

52 WAYS TO  
CONNECT  
AS A  
COUPLE

JAY  
PAYLEITNER



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## 52 WAYS TO CONNECT AS A COUPLE

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*To Alec and Lindsay, Randall and Rachel,  
Max and Megan, and Isaac and Kaitlin.  
May you discover new ways to love each other more every day.*



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# Introduction

Whaddaya say? Let's make marriage sexy again. Let's applaud monogamy. Let's give a shout-out for wedded bliss. Let's study our spouses to see how we can serve them and make them deliriously happy.

What if husbands and wives began dating, playing, hanging out, and laughing together? What if couples helped each other chase dreams, feel appreciated, and maybe even break bad habits?

What if—miraculously—you and your beloved never slammed another door in anger and completely stopped arguing about dirty dishes, in-laws, and credit card bills?

Husbands: What if you muted the playoff game and actually turned to make eye contact when your wife asks a question?

Wives: What if you stopped trashing your husband when you talk with your girlfriends?

Do you kiss in the kitchen? Do you put sex on the calendar? Do you pray together? Are you saving up for a second honeymoon? If not, why not start now?

Here are some ideas you can use this very week to connect as a couple. Pack a picnic. Buy new bed linens. Go to a drive-in movie. Leave a love note. Rent a Porsche. Rent a tandem. Or maybe visit his or her old neighborhood.

Here's an even better idea. Let's start a campaign to build lasting monuments to men and women who have stayed married for 40, 50, 60 years. Oh, wait—those monuments already exist! They're called

families. With kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids. A loving family is way better than any statue or shrine.

Guys and gals, this book is about your marriage and how you can be more intentional about connecting as a couple. There is no risk, no downside. And the benefits are many. For you, your family, your community, and the world.

For some reason, marriage and monogamy have been getting a bad rap in recent years. Don't believe it. God designed marriage to bring joy, purpose, fulfillment, satisfaction, and even spiritual closeness to a man and woman in a lifelong commitment. In the original blueprint, marriage was a blessing. God didn't create marriage to be a burden or a grind. Why would he do that?

No doubt, authentic intimacy takes work, dedication, communication, honesty, forgiveness, and sensitivity. But the rewards far outweigh any effort. The two-sided commitment is what makes it fun. A husband and wife should expect to invest a lifetime figuring out what makes each other tick. And how to tickle each other.

Your assignment today is to convince your husband or wife to read this book *with* you. Maybe even reading it together out loud. It's quite doable. Painless. Even amusing.

The chapters are short. Nothing here will make you feel guilty, weak, or worthless. Actually, most chapters will leave you empowered and optimistic.

Okay? Ready? Commit to sampling the first few chapters and see how it goes. I'm pretty sure you'll make it through the entire book. Along the way you will surely uncover some new insights into how you can love your spouse the way they deserve to be loved. And you can expect the same.

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*“One of the nicest things to be in the whole wide world is  
half of a couple.”*

—JAY PAYLEITNER

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## Couples Need...

# To Elevate Expectations

This book will not save your marriage. This book will not tangle or untangle your bedsheets. This book will not cause you to laugh and love and live in peaceful harmony all the days of your lives. Only you can make those things happen.

How? Most importantly, raise your expectations. You can't really expect to connect as a couple until you embrace the full promise and potential of marriage. Your connection with your spouse is the most valuable and rewarding relationship you have on earth. More than with your parents, your kids, your best friend, or your business partner.

To get the most out of this book and the most out of life, recognize that your marriage relationship is intimately intertwined with every aspect of your existence. Your spouse was given to you (and vice versa) as a helpmate, partner, advisor, encourager, and sounding board as your life journey unfolds. Time spent with your husband or wife should become a sanctuary in which you can refocus your goals and reinvigorate your resolve to fight the good fight.

