

Reflections for a Bride

Tips for the wedding
Counsel for the marriage



by Winsome Smith
In partnership with TruthMedia Internet Group

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* *'Anticipation'* written by Doris Beck
Design and Layout by Stefanie Coutinho
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Introduction

Dear Reader,

This little series of meditations began as I reflected on the upcoming wedding of a young lady I know. She loves the Lord, and so does the young man she will soon marry. God has graciously led the two of them together, and they will soon be joined “in holy matrimony.” It has brought joy to my heart to hear about parts of their journey. What a blessed day that will be, as two are united before God, family and friends.

If you are planning your wedding, I imagine you too share the excitement and joy of “a dream come true.” The mutual love of a bride and groom is beautiful to see; the relationship of a couple who have shared years together and are still deeply in love with one another is a priceless treasure.

Your circumstances may be different than what is reflected here. You may have grown up in a home where love was modeled well, or a home where love was simply another word. You may have a strong faith in God, or you may be searching for answers to some of life’s vital questions.

God is the one who came up with the whole idea of marriage, and His design is beautiful. A good marriage reflects His love for His people. I’d like to encourage you, as you read, to reflect on God’s deep love for you. You are one of a kind, created by God for this time, this place. Dear one, God’s own heart longs for a deep, close relationship with you. No matter what you have or haven’t done, no matter where you are today, I can say with certainty, He loves you.

If you’d like more information about how to begin a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, may I encourage you to read the Gospel of John in the Bible? Watch how Jesus cared for those around Him, and how they responded to Him. Ask God to show you His heart as you read. You may also want to visit www.WomenTodayMagazine.com.

I’d like to congratulate you as you begin this journey called marriage, and thank you for sharing these moments of reflection as you read. My prayer is that the thoughts shared would be an encouragement to you as you embark on this journey, and that your love for one another and for God would grow as the months and years pass. May God’s blessings of faith, hope and love be yours in abundant measure as you begin your home together!

Winsome

CHAPTER 1

Chosen

The acquaintance deepened into respect and a growing friendship, and as you shared, you sensed a growing commitment to the good of one another. Oh, “just friends” you may have said, yet there was a sense that something was taking root in your heart. You found yourself watching for him, wondering what he’d think about something you saw, or wishing you’d run into him once again before you called it a day.

Your conversations together likely became much broader, touching on subjects that you may never have discussed with anyone else. Far deeper, too, as you learned to share your heart, your feelings, your dreams. In learning to listen well to one another, you found a safe place of acceptance and love. The ring of the telephone or the memory of his smile made your heart skip a beat, and you knew how precious your relationship was becoming.

Then one day, he “popped the question”! Whether in a formal restaurant, proclaimed on a billboard, or in the midst of an unsuspecting daily moment, he declared

his love. Perhaps he asked your father first, or maybe you’d discussed it in general terms. Maybe you were even the one who finally said, “Will you marry me?”

In most marriages today, the bride knows she has been chosen by her beloved. Chosen — even the word brings a smile to one’s heart. How exciting it is to know that someone has taken time to get to know you, has grown in his love and commitment to you, and has accepted you! He actually wants to spend the rest of his life with you. You, too, are choosing

a future with this man. How grand!

Such a love, such a decision, is a gift from God, and I do believe it must make Him smile. It reflects His heart for you as well! You may not yet know how much God loves you, but the truth is that He chose to love you before you were even born. There is a verse in the Bible that says “We love God because He loved us first” (1 John 4:19).

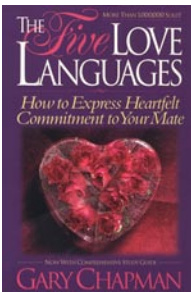
Bask in the love God has lavished on you, and the love of the man you have chosen to spend the rest of your life with. They are both gifts from above.

*“Such a love,
such a decision,
is a gift from
God, and I do
believe it must
make Him
smile.”*

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How has your beloved communicated that you are loved, accepted, chosen? Do you communicate to the man you love that you have chosen to love him? If so, how? *An excellent resource is The Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman. It explores five major ways of expressing love and commitment to your mate.*
2. The traditional wedding vows include the phrase “forsaking all others.” Do you find this an easy or difficult concept? What does it mean to you?
3. In the Bible, it says, “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Do you have the assurance of that kind of relationship with God through Jesus Christ? If not, would you like more information about how you can begin a relationship with Him? Our study coaches would be happy to share with you.

SUGGESTED RESOURCE



Chapman, Gary. (1996). *The Five Love Languages*. Moody Publishers.

CHAPTER 2

So Little Time, So Much To Do!

Oh my! There's a date to set, a location to book, and someone to officiate. There are friends to include in the party and other friends to invite to the celebration. Of course, there are colors, decorations, attire and flowers to plan. Will family be able to come? How large will the wedding party be? What about the invitation list? Will there be a reception, or perhaps several, if he's from one area and you're from another? Speaking of "him," where is the groom at the moment, and did you discuss the music?

Have you asked yourself what matters most on your wedding day? It seems nearly every wedding has some "moments to remember." At one wedding, after careful planning, all attendants were nearly ready. One of the groomsmen pulled out the shoes provided by the tux shop, and looked in awe ... at two left shoes! The closest place that had the same color and style of shoes was several hours away, and getting them in time was out of the question. Although every man in the wedding party had black dress shoes available, the groomsman decided he'd rather stand there with two left feet. Sure enough, the fact is captured forever in the wedding pictures! (Yes, he changed immediately before the reception into more comfortable shoes.)

