

Biblical Covenant Order in the Home

Restoring What Has Been Broken

Zion's Roar Holy Spirit Ministry
Bixby, Oklahoma



Book 5 - Chapter 03 – Study 02

Uprooting the Root

Revised June 19, 2026

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Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible.

Published by:

Zion's Roar Holy Spirit Ministry

Bixby, Oklahoma

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Dear Reader,

In the previous study, we spent considerable time examining what may be taking place beneath the visible ruins of a troubled marriage. We considered how wounds, disappointments, broken trust, unresolved conflict, and other injuries can produce deeper problems within the heart. We examined bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, pride, distrust, and self-protection. Most importantly, we were challenged to look beyond the failures of another person and honestly examine ourselves before God.

Such examination is necessary.

Yet identifying a root and removing a root are not the same thing.

A physician may correctly identify a disease, but the patient is not healed simply because the diagnosis is accurate. Something must be done about the condition that has been discovered.

The same is true within a marriage.

A husband may recognize bitterness within his heart.

A wife may recognize resentment.

Both may acknowledge distrust, pride, unforgiveness, or years of self-protection.

Yet recognition alone changes nothing.

The covenant is not restored merely because the problem has been identified.

Something must be done with what has been exposed.

This is where many people become stuck. They can see the damage. They can identify the wounds. They may even recognize the roots that have been quietly growing beneath the surface. Yet they struggle to understand how those roots can actually be removed.

The purpose of this study is to examine that question.

How does a person begin removing things that may have been developing for years?

How does healing begin when bitterness has taken root?

What does repentance look like when pride has become established?

How does forgiveness become possible when the wounds are real?

And how can restoration ever occur when so much damage has already been done?

These are not easy questions.

Yet if the covenant is to be strengthened, they cannot be avoided.

As you continue, I encourage you to resist the temptation to focus primarily upon the failures of another person. Instead, allow the Scriptures to examine your own heart first. The path toward restoration rarely begins with what someone else must do. More often, it begins with what God is revealing to us.

May the Lord grant each of us the humility to receive His correction, the courage to face the truth, and the willingness to obey whatever He reveals.

John,
Servant of Christ

KNOWING THE ROOT IS NOT ENOUGH

One of the greatest mistakes a person can make is assuming that understanding a problem is the same thing as solving it.

This mistake occurs in many areas of life. A person may understand that a particular habit is harmful and yet continue practicing it. Someone may recognize that a relationship is unhealthy and yet continue following the same course. Knowledge alone does not automatically produce change.

The same principle applies within marriage.

By the time a marriage reaches a state of serious difficulty, many of the visible problems have already been identified. Husband and wife may both recognize the existence of bitterness, resentment, distrust, unforgiveness, pride, emotional distance, or other conditions that have developed over time. In some cases, they may even understand how those conditions developed and the damage they have caused within the covenant.

Yet understanding the problem does not necessarily alter the condition of the marriage.

For this reason, identifying the root beneath the ruins is only the beginning of the process. The purpose of exposing a root is not simply to understand that it exists. The purpose is to deal with it according to the instructions of Scripture.

James 1:22 (KJV) But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

These words deserve careful consideration. James does not describe a person who is unaware of the truth. He describes a person who has heard the truth but has failed to respond to it. The danger is not merely ignorance. The danger is the assumption that hearing, understanding, or agreeing with the truth is the same as obeying it.

This principle becomes especially important when examining a troubled marriage. A person may recognize attitudes and responses that have been damaging the covenant for years and yet continue protecting them from correction. In such cases, increased understanding may bring greater responsibility without producing meaningful change.

One reason this can be difficult is that many destructive attitudes become familiar over time. What began as a response to a wound may eventually feel normal. A person may become accustomed to certain ways of thinking, reacting, or viewing the covenant. The longer those patterns remain, the more difficult it may become to imagine life without them.

