

THE GREAT MARRIAGE  
Q&A BOOK

DR. GARY AND BARBARA ROSBERG



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*The Great Marriage Q & A Book*

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# Starting on the Right Foot



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## 1. I'm a Christian. Why is it so important for me to be married to a Christian?

Believers have to be careful not to be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14, KJV), because no matter how much love you may feel as you're dating an unbeliever, it won't carry you through years of going to church alone, arguing over your views of finances, raising kids, and dealing with life's other issues. Picture yourself being alone because you can't connect at the area of your life that is most important: your deep and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. When you marry an unbeliever, you will eventually experience a very painful emptiness in your marriage.

This is a significant issue because when you're making decisions together, you'll want to be able to discuss those decisions from the standpoint of both of you desiring God's will. Resolving conflict and experiencing forgiveness need to come as an overflow of a personal relationship with Christ. When you're dealing with finances and the stewardship of your God-given resources, your decisions need to come through a filter of the relationship with Jesus Christ. The physical aspect of your relationship is most fulfilling when it comes from your own deep intimacy with Jesus.

[Jesus said,] "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:5

## 2. We lived together before we got married. How can we protect our marriage and avoid snags in our new relationship?

Statistics reveal that over half the population thinks living together before marriage (cohabitation) is a good way to get some of the benefits of marriage and lessen the risk of divorce. Many young couples are

saying to themselves, “If we’re going to marry for life, then we need to have a trial run first.” Sounds logical, right? More and more, people of all ages are deciding to live together—to the point that today the majority of couples who marry have lived together first.

Biblical advice against premarital sex works out to be good advice in one life after another—both in the pain felt by those who disobey God’s plan and in the blessedness of marriage for those who have followed it. God gives us rules and guidelines, not because he’s mean or wants to keep us from anything good but because he loves us so much. His plan for purity before marriage is the best plan. It’s a hedge of protection.

It’s important to believe that the marriage you’ve entered into is for keeps. Nurture your friendship with your spouse. Then, as you weather the storms together, you are that much stronger for it.

Read this hopeful story about marital sex that a caller shared with us:

### Stories from the Front Lines

*“My husband and I dated for two weeks and then we moved in together. Within those two weeks we had decided we wanted to be with each other and we were going to get married.”*



### Coaching Tips: Pitfalls of Living Together before Marriage

- **Sexual difficulties.** Often sexual dissatisfaction will develop. In order to live together, couples frequently use the excuse that they need to find out if they’re sexually compatible. The problem is, they are again “testing” in the wrong venue—with the option to get out, look for others, or even have sex with others during the “living together” period.
- **Comparison issues.** Dissatisfaction begins to haunt your marriage bed as you compare your spouse with previous partners. Sexual promiscuity may help explain why married couples who didn’t live together before marriage have more satisfying sex than couples who cohabited before marriage.
- **Eroded trust.** If both of you were willing to compromise before you got married, what will prevent further compromises to damage your marriage? If both of you were willing to take shortcuts before you got married, what will stop either of you from cutting the corners once or twice after you’re married?

*Financially, we thought it would be good because we could pay off bills and save for a house. We decided we were just going to move in together, have separate bedrooms, and not have sex. But the temptation was so great and we were so in love, we did end up making love. Later we got married. I can tell you from experience that making love in marriage is completely different—and it's amazing. Having sex without the bond of marriage truly becomes an obstacle to really knowing and learning and communicating and seeing the broad spectrum of gifts that you bring into the relationship."*

Don't forget that as Christ followers you provide a vivid witness to all who know you.

Think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy.

**1 Peter 1:13-15**

If you want God to bless your marriage, you need to follow his directions for marriage as given in his Word. Make Scripture reading, prayer, and church attendance regular elements of your schedule. Our book *Renewing Your Love* is a devotional you and your spouse can use to help your spiritual growth and to grow your marital relationship. To build more protection into your marriage, see the suggestions we give in our books *Guard Your Heart* and *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage*.

### **3. My spouse was not a virgin when we married, but I was. How can I work through the difficulties that are sure to come up?**

If you are in a marriage with a person who has been sexually active with others before your marriage and was not married at the time, and if that

person has confessed and sought forgiveness from God, then grace and forgiveness extend into your relationship. We don't believe it was unbiblical to marry such a person. However, you need to realize that there will be consequences for that person's choices. It's wise to make sure your spouse is healthy and free from any sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, your spouse may compare you with previous sexual partners. You need to find a way to forgive and forget as much as possible. The issue will not go away unless you deal directly with it with God's help.