At another wedding, someone forgot the ring. What's the happy couple to do? What is the pastor to do? "With this ring ... wait a second here ... something's missing!" No, no, no, that'd never work. Once again, an observant photographer caught the pastor handing his own ring to the groom on a short

term loan—very short term! No one was the wiser, until the pictures told the story.

"As you approach your big day, enjoy the journey."

One bride planned and cared for many details in the previous weeks. Now that the day had come, she was encouraged to enjoy the moment. Something unexpected would happen, and the difference between enjoying her day and allowing circumstances to dampen it would be found in her choice of attitude. She could choose to let the small stuff be "water off a duck's back."

As you approach your big day, enjoy the journey. Something will happen that, although it seems a terrible mishap at the moment, may be a source of many smiles in the years to come. In the midst of preparing for your wedding, don't forget that it's a marriage you are making ... may it last a lifetime. Take every opportunity available to laugh with those you love. Treasure the memories you're making. May God's richest blessing rest on both of you as you set out on this journey together!



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What matters most to you about the celebration?
2. In the middle of a busy time, it is often helpful to take time out to enjoy the moment. How have you done this, or how could you?
3. If you're feeling overwhelmed, is there a friend or family member who may feel honored to assist in some practical way? How could you make them a part of the celebration?

WEBweddings

by RuthAnn Raycroft

USING THE INTERNET TO HELP YOU PLAN YOUR BIG DAY

Planning a wedding takes time, energy, patience and careful thought. There are so many choices to be made. Options to be considered. Traditions to be preserved. Just imagine the wedding you could have with a world of possibilities at your fingertips. Wedding sites are some of the fastest growing on the Internet and there is almost nothing you can't do here. Pick out a china pattern. Tour a honeymoon location. Select invitations. Choose the rings. Announce your engagement. Find THE dress. There is a lot of information out there, so congratulations and happy surfing!

Budgeting

Regardless of where you live, it's difficult to have a wedding of any kind for nothing. Costs, currencies and expenses differ, but getting married anywhere can be expensive. So make the most of the money you have and PLAN.

- **MetLife Consumer Education Center** has a helpful pamphlet that is a great introduction to the financial aspects of getting married. It contains helpful advice and a good basic budget outline for your wedding.
- **Wedding expert Doris Marie Rowlands** has prepared a comprehensive breakdown of traditional western wedding expenses, as well as an etiquette guide (who usually pays for what). Two charts help to keep track of budget percentages by category, estimates and actual dollars spent.

Announcements

This is one of the most cost-effective and fun ways to use the Internet for your wedding. Send

the news of your engagement or your wedding to the world in a matter of minutes.

- **Lycos** offers easy, step-by-step instructions for building your own personal wedding page. Check out the sample pages from other couples.
- **WillYouMarryMe.com** - If you haven't already proposed, do it here. Announce your special day to the world, with or without design assistance. Lots of options and clear rates.

Invitations

Shopping for your invitations online may save time and money. Be careful to shop locally and compare prices, and be very careful about giving credit card information over the Internet.

- **Formal-Invitations.com** - Here you'll find stylish invitations on unique papers, vintage artwork, vellum printing and more. Select either printed invitations or do-it-yourself kits.
- **Wedding.Orders.com** - A good listing of wedding services catalogues, including several for invitations, and how to order them. Organized by where they are available.

Fashion

Fashion is perhaps one of the most important parts of any wedding, though a bride's (and groom's) attire may be vastly different from one culture to another. Choosing just the right dress or outfit can be a painstaking proposition, but the Internet can make this process not only easier but a lot more fun.

- **WeddingChannel.com, DavidsBridal.com** Check out the latest designs from a variety of designers. Here you can also find fashions for



bridesmaids, flower girls and the mother of the bride.

For Him

- **TheDiamondBuyingGuide.com** - One of the most informative guides to buying a diamond.
- **Online96.com** - Fashion isn't just for the bride! Here is a good basic overview of formal wear and a checklist for the groom and best man.
- **TheKnot.com** - All the details come together here on theknot.com's "grooms and guys" community. Find out everything he needs to know.

All in One

These are some great sites that offer a lot of information, all in one easy-to-navigate package.

- **WeddingChannel.com** and **TheKnot.com** Register online, find local resources in the US, view thousands of dresses by designer or style, buy gifts, get advice and find just about

everything you could possibly want related to the big day.

Make it Last

- **FamilyLife.com, FamilyLifeCanada.com** One of the most important things about a wedding is the marriage it celebrates. Get off to a good start—find out how you can make your relationship better and build a strong marriage for the future.

RuthAnn Raycroft has a Master's Degree in English Literature from Cardiff University in Wales. She is the Publications and Communications Manager for the Society of Christian Schools in BC and continues to work as a freelance writer.

CHAPTER 3

Anticipation

~ from a Mother's heart ~

The showers are over and your special day is almost here. You are excited about how the wedding plans are all coming together, and that you are able to check things off on your 'To Do' list. Everyone around you is full of anticipation for that moment when they see you walking down the aisle, with eyes only for your bridegroom standing at the front of the church.

For you the anticipation has been building since the day he told you that he loved you and wanted to marry you! You could hardly wait to spend the rest of your life with him, and it seemed so very far away. There were so many decisions to be made, details to be planned, and people to see. Now you are almost there! You are counting weeks and days, no longer months or even years.

