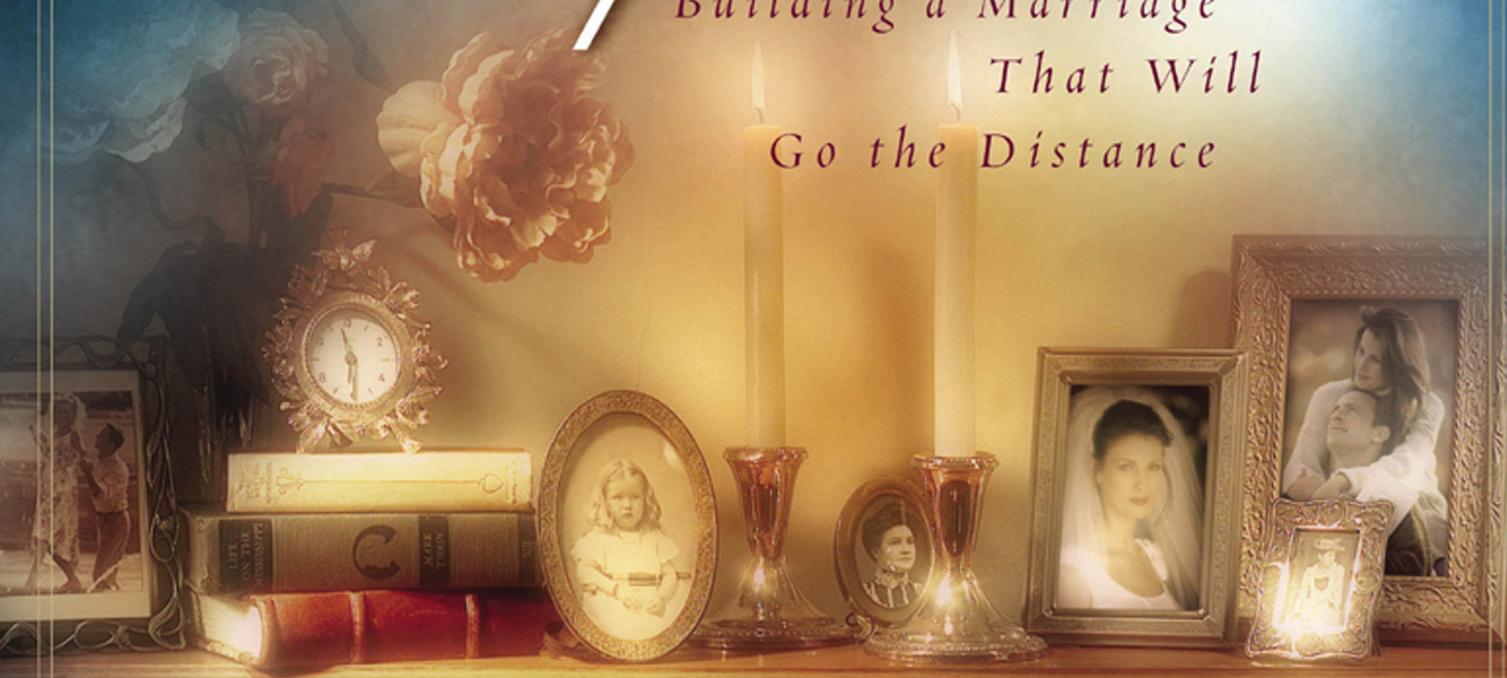


LOVE

FOR A

Lifetime

*Building a Marriage
That Will
Go the Distance*



DR. JAMES DOBSON

*This book is dedicated to my wonderful wife, Shirley,
with whom I have lived and loved for more than forty years.
I thank God every day for His gift of this special lady.*

LOVE FOR A *Lifetime*

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*You can build a stable, satisfying,
intimate relationship that will withstand
the storms of life.*



NEWLYWED *Games*



Love...always protects,
always trusts, always hopes,
always perseveres.

I CORINTHIANS 13:6-7 NIV

OME YEARS AGO, I was flipping through the channels on our television and paused momentarily to watch one of those “newly-wed” game shows. It was a bad decision. The leering host posed a series of dumb questions to a lineup of flaky brides whose equally weird husbands were “sequestered backstage in a soundproof room.”

He challenged the women to predict their husband’s answers to inquiries that went something like this:

“Where was the exact spot your husband saw you stark naked for the first time?”

“If you and your husband ever separated, which of his friends would be the first to make a pass at you?”

