

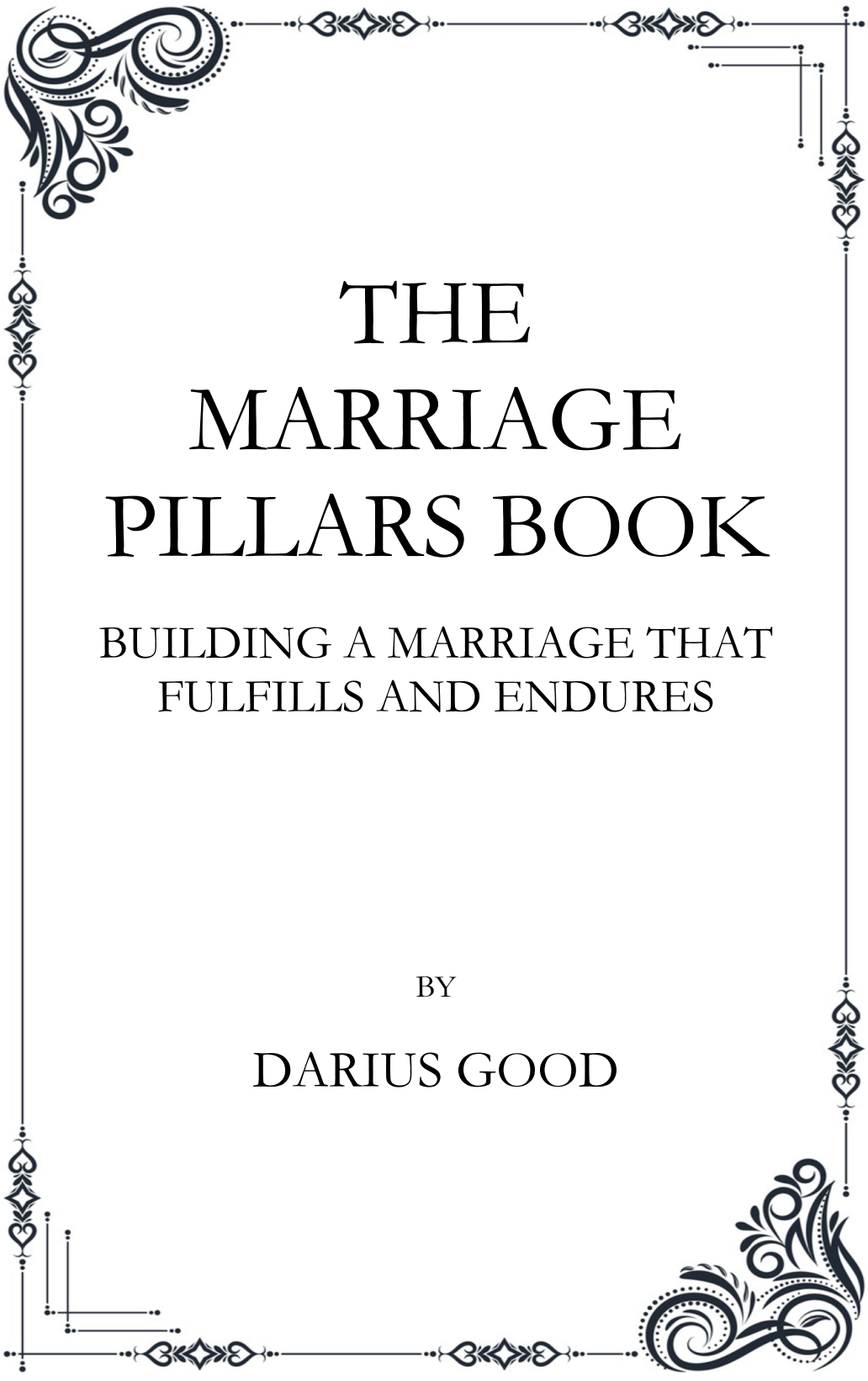
# THE MARRIAGE PILLARS

BUILDING A MARRIAGE THAT FULFILLS AND ENDURES

“For engaged and married couples:  
**30 pillars** that create a lasting,  
peaceful, and fulfilling marriage.”



# DARIUS GOOD



THE  
MARRIAGE  
PILLARS BOOK

BUILDING A MARRIAGE THAT  
FULFILLS AND ENDURES

BY

DARIUS GOOD

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## DEDICATION

To John and Gwendolyn Good

Thank you for the example you set.

