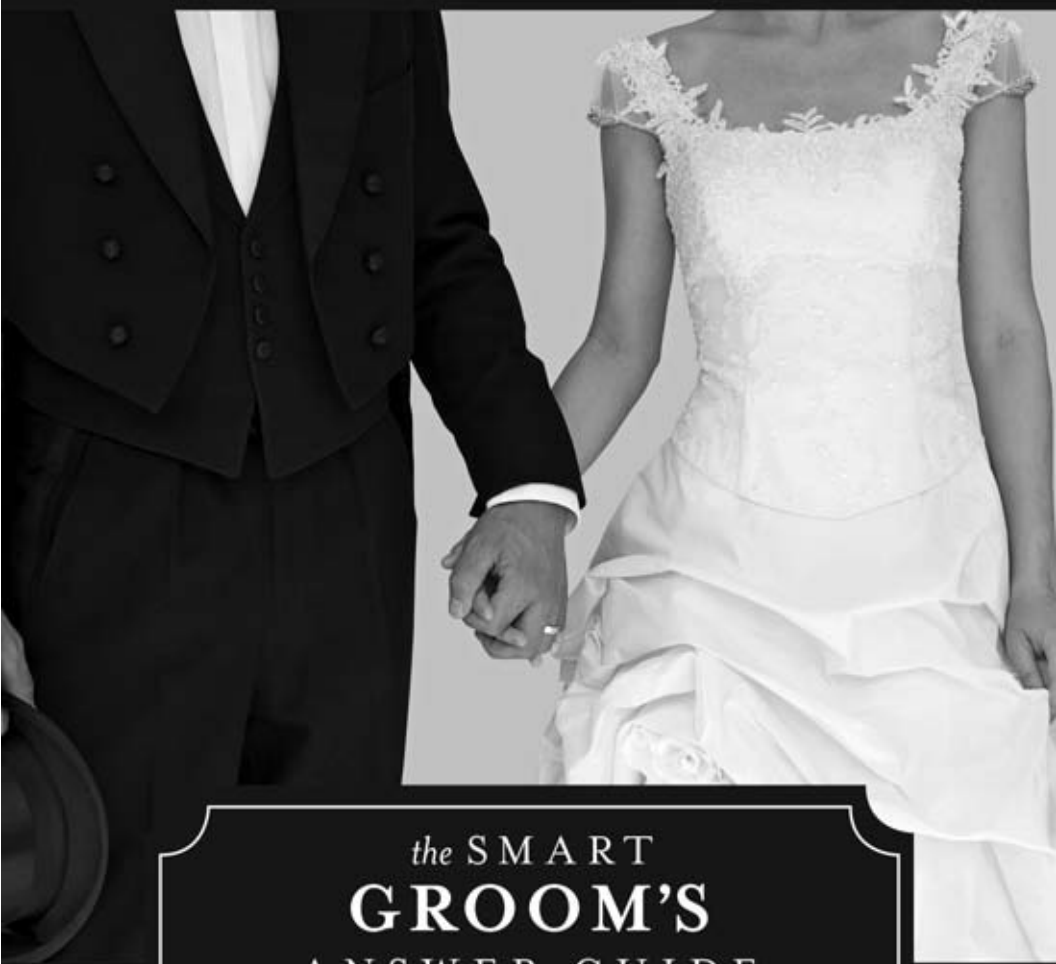


FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®



the SMART
GROOM'S
ANSWER GUIDE



an eye-opening look at your first year of marriage

GENERAL EDITORS

WILFORD WOOTEN, L.M.F.T. & PHILLIP J. SWIHART, PH.D.



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois

The Smart Groom's Answer Guide

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Praise for
Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage,

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INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the Indianapolis 500, it may be difficult to predict which lap will be most critical. But in a marriage, the first five years are central. That's when key adjustments are made and expectations are tested.

How you deal with the large and small crises of your marriage at the start sets important patterns for the future. That's true for brides *and* grooms, no matter whether you tend to run in panic or stay and bury your feelings.

Most marriages start with the delight of "being in love" and honeymoon excitement. The question is what happens next. One spouse put it this way: "I thought the first year would be wonderful. It was hell."

During the first few years, couples "get naked" in more ways than one. And physical nakedness can be much less revealing than many other kinds.

Even in marriages that end up thriving, marital stressors may be—or at least seem to be—more intense in the beginning than later. For instance, it's stressful to find that neither of you seems to have any conflict management skills. As one comedian noted, "My wife and I never fight; we just have moments of intense fellowship."

