

The

Best

Us

Premarital for your Marriage

Pastor Mike Smith

Endorsements

“I’ve been fortunate to walk with Mike Smith in the journey of faith as a fellow father, husband, and follower of Jesus Christ. As a friend, I’ve come to know Mike as a man of great commitment, integrity, and wisdom, but most importantly as a man who is acutely aware of his own need of God’s grace. I highly recommend this book because I know that he is filled with the love of Christ. “

Steven Curtis Chapman, recording artist

“Pastor Mike Smith uses the language of calling. God has called his people for his purposes, everywhere and in everything—including marriage. I can’t imagine a more concise, yet comprehensive, book for preparing God’s people for oneness in marriage. This is essential reading for all lovers, regardless of age. It will make a difference for God’s kingdom.”

Charlie Peacock, songwriter, record producer and author

“Mike Smith’s book is based on years of premarital counseling experience and more importantly, on a Christ-centered compassion for those who are about to embark on the great adventure called marriage. Mike has given the Christian community a wonderful tool to strengthen the foundations of new marriages and to bolster those which are already established.

Michael Card, recording artist and author

“I have known Michael Smith for over twenty years – as a university student with whom I walked and talked, as a new husband whose marriage I solemnized, as an effective youth worker, and now a seasoned, mature pastor. I’ve watched with delight as God blessed his marriage to Rinda and brought to birth in both them a servant’s heart and a discerning spirit.

“In the course of his ministry Michael has been used by God to prepare hundreds of couples for their marriages. The wisdom and gentleness he has been given are reflected on every page of this manual. Pastors will find in it an invaluable guide for premarital counseling. Couples preparing for their marriage will find a book that will encourage them to achieve oneness in the life they intend to share together.”

Dr. William L. Lane, author, and biblical scholar

“The mark of a good book is its need to be written. The mark of an even better book is the *demand* that it be written. It is my joy to recommend Mike Smith’s first volume which many of us insisted that he put into print. For many years now, Mike has been a faithful and gifted servant of couples preparing to enter the covenant of marriage. I

am thrilled that his tested and proven material is now available to others.”

Scotty Smith, author and Pastor Emeritus of Christ Community Church

“As we approach our first anniversary, it seems appropriate to let you know what trials and tribulations have been avoided or dealt with effectively because of our premarital counseling. We are indebted to him for sharing God’s design for marriage with us.”

Tod and Amy (couple participating in marriage preparation)

To my Precious wife, *Rinda*,
Whom I cherish!
Without you I would know little
About oneness

CONTENTS

Preface

Introduction: The High Calling of Marriage

Chapter 1 The Biblical Perspective of Marriage

Chapter 2 Hopes and Expectations of Marriage

Chapter 3 Filling Your Spouse’s Emotional Tank

Chapter 4 The Call to Be a Husband—The Call to Be a Wife

Chapter 5 Communication: The Key to Oneness

Chapter 6 Forgiveness and Conflict Resolution

Chapter 7 Finances

Chapter 8 Sexual Intimacy

Chapter 9 The Wedding Ceremony

Chapter 10 Growing Spiritually in Marriage

PREFACE

There is a great deal of difference between a wedding and a marriage! A wedding might happen over a weekend. It might take many months to plan and many hours to pull together. A wedding is a celebration event. John tells us that Jesus celebrated marriage with a couple by attending their wedding in Cana (John 2:1–2). A wedding can be a wonderful celebration. However, all the work of planning and performing a wedding does not prepare a couple for marriage. A couple can spend so much time and energy on the wedding that they fail to prepare for their marriage. I try to put the wedding in perspective for a couple by challenging them to spend more time planning for their marriage than their wedding. The wedding is a *weekend*; A marriage is a *lifetime*.

I developed this material to help couples prepare for marriage by interacting with one another about pertinent issues. Anyone who takes the time to work through these Scriptures and interact with these questions will be better prepared for marriage. I remind couples that the time they spend with this material will not change *my* life, but I hope it will impact their life together. It has been my experience that six sessions provide a realistic and reasonable amount of time to meet with a couple in preparation for marriage.

I desire to help pastors equip couples for marriage. This material is provided for that purpose. I am making it available to download. If you would like to donate, I suggest \$10 per couple.

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INTRODUCTION: THE HIGH CALLING OF MARRIAGE

For the Pastor or Mentor

Most of my life I grew up thinking of what I might gain (or lose) in a commitment of marriage. This line of thinking led me to evaluate marriage and women in terms of what I could get from such a relationship. I would always ask the question, “What’s in it for me?” When I focused on what *I* was gaining from a relationship, I had a hard time finding satisfaction. When *I* was the focus of a relationship, I was never satisfied. Satisfaction cannot be found in a self-centered life or a self-centered relationship. When I finally began to look at marriage from God’s perspective, I saw it as a calling to a God-centered and other-centered life.

My attitude toward women also changed as I began to view marriage as a calling. My focus shifted from finding the right person to *becoming* the right person. I began to consider what God required of me as a husband instead of what I required of a woman before I would want her to be my wife.

The first question I ask a couple when they are considering marriage is this: “*Where are you in your relationship with God?*” I ask this question first because I am convinced that a person can only love to the extent he or she has experienced love. Love does not originate within us. We respond to the love we receive from others. Regarding love, we are more like the moon than the sun. We reflect the love we have received.

If the only love a person has experienced is from a human source, as genuine as that love may have been, that is the best love he or she will be able to reflect to another. The Scripture says, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). If I have received, responded, and submitted to God’s costly love extended to me in Christ Jesus, then the Spirit works to build this love in me (Gal. 5:22–23). As I receive from God, I can extend to others. The first “other” in this world for a married couple is his or her spouse! As I draw near to God and receive from him through the Son and the Spirit I can then extend to others. By the way, forgiveness is treated the same way in the Bible!

The second question I ask the couple contemplating marriage is: “*What convinces you that God is calling you together as husband and wife?*” Most people expect the question to be, “Why do you want to get married?” This latter question is often the question they answer. I usually must reiterate the idea of being called together rather than merely wanting to be married. Jesus saw marriage as a calling from God (see Mark 10:6–9). Since marriage is a high calling, I ask couples if they are called by God into the

commitment of marriage. Whether I believe the couple should marry is not the point. What is important is that the couple be convinced God is calling them together as husband and wife! The man needs to be convinced God is calling him to be the husband of the woman. The woman needs to be convinced God is calling her to be the wife of the man.

I do not know what marriage will hold for the couple. They do not know what marriage will hold for them either. I will not be present in their marriage. If God is calling them together, he will be with them and will remain sovereign in their married life. They may have surprises in their marriage. These surprises, however, are not surprises to God! He will always remain with the couple in the marriage relationship. In Ecclesiastes 4:12 we read, “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” With the Lord, a marriage between a husband and wife can be that “cord of three strands.”

How do you know if God is calling you to marry someone? I knew that God was calling me to marriage when I experienced the love he gave me for the woman I was dating. He gave me the desire to meet her needs at the expense of my own. I wanted to be her husband and care for her as my wife. I have not perfectly loved my wife in our marriage! But, I know that the desire to love her and care for her came from God and did not come from within me. This desire gave me confidence to know that God was involved and calling me to this marriage. It gave me the energy to move into the commitment of marriage. I was convinced God was working within me and calling us together. This conviction was confirmed when this precious woman responded to my invitation to be my wife. She, too, was convinced that God was calling us together. It has been helpful to look back on what brought us together when we have struggles with one another. It is comforting to remember that God has called us to be husband and wife. We each come as a package deal, with strengths and weaknesses. It is a joy and challenge to move toward oneness in our marriage.

When I take a couple through the material I meet with them the first time to hear their story, give them a bit of mine and to ask them the questions I mentioned above. I then introduce the material to them and encourage them to prepare for their marriage. I highlight the value and benefit of premarital counseling listed below. I Encourage the couple to work through the material first then we meet to discuss it. Normally, I go over the material in the following way:

Session 1 – Introduction

Session 2 – Chapter 1

Session 2 – Chapter 2

Session 3 – Chapters 3 & 4

Session 4 – Chapters 5 & 6

Session 5 – Chapters 7 & 8

Session 6 – Chapters 9 & 10 (Only if I am performing the wedding)

I encourage couples to work through the material separately. This allows them to wrestle with the questions individually and then discuss their thoughts together after their individual reflection. Many couples have told me it was helpful to work individually at first, then come together to share their thoughts.

For the Couple

Why go through premarital counseling? There is a danger in becoming overwhelmed with the decisions a wedding brings. The wedding itself can steal precious time and energy from preparing for your marriage. You need to take time to nurture your relationship as a couple during the engagement. I am often challenged with the statement, “If you are in love you should not have to work at your relationship.” In fact, the exact opposite is true. It is precisely because something is important to you that you work to better understand and appreciate it! Marriage takes two people willing to engage in the relationship and work toward oneness. It is important to consider your marriage before the wedding rather than after it. Here are some reasons why premarital counseling is valuable:

1. It will help you prepare for your *marriage*, not just your wedding. A great wedding will not hold a marriage together. A wedding takes a weekend while a *marriage* takes a lifetime!
2. It will enable you to discuss issues that need to be addressed, and are easier to address, before you commit your lives together at your wedding.
3. It will help you work toward a common goal to work toward in your marriage.
4. It will give you tools to create an environment where oneness can grow and flourish.
5. It will help you see things from your spouse’s perspective. Anticipating your marriage together will help you grow in this skill.
6. It will help you prepare for, if not avoid, the common pitfalls many couples experience in marriage.
7. It will help you lay a foundation for your marriage that you can build upon for years to come.

