

Introduction

What More Can Be Said About Marriage?

1. If you've read Christian marriage books in the past, list the major take-away value of your favorite ones. In what areas did they most benefit you? What issues did they not address or change in your marriage?
2. In what ways have psychological theory or other belief systems found in marriage books you've read perhaps subtly conflicted with God's Word? If not, have you substituted worldly teaching for a sound biblical grounding in marriage?
3. Refer to the story of the young professional and Elaine. At what level have you fallen into the same trap in the past through (a) discussing a spouse's shortcomings, (b) making mental comparisons, (c) spending time alone, and (d) physical intimacy?

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4. What potential for the above dangers is possible in your present situation without the necessary safeguards?

5. Look at all the possibilities mentioned by Carl Rogers to substitute for the old-fashioned marriage. Think of friends and relatives who are using these methods. How are they working for them? What seems to be missing?

6. As with a good golf game, a few basic principles executed well make all the difference. What principles in your relationship with your spouse which you do on a regular basis are most successful?

7. A scripture reading for support and to identify with:
Luke 14:28.

Chapter One

When Marriage Doesn't Go According to Plan

1. Review the opening story of Dave and Karen. Name three steps (in order) that Dave needs to take in relation to the two women in his life to save the marriage.
2. In the story of Cathy and Jack, what are Jack's options after hearing from Henry? What demands, sacrifices, or boundaries would you be willing to make under the circumstances?
3. When a marriage doesn't go according to plan, it's often because no plan has been clearly stated. Write a one-page plan that sets out your expectations, goals, and overall vision for your marriage as it relates to both partners.

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4. In marriage we enter a covenant to be a helpmate and companion in every key area of life. Rate yourself from 1 to 10 in the following areas: sexual, social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. How might you improve your score in each of these critical areas?

5. Sarah displayed characteristics of a godly wife in Scripture. Locate one example each of a godly wife and husband in God's Word. How can you emulate their character in relation to their spouse? Suggested readings: Matthew 1–2; Luke 2 (Joseph and Mary); Acts 18:1–3, 18–19, 26 (Aquila and Priscilla). See also Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 1–4); and Hosea (Hosea 1–3).

6. List all the negatives the culture associates with a wife's submission to her husband. Now enumerate your own fears or dislikes. How does all of the above compare with the overall balance the Bible presents relating to the husband-wife relationship?

Chapter Two

Before We Say “I Do”

1. Be completely honest with each other about past exploits, present beliefs, and behavior, as well as future plans and goals. Is there anything that you may be even subconsciously concealing that might have an impact on your marriage relationship? Discuss how this might affect each of you.

The following questions related to important traits in choosing a marriage partner alternate between husband and wife:

- 2a. Assess his present spiritual activities. Does his present spiritual walk measure up to the standards of a godly man?
- 2b. Does she have saving faith in Christ as both Savior and Lord of every area of her life? Does she trust His power and provision to meet every need?
- 3a. Does he walk with integrity in all his behavior and even attitude? Where does he fall short in the small things?
- 3b. Is she preoccupied with external beauty above the beauty of her character? Do her words and deeds have a continual lovely quality?

- 4a. Is he a resolute decision maker who carefully weighs options based on God's Word? Does he boldly accept consequences?

- 4b. Does she have the strong absolutes combined with initiative and faith to achieve joint goals? Is she willing to defer to the leading of her husband and support his judgments?

- 5a. Does he focus more on his own needs and feelings or those of others? How does he use his time, resources, and abilities?

- 5b. What do her words, heart, and attitude display to others? Is there anything that would embarrass her spouse rather than build confidence?

- 6a. Does he take himself or life too seriously, or do humor and joy fill his life? Does he indulge in the other extreme of sarcasm?

- 6b. Does she display kindness and gentleness starting with her children, or are there pockets of insensitivity and self-centeredness, perhaps with even a tinge of cynicism?

- 7a. Is his humility genuine by his concern for others and dependence upon God? How does he respond to his own achievements and failures?

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- 7b. Can she maintain a positive, even humorous, attitude in the face of opposition and trial? Will she persevere and remain true even when things are tough without complaining?
- 7c. Make a list of other important traits and explore them in detail.
8. See Galatians 5:22–23 for godly characteristics that should be observed in each of us.