There are some tough issues that need to be worked out. You need to be realistic about what this means for your future. You need to talk to someone older and wiser—a pastor, mentor, or biblical counselor. Keep in mind that we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Every person who steps into a marriage relationship is bringing past mistakes, failures, humanity . . . yes, sin—maybe not sexual sin, but still sin before a holy God. Both of you are always going to need grace and forgiveness.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,  
and are justified freely by his grace through the  
redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

**Romans 3:23-24, NIV**

In their book *Don't Date Naked*, Michael and Amy Smalley honestly discuss how they dealt with an issue like this in their own marriage.

#### **4. I'm newly married. What steps can I take in the beginning to strengthen my marriage? What do I need to avoid?**

Honor one another above yourselves.

**Romans 12:10, NIV**

A wedding lasts only a few hours; marriage is for the rest of your life. As you look past your beautiful wedding day, are you planning on spending the rest of your life with this person? To make your married life a stronger and more fulfilling journey, see the descriptions of the six loves in marriage in our book *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage*. Our devotional, *Renewing Your Love*, provides thirty daily devotions for you and your spouse to complete

<b>Issues for Newlyweds to Watch For and Learn to Resolve</b>	
<b>1. A critical spirit</b>	Admit your frustrations. Affirm each other, listen, and encourage. Be teachable. Say you're sorry.
<b>2. Lack of skill in resolving conflict</b>	Too often, people in conflict refuse to move toward each other in humility. Choose to forgive, accept responsibility for your mistakes, and ask for forgiveness.
<b>3. Fatigue and burnout</b>	Decide what is really important. Choose your priorities, and live for them. Remember your limits. Learn to say no; learn how to encourage each other to say no.
<b>4. Weak boundaries with in-laws</b>	Sons and daughters need counsel from parents and in-laws, not control. See chapter 11 in this book for questions and answers specifically about in-laws.
<b>5. Secrets</b>	To combat secrets, confess issues that you think might damage your marriage. Practice honesty and ask for honesty.
<b>6. No room for God</b>	Make God a part of your relationship. Invite him to direct and lead your marriage. When you build your marriage on the words and promises of God, your marriage will withstand the strongest storm. Begin the practice of praying for your spouse. Thank God for each other. Worship together. Serve together.
<b>7. Lack of support</b>	After the wedding and the honeymoon comes—well—life. You both go back to your jobs. As you begin to feel financial and other pressures, keep emotionally connected. Prioritize your life—and put your marriage relationship first. It's essential to stay in touch during the day with phone calls or e-mail.
<b>8. Excesses</b>	Recognize two kinds of excesses: The first excess is the drive to have more; the second reveals itself in destructive behaviors or addictions. Deal with excessive behaviors now. Be willing to get help for addictions.
<b>9. Selfishness</b>	To combat selfishness, you'll need to ask Jesus to teach you how to sacrifice and serve. You become a giver by learning to walk as Jesus did. Learning to serve now will carry you through many a dry time ahead.
<b>10. Unrealistic expectations</b>	Ask yourself, What expectations do I have, and which ones are unrealistic? Which ones do I need to get rid of in order to learn to work with my spouse and build a strong marriage?

together. Encourage, love, and serve each other through the disappointments and obstacles of daily life. Avoid the pitfalls given in the chart "Issues for Newlyweds to Watch For and Learn to Resolve," page 7.

## 5. What can we do to develop a healthy marriage right from the start?

For a healthy marriage to develop, two vital elements must come together.

First is your part. Draw a line in the sand. Proclaim to God and to each other, "We are committed to building a Christian marriage and family. Divorce is not an option for us. We will have nothing of the world's approach to marriage. We are committed to keeping our love fresh, renewed, and growing—for the sake of our marriage, for the sake of our children, and for the cause of Jesus Christ. 'As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD'" (Joshua 24:15, KJV). In the way you talk to each other, today and every day, you affirm that you would choose each other all over again. You say to each other, by words and actions, "You are my one and only."

Second, God took you at your word when you said your wedding vows, and he is working through you to fulfill that commitment. Your marriage will grow deeper and stronger because God will empower you to strengthen your marriage. The two of you are not alone in this battle to ward off the world's twisted view of marriage because yours is a marriage of three—you, your spouse, and Jesus. We urge you both to settle for nothing less than God's best in your relationship.

