ONENESS

in Marriage



"A threefold cord is not quickly broken."

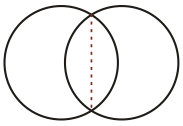
ECCLESIASTES 4:12

A PASTORAL LETTER

Two imperfect people, *one faithful God*

Eliud & Doroth Nduye

onenessinmarriage.com



Two imperfect people, *one faithful God*

What we keep learning from the couples who sit across from us, about love, broken trust, temptation and the long work of becoming one

BY Eliud & Doroth Nduye

GEN 2:24
"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Dear husbands and wives,

GRACE AND PEACE to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to begin with something that still makes us wonder, even after years of walking with couples, and it is the simple fact that God, in His wisdom, takes two people who are not alike and makes them one. He takes a man and a woman who grew up in different homes, who were shaped by different parents and different hurts, who think, speak, rest and even argue in different ways, and He joins them before Him and calls them one flesh. He does not do it by erasing what makes each of them who they are, and He does not wait until either of them is finished. He joins them as they are, two imperfect people, and then He binds Himself to the covenant they have made, so that what holds their marriage together in the end is not how perfect they are but how faithful He is.

That is the heart of this letter. Because every marriage is made of two imperfect people, every marriage will sooner or later discover the places where their differences rub and their imperfections wound. None of that takes God by surprise. The question is never whether a husband and wife will hurt each other, because at some point they will, but whether they will keep turning toward the faithful God who joined them, and through Him toward each other.

We see this every week. Most of the couples who come to talk with us do not begin with the real problem. They begin with the traffic on the way, with the children, with a small complaint about the week, and then somewhere in the second cup of tea one of them says, quietly, the sentence they came to say.

Over the years we have heard some stories more often than we can count. We have heard wives say that they no longer know the man sitting beside them, not because he has left or raised his hand against them, but because small secrets, a hidden debt, a friendship nobody mentions, a phone that is always turned face down, have taken one brick after another out of the wall they used to lean on. And we have heard husbands, truly sorry, who cannot understand why one tearful apology has not repaired what took years to break.

We have heard from husbands, and from wives too, who struggled with lust long before they married and prayed, sincerely, that the wedding would be the end of it, only to

find the old battle waiting for them on the other side. We have seen how the shame of that discovery makes a person quiet and distant at home, how the other spouse reads the distance as coldness and draws back, and how in that silence the temptation grows louder still.

And we have sat with couples who have been arguing for so long that they no longer argue about anything in particular, where every conversation has become a small trial in which each of them is the prosecutor and the other the accused, and where, if you ask what they are really fighting against, they look at each other as though the answer were obvious.

These are not one couple's stories. They come to us in counselling rooms, at conferences and in our own living room, and if we are honest, we have lived pieces of them in our own marriage. Anyone who has been married for a while will recognise them, because in one form or another they are everybody's stories. But we have also watched, again and again, what God does when two tired people stop, turn toward Him and then toward each other.

. . .

So we want to say this clearly, before we go any further. Husbands and wives, God is able to soften hearts that have grown hard, to restore trust that has been broken, to heal wounds that run deeper than words, to rebuild an intimacy you may have thought was gone for good, and to teach two imperfect people how to love each other according to His Word. He rarely does it in a single evening, but He does it, and we have seen it often enough to stake our ministry on it.

Without love we can do nothing

JOHN 15:5
"For without me ye can do nothing."

1 COR 13:1–7
Love is patient and kind, and keeps no careful account of wrongs.

Jesus told His disciples that without Him they could do nothing, and Paul, writing to a church that was full of gifted and quarrelsome people, said that a person could speak every language of men and of angels, understand every mystery and give away everything he owned, and still, without love, be nothing at all. Marriages tend to break in exactly that place. The couples who come to us are rarely short of information, since most of them have read the books and heard the sermons; what they have lost is the willingness to love when loving has started to cost them something.

Love in Scripture is not first a feeling, although it brings feelings with it. It is patient when you would rather be quick, kind when you would rather be right, and it refuses to keep a careful ledger of every wrong, which in a marriage may be the hardest part of all. None of us has that kind of love by nature. It comes from being loved first by God, and so when your love has run dry the place to begin is not to grit your teeth and manufacture more of it, but to go back to the One who loved you when you were least lovable and let Him fill what you have to give.