For showing me what a healthy, godly marriage looks like.

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# INTRODUCTION: DON'T BE "INTERNATIONAL," BE INTENTIONAL



I recently watched a YouTube video of a rapper explaining why he prefers dating women outside the music industry. His reasoning was simple: he loves being able to introduce them to new experiences, yachts, expensive restaurants, designer stores, and luxury vacations, things they had only dreamed about. At the center of his dating philosophy was one idea: creating memorable moments.

This made me recall a debate that went viral online: Is taking a woman to the Cheesecake Factory a bad date? Opinions exploded in every direction. Some mocked the choice. Others defended its simplicity. But beneath the arguments about money, atmosphere, and effort lay a deeper cultural assumption, that romantic relationships are built on shared experiences: travel, fine dining, gifts, and highlight-reel moments.

None of those things are wrong.

But they have been wildly overvalued.

Experiences make great highlights, yet they are not infrastructure. A relationship is not built on the places you've been together. It is built on what holds you together when life is no longer fun or exciting.

Because every relationship eventually faces pressure:

- Miscommunication
- Financial strain
- Emotional distance
- Temptation
- Disappointment
- Change

When pressure hits, you quickly discover what your relationship is really made of. Some collapse. Others remain steady. The difference isn't how much love they felt, how much time they spent, or how many memories they created. The difference is **structure**.

This book is about building that structure with intention.

Too many people drift into relationships chasing feelings and experiences instead of deliberately designing something that can last. They wing it, and when the feelings fade or the highlights stop, so does the relationship.

Look at how couples prepare for marriage. They pour months (sometimes years) into planning the wedding: researching vendors, tasting cakes, choosing flowers, and perfecting every detail so one day is flawless. Yet when you ask how much time they've invested in preparing for the *marriage* itself, the difference is staggering.

People obsess over the moment.

They neglect the structure that must sustain a lifetime after the moment has passed.

No lasting building, business, or creation has ever stood the test of time without a blueprint and quality materials. Relationships are no different. If you want something that lasts, you don't wing it. You plan it. You build it intentionally.

The rapper in that video has been in countless relationships with beautiful women, but none have lasted. Many played out publicly as chaotic and toxic. So just as he brags about taking women on international trips, building a relationship shouldn't be centered on the "international." It should be centered on being intentional.

You don't create a strong relationship by chasing experiences.

You create it by becoming the kind of person who can build real structure, starting with yourself.

That's why the first requirement is integrity.

Before there is a "we," there is a "you."

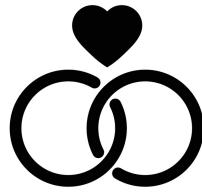


# **SECTION 1**

## **PERSONAL FOUNDATION**

*(Who You Are Individually – The Non-Negotiable Base)*





## CHAPTER ONE

# PROTECTION - GUARDING THE RELATIONSHIP

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**T**he very first marriage in history gives us a powerful picture of what protection looks like. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God and placed in a perfect garden with no sin, no fear, no shame, no insecurity, and no jealousy. The Bible tells us they were “naked and unashamed.” They lived in complete openness and vulnerability, nothing to hide, no need to cover themselves, no impulse to judge or change the other. This is the ideal of marriage: two people who feel totally free to be themselves in the presence of the other.

Yet even in this flawless environment, God gave Adam a clear command: **“Guard the garden.”** Most people focus on the forbidden fruit and the fall, but they miss this vital instruction. Adam was not only told to tend the garden, but he was also told to *protect* it. If he had faithfully guarded the space God entrusted to him, Eve would never have been left vulnerable to the serpent’s temptation. The lesson is timeless: protection is not secondary to marriage. It is foundational.

Guarding the garden was never just about a physical location. For husbands and wives today, it means protecting the *relationship itself*. Many men focus primarily on providing and physically protecting the home yet overlook the more important duty of guarding the marriage from emotional, spiritual, and

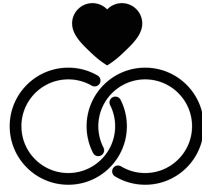
relational threats. This responsibility does not fall on the man alone. Scripture makes it clear that both husband and wife are called to this role. As the Lord declares in Jeremiah, “I, the LORD, promise to bring about something new on the earth, something as unique as a woman protecting a man!”

