

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS
A FOUR-PART SERIES | PART FOUR OF FOUR

DOES GOD CHOOSE WHOM WE MARRY?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

PROVIDENCE • PROTECTION • SURRENDER • COVENANT

Does God Choose Whom We Marry?

Sermon Transcript

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If this is your first time with us, you are an honored guest.

You are welcome whether you arrived with strong faith, difficult questions or no certainty about what you believe.

We do not ask you to pretend.

We ask you to reason honestly with us from the Word of God.

If you would like us to stay in contact with you, our guest card asks for only your first name and email address.

We do not need your home address, telephone number or a complete history of your life.

We simply want the opportunity to welcome you and let you know what is happening at Reason Together Church.

Our Keiki Kids Center is available for the children, and families are always welcome to keep their children with them if they prefer.

After the service, please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversations.

COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Before we consider one of life's most personal decisions, let us ask God for wisdom and honest hearts.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for creating us for relationship.

Thank You for the gift of marriage and for the dignity of singleness.

Protect us from romantic ideas that sound spiritual but are not taught in Your Word.

Protect us also from treating one of life's most sacred covenants as though You have no concern for it.

Give wisdom to those who are deciding whether to marry.

Give patience to those who are waiting.

Give courage to those who need to say no.

Give humility to those who hope the answer will be yes.

Teach husbands and wives to honor the covenant they have made.

Above all, direct our attention to Jesus Christ and make Your Word our final authority.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

Our Scripture reading comes from First Corinthians 7:39.

"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

That single verse contains both freedom and a boundary.

Keep those two words in mind: liberty and Lord.

They will help us answer today's question.

Before we begin, I want to say a brief word about giving.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Our guests are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, I encourage you to support your home church faithfully.

For those who consider Reason Together Church their church home and feel led to give, there is a giving box in the back.

Second Corinthians 9:7 tells us, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Biblical giving is willing, thoughtful and directed toward God.

Those same qualities matter when we consider marriage.

Pressure cannot produce a cheerful gift.

Spiritual pressure cannot produce a healthy covenant.

We have now reached the fourth and final part of our series, "He Shall Direct Thy Paths."

This series began as Danielin and I approached our twentieth wedding anniversary and I found myself looking back at where our story started.

We did not spend four weeks on this story merely because I became sentimental.

We stayed with it because the story raises questions many Christians ask when trying to recognize the direction of God.

In Part One, we asked, "How Do You Know When a 'Coincidence' Is God?"

We learned to receive remarkable circumstances with gratitude without pretending that our interpretation is infallible.

In Part Two, we asked, "Could They Have Been Angels?"

We learned that Scripture may permit a possibility even when the evidence does not allow certainty.

In Part Three, we asked, "Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?"

We turned from the events around me to the motives within me.

Today the circumstances, the possibilities and the motives all arrive at a decision.

We ask, "Does God Choose Whom We Marry?"

Does God select one particular person for every believer?

Is there a single hidden name written in Heaven that we must somehow discover?

If we marry someone else, have we ruined God's plan?

Or does God give faithful Christians Biblical boundaries and wisdom within which they may freely choose each other?

Those are not small questions.

They affect how single Christians pray.

They affect how couples date.

They affect how proposals are made.

They can even affect whether spiritual language becomes a source of comfort or a means of control.

The foundation of this series has been Proverbs 3:5-6.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

God directs paths.

But a directed path does not relieve us of the responsibility to walk wisely.

Last week, I left you with an airport departure from Cebu in the Philippines.

Danielin and I had spent our final night at an observatory overlooking the city.

We talked until sunrise about our hopes, fears, concerns and the very different lives we had known.

By morning, I knew that I loved her.

I knew that I wanted to marry her.

I also knew that I had no idea how it could happen.

At the airport I promised that I would return within a month.

As the final announcement instructed us to turn off our electronic devices, one last message arrived from Danielin.

In capital letters it said, "I LOVE YOU TOO!!!! PLEASE HURRY BACK."

I boarded the flight with more hope than answers.

On the long journey home, I prayed.

What followed was unlike any prayer experience I had known before or have known since.

There was no audible sound.

I experienced what I understood as an extended inward conversation with God.

Questions that had followed me for years seemed to receive answers.

Some of those questions concerned dreams I had carried for a very long time.

Then I brought the question of Danielin before Him.

During that prayer, I came to believe that God was offering to answer one of those dreams.

I believed He had found me faithful in what He had already entrusted to me and was giving me the freedom to choose which future I would pursue.

This did not seem to be a choice between right and wrong.

It seemed to be a choice between two very different blessings.

Reduced to its simplest terms, I understood the choice to be money or Danielin.

One involved a major business agreement I had pursued for months.

If it succeeded, it would demand nearly all my time for the next year and could make me very wealthy.

The other involved turning toward the woman I loved and accepting a future I could not yet explain.

In that prayer, I chose Danielin.

I returned home convinced that God had heard me and that I should pursue marriage.

The next morning, the man involved in that business agreement called me.

He said that after praying, he had decided to award the contract to one of my competitors.
He even offered to reverse that decision if I believed he was mistaken.
I told him that his call confirmed the choice I had made.
I did not feel poor because I lost the agreement.
I felt rich because I knew what I valued.
That experience is part of my testimony.
I will not deny it.
But neither will I ask you to treat my private experience as Scripture.
I cannot prove every impression I received on that airplane.
I cannot turn my experience into a formula that every unmarried Christian must repeat.
I certainly could not use it to tell Danielin that God had removed her right to decide.
"God told me that you must marry me" is not a proposal.
It is pressure dressed in religious clothing.
Even if I believed God was directing me toward Danielin, she remained responsible before God for her own choice.
That distinction is essential.
Experience may give us a question.
Scripture must judge the answer.
So let us begin at the beginning.
Genesis 2:18 records God saying, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."
God formed the woman and brought her unto the man.
Adam did not search through a crowd hoping to identify the right person.
There was one man and one woman.
God directly brought them together.
That establishes the divine origin of marriage.
It does not establish a universal dating method.
Adam's marriage was also the first marriage in human history.
It cannot be repeated in every detail.
No other man should expect God to place him into a deep sleep, remove a rib and introduce him to a newly created wife.

