

H. NORMAN WRIGHT & WES ROBERTS

**BEFORE**  
**YOU SAY**  
**"I DO"**®



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# CHAPTER ONE



## What Is Marriage?



**Y**ou 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.”<sup>1</sup>

“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.”<sup>2</sup>

“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.”<sup>3</sup>

“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.”<sup>4</sup>

### Read Genesis 2:18-25

1. Who originated the marriage institution?
  - (1)
  - (2)
  - (3)
  - (4)
  
2. What are the purposes of marriage, and why was it originated? (See Genesis 1:28; 2:18; Ephesians 5:22-32.)
  
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.”<sup>5</sup> 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. | 7. (1) |
|   | (2)    |
| 3. The ability to work through problems.  | (3)    |
| 4. The ability to give and receive love.  | (4)    |
| 5. Emotional stability—accepting and controlling one’s emotions.  | (5)    |
| 6. Communication skills.  | 8. (1) |
| 7. Similarities between the two people.   | (2)    |
| 8. Similar family background.   | (3)    |

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. | (4) |
| 2. | (5) |
| 3. |     |
| 4. |     |
| 5. |     |
| 6. |     |

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 93 will help both of you make this a special, unifying time of preparation.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Uniqueness and Acceptance in Marriage

**Y**our partner is not you. He or she is “other,” created in God’s image, not yours. He or she has a right to be other, to be treated and respected as other.

Differences. How do you learn to adjust to the differences in your partner without losing who you are? How do you learn to appreciate another person’s uniqueness? How can you learn to live with this person who is so different from you?

“When you marry, do you end up marrying someone who is your opposite or someone who is similar?” The answer is “yes.” It’s both. There will be similarities as well as differences, and you have to learn to adjust to both. Think of it like this:

We marry for our similarities. We stay together for our differences.

Similarities satiate; differences attract.

Differences are rarely the cause of conflict in marriage; the problems arise from our simi-

larities. Differences are the occasion, similarities are the cause.

The differences may serve as the triggering event, as the issue for debate, but our similarities create the conflict between us.

The very same differences that initially drew us together later pull us apart and still later may draw us near again. Differences first attract, then irritate, then frustrate, then illuminate and finally may unite us. Those traits that intrigue in courtship, amuse in early marriage, begin to chafe in time and infuriate in conflicts of middle marriages; but maturation begins to change their meaning and the uniqueness of the other person becomes prized, even in the very differences that were primary irritants.<sup>6</sup>

Differences abound in marriage. Generally, they can be divided into two types. The first includes those that can’t be changed, such as age, race, looks, home, and cultural background. Your personal body metabolism will affect where you want the temperature in the home, whether you wake up bright and eager, ready to face the day, or whether you need an hour to get both eyes focusing. These characteristics cannot be changed.

But the other category includes those differences that can be changed: personal habits in the bathroom or at the dinner table, whether you like to get up early and your spouse enjoys sleeping late, or whether one likes going out three nights a week and the other prefers watching television at home.

Think about this: “If you plan to marry, it is certain that you have a preconceived fantasy of your ideal mate or the perfect marriage. After a while you will begin to realize that your fantasy and the person you have married will begin to diverge sharply. At that point you may embark upon a reform program, forgetting that only God can make

a tree. You misconstrued the words of the wedding ceremony ‘and the two shall become one’ to mean that your mate should become like you and your fantasy. You want to become one in likes, preferences, interests, hobbies, ideas, even reactions and feelings: *Yours!* The oneness in marriage is not similarity or sameness in matters relating to ideas or feelings but oneness in understanding. Any attempt to mold our partners in an effort to match them to our fantasies is arrogance on our part and an insult to them. While it is true that we can never mold or remake another person, we can ‘allow’ him [or her] to change.”<sup>7</sup>

The instruction on right living in Ephesians 4:2 can be applied to the marriage relationship. “Living

as becomes you—with complete lowliness of mind (humility) and meekness (unselfishness, gentleness, mildness), with patience, bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another” (AMP).

Look at the last part of the verse: “making allowances because you love one another.” List six specific examples of how this portion can be applied in your future marriage relationship. Try to think of these in relation to your differentness.

- 1.
- 2.

### SIMILARITIES

How are my fiancé and I similar?

### DIFFERENCES

How are my fiancé and I different?

### EFFECT

How can these differences and similarities complement one another in our marriage?

Which of the differences have you thanked God for?

- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

### Differences in Marriage— The Potential for Growth and Enhancement

Yes, every person who marries has characteristics similar to the one he or she marries. But he or she also has many that are different. Different ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving are part of marital adjustment. Differentness is important because it holds out the promise of need fulfillment for each person.

It is important to remember that one of the main motivating factors toward marriage is the need to feel complete because of what the other person has to offer. Consciously or unconsciously people choose others who can help them feel complete.

On one hand, this innate differentness contains the seeds for hurt and disruption. Why? The answer is quite simple. We are threatened by the differences in our spouse. We are afraid that we might have to adjust our way of thinking and doing things. We also may believe that “if it’s different, it’s wrong.”

Many problems occur because of the lack of tolerance for differences of attitude or opinions in the marital relationship. You will be vaguely aware of differences when you marry. You probably don’t say now that your partner is different—more likely “unique.” But after a while you will say...different.

