

The background of the cover is a soft-focus photograph of a beach at sunset. In the foreground, two wooden Adirondack chairs are positioned on the sand, with two glowing lanterns placed between them. In the middle ground, a man and a woman are walking away from the camera, holding hands and looking out at the ocean. The sky is a mix of purple, pink, and orange, and the water is calm with gentle waves.

The **4** Seasons of  
**Marriage**

Secrets to a Lasting Marriage

**GARY CHAPMAN**

Author of the #1 *New York Times* Bestseller *The 5 Love Languages*

The 4 Seasons of  
Marriage



The 4 Seasons of  
Marriage

Secrets to a Lasting Marriage

GARY CHAPMAN

Author of the #1 *New York Times* Bestseller *The 5 Love Languages*



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale online at [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com).

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*The 4 Seasons of Marriage*

Copyright © 2005 by Gary Chapman. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph copyright © Purestock/Getty Images. All rights reserved.

Author photo copyright © by Boyce Shore & Associates. All rights reserved.

Designed by Ron Kaufmann

Edited by Dave Lindstedt

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*.® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com).

---

**The Library of Congress has cataloged the original edition as follows:**

Chapman, Gary D., date.

The four seasons of marriage / Gary D. Chapman.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4143-0020-7 (hc)

ISBN 978-1-4143-0023-8 (sc)

1. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV835.C4575 2005

248.8'44—dc22

2005009145

---

Repackage first published in 2012 under ISBN 978-1-4143-7634-9.

Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 13 12

7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# CONTENTS



*Acknowledgments*  
*Introduction*

## PART I

### *The Four Seasons of Marriage*

The Nature of Marriage .....	3
Winter.....	9
Spring.....	21
Summer .....	33
Fall .....	49
Marital Seasons Profile .....	61



## PART II

### *Seven Strategies to Enhance the Seasons of Your Marriage*

#### **Strategy 1**

Deal with Past Failures .....	69
-------------------------------	----

#### **Strategy 2**

Choose a Winning Attitude .....	83
---------------------------------	----

#### **Strategy 3**

Learn to Speak Your Spouse's Love Language.....	95
---	----

<b>Strategy 4</b>	
Develop the Awesome Power of Empathetic Listening . . . . .	107
<b>Strategy 5</b>	
Discover the Joy of Helping Your Spouse Succeed . . . . .	119
<b>Strategy 6</b>	
Maximize Your Differences. . . . .	135
<b>Strategy 7</b>	
Implement the Power of Positive Influence . . . . .	145



PART III

*Putting Your Plan into Practice*

Moving Forward from Here and Now. . . . .	167
Four Seasons Q&A . . . . .	171



PART IV

*The Four Seasons of Marriage Study Guide*

Part I. . . . .	185
Part II . . . . .	203
Part III . . . . .	217



*Notes*





# INTRODUCTION



*The tall and stately elm outside my window is covered with snow today. It's late January and winter has arrived in North Carolina. Schools are closed, as are most businesses, and the streets and lawns are swathed in a beautiful blanket of white. In the cozy comfort of my study, I sit by the fireplace and reflect.*

*I remember the summer we first moved to this place. Across the yard, the elm tree was engaged in a life-and-death struggle with a kudzu vine. The broad-leaved kudzu was winning, choking the life out of the hapless tree. Looking down the creek, I saw other trees that had already succumbed. Their dead limbs had fallen and their trunks, still pointing to the sky, were covered with snaking vines. They were simply waiting for the next strong wind to topple them.*

*Although I had arrived too late to save those other trees, I was determined to rescue the elm. With my sharpened, steel vine cutters in hand, I attacked the kudzu with a vengeance, circling the tree and severing every vine in sight. The larger ones were two inches in diameter, and the smallest was half an inch. Finally, I retreated from the battle and waited for nature to run its course. Within a week, the kudzu leaves had shriveled, and I imagined that the elm tree was breathing easier.*

*Summer soon faded into fall and fall into winter. When spring came, the elm tree put out its slender leaves in happy defiance of the gray tendrils still hanging limply over its branches. By the time sum-*

*mer rolled around again, the dead kudzu vines had fallen and the elm tree had a new lease on life.*

*Since then, I've watched the seasons come and go. I've seen the elm drink up the spring rains, soak in the summer rays of the sun, relinquish its leaves to the winds of fall, and cloak itself with white beauty in winter.*

*Today, as I sit here by the fire, gazing at the winter portrait outside my window, I'm also reflecting on the seasons of my life and my career as a marriage counselor. I'm thinking of the forty-two years that Karolyn and I have lived together as husband and wife, and I'm reminded that we, too, have passed through many winters, springs, summers, and falls.*

*I once heard a speaker say that there are four seasons to marriages. As he explained it, we begin as young couples in the spring-time of life, excited about the future. Then comes summer, in which we become involved in vocations and perhaps child rearing. After summer comes fall, when the children leave and we are alone again. Then, in our latter years of life, we experience winter. Although there is some truth in this analogy, it seems to me a much too simplistic description of marriage.*