How can you do that? One thing we suggest in our counseling is something we call The Love List. The Love List enumerates things you can do once *each day*, once *each week*, and once *each month*. It also points you to important exercises to conduct on a *yearly* basis.

## 6. My parents had a terrible marriage and got a divorce. Does this mean my marriage is more likely to end in divorce?

Whether or not your marriage has a greater likelihood of ending in divorce, it doesn't have to end that way. Some of the most teachable

## The Love List: Healthy Habits of Loving Couples<sup>1</sup>

### Once a day

- Touch. Cultivate the valuable practice of tender touch on a daily basis.
- Hug for at least five seconds.
- Remember the two most important minutes of the day for your marriage: the first minutes you meet at the end of the workday.
- Laugh. The more you laugh together, the more you love your spouse. Humor helps you cope.

### Once a week

- Do something active that lifts your spirits. This is an insurance policy against boredom.
- Broaden your sphere of interest. Make a list of activities and circle those you might find pleasurable. Make time to do them.
- Give your spouse space to enjoy certain activities that are his or hers alone.
- Boost your spouse's self-esteem. When your spouse helps you reach your potential and boosts your self-confidence, your options seem limitless. Look for "diamonds"—dig through the rough to look for the good in each other.
- Compliment your spouse.

### Once a month

- Rid yourselves of harmful residue. Explore unfinished business (paying the bills, deciding how long in-laws stay for Christmas, disciplining the kids). Talk about the recent issues and do your best to make decisions.
- Talk about your money. Admit to any deception, and set up safeguards that will keep you honest.
- Talk about your emotional needs and anger. Forgive when you feel hurt.
- Protect each other from overcommitment. Decide together what you and your family can handle.
- Update yourself on how well you know your spouse. Check in with your spouse—what would he or she like you to know?
- Fire up passion in the bedroom. Schedule a sex date at least once a month. Guard your time fiercely.

### Once a year

- Review your top ten highlights of the year. Decide together what constitutes a highlight. Make the review a memorable tradition.
- Chart your course for the coming year. Be proactive about where you'd like to be as a couple twelve months from now. Ask God for guidance. Take time to consider what really matters most to both of you in your relationship.
- Write a mission statement and revisit it yearly. Begin with "Our purpose is . . ." Use this statement to keep your marriage on track. Consider what you'd like to change.
- Think of six things you wish were different and set ways to improve them in the next year. Set specific goals. Understand the power of making resolutions together. Awaken your can-do attitude. Trust God in your coming year together.

people we know have been affected by their parents' divorces. God has taken those experiences and, through his grace, given a heightened resolve for a lasting marriage. You will have to remain teachable—that is key. You will have to unlearn some attitudes or assumptions that you may have brought into your marriage—because what you saw as you were growing up obviously didn't work. We encourage you to be very wise, seek God's will carefully, and be ready to stand strong for a covenant marriage. You may be more tempted to consider divorce as an option because you've seen it close up. Never entertain it as an option. We strongly suggest taking the "d word" out of your vocabulary. Break the pattern of divorce; give your kids what you didn't have; and choose to be a strong, close-knit family who works through the struggles that are inevitable for every married couple.

Take a look at the certificate titled "Our Covenant Home" on our Web site at [www.divorceproof.com](http://www.divorceproof.com) or at the back of our workbook *Discover the Love of Your Life All Over Again*. Signing that certificate can remind you and your spouse of your commitment to your marriage.

Read our book *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* for ideas on how to avoid an unhappy marriage and a divorce. Pursuing the six loves described in the book—serving love, guarding love, forgiving love, persevering love, renewing love, and celebrating love—in your relationship with your spouse will energize your marriage. Our devotional, *Renewing Your Love*, encourages spiritual growth. The daily devotions focus on the marriage loves discussed in *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage*.

## 7. I see so many marriages falling apart. Why do marriages fail?

Marriages fail because they face pressures from life's many inconvenient, tragic, or unexpected circumstances. Sometimes a variety of pressures pile up all at once. Sometimes tragedy hits with the force of a wrecking ball, then goes away. Other times the same nagging pressure can hover like a dark cloud for months or even years. It's not a matter of *if* a marriage will face pressure; it's just a question of *when*.

