



THE
**Healthy
Marriage**

DEVOTIONAL

*365 Daily Inspirations
to Bring You Closer Together*

JIM DALY

PRESIDENT OF FOCUS ON THE FAMILY
with Kenny Chapman

FOREWORD BY GARY THOMAS



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**FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY[®]**

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Foreword

My wife may be one of the world's healthiest eaters, so when I was invited to participate in an Alaskan fishing trip for halibut and salmon, she practically pushed me out the door. Fresh, wild-caught salmon that's flash frozen as soon as your boat returns to shore? She couldn't wait.

I'm not a big fisherman myself (though I was looking forward to the fellowship), so I honestly think Lisa was more excited about the trip than I was.

If you were to look in our freezer today, you'd see the Alaskan fish labeled with *H* for halibut, *S* for salmon, and *R* for some rockfish. Lisa is spacing out the fillets, hoping she can make them last until next summer.

In the book you're holding, Jim Daly has fished the pure, healthy Alaskan waters to bring us nourishing spiritual meals for our marriages. He's dipped his line deep into Scripture and pulled up life-changing truths for us to apply. Even better than fish that are flash frozen, these meals come fully prepared: They are seasoned with life experience, the insightful words of so many Focus on the Family guests, and Jim's own wisdom. It's as delicious and delightful a meal as it is nourishing.

I marvel at the quality of these devotions. Day by day, Jim offers up another tasty morsel, giving you plenty to talk about, pray about, and think about. Prepare yourself for a feast-filled year of marital nourishment.

Gary Thomas

Pastor, international speaker, and author of Sacred Marriage, Cherish, and A Lifelong Love

Introduction

Something powerful happens when a couple sits together sharing their hearts with each other and seeking the Lord together as husband and wife: God creates a masterpiece.

Consider a work of art like Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Is it merely splotches of color and well-placed brushstrokes? Or a classic novel like Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Can his eloquence be reduced to letters on a page? A masterpiece isn't something we look *at*, but something we look *through*. It's a window to something richer and more meaningful than the mechanics of the work itself.

It's the same with your marriage.

The picture of marriage in Scripture is of a man and a woman "becoming one flesh" (see Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8; Ephesians 5:31). *Becoming* requires a willingness to rediscover each other every day. The intimacy you desire might be hidden beneath past wounds, fears, or disappointments. To uncover it, you need to become an engaged spouse who digs beneath the surface of your relationship to find something deeper and life-giving.

The Healthy Marriage Devotional comprises 365 daily thoughts, all designed to help you along the journey of *becoming*. These devotions originated as radio commentary segments and have been enhanced with additional Scripture references and other insights. We've focused on helping you and your spouse get beneath the surface of your relationship and spark meaningful conversation.

Great marriages aren't *found*; they're *formed*. As you and your spouse journey across the years together, I pray you will discover one another anew, deepen your intimacy and commitment, and create a marriage masterpiece.

Let's begin.



SECTION I

Life Together

Seeds into Flowers

Well-known author Dr. Gary Smalley officiated a lot of weddings. He used an effective illustration to help couples understand the nature of their relationship.

Midway through the ceremony, he'd gesture to the beautiful flowers adorning the venue and say to the couple, "You probably believe the garland, the boutonnieres, and the bridal bouquet represent your love—vibrant and in full bloom." Then he'd reach into his pocket and hand the bride and groom a packet of seeds.

"It's actually more like this," he'd continue. "A seed is filled with potential that can only be discovered if it's given the right elements—sun, water, good soil, and time. Likewise, your relationship is filled with the potential to be more than it already is, but it's hidden within mysteries that only reveal themselves over time as you nurture your love."

No matter how long you and your spouse have been together, your marriage is a garden rich with untapped potential. But it must be nurtured and allowed to unfold day by day. Each new circumstance, each shift in seasons, is an opportunity to love each other in new, life-giving ways.

