

A photograph of a couple's hands clasped together in prayer. The woman's hand is on the left, wearing a red sleeve, and the man's hand is on the right, wearing a grey t-shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. The title 'Hand in hand' is written in a large, white, cursive script across the center of the image. There are some white speckles scattered around the text.

Hand in hand

A COUPLE'S DEVOTIONAL
BY STEVEN AND MELISA ZIMMERMAN

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU. PLEASE SEND ANY COMMENTS YOU HAVE ABOUT THIS BOOK TO
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HAND IN HAND COUPLE'S DEVOTIONAL

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This book is dedicated to:

*All the people who have inspired us
and been inspired by us.*

That I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,
with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27 (ESV)

Two of the most fundamental elements of a successful God-centered marriage are prayer and Bible study. So to help you with this, we have written this 14-day devotional for you. If you are currently involved in daily prayer and Bible study with your spouse then we would love for you to try this devotional out. If not, we hope this gift allows you to find an easy transition in putting this essential tool into practice.

We want to thank you for taking the time to invest in your marriage through our classes, coaching, and small groups. Please enjoy this devotional as our gift to you.

Steve & Melissa

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Starting at the Beginning

Have you ever heard the old saying, "Putting the cart before the horse?" Many times in the marriages of today, our society has the entire cart dealership before the horse. We choose living together before marriage, sex outside of marriage, jobs before family, jobs or fun before church, and almost everything before God.

Before you decide to chunk this devotional as completely out of line and crazy, I ask you to read on. This is in no way intended to be judgmental. In fact, as you read this, I have no idea who you are or what your life is like. Yes, some of the statements made in the first paragraph can be a little hard to read if you are you involved in one or more of them. However, in an effort to have a God-centered marriage, we need to know what God has to say.

When we seek the Kingdom of God and His way of doing things (righteous), He promises that He will add all his promises to us.

The Bible is a book that is full of promises. God designed the world to be a wonderful place for us to live. In fact, it was designed with us in mind. He laid out a perfect plan and if we follow it, He promises to provide us with great blessings. When we choose to do marriage God's way, we will receive the wonderful blessings He has planned for us. In order to have a wonderful marriage we have to start at the beginning. We have to seek God first. The best place to start is by accepting Him as your Lord and savior. This is the starting line. Next, we have to seek Him through prayer, Bible study, and church.

The great thing about this is that you don't have to do it alone. You have a partner. Your spouse is the best person on the planet to do this with.

When the two of you start at the beginning by putting God first, you will find that many other areas of your life will come into line and you WILL see God do some amazing things in your life. He promises.

- MELISA

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I will seek first you and your way of doing things and I trust that you will provide everything else I need.

MATTHEW 6:33 (Weymouth New Testament)

Read Your Bible and Pray

When I grew up in Sunday school, I learned a little song that said, "Read your Bible, pray every day." It was really a cute little song that, when examined further, was filled with great wisdom. Reading your Bible every day has so many benefits. Not only will it help you truly understand what God wants you to do, it will help you become better acquainted with God himself. For years, many people have seen God as this far off being that is big and unapproachable. As you read the Bible, you will find that God is very approachable and is actually closer than your very breath. God's deepest desire is that you would truly know Him and want to spend time with him every day. Two of the best ways to do that is through reading your Bible daily and praying. Many couples that I have worked with don't have praying together as part of their daily routine. This is

the very first homework assignment for them. For many, praying with and for someone out loud is awkward. It can be hard to get started.

However, all report that in a very short time, they feel completely comfortable praying with and for their spouse. Many report that it becomes the very centerpiece of their relationship and helps them navigate through the tough spots in life.

If you haven't begun the practice of reading your Bible and praying every day with your spouse, start today. Amazing closeness and peace will follow your dedication to put God first in this area of your marriage.

- MELISA

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I commit to reading your word and spending time praying to you with my spouse everyday. I thank you that as I do this, my way will be prosperous and I will have good success.