At first you may try to *accommodate*. You tolerate, overlook, or deny differences to avoid conflict. Then you may try to *eliminate* the differences by demanding, pressuring, or manipulating your spouse.

But eventually you will learn to *appreciate* the differences because you discover that they are necessary and indispensable. And because of this, you will be able to *celebrate* them. You’ll delight in them. You’ll welcome them. You’ll encourage their growth. As you go through this process, you will discover that you didn’t marry the wrong person.<sup>8</sup>

Consider these thoughts: “In the midst of the marital struggle the honeymoon dream vanishes, and the despair over the old relationship comes up for reexamination. Suddenly each spouse turns his eyes away from the partner, and looks inwardly and asks, ‘What am I doing to my partner? What is wrong with me? What am I misunderstanding? What must I do to rescue this marriage?’

“If honestly asked, the answers are not far behind: ‘I really married my wife because of her difference. It is not my job to make her over, but rather to discover and to value that difference. But before I can do that I must accept my difference, and I really need her to help me discover my uniqueness. My task is not to mold her into a beautiful vase, but to participate with her to discover that beautiful vase even as we discover it in me.

“‘How arrogant of me to think I could shape another human being! How humble it makes me to realize that I need to yield to another and thereby be changed! Our relationship will change both of us—in a process of being shaped into a form far more beautiful than either could imagine.’”<sup>9</sup>

“We try to change people to conform to our ideas of how they should be. So does God. But there the similarity ends. Our ideas of what the other person should do or how he should act may be an improvement or an imprisonment. We may be setting the other person free of behavior patterns that are

restricting his development, or we may be simply chaining him up in another behavioral bondage.”<sup>10</sup>

In reality, we marry the right person—far more right than we can know. In a mysterious, intuitive, perhaps instinctive fashion we are drawn by both similarities and differences, by needs and anxieties, by dreams and fears to choose our complement, our reflection in another.

We always marry the right person, and the discovery of that rightness moves us into the third marriage within a marriage. We at last begin to appreciate what we had sought to eliminate.

As we discover that we knew more than we knew when we chose whom we chose, appreciation begins to break into a gentle flame. In appreciation, we discover that people who marry each other reflect each other. There is a similar level of maturity, a parallel set of self-understandings and self-acceptance in most couples choosing each other. The two express their self-image and self-valuation in the person selected.

People who marry each other complete each other in a puzzling yet pronounced way. The missing is supplied, the imbalanced is brought into equilibrium, the dormant is enriched by what is dominant in the other.<sup>11</sup>

The adventure of marriage is discovering who your partner really is. The excitement is in finding out who your partner will become.

### Family History and Interview Questions

(Adapted from *Finding Your Perfect Mate* by H. Norman Wright, Harvest House.)

Use the following questions to discover as much as you can about your partner.

- How did you get along with each of your parents? What were they like? What did you like and dislike about your parents?
- What were your hurts and disappointments as a child?
- What were your hobbies and favorite games?
- How did you usually get into trouble?
- How did you usually try to get out of trouble?
- What did you enjoy about school activities?
- What pets did you have? Which were your favorites and why?
- What did you dream about doing when you were older?
- Did you like yourself as a child? Explain.
- Did you like yourself as a teenager? Explain.
- What were your talents and special abilities?
- What awards and achievements did you win?
- Did you have a nickname?
- Who were your close friends? Where are they today?
- Describe the area where you grew up—people, neighborhood, etc.
- What was your spiritual life like as a child? As an adolescent?
- Who were the Christians in your family?
- What were you afraid of? Do you have any of those fears today?
- How did you get along with your brothers and/or sisters? If you had none, which relatives were you closest to?
- What parts of your childhood would you like to relive? Why?
- What special memories do you have about your childhood?

- What do you remember from your first day of school?
- Did you enjoy school? Why or why not? What was your favorite grade, and who were your favorite teachers?
- Who was your first date?
- Who were your other dates or boyfriends/girlfriends? What did you like and dislike about each one?
- Where did you go on dates?
- How did you feel when you liked someone and that person didn't care for you?
- How has being an adult changed your life?
- Compare yourself now to when you were 10.
- What have been your greatest disappointments? How have you handled them? What have you learned from them?
- At what age did you first like the opposite sex?
- What was your birth order in your family?
- Did you have enough money in your youth? Enough food and clothing?
- Who educated you in sex? What were your sexual experiences? What is your standard for sexual expression in your life now?
- What are your political views?
- What do you enjoy reading? Watching on TV?
- Have you ever had a child? Do you want children?
- What is your first memory?
- Who were your favorite relatives?
- Describe your education and job experiences. What were your emotional reactions to jobs,

fellow employees, and bosses? What are your ambitions?

- What are your natural gifts? What do you consider your strong points? Weak points?
- What is your medical history?
- What is your favorite holiday, type of music, television program, and pastime?
- While growing up, did you think of marrying someday?
- Who are the five most important people in your life?
- Which Christian leaders or writers have influenced you?
- Where would you like to live? What country, state, city, house, and/or apartment?
- What are your views on aging?
- Describe the best year of your life.

### Daily Log History Sheet

To assist you in becoming better acquainted with your potential partner, complete the following daily activity log with as much specific information as possible. It may be helpful to keep this with you at all times during a typical day. At the end of each hour, write down exactly what you did during that time. You will need to do this twice, once for a weekday and once for a day off.

1. When do you wake up?