Yet the length of time a root has existed does not change its effect upon the tree. If the root is unhealthy, its influence will eventually appear in the fruit it produces. Understanding that reality is important, but understanding alone cannot remove the root.

For this reason, the question before us is no longer whether the problem has been identified.

The question is what will be done about it.

If certain roots have been exposed, why do people often continue holding onto them? Why do attitudes that damage the covenant frequently remain long after their effects have become visible?

Before we can understand how a root is removed, we must first understand why it is so often retained.

WHY WE HOLD ON TO WHAT IS HURTING US

At first glance, it may seem strange that a person would continue holding onto attitudes that are damaging both themselves and their marriage. If bitterness produces division, if resentment weakens trust, and if unforgiveness creates distance, one might assume that removing such things would be an obvious priority.

Yet experience often reveals a different reality.

Many people recognize the damage being caused and still struggle to let go.

This difficulty cannot always be explained by a lack of knowledge. In many cases, the individual understands the problem. They may even acknowledge the need for change. The struggle often lies elsewhere.

Part of the difficulty is that certain attitudes rarely present themselves as enemies. Resentment may appear justified. Bitterness may seem understandable. Distrust may feel wise. Self-protection may appear necessary. Because these responses often develop after a genuine wound, they can easily be viewed as reasonable reactions rather than conditions requiring correction.

Over time, these attitudes may become closely connected to the way a person understands their experiences. They influence how past events are remembered, how present circumstances are interpreted, and how future expectations are formed. As a result, letting go of them may feel less like removing a problem and more like surrendering a form of protection.

This is one reason why healing can feel threatening.

A person who has been hurt may fear being hurt again.

A person who has experienced betrayal may fear becoming vulnerable.

Someone who has carried disappointment for years may hesitate to release it because doing so feels risky.

The issue is not always a desire to remain wounded. Often, it is the fear of what may happen if the defenses built around that wound are lowered.

Scripture frequently addresses this struggle through the subject of trust. Human nature often seeks security through self-preservation, while God repeatedly calls His people to place their confidence in Him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV) 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.

These verses are often quoted in times of uncertainty, yet they also speak to the issue before us. The natural tendency is to rely upon our own understanding, our own defenses, and our own methods of protection. The path of faith requires something different. It requires a willingness to trust God even when obedience feels uncomfortable.

This does not mean that wisdom should be abandoned or that genuine wounds should be ignored. Rather, it means that the pursuit of healing must be governed by God's instructions rather than by fear, pride, resentment, or self-protection.

As long as a person continues viewing destructive roots as necessary safeguards, those roots will remain difficult to remove. Before change can occur, there must first be a willingness to acknowledge that the very things being trusted for protection may actually be contributing to the problem.

This realization brings us to another important truth. The removal of a root does not begin with behavior. It begins with repentance.

REPENTANCE BEGINS AT THE ROOT

As we have seen, the removal of a destructive root does not begin with behavior alone. Before lasting change can occur, something deeper must take place.

Scripture describes that process as repentance.

Unfortunately, repentance is often misunderstood. Many people associate it primarily with regret, sorrow, or the acknowledgment that something is wrong. While these things may accompany repentance, they are not the same thing. A person may regret their actions and yet continue walking in the same direction. They may recognize a problem and yet make no effort to change it.

Biblical repentance involves something more.

It begins when a person becomes willing to honestly agree with God about their condition and respond accordingly. Rather than defending, excusing, minimizing, or justifying what has been exposed, the individual submits to the truth and accepts God's judgment concerning it.

This is one reason why repentance can be difficult. It requires a person to look beyond the failures of others and examine their own heart. In a troubled marriage, this may be especially challenging because genuine wounds often exist on both sides. Husband and wife may both be able to point to disappointments, offenses, failures, and injuries that have contributed to the present condition of the covenant.

Yet repentance does not begin with what another person has done.

It begins with what God is revealing about us.

David expressed this principle after his own sin had been exposed.

