But when my thoughts finally drifted to marriage and *whom* I might marry, I knew I wanted to marry a Christian—an authentic, deeply committed, passionate, and growing follower of Christ.

When I met Tony, I learned he did too.

We both felt blessed to have parents who were happily married as well—we knew that was unusual. Within our circle of family and friends, Tony and I had numerous other examples of couples with great marriages because they were following biblical principles. Those principles guided not only their decision making, but also helped them as they raised their children, developed friendships and other associations, handled their finances, and became active in churches. We had also seen how some couples with different faith walks or none at all sometimes struggled to navigate the challenges of marriage. They lacked a common source of wisdom and grace.

Striving to keep Christ at the center of our relationship has been and continues to be the key to building our marriage. He is the source of true and lasting encouragement, comfort, and love, which makes it possible for us to set aside our selfish interests and live in ever-increasing harmony. Tony and I like to remind couples that the process of two becoming one may begin on their wedding day, but that is just the beginning of a lifetime journey of commitment. We never stop growing with and learning about each other.

Maybe it's because I once taught math as a sixth-grade teacher, but one of my favorite analogies of a Christ-centered marriage is an equilateral triangle. As you may recall from

geometry class, all three sides of an equilateral triangle are the same length. (See? Your teacher *told* you you'd be using this later!) I picture Christ at the top of the triangle. The bride and groom, respectively, form the other two corners. The only way for a married couple to grow closer to each other is for each to grow closer to Christ—shortening the sides of the triangle. And making Christ the focus of one's relationship is all part of God's inviolate plan for marriage.

While our journey hasn't been perfect every moment, Tony and I have always known that whenever we start to get off track, whenever we feel strain or tension, we can turn toward our center and draw closer to Christ—and thereby to each other.

*Adventure Application:* Take a moment to each draw a triangle. Be sure the sides reflect the distance you currently feel between each other and Christ. (The longer the sides, the further apart you feel.) Now compare your triangles. Discuss why you drew them the way you did, and how focusing on Christ could shorten the sides and bring you closer together.

day 2

## LOVING YOUR IN-LAWS

**CORE PRACTICE #2:****Treat your parents and others in authority with respect.**


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*Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you. —EXODUS 20:12*

*Lauren*

I come from a talkative, expressive family, so early in our marriage, I wondered what the quiet, reserved Dungys really thought about me. Tony, on the other hand, quickly learned to accept brutally honest advice from my father and brothers—whether or not he'd asked for it. More than once, Tony and I had to sit down to discuss our families' differences as we figured out how to love and honor our in-laws.

Sometimes we even had to laugh—such as the afternoon I told Tony how I'd nearly fainted from the heat after taking his dad outside to show him our new vegetable garden. I'd asked Wilbur Dungy a simple question about how far apart to plant green beans, only to have him launch into a two-hour lecture on soil content and photosynthesis. That's the day I learned my father-in-law would open up—as long as you were talking about something he was passionate about!

Given our experiences, whenever I am at a wedding I wonder if the bride and groom fully understand that they are not only gaining a spouse, they are inheriting an extended family. Because that is what happens when a bridal couple enters into the sacred covenant of marriage. Despite adding “in-law” to

each name, the truth is that every new bride and groom in essence has a new “mother” and a new “father.”

All too often, brand-new married couples are unsure how to deal with their in-laws. I like how Gary Chapman, author of *The 5 Love Languages*, frames their predicament. Couples, he says, must balance two principles: leaving their parents while still honoring them. The Bible makes it clear that “a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one” (Genesis 2:24). But while a couple’s allegiance shifts from their parents to each other, they are to continue to honor their parents, to value their wisdom, and to seek their best. If the admonishment to “honor your father and mother” in Exodus 20:12 is not enough for a husband to treat his wife’s parents as his own—and vice versa for his bride—then the respect due to each other should be enough to carry the day.<sup>1</sup>

The way we treat our parents affects more than our own relationship with them. A speaker at our church recently pointed out that one of the biggest problems in America is that we have not been trained well in how to honor our fathers and mothers as the Bible commands. As a result, we don’t have proper attitudes toward those in authority. Yet even when we don’t like the behavior modeled by a leader, we have to respect the position of authority he or she holds. That’s a lesson Tony and I want our kids to learn. We want to ensure they honor us and develop proper respect for other authority figures, whether or not they like everything those in charge do.

Loving your in-laws is much easier when you start with honor and respect.