The account teaches that marriage is God's design.

It does not promise that every person has one mysterious counterpart who must be discovered.

Genesis 24 gives us another remarkable marriage story.

Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac.

The servant prayed for specific guidance at a well.

Rebekah arrived and did precisely what he had requested in prayer.

The servant worshiped and said that the LORD had led him in the right way.

That sounds very much like God chose Rebekah for Isaac.

Providence is unmistakable in the account.

But notice what Scripture refuses to erase.

Rebekah was not treated as an object being delivered to a man she had never chosen.

Genesis 24:58 says, "And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man?

And she said, I will go."

God's providence did not cancel her consent.

Divine direction and human choice stood together.

We should also notice that the servant's sign was part of a larger process.

Abraham had given clear boundaries.

The servant observed Rebekah's character.

Her generosity was demonstrated by labor, not merely claimed in conversation.

Her family was involved.

She was asked.

She answered.

Genesis 24 is a beautiful testimony of providence.

It is not permission to invent any sign we please and then bind another person's conscience with it.

The Bible contains a few marriages directed by an unmistakable command.

Hosea was specifically commanded to marry as part of a prophetic sign to Israel.

That was an exceptional calling with an exceptional purpose.

It is not ordinary courtship advice.

We make a serious mistake when we take an extraordinary command given to one prophet and turn it into a secret expectation for everyone.

In Part Two, I mentioned the book of Tobit because Raphael appeared as a human traveling companion.

The same ancient story also connects Raphael with the marriage of Tobias and Sarah.

Tobit is historical background rather than our final authority, but it demonstrates that questions about providence, marriage and family are ancient.

The question is ancient.

The popular soulmate formula is not.

In Part One, we noticed that Ruth's "hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz."

We considered that meeting as an example of providence working through an apparently ordinary circumstance.

Now let us return to that story and ask a different question.

What did providence not replace?

There was no audible voice identifying Boaz as her husband.

There was no miraculous sign in the sky.

There were ordinary steps of faithfulness.

Ruth worked.

Boaz observed her character.

Naomi offered counsel.

Ruth expressed willingness.

Boaz acted honorably.

He respected the legal responsibility of a nearer kinsman.

The community witnessed the agreement.

God's providence did not replace wisdom, integrity, consent or public accountability.

It worked through them.

That may be much closer to the way God usually directs a marriage.

We sometimes look for a spectacular sign while ignoring the character standing directly in front of us.

We ask whether a meeting was miraculous.

Scripture asks whether the person is truthful.

We ask whether we felt instant peace.

Scripture asks whether the relationship displays patience, kindness, self-control and holiness.

We ask whether circumstances opened a door.

Scripture asks whether we can walk through that door without disobeying God.

We ask whether this person is "the one."

Scripture asks whether both people are prepared to become one in covenant.

This brings us back to First Corinthians 7:39.

Paul speaks of a Christian widow who may consider marriage again.

He says, "she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

She is at liberty.

She may marry whom she will.

That is genuine human choice.

Then comes the boundary.

Only in the Lord.

Freedom is not the same as lawlessness.

God does not command her to decode a hidden name.

He gives liberty within allegiance to Christ.

That verse is very difficult to reconcile with the claim that every believer has exactly one possible spouse and that choosing anyone else necessarily destroys God's will.

If only one predetermined person were permissible, Paul could hardly say, "whom she will."

At the same time, "only in the Lord" prevents us from saying that every choice is equally wise or obedient.

Marriage joins lives, worship, priorities, bodies, families, finances and futures.

A Christian should not knowingly construct that union in rebellion against Christ.

Second Corinthians 6:14 warns, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

That passage addresses partnership with unbelief more broadly, but marriage is certainly the most intimate lifelong yoke most people will enter.

Affection does not make spiritual incompatibility disappear.

Chemistry does not replace discipleship.

The question is not merely, "Does this person say that he or she is a Christian?"

The question is whether there is credible evidence of a life submitted to Christ.

No one is perfect.

You are not looking for a flawless person.

You are looking for a person with whom you can faithfully follow Jesus.

That requires attention to character.

Proverbs 19:14 says, "House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD."

A prudent spouse is a gift from God.

But prudence must be observed.

How does this person handle truth?

How does this person treat people who cannot offer anything in return?

How does this person respond to correction?

How does this person handle anger, money, work, temptation and responsibility?

Does the relationship make honesty easier or require increasing secrecy?

Can the two of you pray together without using prayer to manipulate each other?

Can trusted believers who know you both see health in the relationship?

Can you discuss children, church, money, family obligations, work, culture and expectations before emotion turns every difference into a surprise?

Love may begin with attraction.

Marriage requires character.

Providence may arrange a meeting.

Wisdom must still examine the relationship.

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."

Ask.

Pray honestly.

Then use the wisdom God has already provided through Scripture, mature counsel and truthful observation.

Do not ask God for a sign while hiding information that wise counsel would need to know.

Do not interpret urgency as guidance.

Do not confuse fear of losing someone with proof that you are meant to marry.

Do not confuse intense emotion with covenant readiness.

Do not marry a future version of a person who does not yet exist.

Pay attention to the person who is actually before you.

And never use theology to remove the other person's freedom to say no.

Rebekah was asked, "Wilt thou go?"

Marriage requires two willing answers.

One person's certainty cannot become the other person's command.

That truth would guide the next stage of my story with Danielin.

When I returned to America, I did not immediately receive another extraordinary experience.

I called Danielin every morning and every evening.

