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CHAPTER 1

What Is Marriage?

You are probably about to begin one of the most important stages of your life—marriage. Marriage contains unique and interesting potential. As one bright optimist put it, “Marriage is the only game of chance in town where both players can win or both lose!” This manual has been developed to help you decrease the risk element from marriage. We trust that as you and your fiancé work through this program, your present relationship will be strengthened and enhanced as a prelude to an enriching, fulfilling, and growing marriage. We also hope that you will have a much more realistic perception of yourself, your fiancé, and your upcoming marriage.

1. Define marriage. What is its purpose?

2. Do you believe that marriage is a contract? Why or why not?

3. How do you think your fiancé will answer these questions?

4. Read the following quotations. After you have read each of them indicate which portions you agree with and which portions you disagree with.

"Marriage resembles a pair of shears, so joined that they cannot be separated; often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing anyone who comes between them."1

"Is marriage a private action of two persons in love, or a public act of two pledging a contract? Neither, it is something other. Very much other! Basically, the Christian view of marriage is not that it is primarily or essentially a binding legal and social contract. The Christian understands marriage as a covenant made under God and in the presence of fellow members of the Christian family. Such a pledge endures, not because of the force of law or the fear of its actions, but because an unconditional covenant has been made. A covenant more solemn, more binding, more permanent than any legal contract."2

"A system by means of which persons who are sinful and contentious are so caught up by a dream and a purpose bigger than themselves that they work through the years, in spite of repeated disappointment, to make the dream come true."3
“Marriage is a relationship between man and woman intended by God to be a monogamous relationship, intended to be a permanent bond in which many needs are satisfied—the need to love and be loved, the need for deep friendship, for sharing, for companionship, for sexual satisfaction, for children, the need to escape loneliness. Marriage ought to be a bond of love, reflecting the love Christ has for His people, a bond of sacrificial love where husband and wife have become one, one flesh, a unity.”

Read Genesis 2:18-25
1. Who originated the marriage institution?

2. What are the purposes of marriage, and why was it originated? (See Genesis 1:28; 2:18; Ephesians 5:22-32.)
   (1)
   (2)
   (3)
   (4)

3. How is marriage good? (Genesis 2:18; Hebrews 13:4.)

4. What is a helper, in your opinion? In your fiancé’s opinion?

5. What does "leaving mother and father" involve?

6. What do the words “shall cleave” or “will be united” mean?

7. What do the words “be one flesh” mean to you?

8. List six ways that you can promote and maintain the oneness characteristic in your upcoming marriage.
   (1)
   (2)
   (3)
   (4)
   (5)
   (6)
9. List three of the most important Scripture verses upon which you would like to base your marriage relationship. (Please use passages other than Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Corinthians 13; and 1 Peter 3:1-7, as most couples automatically look to these. They are important, but think through other important passages that will assist you in establishing the type of marriage you are seeking.)

(1) 

(2) 

(3) 

Here is another definition of marriage that you may want to consider. “The marriage relationship is a school, a learning and growing environment in which (if everything is as it should be) both partners can grow and develop. The relationship grows along with them. If you can see marriage as an opportunity for growth, you can be satisfied and can satisfy your spouse.”

Dr. David Hubbard graphically described the marriage relationship when he said, “Marriage does not demand perfection. But it must be given priority. It is an institution for sinners. No one else need apply. But it finds its finest glory when sinners see it as God’s way of leading us through his ultimate curriculum of love and righteousness.” Have you ever thought about the purpose of marriage in that light?

Here’s another definition of marriage. Consider it carefully, and then talk over your feelings with your partner: “A Christian marriage is a total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to each other. It is a commitment in which nothing is held back. Marriage is a pledge of mutual fidelity; it is a partnership of mutual subordination. A Christian marriage is similar to a solvent, a freeing up of
the man and woman to be themselves and become all that God intends for them to become. Marriage is a refining process that God will use to have us become the man or woman He wants us to become. Think about it. God will use your marriage for His purpose. He will mold and refine you for your own benefit and for His glory.”

You may be thinking that when you marry there will be two individuals involved in that marriage. That is true, but there is a third party who can give an even greater meaning to your individual and married life—that person is Jesus Christ. In what way will the presence of Jesus Christ in your life make a difference in your marriage?

Read Matthew 7:24-27. This passage is talking about building your house upon a firm foundation. List what you believe are ten firm foundations which will go into making a solid marriage relationship.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. 
10.

Reasons for Marriage

There are many reasons and motivating factors for marriage. What are yours? Have you ever thought about them? Respond to the following and discuss your answers with your fiancé.

1. What will you receive out of marriage that you wouldn’t receive by remaining single?

2. On a separate piece of paper, list the reasons why you are marrying your fiancé. After you have done that, list the reasons why you think your fiancé is marrying you. Then share the results.

Now compare your reasons for marriage with the following list, which has been compiled by several specialists in marriage and family life education. These are unhealthy reasons for marriage. If you find that any of these appear either on your list or in your mind, you should spend time discussing them with your fiancé and your marriage advisor.

1. To spite or get back at your parents.
2. Because of a negative self-image—marrying your fiancé will make you feel worthwhile and will give meaning to your life.
3. To be a therapist or counselor to your fiancé.
4. Fear of being left out—being single forever.
5. Fear of independence.

6. Marrying on the rebound— you were hurt in a former love relationship and to ease your hurt you immediately choose another.

7. Fear of hurting the other person—you’re afraid of what will happen to your fiancé if you break up even though you know that marriage is not the answer.

8. To escape an unhappy home.

9. Because you are pregnant or your fiancé is pregnant.

10. Because you have had sex.

A few of the positive reasons for marriage include:

1. Companionship.

2. To work together and fulfill your own and your future mate’s needs.

3. To fulfill sexual needs in the way God intends.

4. Love (an adequate blending of the various types of love, as explained in Chapter 3).

5. Because you are convinced that it is God’s will for you to marry this person.

Evaluate your “marriageability” by examining the personality traits of yourself and your fiancé. List eight character or personality traits that you feel would help a marriage.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Turn in your Bible to Galatians 5:22,23 and read over the fruit of the Spirit. Would these traits, manifested in a person, increase the potential of success in marriage?

If so, indicate which of these you manifest and which of them you are still having difficulty displaying.

In addition to using the fruit of the Spirit as a guide for evaluating the potential success of a marriage, consider these eight marriageability traits that give a person a greater possibility of having an enriched and satisfying marriage.

1. Adaptability and flexibility—the ability to change and adapt.

2. Empathy—the ability to be sensitive to the needs, hurts, and desires of others, to feel with them and experience the world from their perspective.

3. The ability to work through problems.

4. The ability to give and receive love.

5. Emotional stability—accepting and controlling one’s emotions.
6. Communication skills.

7. Similarities between the two people.

8. Similar family background.

The natural inclination is to look at this list and say, “Oh yes, that’s us. We are like that and have these characteristics.” If you feel these traits are present in your relationship, give a specific example of how each of the first six traits was manifested in the past two weeks. Then, for traits seven and eight, give examples of each type of similarity.

1. (1)

2. (2)

3. (3)

4. (4)

5. (5)

6. (6)

7. (1)

8. (2)

3. (3)

4. (4)

5. (5)

Now that you’ve taken a close look at the fundamental issues of marriage, it’s natural to move to organizing and implementing the details of your wedding day. “Planning Your Wedding Together” on page 87 will help both of you make this a special, unifying time of preparation.