*Adventure Application:* Is there an issue you need to discuss with your spouse about either set of your parents? Talk about how Exodus 20:12 and Genesis 2:24 speak to that issue.

day 3

## FOR GOD SO LOVED . . .

### CORE PRACTICE #3:

**Husbands: Work hard to hear your wife's heart and meet her needs.**

*For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. —JOHN 3:16-17*

### TONY

Bill McCartney was a longtime college football coach whom I first got to know while playing high school football in Michigan, where I grew up. Bill would later coach at the University of Colorado, where he led the Buffaloes to their only national title. In 1990, he felt called to something different and started Promise Keepers, a ministry movement that reaches out to men.

Shortly after Bill founded Promise Keepers, the organization held a men's conference at Houlihan's Stadium in Tampa. Bill was one of the speakers. I had just been hired by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers as their head football coach, and I attended the conference along with several members of my staff. Bill's message impacted me then and continues to carry weight and meaning with me today.

Bill told us that he had started Promise Keepers because of a mistake he had made in his marriage. He admitted that he'd been so shortsighted and self-centered in his drive to become a successful college football coach that he'd often disregarded his wife's needs. Lindy had never balked or failed to support him as he pursued his passion for a career in the world of sports.

However, in the process, she never had the chance to pursue her individual dreams. Even worse, Bill confessed that he'd never given Lindy's desires much thought, figuring that she'd understood when they married that she needed to stand by his career.

When Bill really looked into his wife's eyes, he realized that the life had gone out of them. He resolved to begin serving her. After telling his story, he challenged us to read John 3:16—a Scripture reference familiar to many sports fans—in a new way. He said that when he replaced the words *the world* in that verse with Lindy's name, his attitude toward her had completely changed.

As we left the stadium that day, my fellow coaches and I talked about how Bill's message had resonated with every one of us—because we had done the very same thing with our careers and to our wives. We realized that as we had reached for our dreams, our marriages became a “one-way street,” and we expected our wives to support the destination we had chosen. That night, we left the conference vowing to change that paradigm.

In today's Scripture passage, Jesus told Nicodemus, a curious religious leader, that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son as a sacrifice. That verse took on new meaning for me in the stadium that day. As I followed Bill's example, I read the passage like this: “For God loved *Lauren* so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that if *Lauren* believes in him, [she] will not perish but have eternal life.” Reading it that way allowed me to see Lauren, the woman whom the King of kings had arranged for me to marry, in a new light. More than ever, I wanted my actions and attitude to give her a lift and ongoing encouragement.

When we put the names of our loved ones, friends, and others who cross our paths into this passage, they take on sacred significance. In our minds and hearts, we begin to view them

as God has always seen them—as prime objects of His love and caring affection. Then we are better able to help them become all they were created to be, to follow their dreams and to use their gifts for their good and the good of others.

*Adventure Application:* Read John 3:16 aloud, inserting your wife's name where appropriate. How does that help you better appreciate God's love for her? How does it impact your attitude toward her?

## day 4

## CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

**CORE PRACTICE #4:****Husbands: Be prepared to love sacrificially.**

*For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. —EPHESIANS 5:25-26*

**TONY**

Long airplane rides. Turbulent, stormy weather. Middle seats in a row of three.

Those are just a few of the hassles that can come with regular airline travel. Because of my coaching jobs, I have done a lot of flying over the years. Lately those trips have included going cross country from our home in Tampa to Oregon to watch our son play football. The window seat is my preference when I travel by myself. To make the trip as pleasant as possible, I see to it that I arrive and check in early, board the plane when called, and then settle into my seat and relax.

But that is only when I fly alone. When I fly with Lauren, all my personal plans and preferences, well, they end up out the window. Because we prefer to sit together, we know that whenever our plane's seat configuration has rows of three, one of us is going to have to sit in the middle seat. Lauren doesn't fly as much as I do, but I know how much she loves sitting by the window!

From this vantage point, she can see what is happening on the tarmac below, watch other flights take off and land, make sure—when possible—that our luggage has been loaded, and

observe any changes in the weather. Once airborne, she tries to identify locations in the town we just took off from, view the beautiful countryside as the jet soars by, and take in all the gorgeous cloud formations. (And if she wants to sleep, she can put her pillow against the window and not worry about an awkward interaction with a stranger.)

You know what I mean when I say that the middle seat doesn't offer a lot of privacy. Sitting there can make you feel cramped and uncomfortable. Especially when the person in front of you decides to recline. Taking the middle seat is definitely a sacrifice. And between Lauren and me, it is a sacrifice of love. I think Jesus would be pleased, considering His admonition in the Sermon on the Mount that "if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Matthew 5:40-41, ESV).