Love isn't a commitment you make just once, on your wedding day. It's a journey you take together—each moment a step forward into the unknown, yet rooted in a daily rededication to knit your hearts together as one.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-2

Nurture our marriage relationship into full bloom, Lord. Thank You for the gift of planting and growing a lifetime of love and beauty.

Don't Ignore Trouble

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to have a happy marriage. Or does it? Getting to the moon is no easy task. The rockets NASA built for the space program took years to design and consisted of nearly two million parts. The engineers had to factor in thousands of calculations, including the rocket's speed, the earth's orbit through space, and the path of the moon around the earth. Every detail was subjected to exacting standards. There was no room for ignoring trouble. Doing so invited disaster.

In marriage, ignoring problems can escalate conflict, breed uncertainty, and fuel disunity. The willingness to embrace the truth of your relationship, on the other hand, can open the door to wisdom, which is essential if you and your spouse hope to find common ground, resolve disagreements, and lift your marriage to another level.

Seek truth together. When there's a problem, commit to finding solutions. And above all, learn new ways of communicating, connecting, and fostering deeper intimacy. With time, the engines of your relationship will ignite, and you'll soon be soaring to the stars.

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.

PSALM 15:1-2

Jesus, thank You for being the Way and the Truth and the Life. Pour out Your Spirit on my marriage to help my spouse and me deal with the realities of our relationship and stay steady in our love and respect for each other.

Does Your Marriage Need Help?

It's important for couples facing difficulty to ask for help. Unfortunately, some couples don't realize their marriage is on the rocks until it's too late.

What are some indications that it might be time to seek help? Friends and family members can sometimes spot trouble that you might miss. They may be the first to observe unusual attitudes or behaviors. Listen to those who know you best.

Your children are also a good measure of your marital health. Kids have a special ability to sense tension. If they begin acting out, it might be time to look at your home life.

Compare your relationship now with what it once was. Remember how you used to love spending time together and serving each other? If that's no longer true, it should be a warning sign. All marriages need basic nurturing to survive.

More serious indicators of trouble include physical abuse, sexual problems, extramarital affairs, substance abuse, and destructive patterns such as criticism and nagging. Any of these struggles is cause for seeking immediate help.

If you suspect that you and your spouse need counseling, find a professional in your area or look into the Marriage Intensive through Focus on the Family's Hope Restored program.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

PSALM 46:1

All-powerful God, nothing is too difficult for You to restore and mend. My marriage could use some revival and a return to solid communication. Thank You for already working on our behalf.

Love with Style

Theresa had a stroke eighteen years ago. She has a hard time doing simple things in life, like styling her own hair.

Andrew, Theresa's husband of nearly forty-five years, knows how much joy a new hairstyle brings her. So he went to his wife's salon and bought the hair products that he needed to re-create his wife's look at home. Then Theresa's hairstylist gave him lessons, and Andrew spent hours practicing with a brush, curling iron, and hair spray. He's not ready to declare mastery over hairstyling, but he sure enjoys seeing the smile on Theresa's face.

Expressions of love like Andrew's are inspiring. You don't hear about them often, since the media prefer to expose the latest gossip on marriages that *don't* work out. But we need to hear stories like Theresa and Andrew's. They remind us that every marriage has obstacles to overcome, and most couples hang in there when things get tough. Not only do they find a way to stay together, but they also turn their challenges into the very thing that deepens their love even more.

Endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

ROMANS 5:4

Father, Your Word makes it clear that good things can come from the challenges we face in life, and the same is true for the challenges we face in marriage. Please show us how to navigate tough times so that You are glorified and our love for each other grows stronger in the process.

Formed, Not Found

Ninety-three percent of Americans say that a happy marriage is one of their most important goals. So how does a couple's dream of a happy life together become a nightmare that ends in divorce?

Marriages break up for a lot of reasons, but a common one is the false idea that lasting marriages are the result of finding your "soulmate"—that one person who "gets you." You love each other so naturally that your relationship is effortless. Every day is like a romantic, carefree walk in the park. And why wouldn't it be? You're soulmates. You're meant for each other.