But there is one more feeling that perhaps you weren't prepared for. Your parents may be grieving because they know that although you will always be their little girl, you will be a wife first. Whereas you can hardly wait for your wedding day to arrive,

there are times when they wish they could make the clock stand still. When someone asks how you are doing, your face lights up as you talk about him and your future together. You are looking forward to being a wife, taking care of him and being there for him. Your energy goes into communicating with him, planning for your big day, and being ready to set up your new home together.

It can be seen in the little things, when



you get a letter in the mail, or a message that he called, how your heart leaps towards him in eager anticipation of what he said. And yet at the same time, there is that little nagging doubt in the back of your mind. *Will I be a good wife? Will our love grow stronger with each passing day?*

As you spend hours planning and getting ready for your wedding day and your marriage to this amazing man, enjoy the journey, these last days of singleness, and anticipate all that God has for you and your life together with your husband.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. You know a wedding is approaching. To what extent does this change your goals, schedule and perspective on life?
2. How often do you find the wedding occupying your thoughts and your conversation with others? What about the groom?
3. What do you most eagerly look forward to as the wedding nears?
4. In what ways do you know that you are loved deeply by the man you plan to marry, and by God? How can you respond to this love? *If the love of God is something you do not know personally, we invite your questions and interaction with a study coach.*

Eeks! I Think I Found a Wart!

One challenge as you get to know one another in marriage is that you eventually find out there are “warts.” Suddenly you find some imperfection, a spot that you wish would disappear. Maybe you knew that it was there, and hoped he would never see it.

How do you respond to warts? If they are your own, maybe you’d like to hide them, to pretend they are not there. Maybe explaining them away is your style. “My mother has a wart just like this, and so does my sister. It’s normal.” Comparison is a frequent option for some; “Yes, I’ve got imperfections, but you should see his!” Your response may be dictated by the type of “wart.” Is it some quirk of personality or temperament? Do you bounce out of bed each morning, and just assume he knows about it? Learning to know yourself is a good thing. Learning to know your differences within the marriage, while appreciating how you were created, can be a challenge and a blessing to both of you.

Is your “wart” an area where you need to grow? Balancing a checkbook can be challenging for some; meal planning, taxes or punctuality may be a growth area for others. When you find a weak area, don’t be afraid to learn and grow. If it’s something you need help with, ask your spouse or a friend to assist you.

Community schools or a local church may offer classes, and learning along with others may work well for you. You can also find excellent resources online or in your local library.

Many young couples have found encouragement in getting together with an older couple they respect. You may find they have faced struggles similar to those you are now faced with, and have learned lessons that they’re willing to share.

“Learning to know your differences can be a challenge, and a blessing.”

Do you struggle with mistakes you’ve made in the past and things you regret doing? God wants to help you. Acknowledge those areas, confess these things to God (and perhaps to your spouse or others), and ask Him to give you the strength to change. Consider asking a trusted friend

to pray with and for you. If there is an area of difficulty in your life, consider asking a trustworthy friend, pastor or study coach for insight and accountability.

In facing your own warts, it’s vital to remember the truth expressed in the song many of us have known since childhood: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” He loves you as you are, and sees you as who you could become, dear one. No matter what you have or haven’t done, His love for you runs deep and strong.

May you find that within your marriage you have a safe place to learn and grow!

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How well are you doing at accepting and valuing yourself? If 1 is wishing you'd never met you, and 10 is fully accepting yourself (even with imperfections), where are you on the scale?

2. God loves you deeply. He knows everything about you, and has chosen to lavish His love on you. Choose one of the following verses or passages in the Bible, and try responding to its message to you personally: Psalm 139, Zephaniah 3:17, Jeremiah 31:3, 1 John 3:1. *You may wish to journal, write a letter to God, or spend some time in prayer, sharing your thoughts and feelings as you read of His love for you. Another option would be to commit one of these verses to memory.*

3. We all have strengths. We all have weaknesses. Maybe it's finances, cleaning, menu planning or some other area. Can you identify a growth area? What step(s) could you take this week to learn more about that area?

Beauty the Bride

BY DONNA MARIA

One of the joys of womanhood is taking the time to pamper ourselves so we can face each new day looking and feeling our best. Of course, the desire to look and feel our most beautiful, inside and out, is at its peak on our wedding day.

A few months ago, I had the pleasure of preparing a Bridal Facial Party for a bride-to-be and her wedding party. There were five women in all, and rather than spend the money at a salon, the bride asked me to prepare aromatherapy beauty products so she and her bridesmaids could treat themselves to an afternoon of pampering. Using fresh, natural ingredients I prepared several treatments, similar to those listed here.

Overview of Skin & Function

Our skin is our largest organ, performing several functions, including protecting us from invasion by foreign substances and serving as the transfer point for the release of toxins from our bodies. Our skin is also porous, which means it absorbs many of the substances with which it comes into contact. It is thus especially important to use only natural, gentle ingredients on our skin whenever possible.

The skin provides an honest mirror of our inner health and well being. Consider that when we eat a great deal of fatty foods or foods we are allergic to, our skin is often the first indicator that we have mistreated ourselves. On the other hand, when we have been eating healthily and enjoying plenty of fresh water and exercise, our skin exhibits a healthy glow that is indicative of the attention

we are paying to ourselves.

