

# COMPL EMENT

The Surprising Beauty of Choosing  
Together Over Separate in Marriage

Jamie Ivey

In true Aaron and Jamie style, this book is real, raw, hilarious, and full of wisdom. They do not sugar coat the challenges of marriage yet invite married couples to discover the beauty and adventure God has purposed for our marriages. We need this book in this time and culture.

**Nick and Christine Caine**, founders of A21

Today's culture often alludes to marriage as a monotonous, contractual agreement that can easily be undone and reversed. Aaron and Jamie have delightfully intertwined their firsthand experiences to expound upon God's deepest desires for marriage. This book is for every couple who wants to do the hard work and intentionally live out their covenant.

**Gabe and Rebekah Lyons**, bestselling authors and cofounders of Q Ideas

As in all of life, the best marriage mentors are the ones who not only have a compelling message, but also a compelling life to share. Our friends Aaron and Jamie Ivey are such mentors who offer us their marriage "message" through the lens of Scripture. For who can tell us more about healthy, life-giving marriage than the Maker of marriage Himself? As Aaron and Jamie take us on this journey, they do so in a way that reveals their own life together. In the sharing of their lives as an illustration of their message, they provide a compelling path for other

husbands and wives to follow. We cannot recommend *Complement* highly enough!

**Scott and Patti Sauls**, Christ Presbyterian Church,  
Nashville, Tennessee

The Colliers believe that in marriage, if you're not having fun, you're doing something wrong. Aaron and Jamie are having the most fun and teaching couples how to press through the messy middles of marriage to create a continual flow of synergy, together. In this incredible book, the Iveys are showing us how to be who we each were created to be while leaning on the power of Jesus to help us draw nearer to our spouses for a life of connection, clarity, and screaming-at-the-top-of-our-lungs cheering for the one you share forever with.

**Sam and Toni Collier**, lead pastors of Hillsong Atlanta

As this book says, “No one stumbles into marriage. It has to be built.” We can so relate to this, and we wish we had this book in our hands a decade ago! What Aaron and Jamie do in *Complement* is point us to a biblical perspective of marriage that is centered on the faithful work of Jesus. They dig deep into their own marriage and into the Bible to give us winsome and vital truth that comes to life and can be lived out every day. This isn't a book to be read “some day”; you should read it today. As you do, you're going to be challenged, encouraged, and filled with hope.

**Joel and Brittany Muddamalle**, Proverbs 31 Ministries |  
Transformation Church

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**Jamie Ivey**

**B&H**  
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To our children: Cayden, Amos, Deacon, and Story Ivey

If God has marriage in His plan for your life  
(and it's okay if He doesn't), we pray your  
marriage is fun, thrilling, Jesus-honoring, and always  
complementing each other throughout life.





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# Preface

**W**e're so glad you picked up this book! We wholeheartedly believe that marriage is one of God's incredible gifts to us as His children. While it's not the ultimate thing in life, marriage is meant to be life-giving, thrilling, and beautiful for those who experience it.

We've been through sweet times and difficult times in the two decades of our marriage, and through it all we've learned that God designed marriage to be a living picture of His great love for His people. It's hard. It takes a lot of work, forgiveness, patience, and time. But we've found it to be worth it. And we want you to as well.

In a culture where marriage can be viewed as bland, archaic, or boring, we've found a better way. And it isn't because we do it all correctly or have some special brand of marriage that is unattainable for some. As we've studied God's Word and seen more of His faithfulness in our own lives, we've actually come to see that God's purpose

in marriage is more surprising and exciting than we realized.

We believe in marriage. We believe in *your* marriage. We want it to be healthy and vibrant, fueled by the love of Jesus, and a powerful tool of mission in the world in which we live.

In this book, you're getting two perspectives on the same themes. We took the most valuable things we've learned about complementing each other in marriage and wrote our unique perspectives on them. In fact, we didn't even read each other's portions of the book until in the late editing stages, so what you're getting is the raw, real, and vulnerable perspective on how we complement each other as we strive to honor Jesus with our marriage.