I realize that having to give up the window seat for Lauren doesn't rise anywhere near the examples of sacrifice that Jesus gives. But in all cases, the attitude of our heart determines whether or not we willingly set aside our wants for another. The lesson of the middle seat is simply another way to remember my responsibility to serve others, just as Christ came to serve—not to be served.

Loving sacrificially requires a willingness to surrender every need, every desire, every right, and every position and claim of our own for the good of our spouse or others without begrudging them. God calls upon me to demonstrate sacrificial love to my wife. That simply means that I recognize and put her first in everything—even when it means giving up my window seat.

*Adventure Application:* How do you define *sacrifice*? In what ways do you sacrifice and "take the middle seat" so your spouse can feel loved?

day 5

## THE ONE THING YOU CAN CONTROL

### CORE PRACTICE #5:

**Wives: Show love and respect to your husband.**

*In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over by observing your pure and reverent lives. —1 PETER 3:1-2*

*Lauren*

I learned a long time ago that the circumstances of my day often dictate my attitude. They can determine whether my day is going to be sunny or cloudy—no matter what the weather actually is.

My personal situation may affect how I make decisions and color my perception of comments I hear others make. They frequently determine what comes out of my mouth in response to what others say or what is happening around me.

My circumstances are that powerful. The question is: Do they have to be?

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl recounts the unspeakable horrors of his longtime imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps like Auschwitz and Dachau. As a prisoner, he was stripped of everything. His father, mother, brother, and wife all died in similar prison camps. Though he survived, Frankl suffered from hunger, cold, and brutality. He had lost every possession and knew he could be killed at any hour, but

he still found value and hope in his day. Life, he discovered, was worth preserving.

Even in our most desperate circumstances, he noted, we are never stripped of the “last of human freedoms: to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, though we can’t always choose our situation, we can always choose our attitude—which makes it possible for us to rise above those circumstances.

That’s a healthy, relationship-enhancing reminder for me as I strive to show love and respect to Tony—even on those days when what’s going on around me leaves me feeling tired, overlooked, or annoyed. When our two oldest children were small, Tony took a job coaching the defensive backs for the Kansas City Chiefs. During the season, he often didn’t return home until 2:00 a.m. That meant I had to run the home on my own for much of the year. If the car broke down, I took it to the garage. If one of the kids was struggling in a class, I contacted the teacher. If the lawn needed mowing, I took care of it.

As difficult as that was, it was almost harder when the season ended. As you can imagine, Tony was anxious to reconnect with the kids—which sometimes meant disrupting their homework and bedtime schedule. Even though I knew his heart was in the right place, I was frustrated. After I’d spent months establishing household rules, was it right for Tony to disturb them just because he wanted to take the kids out for ice cream?

But other than blowing off some steam, what would I have gained by lashing out at Tony? What would I have taught the kids about working out differences and honoring others within our home? I realized that I always had the choice, no matter what was going on or how I felt about Tony’s actions, to control my response. I had the choice as to how I would react. I wanted to win over my family, to model in some small way

God's extravagant love and forgiveness. That often meant I had to check my words and my attitudes.

If we show our spouses the respect they deserve in spite of our circumstances, we can make a difficult moment better. The apostle Peter says that when wives demonstrate love for their husbands by respecting their position, they may win their husbands over without the use of words. Who knows? That might even encourage husbands to respond to us with increased love and affection.

*Adventure Application:* Offer a sincere compliment about your spouse this week in front of your children, your parents or siblings, or your friends at church, at work, or in the neighborhood. If possible, do it when he is there too!

day 6

## VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION

### CORE PRACTICE #6:

**Wives: Strike the right balance between acceptance and expressing your disappointment when following your husband's lead in an area where you disagree.**

*For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*

—EPHESIANS 5:22

*Lauren*

When Tony and I first talked about moving to Minnesota in 1992, we viewed the situation much differently. It was a good opportunity for him professionally since he would become the Vikings' defensive coordinator; however, I didn't see how this move would benefit our family. During our three years in Kansas City, we had connected with so many people, and we had found a phenomenal church. The community was an ideal fit for all of us.

In the end, Tony made the decision to accept the position, even though he knew going to Minnesota was not my choice. I felt that we hadn't discussed the decision sufficiently, nor had we prayed about it enough individually and together. I shared my concerns with Tony.

But ultimately I was ready to follow God's direction in submitting to what Tony felt was the right decision, honoring him and also demonstrating my love for him in that process. Don't get me wrong; it wasn't easy then, and I still consider it to be one of the most difficult times in our marriage.

So I understand why this passage has negative connotations.

Whenever someone speaks of or debates this verse, feelings can get intense on both sides.