Application to the skin of fresh, natural products such as essential oils, plant waters (also called “hydrosols”), and cold pressed unscented oils helps maintain a youthful, glowing complexion. Essential oils and hydrosols are the fragrant liquids that are distilled from different plant parts, such as flower petals, herb leaves and tree barks, and are fundamental components of any solid, natural skin care regime. Cold pressed unscented oils are extracted from various fruits, nuts and seeds, and include olive oil, sweet almond oil, avocado oil and jojoba oil. Used in tandem, essential oils, hydrosols and cold pressed unscented oils work together to soothe and nourish the skin, encouraging a healthful, radiant complexion.

Skin Types

There are five basic skin types, and you will want to consider yours when making your own aromatherapy beauty products.

1. Oily Skin

Oily skin is caused by over-active glands, which produce a substance called sebum, a naturally healthy skin lubricant. When the skin produces too much sebum, it becomes thick and heavy in texture. Oily skin is characterized by shininess, pimples and blemishes. Frequent steam cleaning and exfoliation can help reduce these symptoms.

2. Dry Skin

Dry skin usually results when skin fails to produce enough sebum to maintain a naturally lubricated surface. This lack of oil in the skin



is often hereditary, but can also be caused by over-exposure to the sun and other environmental elements. As we age, our skin becomes more dry as decreased metabolism reduces the rapidity with which dead skin cells are replaced. Dry skin often appears coarse, tight, dull and flaky, with visible lines and wrinkles. A massage with essential and cold pressed oils can stimulate metabolism and alleviate dry skin conditions.

3. Normal Skin

Normal skin produces a healthy amount of sebum, and tends to be neither dry nor oily in feel.

4. Sensitive Skin

Sensitive skin reacts unfavorably to a variety of chemicals and environmental factors. Having had ample opportunity to compare brand new baby skin with skin that is just a few years old, it seems to me that all skin is delicate and sensitive when it is new. Increased exposure to

nature's elements such as the sun, wind and cold, as well as to harsh cosmetic ingredients, tends to toughen skin over time.

5. Combination Skin

Many people have different skin types on different parts of the face. For example, it is not uncommon for a person to have oily skin around the nose, forehead and chin, while the rest of the face is more on the dry side. If you have more than one skin type on your face, it is wise to use products containing different ingredients to treat the areas differently.

Your Step By Step At-Home Facial

A basic facial must include at least 3 elements: (1) cleansing; (2) toning; and (3) moisturizing. Additional steps might include steaming, exfoliating and masking. Each of these steps is outlined below, along with suggested recipes for you to try.

Step 1. Before cleansing your skin with a gentle cleanser, it is wise to give yourself a light steam treatment to open your pores and prepare your face for cleaning. To do this, simply soak a soft towel in a bowl of comfortably warm herbal tea (chamomile is one of my favorites). Wring out the towel and place it over your face and neck area and relax until it cools slightly. You may repeat this process, as it is quite soothing.

Step 2. Cleanse your face with a gentle handmade cleanser such as Rose Cream Cleanser. Use upward, circular movements of the fingertips to gently stimulate the skin and help lift surface debris and excess oil. Rinse with warm water and gently pat excess moisture from your face with a soft towel. If you wear heavy make-up, you might wish to repeat the cleansing process.

Step 3. After cleansing, it is important to tone the skin using ingredients that help balance the pH of the skin, which is typically disturbed during the cleansing process. The recipe for Tone Up Tea is excellent for most skin types, and contains aloe to soothe and green tea as an effective anti-oxidant. Apply the toner with a soft cotton pad, but do not rub the skin. Rather, saturate the pad and pat the toner over the face and neck area. Do not pat skin dry. If you sense the aroma of the cider vinegar, don't worry. It disappears quickly. Apple cider vinegar is the best natural ingredient to ensure optimal pH balance for the skin. Avoid the eye area when using this toner. Your skin is now ready for moisturizing.

Step 4. Moisturize your skin using Aromatic Facial Oil, which contains a host of soothing ingredients to add moisture and nutrients to your skin. To seal in the moisture, be sure to

apply the oil while your skin is damp from applying the toner. Gently apply the oil to your face and neck using patting motions. For oily areas of skin, one application of oil should suffice. Apply twice to dry areas of skin, waiting about 2-3 minutes between applications, and being sure to moisten the skin slightly with water or toner before the second application.

On occasion, you may wish to add a gentle exfoliation and mask to your treatment. You can try the recipes here, or make up your own using ingredients you have in your kitchen. Persons with oily skin may find exfoliation beneficial once or twice a week, while people with dry skin may wish to exfoliate only once a month.

Recipes

Essential oils can be obtained at most natural food/product stores. **Canada** (for mail order):

Osmosis (888) OSM-OSIS (676-6747)

The Aroma Shoppe (416) 698-5850

US (for mail order):

Creamy Facial Mask

- 2 tbsp. white clay (I recommend and use kaolin)
- 3 tbsp. whipping cream
- 1 tbsp. rose hydrosol

Combine all ingredients together in a bowl and stir until a paste-like consistency is achieved. If mixture is too runny, add a bit more clay and stir. If mixture is not smooth enough, add a bit more hydrosol. Spread over clean face as the step immediately preceding application of facial toner, avoiding eye area and lips. Rest for 10-15 minutes. Rinse with warm water and pat excess water from face.

Tone Up Tea

- 1 cup distilled water
- 1 heaping tbsp. dried green tea leaves
- 1 heaping tbsp. dried chamomile flowers
- 1 tbsp. rose hydrosol
- 1 tbsp. aloe vera gel
- 3 tsp. apple cider vinegar
- 3 tsp. lemon juice (for oily skin)

Heat distilled water until boiling. Remove from heat and add green tea and chamomile. Steep for 15 minutes and strain out plant material. Add rose hydrosol, aloe vera and vinegar (and lemon juice, if using) and stir well. Pour into a clean bottle and label. Shake well to ensure the mix. Store in a refrigerator for best results and use within 3 weeks.