Chapter Three

Sealed with a Vow

1. Make a point of reading your original wedding vows. Have you done more or less to keep those vows, and what would it take to strengthen unkept (or neglected) vows?
2. Vow One: Have you both fully comprehended the meaning of marriage from a legal and spiritual standpoint? List the changes that occur as you relate spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Express your understanding of “cleaving” to your mate in an ongoing sense.
3. Vow Two: If marriage is God’s *ordinance*, look up the meaning of that word as well as the word *covenant* to determine what God has commanded in terms of obligations. What circumstances will adversely affect or tempt you to modify this covenant? What are your chief barriers to intimacy?

4. Vow Three: Look at the key words *love*, *honor*, and *keep*. How can commitment replace emotion in the first case? What practical ways do we honor by putting the other first? Finally, in what areas can we look out for the other's interests?

5. Vow Four: Sickness can be devastating and require tremendous patience and a servant attitude. Discuss how you would respond to serious illness and what you would need from your own resources and from God to fulfill this vow. How have you learned by observing other marriages going through testing in this area?

6. Vow Five: Mental as well as physical infidelity are forbidden in marriage. Discuss your weaknesses due to unmet expectations or outside pressures. How can you establish the hedges that will protect you from all unfaithfulness, even that of the mind. See 1 Corinthians 10:13 for a Scripture verse to remember in times of temptation; see 1 Samuel 11:1–12:25; Psalm 51 for a warning of the consequences of yielding to temptation.

7. Vow Six: Separation and divorce are considered as options by some people even for general unhappiness. If you've ever considered these for any reason, make a pledge to surrender them as a negative option based on God's command, and agree to deal with the underlying issues leading in this direction.

Chapter Four

The Role of a Wife

1. Name some “supermodel” Christian women of today who exhibit attractive Christlike qualities. What are those qualities and why are they lovely? How can you emulate some of them in your life?
2. Submission and equality in marriage are not mutually exclusive. How can female assertiveness and initiative work well with male headship in your marriage? Where do adjustments need to be made by both partners to achieve the proper balance?
3. Recall a difficult situation or decision where you both strongly disagreed. How did you finally resolve it and on what principles? Based on the biblical concepts of submission and equality, would you do things differently were the same issues to come up today?

4. Many couples struggle with both proper male headship (both extremes), and appropriate female submission (both extremes again), but fail to realize that personality factors, upbringing, goals, etc., affect these imbalances. Examine and attempt to correct this in your present relationship.

5. Older women have a wealth of experience, both practical and spiritual, to utilize in coping with the stresses of being a wife and mother. Seek out an older, wiser Christian woman to share lessons she's learned, especially in your weak or difficult areas.

6. Lack of self-control can cause numerous problems in a marriage. Look especially at the areas mentioned by the author: finances, food, home, the tongue, and a pure mind and heart. Review these and add other areas of your life where you might not have balance or control. Take steps with the help of God and your spouse to improve.

7. Walter Chantry, in *The High Calling of Motherhood*, lists the main purposes of a mother's role in building strong character: developing talents, instilling virtues, correcting faults, and evangelizing. If you've missed or neglected one of these areas, set up a concrete plan to address it more thoroughly.

8. See 2 Peter 1:5–9 for godly qualities and virtues that should be evident in our lives.

Chapter Five

The Role of a Husband

1. List all your hobbies, recreation, friendships, etc., apart from work and family life. How much time, effort, and care go into each of them? Compare that total with the total investment in your wife. To put her first in your life, make plans, beginning with this month, to adjust your priorities.
2. Read together Ephesians 5:25–33. Now describe from the Gospels what Christ actually did for His church. Compare your attitude and actions by viewing your wife as representing the church. How can you become more Christlike in laying down your life?
3. Though our degree of love cannot equal Christ's, our attitude can reflect His character. How often does your love for your wife remain constant without expecting a response? Cite an example where you kept serving her without verbal affirmation.

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4. At what times, due to your lack of commitment or ability, has your wife taken the role of leadership? How is this linked to your failure to first provide adequate love and attention to her needs? Discuss how you can regain the initiative.

5. Even when we demonstrate love, it's often only because it's convenient. What have you given up related to your own interests in order to love your wife and put her needs first? Sacrificial love is deliberate! Plan an event or action that will go the "extra mile" in her eyes because of the personal sacrifice involved. Read 1 Corinthians 13 for a description of true love.

6. In your training and instruction of your children, are you too directive, not allowing freedom or breathing room? Or are you nondirective, not providing them with clear guidelines in life? Pick a situation that demands a careful balance and take the proper steps.

7. Our most important task is teaching and training in the Christian faith. What have you done (or will do) to ensure that your children receive an understanding of Christian doctrine and how to apply it to their life situations? How can you and your wife also improve your prayer and fellowship time together and encourage each other in spiritual growth?