If you want to divorce-proof your marriage against the storms and struggles of life, if you want a deeper bond and a richer friendship, you

need what we call persevering love. It's the kind of love that triumphs over trials and grows stronger when you are most vulnerable. Persevering love doesn't just hang on through calamity by its fingernails; it hangs in there and thrives. It's the kind of love described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:7: "Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." Persevering love bonds marriages together like superglue and keeps them from falling apart.

Read what a caller had to say:

### Stories from the Front Lines

*"One of the things that I do to divorce-proof my marriage is to not act like I'm the Holy Spirit for my husband. I committed to let the Lord work in his way in his time. If there's a circumstance where I see my husband struggling because of some decisions he's making or not making, and if I casually bring that up in conversation, he is resistant to hearing that from me. Instead of nagging him about it, I just go to the Lord in prayer and begin to ask him to reveal these things to my husband's heart and mind in ways that only he can."*

Our daughter was heading out of town and asked Gary, "Dad, I've got a little over three thousand miles on my car. Can I wait to get the oil changed?" He said, "You know what? It probably won't hurt, but you don't want to put four thousand or six thousand miles on your car without changing the oil. For it to run well, it needs preventive maintenance." Our question for you is, "Are you putting fifteen, twenty, twenty-five thousand miles on your marriage without checking the oil, so to speak?" You know what? Your marriage needs preventive maintenance, too. What are you doing to guard your heart? Be vigilant. Check the oil in your heart and do some refilling when needed! Often the marriages that fail are the ones that didn't check the oil and refill when it was needed. You wouldn't run your car into the ground; don't do that to your marriage either. What can you do daily to fill your heart with renewed focus and perspective? Are you reading the Word? How is your prayer life? Are you allowing God to pour into your life so that you can pour into your spouse's life? Don't miss out—take time to refuel your inner life with the Holy Spirit.

## 8. So many people I know are divorced. Is it possible for any marriage to last?

If somebody came up with a TV game show called *America's Perfect Couple*, none of us would expect to qualify for the grand prize. We readily admit that our marriage isn't perfect. But that's no excuse to settle for the status quo. A marriage that is merely "good enough" won't make it over the long haul. If you believe you can coast along indefinitely on a good-enough marriage, you are believing a big lie. The truth is that if your marriage isn't growing deeper, you may be heading toward disconnect, discord, and emotional divorce.

Remember: You are in a battle with God's archenemy over the vitality and success of your marriage. The forces arrayed against you are great. You must be on your guard because Satan is looking for an opportunity to bring your marriage down. You must not only be watchful, you must also take the offensive in this conflict. You must be proactive about nurturing your marriage relationship. Most doomed marriages don't end up in divorce overnight. Rather, they atrophy over a period of years due to laziness and lack of effort.

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.

**1 Peter 5:8-9**

A marriage that looks healthy today can drift to the precipice of divorce in five or ten years if it is not constantly and purposefully reenergized.

Marriages can go the distance and even thrive when husband and wife serve each other by putting each other first after their allegiance to Christ. This is the attitude you are to adopt toward your spouse. The contrast is not as dramatic, of course, since you are not perfect and neither is your spouse. In some areas you may be stronger or wiser, while in other areas your spouse is stronger or wiser. But whether your spouse is top dog at the moment or not, if you follow Jesus' model you will think of your spouse as more important than yourself. When you do that, you won't have any trouble putting him or her first in your life,

after Christ, of course. You will lovingly serve your spouse by doing for him or her what you wish others would do for you if you were in any given circumstance.

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.  
 Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.  
 Love each other with genuine affection, and take  
 delight in honoring each other. **Romans 12:9-10**



### Coaching Tips: Guidelines for Building a Thriving Marriage

- Lighten your spouse's load—take his or her “to-do” list and do some of the items yourself, such as make the beds, take out the trash, clean, or finish the yard work.
- Let the world know you are proud of your spouse! Communicate how important your spouse is when you talk about him or her instead of grabbing the spotlight for yourself. Always speak positively and constructively about your spouse around your children. When you are with other adults, make a point of bringing up complimentary tidbits about your spouse. And share your positive comments as generously in private—alone with your spouse—as you do in public.
- Let go of all bitterness and anger. Never berate, demean, or humiliate your spouse in public or private.
- Seek to bring out the best in your spouse. Try to outdo your spouse with courtesy and kindness.
- Think of new ways to say yes to your spouse. Make time alone a priority. Nothing says, “You are number one in my life” like putting your spouse first with your time. And nothing communicates second-class status (or third or fourth) more than elevating your schedule and activities above time spent with your spouse. You would be wise to carve out significant portions of your week for one-on-one conversation with your spouse.
- Think, *I'm third*, in your marriage: Jesus is first, your spouse is second, and you are third. If you want your marriage to thrive over the long haul, you can start by putting your spouse first, right after Jesus.