I believe that's partly because much of the submission we have witnessed in human history has been forced. People who have been captured by military action or enslaved by others have been required to submit to stay alive. The dominating party has received all the benefits in these one-way relationships to the detriment of those who have had to obey. That's what most of us think of when we hear the term *submission*, and we understandably balk at those applications.

However, that is not what the apostle Paul was describing when he wrote this letter to the believers at the church at Ephesus. He was advocating *voluntary* submission, which occurs when people decide on their own to come under the protection and guidance of another for *their* benefit. This type of submission forms the whole basis for Christian marriage. The husband voluntarily puts himself under Christ's direction and guidance, submitting his will to that of Jesus. And the wife likewise puts herself under the direction of Jesus and her husband. When this happens, both parties receive the benefits of following Christ, together.

Remember that Christ lived out submission by following His Father's will for His life, mission, and purpose. Christ came, ministered to those all around Him, died on the cross for you and for me, and rose from the tomb to assure eternal salvation for all who believe in Him. His sacrifice culminated in the new covenant between God and His people.

When we follow that example in our marriages, not only will we glorify God, but our obedience will allow us to ultimately see the blessings God has for us. As I look back at our years in Minnesota, I see many blessings. For example, I made some wonderful friendships that continue to this day. Tony further established his abilities and experience as an exceptional coach,

and our children got to connect and bond with a few of their cousins who lived nearby.

And the next time Tony and I had to decide whether to move, we approached it differently. We had both learned what it meant to honor and submit to each other, so we spent more time deliberating and praying together about our decision. Of course, the fact that we were moving to sunny Florida made it much easier!

*Adventure Application:* *Submission* can be a loaded term in our culture. Take a few minutes today to discuss what this word means to you. Do you each feel that the other hears your heart and respects your feelings? If not, godly submission will be tough to practice. How might you begin to practice submission and meeting your spouse where he or she is?

## day 7

## PRINCIPLE 1

# LOOK TO THE BIBLE AS YOUR GUIDEBOOK AND TO CHRIST AS YOUR LIVING EXAMPLE.

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## UNCOMMON WISDOM

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* —EPHESIANS 5:21

## UNCOMMON PRACTICE

Take a few moments to select one of this week's practices to explore further. Or you may each want to choose one principle directed specifically to you as the husband or you as the wife.

The related Adventure Application appears just below each practice. If you'd prefer to come up with a different way of living out that practice this week, feel free to discuss what that might look like.

- *Make Christ the center of your marriage.*

Take a moment to each draw a triangle. Be sure the sides reflect the distance you currently feel between each other and Christ. (The longer the sides, the further apart you feel.) Now compare your triangles. Discuss why you drew them the way you did, and how focusing on Christ could shorten the sides and bring you closer together.

- *Treat your parents and others in authority with respect.*  
Is there an issue you need to discuss with your spouse

about either set of your parents? Talk about how Exodus 20:12 and Genesis 2:24 speak into that issue.

- *Husbands: Work hard to hear your wife's heart and meet her needs.*

Read John 3:16 aloud, inserting your wife's name where appropriate. How does that help you better appreciate God's love for her? How does it impact your attitude toward her?

- *Husbands: Be prepared to love sacrificially.*

How do you define *sacrifice*? In what ways do you sacrifice and “take the middle seat” so your spouse can feel loved?

- *Wives: Show love and respect to your husband.*

Offer a sincere compliment about your spouse this week in front of your children, your parents or siblings, or your friends at church, at work, or in the neighborhood. If possible, do it when he is there too!

- *Wives: Strike the right balance between acceptance and expressing your disappointment when following your husband's lead in an area where you disagree.*

*Submission* can be a loaded term in our culture. Take a few minutes today to discuss what this word means to you. Do you each feel that the other hears your heart and respects your feelings? If not, godly submission will be tough to practice. How might you begin to practice submission and meeting your spouse where he or she is?

## UNCOMMON PRAYER

Take a few minutes to discuss any praises and needs you'd like to bring to God as a couple. Then, in addition to praying about those things, use one or more of the following prayer prompts to ask God to help you rely on Scripture and on Christ to build a stronger marriage.

*Praise God that He hasn't left you alone to figure out how to love each other, but that His Word offers an abundance of wisdom to learn from, promises to claim, and examples to follow.*

*Throughout the week, ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of passages from His Word that can breathe new hope and joy into your marriage.*

*Confess your need for Christ to help you show honor, respect, and grace to your in-laws, your spouse, and even yourself when you face dashed expectations or unanticipated frustrations.*

*Invite Jesus to be at the center of your marriage this week, filling your hearts with love for Him and each other and infusing your relationship with uncommon affection, peace, and self-sacrifice.*