And then there's sex. Whatever happened to the glorious expectations you had in that wonder-world of dating? It may only take a few months of marital reality for the fantasies of "true love" and sexual excitement to clash with the disappointments of sharing a bed

with another imperfect person who's sometimes tough to like, let alone love.

The spiritual dimension of your relationship can be a point of contention early in your marriage, too. These years often form fertile ground for spiritual attack by an enemy who would love to destroy a relationship that God has blessed as holy.

Many of the challenges of the first years stem from distorted expectations. We live in a fast-food culture with a sense of entitlement to having everything happen on demand. But marriage doesn't work that way.

The apostle Paul advised Christians to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). As radio Bible teacher Alistair Begg has noted, we need to do the same in our marriages.

This is a book about working things out—trembling or otherwise. In the pages to follow you'll find answers to questions commonly asked by grooms and grooms-to-be. You'll probably find some issues you're struggling with. It's our hope and prayer that this book will be a rich source of help and encouragement on your journey through the partnership called marriage.

There's another distinctive to this volume, too. The many authors who've contributed have a working relationship with Focus on the Family. Most are professional staff members with Focus on the Family's counseling department. All are committed Christians and highly qualified, licensed mental health, marriage, and family therapists with many years of combined experience in working with thousands of couples and individuals across America.

The early years of marriage are a special adventure. As you

explore your new partnership, explore this book, too. We believe you'll find it to be a thought-provoking source of creative solutions for meeting the challenges of your first years together.

—*Wilford Wooten and Phillip J. Swihart*
General Editors

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A HUSBAND?



“A man is not where he lives, but where he loves.”

—LATIN PROVERB

John was working long hours at his office, providing financially for his family. That, he believed, was his duty as a husband. Seldom at home, he didn't realize what his schedule was doing to the foundation of the family he was trying to establish.

Before he knew it, he was living by himself.

Stunned, he asked himself why his wife had suddenly left him.

The warning signs had been there, but John had been too busy to recognize them. The fact was that he'd developed a skewed perspective of his role as a man and husband several years before marrying Susan. As a young man he'd watched his father work long hours, and came to believe that his identity and level of success depended on how others saw his accomplishments. Compliments drove his work ethic.

John was struggling with loving and accepting himself. He worked long and hard to gain the praise of others—but neglected his family because building a strong marriage usually doesn't earn many accolades.

What does it mean to be a husband? John thought he knew, but discovered otherwise.

You don't have to make the same mistake. Here are some qualities found in Ephesians 5:19-33 that help define what a husband is and does.

1. *Love shown in sacrifice and commitment.* A husband's love needs to be unselfish. It's not always tied to sexual desire, which by its nature is self-seeking.

How might things have been different for John if, when awakening every morning, he'd started the day by figuring out how to make it a special one for Susan? That act of sacrificial, committed, unselfish love could have revolutionized their relationship.

Love from a husband also needs to be natural, not dutiful. Making sacrifices out of mere duty isn't an expression of love; it may just be an effort to avoid failure and pain. That's not to say that loving deeds will always be accompanied by warm feelings; sometimes the actions come first and the feelings are a step behind.

2. *Leadership and courage.* Leaders need to first learn how to serve (see Matthew 20:26). Then they can lead through example. In John's case, he could have helped his family by showing how to express unconditional love, set boundaries, provide guidance, exercise self-control, and manage money.

Husbands need courage, too. But that quality isn't just about driving through thunderstorms and stopping burglars. A husband also needs the courage to admit his mistakes, and to participate in his own growing and maturing process.

3. *Sound priorities.* A husband must learn about his wife's needs, put them above his own, and respond to them—physically and emotionally. John needed to say no to his competitive drive sometimes.

He needed to learn that the most rewarding thing—above applause, recognition, money, success, and attention—is being able to love another person to the point that you would give your life for her.

That's not to say that a husband must erase his boundaries and individuality. It's important to maintain friendships, dreams, goals, vision, and "healthy space." But a "me first" attitude is the opposite of the one commanded in Scripture (see Philippians 2:3-4).

4. *Communication and thanksgiving.* A husband needs to keep learning more about his wife and to communicate verbally and non-verbally. It's not healthy to trust only in yourself.

Just as a man can't read a woman's mind, a woman can't read a man's. Take time to share your thoughts. Let your spouse into your life.

5. *Unity.* The marriage covenant represents the greatest unity a man will ever have. It's a closeness that's above that between parents and children and among friends.

Both Old and New Testaments (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31) affirm that husband and wife "will become one flesh." There's a unity that goes beyond the physical.

Joan and Bill are examples of what happens when these principles are applied in a marriage.

Recently married, Bill was getting involved in as many things as possible at work in an attempt to "move up" in his career. He was trying to establish what he called "a good name."