Trust comes back the way it left

GAL 6:9
"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Of all the wounds a marriage can suffer, broken trust may be the slowest to heal, because trust is not an idea held in the head but a resting place in the heart. When a husband or a wife has been deceived, the injury goes deeper than the thing that was done; the ground they were standing on has moved, and a heart that was caught unprepared once quietly learns to stay on guard. The one who has broken the trust usually longs for a single honest

conversation that will close the matter, and we understand why, because long seasons of repair are humbling for everyone, but such a conversation is never enough on its own. Trust did not leave in a single moment either. It slipped away a little at a time, through small hidden things, and it comes back the same way, through small things done in the open, over and over, until one day the hurt spouse finds that they have begun to lean on the other again without quite deciding to.

In practice this looks very ordinary. It means keeping your word on the little things, calling when you said you would call, coming home at the hour you gave and paying the bill you promised to pay, because to a hurt spouse every small promise kept is a piece of evidence. It means owning what you did without the word "but", since "I am sorry, but you also..." is not really an apology at all, only a defence wearing an apology's clothes. And it means showing up the same way next week and the week after, when the tears have dried and nobody is checking, with the same openness about your phone, your money and your time.

EPH 4:32
"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

PS 34:18
"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart."

We need to be clear about forgiveness here, because many Christian couples confuse it with trust. Forgiveness is not optional for us. We forgive because Christ has forgiven us, and Scripture leaves us no room to hold another person's sin over them for ever. But forgiveness and trust are not the same thing. Forgiveness can be given in a moment, as a gift, while trust has to be rebuilt over time, as a process, because a heart that has been broken does not mend on command. Being a Christian does not mean that a person can betray their spouse, say sorry, quote a verse about forgiveness and expect everything to return to normal in the blink of an eye. To ask the wounded one to carry on as though nothing has happened is not faith; it is a second wound.

There is something deeply spiritual about giving a hurt spouse room to breathe. The Lord Himself draws near to the broken-hearted and is patient with them, and the one who has been hurt needs time to grieve, to ask honest questions and to make sense of what has happened before life can move forward again. How long that takes differs from one person to another, and it should neither be rushed nor measured against anybody else's story. The one who caused the hurt helps the healing most by being patient, by answering questions honestly, and by never demanding that the other simply get over it.

Yet the work does not belong to one partner alone. Trust is rebuilt by two people who decide to come back to each other, and the surest way we know for that to happen is for both of them to come back to God together. As a husband and wife draw near to Him, praying together, opening the Word together and letting Him search their hearts, they find themselves drawn nearer to each other as well, and Christ, who restores what we cannot, begins to do quietly what no promise or apology could do alone. Patience is part of the work for both of you, and the harvest Paul promised to those who do not grow weary comes in its own season.

Your spouse is not the enemy

ECCL 4:9–12
"Two are better than one ... For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow."

Couples who have been fighting each other for years have usually forgotten what the Preacher wrote long ago, that two are better than one because when one falls the other can lift him up; somewhere along the way they stopped lifting each other and started keeping score.

Sin is the enemy of your marriage, and so are pride, and the bitterness that grows out of old wounds left untended, and the busyness that slowly turns two people who share a bed into polite strangers. The enemy of our souls would love you to believe that your husband or your wife is the real problem, because a couple who are fighting each other have no

strength left to resist him. Your spouse is not your enemy. Your spouse is the person God gave you to stand beside when the real enemy comes.

One simple practice has helped many of the couples we walk with, although it feels almost childish at first. Whenever a quarrel begins to rise, one of you stops and asks, "What are we actually fighting here?", and together you name it, whether it is fear about money, or plain tiredness, or an old hurt that has been touched again. Then you hold hands, even while you are still upset, and pray for two minutes against that thing rather than against each other. It will not end every argument, but it changes what your arguments are about, and over time it can change the whole tone of a home.

ECCL 4:12

"A threefold cord is not quickly broken." Two people can be pulled apart; two people bound together with God are far harder to break.

What marriage does not fix

MATT 5:28 · GAL 5:22–23
Lust begins in the heart; self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.