We spoke for about an hour while she prepared for work and again after she returned home.

I also stayed in contact with her sister, friends, church workers and Pastors.

I was not simply trying to win a private romance.

I wanted the people who knew and loved her to examine me as well.

Within the month I had promised, I boarded another flight to Cebu.

This time I stayed in a modest pension house near where Danielin lived and worked.

I arranged my schedule around her responsibilities.

She continued teaching.

She continued serving in church.

We spent time together when she was free, and I spent time with the people who mattered to her.

The goal was not to create a perfect vacation.

It was to learn whether two very different lives could become one faithful life.

During that period, another remarkable circumstance occurred.

Before returning to the Philippines, I had listed my home for a price high enough that I did not expect it to sell quickly.

I reasoned that if marriage became certain, Danielin and I could begin in a home that belonged to our shared future rather than only to my past.

While we were together in Cebu, my broker sent word that the next-door neighbor had offered the full asking price in cash and wanted the furniture as well.

The sale removed an obstacle I had not known how to address.

Was that providence?

I believe it was.

Did the sale force Danielin to marry me?

Absolutely not.

An open door gave us an opportunity.

It did not speak her vows.

As the days passed, Danielin freely told me that she loved me.

We continued dating until I believed it was time to propose.

Her sister helped me select a ring.

I sought counsel from respected Pastors who knew her.

Then I asked Danielin to marry me.

She said yes.

That answer mattered more than every circumstance I had interpreted before it.

It took weeks to complete the legal requirements for an international marriage.

Danielin originally spoke of a simple wedding.

We managed to have something considerably larger.

We were married in the church and celebrated with family, friends and the community that had watched our relationship develop.

We did not stand before them and say that coincidences had made us married.

We made vows.

That is where the Biblical idea of "the one" becomes much clearer.

Before marriage, Scripture does not tell you to treat one possible person as though a covenant already exists.

You may consider.

You may pray.

You may seek counsel.

You may decide not to proceed.

The other person may decide not to proceed.

But when two people freely enter a Biblical marriage covenant, the question changes.

You are no longer searching for "the one."

You have covenanted with the one you chose.

Malachi 2:14 calls a wife "thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant."

Jesus says in Matthew 19:6, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

The wedding vow does not merely announce that you solved a romantic mystery.

It establishes a covenant that must now be honored.

The culture says that someone remains "the one" as long as the feeling remains effortless.

Scripture calls husband and wife to faithful love when life is costly.

The culture tells us to keep wondering whether someone more perfectly matched might be elsewhere.

Covenant says that faithfulness is directed toward the spouse to whom you gave your word.

Marriage does not become holy because two people felt destined.

Marriage is holy because it belongs to God's design and is lived under His authority.

That does not mean marriage excuses abuse, conceals violence or requires anyone to remain in immediate danger.

Sin should be brought into the light, and those in danger should seek help.

It does mean that ordinary disappointment is not proof that you married the wrong person.

Difficulty does not reveal that your true soulmate is somewhere else.

Two imperfect people will discover differences that no courtship could completely expose.

Covenant love learns to confess, forgive, grow and remain faithful.

So does God choose whom we marry?

We can now answer with care.

God is sovereign over every part of our lives.

No faithful marriage surprises Him.

He may providentially arrange meetings, close doors, open opportunities and use circumstances we never could have planned.

In some Biblical accounts, God unmistakably appointed a particular marriage for a particular purpose.

But Scripture does not promise that every Christian has one hidden, predetermined spouse who must be discovered through signs.

For ordinary believers, God gives real choice within Biblical boundaries.

He calls us to marry in the Lord.

He gives wisdom.

He tells us to examine character.

He uses counsel, providence, prayer and patient observation.

He requires mutual consent.

Then, when vows are made, He calls the couple to covenant faithfulness.

You may therefore say, "I chose my spouse."

You may also gratefully say, "God directed our paths."

Those statements do not contradict each other.

Providence and responsible choice can occupy the same story.

That is how I understand my story with Danielin.

I believe God directed my path to Cebu.

I believe He used a repeated passage from Proverbs, a meeting in a squatter community, protective people, an airline office, a sealed letter, a lost contract, a sold house and many quieter moments of prayer and counsel.

I also chose Danielin.

Danielin chose me.

Neither of us surrendered responsibility for that choice.

Then we made a covenant before God.

Nearly twenty years later, I am not thankful merely that I once recognized a remarkable path.

I am thankful that my wife and I have continued walking it together.

The direction of God was not only about getting us to a wedding.

It has been about forming a marriage.

That may be the most important correction to the language of "the one."

Many people devote enormous attention to finding the right person and very little attention to becoming a faithful person.

Ask God to guide your choice.

Also ask Him to shape your character.

Do not merely pray, "Lord, send me someone who will love me."

Pray, "Lord, teach me to love with patience, truth and sacrifice."

Do not merely ask for someone who will meet your needs.

Ask whether you are prepared to serve without losing honesty, wisdom or holiness.

Do not make marriage an idol.

Jesus is not a consolation prize for people who have not found a spouse.

Marriage is honorable, but it is not salvation.

Singleness is not evidence that God forgot you.

First Corinthians 7 honors both marriage and faithful singleness.

Your completeness is found in Christ, not in another human being.

No husband can bear the weight of being a savior.

No wife can bear the weight of being the source of another person's identity.

Only Jesus can occupy that place.

The deepest love story in Scripture is not the story of a man discovering his soulmate.

It is the story of Christ loving sinners who could not save themselves.

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

Jesus did not love His church because she had earned His sacrifice.

He gave Himself to redeem her.

He died upon the cross for our sins.

He was buried.

On the third day, He rose again.

Before you can understand Christian marriage, you must understand Christian grace.

We do not enter the family of God because we found the correct sign.

We come through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:9 says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ, you may come to Him today.

You do not need to solve every question before you call upon Him.

If that expresses the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.