Aromatic Facial Oil

- 3 tbsp. jojoba oil
- 3 tbsp. rose hips seed oil (or 3 tbsp. hazelnut oil for oily skin)
- 2 drops rose essential oil
- 3 drops lavender essential oil
- 2 drops geranium essential oil
- 2 drops palmarosa essential oil

In a glass bowl or dish, combine oils with essential oils. Stir with a clean popsicle stick or plastic utensil to combine. Pour into a clean bottle, preferably one with a medicine dropper so you can apply the oil using the dropper. After cleansing and toning, and while your skin remains a bit damp, apply a bit of the moisturizer using gentle patting motions. Do not rub the oil into the skin. Rather, just gently pat it onto the skin and it will absorb readily within a few minutes.

Oats & Aloe Exfoliant

- 1 tbsp. finely ground oats
- 1 tbsp. finely ground almonds
- 1 tsp. honey
- 1 tbsp. aloe vera gel

Combine ingredients in a bowl and stir until well mixed. Apply to face and neck skin after cleansing and before toner is applied, using gentle circular motions. Rinse well with warm water and gently pat excess moisture from face. Follow with facial mask.

Rose Cream Cleanser

- 1 tbsp. sour cream
- 1 tsp. rose hydrosol
- 2 tsp. extra virgin olive oil

Combine all ingredients in the order shown, stirring well after each one. Apply cleanser to face and neck, using gentle, upward sweeping motions. Rinse well. This recipe should be used within 2 days and makes enough for two cleanings.

Caution: As with anything that touches the skin, be careful when using any skin care products, as you could have an allergic reaction to even the natural ingredients they contain. Note the ingredients listed above, and if you are allergic to any of them, it would be wise to avoid the products containing them. If you notice any uncomfortable tingling or redness on your skin, you may be having an allergic reaction. If this occurs, rinse your skin thoroughly with warm water and avoid that product in the future; you may be allergic to something in it. Use common sense when using any skin care products, and remember that less is always more when it comes to essential oils.

Donna Maria, an attorney, aromatherapist, author and motivational speaker, is the founder and president of The Handmade Toiletries Network, a trade organization representing over 170 manufacturers of handmade toiletries products, including soaps, cosmetics and fragrances. July 2000 marked the publication of Donna Maria's fourth book, Making Aromatherapy Creams & Lotions (Storey Books). Visit her website at www.DonnaMaria.com.

CHAPTER 5

Handle With Love

Remember those “warts”? Guess what? You will find you both have them! You have found some of your own, and one day you will see some of his. What you may have thought was a cute little quirk can eventually become an irritant. Consider well your response to the imperfections of your man — may it be solidly grounded in love.

If the “wart” is just some difference in personality between you, celebrate it. As you respond to other imperfections or irritants, consider your options. You may choose to cover it with love, simply forgiving it and letting it go. Forgiving can sometimes seem impossible. It may well be impossible without God’s help; remember, though, that God offers forgiveness for every mistake in the past. Once forgiven, let it go. Don’t keep the offense in the kitchen drawer, ready to pull out and use against him time and again.

“Blessed is the couple who can create an environment of mutual love.”

Yet another valid and caring response is to confront in love. In the Bible, Paul challenged the early believers to “speak the truth in love.”

Perhaps that wart you see is a blind spot for your husband. A word at the right time, with a loving attitude, and help from God, can make a huge difference.



If you cannot come to some resolution in a timely manner, dear one, may I encourage you to consider your response well? In any case, bad-mouthing your spouse is not wise; involving those who don’t know you or don’t care is usually foolish. Yet there is certainly a time, if the two of you have been unable to communicate well, to discreetly ask a trusted advisor for perspective and help on a specific issue. A third party can pave the way for better understanding, if you are both willing.

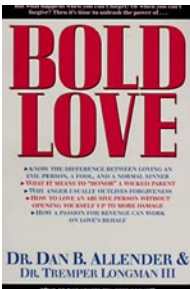
Many times a spouse will try to fix or change their partner. But as has been stated so wisely, “There is a God, and I’m not Him.”

Blessed is the couple who can share with one another openly, speak honestly and together create an environment of mutual acceptance, love and growth.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name three characteristics that drew you to your husband/boyfriend? What do you like about him? What makes him more special than any other guy in the crowd? Perhaps you could share that with him today.
2. How are differences between you a challenge in the relationship? How does it enrich your life? *Many weaknesses are simply strengths pushed too far to the extreme. If there's a weakness, look farther; is there an underlying strength? How does he help to balance you?*
3. Do you think it can ever be a loving thing to confront someone? Why or why not? You might try reading the Bible about this issue. See Luke 17:3-4, Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1.

SUGGESTED RESOURCE



Allender, Dan and Longman III, Tremper. (1993). *Bold Love*. NavPress Publishing Group.

Be Good to your Marriage

by David & Claudia Arp



Do you want to be good to your marriage? Now, not later when the kids grow up, is the best time to be good to your marriage. Your marriage can actually influence your children in a very positive way — especially when you're good to it!

Children who grow up in happy, intact, functional families with parents who love each other unconsciously learn the roles they will later need in marriage and parenthood. So as you build your marriage, you're mentoring your own children.

