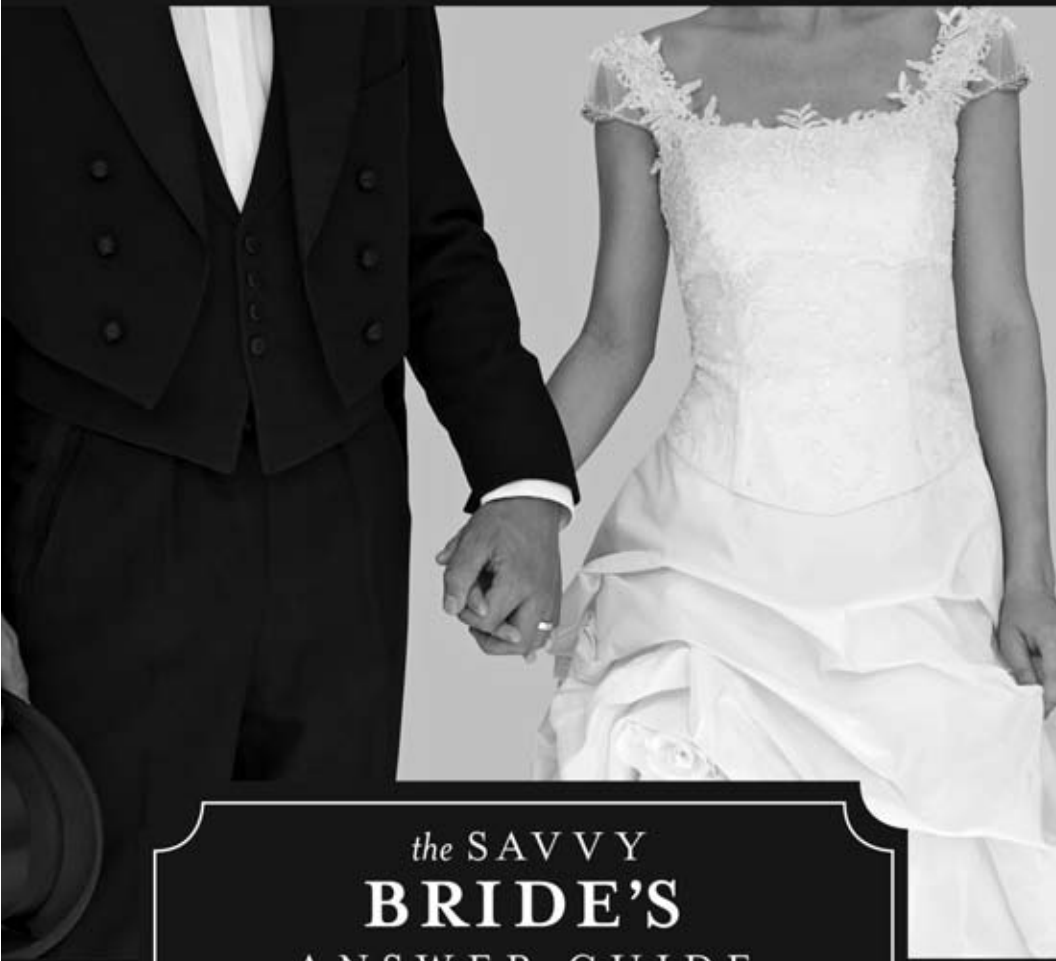


FOCUS ON THE FAMILY<sup>®</sup>



*the* SAVVY  
**BRIDE'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 Savvy Bride's Answer Guide*

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**Praise for**  
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from which this book is adapted:

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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 brides and brides-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 WIFE?



Valerie threw her coat to the floor and screamed, “Robert, this is it! I am tired of being treated like a child. You will not allow me to be an adult. You force me to act like a child by the way you treat me. I can’t express my opinion or offer any advice. It always has to be your decision—and if I question that decision, you try to argue me back down. I don’t know what God intended for a wife to be, but I don’t think it was to be like this!”

What *does* it mean to be a wife?

It’s a question that’s been asked since the beginning of time. Surely every young wife and wife-to-be has at least *thought* about it.

Much of the confusion about what it means to be a wife stems from our culture’s messages on the subject. Hollywood often portrays women as independent, strong, superior, and answerable to no one. But is that what a wife should look like? What are her roles? What should a husband expect of her?