The words do not save you.

Jesus saves.

Pray sincerely from your heart.

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that Jesus Christ died upon the cross for my sins.

I believe that He was buried and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my faith in Jesus Christ.

Please forgive me.

Please save me.

Help me follow You from this day forward.

In the name of Jesus I pray.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer sincerely, please speak with me or another trusted Christian before you leave.

We would be honored to pray with you and help you begin learning what it means to follow Christ.

For those who are considering marriage, begin with a better question than, "How can I prove this person is the one?"

Ask, "Can we faithfully follow Christ together?"

Examine faith, character, truthfulness, responsibility and the freedom of both people to choose.

Invite wise believers to speak honestly.

Do not punish them when they tell you what you did not hope to hear.

Do not rush because loneliness has made every delay feel unbearable.

Do not demand a sign that allows you to avoid wisdom.

Pray.

Listen.

Observe.

Wait when wisdom requires waiting.

Act when obedience requires action.

And allow the other person to answer freely.

For those who are married, stop comparing your covenant with an imaginary person who has never disappointed you.

Choose your spouse again through today's faithfulness.

Speak truth with love.

Confess quickly.

Forgive sincerely.

Seek help when the two of you cannot resolve something alone.

Protect one another's dignity.

Pray together.

Serve Christ together.

Remember that God did not direct your path only to a ceremony.

He calls you to walk faithfully after it.

For those who are single, widowed or divorced, do not hear this sermon as an announcement that your life is incomplete.

You belong fully to Christ.

Your value is not waiting for a wedding day.

If marriage becomes part of your path, receive it with gratitude and wisdom.

If it does not, no lesser Savior and no lesser purpose have been given to you.

Our four-part journey began with the promise, "he shall direct thy paths."

It ends with the responsibility to trust Him while walking.

We may not understand every coincidence.

We may not identify every angel.

We may struggle to separate God's will from our own desire.

We may never receive absolute certainty about every decision.

But we have not been left without light.

We have the Word of God.

We have the wisdom He invites us to seek.

We have the freedom to make faithful choices under the lordship of Christ.

And we have grace when our understanding proves incomplete.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for directing our paths with greater wisdom than our own.

Thank You for the ways You use Scripture, prayer, counsel, circumstances and ordinary faithfulness.

For those considering marriage, grant patience, clarity and courage.

Keep them from manipulation, fantasy and fear.

Lead them toward relationships that honor Jesus Christ.

For husbands and wives, renew covenant love.

Teach us to choose faithfulness in ordinary moments.

Bring repentance where there has been sin, healing where there has been injury and wise help where there is danger.

For those who are single, widowed or divorced, make the sufficiency of Christ precious and clear.

Guard every heart from believing that marital status determines human worth.

Thank You for the path that brought Danielin and me together.

Help my wife and me continue to honor You as we walk it.

May every testimony we tell direct attention beyond ourselves to Your grace.

We place our choices, our relationships and our futures in Your hands.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

This concludes our four-part series, "He Shall Direct Thy Paths."

The story has been personal, but the final authority has remained the Word of God.

May we remember the remarkable moments with gratitude, examine them with humility and walk forward in obedience.

Please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

Bring your questions and stay for the conversation.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS

A FOUR-PART SERIES | PART FOUR OF FOUR

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Does God Choose Whom We Marry?

Providence, Choice and Covenant

1 Corinthians 7:39

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Introduction

This Commentary completes the four-part series, He Shall Direct Thy Paths. The series began as Danielin and I approached our twentieth wedding anniversary and I looked back at where our story started. The occasion was sentimental, but the purpose was larger than memory. The story supplied a setting in which to examine how Christians speak about providence, angels, surrender, marriage and the will of God.

Part One asked, 'How Do You Know When a "Coincidence" Is God?' Part Two asked, 'Could They Have Been Angels?' Part Three asked, 'Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?' The first study disciplined our claims about circumstances. The second disciplined our claims about unseen messengers. The third disciplined the desire doing the interpreting. Part Four now asks, 'Does God Choose Whom We Marry?'

The question is personal because I believe God directed the path that brought Danielin and me together. It is pastoral because careless answers can frighten single Christians, romanticize poor decisions or allow spiritual language to pressure another person. A faithful answer must preserve God's providence without inventing a universal soulmate doctrine. It must preserve real choice without acting as though marriage lies outside God's government.

First Corinthians 7:39 supplies the controlling balance: 'she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.' Liberty and Lord belong together. The believer chooses, but the choice is not detached from Christ. God may guide through providence, prayer, wisdom, counsel and opportunity. Yet no private impression removes the need for character, consent or covenant.

Controlling answer: God may providentially direct a particular marriage, but Scripture does not promise one hidden spouse for every believer. Christians make responsible choices within Biblical boundaries. Two people freely consent, make vows and then owe covenant faithfulness to the spouse they chose.

The Four Studies Resolve Together

Part	Question	Lasting conclusion
One	How Do You Know When a "Coincidence" Is God?	Providence is certain, but our interpretation of a particular event remains fallible.
Two	Could They Have Been Angels?	Biblical possibility does not create historical certainty.

Part	Question	Lasting conclusion
Three	Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?	Prayer must surrender the preferred answer rather than recruit God to approve it.
Four	Does God Choose Whom We Marry?	Providence, responsible choice, mutual consent and covenant belong in the same account.

The progression matters. If the fourth study stood alone, the remarkable circumstances could sound like a formula for finding a spouse. Because Parts One through Three have already tested providence, possibility and motive, Part Four can receive the testimony without making it a rule. The entire series moves from interpretation toward responsibility. God directs paths, and human beings remain accountable for how they walk.

1. The Airplane Choice: Testimony Under Scripture

Why the Two Dreams Matter

On the long flight home from Cebu, I prayed about questions and dreams that had followed me for years. I experienced what I understood as an extended inward conversation with God. There was no audible sound. During that prayer, I came to believe that God was offering to answer one of those long-held dreams and had found me faithful in what He had already entrusted to me.