10 ways to be good to your marriage

1 Call your spouse just to say “I love you!”

2 Scratch your partner’s back.

3 Get up with the baby, and let your spouse sleep.

4 Let voice mail collect your calls or turn the phone ringer off so you can concentrate on each other.

5 Light a scented candle.

6 Eat a bowl of ice cream together after the kids are in bed.

7 Turn off the TV.

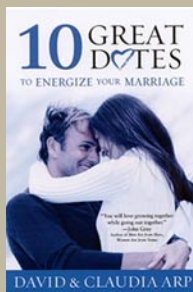
8 Put on your mate’s favourite music.

9 Write a letter and tell your mate why you’d marry him or her all over again!

10 Get out your wedding pictures, look at them together, and rejoice that you married each other!

10 great dates: energize your marriage

SUGGESTED RESOURCE



Arp, David and Claudia. (1997). *10 Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage*. Zondervan.

David and Claudia Arp, MSW, founders of Marriage Alive Seminars, are marriage educators, columnists and authors of numerous books and small group video curriculum including *The Second Half of Marriage* and *10 Great Dates* (Zondervan). Website: www.marriagealive.com

CHAPTER 6

Gifts to One Another

As you start out on this journey called marriage, have you considered the idea of gifts? Oh, there are shower gifts and wedding gifts, I suspect. I wasn't thinking of those. I'm talking about something more personal. As God has drawn the two of you together, and as you enter into covenant with one another as husband and wife, there is a real sense in which God is giving this man to you, and giving you to this man.

Have you received him as a gift? God knows so well what you need, what you enjoy, and the ways He wants to work in and through your life. This man will have a huge impact on you in the years ahead. There may be days when you wonder if he's the enemy. Keep in mind, dear one, that there is an enemy, but this man is not the enemy. He's a gift to you.

Sometimes the harder part is to realize, deep down, that God has chosen you as a gift to this man. He didn't create you as a mirror

image of the man you love; you bring a different personality, different talents, different dreams. So bring all of yourself to this marriage! When God created Eve and brought her to Adam,

the Bible says she was a helper "fit" or "meet" for him. She was designed for this man, and together they would be far more than either would be alone. You are the one that God created, prepared and now wants to give to this man. Don't try to be someone else, because if you're successful in wearing someone else's shoes, you've not brought the most precious gift—yourself.

Oh, dear one, you are being given to one another, but ultimately you have been created for God.

If you've placed your faith in Him, you belong, first and foremost, to your Savior. You've been bought with a price. Rejoice over the truth that you have been created by and for God, and receive with gratitude the gift God has given to you.



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you considered the different ways you have been created from the man you love? In what ways is he a gift to you?
2. How are you a gift for your man? Are you willing and able to bring “all of you” to the marriage? *Many women find some area(s) that they have difficulty bringing into the marriage. Maybe it’s something you don’t like about yourself, or something that has happened to you. If this is the case, you may wish to find a wise woman you trust who can help you deal with that.*
3. How do you respond to the truth that you have been created by and for God? Does this truth challenge you? Is it a comfort? Is it a new thought for you?
4. Is there a practical way that you can celebrate your differences this week? Is there some word of affirmation you can share with this man? *Your words can be a huge encouragement or a major discouragement to those you love. If you feel awkward speaking words of affirmation, take time to write a note, sharing two or three things you appreciate about him.*

Wedding Gift-Giving Guidelines

by Susan Clot de Broissia

Whether you're planning a wedding, or attending one, gift-giving plays an important role in the "big day." Here are a few guidelines to help answer some of the questions about this part of the wedding process.

For the wedding guest

So you've been invited to a wedding. Are you wondering what to do about the somewhat obligatory gift? Most brides and grooms have registered their gift wish list with a local department or specialty store. Does this mean you must select from this list? Not necessarily. While it is nice to help the couple complete their flatware selection or informal place settings, remember that a unique gift can be just as welcomed. With the convenience of shopping online, you can now purchase, gift wrap, enclose a personalized gift card and ship a gift to the couple without leaving your home or office.

Some things to keep in mind: Do not take a gift to the reception. You cannot be guaranteed that the bride and groom will ever see the gift, as there is generally no security at the reception (with the possible exception being if the reception is at the home of the couple or a family member). Gifts can easily be damaged or misplaced. Remember, the last thing on the couple's mind that night will be gathering up gifts. It could easily be left behind. Send the gift to the address on the registry or the RSVP address on the wedding invitation. Etiquette says that it is a nice gesture to send a gift whether or not you plan on attending.

For the couple

Planning a wedding can be a very time-consuming process. If you're like most couples today, you both work full-time, leaving little time during the week to complete the many details. Fortunately, with the explosion of the Web, many excellent resources are now available online to help you to plan your big day. You can gather ideas for your ceremony and reception, locate local vendors, read tips from those who have been there, register your gift wish list, and purchase gifts for your wedding party.

Giving a token of appreciation to bridesmaids, ushers, groomsmen, and others who have taken a role in the wedding planning process has long been a custom. After all, these individuals are generally close friends or family members who have given of their time to help make your day special. And taking part in a wedding generally comes with financial responsibilities with the purchase or rental of wedding attire, throwing bridal showers and bachelor/bachelorette parties, and travel expenses. Giving gifts to members of the wedding party is left to the discretion of each couple. There are no set standards on the cost of the gift, nor do all gifts have to be the same. Below are some guidelines to help you decide what is most appropriate for your situation.

Who should receive a gift?