When you enter marriage, you must intentionally guard it from three directions:

- **From outside forces** — meddling parents or siblings, toxic friendships, work stress, church or organizational pressures, and cultural messages that normalize discontent or comparison.
- **From harming your spouse** — learning what triggers their anxiety, depression, or insecurity and choosing to become their safest place rather than an additional burden.
- **From yourself** — guarding your eyes, ears, and heart against intrusive thoughts, harmful media (social media, toxic podcasts, emotionally charged entertainment), secret habits, or friendships that quietly plant seeds of resentment or fantasy.

Before any great structure can stand, it must first be protected. The strongest marriages are not built on romance alone; they are fiercely guarded by two people who understand that even the most beautiful love is vulnerable to both obvious attacks and subtle erosion.

Protection begins with a deliberate mindset: your marriage is sacred ground, and you are its primary guardian. A man or woman who refuses to protect what they claim to cherish will eventually lose it. But the one who stands watch — calmly, consistently, and courageously, creates the secure foundation upon which trust, intimacy, and lasting love can flourish.



## CHAPTER TWO

# INTEGRITY - CHARACTER BEFORE CHEMISTRY

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**I**ntegrity is the foundation of every healthy relationship, because before two people can build something lasting together, each person must first be whole within themselves.

At its core, integrity means your private self matches your public self. Your words align with your actions. Your values remain consistent, not situational. You are the same person whether life is easy or difficult, whether anyone is watching or not. It is the quality of being undivided, honest, reliable, and whole.

When someone lacks integrity, they bring inconsistency and internal division into the relationship. Patterns become unpredictable. One day, they show up as a thoughtful partner; the next, they're distant or contradictory. Over time, this creates doubt, anxiety, and emotional chaos. Trust cannot fully form in unstable ground.

Integrity is not just about “not lying.” It is about being whole.

It shows up as:

- What you say matches what you do

- Who you present to the world matches who you are behind closed doors
- Your values don't change based on convenience or pressure

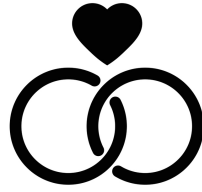
A person without integrity injects confusion into the relationship. Once doubt takes root, trust becomes fragile and hard to rebuild.

Integrity removes that uncertainty. It creates predictability, not in personality or mood, but in character. You know how this person will respond when life gets hard, not just when everything is smooth. That stability of character becomes the solid ground a relationship can stand on.

You can have intense chemistry and compatibility without integrity. You can have strong attraction, shared time, financial, and deep emotional investment, all without integrity.

But you cannot build a stable, thriving relationship without it. Eventually, the cracks will show, and everything built on top of that shaky foundation will weaken or collapse.

Integrity is not something you add later, once the relationship is underway. It is the foundation you build from, starting with yourself.



## CHAPTER THREE

# EMOTIONAL REGULATION - STEADY UNDER PRESSURE

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**B**efore any relationship fails between two people, an emotional breakdown usually happens inside one person first. This has little to do with love or attraction. It stems from the inability to manage emotions when pressure hits.

Emotional regulation is the ability to stay steady when you feel triggered, frustrated, disappointed, or misunderstood. It is the discipline of not letting your emotions hijack your decisions, words, or behavior.

Emotions are real, but they are not always reliable. Many people confidently describe how they would respond in difficult situations, seeing themselves as strong, unbending, or “alpha.” Yet when the perfect storm arrives, they often react in ways they never imagined.

### **Pressure Reveals Character**

Pressure is inevitable in every relationship. Misunderstandings will happen. Expectations will go unmet. Stress from work, family, or life will spill over.

In those moments, what’s already inside a person comes out:

- Some become louder and more aggressive.
- Some shut down completely.
- Some lash out impulsively.
- Some say things they can never take back.

The problem is rarely the trigger itself. The fracture happens because of how it is handled.

### **Reaction vs. Response**

There is a critical difference between reacting and responding.

A **reaction** is immediate, emotional, and unfiltered — driven purely by the heat of the moment.

A **response** is thoughtful, controlled, and intentional — guided by maturity and values.