We'd encourage you to think of this not as two books, but two halves of the same book—and to read both halves. Read one half, then trade with your spouse. We think you'll find encouragement and challenges as you read both of our thoughts on each concept.

We're fighting for *your* marriage, even from a distance. It's an honor to join you on the journey of choosing together over separate in marriage.

Aaron and Jamie Ivey

## INTRODUCTION

# What I Thought Marriage Would Be

I'll never forget that day in the summer of 1999 when I walked into my dad's office as a young twenty-one-year-old bride-to-be, and said the words out loud that had been haunting me, suffocating me, for weeks.

"Dad," I said, "I don't think I can marry him."

Just in saying it, I felt as though a ginormous weight had been lifted off of my shoulders, even as I waited for my dad's reaction, wondering if he'd tell me I needed to figure out a way to make it work, or that I didn't have to go through with it. I expected my dad to take my side, which is why he'd been my first go-to. But I also knew plans had been made. People's time had been invested. Lots of money was involved. So I was nervous. He certainly, in my eyes, had every right to be really angry and frustrated with me.

Looking back though, I count that moment as a key indicator that I was finally growing up inside. I'd gotten cold feet, yes. I hadn't been able to shake the fact that I wasn't supposed to marry this man. But instead of pushing through and trying to figure things out on my own, I'd actually been listening to the Holy Spirit on this one. Which wasn't normal for me. And from the best I could tell, He was clearly showing me a way out. And I'd decided to follow Him through it.

Obviously, I hadn't gone into things at first with the intention of canceling an engagement and breaking someone's heart. I'd wanted it to work out. I'm never one who likes to admit I can't do something I set out to do. I hate letting people down, and with this one decision I felt like I was letting *everyone* down. A tug-of-war of the soul for sure, especially for a people-pleaser like me.

But Dad said he would support me in my decision, which confirmed it all for me. So I called off the wedding, sold the dress, my parents lost a bunch of deposits, and I started the process of sharing the news with family. I was sad about hurting a person that I really did love—as much as my heart could love anyone at that moment—but I can say I felt more confident about this decision than any other I'd ever made in my entire lifetime.

I recalled this story recently to someone and told them what I'm about to tell you. Making that decision to call off the wedding and break up with my fiancé was, and still is, one of the hardest things I've ever done. But I can also say in the same breath that it's one of the best things, if not *the* best thing (behind following Jesus, of course) that I have ever committed myself to doing. *Ever*. That twenty-one-year-old girl was way braver than she thought she was. As naive as I was, in terms of what marriage entailed and what it meant to truly love well, God had given me a healthy enough dose of knowledge about what marriage was meant to be that it kept me from walking into one that wasn't best for me.

Two years later I happily stood at the altar facing my one and only husband, Aaron, and committed myself to a lifetime with him. Hands down, the best day of my life, when I said yes to a lifetime with Aaron Ivey. I cannot imagine this life without him. I cannot imagine this journey of parenting without him. I cannot imagine ministry without him. He truly is my favorite person in the whole world.

We were still young, and still growing, and we'd still have many obstacles to work through, but we founded our union on equal love, trust, and dedication to each



other. We believed in each other, pursued each other, cheered for each other, supported each other. Both of us loved the Lord and wanted to build our marriage in a way that glorified Him more than ourselves, and this remains our mission now with our marriage today.

Twenty years later, we're still doing these things.  
Still complementing each other.

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Your and my ideas of marriage are shaped by what we see or have seen in our lives. We're influenced by the married people around us.

When I was in the third grade, for example, I remember spending the night at my friend Ashley's house. Her parents' marriage was like a fairy tale to me. Her dad worked hard, and her mom kept the house well. I often saw her mom in a long, flowing satin robe at night. It was the most beautiful thing. I remember thinking I one day wanted to be married too, and wear a satin robe around the house.