The effort you put into preparing for your marriage will pay dividends throughout your married life! Premarital counseling allows you to lay the foundation for your marriage that you will build upon throughout your life together.

Why discussion questions? Talking through your thoughts on a shared life together enables you, as a couple, to consider your marriage relationship. It encourages you to consider questions and look at issues you need to consider. Looking at the Scriptures together and discussing questions will bring issues to the surface to allow you to address them. It will encourage you to take your marriage and relationship more seriously! You will not anticipate everything before your marriage, and you don’t need to. You won’t need to decide what to do on your tenth anniversary before your wedding! You should discuss things that will help you get started in enjoying a life together as a couple.

It is helpful to go through the material separately. Think through the Scriptures and questions individually and then come together to discuss your thoughts. It is important to discuss these issues together. I recommend meeting with someone you respect who can help you prepare for marriage by walking you through your premarital counseling, such as a pastor or counselor. If those options are not accessible, you might ask a couple with a

healthy marriage relationship to help you go through the material and prepare for your life together.

Each chapter will cover an aspect of marriage. Within each chapter you will find introductory remarks, Scriptural references, potential trouble spots, references to concepts and books, along with discussion questions. These are all intended to prepare you for the issues you will face in marriage and to equip you with tools to handle these issues when they arise. This material is a combination of biblical insights regarding marriage and practical advice to build a healthy marriage relationship.

What about the physical aspect of your relationship? Many couples struggle with physical intimacy during dating and the engagement period. God created sexual intimacy for our good and for the safety and security of marriage. His instruction concerning this matter is for our benefit! God has our best interest in mind. You may be tempted to become sexually intimate, rationalize, and give in to the temptation because you are planning to marry. However, sexual intimacy outside the covenant of marriage will confuse your relationship. It will often cause more confusion for the woman. Physical intimacy can prevent you from working to build an emotional oneness in your relationship because it creates a lack of trust!

In the Song of Solomon 8:4 we read, “Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love [physical intimacy] until it so desires [the covenant of marriage].” As your emotional and spiritual oneness grows, your desire to express that oneness physically will likely increase. You need a plan to handle that temptation. Boundaries are helpful (i.e., avoid unstructured time alone in the late evening; avoid arousing sexual desires; avoid lying down together). See the section on “Levels of Physical Intimacy Between a Couple” in the Sexual Intimacy section for ideas regarding boundaries.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. After looking over the outline of the six sessions, can you think of any issues not listed that you and your fiancé need to discuss?**

- 2. If you are working through this material with a pastor, counselor, or mentor couple, are there any issues you need to make them aware of before you begin?**

Chapter 1

THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MARRIAGE

The reason for discussing the purpose of marriage is to anticipate the commitment you will be making in marriage. Your perspective of what marriage is and of what a husband and wife should be comes from your parents, family, other relationships you have seen, and perhaps, what you have read in God's Word. You and your fiancé have had different experiences. Hopefully your separate perspectives on marriage will overlap somewhat. You need to look at your different perspectives and place them through the grid of God's Word to filter out wrong attitudes and ideas and to embrace appropriate attitudes. A common standard from which you are both working is essential. Hopefully it will be consistent with God's Word. The following questions will help you reach this common understanding from which you will build your marriage.

1. **Briefly describe a healthy marriage.**
2. **List three key elements of a healthy marriage.**
3. **What is the primary purpose of marriage?**
4. **Is marriage a contract? Why or why not?**
5. **What commitment will you make when you take marriage vows?
(Chapter 9 lists sample vows)**

6. When and where did the institution of marriage originate?

Vows

To keep a vow does not mean to keep from breaking it. If that were the case, marriage vows would be broken the day they are made. This is where a vow differs from a mere promise or resolution. A resolution, once broken, must either be forgotten or made again. But a vow retains its power and validity irrespective of conduct. It is not like the signing of a legal contract and not like any other form of human promise. A person cannot promise to love another person; he can only vow to do so. A vow is, per se, a confession of inadequacy and an automatic calling upon the only adequacy there is, which is the mercy and power of God. From *The Mystery of Marriage* by Mike Mason ([Sisters: Multnomah, 1985], 115-16).

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE

Genesis 2:15–25

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

¹⁸ The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,
“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”

²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Why do you think God created us male and female?**
- 2. God instituted marriage in one sentence! What are the three key aspects of a marriage relationship? (Gen. 2:24).**
- 3. What ways should you both “leave” father and mother? Why is this important?**
- 4. The key aspect of “leaving” is placing your relationship as a husband or wife as the most significant human relationship. What challenges do you anticipate with this new relational priority?**
- 5. What does it mean for a man and a woman to “be united” in marriage?**
- 6. List some things you can do as a couple to create an environment for**

this union in your marriage.

7. What does “they will become one flesh” mean? (see 1 Cor. 6:16).

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE

Genesis 3:1–21

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴ “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me— she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”
¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,
 Cursed are you above all the livestock
 and all the wild animals!
 You will crawl on your belly
 and you will eat dust all the days of your life.
¹⁵ And I will put enmity
 between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and hers;
 he will crush your head,
 and you will strike his heel.”
¹⁶ To the woman he said,
 “I will greatly increase your pains in
 childbearing;
 with pain you will give birth to children.
 Your desire will be for your husband,
 and he will rule over you.”
¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife
 and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’
 “Cursed is the ground because of you;
 through painful toil you will eat of it
 all the days of your life.
¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
 and you will eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
 you will eat your food
 until you return to the ground,
 since from it you were taken;
 for dust you are
 and to dust you will return.”
²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would
 become the mother of all the living.
²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and
 his wife and clothed them.

God established marriage before sin entered the world. After Adam and Eve rebelled, God did not change the institution of marriage. The man and the woman in the marriage radically changed!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Eve’s sin appears to be that she doubted God’s veracity, that he was**

honorable, good, and trustworthy. She believed the lie of the serpent (Satan) rather than God. How does this same sin affect you in your relationship with God and others?

2. Adam's sin appears to be one of pride. He did what he wanted rather than obey his Creator. How does pride impact your relationship with God and others?

3. How did this first couple's fall into rebellion against God change their relationship with God and with one another?

4. What other aspects of the Fall and God's subsequent curse will cause tension and ambiguity in your marriage relationship?

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

The apostle Paul was writing to Christians in the following two passages. He addressed the implications of being loved by God and the results of the Holy Spirit's working in the life of the believer.

Colossians 3:12–17

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with

gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Galatians 5:22–23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What do you see in these two passages?**
- 2. How is love central to the work of God in our hearts? Where does this love come from?**
- 3. What virtues from these two passages do you see in your fiancé?**

YOUR SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

List some of your similarities and differences below. Consider various areas such as personality, hobbies, interests, strengths, family background, church background, priorities, personal habits, decision making, neatness, need for closure, promptness, drive, education, flexibility, etc.

Similarities

Differences

- 1. Which of these similarities and differences will be the most difficult to deal with in your marriage?**
- 2. What is communicated if you try to change your spouse?**
- 3. Affirmation is the foundation for change. How can you affirm one another in your differences?**
- 4. How does change occur in your life?**

Chapter 2

YOUR HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE

When I sat down with my wife's father to ask him if I could marry his daughter, he told me that he had thought for a long time about what to tell the young man who asked to marry her. He said, "Here is what I have concluded: You never know what you are getting into until you have gotten into it!" I didn't fully understand what he was saying until much later. He was trying to tell me (without pouring cold water on my enthusiasm) that marriage might not be what I hoped and expected it to be. I have come to appreciate the wisdom in those words!

It is an interesting study of the Gospel accounts to see how Jesus dealt with the expectation people placed on him as they understood him to be the Messiah. Jesus disappointed many people because they had inappropriate expectations of him. Perhaps the most surprising example is John the Baptist. John said of Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me'" (John 1:29–30). He heard God testify about Jesus being his son when he baptized him, and the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:21–22). Later John was put in prison, and he did not expect this! He sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask this question, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:19). John was satisfied that Jesus was the Messiah after hearing his answer! He had to readjust his hopes and expectations to God's plans. Perhaps this will need to happen before you marry an, at times, during your marriage.

You have many hopes, dreams, and expectations about your marriage. What you are looking forward to in marriage may not be the same things your fiancé is anticipating. Hopefully you will have some overlap! It is valuable to discuss what you hope marriage will be before you marry. This discussion can help you have a more realistic picture of your future marriage relationship. It will also help you learn more of your spouse's love language. You will not be able to think of all your hopes and expectations. You may not even know that you have an expectation until something happens that surprises you in your marriage! Do your best to articulate your hopes.