Reactions create damage faster than the original problem ever could. You can recover from a simple disagreement. It is far harder to repair cruel words, insults, or silent treatment delivered in the heat of anger. A calm “I misunderstood what you were saying” can heal quickly. “You’re too sensitive” or “I hate you” in the moment often leaves lasting scars.

### **Emotional Immaturity Creates Instability**

A person who cannot regulate their emotions makes the entire relationship unstable, not because they are a bad person, but because they are unpredictable. Unpredictability breeds anxiety. Partners start walking on eggshells. Conversations become guarded. Honesty gets filtered. Connection slowly erodes.

No one can build lasting security on emotional chaos.

### **Regulation Is Not Suppression**

Emotional regulation does not mean you stop feeling or stop voicing your feelings. It means you refuse to be controlled by what you feel.

There is a difference between:

- Feeling anger and expressing it destructively
- Feeling hurt and communicating it with clarity instead of attack

- Feeling disappointment and sharing it without blame or contempt

Maturity is not the absence of emotion. Maturity is having control over your emotions.

### **The Strong Partner Is Not the Loudest, But the Steadiest**

Real strength in a relationship is often misunderstood. It is not who wins the argument, speaks the loudest, or delivers the sharpest comeback.

Strength is the ability to remain grounded when everything inside you wants to explode. It is weighing the consequences before speaking. It is choosing peace and connection over pride and being “right.”

Strength understands that escalation does not resolve conflict, it only multiplies it.

If you cannot manage yourself under pressure, you cannot sustain a healthy relationship under pressure. There will be seasons when your partner is overwhelmed and barely holding it together. In those moments, both of you cannot fall apart at once. One person must have the capacity to stay steady and offer support.

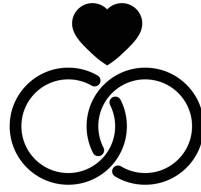
Internal reactions have destroyed far more relationships than external problems ever have. What determines longevity is not whether pressure appears, but whether you can remain steady when it does.

My parents often told me: “Think before you speak.” They weren’t just teaching me to pick polite words. They were teaching me to measure the consequences of what I was about to say.

Before speaking in the heat of the moment, ask yourself:

- Will I still feel this way tomorrow?
- Will these words hurt the person I love?
- Is this truly how I feel, or is it just the emotion talking?
- Is there a better way to express what’s inside me?

Emotional regulation is what keeps relationships from fracturing. Before a relationship can become strong between two people, each person must first learn how to remain steady within themselves.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# ACCOUNTABILITY - OWNERSHIP OVER EXCUSES, EXCUSES VS EXPLANATIONS

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**E**very strong relationship eventually faces an unavoidable truth: people will make mistakes.

Not occasionally — consistently.

No matter how good the intentions, how careful the words, or how deep the love, relationships are made of two imperfect people living in an imperfect world. What determines the health of a relationship is not whether mistakes happen.

It is what happens after the mistake.

### **Ownership vs. Excuses**

Accountability begins with ownership.

Ownership says: “I did it. This is my part.”

Excuses say: “Here’s why it’s not really my fault.”

Ownership takes full responsibility without shifting blame or deflecting. It creates space for correction, learning, and growth. It clarifies the issue so it can actually be addressed. It rebuilds trust and stability.

Excuses, on the other hand, redirect focus from the problem to defending behavior. Instead of progress, they produce delay, defensiveness, and eroded trust. Over time, repeated excuses don't just stall the relationship — they send it backward.

### **The Difference Between Excuses and Explanation**

There is an important difference between an excuse and an explanation, even though they can sound similar.

An **excuse** is designed to remove or minimize responsibility. It shifts blame, softens fault, or protects the ego.

An **explanation** provides honest context while still owning the responsibility.

An excuse says, “This is why it’s not really my fault.”

An explanation says, “This is what happened, and I still take responsibility for my part.”

Healthy relationships need explanations, and context helps partners understand emotions and decisions. But explanation must never replace ownership. When it does, the conversation stops being about resolution and becomes about who is right. Growth stalls. Tension builds.

A mature relationship can hold both: “Here is the context — and I am still responsible for how things turned out.”

### **Why Accountability Is Rare**

Accountability is difficult because it requires the death of ego. It forces the uncomfortable admission: “I was wrong.”

Many people would rather defend, justify, or deflect than face that sentence. But avoidance does not erase damage, it only delays healing.