Psalm 51:3-4 (KJV) For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight...

David's words do not suggest that other people were unaffected by his actions. His sin certainly impacted others. Yet his focus was upon his accountability before God. He did not begin by examining the failures of those around him. He began by examining himself.

The same principle applies here.

A husband may be able to identify many ways in which his wife has failed him.

A wife may be able to identify many ways in which her husband has failed her.

Those issues may be real and may eventually need to be addressed. Yet repentance cannot begin with another person's responsibilities. It must begin with our own.

For this reason, true repentance often involves difficult questions.

Have I allowed bitterness to remain?

Have I nurtured resentment?

Have I justified attitudes that Scripture condemns?

Have I become more committed to protecting myself than honoring God?

Have I allowed pride, unforgiveness, distrust, or self-protection to take root within my heart?

These questions are not intended to produce condemnation. They are intended to expose what must be addressed if healing is ever going to occur.

Acts 3:19 (KJV) Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...

Notice that repentance is connected to change. Scripture does not present repentance as the mere recognition of a problem. It involves turning away from one path and beginning another.

For this reason, repentance marks the point at which the work of uprooting begins. The root is no longer being ignored, protected, justified, or explained away. It is being brought into the light so that it can be dealt with according to the will of God.

Yet even after repentance begins, another question remains.

What happens when the root we are dealing with involves wounds that were caused by another person?

What does Scripture require when the injury is real, the pain is genuine, and the offense cannot simply be erased from memory?

To answer that question, we must examine one of the most difficult subjects in all of Scripture.

Forgiveness.

THE HARD WORK OF FORGIVENESS

Few subjects are more difficult to discuss within a troubled marriage than forgiveness.

Part of the difficulty is that forgiveness becomes most challenging when the wounds are genuine. It is relatively easy to speak about forgiveness in theory. It becomes far more difficult when trust has been broken, harsh words have been spoken, promises have been neglected, or years of disappointment have accumulated within the covenant.

For this reason, many people struggle to understand what forgiveness actually requires.

Some view forgiveness as pretending the offense never occurred. Others assume it means excusing sinful behavior or ignoring the damage that was done. Still others fear that forgiveness requires the immediate restoration of trust regardless of what has happened.

Scripture presents none of these ideas.

Forgiveness does not require a person to deny reality. It does not require them to call evil good. Neither does it require them to ignore the consequences that often follow sinful actions.

Rather, forgiveness addresses a different issue. It addresses the debt that remains within the heart.

One reason wounds continue exerting influence for so many years is that the offense often remains active within a person's thinking. The injury is remembered. The debt remains unpaid. The desire for vindication, repayment, or justice continues occupying a place within the heart. As long as that debt is being carried, the wound often retains much of its power.

This helps explain why forgiveness is so difficult.

Forgiveness requires the release of something that human nature often wants to retain.

It requires surrendering the right to personally collect a debt.

It requires entrusting judgment to God rather than preserving the offense for future consideration.

This principle appears throughout Scripture.

Colossians 3:13 (KJV) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. Paul's instruction does not depend upon the size of the offense.

Instead, he directs believers to consider the mercy they themselves have received. The standard is not the worthiness of the offender but the example of Christ.

This does not make forgiveness easy.

In many situations, forgiveness may need to be exercised repeatedly as old memories resurface and old wounds attempt to regain influence. The decision to forgive does not always remove pain immediately. It does not erase memory. It does not instantly rebuild trust. In some situations, trust may require considerable time to restore.

Yet forgiveness accomplishes something important.

It removes the debt from our hands.

The offense is no longer being preserved, rehearsed, protected, or carried as a continuing obligation that another person must satisfy. The matter is placed before God, and the injured person is released from the burden of acting as judge, collector, and keeper of the debt.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (KJV) Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Notice how closely forgiveness is connected to the removal of bitterness. This should not surprise us. A root cannot remain healthy when the very thing feeding it is removed. As forgiveness begins its work, bitterness loses much of the nourishment it requires to survive.