That sequence explains what followed. I did not understand the moment as a choice between obedience and sin. I understood it as freedom to pursue one of two different blessings. Reduced to its simplest terms, the choice appeared to be money or Danielin. One path involved a major agreement that could make me wealthy but would consume the coming year. The other involved turning toward the woman I loved and accepting a future I could not yet explain.

In that prayer, I chose Danielin. The next morning the other party said that, after praying, he had awarded the agreement to a competitor. He offered to reverse the decision. I received the timing as confirmation and declined. The event clarified what I valued, but it did not create Danielin's obligation to share my conclusion.

What the Testimony Can and Cannot Do

A first-person testimony can truthfully report what a person experienced, believed and chose. It cannot elevate an inward conversation to canonical authority. I may say that I believed God had directed me. I should not claim that every detail of my interpretation is beyond correction or that another Christian must seek the same experience.

The distinction becomes especially important in romance. 'God told me that you must marry me' is not evidence of love. It is an attempt to place divine authority behind one person's desire. Even

a sincere conviction may govern only the believer's own next step. It may lead someone to pray, return, seek counsel or make a proposal. It cannot answer on behalf of the other person.

Danielin's final airport message established mutual affection. It did not establish a marriage. My prayer established my intention to pursue the relationship. It did not establish her consent. The lost agreement altered my practical future. It did not speak her vows. This calibrated language protects the beauty of the testimony rather than diminishing it.

2. Creation Gives Marriage Its Meaning

Adam and Eve

Genesis 2:18-24 presents marriage as God's design. God declares that it is not good for the man to be alone, forms the woman and brings her to the man. Adam receives her with recognition and delight. The text culminates in leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh.

This first marriage is uniquely appointed. There was one man and one woman. Adam did not choose among possible spouses. Yet uniqueness limits the account as a courtship model. No later believer should expect a newly created spouse to be delivered after the removal of a rib. Genesis establishes the origin, complementarity and one-flesh character of marriage. It does not establish that every person must discover one concealed counterpart.

Jesus appeals to this creation text in Matthew 19:4-6. His emphasis is not the technique by which a spouse is found. It is the seriousness of the union once made: 'What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' Creation directs our attention away from romantic detection and toward covenant responsibility.

Marriage Is a Gift, Not a Guarantee

Proverbs 19:14 describes a prudent wife as being from the LORD. A faithful spouse may therefore be received with gratitude as divine gift. The proverb does not promise marriage to every believer or prescribe a method for identifying one person. Wisdom literature trains judgment. It invites us to value prudence rather than appearance, urgency or wealth.

First Corinthians 7 honors marriage and singleness. Paul can call singleness a gift while also recognizing lawful desire for marriage. The church must not speak as though adulthood is incomplete until a wedding occurs. Christ, not marital status, establishes the believer's identity and place in God's family.

3. Exceptional Guidance Is Not a Universal Formula

Isaac and Rebekah

Genesis 24 contains unmistakable providence. Abraham's servant travels under clear instruction, prays at the well and encounters Rebekah, whose generosity answers the requested sign. The servant worships because the LORD has led him in the way. This is strong Biblical evidence that God may direct a particular marriage.

The same chapter refuses to erase ordinary evidence and human action. Rebekah's character appears in the work of drawing water. Her family hears the account. The servant discloses his purpose. Most importantly, Rebekah is asked, 'Wilt thou go with this man?' She answers, 'I will go.' Providence and consent stand together.

The narrative therefore supports gratitude without authorizing arbitrary signs. A believer should not isolate the miraculous-looking detail while ignoring boundaries, character, truth, family, freedom and willingness.

Hosea and Other Exceptional Cases

Hosea received an explicit prophetic command concerning marriage. His household became a sign of Israel's unfaithfulness and God's pursuing covenant love. That calling was extraordinary and costly. It does not function as ordinary dating advice or permit believers to imitate a prophetic sign without a prophetic commission.

Exceptional narratives demonstrate what God may do. They do not automatically reveal what every Christian should expect. A doctrine must account for the ordinary instructions given to the whole church, not only unusual assignments given to particular people.

A Brief Historical Witness from Tobit

The noncanonical book of Tobit connects Raphael's guidance with the marriage of Tobias and Sarah. It shows that ancient Jewish readers also told marriage stories in which providence, family responsibility, prayer and heavenly aid converged. Because Tobit was treated more fully in Part Two, it serves only as historical background here.

No doctrine in this study depends upon Tobit. Canonical Scripture supplies the governing teaching about creation, liberty, consent and covenant. Historical witnesses may illuminate how a question has been discussed. They do not outrank the Word of God.

4. Ruth and Boaz: What Providence Did Not Replace

A New Use of a Familiar Story

Part One considered Ruth 2:3, where Ruth's 'hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz.' That wording allowed us to ask whether an apparently ordinary arrival could belong to providence. Part Four returns to the narrative for a different purpose. What did providence not replace?

Ruth worked. Boaz asked about her and heard testimony concerning her loyalty. He observed her conduct and protected her. Naomi offered counsel. Ruth acted with expressed willingness. Boaz honored the nearer redeemer's legal right rather than seizing the desired outcome. The elders and community witnessed the public transaction. God later gave conception.

Providence did not replace labor, reputation, generosity, legal integrity, counsel or public accountability. It worked through them. That is a more durable model for discernment than treating an intense feeling as a complete answer.

Do Not Copy the Culture Uncritically

Ruth lived within an ancient kinship and redemption system. The threshing-floor scene and the role of the nearer redeemer are not a modern dating script. Responsible interpretation asks what theological and moral principles the narrative commends without pretending that every social form should be reproduced.