## **Correction Is the Proof of Accountability**

Real accountability is more than admission. Anyone can say “I’m sorry” to escape an uncomfortable moment. Few are willing to change their behavior afterward.

Correction, consistent change in action, is what rebuilds trust over time. Words alone fade. New patterns restore confidence.

When someone consistently owns their mistakes and then changes, they send a powerful message:

“I care more about this relationship than protecting my pride.”

## **Deflection Culture**

When accountability is missing, the relationship shifts from connection to self-protection.

Every conversation becomes a debate.

Every issue becomes blame.

Every disagreement becomes survival.

This pattern is ancient. In the book of Genesis, when God confronted Adam after eating the fruit God told Adam not to eat, he immediately deflected: “The woman you gave me, she gave me the fruit.” He blamed both Eve and God rather than owning his choice. Deflection is human nature, but when it replaces accountability, it blocks the growth every relationship needs to survive.

## **Healthy Relationships Require Repair, Not Perfection**

A strong relationship is not one where nothing ever breaks. It is one where both people know things will break and are committed to repairing them.

Repair requires:

- Honesty about what happened
- Ownership of your part
- Willingness to change behavior
- Patience through the process

Without repair, damage becomes permanent.  
With repair, even broken places can become stronger.

Just as a house eventually needs tightening, fixing, or replacing parts, relationships require ongoing maintenance. A simple repair is often enough; a full remodel is not always necessary.

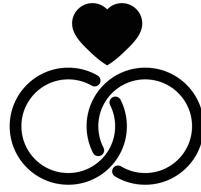
I've seen couples take ownership yet still refuse to make the actual changes. Without the follow-through of repair, accountability remains incomplete.

Accountability is not about shame — it is about stewardship.

It is the willingness to say, “I will handle my part correctly so this relationship can stay healthy.”

Love may bring two people together, but accountability keeps the relationship healthy and growing. Refusal to take accountability is one of the clearest signs of an unhealthy or toxic dynamic.

At the end of the day, the strength of a relationship is measured not only by how deeply two people love each other, but by how responsibly each person handles their own actions.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# RESILIENCE - THE ART OF ENDURING WITHOUT BREAKING

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**E**very meaningful relationship will be tested. Not once, but many times over.

A healthy relationship should not live in constant stress, pressure, and anxiety. When it does, something fundamental is missing. Yet even the strongest partnerships move through seasons: some smooth and joyful, others uncertain, strained, or draining. In those harder seasons, love alone is rarely enough. What determines whether the relationship survives is **resilience**, the ability to endure hardship without collapsing. It is the strength to stay committed, stable, and present even when circumstances turn difficult. Because difficulty is not the exception in relationships, it is an unavoidable part of the journey.

### **Pressure Is Inevitable**

At some point, every couple faces pressure from multiple directions at once:

- Financial strain
- Emotional exhaustion
- External stress from family, work, or major life transitions
- Internal conflicts with each other or with children

- Unmet expectations
- Unexpected health challenges

When these pressures converge, they test more than feelings; they test the very stability of the bond.

Consider the palm tree, common in places like Florida that endure yearly storms and hurricane-force winds. Unlike rigid oaks that often snap or uproot, palm trees bend dramatically, sometimes 40 to 50 degrees, without breaking. Their trunks are not stiff wood but a flexible, fibrous structure, almost like bundles of wire. They don't fight the wind; they move with it, then return upright once the storm passes. Palm trees survive because they are built for resilience.

Some relationships are like stiff trees: beautiful and strong when skies are clear, but easily uprooted by the first real gale. Others bend under pressure but refuse to break. The difference is resilience.

### **Fragility vs. Strength**

A fragile relationship thrives only under ideal conditions: easy communication, stable emotions, and favorable circumstances. When those conditions shift, closeness erodes. Conversations turn tense or silent. Intimacy fades. The smallest disruption feels like a threat.

A resilient relationship is built with a different understanding: things *will* go wrong.

Challenges are expected, not shocking. Both people know they have the capacity to adjust, endure, and keep choosing each other even when it's hard.

### **Endurance Requires Stability**

Resilience is not denial or pretending everything is fine. It is staying grounded while facing reality head-on.

