



## **INTRODUCTION**

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And they lived happily ever after.

The End

So ends romance novels, romance films and fairy tales. However, once you finish the book and close the cover, or step out of the darkened theater, reality is waiting.

So what does that have to do with preparing for marriage? The ideas and expectations many engaged couples have about marriage are the same as Hollywood's version: fantasyland. This workbook is an attempt to present marriage preparation in the light of reality. Accomplishing this requires balance. Engagement is a joyous time, and you are eagerly looking forward to your union. Your engagement time is filled with enthusiasm, infatuation, high emotions, and high expectations. This book seeks to lift up your union and celebrate your joy at the same time it seeks to prepare you to go the distance in the years ahead, when infatuation and feelings come and go and when expectations and hopes might go unmet.

A good, lifelong marriage doesn't just happen. It isn't a Cinderella and handsome prince story. There isn't any magic, mystery, or luck to having a lasting, satisfying marriage. The path for such a marriage is well traveled; many have walked it. It is so well marked that any couple can have an enjoyable and successful marriage if they simply follow the path.

What is the path?

Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father [God] but through me*" (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is the path. Faith in Him and obedience to Him and to the Bible is the path for a godly, lifelong marriage. Jesus called us not only to be believers, but to be disciples. We cannot follow Jesus without submitting to His discipline—without living a disciplined life. Jesus instructs us to count the cost of following Him. (See Matt. 7:21-29, 8:19-22, 10:32-42, 16:24-25; Luke 6:46-49, 14:25-35, 14:25-35.)

In the same way, having a godly, lifelong relationship with your spouse comes at a cost. We face a multitude of circumstances in life. Some of them are pleasant, and some of them are unpleasant, or worse, they are painful. The traditional marriage vow includes all possibilities: *in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, until death us do part*. (The so-called negative aspects have been emphasized because we tend to overlook and avoid them.)

Your vows are not a series of sentimental phrases you say for the sake of tradition. Rather, they state the terms of the marriage covenant. They are there so you will count the cost. You are vowing, first to God and then to each other, a binding, lifelong covenant that sets in motion a complete and complex change, not only in earthly living, but also in the kingdom of God. Marriage is first a spiritual deal. Marriage *is* made in heaven (Gen. 2:24). Marriage is the binding and bonding of two people as one. It is God's deal. *What God has joined together let not man separate* (Mal. 2:14-16; Matt. 19:6).

### ***Why another workbook?***

One goal of this book is to present material relevant to a broad-based audience of differing upbringings and life situations. Some workbooks take a more lighthearted approach, which might work well for couples who have maintained their purity, who come from wonderful families, and who have well-balanced lives. This book will certainly work for them, but it also speaks to those whose lives have been messed up or who, apart from God, have made a mess of their lives.

In our premarital ministry work, we found the existing resources inadequately covered issues we wanted to address. After searching and not finding such a resource, I decided to write one that would specifically address issues prevalent in our culture and in our churches.

I thought long and hard about whether one book could and should encompass both groups. On the one hand, I did not want to trouble virgin couples with material that did not apply to them and that could be shocking or offensive. On the other hand, based on our experience with the other group of couples, and from conversations with pastors about the state of affairs within the church, I opted for a single resource. I tested this decision by using this book in premarital sessions with a young engaged couple who epitomize faithfulness, purity, and godliness in their relationship. They were not offended by the straightforward approach used in certain chapters. They knew some of it did not apply to them, and so they simply skipped it. They understood and appreciated our desire to leave no stone unturned.

The Church is experiencing rampant sin. Multitudes of Christians are divorcing. Some estimates are as high as 50 percent of so-called Christian marriages are ending in divorce. If these people are actually Bible-believing born again Christians, the facts are staggering and, to our disgrace, we are dishonoring God whom we say we love and obey.