As a college student, I watched my parents walk through a difficult season in their marriage. The tough patch they endured created ripple effects that impacted

everyone in their circle, things that Satan still tries stirring up in my mind to place a sense of fear over my marriage. Yet I also watched God do a miracle in their relationship—the same kind of miracle I’ve seen Him do over and over in the lives of friends I’ve known throughout the past twenty years. What Satan sets out to destroy, God sets out to redeem and build up.

Both sets of my grandparents were married in the late 1940s, when men were going and coming from war, and women were raising babies and taking care of the home. As I became an adult, I began to see the struggles that marriages can endure at that age, when someone becomes distant or when someone becomes ill, as happened to both of my grandfathers.

You’ve had these same kinds of formative thoughts. Your own feelings. Your own observations. Your own take on how our culture views marriage today. All of it has rubbed off on you and factored into your thinking, becoming part of either your desire for marriage, your skepticism of marriage, or perhaps your decision to not want anything to do with marriage.

As for me, I have always desired marriage. I went to a private Christian college right out of high school, where there was a running joke that a lot of the girls only came

to school to get their “MRS” degree. Maybe they were like me and just always saw themselves experiencing the kind of companionship that marriage could bring. Or maybe (also like me) they believed a man would fill some holes in their hearts for them.

I’ll admit, I came into marriage thinking that Aaron would complete me, that my life would finally begin once we were married. I assumed my heart would never be hurt again. I thought he would fill the hole in my heart that yearned so badly to be unconditionally loved. I put a lot of pressure on him to never hurt me and never have arguments with me. I wanted a love that would always make me feel good and never make me uncomfortable.

Let’s just say I brought a multi-piece set of baggage to our wedding day—baggage I wanted to keep a secret from him because I was certain he wouldn’t want this kind of baggage in our house. And I’m guessing, so did you. Or, if you haven’t married yet, you’re well on your way to doing it. No matter where you’re located today in your life journey, you too have ideas about what you expect from marriage. You don’t need to be married to think these thoughts.

But though the world tells you a lot about marriage, and the church tells you a lot about marriage, we believe

God's Word is where we should all be getting our real perspectives on marriage. The Bible holds immense value for those of us yearning to love our husbands well in marriages that bless them, beautify us, and bring maximum glory to God.

Aaron and I think marriage has gotten a bad rap recently. Some people are disregarding the value of it. Others are using it to stifle a person's gifts and talents. Still others enter into it knowing that when the going gets tough, they'll run. There are just so many varying ideas around the gift of marriage. And if we're honest with you (which we always will be), we think even Christians haven't always done the best job of making marriage look like the true gift from God that it's meant to be. But for marriage to be what God had in mind, where it can stand up to real life and not back down from its amazing potential, we can't be buying into beliefs about marriage that clash with what God has always said about it.

I don't care who you are, something will come along to make your marriage difficult. Maybe this happened for you as early as your honeymoon (I'm serious), or maybe by Year Three. For us, it wasn't really until around Year Nine when circumstances conspired to make life hard at our house. In those moments, I knew there had to be more

to marriage than just fun times and a constant companion. I needed a partner who was willing to walk through the fire with me. I needed a partner who was willing to keep the wind in my sails. I needed a partner who was willing to both lead *and* follow in different circumstances.

To complement me. Even as I complement him.

After being married for more than two decades now, I've learned marriage is so very beautiful. God created something for His children that magnifies Him in all sorts of ways. I've learned that great marriages don't happen overnight but are created through years of hard work and sacrifice on both spouses' parts.

I've also learned something else. Remember that desire of mine about Aaron *completing* me? How he would fill all the holes in my heart? That idea was never going to work out, I discovered. But I've grown to see that the way we *complement* each other does some wonderful things in both of our hearts. It's a beautiful picture of how God designed marriage to be.

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I've been begging Aaron forever for us to renew our vows to each other one day. If I could have it my way, I'd

love doing it on our twenty-fifth anniversary. We could go somewhere beautiful, preferably a beach. I'd get a lovely white dress; he'd look all handsome in skinny jeans and a white shirt; our kids would stand all around us; and we'd renew what we committed to one another all those years ago. It sounds downright dreamy to me.