## 9. How can we make sure our marriage doesn't end in divorce?

The very survival of your marriage depends on your recognizing the scope of the marriage covenant you made before God on your wedding day. You must say with absolute conviction, "Divorce is not an option. We are married for life." Without this firm pledge to God and to each other, your marriage is vulnerable to defeat from every angle. But when you stand on your lifetime promise, your marriage can survive anything. Banish the idea of divorce from your thinking. Your marriage is safely divorce-proofed only when you commit to never using the "d word." Before you can ever know the deep security and confidence God intends for you to enjoy as a couple, you need to be certain that your relationship is rooted in a love that will never give up.

Why is that so important? The Old Testament prophet Malachi tells us that God says, "I hate divorce!" (Malachi 2:16). If God hates something, wouldn't it be wise to put it on your hate list, too? God is very serious about the covenant you made before him with your spouse on your wedding day. He is unequivocal on this topic: Marriage is to be a lifelong commitment—period. Divorce should not even be considered an option.

God does not say, "I hate divorced people." On the contrary, he loves all people, including divorced people. That's precisely why he is so vehement about divorce—he knows the pain it brings to the people he loves. It's as if he pleads with us, "Divorce deeply wounds everyone involved. I don't want to see you hurt. Do yourself a favor: Avoid the hurt by honoring your lifetime commitment."

In the same breath as his denouncement of divorce in Malachi 2:16, God provides two antidotes to divorce. As you apply these commands to your relationship, you take major steps toward divorce-proofing your marriage.

First, he says, "Guard your heart."

"I hate divorce!" says the LORD. . . . "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful."

**Malachi 2:16**

This command suggests that there is something threatening marriage and you need to keep up your guard. Our culture openly condones and

facilitates divorce. A person can get a divorce for practically no reason at all. It's an easy out for anyone who doesn't want to deal with even the normal conflicts and adjustments of married life. Our culture seems to say, "If your marriage isn't working out the way you like, just divorce your spouse and look for one you like better." The "wisdom" of the world, disseminated through such dubious channels as tabloids and talk shows, says, "Divorce is the solution to your marriage problems." But God says, "I hate divorce," and he warns us to avoid this casual attitude toward the solemn vows we recited before him. God is bigger than our current problems. Why not give him a chance to prove how big he is?

God's second antidote for divorce in Malachi 2:16 is "Do not be unfaithful." You promised to love, honor, and cherish your spouse. He or she is counting on you to keep your word. Don't break faith by going back on your vow. Pour your energies into unqualified love and



### Coaching Tips: Six Kinds of Love That Will Divorce-Proof Your Marriage

You can divorce-proof your relationship by consistently exercising six facets of love:

1. **Forgiving love.** Offer each other a fresh start after offenses, both large and small, by consistently confessing wrongs and forgiving each other. Forgiving love helps each of you feel accepted by and connected to the other.
2. **Serving love.** Commit to discovering and meeting each other's deepest needs. Serving love helps each of you feel understood and honored by the other.
3. **Persevering love.** Support, encourage, and comfort each other through the trials of life.
4. **Guarding love.** Protect your heart and your spouse's heart from the many threats to your marriage. Guarding love builds a sense of safety and security into your relationship.
5. **Celebrating love.** Continually look for ways to enjoy each other emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Celebrating love helps each of you feel cherished and captivated by the other.
6. **Renewing love.** Never be satisfied with the status quo. Strive together to keep your marriage fresh and growing. Renewing love helps strengthen your commitment to each other and keeps your love vibrant.

faithfulness in marriage instead of making excuses and looking for loopholes. Continually ask yourself, "How can I help make our relationship richer, deeper, and more fulfilling despite our conflicts and struggles?"

Our book *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* fully discusses how the six kinds of love described in the chart above can help keep couples from Disappointment, Discouragement, Distance, Disconnect, Discord, and Emotional Divorce.