For this reason, forgiveness is not merely an act of kindness toward another person.

It is also part of the process by which God begins removing destructive roots from our own heart.

Yet forgiveness, important as it is, does not complete the work of restoration.

A root may be exposed.

A debt may be released.

Bitterness may begin losing its hold.

Even then, something else often remains.

The walls that were built around the wound.

Those walls must also be addressed.

PULLING DOWN THE WALLS

As important as forgiveness is, forgiveness alone does not always remove everything that has developed around a wound.

In many troubled marriages, the injury itself is only part of the problem. Over time, various forms of protection often develop around that injury. These protections may have begun as attempts to avoid further pain, but eventually they become barriers that affect the covenant itself.

A husband who has experienced repeated disappointment may become increasingly guarded in his communication. A wife who has endured years of hurt may find it difficult to trust. In other situations, emotional distance slowly replaces openness, and caution gradually takes the place of vulnerability.

These responses are understandable. Few people willingly place themselves in situations where they expect to be wounded again. The desire to avoid future pain is a natural reaction to previous hurt.

The difficulty arises when those protective measures remain long after they have ceased serving a healthy purpose.

Walls are effective at keeping things out.

Unfortunately, they are often just as effective at keeping things in.

The same barriers that prevent further hurt may also prevent healing. The same distance that protects against disappointment may also prevent closeness. The same caution that seeks to avoid vulnerability may also prevent trust from growing again.

For this reason, many couples discover that removing bitterness is only part of the work. Even after forgiveness has begun, the habits of self-protection often remain. Husband and wife may no longer be actively fighting one another, yet they continue relating

to one another through walls that were built during previous seasons of pain.

This process rarely changes overnight.

Trust that was damaged over time is often rebuilt over time. Openness that was lost through years of disappointment is rarely restored in a single conversation. In many cases, restoration involves a gradual willingness to lower defenses that have existed for a very long time.

This requires wisdom.

Scripture never encourages recklessness, nor does it require people to ignore genuine concerns. Yet neither does it encourage permanent emotional separation within a covenant that God designed for unity.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (KJV) With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Notice the language Paul uses. Unity is not presented as something that maintains itself automatically. It requires effort. It requires patience. It requires humility. It requires a willingness to continue moving toward one another rather than away from one another.

For some couples, this may mean learning to communicate honestly again. For others, it may involve rebuilding trust one step at a time. In still other situations, it may require addressing fears, assumptions, and habits that developed during years of conflict.

Whatever form the walls may take, they cannot remain untouched if restoration is to occur.

A covenant cannot flourish where husband and wife remain permanently hidden from one another.

The goal is not merely the absence of conflict.
The goal is the restoration of unity.

As we consider these things, another important truth comes into view. While restoration often involves two people working together, the first steps toward obedience do not require the participation of both.

This is especially important for those whose spouse is unwilling, absent, separated, or moving in a different direction.

The work that God is calling you to do does not begin when another person changes.

It begins when you choose to obey Him.

RESTORATION REQUIRES TWO, REPENTANCE REQUIRES ONE

As we have worked through this study, much of our attention has been directed toward the condition of the covenant. We have examined the roots that damage unity, the necessity of repentance, the challenge of forgiveness, and the barriers created by self-protection and emotional distance.

At this point, an important question often emerges.

What happens when only one person is willing to address these issues?

This question becomes especially relevant in troubled marriages. In some situations, one spouse may desire restoration while the other remains resistant. In others, separation may already have occurred. Some readers may even find themselves attempting to apply these principles while their spouse has little interest in doing the same.

Such circumstances can be deeply discouraging because many aspects of restoration involve the participation of both husband and wife. Trust is difficult to rebuild when only one person is working toward it. Communication cannot be restored by one person alone. Reconciliation, by its very nature, involves movement from both sides of the covenant.