*My experience, both in my own marriage and in counseling couples for more than thirty years, suggests that marriages are perpetually in a state of transition, continually moving from one season to another—perhaps not annually, as in nature, but just as certainly and consistently. Sometimes we find ourselves in winter—discouraged, detached, and dissatisfied; other times we experience springtime, with its openness, hope, and anticipation. On still other occasions we bask in the warmth of summer—comfortable, relaxed, enjoying life. And then comes fall with its uncertainty, negligence, and apprehension. The cycle repeats itself many times throughout the life of a marriage, just as the seasons repeat themselves in nature.*

*The purpose of this book is to describe these recurring seasons of marriage, to help you and your spouse identify which season your marriage is in, and to show you how to move away from the unsettledness of fall or the alienation and coldness of winter toward the hopefulness of spring or the warmth and closeness of summer. The seven strategies laid out in the second part of the book will not keep your marriage from experiencing fall and winter; but they will give you positive steps you can take to make the most of each season, prepare for the next, and advance your marriage into spring and summer.*

*The seasons of marriage come and go. Each one holds the potential for emotional health and happiness, and each one has its challenges. The key is to develop the necessary skills to enhance your marriage in all four seasons.*

*Unlike trees, which are at the mercy of the weather and other factors, as humans we have the capacity to make decisions. We can choose attitudes and actions that will improve and strengthen our marriages. We can plant seeds of love and hope in the springtime that will produce fruit during the summer. And we can harvest a storehouse of good feelings and open communication that will prepare us to weather the changes of fall and the icy cold of winter.*

*If you have picked up this book in the dead of winter in your marriage, take courage. There's hope. I have watched hundreds of couples apply these strategies and experience the "blooming of the crocuses" in their relationships. I believe that these practical steps will work for you as well. Even if you're reading this book alone and your mate is not willing to participate, I will show you how to start on your own to win back your spouse's heart and move your marriage toward a warmer season.*

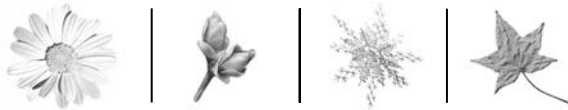
*If your marriage is currently in spring or summer, it's important not to let the kudzu vines gain a foothold in your relationship. I will*

*show you how to cut the tendrils of negative attitudes and actions and free your marriage to be all that God designed it to be.*

*If you find the book helpful, I hope you will share it with your married friends, who are also experiencing the four seasons of marriage.*

PART I

*The Four Seasons of Marriage*







## THE NATURE OF MARRIAGE

*In the early days of my career*, I was an avid student of anthropology. During my undergraduate and graduate studies in that discipline, I explored ethnographies compiled through the years by various anthropologists. One conclusive finding of these studies was that marriage between a man and a woman is the central, social building block in every human society, without exception. It is also true that monogamous, lifelong marriage is the universal cultural norm.

Of course, some people will deviate from this practice, as in polygamy (which is still found in a few nonliterate cultures) and serial monogamy (which has become common practice in some Western cultures), but these exceptions do not erase the cultural norm of lifetime monogamy from the human psyche. In fact, in spite of the widespread acceptance of divorce in the United States over the past forty years, a recent poll of never-married singles ages twenty to thirty indicates that eighty-seven percent planned to marry only once.<sup>1</sup> Many of these people have seen their parents divorce and that is not what they want for themselves.

The social institution of marriage is first and foremost a *cove-*



*nant* relationship in which a man and a woman pledge themselves to each other for a lifetime partnership. In the biblical account of creation, God's expressed desire is that the two "will become one flesh."<sup>2</sup> At the heart of marriage, therefore, is the idea of *unity*. It is the opposite of *aloneness*. Again from the creation account in Genesis, it is abundantly clear that God did not intend for men and women to live alone.<sup>3</sup> Something deep within a man cries out for companionship with a woman, and the woman has a similar desire for intimacy with a man. Marriage is designed to satisfy this deep search for intimacy. Thus, marriage is not simply a relationship; it is an *intimate* relationship that encompasses all aspects of life: intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical. In a marriage relationship, a husband and wife share life with each other in the deepest possible way. They view themselves as a unified team, not as two individuals who happen to be living in close proximity. Because the desire and drive for intimacy are at the very heart of marriage, the individuals involved become troubled about their relationship when such intimacy is not attained.

Marriage is also a *purposeful* relationship. All research indicates that an intimate marriage provides the safest and most productive climate for raising children, for example. But procreation is not the only purpose of marriage. Each person is also endowed by God with certain latent possibilities. The partnership of marriage is an ideal environment for nurturing and developing these gifts and abilities. As the writer of the ancient book of Ecclesiastes observes, "Two are better than one. . . . If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"<sup>4</sup> Every married couple has experienced the reality of this principle. Two are better than one.

Husbands and wives are designed to complement each other.