Dr. Willard Harley in his book, *His Needs, Her Needs*, lists the results of interviewing hundreds of couples about their hopes for marriage. He lists the following top five needs

that most men and women are looking to marriage to fulfill. I would call them “expectations.” There is a difference between a need and an expectation! These lists are given to help you get started as you think of your own hopes and expectations.

Her Expectations

Affection
Conversation
Honesty and openness
Financial support
Family commitment

His Expectations

Sexual fulfillment
Recreational companionship
An attractive spouse
Domestic support
Admiration

Ken Nair lists six qualities that endear men to their wives. Perhaps this list of qualities along with the following list of strands of oneness will help you as you compile a list of your expectations and hopes for marriage (*Discovering the Mind of a Woman*).

Qualities That Endear Men to Their Wives

- He can walk in and out of the house without causing damage.
- He will open his heart to her.
- He is sensitive to her and other people.
- He is thoughtful enough to remember the things important to her and is creative and imaginative in doing them.
- He does things with her; he is inclusive and not exclusive.
- He believes they really are one.

Strands of Oneness between a Husband and Wife (in random order)

Submission to God	Humility
Vulnerability	Fidelity
Affirming touch	Shared feelings
Abiding trust	Absence of defenses
Honesty	Similar values
Genuine understanding	Mutual confidence
Forgiveness	Listening to one another
Spiritual harmony	Open communications
Imparted secrets	Sensuous nearness
Closeness without inhibitions	Sexual pleasure lovingly shared
Signs of love freely given & received	
Acceptance without rejection	Sharing of responsibilities
Sensitive appreciation of your spouse’s physical & emotional response	Intellectual agreement on major issues

In thinking about your hopes and expectations for marriage, you might consider marriage relationships you have observed, beginning with your parents. Are there qualities you hope to emulate from those relationships? Are there aspects of other relationships you desire to avoid?

If you are sharing one copy, one person may want to use a separate sheet of paper.

List fifteen hopes and expectations you have regarding your marriage. It may help to begin these with: *“My hope for our marriage is....”* *“In our marriage I anticipate my husband/wife will....”* *“In our marriage I would like my husband/wife to....”* Try to be as specific as possible. After you have both made your lists, discuss them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.

List ten hopes or expectations you believe your fiancé has for you in your marriage. (Try to list things you believe your fiancé might not be comfortable listing.) Begin these with: *“In our marriage I believe my spouse will want me to....”* *“I anticipate that in our marriage my husband/wife would like....”*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Now list five hopes or expectations you have for yourself in your marriage.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

After looking over your fiancé's lists, consider the following questions:

- 1. Did you find any surprises on your fiancé's lists? If so, list them.**
- 2. Were there things you thought would be on your fiancé's lists that were not?**
- 3. Are there things on your fiancé's lists that you believe to be unrealistic or particularly challenging?**
- 4. How will you respond to your fiancé if things do not happen as you hope?**
- 5. What is the danger of expectations for your spouse in marriage? (You want to be careful not to use these lists as a weapon against your spouse.)**
- 6. Why is it better to have expectations for yourself rather than your fiancé?**

7. How will you handle holidays as a married couple? Will your practice change if you have children? (Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc.).
8. How important were birthdays (or other special events) in your family of origin? Do you like to be surprised with gifts?
9. Do you feel you and your fiancé are equally adaptable and flexible? Why is this important?
10. Who is generally more sensitive, you or your fiancé?
11. Have you had many disappointments in your life or in your relationship?
12. Are you more disappointed by others or about yourself?
13. Which of the following circumstances would be especially difficult for you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial struggles | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of job |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to purchase a home | <input type="checkbox"/> Living with parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse attracted to another person | <input type="checkbox"/> Parents living with you |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Someone flirting with your spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Living far from family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Infertility | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexpected pregnancy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse getting a chronic illness | <input type="checkbox"/> Miscarriage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse uninterested in Spiritual matters | <input type="checkbox"/> Home burglarized |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child born with a birth defect | <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse traveling regularly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse uninterested in intimacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Tension with in-laws |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addictions (food, drug, alcohol, porn) | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal problems |

Identifying idols of the Heart

Author and Pastor Tim Keller in his book, *Counterfeit Gods*, describes an idol as anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.” There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is *worship*.

Keller lists twenty questions designed to help you identify idols or potential idols in your life. Check the ones that are most likely to be true of you and then discuss them. “Life only has meaning/I only have worth if...”

- “I have power and influence over others.” (Power idolatry)

- “I am loved and respected by ____.” (Approval idolatry)
- “I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life.” (Comfort idolatry)
- “I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of ____.” (Control idolatry)
- “People are dependent on me and need me.” (Helping idolatry)
- “Someone is there to protect me and keep me safe.” (Dependence idolatry)
- “I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.” (Independence idolatry)
- “I am highly productive and getting a lot done.” (Work idolatry)
- “I am being recognized for my accomplishments, and I am excelling in my work.” (Achievement idolatry)
- “I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.” (Materialism idolatry)
- “I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in its activities.” (Religion idolatry)
- “This one person is in my life and happy to be there, and/or happy with me.” (Individual person idolatry)
- “I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and am living by a self-made morality.” (Irreligion idolatry)
- “My race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior.” (Racial/cultural idolatry)
- “A particular social group or professional group or other group lets me in.” (Inner ring idolatry)
- “My children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me.” (Family idolatry)
- “Mr. or Ms. ‘Right’ is in love with me.” (Relationship idolatry)
- “I am hurting \ in a problem; only then do I feel worthy of love or able to deal with guilt.” (Suffering idolatry)
- “My political or social cause is making progress and ascending in influence or power.” (Ideology idolatry)
- “I have a particular kind of look or body image.” (Image idolatry)

14. Which of these idols are potential temptations for you? Any of these concern a concern you have for your fiancé?

15. Can you think of any concerns you have that the two of you have not discussed to this point and want to discuss with your fiancé?

Chapter 3

FILLING YOUR SPOUSE'S EMOTIONAL TANK

I first heard the idea of an “emotional tank” from Dr. Ross Campbell’s book, *How to Really Love Your Teenager*. An emotional tank is the reservoir a person draws from to feel secure in life. Dr. Campbell gives the example of a young boy at the market with his mother who feels safe and secure enough to walk five feet ahead of her. When a stranger says hello to him, he becomes insecure and runs back to hold onto his mother’s leg for emotional reassurance. The greeting suddenly drained his emotional tank. Soon he will be recharged and able to venture out again. Teenagers and adults have emotional tanks as well. The older you are, the larger your emotional tank is. It will take more time to fill an adult’s empty emotional tank than a child’s. One of the responsibilities of a parent is to fill his or her child’s emotional tank with focused attention, love, acceptance, training, discipline, instruction, and loving touch. One calling in marriage is to fill your spouse’s emotional tank.

A need is something you can either meet or ignore. It is not something you can talk someone out of. Trying to negotiate a need is the same as ignoring it. When it comes to recognizing and filling a spouse’s emotional tank, the husband seems to be at a disadvantage compared to his wife. I compare the skills men and women have to recognize and meet the emotional needs of a spouse with boxes of crayons: Women have the sixty-four-color box with four-tiered rows and a built-in sharpener in the back! Most of her colors need two words to describe (forest green, periwinkle blue, burnt orange). Men have the eight-color box with the basic colors of black, brown, red, blue, green, yellow, orange, and purple (some call it violet)! Perhaps a better illustration would be a paint palette with eight colors to mix and match to make a variety of new colors. It takes men time to learn to make different colors with the basic eight. Women seem to have many colors premixed and continue to make new ones. It is important to learn to lovingly care for your spouse. In some ways it is like learning another language (your spouse’s love language).

Some of the emotional needs of a woman fall into four basic categories: security, romance, emotional intimacy, and affirming touch. The four complementary categories

for a man are: feeling needed, feeling appreciated, physical intimacy, and responsive to his touch. List and discuss together your respective emotional needs, using the basic categories listed above.

A Wife's Emotional Tank

A Husband's Emotional Tank

Security

Feeling needed

Romance

Feeling appreciated

Emotional intimacy

Physical intimacy

Affirming touch

Responsive to his touch

Chapter 4

THE CALL TO BE A HUSBAND

THE CALL TO BE A WIFE

As you anticipate your life together as husband and wife, it is important to talk about roles and responsibilities. However, it is dangerous to look at roles and responsibilities as duties to fulfill and obligations to perform. It is healthier and more biblical to understand marriage as a calling. God calls the man to be a husband to his wife. The woman is called to be a wife to her husband. How does this calling impact roles, responsibilities, and decision making in your relationship? That is the question we will explore in this chapter. In addition, we will address some stereotypes. What does the Bible teach about the calling of the husband? What does the Bible teach about the calling of the wife?

The picture of a man and woman united in marriage is that of oneness. You are a team of two who together have become one. You become a part of one another. The attitudes, motives, and actions of each spouse affect the team. In marriage, a husband needs to see his wife as a part of himself, as a part of his own body. A wife needs to see her husband as a part of herself. You need to cherish your spouse and look at your spouse as a precious gift from God. Include your spouse in your life. Open up and receive the other. Consider your attitude toward your own leg or arm. It is vital to you, and you depend on it. You nurture it when it is injured or weak. You grieve the loss of the use of your leg while you create an environment to allow it to heal. Your spouse is much more precious than your own leg! Cherish him or her as such!