## 10. How can I know if I'm married to the right person?

If your spouse is not a believer, you may remember a time when you thought, *This person is not someone I should be with*. Perhaps you finally saw that you were trying to find your self-worth and security in a fellow human instead of in God, and you felt guilty for that. It is a difficult truth to swallow—knowing you should not have fallen for the wrong person.

Many young people call us saying that they met a person and have fallen in love but this potential spouse is not a believer. The callers believe that they are such strong Christians they can change the person. Here's what Megan told us:

### Stories from the Front Lines

*"I was so in love with this guy. I thought he would be so perfect if only he were a believer—all I had to do was change him—that God must have put me in his life for just that reason. I was wrong. The decision to marry that man led me down a five-year path of terrible heartache that ended in divorce. I went through a difficult depression. I want to caution listeners that if you have a real commitment to Jesus that you end up compromising, the very next thing that happens involves both internal and external conflict. That is always sure to follow. But God is so faithful. He has restored my heart. I'm married to a wonderful man now. God has done an awesome work in my life, but I could have avoided all of that heartache by heeding the strong counsel of those people who cared for me and by listening to God's advice to not be unequally yoked. If you meet a guy or girl that you're*

*interested in who is not a believer, back off and pray for that person. If that's who God wants you to be with, he'll bring that person around. But it's so important to be equally yoked, to be like-minded in your faith."*

Don't ask whether you might not be married to the right person. Instead, pray for your spouse. Just as you pray for your own spiritual growth, also pray for your spouse's spiritual growth. Only God can change hearts—nagging won't. Husbands, pray for your wife's busy schedule each day. Wives, pray for your husbands at work.

Scripture reassures us that if we hold to our faith in Christ and live godly lives we may win our spouse to the Lord—even without preaching. Love your spouse. Pray for yourself, your spouse, and your marriage.

Your godly lives will speak to them without any words.  
They will be won over by observing your pure and  
reverent lives.

**1 Peter 3:1-2**

Remind yourself why you married your spouse. What things attracted you? Think about your friendship. Our workbook *Discover the Love of Your Life All Over Again* is for couples and groups and will help you rekindle your commitment to your wedding vows. You may also want to view the "Discover the Love of Your Life All Over Again" DVD series with your small group. Visit our Web site at [www.divorceproof.com](http://www.divorceproof.com) for more information on this exciting DVD series.

## **11. We strive to have a 50/50 marriage—making sure everything is equal. That's the most fair, isn't it?**

One of the biggest problems among the couples we talk to occurs when husbands and wives measure out their service for each other in reciprocal portions. Sadly, the best many marriages ever do is operate according to the popular "50/50 plan," the "I'll-meet-your-needs-if-you-meet-mine" philosophy. In this plan, marriage becomes an arrangement of trade-offs and compromises, with spouses keeping score so one person never gets or gives more than the other. Their goal is to meet each other halfway.

It is true that some couples who live by this rule are generous to each other and even moderately happy. But apportioning love usually doesn't result in spouses who feel honored and understood. The problem usually arises when they can't agree on where "halfway" is.

Read the following story from our radio program:

### Stories from the Front Lines

*Tom and Sue both grew up watching their mothers get trampled by their demanding fathers. So when Tom and Sue married, they vowed that they would evenly divide all tasks and responsibilities between them. Household work would be split down the middle. They insisted that their 50/50 relationship would be 100 percent fair. It sounded logical and workable, allowing each of them to maintain control without either of them getting stepped on. Instead of creating a fair environment, however, this 50/50 plan became like a slave driver. They argued about who washed the dishes last—or who did the laundry or who cooked. Sue's weekend with her college roommates was matched minute-for-minute and dollar-for-dollar by Tom's hunting trip with his buddies. They tracked their childcare duties as if they had a stopwatch ticking in their heads. When Tom came home from work, Sue said she was off duty. They also kept track of the money they each earned, the running totals clearly distinguished in separate bank accounts.*

Can you imagine the tension between Tom and Sue? Control and comparison tore them apart. A friend of ours calls these kinds of couples the "ledger people." They keep track of everything, compare and weigh their lists, and then proceed to hurt each other with angry words when the "ledger" doesn't balance.

Would you want to live like Tom and Sue? Do you want to wait for your spouse to give in and serve first? Do you want to compare what you've done for your spouse to what your spouse has done for you? Do you want to be a "ledger person"?