When the man is weak, his wife is strong; when she stumbles, he is there to pick her up. Life is easier when two hearts and minds are committed to working together to face the challenges of the day.

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF MARRIAGE
Committed
United
Intimate
Purposeful
Complementary

After forty-plus years of marriage, I look back and realize that many of the things I have accomplished would never have come to fruition were it not for the encouragement and help of my wife. I'd also like to think that she has accomplished more with her life because of my support. This brings me a great deal of satisfaction. Together we have committed ourselves to seek and follow God's plan for our lives. We help each other discover our unique giftedness and encourage each other to use these abilities to serve God and to promote good in the world. As we do this, our lives point others to God and we accomplish our highest end. Our marriage relationship enhances the effectiveness with which we serve God.

King David captured the vision for us in Psalm 34:3: "Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together." From a biblical perspective, the purpose of life is not to accomplish our own objectives. The purpose of life is to know God and to bring glory and honor to his name. For most people, marriage enhances the possibility of achieving this objective.

## ADAPTING TO THE CHANGING SEASONS

Marriage relationships are constantly changing. Attitudes shift, emotions fluctuate, and the way spouses treat each other ebbs and flows between loving and not so loving.

Sometimes, change is beyond our control. For example, when Ben's wife, Nancy, was told she had cancer, the diagnosis changed the fabric of their lives and their relationship. They could adapt to the situation, but they couldn't control it. The same was true of Tricia and her husband, Rob, a member of the National Guard. When his unit was activated, he was sent into a war zone half a world away. Rob and Tricia could adapt, but the circumstances were beyond their control. When it became clear to Jon and Carol that her mother could no longer live alone, they had to respond to a change that they couldn't control. Life is full of unanticipated changes. Our only choice as couples is in how we will respond.

Other changes we create for ourselves, but sometimes with unexpected consequences. When Ken and Melinda moved to Kansas City after living near her family in Chicago for ten years, it created numerous changes that they now had to face together. The decisions we make regarding vocation, child rearing, education, civic and church involvement, and other areas of life create changes that affect our marriage relationships. The manner in which couples process these changes will determine the quality of their marriages.

In the natural world, the four seasons are created by certain inevitable changes that occur as the earth turns on its axis and revolves around the sun. Likewise, the changes we face in life (and the way we process and respond to them) create the seasons of marriage. The birth of a baby, the death of a loved one, illness, in-laws, getting a job, losing a job, the demands of a job, travel, vacations, weight gain, weight loss, financial ups and downs,

moving, staying, depression, disagreements, moods, teenagers, aging bodies, aging parents, hobbies, habits, sex, impotence, infidelity—all these are examples of situations and circumstances that put pressure on a marriage and demand a response. If we respond well, in harmony with our spouse, we can keep our marriage in spring or summer. If we don't respond well or if our response clashes with our spouse's response, we can feel the chill of autumn or be thrust into the icy cold of winter—sometimes before we know what hit us.

Some changes, such as sexual infidelity, strike at the very heart of a marriage. Other changes are simply a natural part of life, such as illness, aging, or a new job. Our response to change consists of emotions, attitudes, and actions. The combination of these three factors will determine which season our marriage is in at any given time.

The thesis of this book is that the natural seasons—winter, spring, summer, and fall—provide us with an apt analogy for the changes that occur in our marriage relationships. As we experience life through the five senses—hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching—we feel emotions, develop attitudes, and take action. The interweaving of our emotions, attitudes, and actions creates the quality of our relationship in the various seasons of marriage.

It has become popular in Western culture over the past forty years to exalt emotions as the guiding light that determines our actions. After more than thirty years of counseling couples, I am convinced this is a misguided notion. Don't misunderstand me: I am not suggesting that emotions are not important. Emotions tell us that something is wrong or right in a relationship, but emotions must lead to reason, and reason must be guided by truth if we are to take constructive action. We must not short-

circuit the process and jump straight from emotions to action without the benefit of reason. Many couples who have done this have found themselves in winter when they could have ended up in spring or summer.

---

*EMOTIONS moderated by REASON guided by TRUTH = **CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION***

---

Let's begin our journey by defining the four seasons of marriage. In the next four chapters, we will look at the common emotions, attitudes, and actions that create a particular season. We will do this by visiting with couples who have chosen to communicate to me the joys and sorrows of their season of marriage. Names and places have been changed to protect the privacy of the couples involved, but the stories are real and for the most part are told in the words of the people themselves.

Perhaps you will discover yourself in one of these seasons of marriage. If not, the Marital Seasons Profile at the end of Part I will help you identify the season of your marriage. In the second part of the book, I will introduce seven practical ideas for weaving your emotions, attitudes, and actions together to move from one season to another.

In Part III, we'll recap the seven strategies and answer some of the common questions I've been asked about the four seasons of marriage.

Finally, to help you use this book in a small-group setting, or to facilitate your own understanding, we've included a study guide intended to promote conversation about the four seasons of marriage and the seven strategies. My hope is that all these features will help you and your spouse enhance the seasons of your marriage.