Aaron always says no. Every time I ask. He doesn't think about it for even a single second. Automatic no. Because, he says, we made a covenant to each other when we said our vows the first time, and there is no reason ever to renew a covenant. Such a pastor statement! Don't you think? But I understand what he means. And I guess I secretly agree with him.

So I think I've changed my request to a vow *remembrance* ceremony. That's the party I really want!

We recently attended a party sort of like that—our friends Devin and Catherine's anniversary party. They invited their closest friends and family to celebrate the thirty years they'd been committed to each other in marriage. Their four kids were there; their new daughters-in-law were there. We stood outside their house on the back patio, and Aaron led them through a moment of remembering what God had done for them over the past three decades in their marriage.

I'll never forget what Devin said to his wife during that ceremony. As he held Catherine's hands, staring into her eyes while all of us watched, he said, "I recommit my life to you through the lens of experience." My eyes moistened with tears and I thought to myself, yes, *THAT* is what we do in marriage, day after day after day. We wake up each morning knowing exactly what yesterday held, and the day before that, and the day before that. And yet we commit to staying. We commit to love. We commit to serve. We commit to forgive. We commit to cheering. We commit to following.

We commit to each other because God has put us together, and because He thinks we're the best team, and because everything He really wants to accomplish in us will happen with *this* man and *this* woman, with *our* history, staying strong into *our* future.



*Marriage is hard.*

That may be the understatement of the year. We've experienced it ourselves and we've seen it in marriages all around us. But here's something else we believe.

*Marriage is worth the fight.*

Maybe you're young right now and don't have marriage on your brain at all; you're just wanting to prepare your heart for what might come. Or maybe you're early married and you want to keep building and repairing, making things better than they've ever been between you. Or maybe you're twenty-plus years in, like us, and you need a fresh kick in the pants to help you value the person that God put in your world to walk through life with you.

Wherever you're coming from, our prayer and hope is that you too can sense the deep honor of *complementing* your spouse in every area of your life. As we dive into these ten different ways that give you everyday, ongoing opportunities to complement your husband, I pray you will feel equal parts encouraged and challenged.

Growth in marriage is a good thing. We'll never arrive, of course. We'll be working on this relationship from now until the day we part through death. But we believe in you, and we believe in your marriage. And we believe God has given you and us, in His Word, the best way for all of us to live it out.





## CHAPTER 1

# Love

I have a thing for a good love story, and I'd bet you do as well. That's why Hollywood puts so much money and energy into making those stories come alive for us on the big screen. Each time we see a movie like that, we find ourselves rooting for love no matter what kind of journey it takes the characters on.

But most Hollywood love stories focus on the *feeling*, on the excitement and newness that new love brings. They know that something inside of us longs for that feeling of being loved just for who we are. We want the man to chase after us in the airport because he finally realizes he can't live without us. We want our husband to show up at work with two tickets to a weekend in Santa Fe, New Mexico, just because. We want sex on the beach and frolicking through the wildflowers while running

hand in hand. The intense feelings associated with love are what we find ourselves desiring and idolizing.

The problem with this, of course, is that REAL LIFE doesn't always feel like NEW LOVE. Real life is hard. Real life requires more of us than sometimes our emotions can handle. I wish it was as easy as Julia Roberts says in *Nottinghill*: "I'm just a girl standing in front of a boy asking him to love her."

But it's not. Love takes way more work and is far more valuable than how they portray it in the movies.

What exactly is love anyway? The dictionary says love is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, love is an intense feeling of deep affection, as well as a great interest and pleasure in something. I agree with *Webster* on both of those definitions. As a verb, love means to feel a deep romantic or sexual attachment to someone. And I agree with all of that as well.

But what the dictionary *doesn't* tell you, which I want to add, is that love takes hard work to give.

Yes, loving your husband should be hard work.