In addition to divorce, the Church is increasingly experiencing sin in the form of child abuse, spousal abuse, substance abuse, and pornography. A growing number of believers see nothing unbiblical or wrong about engaging in sex outside of marriage. In light of this, we intend to dig deep into your personal life and your mate's personal life. We hope to cover such things as childhood and family relationship issues and traumatic experiences. We explore issues such as your views of God, the authority of the Bible, your Christian walk, and topics that go by the popular names of self-acceptance, self-respect, boundaries, and other emotional-mental mindsets. We focus on character and personality issues, religious views, habits, past relationships, and histories with addictions and lingering sins.

Another goal of this study is for you to know yourself and your mate as clearly and honestly as possible. This workbook addresses the question of whether you know yourself and your mate well enough to be making wise, mature, and godly choices.

Moreover, we want to elevate marriage to the sacred position to which God has placed it. Even within Christianity, the view of marriage has been cheapened. Thus, we attempt to instill this sacred view of marriage into your—the premarital couple's—mindset. Lastly (although it is actually first), the goal is to elevate your thinking to the truth that, as with all of life, marriage is foremost about God's purpose, plan, and Kingdom (Mal. 2:15-16). Marriage is mission.

God's grace, blessing, and peace be upon you as you seek to make a marriage that honors God, is enjoyable and rewarding, and that lasts a lifetime.

Mike & Jewel Williamson  
May 2008

## NOTES AND INSTRUCTIONS

### The workbook

The consensus from many is this book is a very good resource for premarital couples and mentors. It covers a lot of ground and provides in-depth structure for mentors and couples to follow. Even so, it is a work in progress; we welcome and appreciate comments and suggestions.

### Mentoring

Some couples will do this course with a pastor or counselor; others will do it with a mentor couple. No matter which type, the leader's experience, marriage, and relationship to God will be an example that offers great potential for learning and growth. Mentors, however, usually are not pastoral counselors or licensed counselors. There are times when problematic issues surface, and someone more experienced in the Word, in the Spirit, and in counseling may be suggested for further help. One of the responsibilities of the mentors is to be alert for such things and to suggest appropriate help if needed. Mentors are accountable to church leadership; they are to keep your pastor or leadership informed about your relationship and your progress in the premarital course.

### Doing the work

#### **Each person is to have his or her own workbook**

There is no set number or duration of sessions. Meetings should be scheduled to give you time to thoroughly do the homework and discuss your answers with your fiancé(e) before each session. Since the section lengths vary, you might elect to do several sections of the book at one meeting or break a section into a couple of meetings.

It is important that you do your homework alone—by yourself. At this point, we do not want you to influence or to be influenced by each other's opinions and comments. After you have completed the lesson then do, indeed, discuss and compare your answers with each other. Also, discuss your answers with each other *before* meeting with your mentors. This will help avoid any surprises. It is also a chance for on-the-job training in communication and conflict resolution.



- Where there is an arrow such as the one shown here, stop and do what the arrow is referencing. It is important to do the work at that time, because it relates to the material that follows.
- You are also to look up verses that are in line with text.

### The sessions

Sometimes the questions spark discussion that takes the session down a path away from the format. These rabbit trails often add insight and liveliness to the session. Although the workbook provides structure to follow, your pastor, counselor, or mentors might alter this. For example, they may have you start with a section in the middle of the book. Perhaps your mentors will require you to write out scriptures as well as read them. They may require you to read other books, complete an inventory, watch video presentations, and attend group meetings or seminars. Thus, while this course provides a structure to follow, it is adaptable and allows for flexibility.

## Using additional paper

We encourage you to use additional paper to write more lengthy answers and comments. If you do, please use the paper's margin for noting page references and question or item numbers. This will aid in matching answers with questions during your time with your mentors.

## Using the rating scales

Usually the rating scale is from 1-5 with 5 being the best, most, or most agreed, etc. Rating yourself and your future spouse is a subjective and, thus, an imprecise exercise. Your mood and feelings at the time will factor into your answers. In addition, you may be uncertain what the question is asking. Therefore, don't be overly concerned about being exact. A general idea of where you *might* be with any question or issue is sufficient. Your discussion times with each other and with your mentors will allow you to explain your responses more clearly.