“How would you describe the first time you and your husband ‘made whoopee’ using these TV terms: First Run, Rerun, or Cancelled?”

Without the least hesitation, the women blurted out frank answers to these and other intimate questions. At times I felt I shouldn't be watching, and indeed, past generations would have blushed and gasped. But the host was undaunted. He then asked the wives, "What kind of insect does your husband remind you of when he's feeling romantic?" If you think the question was ridiculous, consider the answer given by one female contestant. "A bear," she giggled. When her husband realized she couldn't tell an insect from a mammal, he pounded her with his answer card. She said, "Welllll...I didn't know!"

A few minutes later, the men were given an opportunity to humiliate their wives. They grabbed it. Among other questions designed to produce hostility, they were asked to complete this sentence: "You haven't seen ugly until you've seen my wife's _____." What "fun" to watch the brides squirm as their husbands described their anatomical deficiencies to millions of viewers! Throughout the program the men and women continued to club one another on the head with their answer cards and call each other "stupid." That did it. I couldn't watch any more.

It has been said that television programming reflects the values of the society it serves. Heaven help us if that is true. The impulsive responses of the newlyweds revealed their immaturity, selfishness, hostility, vulnerability, and sense of inadequacy. These are the prime ingredients of marital instability, and too commonly,

By intimacy, I'm referring to the mystical bond of friendship, understanding, and commitment that almost defies explanation.



divorce itself. An army of disillusioned ex-husbands and ex-wives can attest to that all too well.

For every ten new marriages in America today, five will end in bitter conflict and divorce. That is tragic, but have you ever wondered what happens to the other five? Do they sail blissfully into the sunset? Hardly! According to clinical psychologist Neil Warren, all five will stay together for a lifetime, but in varying degrees of disharmony. On a Focus on the Family radio broadcast, Dr. Warren quoted the research of Dr. John Cuber, whose findings were published in a book entitled *The Significant Americans*. Cuber learned that some couples will remain married for the benefit of the children, while others will pass the years in relative apathy. Incredibly, only one or two couples in ten will achieve what might be called “intimacy” in their marriages.

By intimacy, Dr. Cuber was referring to the mystical bond of friendship, understanding, and commitment that almost defies explanation. It occurs when a man and woman, starting out as separate and distinct individuals, fuse into a single unit, which the Bible calls “one flesh.” I’m convinced that the human spirit craves this kind of unconditional love and that women, especially,

experience something akin to “soul hunger” when it cannot be achieved. I’m also certain that most couples expect to find intimacy in marriage, yet somehow it often eludes them.

Fortunately, you and your partner are not merely passive victims in the unfolding drama of your lives together. You can build a stable, satisfying, intimate relationship that will withstand the storms of life. All you need is a little wise counsel...and a burning desire to succeed.



A man will leave his father and mother
and be united to his wife,
and they will become one flesh.

GENESIS 2:24

Love for a Lifetime is designed to help you do just that. It is intended especially for single adults, engaged couples, and husbands and wives who have not yet celebrated their tenth anniversaries. This book offers principles and concepts that can armor-plate a marriage and equip it to go the distance. Some of these ideas were gleaned directly from a panel of husbands and wives who have enjoyed successful marriages for thirty, forty, or fifty years. Other material is based on the research of respected experts in the field. We will also examine the major pitfalls that can waylay a relationship and offer advice on how to avoid them. Ultimately, of course, we will rely on the principles endorsed by the Creator of families Himself. That is pretty safe counsel, to be sure.

So let's get started! There is no better time than these early years to lay the proper foundation for a rock-solid marriage. To begin, I hope you'll forget everything you've seen on those newlywed game shows. Unless, perhaps, you'd like to tell us about the last time you would have, if you could have, beat your spouse on the head with a frying pan. Move over, game show hosts. I can ask dumb questions, too! ✿



*W*hat greater thing is there

for two human souls

than to feel that they are joined...

to strengthen each other...

to be at one with each other

in silent, unspeakable memories.

GEORGE ELIOT

*The key to a healthy marriage
is to keep your eyes wide open
before you wed...
and half closed thereafter.*



EYES *Wide Open*





Matrimony...
offers the most fulfilling
human relationship
possible.



YOUNG MAN FELL IN LOVE with a pretty young lady. He took her home to meet his mother before asking her to marry him. But his mother disliked the girl intensely and refused to give her blessing. Three times this happened with different marriage candidates, leaving the young man exasperated. Finally, in desperation, he found a girl who was amazingly like his mother. They walked, talked, and even looked alike. *Surely my mother will approve of this selection*, he thought. With great anticipation he took his new friend home to be considered...and behold, his *father* hated her!