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

Ephesians 5:1–2, 15–33

¹ Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and

gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. . . .

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Mark 10:42–45

⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Philippians 2:1–4

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united

with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What does it mean to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”? (Eph. 5:21).**
- 2. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church. Don’t think of *head* in today’s usage! To understand how the husband is to be “head” of his wife, you need to understand how Christ acted as head of the church as her Savior! How does he act according to these verses? (Eph. 5:25–28).**
- 3. What did Jesus do for the church? Considering the comparison of the husband being the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, what is the husband supposed to do for his wife?**
- 4. What does it mean for the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church?**
- 5. The husband is supposed to lead in setting the standard of love and sacrifice in the marriage relationship. What is Christ’s idea of leadership? (Mark 10:42–45).**

6. **How does the church submit to Christ?**

7. **What does this passage teach about a wife submitting to her husband?**

8. **In this passage the word *submit* implies the idea of the wife's giving in to her husband's love or responding to it. What is a good synonym for *submit* here?**

9. **A man may tend to dominate his wife physically (or by the threat of harm). Therefore, Paul concluded the passage by reiterating that a man should not dominate but "love." What happens to oneness when a man dominates his wife?**

10. **A woman may tend to dominate her husband verbally and by shaming or belittling him. Therefore, Paul taught that a woman is not to dominate but to "respect" her husband. How is oneness hurt when a woman dominates her husband?**

11. **What do both spouses need to do to make the marriage work? (Phil. 2:1-4).**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

1. **The husband should be the leader and the spiritual leader in the home.**

- 2. Will you both work after the wedding? Should the wife stay at home with preschool children?**

- 3. How will you divide up the household responsibilities?**

- 4. Will you plan and manage money matters together? How will you do this?**

- 5. Should either spouse make an unbudgeted purchase without consulting the other?**

- 6. If you have children, how will you divide the responsibility to care for them? How many children do you think you would like to have? How will you decide on discipline issues? Who will be responsible?**

- 7. Is it wrong to spank a child? Do children need strict discipline? Where does love fit with discipline?**

- 8. Will you continue to go out on dates after you are married?**

- 9. How will you handle relationships with other friends?**

- 10. How will you handle household chores?**

- 11. How important is it to have meals together as a couple? As a family?**

- 12. Do you have any family traditions you hope to carry continue?**

- 13. Are there any traditions you would like to start in your family?**

- 14. If one spouse inherits money, how will you decide what to do with it?**

- 15. How will you be involved with your extended families? What expectations for involvement do you anticipate your families have for you as a couple?**

- 16. Do you plan to take vacations regularly? How will you decide what to do?**

- 17. Who will do the grocery shopping? Who will do the cooking? Who will do the dishes?**

- 18. How will you decide where to live? Who will make decorating decisions in your home?**
- 19. You have been making decisions as an engaged couple. Do you plan to make any changes in your decision-making process as a couple after the wedding?**
- 20. How quickly do you make decisions? How about your fiancé?**
- 21. Who made most of the decisions in your home as a child?**
- 22. What will you do when you are at an impasse and a decision must be made? Will you wait until you agree before you act?**
- 23. Are there areas where you want “veto power” over your spouse’s decision? Are there areas where you want your spouse to have “veto power” over your decisions?**
- 24. When do you find it difficult to make decisions? What areas are challenging for you?**
- 25. When are you overly cautious in decision making? When have you not used enough caution?**

26. How will you handle social media as a married couple?

27. There is a difference between keeping confidences and keeping secrets from your spouse. How will you handle this together?

28. How will you guard against keeping secrets from one another (particularly online secrets)?

29. Will you meet alone with people of the opposite sex? How will you handle work relationships with those of the opposite sex?

Chapter 6

COMMUNICATION: THE KEY TO ONENESS

If you compare your marriage relationship to a garden, then communication is the water for the garden. You can destroy a garden with a fire hose! By contrast, a good steady rain will provide a garden with the life-giving water it needs to produce healthy growth. No skill is more critical to your oneness than good communication! Poor communication, miscommunication, and the lack of communication will cause you enormous struggles as a couple. Pride, stubbornness, defensiveness, and anger will further keep you from the oneness you can enjoy as a husband and wife. Submission to God, honesty, openness, forgiveness, and good communication skills are essential for a healthy marriage.

There are numerous subtleties in the communication process. People give off signals in many ways, and signals can easily be misread. You need to become skillful at giving clear communication signals to your spouse. You also need to work to understand your spouse's signals. As your relationship matures, you will grow to better understand your spouse's signals as you learn from your mistakes in this vital area of communication.

Men and women tend to use language differently. Women are generally more verbal than men. Furthermore, women often communicate to start and sustain relationships; they want to connect with people. Men usually communicate to give and receive information. Thus, if a man is not saying anything, it is because he does not have anything to say. Often a woman will say to her husband, "Let's talk!" He will respond by saying, "About what?" In effect, she is saying, "Let's connect! What is going on with you?" He is saying, "Ask me a question!" "What do you want to know?" "What do you want to talk about?"

Another common difference is that women usually like to talk through their problems, while men generally want to solve rather than talk about problems. Talking through problems allows women to vent frustrations, verbally work through the problem, and gain needed energy to face difficult situations. By contrast, if a man is thinking or talking about a problem, he is trying to solve it. Sometimes he may need to back away from the problem to gain energy to attack it. One way is not right and the other wrong. They are simply different. The different approaches to problem solving can become particularly challenging when a couple is facing a problem in their relationship. The man may want to withdraw to mentally process, and the woman may want to talk it out. The opposite may be true for some couples! You and your fiancé are unique. As a unique

couple it is vital to your relationship for you to work to understand each other and grow in the skill of communicating with each other!

The “communication package” contains three basic parts: words, tone, and nonverbal signals. The words you speak make up a small part of the message you send. The more important parts are the tone and nonverbal signals you give off as you speak. How you say what you say is generally more significant than the words you use. Eye contact, mannerisms, facial expressions, the tone of your voice, and the volume of your voice will signal what you are trying to communicate. If you use a sarcastic tone with the phrase, “Sure, that would be loads of fun!” you negate the words you use. Sometimes your total communication can be nonverbal. The rolling of the eyes is a classic example.

One of the problems with communicating through electronic means is that all you can use are words and the element of tone and nonverbal signals are unavailable. It is easy to misunderstand face to face discussions. Take caution with electronic discussions!

Cherish your spouse! Work to communicate to your spouse how important he or she is to you. Words have a great deal of power in your marriage! You can use words to create an environment for oneness in your marriage or to destroy one another and any hope for oneness.

Pastor Scotty Smith gave this equation for a rich relationship: *Time Together - Defensiveness - Distractions + Involved Listening + God’s Grace = Rich Relationship*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are your spouse’s strengths in the following areas of communication? What are his or her weaknesses? What do you think your strengths and weaknesses are?

a. Amount of communication

b. Tone

c. Nonverbal signals

d. Involved listening

- e. **Defensiveness**

- f. **Eye contact**

- g. **Volume and inflection of your voices**

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

Proverbs 12:18

Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 12:25

An anxious heart weighs a man down,
but a kind word cheers him up.

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:4

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

Proverbs 15:23

A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—
and how good is a timely word!

Proverbs 17:27–28

²⁷A man of knowledge uses words with restraint,
and a man of understanding is even-tempered.

²⁸Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent,
and discerning if he holds his tongue.

Proverbs 18:21

The tongue has the power of life and death,

and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept instruction,
and in the end you will be wise.

Proverbs 27:2

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
someone else, and not your own lips.

Proverbs 29:20

Do you see a man who speaks in haste?
There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Matthew 15:17–18

¹⁷“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’”

Ephesians 4:1–3

¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Colossians 4:6

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

James 1:19

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

James 1:26

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

James 3:5–8

⁵Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself

Levels of Vulnerability

Five: Spiritual matters (confessing sins, sharing, etc.)

Four: Feelings and emotions

Three: Ideas, judgments, hopes, dreams, fears, values, etc.

Two: Information

One: Greetings and casual conversation

1. **What level do you normally share with others? What levels do you share with your fiancé? What keeps you from being more vulnerable? What helps you?**

2. **What levels do you generally share in prayer and time alone with God?**

3. **Some people are more “thinking oriented” and others are more “feeling oriented.” Which do you consider yourself? Your spouse? Does it matter?**

Chapter 8

FORGIVENESS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As you seek to move toward oneness in your marriage, you will experience times of disappointment and hurt. These times can be opportunities to grow or traps that will keep you from growing in oneness, thus leading to distance and awkwardness in your relationship, if not to open hostility. At times you may be tempted to play destructive games in your relationship. If you get into the routine of “keeping score” and rewarding and punishing one another, you will have many difficulties. Manipulative games will destroy oneness. Prior to marriage, it is helpful to agree that manipulative games are harmful and to make a commitment to stop playing them when you become aware that you are.