JOSHUA 1:8 (ESV)



pray

He's Got This

One of the best-known portions of the New Testament is in John where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. We are going to take a look at how everybody else reacts both before and after.

Prior to Lazarus' resurrection Martha is frantic. She is hurrying around. She is complaining that Mary isn't doing her share of the housework. Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet. She was troubled and her heart was heavy, as she asked Jesus why He had not saved her brother. Mary and Martha both knew who Jesus was, but neither were trusting Him and exhibiting faith in what they knew. To quote the late Paul Harvey, "and now for the rest of the story."

Fast forward, to chapter 12 Jesus returns to Bethany. All it says about Martha is that she served.

No whining, no complaining about others carrying their weight. She served, which is what Jesus would later say he came to do.

Mary repeated her action of going to be at Jesus' feet, but gone was the doubt exhibited by questioning why her brother had been allowed to die. It was replaced with not only worship, but extravagant worship. She poured expensive perfume on his feet and wiped them with her hair. She had gone from questioning His motives and actions to all out devotion.

The difference between the two is they now had absolute certainty in who Jesus was, and that he would do everything he said he would. Let's take a look at what he said: verse 11:23 "Your brother will rise again." Check. 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life."

and check. 11:40, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" check. Lastly, verse 11-41-42 " Father, I thank you that you have heard me, I knew that you always hear me, but I said this is for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." Using the behavior change in chapter 12 we can say check to that as well.

All this is to show that what Jesus says He will do we can trust will be done. Look at Mary and Martha, not to mention the profound change in Lazarus between chapters 11 and 12. Gone is worry, doubt, and pain, replaced with peace and unbridled worship. When Jesus says, He's got it, trust Him and reap the benefits of that trust.

- STEVE



trust

BIBLE CONFESSION:

Jesus my faith extends beyond believing in you but believing you will do everything you say you will. Today I receive the peace that comes from trusting you completely.

JOHN 11:11-37 // JOHN 12:1-11

Priorities

I was raised in a home that loved football. To this day, I will happily spend hours on Saturdays and Sundays in fall and not tire of the competition and the contact. Thankfully, my wife was raised in the same kind of home. I am proud of the fact she knows both who Johnny Unitas is, and who he played for. When I moved to Oklahoma my father in law sat me down and explained how football worked here. There was a natural order, a list of priorities on who you rooted for. It went like this:

1. The Oklahoma Sooners
2. The Oklahoma State Cowboys
3. Any Big 12 team not from Austin, Texas
4. Texas (in a pinch)
5. Any team south of the Mason-Dixon line
6. If it was two northern teams it was only because they were the only games on.

There was a defined order and some games were more important than other games. This is a truth that goes far beyond 100 yards of turf and two sets of goal posts. The same is true in marriage and in life. Define what is most important and pursue that. God clearly defines what is most important and instructs us to build our lives around that.

What does that look like? I can tell you if the Minnesota Vikings are on I can make time for those 3 hours regardless of how crowded my schedule may seem. What I have learned to do is make sure they have not pushed the Creator of the universe into a corner while I squeeze my viewing pleasure into an already busy day. If you make something a priority you will always have time for it. Why God and not the Vikings? One is momentary and the other eternal. One bestows blessings and the other may create a moment of joy

that is followed by heartache. One is perfectly consistent the other maddeningly frustrating.

He asks us to focus on Him because it is in our best interest, like any good Father would do. Not only is it best for us, it is best for our marriage. Let's keep our eyes on the real prize and get our priorities in order.

- STEVE

BIBLE CONFESSION:

Jesus my faith extends beyond believing in you but believing you will do everything you say you will. Today I receive the peace that comes from trusting you completely.

JOHN 11:11-37 // JOHN 12:1-11

focus
on
Him

The Power of Three

Steven and I met online. He lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota and I lived in a very small rural community in western Oklahoma. There are benefits and drawbacks to online relationships, the first of which is the distance. For some, this distance is much less than others. For us, however, it was huge. We learned to communicate on the phone pretty well. We spent hours on the phone every day and night. Because I had children we limited our phone time to start after they went to bed most days. So we frequently had four or five hour phone calls that didn't start until nine or ten in the evening. As you can imagine in the early days we didn't get a lot of sleep. I guess we lived on love.