This young man had a problem, but his predicament was hardly unique. Finding the right person to love for a lifetime can be one of the greatest challenges in living. By the time you locate a sane, loyal, mature, disciplined, intelligent, motivated, chaste, kind, unselfish, attractive, and godly partner, you're too worn out to care. Furthermore, merely *locating* Mr. or Miss Marvelous is only half the assignment; getting that person interested in you is another matter.

And it's not becoming any easier to find and keep the right partner. At this writing, 1.1 million divorces occur in the United States every year.¹ The average duration of first marriages that end in divorce is only eight years.² What a tragedy! Not one of these couples anticipated the conflict and pain that quickly settled into their marriage. They were shocked...surprised...dismayed. When they stood at the altar and promised to be faithful forever, they never dreamed they were making the greatest mistake of their lives.

Part of the problem is that many men and women enter marriage having had no healthy role models in their formative years. If nearly half of all families are splitting up today, that means that almost half of all marriageable young adults have seen only conflict and disillusionment at home. It's no wonder that these newlyweds often sputter and fumble their way through early married life.

Some choose not to marry at all because of their skepticism about long-term relationships. Consider the words of a popular song from an earlier era, by Carly

Simon and Jacob Brackman. The lyrics are devastating. In effect, they say it's impossible to achieve intimacy in marriage; such a life will be lonely, meaningless, and sterile.

My friends from college they're all married now:

They have their houses and their lawns.

They have their silent noons.

Tearful nights, angry dawns.

Their children hate them for the things they're not:

They hate themselves for what they are.

And yet they drink, they laugh.

Close the wound, hide the scar.

But you say it's time we moved in together

And raise a family of our own, you and me.

Well, that's the way I've always heard it should be:

You want to marry, we'll marry.³



How strongly I disagree with the message in this sad song! After more than forty wonderful years of matrimony with Shirley, I can state unequivocally not only that marriage is still workable, but that it offers the most fulfilling human relationship possible. The family was God's idea and He does not make mistakes. He observed the loneliness that plagued Adam in the Garden of Eden and gave him a woman to share his thoughts with and to feel his touch. There is nothing quite like being loved unconditionally and intimately, decade after decade, by someone who promises to be there for better or worse, all the rest of your days.

Indeed, marriage is marvelous when functioning as intended—but therein lies the problem. Many of us fall into certain behavioral patterns that weaken the marital bond and interfere with a long-term relationship.

Among these destructive patterns is the tendency for young men and women to marry virtual strangers. Oh, I know that a typical couple talks for countless hours during the courtship period and believes they know each other. But a dating relationship is designed to *conceal* information. Each partner puts his or her best foot forward, hiding embarrassing facts, habits, and flaws.

*Plans fail for
lack of counsel,
but with many
advisers they succeed.*

PROVERBS 15:22

*There is nothing
quite like being loved
unconditionally and
intimately, decade
after decade, by
someone who
promises to be there
for better or worse...*



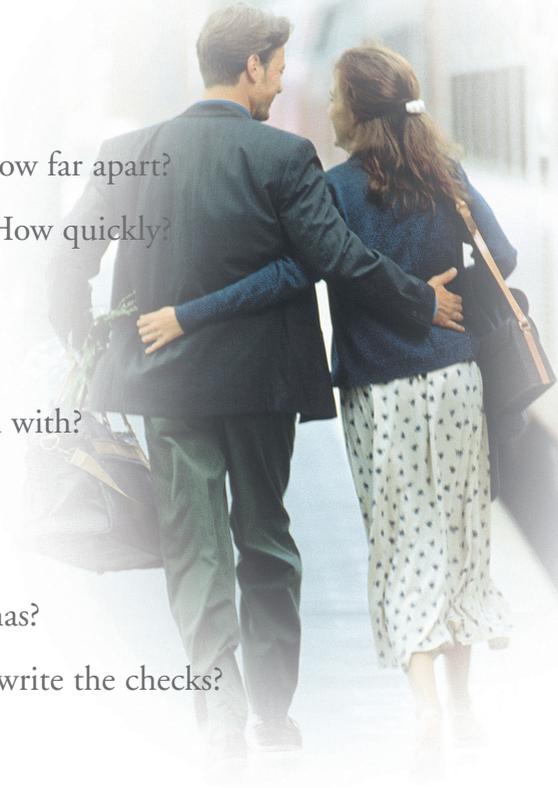
Consequently, the bride and groom who tie the knot too quickly begin marriage with an array of false assumptions about how life will be after the wedding. Major conflicts occur a few weeks later when they discover that they differ radically on what each considers non-negotiable issues. The stage is set for arguments and hurt feelings.