The transferable features are God's hidden kindness, visible character, honorable initiative, willingness, community knowledge and lawful process. Ruth and Boaz teach neither passive fatalism nor romantic self-invention. Their story joins providence with faithful action.

5. Liberty and Lord: The Controlling Text

Real Freedom

First Corinthians 7:39 concerns a widow who may marry again. Paul says that she is 'at liberty to be married to whom she will.' The language recognizes genuine human agency. She is not instructed to locate a single hidden name or fear that one mistaken choice will place her forever outside the will of God.

Freedom does not make every available relationship equally wise. A lawful choice may still be immature, hurried or poorly informed. Yet Paul's language is difficult to reconcile with a universal doctrine that only one person on earth can ever be chosen without violating God's secret plan.

Only in the Lord

The boundary is equally real: 'only in the Lord.' Marriage joins worship, bodies, households, finances, loyalties and futures. A Christian should not knowingly build that union in opposition to Christ. Second Corinthians 6:14 addresses unequal partnership with unbelief in a broader context, but its principle bears obvious relevance to the most intimate lifelong yoke.

A verbal label alone does not settle the question. Jesus warns that words of profession may exist without obedient relationship. The issue is not perfection. It is credible allegiance to Christ, repentance when wrong and a shared direction of discipleship.

Existing mixed marriages require different counsel. First Corinthians 7:12-16 tells a believer not to abandon an unbelieving spouse who is willing to remain. A warning about entering a union should not be misused to dissolve a covenant that already exists.

The Answer in One View

Question	Biblical answer	Pastoral safeguard
Does God govern whom we meet?	Yes. His providence extends to ordinary events and remarkable openings.	A meeting is an opportunity, not a marriage covenant.
Does every believer have one hidden spouse?	Scripture does not establish that universal promise.	Do not turn uncertainty into fear that one mistake ruins God's plan.
May God direct a particular marriage?	Yes. Scripture records both exceptional appointment and ordinary providence.	Personal conviction must remain beneath Scripture and cannot bind another person.
Do believers truly choose?	Yes. First Corinthians 7:39 says a believer is at liberty to marry 'whom she will,' only in the Lord.	Freedom remains bounded by allegiance to Christ, wisdom and holiness.
What makes a spouse covenantally the one?	Free consent followed by lawful, Biblical vows establishes the covenant.	Signs, chemistry and circumstances cannot substitute for consent or vows.

6. Character Is Evidence, Not Decoration

Observe the Person Who Exists

Attraction can begin a relationship, but it cannot carry the full weight of marriage. Proverbs praises prudence, diligence, generosity, truth and fear of the LORD. Jesus teaches that a tree is known by its fruit. James contrasts selfish ambition with wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, merciful and sincere.

Courtship should therefore examine ordinary conduct. How does the person speak when disappointed? How are employees, family members and strangers treated? What happens when correction is offered? Is money discussed truthfully? Are promises kept? Does the relationship make honesty easier or require growing secrecy?

Do not marry a future version of someone who has never existed. Hope for growth is Christian. Pretending that repeated present patterns do not matter is not faith. Character does not need to be flawless, but repentance, teachability and fruit should be observable.

Compatibility Is More Than Similarity

Two people need not have identical personalities, cultures or interests. Danielin and I came from very different countries and experiences. The necessary work was not to erase difference, but to ask whether those differences could be handled with truth, humility and a shared commitment to Christ.

Discussions about children, church, finances, debt, work, family obligations, culture, location and expectations belong before vows. These conversations are not unromantic. They honor the person by refusing to build a future upon assumptions neither person has examined.

A Courtship Discernment Grid

Area	Questions to ask	Danger sign
Faith	Can we follow Christ together? Is the profession credible in ordinary life?	A Christian label is used while discipleship is absent or opposed.
Character	How are truth, work, anger, money, mercy and correction handled?	The relationship depends on a future version of the person.
Consent	Can either person say no without spiritual, financial or social punishment?	One person's certainty is presented as God's command to the other.
Counsel	Do mature believers know the facts and have freedom to disagree?	Only agreeable or dependent advisers are invited.
Practical life	Have children, church, culture, debt, work and family duties been discussed?	Major differences are hidden beneath chemistry or urgency.
Safety	Can disagreement preserve truth, dignity, boundaries and freedom from fear?	Threats, surveillance, humiliation, coercion or violence control the relationship.

7. Consent Is Theological, Not Merely Procedural

Two Answers Are Required

Rebekah was asked whether she would go. Ruth acted with willingness. First Corinthians 7 describes reciprocal marital obligations rather than unilateral possession. Historic Christian confessions later stated that those able to give rational consent may marry. Consent is not a modern accessory attached to Biblical marriage. It expresses the moral agency of persons made in the image of God.

One person's conviction cannot supply both answers. A proposal must remain a real question. The other person must be free to decline without being told that refusal is disobedience to God. A yes produced by fear, financial dependence, social humiliation or spiritual threat is not the kind of willing covenant the church should celebrate.

Power Must Be Examined

Differences in age, wealth, citizenship, ministry authority or social status may increase the need for safeguards. They do not automatically make a relationship wrong. They do require special care that generosity is not purchasing influence and spiritual authority is not making disagreement unsafe.

When I returned to Cebu, I remained connected with Danielin's sister, friends, church workers and Pastors. The community had opportunity to observe me. Danielin continued teaching and serving. Our time together was fitted around her actual responsibilities. Those ordinary settings helped keep the relationship from becoming a private story controlled by the visiting American.

Safety Is Not Opposition to Covenant

No teaching about submission or covenant should be used to conceal abuse or require someone to remain in immediate danger. Threats, violence, coercive control and sexual violation should be brought into the light. A person in danger should seek safety and obtain qualified pastoral, legal and professional help.

At the same time, ordinary disappointment is not proof that the wrong soulmate was chosen. Every marriage joins imperfect people. Covenant faithfulness includes repentance, forgiveness, truth, boundaries and help when a couple cannot resolve a serious matter alone. Wisdom distinguishes hardship that calls for growth from danger that calls for protection.