One of the things we initiated early on in our relationship (yes while we were still doing the

phone thing) was daily Bible study and prayer. Our relationship truly was founded on these two things. Through this daily time of Bible study and prayer we found that God joined us every time. He fulfilled his promise from Matthew 18:20.

Being diligent to make time every day to join with your spouse in Bible Study and prayer you are guaranteed that the presence of God is with you. You are also accessing the tremendous power that is provided when two people are in agreement.

I have a friend who is a teacher and she would frequently tell her students who needed to do their homework or return a book from home for the school library or bring a signed note from their parents back to school to "make it important." Bible study and

prayer together with your spouse is something that we must make important. Life will vie for all your time every day. However, by keeping daily Bible study and prayer together as a non-negotiable you will ensure the success of your marriage and the success of seeing your prayers answered. So from today on, "MAKE IT IMPORTANT."

- MELISA

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I thank you that you that as we join together for prayer and Bible study, we are guaranteed that you are in the midst of us and anything that we ask in your name will be done for us.

MATTHEW 18:19-20 (AMP)



Agreement Vs. Strife

In order to run anything whether it is an engine or your body, you need to have fuel. There are a lot of fuels available and some work better than others. Some energy is positive and some are negative. As much as I would love to say there is equal availability of both, all to often we choose the wrong one.

I had lent my car to a friend whose car was in the shop, and I was using my son's truck for the day. I had to stop to fill up before getting my car back. There were two choices at the gas station, gas and diesel. One allows the truck to run as designed and one causes the engine to be ruined. It's why it says diesel right on the vehicle and all over the manual. The bible is our manual and it tells us to avoid strife and get in agreement with God. In our marriages we have to seek that place of agreement. The middle ground is so much more fruitful

than protecting your turf. It's where we find the right fuel to move our marriages and relationships forward. God tells us that we can have whatever we ask if we can get in agreement. The second part is that it will be done by the Father, not by us. Two people pushing in opposite directions cancel each other out. Those same people going in the same direction take the same energy and get progress. Coupled with faith that the Father will be doing it, allows anything to be possible.

What if I can get into agreement with my spouse? If you are disagreeing in a way that is disrespectful or unloving, you have just invited strife into your home. How bad is strife? It allows for EVERY evil work. Jealousy, envy, anger, gossip, hatred, they are all covered by every evil work. Nothing will drain the energy from a relationship like strife. It will also ruin

the engine so that it never runs again without major and expensive repairs. Avoid the repairs by avoiding strife. If you don't see eye to eye, don't be ugly about it. Seek the middle ground where agreement can be found. Once there, agree and remind God of His word. That it is through the Father that the agreement becomes the reality. Faith adds the boost to the fuel to get you to where you want your marriage to go.

- STEVE

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I will lovingly seek agreement with my spouse and trust you to bring it to pass. I will close the door to strife in my relationship.

MATTHEW 18:19 // JAMES 3:13



faith

Knowledge and Insight

As we work with couple after couple, we noticed that many struggled with knowing what to do in their marriage and how do make their marriage successful. While some marriages are successful, others are completely void of success and nearly in the divorce court before they seek out help. Most would willing say that if they knew what to do and how to do it they would be willing to do whatever it took to save their marriage. Most people, in fact, do not want to get divorced. Most people do not want to go through the rejection it creates. Even more than that, most people do not want to put their children through the trauma a divorce causes. Many couples simply don't know any other way. They have truly done their best and tried everything they knew to do and yet found themselves at the end of what started out as the best thing in their lives. Is it possible to make changes

before you get this far? Is it really possible to have a successful, life-giving marriage? The answer is a resounding yes!