Unforgiveness is a cancer that will destroy you. “Unforgiveness is the poison you drink hoping the other will die!” You may feel justified in not extending forgiveness when you focus on the way you were wronged or how you have been hurt by your spouse. The more you insist on this line of defense, the more secure you become in your feelings of hurt or indignation. You will find people who will tell you that you should withhold forgiveness. However, unforgiveness will shatter any attempt to grow in oneness in your marriage. To have a relationship with someone forgiveness is a must! The way to break loose the logjam of unforgiveness is to focus on how you have been treated by God rather than how you have been hurt by your spouse.

The Scripture says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). God has responded to evil with sacrificial love displayed in Jesus Christ and by giving his Holy Spirit. God extends himself to those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. Christ’s righteousness is credited to the believer, and the believer’s sin is charged to Christ’s account. If you were to get what you deserve from God, you would receive eternal condemnation. God does not owe you anything! Focus on how God has responded in Christ, and then draw near to him and ask him to change your heart so that you might love as radically as he has loved! Dwelling on how another person has treated you rather than how God has treated you will lead to many struggles in your life and relationships. Remember Paul’s admonition in Colossians 3:13, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What manipulative games have you seen people play to get their way?**

(that is, the silent treatment, scorekeeping, etc.)

2. **What manipulative games hurt you?**

3. **What manipulative games are you most tempted to play?**

4. **Do you have any grudges against anyone? Is there anyone you cannot forgive? Explain.**

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES TO FORGIVENESS

Psalm 130:3–4

³If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins,
O LORD, who could stand?

⁴But with you there is forgiveness;
therefore you are feared.

Matthew 6:12–15

¹²“Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do
not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your
sins.”

Matthew 18:21–22

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how
many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against
me? Up to seven times?”

²²Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but
seventy-seven times.”

Mark 11:25

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Luke 6:31

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Luke 6:35–36

³⁵“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Luke 6:37–38

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Luke 17:3–4

³So watch yourselves.

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

⁴If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

Ephesians 4:25–27

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold.

Colossians 3:12–13

¹²Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you learn from these verses regarding forgiveness?
2. Look again at Colossians 3:12–13. What is the basis for forgiving others? How is a Christian called to forgive? How are some of the manipulative games mentioned above in opposition to this admonition to forgive?
3. Can you resolve conflict without a willingness to forgive? Explain.
4. What inappropriate ways of handling conflict have you seen?
5. What triggers you to soften your heart and work toward reconciliation in a conflict? How do you try to justify keeping a hard heart in a conflict?

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Negative Ways

- Bickering
- Denying conflict
- Trying to win
- Giving in
- Giving up

Positive Ways

- Talking openly
- Talking honestly

- Seeking compromise
- Moving toward resolution

Various ways of handling conflict are listed above. The best way is to move toward resolution. Compromise can be a step in the direction toward resolution. In your relations with others you may need to try to win, give in, or give up. But, in your relationship with your spouse these are unhealthy ways of handling conflict. They will not move you toward oneness. Quite the opposite! They will erode oneness. You want to learn to cherish your spouse! You need to think the best of your spouse and seek ways to work together. You want to learn the skill of resolving conflict in a redemptive way. At times a compromise may bring resolution. At other times a compromise may only prolong dealing with the conflict.

Four responses to conflict are particularly destructive in marriage:

- walking out in the middle of an argument
- intensifying the argument in the middle of the conflict
- ridiculing, mocking, or belittling your spouse or your spouse's feelings and ideas in the midst of conflict
- believing destructive things about your spouse that are not true (that is, your spouse is actively trying to make your life miserable)

Steps to take in working toward resolution in a conflict:

1. Select a time to discuss the matter. Make sure you have enough time to work through the issue. Choose a time when you are not tired or hungry!
2. Define the problem. How would the other define it?
3. Use an example your spouse will be familiar with to compare your hurt in the present conflict.
4. Try to see the conflict from the other's point of view.
5. Remember that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Own up to how you have added to the problem. This is where the husband can take leadership in loving his wife as Christ loved the church. Someone needs to break the ice!
6. Ask for forgiveness for wrong attitudes, assumptions, hurtful words, destructive behavior, etc.
7. Decide on a response strategy if or when the situation reoccurs.

DEALING WITH ANGER

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "In your anger do not sin" (4:26), he was referring to righteous anger. Anger is an emotion. In itself it is appropriate at times. Anger can be righteous or unrighteous. When you are angry, it is important to understand why and to

determine whether your anger is appropriate.

If your anger is inappropriate (unrighteous anger), humble yourself before God and invite him to change your hard heart. Focus on how God has lovingly responded to you in Christ instead of focusing on the source of your anger.

If your anger is appropriate, be careful to express your anger appropriately. It is often the case that anger is righteous, but its expression is unrighteous and destructive. Listed below are fifteen ways of behaving while angry, Ross Campbell's book, *How to Really Love Your Teenagers*. These are divided into positive and negative categories.

Positive

- Pleasant behavior
- Seeking resolution
- Focusing anger on source only
- Holding to the primary complaint
- Thinking logically and constructively

Negative

- Unpleasant and loud behavior
- Cursing
- Displacing anger to sources other than the original
- Expressing unrelated complaints
- Throwing objects
- Destroying property
- Verbal abuse
- Emotionally destructive behavior
- Physical abuse
- Passive-aggressive behavior

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Are there things you do not have much tolerance for? (e.g. irresponsibility, incompetence, laziness). Why?**

- 2. When are you most likely to be inappropriately angry? (e.g. when you don't get your way).**

- 3. Give an example of a time when you experienced righteous anger.**

How did you express your anger at that time?

4. Using the lists as a reference point, how do you usually express your anger? How does your fiancé?

REPENTANCE AS A MEANS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

When you experience a conflict as a couple, you may have difficulty moving forward. Often the husband wants to move forward too quickly, and the wife is more cautious. The wife's caution generally comes from a fear that her husband does not understand how much hurt she has felt in the situation. She may be looking for assurance that he understands the magnitude of her hurt. Once she senses that her husband understands, she can move forward with some degree of confidence that it might not happen again. The following six steps of repentance by Thomas Watson will help you deal with the gravity of sin and then hopefully help you to embrace God's forgiveness and love in Jesus Christ.

1. Seeing your sin (owning up to your sin)
2. Sorrow over and grieving for your sin (the self-righteous show no sorrow for sin)
3. Confessing your sin (confessing specifically without making excuses)
4. Shame over your sin (Jer. 6:15: "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.")
5. Hating your sin
6. Turning from your sin

THE DEPTH OF SIN

The following quote is intended to help you grasp the extent of sin and your ongoing need for Christ's righteousness. Jack Miller would often say, "I am a big sinner and need a big Savior!" If you do not think you are a "big sinner," you will minimize your need for a Savior and minimize the work of Jesus Christ. Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* ([Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979], p. 79), comments on the dangers of minimizing sin:

During the last two centuries the understanding of sin has suffered a correlative decline in the church along with the apprehension of God. The Reformers perceived that fallen human nature was touched in every area by the deforming presence of original sin, the compulsive force operating behind individual acts of transgression. They believed that man has freedom of will to do as he pleases but that without the renewing work of the Spirit he is incurably averse to seeking and serving God. Apart from

grace his best actions are still built upon the foundation of unbelief, and even his virtues are organized as weapons against the rule of God. . . .

In the 18th and 19th centuries this depth analysis of sin was abandoned by the growing rationalist movement . . . During the same period the church's consciousness of sin began to erode along with its awareness of God. Gradually sin began to be defined in a way which seemed more rationally defensible: sins are conscious, voluntary acts of transgression against known laws.

But the structure of sin in the human personality is something far more complicated than the isolated acts and thoughts of deliberate disobedience commonly designated by the word. *In its biblical definition, sin cannot be limited to isolated instances or patterns of wrongdoing; it is something much more akin to . . . an organic network of compulsive attitudes, beliefs and behavior deeply rooted in our alienation from God.*

Chapter 8

FINANCES

Many have said that finances and sexual intimacy are the most difficult areas a couple will encounter in marriage. My experience is that oneness is the most difficult area in marriage. The lack of oneness will be revealed in tension over finances and intimacy. By contrast, the presence of oneness in a marriage is clearly reflected in the way the husband and wife handle their shared resources and their shared bodies.

It is important for the husband and wife to embrace a common attitude toward finances. If you both hold to some objective principles that are not necessarily based on your individual experiences or desires, you can avoid many problems with finances. You and your fiancé may have different attitudes regarding debt, giving, spending, saving, and budgeting. It is important to reach a mutual attitude toward these aspects of your finances

Even though you may come to agreement on principles about your finances, it may take a while to get to the point of being able to apply these principles in your shared life. You may need three to six months to learn how much your monthly expenses are. You need to keep in mind that spending for a wedding is not the same as spending within your married life. It may take you time to settle down and gain a handle on your finances. You want to avoid the extremes of being overzealous too early in your marriage or procrastinating about your finances. There are several good books and resources on this subject that could benefit you if you hit some snags in this area. You might ask couples you both respect how they handle their budget and finances.