8. Open Doors Remove Obstacles, Not Freedom

The House Sale

Before returning to the Philippines, I listed my home at a price high enough that I did not expect an immediate sale. If marriage became certain, I wanted Danielin and me to begin in a home belonging to our shared future rather than only to my past. While we were together in Cebu, my broker reported that the next-door neighbor had offered the full asking price in cash and wanted the furniture.

I believe the sale was providential. It removed a practical obstacle I did not know how to solve. Yet a property transaction could not determine Danielin's will. The open door created opportunity. It did not create a covenant.

Opportunity Still Requires Wisdom

An open door is a circumstance. It may deserve gratitude and careful attention, but it does not interpret itself. Paul sometimes recognized an open door for ministry while also encountering opposition. A favorable opportunity may be used well or poorly. A closed path may mean delay, redirection or simply difficulty.

The series has therefore resisted both cynicism and certainty inflation. We need not deny providence to remain humble. We may say, 'I believe God opened this path,' while acknowledging that the next faithful step still requires Scripture, wisdom, honesty and consent.

9. From Courtship to Covenant

The Proposal

After daily calls, my return to Cebu and time with Danielin's community, I sought counsel from respected Pastors. Her sister helped me select a ring. Then I asked Danielin to marry me. She said yes. Her answer mattered more to the marriage decision than every circumstance I had previously interpreted.

Weeks of legal requirements followed. The wedding occurred publicly in the church with family, friends and the community that had watched the relationship develop. The ceremony did not celebrate a private riddle solved by one person. Two people made vows before God and witnesses.

When the Meaning of The One Changes

Before marriage, Scripture permits consideration and decision. Either person may conclude that the relationship should not proceed. After vows, the question changes. Malachi 2:14 calls the wife 'thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.' Matthew 19:6 teaches that the two are no longer twain but one flesh.

The spouse becomes covenantally the one, not because every earlier sign has been proved infallible, but because a real promise has been made. The culture keeps asking whether someone more perfectly matched might exist. Covenant directs faithfulness toward the husband or wife to whom the promise was given.

This does not make feelings irrelevant. Affection should be nourished. It does mean that marital love cannot be defined only by effortless emotion. Christian love practices patience, truth, sacrifice, confession and forgiveness in ordinary life.

10. Nearly Twenty Years: Fruit Without Outcome Bias

Gratitude Looking Back

As Danielin and I approach our twentieth wedding anniversary, I can gratefully confess that God directed our paths. I can remember repeated Scripture, a meeting in a squatter community, protective companions, an airline office, a sealed letter, a lost agreement, a sold house and many quieter moments of prayer and counsel.

I can also say that I chose Danielin, Danielin chose me and we made a covenant. Providence and responsible choice are not competing explanations. Scripture regularly attributes events to God's government while preserving the meaningful action and accountability of human beings.

What a Good Outcome Does Not Prove

A long marriage does not retroactively prove that every impression was interpreted perfectly. That would be outcome bias, judging the reasoning solely by the later result. Nor would hardship prove that the entire path was false. Faithfulness must be evaluated by Scripture and truth, not only by whether the story became comfortable.

The stronger testimony is that God's direction did not end at the wedding. Marriage has required continued formation, sacrifice, forgiveness and shared service. The remarkable beginning deserves gratitude. The ordinary faithfulness that follows gives the testimony its mature shape.

11. Marriage Is Not Salvation

The Dignity of Singleness

A study about finding a spouse can unintentionally suggest that everyone else is waiting for life to begin. First Corinthians 7 refuses that conclusion. Paul honors faithful singleness as a gift with distinctive freedom for devotion to the Lord. Jesus lived the complete human life without marriage.

Single, widowed and divorced believers are not supporting characters in the church. They belong fully to Christ and to His people. Marriage may be deeply desired without becoming the measure of worth, maturity or divine favor.

Christ Bears the Weight No Spouse Can Carry

No husband can be another person's savior. No wife can supply ultimate identity, forgiveness or eternal life. When a relationship must succeed for life to have meaning, love has been asked to carry the weight of worship.

Ephesians 5 does not present marriage as salvation. It presents Christ's saving love as the pattern that reforms marriage. Jesus gave Himself for the church. He died for sinners, was buried and rose again. We enter God's family through repentance and faith in Christ, not by recognizing the correct romantic sign.

This Gospel frees married people to love without demanding worship from each other. It frees unmarried people to live a complete Christian vocation. It also supplies grace when our discernment was imperfect and when faithful relationships require repentance and repair.

12. A Pastoral Answer for Different Listeners

For the Person Considering Marriage

Ask a better question than, 'How can I prove this person is the one?' Ask, 'Can we faithfully follow Christ together?' Pray for wisdom. Name what you want. Observe actual character. Discuss difficult realities. Invite counsel from people who may disagree. Allow time to reveal what urgency conceals.

Do not demand certainty God has not promised. A faithful decision may still involve risk because another human being is not a formula. Choose honestly within Biblical boundaries and remain humble about your interpretation.

For Parents, Pastors and Friends

Counsel is not control. Tell the truth, ask neglected questions and identify danger. Do not attempt to replace the adult's responsibility with your private revelation or preference. Good counsel strengthens responsible choice rather than making dependence permanent.

If a relationship includes coercion, abuse or serious deception, clarity is loving. If the concern is merely that the couple's path differs from your expectations, humility is also required.

For Married Believers

Stop comparing a real spouse with an imaginary person who has never disappointed you. Choose today's covenant faithfulness. Speak truth with love. Confess quickly. Forgive sincerely. Seek help before distance hardens into contempt. Pray and serve together.

God did not direct a path only to a ceremony. He calls husband and wife to walk faithfully after it. The question for today is less, 'Did I once identify the right person?' and more, 'How will I honor the covenant I have made?'