Maybe you're thinking, *Whoa, Jamie, hold up. If love is hard work, then it's not love. Love should be easy. If it's true love, it shouldn't be hard.*

I'm sorry, have you been living on another planet? People are hard. People are mean. People drive us crazy. If you put two crazy, hard-to-love people together and then expect it to be easy . . .

Nope. Not at all.

Love is something we keep working on. Improving on. I'm much better at love today than ten years ago. Or, gosh, I sure hope so. For instance, Aaron loves words of affirmation, and I'm not the best at giving them. But over the years, I've worked hard at intentionally telling him how much I respect the work he does and how much it matters. And my work is paying off. I'm better at it now than I used to be. Still not a master of it, but I'm learning to love him better. Here's the thing though: it's taken me *hard work* to get here.

And that's okay. When you fall in love with your special someone, there's that intense initial feeling of deep affection. You have a great interest in him. You also feel sexual attraction. All those things are true, and fine, and good. But it's also true that as time moves on and as life happens, those intense feelings and sexual attractions begin to take hard work and time to create—hard work and time that you didn't have to put into it before.

Love is an action. Love is a choice. You choose to love over and over and over again. Day after day. Year after year.

And the challenge of it, surprisingly, is what makes it so beautiful.

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When we think about love within marriage, we tend to go straight to the sexual intimacy that occurs between a husband and a wife. And just so you know, I'll definitely be going there with you in this book. I've saved up a whole chapter for it later on. But while sex is certainly one of the ways we show love to our husbands and they show it to us, it's not the ultimate way. There is so much more to love than just sex. You know that.

Love is an action.  
Love is a choice.

But here's what I want you to think about that's not quite so obvious: *There is so much more to love than just love.*

I believe people in a lot of marriages are doing their best to love one another. But what I see so often today are women loving everyone around them better than they love their husbands. They *assume* they're loving him because they're married to him and doing stuff for him (like having sex with him and cooking his dinner). And yet their marriage is suffering because they're not sharing a genuine Christlike love for each other.

And true love, even married love, can only come from the example that Jesus Himself set for us.

Most people in the world, whether they claim to be a Christ-follower or not, would still claim that Jesus Christ was a good, moral man worth modeling our lives after. I certainly agree with that (though I think he's much more than *just* that). But we have a tendency to think that He's not our model for marriage because He was never married Himself. We could not be more wrong in holding to that opinion. We are meant to be imitators of Jesus in *all of our lives*. Marriage is no exception. Why *should* it be?

If you want to know how and why you can even begin to continually love this man you married, start with knowing that you can only love him because Jesus first loved you (1 John 4:19). Start by looking at the way God sent His Son for you and how Jesus died on a cross

for you, and then you can start to comprehend the kind of love that you're meant to emulate in marriage.

Jesus' love for you was sacrificial. He didn't die for you because you're such a good person or because His Father made Him do it. No, Jesus died on a cross for you and your sins (and for me and my sins) because His love for us is so grand that He would do anything to restore us back to the Father.

*Anything.*

All right, so that's what Jesus' love is like. A sacrificial love. An *anything* love. That's the love He demonstrated toward us. And so with Jesus' brand of love as background, notice what He said *our* love is supposed to be like. The night before His arrest and crucifixion, He gave His disciples the following "new commandment."

"A new commandment I give to you,  
that you love one another: just as I  
have loved you, you also are to love one  
another." (John 13:34)

"Just as I have loved you." That's the standard for how you and I are called to love our husbands. So if we truly want to be someone who looks more like Jesus every single day, here's our shot at it, right out of the gate

every morning: to love our husbands the same way Jesus has loved us.

And tell me now, does that sound like *hard work* sometimes?

It is. And guess what? It gets even harder. The breakdown I see sometimes in relationships, especially in marriages, is that sacrificial love often seems so one-sided. It feels as though you're the one who's doing all the giving, all the loving, with zero guarantees that your husband will reciprocate that same love to you. It feels so risky. It's almost as if you're just setting yourself up to be hurt. And no one would wish that on themselves.