Knowledge and insight are two of the greatest tools that we have. However, many people think they have knowledge and insight and yet are not successful in their marriage. Something has to be missing. Knowledge is the recognition, acknowledgement or full discernment of something. Insight on the other hand means introspection or a thorough knowledge and skill. As an illustration, think of knowledge as knowing all about something and how it works. Insight is knowing how to put into action that very knowledge. Often times we find that we actually know how things are supposed to work but we don't know how to apply it to our lives. The good news is that the Bible is brimming

ephesians

full with both knowledge and insight. As we search the Bible to see what it says about being married and we make the necessary steps to apply it to our lives everyday we will truly begin to see the changes we need. A great place to start is in Ephesians 5. It has knowledge and insight about how to be married, how to treat each other, and how to grow in your walk with Christ.

Take a few minutes and look at Ephesians 5 and see if you can identify 3 things that you could do to make your marriage better (knowledge). Now, take a few minutes and write down practical ways that you can implement them in your marriage, (insight). As you begin to do this you will find things improving. God's word is powerful and effective when we read it and apply it to our lives.

- MELISA

BIBLE CONFESSION:

Lord, I thank you that my spouse's love for God and me may abound more and more in real knowledge and discernment so that they may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Jesus Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-10

Dirt or Double

Your spouse is a precious gift from God. On your wedding day you received each other and celebrated in front of your friends and family. What have you done with the treasure you were given since then?

Matthew 25:14-30 is a story about the master giving something of great value to his servants to see what they do with it. We are to invest in the marriages we were given, to multiply the love and show God we can be trusted with His most precious children. My wife often uses the example, if you were given a precious gem, what would you do with it? You would keep it in a velvet box, not let the children near it and protect it with everything you have. This is how we should steward the love of our husband or wife.

The servants in the parable are in two groups, ones that invested and doubled their returns and the one that shoveled dirt on it. We all get to pick our side and we all have things to invest with, our time, money and emotions. What we are entrusted with is what we share with our loved ones.

The other option is to risk nothing, give nothing, and never see more than you started with. In a relationship, stagnation leads to death. The key to choosing wisely is found in Deuteronomy 30:19. "I set before you life and death, choose life." Invest in your relationship, see it grow, and show the life that a healthy marriage can give to everyone around you.

- STEVE

*"A Man doesn't own his marriage,
he is only the steward of his wife's love."*

- EDWIN COLE

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I thank you for trusting me with the treasure of my spouse. I will invest in them and grow our relationship.

MATTHEW 25:14-39 (NIV)

The Greatest Love of All

We live in a society where the commonly held belief is that we must "look out for number one." We are driven to take care of our selves. I often hear people say, "If I don't take care of myself no one else will." This is exactly the opposite of what God asks us to do in His word. Jesus commands us in John 15:12-14 to not only love each other, but he goes on to state that the greatest form of love is to "lay down your life for a friend." At first glance, laying down your life might sound very much like dying for your friend. I think more than that it means being willing to sacrifice your own desires, plans, goals, and time for someone else.

What would happen in our marriages if we would decide to apply this principle on a daily basis? What if we choose to put the needs, desires, plans, and goals of our spouse before our own? This one simple idea

of preferring our spouse each day could be the biggest game changer of any marriage. The beautiful thing about this choice is that it doesn't mean that our needs, goals and desires are not met, it just means we choose to meet someone else's first. When both the husband and wife choose this, everyone becomes first.

I challenge you, make an effort to lay down your life for your spouse. Put their needs ahead of yours and demonstrate the greatest love of all. God will be pleased with you and your spouse will enjoy the benefits of your choice. I bet you will find that find that your own needs are being met as well.

- MELISA

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I will choose to lay down my life
for my spouse as I choose to follow
your Word. I will demonstrated the
greatest level of love in my marriage.

JOHN 15:12-14 (NIV)



love

Chief Spiritual Officer (CSO)

We are all involved in relationships where our partners have let us down in one way or the other. We have to remember that we can't just limit the relationship to the husband and wife. We need to incorporate an executive who can overcome both of our shortcomings. This is where we ask the God described in Psalm 86 to become part of the team.