■ **The Bride and Groom** – One of the oldest wedding-gift traditions is the exchange of gifts between the bride and the groom. While this custom is followed by many couples, it is not mandatory. But why not give each other some-



thing that reflects your commitment? It's best to find something that is lasting, and if appropriate, engrave it with each of your initials and your wedding date. **Ideas:** A picture frame, a poem, an elegant desk clock, a collectible, jewelry.

- **Parents** – One of the more recent customs is to give a gift to your parents as a token of appreciation for all they have done in raising you—and to symbolize your continued ties even though you are now starting your own family. **Ideas:** A nicely framed photo from the wedding, a letter expressing your gratitude, an engravable bowl.

- **Maid of Honor / Bridesmaids** – These are

the women who will be helping you with the wedding planning and the actual day. They'll throw showers/parties for you, take you out for lunch to relax, pick up your dress from the seamstress, etc. They'll also most likely be the ones to buy those dresses and dyed shoes that they'll wear only once. So it is nice to thank them with a small memento. The Maid of Honor generally receives a gift of greater value, but this is not mandatory. **Ideas:** Bud vases, photo frames or albums, bath oils, crystal bowls, gift baskets, Limoges boxes or other collectibles, key chains, clocks, some part of their wedding attire (hair clips, jewelry).

- **Best Man / Groomsmen / Ushers** – These are the guys who will throw the bachelor party,

help you with your tuxedo, help with honeymoon arrangements, walk family and friends to their seats during the ceremony, etc. They may travel a long distance to make the wedding, and will most likely rent their tuxedo to match the rest of the wedding party. It is therefore a nice gesture to thank them with a small gift. The Best Man generally receives a gift of greater value, but this is not mandatory.

Ideas: Desk clocks, business card holders, photo frames, key chains, pocket watches, Swiss Army products, high quality pens/pen sets.

■ **Flower girl(s) / Ring Bearer(s)** – These children add a sweet touch to your wedding ceremony and they are thrilled to be a part of such a grand event. While they generally do not play a large part in the planning aspects of the wedding, they do often spend a lot of time practicing for their “big and important role” in your wedding. It is customary to give them a small token of appreciation to commemorate their role in your wedding day. **Ideas:** A framed photo of him/her with you on your wedding day, a small collectible (figurine, box, bowl, etc.), a small item of jewelry, a stuffed animal, a hair clip.

■ **Anyone who plays a special part in your wedding** – Do you have a special uncle who walked you down the aisle, or a friend who sang a solo during your ceremony? Anyone who does something that you find especially touching should receive a token of appreciation. **Ideas:** A note expressing your appreciation or a framed photo from the wedding.

Size of the wedding party

If you will be having a large wedding party, it is oftentimes a better idea to choose two gifts—one for the males and one for the females—and

buy them in bulk. This helps keep costs down (large weddings can be expensive!) and helps save time. Clocks, pens, key rings and photo frames all make elegant statements and can be easily personalized with engraving.

For smaller wedding parties, you may opt to select more personalized gifts for each member of the wedding. Tickets to a local sporting event are great for the sports fan, while a bottle of a good vintage wine would be more appropriate for the wine connoisseur. Generally these people will have played very active roles in your wedding planning, since they number fewer than in a larger wedding party. Why not recognize their roles with individualized gifts?

Cost of gifts

Couples on a budget need not worry about breaking the bank when purchasing gifts for their wedding party. The cost of the gifts is dictated by what the couple can afford. The adage “It’s the thought that counts” holds true here. A little creativity and thoughtfulness can go a long way. Write a poem that expresses how you feel about the individual. Do they like outdoor events? Offer to take them camping; drive and bring the food. Other ideas include creative gift baskets, small vases, clocks, and spa items (bath oils, soaps, etc.) Whatever you choose to do, all gifts for bridesmaids should be of equal value, all gifts for groomsmen should be of equal value, etc., whenever possible.

Presentation of the gifts

Presentation of a gift is almost as important as the gift itself. First, be sure to enclose a short, personalized note thanking the individual for the important role he or she played in your wedding and mention any details that you especially appreciated. Second, be sure



to elegantly wrap the gift. Nice paper, bows, and tissue paper help to make a nice gift even more charming. Some couples opt to incorporate the wedding colors into the gift wrap, tissues and bows.

When should you give your wedding party their gifts? Generally, couples prefer to present the gifts at the rehearsal dinner because of the intimate setting with family and closest friends. Other appropriate times include a small gathering or party for your wedding party

the week before the wedding, or in a private setting where you can express your gratitude to each participant individually.

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Susan Clot de Broissia works for Netique Gift Boutique, a one-stop Internet source for rare, unique and elegant gifts, including a nice selection of gifts for the bride and groom and the wedding party. Visit Netique at www.netique.com or call toll-free at 1-888-WEB-GIFT.

CHAPTER 7

Learning to Live With One Another Without Losing Myself

Let us take a few moments to set aside the wedding details, and briefly consider an area that challenges many women. How can you learn to live with the man you love without losing yourself? There are two sides to this.

Some women, especially those who are getting established on a career path or have waited a bit before marriage, know who they are as an individual. Their identity seems clear; they've had time to learn their own strengths, weaknesses and roles. Getting married, for these women, may be just a part of life, and they may even think that marriage and family will have to just fit in with the way they have planned their life already. Learning to live together effectively may be a challenge for them. Love for a husband, however, will require them to learn, to grow and to adapt to the one they love.

For other women, the challenge is different, at least on the surface. To be a wife (and possibly a mother) fulfills a dream since early childhood. We've often been taught as women that our love should be sacrificial, that we should be willing to put others first.