Soulmates are an entertaining plot device for a movie, but real life rarely works that way. A relationship as intimate as marriage can't be created without some work. The illusion of an effortless marriage shatters at the first sign of conflict. That's when doubt creeps in, and you'll wonder, *What if this isn't my soulmate after all?*

Here's the good news: Soulmates aren't found, they're formed. You don't magically stumble into a happy, healthy marriage. You build one across time by committing to love your spouse through thick and thin, for better or worse.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

ROMANS 12:2

Father, help me not to buy into the world's view of romantic love but to embrace Your thoughts on what it means to build a strong, lasting marriage that honors You.

Roles and Chores

When you and your spouse fell in love and spent hours gazing into each other's eyes, did you discuss how the two of you would divide up household chores after marriage? Probably not.

Mandy and Tom settled the chores issue like this: Everything *inside* the house would be her responsibility; everything *outside* would be his. This worked until Mandy decided taking the garbage all the way to the curb wasn't "inside" work. Needless to say, Tom wasn't happy to come home from work and find a trash bag sitting by the front door!

Fortunately, there's a better way to organize chores. Mandy and Tom could have avoided a lot of unnecessary grief if they'd simply discussed their assumptions beforehand. In particular, it's a good idea to have open, honest conversations that detail your expectations. Give serious thought to who each of you is and how you want your household to operate. Concentrate on giftedness rather than gender. So instead of emphasizing "male" and "female" roles, talk about which jobs each of you enjoys.

And the best part? If you tackle the work as a team, not only will you conquer household chores, but you'll also strengthen your relationship along the way.

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

PROVERBS 18:2

Strengthen our relationship even through what seems insignificant. Let us refine each other daily and encourage each other toward You and toward our marriage.

Five Secrets of a Happy Marriage

Who knows the secrets of a happy marriage better than couples who have been together many decades?

I asked one of my colleagues to survey a group of these couples and learn their secrets. Here are five key tips they shared:

1. Don't keep secrets. Be open and honest. Share the deeper parts of your hearts with each other.
2. Don't hold grudges. Learn to forgive. Grudges lead to bitterness and invite couples to start pulling away from each other and looking for an exit door.
3. Address your conflicts and work through them, but don't dwell on your disagreements. Put your past behind you and focus on the positive parts of your marriage.
4. Understand that your love will change over the years because *you* will change. You can only create a happy marriage if you stay committed to each other across the seasons of life.
5. Support your spouse in his or her interests. Learn what activities your spouse is passionate about, and join in on the fun.

The secrets to a happy marriage really aren't secrets at all. The magic comes from your willingness to jump in and do the work.

I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live.

ECCLESIASTES 3:12

*Lord, a happy, joyful marriage is such a rich treasure.
Thank You for all the incredible couples out there
who have been married fifty years or more and
still model the secrets of a fulfilling marriage.
May my marriage be one of them someday.*

More Than a Piece of Paper

The phrase *till death do us part* has been a popular element of wedding vows for generations—and with good reason. Marriage is a sacred commitment to be as dedicated to your spouse in the bad times as you are in the good times. Devotion that deep is a couple’s only hope if they want to build a marriage that lasts a lifetime.

But here’s the catch: Commitment doesn’t naturally bubble to the surface in a moment of crisis. It’s cultivated over time as husbands and wives live out their love for one another each and every day. Commitment is what makes marriage more than just a piece of paper or a box to check on a tax form. Marriage is a sacred union that bestows countless benefits on the couple, their children, and society—benefits that cannot be replicated by any other relationship.

Neither your individual household nor society at large will flourish without the foundation of stable marriages. That’s because healthy cultures and healthy marriages require the same thing: selfless people who seek each other’s happiness, not just their own.

Marriage is a commitment so deep and meaningful that it can only be described with a vow as profound as “till death do us part.”

Let marriage be held in honor among all.

HEBREWS 13:4

Lord, help us live out our vows to each other daily. Bless our union with the strength to face challenges hand in hand. Help us center our hearts on You as the cornerstone of our marriage.