Yet Scripture draws an important distinction between restoration and repentance.

While restoration commonly involves the participation of two people, repentance remains a personal responsibility before God. The willingness of another person to obey does not remove our own obligation to do so.

This principle appears repeatedly throughout Scripture. God's people are consistently called to respond to His instructions

regardless of how others choose to respond. The responsibility to forgive, pursue peace, humble ourselves, and walk in obedience is not suspended because another person refuses to do the same.

Romans 12:18 (KJV) If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Paul's words acknowledge a reality that many eventually encounter. Peace is not always possible because its outcome does not rest entirely in the hands of one person. Yet believers are still called to do what lies within their power. Their responsibility is measured not by the response of others but by their own faithfulness before God.

This principle brings important clarity to a troubled marriage. There are certain things that cannot be forced. No person can compel another to repent. No person can manufacture humility, forgiveness, honesty, or reconciliation within the heart of someone else. Those matters ultimately belong to the individual and to God.

What remains within our control is our own response to what God is revealing.

For this reason, the examination of a troubled marriage should not begin with questions concerning when another person will change. Scripture consistently directs attention toward our own conduct, our own obedience, and our own responsibility before God. The question is not whether another person has failed. The question is how we will respond to what God has shown us.

This perspective does not guarantee a particular outcome. Scripture never promises that every damaged marriage will be restored. Some situations remain complicated. Some involve resistance, separation, or circumstances beyond our ability to change. Yet even in those situations, the responsibility to walk faithfully before God remains unchanged.

For many people, this realization becomes an important turning point. Progress often begins when attention shifts away from controlling another person's response and returns to the areas of life where obedience is actually possible.

As we come to the end of this study, one final question remains.

What does life within the covenant begin to look like after these roots have been exposed and removed?

That question will lead us into our next study as we begin examining how husband and wife can learn to walk together again.

CONTINUE THE WORK

In the previous study, we examined the roots that often develop beneath the visible ruins of a troubled marriage. We considered how wounds, disappointments, bitterness, resentment, distrust, unforgiveness, pride, and self-protection can quietly weaken the covenant over time.

In this study, our attention has been directed toward a different question: What should be done once those roots have been exposed?

Scripture has shown us that recognition alone is not enough. A root may be identified and yet remain firmly planted. Lasting change begins when a person becomes willing to respond to what God has revealed.

This process often involves repentance, forgiveness, humility, and a willingness to surrender attitudes that may have been present for many years. While these steps are not always easy, they are necessary if healing and restoration are to move beyond theory and become reality.

As you reflect upon what you have read, consider taking time to examine your own heart before God.

Are there roots that have been exposed but not yet addressed?

Are there offenses that continue exerting influence over your attitudes and responses?

Are there walls that have remained standing long after the wound that originally produced them?

Have you been waiting for circumstances to change while postponing what God may already be calling you to do?

Questions such as these are not intended to produce guilt. Their purpose is to encourage honest examination and faithful obedience. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly begins His work by dealing with the condition of the heart before addressing the visible fruit that grows from it.

Whatever your circumstances may be, remember that the work of restoration does not begin when everything becomes clear or easy. It begins when truth is received and acted upon.

SHARE THIS STUDY

Many husbands and wives recognize that something is wrong within the covenant yet struggle to understand how healing begins. Consider sharing this study with those who may benefit from a biblical examination of repentance, forgiveness, humility, and restoration.

A truth that exposes the root is valuable. A truth that helps remove it may become the beginning of lasting change.

CONTINUE GROWING

Additional Bible studies examining marriage, family, discipleship, obedience, and Christian living are available at:
<https://zionsroar.org/biblical-studies>

NEED HELP?

If you would like to study these subjects further, have questions about this material, or would like biblical fellowship and encouragement, we invite you to contact us.

We would be honored to open the Scriptures with you and examine these subjects together.

The removal of a root is not the completion of restoration. It is the preparation for it.