Joan was also working full-time, but was home in the evenings. As a result, she spent many lonely nights and weekends waiting for Bill to come home. The couple's romance and intimacy were becoming nonexistent.

Joan asked Bill to begin saying no to work requests that weren't

essential. He listened to her need to connect and began to set limits on his job commitments.

This was difficult for him initially, but the relationship began to thrive. He began to feel better about himself. He noticed that things were even improving at work, too.

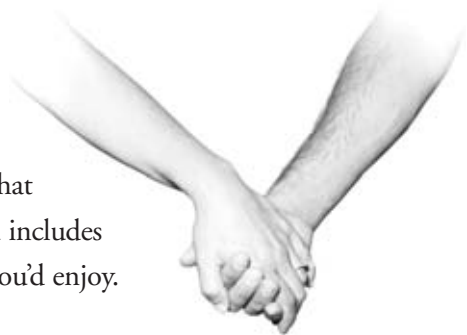
It was clear that God was honoring Bill's commitment to listen and respond to his wife. If only John had made that commitment while he still had the opportunity.

What does it mean to be a husband? There are many steps a man takes in his marital journey, but the first—and perhaps most important—is committing himself to fulfilling his God-ordained purpose of meeting his wife's needs.

—*Daniel Huerta*

TAKING IT PERSONALLY

1. How do you think your parents—or others who raised you—would answer the “What does it mean to be a husband?” question? How might their answers have influenced your views on this subject?
2. What appeals to you most about becoming a husband? Try writing a one-page job description that starts with that “duty” and includes at least four other things you'd enjoy.



SUGGESTED RESOURCES

There are many helpful books and other resources to guide you through the early years of marriage. Check your local bookstore for the following:

Boundaries in Marriage by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend
(Zondervan, 2002)

The DNA of Relationships by Gary Smalley (Tyndale House Publishers, 2004)

For Women Only by Shaunti Feldhahn (Multnomah, 2004)

The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment by Clifford L. Penner and Joyce J. Penner (W Publishing Group, 2003)

Great Expectations: An Interactive Guide to Your First Year of Marriage by Toben and Joanne Heim (NavPress, 2000)

Healing the Hurt in Your Marriage by Dr. Gary and Barbara Rosberg
(Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishers, 2004)

Hedges: Loving Your Marriage Enough to Protect It by Jerry B. Jenkins
(Crossway Books, 2005)

Hidden Keys of a Loving, Lasting Marriage by Gary Smalley and Norma Smalley (Zondervan, 1993)

His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage by Willard F. Harley, Jr. (Monarch Books, 1994)

How Do You Say, "I Love You"? by Judson Swihart (InterVarsity Press, 1977)

The Language of Love by Gary Smalley and John Trent, Ph.D. (Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishing, 2006)

Love and Respect by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs (Integrity Publishers, 2004)

Love for a Lifetime by Dr. James Dobson (Multnomah, 2004)

Love Must Be Tough: New Hope for Families in Crisis by Dr. James Dobson (Multnomah, 2004)

The Most Important Year in a Woman's Life/The Most Important Year in a Man's Life by Robert Wolgemuth, Bobbie Wolgemuth, Mark DeVries, and Susan DeVries (Zondervan, 2003)

Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas (Zondervan, 2002)

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts by Les and Leslie Parrott (Zondervan, 1995)

Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage by Lee and Leslie Strobel (Zondervan, 2002)

Your Marriage Masterpiece by Al Janssen (Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishing, 2008)

The following booklets and recordings are available from Focus on the Family (call 1-800-A-FAMILY):

Accepting Your Mate's Differences by Dr. Kevin Leman (Focus on the Family broadcast CD192)

Building a Marriage That Lasts by Dr. James Dobson (Focus on the Family booklet LF154)

Learning to Communicate by Gary Smalley and John Trent (Focus on the Family broadcast CD111)

Nothing to Hide by Joann Condie (Focus on the Family booklet F00038T)

NOTES

Is It Okay Not to Have Kids?

1. Candice Z. Watters, "Defending 'The Cost of Delaying Marriage,'" *Boundless* webzine (<http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001145.cfm>).

How Can Faith Keep Us Together?

1. Glenn Stanton, "The Role Faith Plays in Marriage and the Likelihood of Divorce," (Focus on Social Issues, July 8, 2005), found at <http://family.org/cforum/fosi/marriage/divorce/a0037068.cfm>.
2. W. Bradford Wilcox, "The Cultural Contradictions of Mainline Family Ideology and Practice," publication pending.

How Can We Keep Romance Alive?

1. Gary and Norma Smalley, *It Takes Two to Tango* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 1997), p. 25.