It looks like this:

- You don't abandon the relationship the moment it becomes uncomfortable.
- You don't shut down or withdraw when emotions run high.
- You refuse to let temporary hardship create permanent damage.

Many relationships don't end because of one dramatic failure. They erode from "a lot of little things." Such as unaddressed resentments, avoided conversations, small hurts that accumulate like unnoticed cracks in a foundation. Sweeping problems under the rug isn't maintenance. It's avoidance. Over time, enough ignored cracks will bring the whole house down.

### **Two People Cannot Collapse at the Same Time**

In the middle of a storm, we often imagine both partners standing strong side-by-side, giving their all. Reality is usually messier. Storms rarely hit both people with equal force at the same moment.

One partner may be carrying emotional, mental, or even spiritual exhaustion while the other still has strength left. In those seasons, the relationship's survival depends on whether the steadier partner can remain stable—offering support without resentment, holding space without collapsing themselves.

This doesn't mean one person becomes the permanent caretaker. Roles shift over time. Today, you may be the one bending but not breaking so your partner can regain footing.

Tomorrow, the positions may reverse. What matters is the quiet agreement: we will not both fold at once. There must always be enough combined strength to keep the relationship upright until balance returns.

When both lack resilience, there is simply nothing left to stand on when pressure rises.

### **Resilience Is Built, Not Assumed**

Resilience is not an automatic trait you either have or don't. It is developed through repeated, intentional choices.

It grows when you:

- Face difficult conversations instead of avoiding them.
- Learn from past storms rather than repeating the same patterns.
- Strengthen your own emotional regulation—through exercise, reflection, therapy, spiritual practice, or whatever helps you stay steady.
- Build a broader support system—trusted friends, mentors, or professionals—so you're not carrying everything alone.

- Practice small daily habits together: gratitude, laughter, shared movement, or brief check-ins that keep connection alive even in hard seasons.

Above all, resilience is built through **commitment**, the daily decision to stay engaged rather than checking out when things get heavy.

Real couples prove this every day. Some have walked through job loss, serious illness, or the grief of losing a child and emerged closer because they turned toward each other instead of away. They treated the problem as the enemy, not their partner. They learned to repair quickly, express appreciation even when frustrated, and protect rituals of connection when life tried to pull them apart.

A relationship that cannot endure pressure will not last. Life will never remain easy, fair, or predictable forever.

What sustains a partnership is not the absence of hardship, but the presence of resilience within it. Strong relationships are not those that somehow avoid every storm. They are the ones who learn how to stand in the wind, bending, adjusting, supporting one another, without collapsing.

When the hurricane passes, the palm tree stands tall again, often even stronger and more deeply rooted than before.

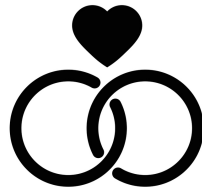


## **SECTION 2**

# **RELATIONAL CORE**

*(How You Treat Each Other – The Heart of Daily Interaction)*





## CHAPTER SIX

# RESPECT - THE FOUNDATION THAT KEEPS LOVE ALIVE

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**R**espect is the respiratory system of a relationship. Without it, everything stops functioning: communication, trust, intimacy, and even love itself. You can have history, attraction, shared goals, and moments of happiness, but if respect is missing, the relationship will slowly suffocate and die.

Respect is far more than politeness or saying “please” and “thank you.” At its core, respect is how you see the other person. It is the decision not to dismiss them, but to truly acknowledge them.

When respect is present, people feel seen, heard, and safe. When it is absent, they feel tolerated at best and devalued or insulted at worst.

### **Respect Begins with Recognition**

At its heart, respect is recognition. It is the active choice to give someone the regard they deserve simply because they are a person of value.

It quietly communicates:

- “You matter.”
- “Your thoughts are important.”
- “Your feelings are not disposable.”

- “Your role in my life is significant.”

Many relationships struggle not because love has faded, but because respect has been lost. One or both partners stop truly seeing each other. Familiarity breeds invisibility; they are physically present, yet emotionally unseen. Once someone feels unheard and devalued, they begin to withdraw, even if they remain in the same room.

## **The Difference Between Love and Respect**

Love and respect are often treated as if they are the same, but they function differently.

Love is what you feel.

Respect is how you treat what you feel.

You can love someone and still speak to them harshly. You can love someone and still dismiss their perspective or devalue their significance. But when respect is present, it governs your behavior, even in moments of frustration or anger.