If you’re struggling with your role (or your spouse’s), you’re not alone. When these issues are unresolved, it often leads to a sense of hopelessness going into the wedding and a sense of contention afterward.

Let's answer the question by looking at its opposite: What does it *not* mean to be wife? Here are three principles to think about.

1. *A wife is not a maid.* Some husbands expect their wives to take care of all domestic chores. Some wives are content with this arrangement, especially when the husband assumes a handyman role. But both partners should negotiate this and feel comfortable with the result.

Mandy and Maury simplified the division of labor by agreeing that everything inside the home would be her responsibility—and everything outside the door would be his. That worked well until Mandy decided that taking the garbage out, a job she'd been doing, wasn't "inside" work. She voiced her concern to Maury, but it fell on deaf ears. The next day, Maury pulled into the driveway to discover the trash can sitting outside the front door!

Nowhere in Scripture does God command wives, "Thou shalt perform every household task alone, no matter how sick or tired thou mayest become or how many sleepless nights thou hast experienced." God didn't intend a wife to be the family butler, cook, and domestic engineer without support from her husband.

Just as wives are not exempt from helping out with yard work, husbands aren't excused from mutually agreed upon duties inside the home. Was Eve expected to perform every domestic chore by herself? When she became pregnant with Cain, who do you think she depended on? Since no one else was around to help out, we can safely assume that Adam took up the slack.

Adam's view of Eve was reflected in his statement of appreciation when God first presented her to him: "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' For this reason a man will

leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23-24). Couples need to adopt the same team approach, recalling that God has brought them together in a partnership.

2. *A wife is not a doormat.* The Bible does say that the husband is the “head” of the wife, and that wives are to be in submission to their husbands. But nowhere does it grant “dictator” status to husbands, or require that wives must fulfill a husband’s every wish and command, no matter how unreasonable or uncaring.

Submission is an attitude, a spirit of being under someone’s leadership in the domain of marriage. Paul says in Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord.” But he also says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). Submission doesn’t mean that a woman can be mistreated or harmed by her husband simply because he’s the leader of the home.

Submission doesn’t necessarily mean agreement, either. Just because a wife is under her husband’s leadership, she doesn’t necessarily agree with everything he does or every decision he makes.

How does that work in real life? Think about what happens when you accept a job. You agree to submit to someone else’s authority. You don’t give up your freedom and rights as a human being. You’re still supposed to be treated with respect and kindness.

Submitting at work is critical to career development. The employee who willingly submits to the job’s requirements will get something in return—job satisfaction and the security of regular income. We give, but we also receive.

The same is true of roles in marriage. A wife voluntarily places herself in a position of submission to God and to her husband’s

leadership. She doesn't give up her individuality. She gives her heart, body, and soul to a relationship of mutuality and service.

If you follow God's commands on how to treat your mate, you'll love, respect, honor, and cherish each other. You'll find no human doormats in your home.

3. *A wife is not to be the downfall of her husband.* God designed women to be husband builders, not husband wreckers. As the Bible puts it, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18).

Adam was engineered to work hard, lead his family, and overcome challenges. God gave Eve the ability, power, and free choice to either build up her husband or tear him down.

Proverbs 14:1 says, "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down." Most wives don't set out to destroy their mates. But they often allow stress, frustration, and resentment to motivate them to treat their husbands in ways that dishonor them. Constant nagging and criticism, for instance, can wear a man down more quickly than a 60-hour week of hard labor! This kind of behavior destroys a man's ability to be what he should be—a confident leader.

When a man feels disrespected and demoralized, he often reacts by withdrawing from the relationship. His ability to be truly close to his wife has a lot to do with how she treats him. As Ephesians 5:33 (AMP) says, "Let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband—that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates, and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly."

So what does it mean to be a wife?

There are many ways to answer that question. But here's one

summary you might keep in mind. The apostle Paul urged older women to teach younger women, “so that they will wisely train the young women to be sane and sober-minded—temperate, disciplined—and to love their husbands and their children; to be self-controlled, chaste, homemakers, good-natured (kindhearted), adapting and subordinating themselves to their husbands, that the word of God may not be exposed to reproach—blasphemed or discredited” (Titus 2:4-5, AMP).

—*Mitch Temple*

## 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 wife?” question? How might their answers have influenced your views on this subject?
2. What appeals to you most about becoming a wife? 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

### **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.