That doesn't mean married life is some kind of fairy-tale existence. On occasion, there will be a short circuit in communications. Some poor choices will be made. Maybe he reinvents himself for a season, and you don't like the new version so much. Maybe she's expressed some desires or demands that are not top priorities for you. Maybe you feel as if you're in a rut, on the edge of a cliff, or at the bottom of a deep, dry well. No matter what, don't buy the lie—marriage is not the problem. In fact, *it may very well be the solution.*

Consider the big picture for a moment. Marriage is the perfect design for life on this planet. It permanently connects two individuals with different gifts, abilities, desires, and body parts. They fit together quite nicely. Two become one, which means they challenge, support, and comfort each other. Because of the marriage partnership, the lives of two flawed souls are continually upgraded, repaired, and enhanced.

You remember saying these words: “To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish till death do us part.”

At the time—and to most people—that meant you were promising to hang tough in good times and bad. But consider this: Might it be possible the marriage vows are part of a celestial promise that the two of you are now perfectly equipped to handle anything that comes your way? Think of it this way. From this day forward—if you have and hold each other—you can expect to find meaning and joy even if you happen to be poor or sick. By loving and cherishing till death, anything that seems to be happening for worse will have time to turn for better. It’s all right there in your vows.

The marriage relationship must have great significance and power. The crowning achievement of God’s creation was a man and woman coming together for the first time in history.

So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” . . .

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.  
And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day (Genesis 1:27,31).

On God’s first recorded seven-day workweek, he created everything that exists outside of heaven—light, sky, water, land, stars, planets, plants, and animals. The very last thing he did was make man and

woman in his image, instructing *both of them* to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth. Only then did God rest.

It appears God has some high expectations for your marriage. Do you?

After your honeymoon, did you set your marriage on cruise control and settle into some unfulfilling routine? Or are you following God's plan to work together to "subdue" the earth? That's the goal, and you need to put your heads together to figure out what that means for you and your beloved. It will require you to look beyond your individual selfish needs. It means you need to see your spouse as a partner created by God. To reach your full potential, you need to see the beauty, blessing, and value in your marriage relationship.

Marriage is not just a social construct that happens to be a convenient arrangement for paying a mortgage, sharing household chores, having an available sex partner, or raising kids. Your marriage can, should, and will be awesome. Expect it.

— Question to Ask Out Loud —

What part of the earth do we want to subdue together?

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*"Marriage is an adventure, like going to war."*

—G.K. CHESTERTON

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## Couples Need...

# To Stop Guessing

**D**on't answer this out loud.

*Wives, would you rather have your husband surprise you with a small bouquet of flowers or a small box of chocolates? Decide now.*

*Husbands, would your bride rather have you surprise her with a small bouquet of flowers or a small box of chocolates? Decide now.*

Now compare your answers.

When I ask those questions of an audience of married couples, the answers match about 60 percent of the time. Not bad, right? Except that means four out of ten well-intentioned guys are bringing home the wrong surprise.

Of course, any smart wife expresses delight with any gift at any time. If she doesn't, then that's a completely different set of problems. Also, in an auditorium filled with husbands and wives, there are most certainly guys who pretty much never bring home any surprises at all. Which is yet another kind of problem.

Also worth noting, some wives will sincerely say, "Either is wonderful. It truly is the thought that counts." While a statistically insignificant amount of women care for neither flowers nor chocolate.

All that to say, you may not know each other as well as you think you do. Is that a problem? Not at all. One of the joys of marriage is discovering new things about your spouse, which should continue to happen even decades into your marriage. Just a month ago, I learned that Rita spent an enjoyable summer of her youth as an intern at an art studio in Chicago. That fresh insight led to all kinds of new memory

sharing and discoveries about the girl I thought I knew. (And now that I think about it, I don't know how Rita would answer the flowers versus chocolate question.)

The idea that mysteries remain even after years of marriage lends itself to another reason to stick around and see how life unfolds. Some of those mysteries will reveal themselves naturally over time. Some are worth a bit of intentional probing so the two of you can live in harmony and uncover fresh opportunities to bring each other delight, pleasure, and satisfaction.

Let's consider a few more questions beyond flowers and chocolates. There are no wrong or right answers—there is only insight to be gained into your spouse's minor preferences and deep desires. The strategy to make this little exercise work is for you each to come up with your own answers and then compare notes.

*Vacation.* Beach, mountaintop, or big city?

*Retirement.* Florida, Arizona, near the grandkids, or “I like it right here”?

*Massage.* Foot rub or full body?