Respect forces you to pause before you speak. It calls you to consider before you react. It reminds you: this is someone of value.

## **Respect in Communication**

One of the clearest signs of respect is healthy communication.

In strong relationships:

- People listen without interrupting.
- They refuse to weaponize words.
- They do not mock, belittle, or dismiss.
- They keep disagreements from becoming character attacks.

In struggling relationships, communication turns into a battlefield: conversations become competitions, listening becomes waiting to respond, and words are used to win rather than to understand.

Respect changes the entire goal of communication. Instead of asking, “How do I win this argument?” respect asks, “How do I preserve this person while we work through this issue?” That single shift changes everything.

## **Respect and Roles**

Every relationship has roles: spoken or unspoken. These roles are not about control; they are about responsibility, contribution, and mutual function. Two can lift more together than one. The load of life should be easier because each person is contributing and responsible for their role.

Respect acknowledges and honors those roles. When roles are respected, there is appreciation for what each person carries, less competition and more cooperation, and clarity instead of confusion.

When roles are disrespected, people feel overburdened or undervalued, responsibilities breed resentment, and power struggles emerge.

Respect says, “I see what you bring to this relationship, and I honor it.” It refuses to minimize effort or take contribution for granted. It simply values it.

## **The Erosion of Respect**

Respect is rarely lost in a single moment. It erodes gradually through small, seemingly harmless acts: sarcasm that cuts too deep, joking meant to wound, dismissive responses, ignored concerns, brushed-off requests, or constantly talking over one another.

Over time, these behaviors compound. Patience turns into irritation. Appreciation hardens into expectation. What once felt like honor slowly becomes entitlement.

Eventually, the relationship shifts from mutual valuing to mutual tolerating. And when contempt enters, when one person begins to look down on the other with superiority or disdain, respect is no longer merely weakened. It has been replaced.

## **The Danger of Contempt**

Contempt is one of the most insidious and destructive forces in any relationship. It marks the point where respect has been overtaken by a sense of superiority, disdain, and moral judgment. Rather than “I disagree with what you did,” contempt declares, “There is something fundamentally wrong with *you*.”

Unlike anger or frustration—which can still coexist with care and a desire to repair—contempt conveys disgust and hierarchy: “You are beneath me.” It attacks the partner’s sense of self, dignity, and worth.

Once contempt takes root, it creates a toxic cycle:

- It destroys emotional safety and connection
- It escalates conflict into character assassination
- It breeds resentment, loneliness, and disconnection

Contempt inverts the respiratory system of the relationship. Without respect’s oxygen, love cannot breathe. It doesn’t just suffocate communication, trust, and intimacy—it poisons them, making repair feel futile because the relationship no longer seems worth the effort.

Yet even here, hope remains. While contempt is incredibly damaging and often signals deep trouble, it can be addressed through consistent, humble work to rebuild respect and a culture of appreciation. Left unchecked, however, it becomes one of the clearest signs that the relationship is sliding from mutual valuing toward mutual disconnection.

### **Self-Respect and Mutual Respect**

Healthy relationships require two people who understand their own value and therefore recognize value in each other. Self-respect can be difficult for many reasons, whether rooted in personal struggles or shaped by painful experiences with family, friends, school, work, or other relationships that diminished someone’s sense of worth.

Mutual respect is never accidental. It is the natural meeting of two individuals who both believe: value deserves value.

### **Rebuilding Respect**

If respect has been damaged, it can be rebuilt, but not with promises alone. It requires consistent behavioral change, accountability without defensiveness, intentional effort to listen and understand, and a willingness to unlearn harmful patterns.

Respect returns through patterns, not words. It is restored in the small, daily moments: choosing to listen instead of interrupting, to validate instead of dismissing, to speak with care instead of reacting in anger, and to follow through on what was promised.

Over time, these choices rebuild trust, and when trust grows, respect can return.

Respect is not optional in a healthy relationship—it is foundational.

Love may bring two people together, but respect is what keeps them aligned. Without respect, love becomes unstable. With respect, even the hardest challenges can be navigated with dignity and strength.

Respect answers a fundamental question every person asks, whether out loud or in silence:

“Do I matter here?”

When the answer is consistently yes, the relationship has something strong enough to endure.

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