What is your attitude toward wealth? Does money make a person more significant? Does money impress God? Money cannot make a person more significant! Jesus Christ was the most significant person that ever walked the earth. He preached that a person's life was more than his or her possessions. He also practiced what he preached! When he died he had only the clothing on his back to be divided up, yet he was rich toward God and toward people!

There are many things money cannot do for you. Money usually gives you more options, but it is not the only thing that gives you options. Education, training, skills, experience, discipline, and relationships can also increase your options!

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES REGARDING FINANCES

Deuteronomy 8:17–18

¹⁷You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

1 Chronicles 29:11–12

¹¹“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.
¹²Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.
In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.”

Proverbs 6:10–11

¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—
¹¹ and poverty will come on you like a bandit
and scarcity like an armed man.

Proverbs 13:11

Dishonest money dwindles away,
but he who gathers money little by little
makes it grow.

Proverbs 13:22

A good man leaves an inheritance
for his children’s children,
but a sinner’s wealth is stored up for the righteous.

Proverbs 23:4–5

⁴Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
have the wisdom to show restraint.
⁵Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone,
for they will surely sprout wings
and fly off to the sky like an eagle.

Proverbs 25:28

Like a city whose walls are broken down
is a man who lacks self-control.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

Whoever loves money never has money enough;
whoever loves wealth is never
satisfied with his income.

This too is meaningless.

Matthew 6:19–21

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,
where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in
and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do
not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there
your heart will be also.”

Luke 12:15

Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard
against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in
the abundance of his possessions.”

Romans 13:6–8

⁶This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are
God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.

⁷Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay
taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if
honor, then honor.

⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing
debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man
has fulfilled the law.

Philippians 4:11–13

¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have
learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know
what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have
plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and
every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living
in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do everything through him who
gives me strength.

1 Timothy 6:6–10

⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we
brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing
out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be
content with that. ⁹People who want to get rich fall into
temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful
desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the
love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people,

eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Timothy 6:17–19

¹⁷Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,
“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What money traps do the Scriptures warn against?**
- 2. Do you *really* believe your life is more than “the abundance of [your] possessions” (Luke 12:15)? Explain.**
- 3. Is money the problem? Is money evil or is the love of money evil? (See Eccles. 5:10; Phil. 4:11–13; 1 Tim. 6:6–10). Explain.**
- 4. What does it mean to “let no debt remain outstanding” (Rom. 13:6–8)?**

SOME PRINCIPLES ABOUT MONEY AND POSSESSIONS TO CONSIDER

- Everything you have has been entrusted to you by God (1 Chron. 29:11–12). You are a steward or manager of what God has given. Your time, talents and treasures are from his hand (Deut. 8:17–18).
- Greed will destroy you. If you focus on making money and acquiring possessions, you will never find contentment (Eccles. 5:10).
- There is a reason work is called “work.” Laziness will lead to destruction (Prov. 6:10–11).
- Learn to be generous with the resources that are entrusted to you. The things you seek to hold on to will become idols to you.
- Budgeting “your” money (and time for that matter) takes self-control (Prov. 25:28). Yet, it can give you freedom over your finances. You can spend money with the confidence that you are not robbing other areas, because you have money set aside for them as well.
- It is no challenge to spend more money than you make. The challenge is to spend significantly less than you make so you can save and give to others in need. Leave yourself some margin. There is a fine line between living within your means and living beyond your means. Stay away from that line by living below your means.
- Do not borrow money for depreciating items. Credit is a subtle trap! Learn to be patient rather than falling into the mindset of “enjoy now, pay later.”
- The more “things” you accumulate the more time you will have to spend taking care of those things. Seek to live more simply.

Ron Blue mentions the three most common mistakes couples make regarding their money: living a consumptive lifestyle; not budgeting their money (making a joint conscious decision what to do with money before spending it); spending too much money on automobiles (*Mastering Your Money* [Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1986], 113–18).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Do you and your fiancé agree with these principles? Explain.**
- 2. What principles about money would you add to this list?**
- 3. What is your attitude toward unsecured loans (credit card debt, etc.)?**

- 4. Do you have any outstanding debt you will bring into the marriage? Do you know your fiancé's financial status? Have you shared yours?**

- 5. What fears do you have about your financial situation as a couple?**

- 6. How do you plan to manage your finances after your wedding?**

- 7. Have you thought about a budget? How many checking accounts will you have?**

- 8. Do you both have similar attitudes toward standard of living, giving, saving, and debt?**

- 9. Who will pay the bills, balance the checkbook, and handle investments?**

Chapter 8

SEXUAL INTIMACY

Dr. Ed Wheat defines *intimacy* as the state of being most private, most personal in relationship. It depicts a special quality of emotional closeness between two people in which both are constantly alert and responsive to fluctuations of feelings and to the well-being of the other. Dr. Helen Kaplan terms intimacy “an important ingredient in the quality of love and of life. A high degree of intimacy between two spouses contributes to the happiness and emotional stability of both. All activities are more enjoyable, and life is richer and more colorful when shared with an intimate partner” *Disorders of Sexual Desire*.

Men approach sexual intimacy quite differently from the way women generally view it. When you speak of the differences between men and women, this difference may top all the lists! Moving toward oneness in the sharing of sexual intimacy is a challenge with potential for great rewards in your relationship. Understanding things from your spouse’s view is critical if you are going to enjoy sexual oneness. Sexual intimacy can be the road to expressing oneness. However, the road toward oneness can also be the road away from oneness!

It is important to remember that God created us male and female. This unique creation includes the different sexual responses and attitudes of males and females toward sexual intimacy. God designed the sexual union for a husband and wife in marriage (Genesis 2:24). He instituted marriage and has instructed us that sexual intimacy belongs in the context of the commitment, sanctity, and security of a marriage. This instruction is for our good.

God has designed sexual intimacy in marriage for three reasons: pleasure, procreation, and communication.

1. *Pleasure*: God designed sexual intimacy to be enjoyable. He created the orgasm. He designed the various responses to sexual stimulation. He created the sensitivity of the head of the penis. The sole purpose of a woman’s clitoris is for sexual stimulation. This is God’s design. Though pleasure is the first reason it is not the most important.
2. *Procreation*: God planned that children would be brought into this world in the setting of a committed relationship between a man and woman in marriage. In this context of love and devotion a child would be brought into the world with a mother and father to give love, care, guidance, and protection.
3. *Communication*: Sexual intercourse does not *create* intimacy, love, or oneness. However, it can *express* and *solidify* an existing intimacy, love, and

oneness that are already present in the marriage relationship. Within the sexual union the husband and wife are enveloped into one another. They press their bodies together as if to become one body. If no love or oneness is present in the relationship, then any sexual union will be for pleasure or procreation only. Without a growing oneness in marriage, sex will be a struggle for a couple. If you spend the gift of sex on pleasure only, what will you have left to communicate oneness and love? Sexual intimacy for pleasure only will not sustain a relationship. The relationship will not grow emotionally. The focus will soon become making the sexual act more exciting. This is a dead-end street! Such is the damage of sexual intimacy outside a growing oneness in marriage.

My experience in working with couples preparing for marriage has shown me that the man usually enters marriage considering pleasure as the primary reason for sex, while the woman sees communicating an existing oneness as the primary reason for sex. This difference in perspective can set the stage for many misunderstandings in the sexual relationship. Often a wife will have to help her husband understand the communicative aspects of sexual intimacy. She needs to help him see what makes her want to be close to him. Most husbands want their wives to enjoy sexual intimacy. The husband needs to work to help his wife enjoy the sexual union. He needs to learn how to work with her to allow her to experience orgasm. This is an art form to explore throughout your marriage relationship as you grow and mature.

Many resources on the physical union between a husband and wife are available, and I would highly recommend reading one. Techniques need to be learned. You are not born with this knowledge! Ed Wheat's, *Intended for Pleasure*, Nancy Houston's *Love and Sex; A Christian Guide to Healthy Intimacy*, or a similar type of book will help you explore the physiological aspects of the sexual union.

Some church traditions teach that the use of contraception and birth control by a married couple is sinful. I do not believe the Scriptures support this position. If the only reason for sex in marriage were procreation, I might be inclined to agree. However, procreation is not the only reason God created the sexual union. As mentioned before, solidifying a growing oneness between the couple is highest purpose for sexual intimacy in marriage.

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES REGARDING SEXUAL INTIMACY

Genesis 2:24

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Genesis 4:1

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."

Song of Solomon 2:3-7

³ Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest
is my lover among the young men.

I delight to sit in his shade,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
⁴ He has taken me to the banquet hall,
and his banner over me is love.
⁵ Strengthen me with raisins,
refresh me with apples,
for I am faint with love.
⁶ His left arm is under my head,
and his right arm embraces me.
⁷ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you
by the gazelles and by the does of the field:
Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

Song of Solomon 4:1–5

¹ How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes behind your veil are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
descending from Mount Gilead.
² Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn,
coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin;
not one of them is alone.
³ Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;
your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.
⁴ Your neck is like the tower of David,
built with elegance;
on it hang a thousand shields,
all of them shields of warriors.
⁵ Your two breasts are like two fawns,
like twin fawns of a gazelle
that browse among the lilies.