## Additional Suggested Resources

There are so many valuable resources that it would take pages to list them all. The appendix lists some resources you might find helpful. We encourage you to use the few we have listed below and any others of your choosing before or while going through the course.

### Books:

- *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. The section on communication includes the topic of love languages. If you are not already familiar with the subject, it would be helpful for you to read it before doing the communication section.
- *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerichs
- *Cracking the Communication Code* by Emerson Eggerichs
- *The Smart Stepfamily* by Ron Deal. If you are forming a stepfamily—read this.
- *Love, Sex, and Lasting Relationships* by Chip Ingram
- *Relationships* by Les & Leslie Parrott

### Multimedia:

- *Love and Respect* DVD series by Emerson Eggerichs. The DVD seminar is offered in churches and is available to purchase. Understanding the basic needs of men and women, and how these needs differ, will save you a lot of miscommunication and conflict. [www.loveandrespect.com](http://www.loveandrespect.com)
- *We Two Are One* audio series by Pastor Alistair Beggs. This powerful audio series presents the sacred, covenantal, and God-ordained nature of marriage. [www.truthforlife.org](http://www.truthforlife.org)

## ***YOUR FIRST MEETING***

### ***Before you start***

During your first meeting and before launching into the workbook, we suggest you and your mentors take some time to get to know each other. Perhaps you already know each other and have a long history. On the other hand, maybe you are strangers and meeting for the first time. If the latter is the case, we suggest you spend the first part of your initial meeting getting comfortable with one another by sharing some of your history. Perhaps you will want to share such things as how and when you and your soon-to-be spouse met, what attracted you to each other, your moment of decision and commitment to marry, and the process of moving through the various stages of your relationship.

This will also be a perfect time for your mentors to share some of their lives with you. They might, for example, show pictures of their wedding and share how they met. If mentors have been married a long time, pictures of before and after (much after) can be fun and encouraging. Seeing wedding pictures of a couple married for thirty years can bring a lot of hope and encouragement (not to mention laughter) to a young couple.

We hope you experience a warm, friendly relationship with your mentors. We hope they will make you comfortable and at ease. What follows in this book are some very in-depth, probing questions. Answering them will require a bond of trust between you and your mentors. Moreover, some of the material might elicit a deeper bond of trust between you and your mate.

We also hope your mentors will be appropriately transparent and candid with you about their lives. Since this book asks some deeply probing questions, it is only fair that your mentors be open about their lives too. Keep in mind that they are also human. They have issues, struggles, successes and failures. Thus, mentors should exemplify humility and gentleness. Again, your mentors have a responsibility before God and before church leadership to speak the truth in love, to submit to the Word of God, and to deal forthrightly with your relationship and issues of marriage.

Here are some questions to help transition from introductions and getting comfortable to starting the workbook.

1. Why are you taking this course? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What do you expect from this premarital course? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Do you have any questions or concerns about this course? \_\_\_\_\_ Any anxiety? \_\_\_\_\_ Comments?

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4. What would you like from your mentors? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Are you enthusiastic about participating in this course? Would you do this course if your church or pastor didn't require it? Comment \_\_\_\_\_

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6. This is an intense course and the homework elicits thoughtful answers. You will be required to do the homework in a whole-hearted, timely manner. Your mentors most certainly would like your enthusiastic participation in this course. Are you enthusiastically committed to doing this? \_\_\_\_\_

Finally, this course is a work in progress. Our goal is to make this an in-depth approach to marriage preparation, but at the same time, to make it an enjoyable, beneficial experience. In addition, as the subtitle indicates, our goal is to honor God by submitting to His Word as the authority for our lives. We continually seek to improve this book toward those goals. If you have comments or suggestions, we would appreciate hearing from you. Our email address is [mike@genesis224.com](mailto:mike@genesis224.com). You can also visit our Web site and contact us at [www.genesis224.com](http://www.genesis224.com).

Now that you have had some time to become acquainted with your mentors, let's begin at the beginning: Your relationship with God.