Pastoral Summary

1. God created marriage and remains sovereign over the paths by which people meet.
2. Scripture records particular marriages directed in unmistakable ways, but it does not promise one hidden spouse for every believer.
3. First Corinthians 7:39 joins real liberty with the boundary 'only in the Lord.'
4. Private impressions may guide the believer's own inquiry, but they cannot bind another person's conscience.
5. Providence may arrange opportunity while wisdom examines faith, character, truth and practical life.
6. Mutual consent is essential. One person's certainty cannot answer for both people.
7. Open doors may remove obstacles, but they do not create vows.
8. Before marriage, believers choose responsibly. After marriage, covenant directs faithfulness toward the spouse chosen.
9. Marriage does not excuse abuse or command anyone to remain in immediate danger.
10. Singleness is honorable and complete Christian identity is found in Christ.
11. A good outcome supports gratitude but does not make every earlier interpretation infallible.
12. God's direction continues through the ordinary work of forming a faithful marriage.

Marriage Discernment Worksheet

1. State the decision plainly. Are we discerning whether to begin dating, continue dating, become engaged or marry?
2. Write what you most want and what you most fear. What answer would be hardest to receive?
3. Identify the controlling Biblical boundaries. Are both people credibly in the Lord? Is any known sin being excused?
4. List observable character evidence. Include truthfulness, work, money, anger, mercy, sexuality, responsibility and response to correction.
5. Name the major practical matters already discussed: children, church, location, family, culture, finances, debt, work and health.
6. Test consent. Can either person say no or slow down without punishment, spiritual accusation or financial pressure?
7. Identify power differences. What safeguards are needed because of age, wealth, citizenship, office or dependence?
8. Seek independent counsel. Who knows the full facts, understands Scripture and has permission to disagree?
9. Separate providence from interpretation. What happened? What meaning are you assigning to it? What other explanations remain possible?
10. Reject manufactured urgency. Which deadlines are real and which arise from fear of losing the relationship?
11. Ask what evidence would cause you to pause or stop. Have you made the preferred conclusion impossible to challenge?
12. Pray for wisdom and surrender. Can you remain faithful to Christ if the answer is no?
13. If moving forward, decide the next responsible step rather than demanding complete knowledge of the future.
14. If danger, coercion or abuse exists, seek safety and qualified help before continuing ordinary discernment.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What assumptions about 'the one' have shaped the way you think about marriage?
2. How does First Corinthians 7:39 hold liberty and lordship together?
3. What does Genesis 24 preserve alongside remarkable providence?
4. Why should Adam and Eve or Hosea not become a universal courtship formula?
5. In Ruth's story, what ordinary responsibilities did providence not replace?
6. When may a personal conviction appropriately guide your action, and when does it become pressure upon someone else?

7. Which aspects of character are easiest to overlook when attraction is strong?
8. What practical topics should be discussed before engagement?
9. How can parents, Pastors and friends offer meaningful counsel without controlling the decision?
10. What is the difference between a difficult marriage and an unsafe situation?
11. Why do wedding vows change the meaning of 'the one'?
12. How can a married person choose covenant faithfulness today?
13. How does the church unintentionally make single believers feel incomplete?
14. What have the four parts of He Shall Direct Thy Paths taught you about interpreting your own story?

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for creating marriage and for directing our paths with wisdom greater than our own. Thank You also for the dignity of singleness and for the complete life every believer receives in Jesus Christ.

Give wisdom to those considering marriage. Help them examine faith, character, truth and practical responsibilities. Protect them from fantasy, manipulation and fear. Give each person freedom to answer honestly and courage to receive an answer that may not be the one desired.

Strengthen husbands and wives in the covenants they have made. Teach them patience, confession, forgiveness and sacrificial love. Bring hidden sin into the light. Provide protection and wise help where there is danger. Remind every home that no spouse can take the place of Christ.

Thank You for the path that brought Danielin and me together and for nearly twenty years of marriage. Help my wife and me continue walking faithfully. Let every testimony we tell point beyond ourselves to Your providence, Your Word and Your grace.

We place our choices, relationships and futures into Your hands. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Biblical References

1. Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-24; 24
2. Ruth 1-4
3. Hosea 1-3
4. Proverbs 19:14; 31:10-31
5. Malachi 2:14-16
6. Matthew 7:16-23; 19:4-9
7. John 13:34-35
8. Romans 8:28; 10:9-13
9. 1 Corinthians 7; 13
10. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
11. Ephesians 5:21-33
12. Philippians 2:3-5
13. Colossians 3:12-19
14. James 1:5; 3:13-18
15. 1 Peter 3:1-7
16. Hebrews 13:4

Selected Sources and Further Reading

1. The Holy Bible, King James Version. Canonical authority for public quotation and doctrine.
2. Hawksley, Thomas W. 'From Boardroom to Mission Field.' Ministry Magazine, 2016. Narrative source for the Cebu journey and marriage testimony.
3. Tobit 6-8. Historical and noncanonical witness concerning Raphael, Tobias, Sarah, family responsibility and marital prayer. Used only as background.
4. Augustine. The Good of Marriage. A historic Christian treatment of marriage's goods and moral seriousness.
5. John Calvin. Commentaries on Genesis and First Corinthians. A Reformation witness concerning providence, marriage and Christian liberty.
6. The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689, chapter 25, 'Of Marriage.' A subordinate confessional summary of consent and marriage boundaries.
7. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 24, 'Of Marriage and Divorce.' A historic confessional witness, subordinate to Scripture.
8. American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology. Entries concerning confirmation bias and motivated reasoning, useful for describing interpretive tendencies but not for establishing doctrine.
9. National Domestic Violence Hotline, www.thehotline.org. Practical safety resource for people experiencing abuse or coercive control in the United States. In immediate danger, contact emergency services.