Keeping this in mind, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The God prayed to in Psalm 86 is the same God. I am going to run down who we are talking about and see if this isn't the God you want as Chief Spiritual Officer in your marriage.

He is forgiving and good, verse 5. Don't we all want a boss who can look past a mistake or two and allow us to grow? "You are great and do marvelous things," verse 10.

We all need to team with someone who can do better than we can so we can learn from them. "For great is your love towards me," verse 13.

Love that is pure is the fuel for every marriage and if it comes from the CSO it will flow down throughout the house. Verse 15, "you oh Lord are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness". Everything you want in your relationship rolled up in a single verse. You'd be foolish not to promote a God like that to the top. You have to invite Him to take the position. There will be no hostile takeover. So make the move today, appoint God your CSO and the result is found in verse 17b. "Oh Lord, you have helped and comforted me." Don't we all want that?

- STEVE

OSO

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God, I put you in charge of my spirit,
grow me and reshape me to be more
like you so I can love my spouse
like you do.

PSALM 86 (NIV)

Willingness & Obedience Are Key

Raising children can be a great blessing and one of the biggest trials of life. One of my main goals in raising my children was training them to listen and obey quickly and quietly. My belief is, the first time they didn't do as they were asked they were disobedient. I have often heard parents use the count to three method of correcting a child. No criticism of those parents, but that plan just didn't fit with my idea of obedience. For the most part when my children were smaller they were mostly obedient. My sons, however, when they were teenagers, began to be more rebellious. In fact, one of my sons adopted the motto that "your parents can only punish you if you let them." Depending on how old you are, this may be true. His adopting this philosophy, however, led him down a path of destruction. He frequently found himself in places that, if the truth be known, he didn't really want to be.

My goal for teaching them to learn to obey quickly and quietly was not driven by some big power trip but because I truly believe that if they can learn to do that with their parents, then when God speaks to them it will be natural for them to quickly obey Him as well. I'm happy to report that all my children eventually learned to willingly obey the voice of God most of the time. After all, we all miss it from time to time.

Isaiah tells us there are two parts to "eating the good of the land," which can be translated, having the blessings of God in our lives. First, we must be willing to follow God and secondly, we must be obedient to His word and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. God has given us very clear instructions on how to be husbands and wives. When we read the Bible and willingly become obedient to do what He has laid out for us, we will have

the marriage that we want. Begin to make it a priority to read the Bible and see what God has as His design for marriage and make it the pattern for the way you do your marriage. Not sure where to start your study? Begin by reading Ephesians 5. It gives a pretty clear picture of God's design for marriages.

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I will learn to be willing and obedient to your Word and see my marriage become all that you have designed for it to be. I will eat the good of the land.

ISAIAH 1:19 (NIV)

Be
Willing

Tug of War

I knew it was almost the end of the school year when we would have field day. This was a day where school was replaced with a day outside competing in all sorts of fun events like the baseball throw, three legged race, and 100-yard dash. Ribbons were given out and everyone enjoyed the sunshine and not doing multiplication tables. The conclusion of the day's events ended with tugs of war, each class competing against each other. It was a fitting end to the day, but let's take a look at what are the real results of a tug of war?

One side gloating, the other down in the dumps covered in mud, both sides with rope burns on the hands, unwilling to shake because the sting is still fresh. This is all too often how we deal with our spouse during and as importantly, after a fight.

Are you more interested in winning than solving the problem? Do you revel in the others defeat? Is there unnecessary mud slinging? Are you willing to shake their hand when you are done?

We have to remember marriage is a long haul proposition. Keeping score and trying to rack up a long winning streak isn't going to promote growth. Try if at all possible, and it is almost always possible to be at peace with ALL men. Solutions, not surrenders, are what allow you to have a great marriage.

Be the dove, not a hawk. Be willing to meet in the middle, not fight to the death. Fighting to the death always leaves one of you dead, not the outcome either of you is looking for. The story of Noah is brought to a conclusion when the dove returns with an olive branch.