*Evening at home.* TV, movie rental, game night, or curling up with a good book?

*\$6,000 bonus windfall.* Pay bills, invest, vacation splurge, or buy something for the home?

*Christmas tree.* Fake or fir?

*Skiing.* Snow or water?

*Instant communication.* Call or text?

*\$100 tickets.* Symphony, Broadway show, playoff game, or rock and roll?

*End-of-year gift.* Local charity, missionary friend, orphan sponsorship, or trusted ministry?

*Christmas tradition.* Open one gift at a time or everyone rips in at once?

*Breakfast.* In bed, a local bistro, or at the kitchen table with the newspaper?

You get the idea, right? Considering this list, it occurs to me that

these would be excellent questions to ask each other *before* you get married. Even though there are no real wrong answers here, these preferences are well worth knowing. It might be slightly earth-shattering to learn that you've been going to the beach every winter for the last ten years and your spouse would have rather been at a downtown Hilton. Or that you've been chopping down a live tree every Christmas when a plastic tree with zero needles in the carpet would have suited you both just fine. Or maybe you always stopped at the foot rub, but now you know you can explore other regions as well.

You can play the "Would you rather...?" game anytime or anyplace. I recommend it. If you learn something particularly surprising, let me know. But don't play too long or dig too deep. It's always nice to save some mystery for another day.

— Question to Ask Out Loud —

Next month we're going to \_\_\_\_\_. Would you rather fly, drive, or take the train? Should we go alone or with another couple? Would you rather stay overnight or drive home in the dark? Would you rather not go at all?

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*"What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility."*

—GEORGE LEVINGER

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## Couples Need...

# To Work on Your Marriage Together

This is a book for both husbands and wives. But unofficial statistics I just made up indicate that 92.3 percent of the time it's the wife who buys a book like this. Her hope and dream is for the two of them to read the book together. For most couples, that just ain't gonna happen.

Before going any further, let's take a moment right here in chapter 3 to congratulate that small percentage of couples who are digging into this together. Or it might be time for you—the wonderful, thoughtful, beautiful, hopeful wife—to throw this book at your husband's head and say, “Hey, let's do this together. It'll be fun!”

If that doesn't feel like the right option, just keep reading and make sure your husband gets a verbal summary of the main points. Careful however. When wives read relationship books, get marriage advice from friends, or go to counseling alone, there's a tendency to see only one side of the argument.

Often, the wife's summary is really just an excuse to bash her husband. She will carefully extract critical passages that prove some point she has been making for years.

“See! You're *not* supposed to leave boot prints on the linoleum.”

“See! You're *not* supposed to side with your mom all the time.”

“See! You're *not* supposed to take me to a sports bar for dinner and spend the entire meal looking over my shoulder at some televised game you don't even care about.”

Giving wives ammunition to snipe at their husbands is not my intention at all. If you happen to find yourself using this book as a

battering ram to crush the spirit of your devoted husband, please slip it quietly onto your bookshelf and back away before someone (or some marriage) gets hurt.

Yes, there are moments in this book that instruct a husband to wipe his feet, cut the apron strings, and make reservations at a TV-free restaurant. (There are also moments in this book that give specific instructions to wives.) But most of these 52 chapters focus on *positive* strategies for connecting as a couple, including conversations to have, memories to remember, places to visit, and reasons to celebrate God's gift of marriage.

With that in mind, I totally encourage you—on 52 separate occasions—to take turns reading these chapters to each other right out loud. You can read some of them in four minutes. None of them will take longer than ten. What might take a few extra minutes is the single question at the end of each chapter.

So, ladies, no nagging, no silent treatment, no withholding sex, and no book throwing. Tell him you love him and want to stay blissfully married forever and ever. Then simply ask him to give it a try.

For those guys who are already reading this book out loud with your brides, your reward: three extra kisses.

### — Question to Ask Out Loud —

Should we try reading this book together every night? Over breakfast? Or should we not stress about maintaining a firm schedule, and just keep moving the bookmark one chapter at a time when we find a few minutes during the week?

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*“The great happiness in life is the conviction that we are loved—loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves.”*

—VICTOR HUGO

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