Chapter Six

Pulling Weeds

1. Past romantic relationships can come back to haunt us, especially at vulnerable times. Search your hearts for past sins of reliving desire or comparison with your present spouse. Confess to one another and resolve not only to eliminate this from your thought life but also potentially entangling circumstances or continuing relational ties. Read and memorize Scripture that emphasizes repentance, forgiveness, and putting the past behind. Suggestions: Luke 17:3; Ephesians 4:32; Philippians 3:13; 1 John 1:9.
2. If either spouse has children from a past marriage, those loyalties can also create many complications. In what ways have these other children and their needs impacted your own marriage relationship? How can you protect yourself from “old wounds” as well as keep both worlds within proper boundaries? What will you attempt to do to mend wounds and open doors to witness to these family members?
3. The issues related to your own children in your present marriage can become weeds that overrun your garden as well. Among the following, what are your chief areas of difficulty and what can you do to deal with the problem?

Infertility	Lack of desire for children
Lack of family planning	Their unmet expectations
The only thing holding you together	Discipline problems or approaches
Behavior a cause for diversion	Parental guilt for inadequacy

4. Sharing responsibilities (especially household) can be stressful when there are differing philosophies, time schedules, abilities, and interests. Look at these four considerations and write out general guidelines that will help your communication and daily decisions as you face daily domestic responsibilities.
5. We so take basic manners for granted that we often neglect them. As you serve each other, directly or indirectly, how often do you express gratitude, affection, compliments, or an explanation of why their service is meaningful and important to you? Assess your performance and come up with a rule of response for the future. Do you see areas needing improvement as your children observe and mimic you?
6. Comparison, even in small ways, saps the vitality from a marriage. Do you accept your spouse as he/she is at present or are you taking on the job of changing him/her? Take inventory of everything from physical characteristics to spiritual growth. Reaffirm your acceptance of your spouse, failures and all. Concentrate on the positives.

7. Past offenses, minor or major, from an unkind word to an affair, need to be confessed. This should be followed by true repentance, which should result in genuine forgiveness and healing. Without dredging up unnecessary past sins, confess those things that may be blocking a close relationship. Also confess bitterness and an ongoing lack of forgiveness. See James 5:16 for the value and necessity of this action.

Chapter Seven

Planting Hedges

1. On a piece of paper draw a series of levels representing different phases of your marriage. How well did you plan for past stages and what were the results? How are you doing in your present stage? What will be the challenges of the future as you face challenges such as college, weddings, and retirement? Try to identify some possible challenges you hadn't thought about and address them thoroughly.
2. Similar to the author, we all have our blind spots, even if we've been married over twenty years, and our mates see them clearly. Even if you've heard about them previously, lovingly discuss each other's weaknesses that may not be apparent or fixable. List progressive steps in which you can help your mate change, without rejecting or criticizing him/her.

3. The language of sacrifice permeates the lives of the saints through the centuries. With your spouse, choose a favorite book on this subject, and after reading it together, outline the principles of sacrifice that apply to your marriage. As with Jim Elliot, find two or three memorable quotes that you will use in terms of servanthood, and make a note of the qualities in their lives that you admire.

4. Did you truly come into your marriage with a passion to completely serve and satisfy your spouse? If you had to lose everything else—career, hobbies, dreams—to merely serve your spouse’s needs, would you be willing to do it? How have you succeeded at this task compared to your other goals and desires in life?

5. What are your most difficult challenges in serving or communicating with your wife? Generally, these challenges revolve around times when your favorite or most critical activities coincide with those you least like related to your spouse’s needs. Try to isolate these. Think of three ways in which you can please each other daily, and do them. Ask each other “What can I do to serve you?” The requests may be the same for years, or they may change weekly.

Conclusion

1. Similar to the author, make a pact with a friend of the same sex regarding purity and sexual fidelity to your spouse. Agree to share and ask questions regarding the details of relationships with members of the opposite sex apart from your spouse. Memorize a verse to recall in times of challenge. Recommendation: 1 Corinthians 10:13.

2. Do you know of any couples who may benefit from your joint interest in their marriage? What can you both do to get involved and provide support and accountability? Take the first step and pray that your godly precepts can make a difference in helping them to shape their own pure and vibrant marriage.

3. Make it a priority to be involved with other couples on a regular basis, in order to support and be accountable to one another in your marriage relationships. Church small groups and Sunday schools are ideal (Hebrews 10:25).