There's a better way. It's the 100/100 marriage, which is God's design for a husband and wife. The apostle Paul says: "For husbands,

this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word" (Ephesians 5:25-26). When a husband loves in this way, he chooses to serve his wife because of his desire to be obedient to God's design for him. He is stirred not only by pleasing her but also by pleasing God. The same is true of the wife. When you serve each other, trying with 100 percent of yourself to love and serve your spouse, you will find joy and fulfillment beyond what you can imagine.

## **12. My spouse and I are from totally different backgrounds/cultures. How can we make our marriage work?**

The most important thing to understand is that when you marry, you are marrying the person's parents and his or her background. If you come from vastly different cultures, educate yourself about how those differences may compete with what you're used to. Do you think your culture is "right" and his or hers "wrong"? Can you respect and adjust to the differences? Are you teachable? Is your spouse? These differences can be significant—and grow larger over time. The more differences you have, the more fragile your marriage relationship can be.

However, cultural differences don't need to be a marriage breaker. We have found in counseling that when a man and a woman are teachable and are seeking Christ first as they blend their different backgrounds and experiences, they can have a rich and wonderful marriage! You can work through those issues if you have the common denominator of being joined together in Christ Jesus and in your faith. Are both of you open and teachable to his ways? If not, you're missing the glue that will hold your marriage together.

Our book *Divorce-Proof Your Marriage* discusses six kinds of love that you can practice to strengthen your marriage.

## **13. My spouse and I are from different Christian denominations. Is that a problem?**

Start by considering if your traditions hold primary theological differences that would cause a conflict for you. While we have discussed at

length the issue of believers marrying unbelievers, at times the question comes up between believers who come from Christian denominations that differ in how they view liturgy, the sacraments, church membership, worship styles, biblical interpretation, and various doctrines.

Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

**Philippians 2:3**

If you're in this situation, we would recommend that you decide how important each issue is for you. Pray about each issue and discuss it with your spouse. Be open to your spouse's opinion. Compromise whenever you can without losing your values. The resulting changes and new experiences can be spiritually refreshing and strengthen your marriage. Decide together what church you and your spouse will attend and the traditions you'll follow.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**Ephesians 5:21**

#### **14. I'm much younger than my spouse. What difficulties might we face?**

When people whose ages differ by a decade or two marry, they will have very different life experiences and histories to try to blend—everything from their backgrounds, to what happened during those decades of growing up, to music, to culture, to passages of life. One of the main problems we find among such couples is the inability to get "in sync" simply because of those differences.

Does this mean that a couple with an age difference of ten, fifteen, or twenty years can't make sense of a marriage? They can, but it's much easier the older they are when they marry. For example, a sixty-year-old marrying a fifty-year-old will find it much easier to blend their histories than a thirty-year-old marrying a twenty-year-old.

Take the time to get to know each other and to see if you really can get "in sync." Be honest with yourselves. It is indeed important, especially if one of you is quite young. Study your spouse to discover his or

her favorite things. Read and discuss our book *The Five Love Needs of Men and Women* to find out more about your spouse. Have your spouse tell you how he or she would rank the love needs. Our book *40 Unforgettable Dates with Your Mate* provides ideas for planning dates with your spouse, including questions to discuss on the dates. To grow closer spiritually, read and study our devotional, *Renewing Your Love*.

### 15. Men and women are so different. How can we understand each other? What are some of the differences?

Men and women sure are different. It doesn't take science to tell us that. All we need to do is look at how any group of guys or girls interact to begin to see some differences. Obviously, these are generalities, but here are just a few of the differences between men and women:

- When guys need encouragement, they typically go for the slap on the back from the guys on the court. When women need encouragement, they want hugs from their supportive friends.
- Men look to their friends to be just company. Women want emotional connection in friendships. For women, it hasn't been a good time if they haven't had a good laugh or a good cry.
- Men replenish by having someone listen to their ideas; women replenish by having someone listen to their hearts.
- Men are more likely to share just the facts, while women love to share their feelings and all the details—conversations, the setting, what people were wearing.
- Men compete; women connect.
- Men think of intimacy in physical terms (S-E-X); women think of intimacy in emotional terms (T-A-L-K).

For more information to help you understand your spouse, please see our book *The Five Love Needs of Men and Women*.