Equally dangerous is the decision to live together before marriage. This is a bad idea for many reasons. First, it leads to sexual immorality that dishonors God (see 1 Corinthians 6:18–20). Second, it undermines the relationship. Studies show that couples who live together before marriage have a greater than 50 percent chance of divorce than those who don't. Researchers found that those who cohabit later regretted having “violated their moral standards” and “felt a loss of personal freedom to exit out the back door.”⁴

What, then, is the best approach for couples who feel they are on a path to marriage? I strongly recommend premarital counseling. Each engaged couple, even those who seem perfectly suited to one another, should participate in at least six to ten sessions with someone who is trained to help them prepare for marriage. These encounters should help identify the assumptions each partner holds so the couple can work through areas of potential

conflict. The following questions touch on issues that should be discussed in the presence of a counselor or pastor:

- Where will you live?
- Will you both work? For how long?
- What about children? How many? How soon? How far apart?
- Will the wife return to work after babies arrive? How quickly?
- How will the kids be disciplined? Fed? Trained?
- What church will you attend?
- What theological differences need to be reckoned with?
- How will your roles vary?
- How will you respond to your in-laws?
- Where will you spend Thanksgiving and Christmas?
- How will financial decisions be made? Who will write the checks?
- How do each of you feel about credit?
- Will you buy a car on credit? How soon? What kind?
- How far do you expect to go sexually before marriage?
- If the bride's friends differ from the groom's, how will you relate to them?
- What are your greatest apprehensions about your fiancé(e)?
- What other expectations do you have?



As couples go through these questions, surprises often turn up. Some prospective husbands and wives discover major problems and agree to postpone or call off the wedding. Others work through their conflicts and proceed with increased confidence. All benefit from getting to know each other better.

Someone has said: The key to a healthy marriage is to keep your eyes wide open before you wed and half closed thereafter. I agree.

Noted counselor and author Norman Wright discussed his views on premarital counseling during a *Focus on the Family* radio broadcast some years ago and made several significant observations:

1. Couples should not announce their engagement or select a wedding date until at least half of the counseling sessions are completed. That way they can gracefully go their separate ways if unresolvable problems emerge.
2. Couples need to think through the implications of their decisions regarding children. For example, when an engaged man and woman indicate that they intend to have three children, each three years apart, it means they will not be alone at home for twenty-six more years once the first child is born! Couples are often stunned at hearing this. They should talk about how they will nurture their relationship and keep it alive throughout the parenting years.

3. Spiritual incompatibility is common among couples today. A man and woman may share the same belief system, but often one partner is relatively less mature than the other. One approach is for couples to pray together silently for three to four minutes a day, and then share their prayers out loud. After they are married, Wright recommends they ask one another each morning, “How can I pray for you today?” Then at the end of the day they can ask again about the issues raised in the morning and pray about them together. That’s a fine way to handle stress in any relationship!
4. Another frequent source of conflict is parental dependence by one or both partners. This problem is more likely to occur if an individual has never lived away from home. To overcome this difficulty, additional measures must be taken to lessen the dependency. Parental overprotection and interference can be a marriage killer if not recognized and handled properly.
5. Many loving parents today pay for premarital counseling as a gift. I think this is an excellent idea and may be the greatest contribution mothers and fathers will ever make to long-term marriage in the next generation.

*Love does not consist
in gazing at each
other, but in looking
in the
same direction.*

ANTOINE-deSAINT-EXUPERY



In addition to premarital counseling, another wonderful way to eliminate the unpleasant surprises of early married life is a program offered by many churches called Engaged Encounter. During a weekend retreat, engaged couples learn to communicate and understand each other better. Having participated with Shirley in a Marriage Encounter program based on similar concepts, I can attest to its value. That weekend was a highlight of our lives together. I strongly recommend Engaged Encounter to every couple planning a wedding. For more information, write to:

Engaged Encounter

1509 South Forest Street

Denver, Colorado 80222-3831

303-753-9407

Premarital counseling and Engaged Encounter are two great ways to get a marriage off on the right foot. Without specific effort to overcome the barriers to understanding, the honeymoon could be a blind date with destiny.

There is a better way! ✿