GEN 39:12
"He left his garment in her hand, and fled."

The thought about Solomon, David, Abraham and Samson was first shared by Strong Marriages.

1 COR 7:5 · 1 JOHN 1:9
"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us."

Many people walk into marriage believing that it will cure lust. It does not, and we think it is a kindness to say so plainly before people marry rather than after. Lust does not care whether you are single or married. Jesus placed it in the heart rather than in our circumstances, and a wedding changes your circumstances without, by itself, changing your heart. Self-control is still required of every husband and every wife, and it remains a fruit that the Holy Spirit grows in those who walk with Him.

Scripture is honest with us about this. Solomon had wisdom, David had a heart for worship, Abraham was called the friend of God and Samson had a strength no man could match, and yet each of them, in his own way, stumbled where he did not guard himself. Joseph, a young slave far from home with every excuse to give in, is remembered for one simple thing: when temptation took hold of his garment, he left it in her hand and ran. Gifts are not a substitute for discipline, and neither is a wedding ring.

So guard the doors of your heart. Be honest about what you watch and where your phone goes late at night, and be careful with friendships that are becoming warmer than they should. Bring temptation into the light early, with a trusted friend of the same sex or with a pastor, before it has time to grow in secret. And turn toward your spouse rather than away, tending your intimacy with kindness, time and patience, because Paul warns that long neglect gives the tempter room. If you have already fallen, you are not beyond God's reach, for if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us. Confession is painful, but secrecy costs far more, and we have seen many marriages begin to heal on the evening one spouse finally told the other the truth and asked them to pray together.

Loving someone who loves imperfectly

EPH 5:25
"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

ROM 5:8 · 1 PET 3:7

Paul's instruction to husbands is one of the most demanding sentences in the Bible: love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Christ did not wait for the church to become lovely before He loved her; He loved her while she was still wandering and gave Himself to make her whole. Peter adds that a husband should live with his wife with understanding and give her honour, as one who shares with him the grace of life, so that their prayers are not hindered.

A husband, then, should be ready to keep loving his wife even when she follows imperfectly, remembering that he follows imperfectly too, and that a love which honours God is greater than either of their failures. The same grace is asked of wives. Neither of you is called to wait until the other has become perfect before you begin to love well.

We must add one careful word here, because we have sat with too many frightened people to leave it unsaid. Loving an imperfect spouse is never the same thing as accepting abuse. If there is violence in your home, or threats, or a kind of control that leaves you afraid, love does not ask you to stay silent or to remain in danger. Please speak to a pastor or a counsellor you trust, and in an emergency call 112.

Fighting on the same side

NEH 4:14

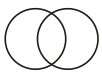
"Remember the Lord ... and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

If we could leave every couple with a single picture, it would be the one Nehemiah gave the people of Jerusalem when their walls lay in ruins and their enemies were gathering outside. He did not let them argue about whose fault the broken walls were. He set them along the wall family by family, side by side, and told them to remember the Lord and to fight for their brothers, their sons and daughters, their wives and their homes. They built with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and the wall was finished.

That is what we pray for you. There is no marriage without battles, and we would be lying if we promised you one; what we long to see is a husband and a wife who have finally agreed about who the enemy is and have turned, shoulder to shoulder, to face him together, with God holding the cord that binds them. Fight for your spouse's heart when it is tired, fight for the trust you are rebuilding one small promise at a time, fight the lust and pride and bitterness that would gladly pull you apart, and never again mistake the person beside you for the one you are fighting.

If you want somewhere to begin, begin small, and begin tonight. Keep one promise you have let slip. Say one sorry with no "but" after it. And the next time a quarrel rises, take your spouse's hand, even if it feels awkward, and pray for two minutes against the problem instead of against each other. It will not fix everything at once, but two imperfect people who keep turning toward a faithful God, and toward each other, will find in time that He has been building something in them that neither of them could ever have built alone.

> *Lord, You are the third strand in our cord. Soften what has grown hard in us, heal what we have broken, and teach us to love each other the way You have loved us. Amen.*



Eliud & Doroth Nduye · ONENESS IN MARRIAGE

onenessinmarriage.com · free to read, keep and share with anyone who needs it