Song of Solomon 5:10–16

¹⁰ My lover is radiant and ruddy,
outstanding among ten thousand.
¹¹ His head is purest gold;
his hair is wavy
and black as a raven.
¹² His eyes are like doves
by the water streams,
washed in milk,
mounted like jewels.
¹³ His cheeks are like beds of spice

yielding perfume.
His lips are like lilies
dripping with myrrh.
¹⁴ His arms are rods of gold
set with chrysolite.
His body is like polished ivory
decorated with sapphires.
¹⁵ His legs are pillars of marble
set on bases of pure gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon,
choice as its cedars.
¹⁶ His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is altogether lovely.
This is my lover, this my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

Song of Solomon 7:1–9

¹ How beautiful your sandaled feet,
O prince's daughter!
Your graceful legs are like jewels,
the work of a craftsman's hands.
² Your navel is a rounded goblet
that never lacks blended wine.
Your waist is a mound of wheat
encircled by lilies.
³ Your breasts are like two fawns,
twins of a gazelle.
⁴ Your neck is like an ivory tower.
Your eyes are the pools of Heshbon
by the gate of Bath Rabbim.
Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon
looking toward Damascus.
⁵ Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel.
Your hair is like royal tapestry;
the king is held captive by its tresses.
⁶ How beautiful you are and how pleasing,
O love, with your delights!
⁷ Your stature is like that of the palm,
and your breasts like clusters of fruit.
⁸ I said, "I will climb the palm tree;
I will take hold of its fruit."
May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine,
the fragrance of your breath like apples,
⁹ and your mouth like the best wine.

Mark 10:7–9

⁷ “‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

1 Corinthians 6:16–20

¹⁶Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? ²⁰You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 7:2–5

²But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Thessalonians 4:3–5

³It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What new insights about sexual intimacy have you gained from these Scriptures?**

2. What does Paul mean by “you are not your own; you were bought at a price”? (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

3. How will Paul’s admonition that your body does not belong to you only but also to your spouse affect your marriage? (1 Cor. 7:2–5).

4. What will it mean in your sexual intimacy to see yourselves as a part of one another?

5. Using the verses from the Song of Solomon, what observations can you make about the love relationship between a husband and wife?

6. Do you and your fiancé share the same views toward sexual intimacy? Are your views consistent with the Scriptures?

7. Do you and your fiancé agree about contraception and birth control?

8. Have you discussed your hopes for the first night of your honeymoon? Preparations for the wedding and the wedding day can be physically and emotionally draining, especially for the bride. Have you considered this?

9. Are there any biblical restrictions placed on a married couple regarding sex?

- 10. What about sexual intimacy during menstruation?**

- 11. How often do you anticipate having sexual intercourse?**

- 12. What is a good way for your spouse to approach you when sexual intimacy is desired? How much preparation do you think you will need? Is spontaneity good?**

- 13. Will masturbation have a place in your sexual relationship? How should you view this?**

- 14. What are some of the common differences between a man's expectations and a woman's expectations of sexual intimacy?**

- 15. How important will it be for you to go to bed together each night? Will this be difficult or even possible? Explain.**

In your marriage, you may be surprised by your discovery of the differences between men and women. One key difference is that men are more physically oriented and women more emotionally oriented. A woman needs to be emotionally close to her husband to enjoy physical closeness. A man needs physical closeness to be able to give of himself emotionally. When a woman makes a comment about closeness, she may be speaking of emotional closeness whereas the man is hearing physical closeness. You need listen and understand what she is saying. You will need help from your spouse with this.

Here are some other differences you may want to discuss:

- Women are hormonally cyclical; men are not.
- Women are usually more modest than men.
- A man thinks he should know how to please his wife sexually.
- God has created a woman's body to give life. This is obvious regarding conception, birthing a child, nursing a child, etc. A wife's body gives life to her husband before it gives life to a child. Notice the metaphors in The Song of Solomon regarding his wife's body nourishing him and exciting him!
- A man likes direct touch and therefore will tend to give his wife direct sexual touch if not instructed otherwise. A woman likes indirect touch and will usually give her husband indirect sexual touch if not shown differently.
- A man wants his wife to desire sexual closeness. A woman wants her husband to desire emotional closeness.
- Sexual intercourse places physical demands on the husband and emotional demands on the wife.
- Emotional rejection is difficult for women. Physical rejection is difficult for men. Take care not to use emotional or physical intimacy as a reward or punishment! This will destroy oneness.
- A man needs to learn how to read his wife and work to please her sexually. The woman's response will greatly affect the man's pleasure and performance.
- A woman generally must give herself to sexual stimulation to reach orgasm; stimulation alone usually will bring a man to orgasm.
- Pornography falsely creates women with the same sexual desires as men. Reality is not the concern. Pornography can do great harm to a man's attitude toward his wife and their sexual union. (The same may be true with romance novels and movies. Romance novels create men to be what women want!)
- A man will likely be attracted to his wife's vaginal area. He may also expect his wife to be equally fascinated with his penis, which may not be the case.

Ten Recommendations for Creating a Great Sex Life from Clifford and Joyce Penner

1. The most vital factor in producing a great sexual relationship in marriage revolves around the role of the man.
2. The man must move in the direction of the woman's needs.
3. The woman needs to learn how to receive.
4. The woman must be free to lead in the sexual experience.
5. The man must progress very s-l-o-w-l-y.
6. The man needs to remain flexible, without a set "agenda" for how things are supposed to go.
7. Both husband and wife need to be into the sexual process for the pleasure of it—not for the results of it.
8. If one partner was the victim of sexual abuse during childhood, healing from the trauma must take place for a healthy sexual relationship to occur.
9. Mutual satisfaction should be the expectation in every sexual experience.

10. It is vital that both partners know how the body works sexually.

Levels of Physical Intimacy Between a Couple

Nonsexual intimacy

- Holding hands (hand to hand)
- Arm around the shoulder (hand to shoulder)
- A hug or kiss on the cheek (cheek to cheek)

Quasisexual intimacy

- A kiss (lips to lips; mouth to mouth)
- A hug and a kiss (hand to head; mouth to mouth; clothed body to body)

Sexual intimacy

- Hand to breasts, chest, stomach, bottom
- Hand to genital
- Lips and mouth to body
- Lips and mouth to breasts, chest, stomach, bottom
- Lips and mouth to genital
- Genital to genital

GENUINE PHYSICAL INTIMACY CAN HEAL, RENEW, REFRESH, AND SUSTAIN A MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

Genuine Physical Intimacy: “The practice of tenderness, shared thoughts, exchanged feelings, mutual supportiveness and trust, the valuing of each other’s bodies, almost as if they were your own, shared laughter, a closeness so substantial and abiding that no one else can interfere with it—all adds up to continuous sexual interaction in a deeply satisfying form. It is the mating pattern of true sexual intimacy” (Ed Wheat and Gloria Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure* [New York: Revell, 1977], 132).

A PRESCRIPTION FOR INTIMACY: LOVE (TRUST), SENSUOUSNESS, AND SEXUALITY

Establish a mutual love, respect, and trust. Love as God has loved you. Forgive as God has forgiven you. Extend grace, mercy, and acceptance as God has done to you.

Learn to enjoy sensuousness. Sensuousness is the need to be held, fondled, caressed, and touched. Sensuality is a preoccupation with the physical.

Relate sexually as lovers. Lovers court one another. They enjoy being together and cherish one another. After sexual intimacy, hold one another. A man wants reassurance that he has pleased his wife. A woman wants reassurance of her husband’s love and that he has been pleased and satisfied.

Chapter 9

THE WEDDING CEREMONY

The focus of this material has been to encourage you to prepare for your marriage, not just your wedding. A wedding is a great time to celebrate. You invite your family and friends to join in on your excitement and to rejoice with you. It should be a time to gather with family and friends to celebrate that God has called you together to be one in marriage. It gives you the opportunity to publicly vow before God and witnesses to become husband and wife. A father gives his daughter into the hands of her betrothed. A man vows to care for his bride as a cherished wife and to be faithful to her alone. A woman vows to care for her groom lovingly and faithfully. It can be a precious time. It can also be exhausting and expensive if things get out of hand!

It is important to keep your thinking about the wedding ceremony in the proper perspective. You want to remember the primary reason for the event and not lose perspective of the more important things that are taking place during the wedding ceremony. You may be inundated with decisions and details in planning for the wedding. You may be overwhelmed with pressure as the day approaches. Keep reminding yourself of the primary purpose of the day. At the rehearsal, I tell the bride and groom that no matter what happens at the wedding they will be married. That is the most important thing! Try to relax and enjoy your family and friends. Let others handle as many of the details as possible. Some plans may not work out as you wanted them to. You need to be flexible. The more pressure you place on everything working out perfectly the more stressful the day will be. Avoid the trap of letting minor details frustrate you..