Yet if we truly want to be like Jesus—if we want our love for our husband to be *true love*—it must be Jesus' love, where we pour ourselves out completely for our man and then leave the results to God. I cannot guarantee that your husband will reciprocate the same type of love for you as you give to him, but I can guarantee you one thing: God will honor your love for your husband, just as He honored the faithful love of His Son for His people. Again, it may not result in being loved back faithfully by your husband. But if you ever expect to be, this is the way you do it.

By loving as Jesus loves.



So let's get really practical about this. The main verses that come to mind when we think of love—the verses that go into such beautiful, hard work detail about what Jesus' love is like—come from 1 Corinthians 13. You often hear

God will honor  
your love for your  
husband, just as He  
honored the faithful  
love of His Son  
for His people.

them quoted at weddings, probably even at *your* wedding. Or they might be embroidered on a pillow you received as a gift from your great aunt. Maybe they're on a cool print that hangs in your bedroom, hallway, or office. My point

here is that these words about love routinely come up when we talk about marriage, and though they weren't written with *marital* love immediately in mind, I think it's right to apply the wisdom they offer to marriage. If we want to be wives who love our husbands well—like Jesus loves us—here are the characteristics that should be found in us.

- Love . . . is patient.
- Love . . . is kind.
- Love . . . is not envious.
- Love . . . is not boastful.

- Love . . . is not arrogant.
- Love . . . is not rude.
- Love . . . does not insist on its own way.
- Love . . . is not irritable.
- Love . . . is not resentful.
- Love . . . does not rejoice at wrongdoing.
- Love . . . rejoices with the truth.
- Love . . . bears all things.
- Love . . . believes all things.
- Love . . . hopes all things.
- Love . . . endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4–8)

If we are to be women who love our husbands the way Christ loves us, we need to take these words to the core of our soul and beg God for the strength to be these things to our men. Will we get it right all the time? Absolutely not. I could write a story around each of these descriptions of love and tell you how I've failed to live them. We are selfish humans who, on our own, would only desire to make ourselves happy.

But love, as I said, is worth fighting for. It's worth sacrificing for. Jesus is our teacher in all things love, and His love toward us was sacrificial. Which means if we are to emulate Him and do all these things, we should

expect it to be a sacrifice. Love is not flippant and easy; it is costly and difficult. That's what makes it so valuable.

Being kind when your husband doesn't deserve it feels unnatural. We like to treat people how they deserve. And yet, praise God, that's now how He looks at us, am I right? "He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve" (Ps. 103:10 CSB). He doesn't give us what's coming to us. He gives us His love.

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I do love Aaron so much. It's true. But my love for him feels different today than it did twenty years ago. Different is not always bad; it's just different. The love I had for him on our wedding day was so very real, but it was all the love I could muster at that time. And I guess it was all I needed. Our life was easy. It was full of bliss. We were young and in love.

But when I think about loving Aaron now, I see a much bigger picture of what love looks like. I see a love that remains even when we're in a fight. I feel a love for him that amazingly is still capable of growing stronger, like when he reassures me for the four millionth time that I am indeed a good mom. I'm still surprised at how

much love overflows from my heart for him when we're walking through a stressful season and we take time out for a date night. I love him a million times more today than I did on our wedding day. And the only way this happens is because I have chosen every single day to love him more than I did the day before.

I want to love him like Jesus loves me.

When we walked through our hardest season of parenting so far, and then our first hard season of marriage, I had to make a daily choice to choose love—to choose to give love and receive love even when it would have been much easier to shut down and be closed off. Because as much as I love the idea of love being a passive verb that is easily attainable, I know it takes choosing. For all of us. It takes kindness when we want deep in our hearts to tear our husband down. It takes throwing away the scorecard when we desperately want to add up points against him. It takes forgiving when we would feel better keeping a death grip on his wrongdoings. It takes grace when all we want to give is punishment.

It takes all of these things day after day. And what I've found to be true in my own life is that I love loving Aaron, and I have a strong suspicion that he too loves loving me.

