

## Introduction

**N**ext to your decision to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, the decision to marry “the love of your life” is the most important, life-changing choice you will ever make. If you follow God’s plan, the plan given in the Bible, marriage is for life – *all of your life and to the same person*. That takes a lot of commitment. You must be willing to stick it out. Thinking through and discussing together before you are married the issues that you will face can give you a tremendous boost toward a happy and successful marriage. It is clearly better to set out building a strong and happy marriage than it is to mend a broken one.

This little self-help book has been written primarily for a couple approaching the matrimonial altar, however, the principles and questions presented will help any married couple. Having a happy marriage takes work, both husband and wife putting forth effort to make corrections and improvements as they are needed. Prayerfully studying and restudying this material to pinpoint where improvement is desirable can be very useful in making marriage better and better as the years pass.

You may not like what you find on these pages. Some of the principles are not popular in our modern society. But stating what is readily acceptable, what is in vogue, or what is easiest to do is not my purpose. We need to see what God says. After all, He created marriage in the beginning, and, as the Creator, He knows best how your marriage should function.

## Get Ready, Get Set, I Do!

Hopefully, after reading and considering the biblical principles presented in this book, you will have a better understanding of what a godly marriage is and what your marriage should be like after the honeymoon. Most importantly, you will be able to focus on what God has to say about marriage and the kind of family He wants you and your mate to build together. Major points are supported with scripture. Locating cited passages and reading them in your own Bible will enrich your study. You will find scriptures quoted and sources referenced in the back of the book. All scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

After you have read God's word for yourself, I want you to challenge my teaching. I am not the authority. God is. Nor am I infallible. How I understand and explain God's book on marriage is not as important as how you understand and apply it – as long as you are honest with it.

I hope you and your love will consider this material together, along with the Bible text, discussing it openly and prayerfully. In many chapters there are questions designed to help you evaluate your readiness for marriage, or your behavior if already married. Answer the questions honestly. It is far better to disappoint your intended spouse now with an honest answer, than it is to say what you think he or she wants to hear. If you are not honest now, you will both suffer the heartache that will inevitably come after the marital knot has been tied and your real selves become evident.

If not yet married, try to visualize your marriage to this person you have chosen, but answer questions *according to how you think and act today*.

## How to improve your marriage

What real value is there in spending time before saying, “I do,” answering a list of questions about your attitudes, beliefs and behavior? The value is in testing your relationship before making a final commitment. It is a means of preparing for the many years you will be living and working together. Think about it! It is quite common for individuals joining a corporate executive team to undergo rigorous testing and weeks of intensive training before being allowed to take their place of responsibility. A winning football team spends countless hours preparing for the big game, honing skills that will be critical within the context of close relationships. A surgical team whose members are frequently bickering and constantly out of sync with one another is a deadly force. Success for all endeavors involving close relationships depends upon careful choice and diligent preparation. Why should marriage, the most intimate of all human relationships, be different? Why should the team requiring the longest commitment of its members be exempt from thoughtful preparation? Why should two people be joined together in a holy union sanctioned to create human life and mold it into a future generation for good or evil without prior testing of their qualifications and a few hours of prayerful examination of their attitudes and behavior?

Many young people today readily agree with the gravity of the union and the importance of testing the relationship before making a final commitment. Consequently, having sex before marriage, even living together for months, as a means of verifying the relationship are on the rise. The number of American couples living together outside of marriage in 2004 was up nearly 1,200 percent from 1960s number.<sup>1</sup> That’s right – 1,200 percent! A June 2001 report from the National Marriage Project revealed the results of

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a Gallop poll in which 62% of young people between the ages of 20 - 29 believed that cohabitation (living together in sexual union before marriage) is effective divorce prevention. Surprisingly, as many as 43% said they “would only marry someone if he or she agreed to live together with you first, so that you could find out whether or not you really get along.”<sup>2</sup> A major problem with such thinking is that cohabitation is not a valid test.

A study of 3,300 married couples found that those who cohabited prior to marriage have an estimated likelihood “of dissolution that is about 46% higher than for non-cohabiters.”<sup>3</sup> Of those who live together without benefit of marriage, 55% do end up marrying but a whopping 40% of those divorce later.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, a better method of premarital preparation is needed. Interestingly, there is one not only available but proven.

A number of studies suggest that the seeds of marital distress and divorce are there for many couples even when they say, “I do.” These studies show that those couples who will do well in a marriage and those who will likely fail can be identified before the wedding with accuracies of 80 - 94%.<sup>5</sup> Considering the results of these studies, it is unwise to enter marriage without assessing your relationship by premarital examination and counseling. Further, it is biblical to do so. Long ago, the apostle Paul advised the Corinthians to “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”<sup>6</sup>

This book was written to provide you and your mate a self-help tool for evaluating your chances of a successful marriage. It will help you wisely choose before making