The wedding couple usually have different expectations for the wedding day. You may be able to help one another keep the day and event in perspective. Often the bride and her family handle much of the planning. You should both be involved in the major decisions so that you feel it is a shared event. My experience is that a bride wants her groom to feel part of the wedding and the events prior to it.

Much advice about wedding ceremonies is available. This abundance of wedding advice is often problematic because too many options or shared opinions can create confusion for the couple. Remember your families as you consider the day. As you plan the wedding ceremony, always keep in mind the priority of what you are doing and why you are doing it.

I will base the following information on the wedding ceremony on the assumption

that you are planning a church ceremony with a pastor performing the wedding. Churches usually have individual policies regarding the use of their sanctuaries and facilities for a wedding. Some will allow other pastors to perform the ceremony. Some require that one of their pastors perform or at least participate in the ceremony. Some churches have a wedding coordinator who will work with you, and most probably do not. Some churches require you to use their own pianist or organist with their facilities. Some churches have facilities for a reception and policies about what can be done or served at the reception. You need to work with the church, church staff, and pastor on these details.

Most pastors welcome the couple's input into the ceremony. However, this is not a guarantee. Certain things need to take place in a wedding. Normally the order of the service is flexible, within reason. You can also add certain elements and choose music to personalize your ceremony. You may want to have input on the Scripture readings and selection of the wording of the vows. I have officiated many weddings and have seen a variety of things done. Some couples want a traditional wedding and ask me to choose the order of service. These couples only select the music. I work with them on the Scripture readings and vows and do the rest of the service on my own. Others want to work through every detail of the wedding. Work with your pastor or officiant to plan the ceremony.

ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER IN A WEDDING CEREMONY

Music. The use of music is a great way to personalize the wedding ceremony. You have the prelude (including the seating of the mothers), processional, solos, hymns, recessional, and postlude music to choose from. You also usually have several options regarding instruments you want to incorporate into the service. Work with the church, family, and friends to make these decisions.

Scripture. You may want to incorporate into the ceremony some passages that have been particularly meaningful to you. Here are a few passages you might like to consider as readings: Genesis 2:18–25; Ruth 1:16b–17; Psalm 27:1–8, 11–14; Psalm 139:1–24; Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Song of Solomon 8:6–7; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Ezekiel 36:24–27; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13, Ephesians 3:14–21; Ephesians 4:1–6; Ephesians 5:22–33; Philippians 2:1–11; Colossians 3:12–17; 1 John 4:7–19, Mark 10:7–9.

Vows. Some couples want to write their own vows. Several different variations of traditional vows can be used. Some pastors might use a set of vows. I commend traditional vows to you. The promise to receive another as a spouse for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to as long as we both shall live are significant vows! You might want to use some variation of the traditional vows. Work with your pastor on this. Here are some ideas to work with:

- I *groom/bride* take you *bride/groom* to be my lawfully wedded *wife/husband*. I promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be your loving and faithful *husband/wife*, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live. This is my solemn vow.
- *Bride/Groom*, I take you to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live. This is my solemn vow.

- In the name of God, I *groom/bride* take you *bride/groom*, to be my *wife/husband*, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

- I *groom* take you *bride* to be my *wife*. Believing that God has called us together, I pledge to love you as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. By God's grace, I will seek to lead our home, protecting and providing for you. I will pray for you, respect you, and trust you. And with God's help, he will always be the center of our relationship and the one we together love, serve, and honor.

I *bride* take you *groom* to be my *husband*. Believing that God has called us together, I pledge to love you as the church loves Christ. By God's grace I will encourage you. I will pray for you, respect you, and trust you. And with God's help, he will always be the center of our relationship and the one we together love, serve, and honor.

- *Bride/Groom*, I promise with God's help to be your faithful *husband/wife*, to love and to serve you as Christ commands, as long as we both shall live.

Wedding Coordinator and Director. A wedding coordinator is someone who helps work out all the details of planning a wedding and helps direct the wedding ceremony itself. At the rehearsal the wedding director can assist the pastor, bride, and groom in leading the wedding party through the ceremony they have planned with the pastor. At the rehearsal you want to go over each person's role for the ceremony. A director can prompt participants regarding the timing of their parts. This person can be a paid professional but does not have to be. Someone who has attended or participated in weddings could do a fine job. I have performed many weddings with a professional wedding director, with a nonprofessional, and with no wedding director. It is up to you! The larger the wedding party and the more complicated the ceremony, the more likely you may want someone with experience. When selecting a wedding director, remember that there is a difference between directing and controlling.

Order of the Ceremony. As mentioned before, you should work with your pastor. In some church traditions most of the decisions regarding the wedding are already made. Some include a full church service as part of the wedding. Ask your pastor about the significance of certain parts of the wedding. This will aid you in working through the planning of the ceremony. Here are some terms and a suggested order. The items in brackets are *suggested* places for parts you may want to include in the ceremony.

- Prelude
- Seating of the Mothers
- Processional
- Welcome (Called *Call to Worship* and/or *Charge*)
- Prayer (Opening prayer of God's blessing called *Invocation*)
- [Congregational Hymn]
- Declaration of Intent (The question answered by "I do" or "I will"; also called *Confirmation of Commitment* or *Declaration of Consent*)
- The Bridal Gift ("Who gives/presents this woman . . ."; also called *Presentation of the Bride*)

- Scriptural Reading(s)
- The Significance of Christian Marriage (Brief remarks in response to the Scripture reading and words of encouragement to the couple; also called *Homily*)
- Exchange of Vows
- Exchange of Rings
- [Unity candle (or some other symbol of the marriage bond) and solo]
(Two candles lit by the mothers are taken by the couple, who together light a central candle and extinguish the side candles—some prefer to leave the side candles burning.)
- Prayer for the Couple (Prayer for the new husband and wife)
- [The Lord’s Prayer] (Solo, or recited in unison at the end of the prayer)
- Pronouncement of Marriage
- Benediction; also called *The Marriage Blessing*
- Kiss
- Introduction
- Recessional
- Postlude

Chapter 10

GROWING SPIRITUALLY IN MARRIAGE

You need to continue to grow in your relationship with the Lord throughout your lives and in your marriage. The Scriptures tell us that we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). The love you receive from God in Jesus Christ and by the working of the Holy Spirit is the love you are to extend to others. That first “other” should be your spouse! Your love should not be static but dynamic. It should be growing and maturing. The Christian is called to be a conduit of God’s grace to others and not merely a receptacle of his grace, love, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion.

Paul instructed the Philippians to be like-minded, have the same love, and be one in the Spirit, since they all had encouragement by being united with Christ, comfort from his love, fellowship with the Spirit, tenderness, and compassion (Phil. 2:1–2). Receiving grace from God should cause you to spill out grace to others. Paul instructed the Colossians to forgive as the Lord forgave them (Col. 3:13). He used Jesus as an example for the believer to follow in his sacrificial giving (2 Cor. 8:9) and in his humble attitude (Phil. 2:5). As followers of Christ we are to emulate his example. Paul wrote that he labored with God’s power working within him to present everyone he worked with complete in Christ (Col. 1:28–29). Marriage can be a context in which God continues to refine you as you follow him.

You should grow in understanding, believing, obeying, and sharing the gospel. This growth will help your oneness mature if you can do it together as a couple. You will want to develop a heart for God, people, and God’s Word. I know that these three are eternal: God, people, and God’s Word! Together, pour your life into them. You need to draw near to God and invite him to change your hearts to enable you to follow him by expressing your faith through love (Gal. 5:6). Together look for ways to grow and to be stretched spiritually and to serve God through serving others.

My wife and I take walks together in the mornings to talk and pray. We also participate in a small group with other couples for support and encouragement. We stay active in our local church together. Furthermore, we have enjoyed reading the Scriptures together. Though we read individually, we read the same passages. If you read three chapters of the Old Testament and one chapter of the New Testament daily, you can read the entire Bible in a year. There are many great software applications that assist in reading plans. I commend The Bible Project (thebibleproject.com) to you an excellent

resource. Pace yourselves and enjoy your spiritual journey together!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What are you presently doing to grow in your relationship with God?**
- 2. How do you presently draw near to God in prayer?**
- 3. What is your current practice of reading, studying, and applying God's Word?**
- 4. How can you grow spiritually as a couple?**
- 5. After a season of adjusting to marriage, what area of service would you like to participate in as a couple?**
- 6. What will happen if you grow spiritually, but your spouse does not?**
- 7. What concerns do you have about your spiritual life together in your marriage?**
- 8. Are you planning to get involved in a local church as a couple?**

9. What is important to look for when considering a local church?

10. Are there other couples you can meet with for the purpose of growing together in the gospel?

11. Where will you go to seek spiritual counsel when you need it?

List below the warning signs (I call them “red flags”) that the oneness in your relationship is deteriorating rather than growing. List next to the red flag warning what action you can take to respond your spouse to cultivate oneness. (Examples: critical attitude toward your spouse, lack of communication, little time spent together, lack of intimacy, etc.)

Red Flag Warning

Response

The material, Scriptures, questions, and exercises have been designed to help you lay a foundation for experiencing a lifetime of love in your marriage. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for one another as you continue to build on this foundation throughout your married life.