God has ended His war against humanity (which by the way, didn't go well for the humans) and offered never to do it again. A promise He upheld. While we may not be able to promise never to fight again, we can certainly start by learning to offer olive branches.

- STEVE

BIBLE CONFESSION:

God I ask you to help me be a peacemaker and not a war starter. Being at peace with all men.

ROMANS 12:18 (NIV)



peace

Everything Starts With You

The great thing about Genesis 1:27 and Mark 12:31 is that they work in conjunction to inspire us to treat our spouses better. Isn't that just like God to create a win-win situation?

We as Christians are to love and follow Christ. A lot of Christians are struggling in the area of loving themselves because they are conscious of every sin, big and small, that they have ever committed. God is equally aware and loves you anyway. If you can't get past the legalism, remember Genesis 1:27. If we are made in his image, love the part of yourself that is like Him. Invite God to work on the rest of you. A sincere invitation for God to work on the rest of you will result in you loving yourself more and more.

This matters when we pair it with our second scripture, Mark 12:31. If we are to love others as we love ourselves, and we do a poor job of loving ourselves, we haven't accomplished much.

What would it look like if we took the opposite approach? Flaws and all, I am worthy of God's love and my own. I love me as much like God loves me as I can. Keeping that in mind, I now have an obligation to love my neighbor with a passionate, overwhelming, and completely out of proportion love. The easiest part of loving your neighbor starts at your house. Love the one next to you and let it spread to everyone else. Do that and you are doing exactly what Jesus ask you to.

- STEVE

Love the one
next to you

BIBLE CONFESSION:

I see you in me God and I will
love myself and my neighbors well.

GENESIS 1:27 // MARK 12:31

Old Baggage - New Creation

We all go into relationships with baggage from either our childhood, or from previous relationships. There is not a rule that says we have to keep it with us into our new relationship. In fact the Bible says quite the opposite. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says, "therefore if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old has passed away." There is no reason for us to be bringing dead issues with us into new relationships.

The trick is if they aren't dead yet. The answer is to give them to Christ. You can't tie a string to them so you can leave it at the cross and pull it back you when you are feeling sorry for yourselves. In the temple they used to tie a rope to the High Priest when he went into the Holy of Holies, in case he died in the presence of God. This allowed them to pull his dead body out. It is another case of tying the rope to the wrong thing.

We have to tie our rope to God and let Him pull us out of our issues so that we can walk into our marriage as a new creation, free from the struggles of our past. He who the Son sets free is free indeed. We get to choose to walk in that freedom or cling to the brokenness of our past lives, John 8:36.

A big part of cutting the rope is for our loved one to allow the past to stay in the past. Are you bringing up past transgressions, especially ones you've said you have forgiven them for? This has got to stop! Those of you who are constantly looking backwards are destined to crash because you are not looking where you are going. Your spouse may not be perfect. Focus on who they are and what they are doing now. You can't be locked into who they used to be and what they did.

Allow the power of Christ to work in their lives. Speak in faith to who you want them to become. Wait and watch. You will see the person you hoped for emerge.

- STEVE

free
indeed

BIBLE CONFESSION:

I will allow the blood of Christ to cover our sins.
Live in the present and trust God for our future.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 // JOHN 8:36

MISSION

Building and rebuilding bridges in relationships.

VISION

We will accomplish this by imparting Biblical counsel, investing in people, and revealing the restorative power of love and respect in marriages and families.

BELIEF

Bridge Builder Marriage Ministry believes that marriage is between a man and a woman, designed by God and meant for a lifetime. We believe that God heals brokenness and restores people, marriages, and families.

Together, Steve and Melisa have purposed to bring all their experiences and training to bear in preparing couples for marriage, enriching marriages, and repairing marriages. They have a special place in their hearts for speaking into blended families as they have walked that path since they met. Their mission continues to be "Building and Rebuilding Bridges in Relationships."

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