The potential danger in this thinking is that a woman may give up who she is. She may find herself surrendering her own dreams, desires and calling, in an effort to best serve and please her husband. She loses a part of herself, and may find in future years that she lost something precious. Part of the tragedy is that she can no longer bring all of herself to the marriage, either.

How can a woman avoid these two pitfalls? A major key, is in accepting who God says we are as women, according to the Bible. Have you investigated what the Bible has to say about your identity? Your core identity cannot be in your career or in your marriage—both of those are external, and both may change. People change jobs every day, and even the security of a marriage can be shattered by death, illness or other tragedy. If you are to avoid the trap of simply remaining two separate individuals under a single roof (living in physical proximity without truly sharing your lives), you will need an identity that goes beyond the external.

You are, at heart, a woman whom God dearly loves. He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, for you. He has a purpose for you, and a part of that purpose may well be found in the role of wife and mother; it may be as a nurse, teacher, executive, or other professional. It is a part though, not the whole of life. If you're not to lose yourself, you need to know who you are and to whom you belong. If you're to give freely and love well, you need to know how very secure you are in Him.

Read the Bible, God's love letter to you (see Psalm 139), and ask Him to show you how much He loves you. Ask God how He sees you and how to best bring that to your marriage. He can help you as you seek to blend your needs, desires and dreams with those of your husband. He wants the best for both of you!

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. To have a good relationship with anyone, there will be times when you have to set aside your own agenda or desires to meet the needs of the other person. How do you see this happening in your marriage? Is it something that you are able to do well, or is it a struggle?
2. For some people, reaching out to meet the needs of others comes easily. A far greater challenge can be to recognize and communicate their own needs. On a scale of 1-10, how effective are you at communicating to your boyfriend/husband what you need? How well can he hear it? Is there something you can do together to move one step closer to a 10 in this area?
3. Respond to the following statement: "If two people always agree, one of you is unnecessary." Do you agree or disagree, and why? *God has created each person as an individual. As we grow, we often become more like those we love or admire, while retaining our own individuality. To become merely a shadow of the other with no thoughts, opinions, desires or struggles of one's own would seem a tragic loss.*

CHAPTER 8

Filling Our Home With the Good Stuff

Beginning your home together is exciting! Maybe you will both be moving to a new place, or one of you has lived there and now the other is preparing to move in. You've probably already either received some shower or wedding gifts to help with furnishing that first home together, or you've shared some preferences with family and friends about what you'd like it to look like. Is it an apartment? A house? Something a bit more untraditional like a motor home or a barn?

No matter where that first home is, it will provide memories. It may even be a place that you'll eventually want to take children back to see. "Your father and I, when we were first married, lived in that little apartment over there! I remember our first Christmas. Oh, remember when I told you about...?"

Are you dreaming of how you'll decorate the living room, the bathroom, the bedroom? You may have chosen some favorite colors, or be working within the limitations of that first apartment. I remember an apartment hallway with bits of three or four different wallpapers peeking out. What a challenge that was! Maybe you can already picture yourself standing in your own kitchen, putting the last touches on a special meal for just the two of you.

May I ask you to dream for a bit longer with me? What else do you want to use to fill your home? I'm not talking about the things you can see and touch this time, though they can contribute in some way. Rather, consider the types of interaction you'd love to see, the

emotional climate that someone would sense when walking into your home. What kind of atmosphere do you want to create? It could be a place of quiet togetherness that your heart yearns for after a busy day apart from the man you love. Maybe it is a place for you both to be creative, or to fill with the laughter of friends and family.

I remember a comment a college friend made after we spent an afternoon with my parents and siblings. "There's so much love there, you can almost reach out and grab a handful!" Do you have enough love to share with those who come to your home?

A lady I knew several years ago once said, "My husband and I decided, life's too short to spend it angry with one another. We want to choose an attitude of joy each day." In visiting that home, I had to agree, they'd created an uplifting atmosphere of joy. I'm sure they had their heartaches through the years, but somehow they'd learned to find joy in each other's company, and for believers, in their relationship with God. Friends felt welcome there.

What about peace? Will your home be filled with a peace that transcends understanding, even when hard days come? There may be lots of activity, it may even be downright noisy, but will it be peaceful? Another characteristic that may appear on your list is faithfulness. Can you depend on one another to be faithful, to be true to the promises you make? Will the responses there be filled with kindness and gentleness?

As you begin your home together, my prayer is that it be filled to overflowing with love, joy, peace, gentleness, kindness and faithfulness. May God help you to develop these characteristics in increasing measure in your own life and in your home.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Name the top two or three qualities that you'd like to characterize your own home.
2. Let's look at a few qualities that many women would want in their home. First, consider love. Describe what love would look like in a home or family. How does it respond to others? Try reading 1 Corinthians 13 in the Bible for the classic description of love.
3. Do you want your home to be characterized by peace? If one's own heart is not at peace, how does that affect a home? *How can you cooperate with God in developing a heart at peace with Him and with those around you? (See Philippians. 4:6-7, Galatians 5:22 and Isaiah 26:3.)*
4. What characteristics would you like to see in the communication in your home? If possible, name one area where you do well, and one area in which you'd like to grow. *If you'd like help, James 3:3-12, James 4 and the book of Proverbs has much to say about our communication.*

by Gary Foreman

For Richer, For Poorer

You've fallen in love. And now you're planning on spending the rest of your life with that special someone. As you hold each other's hands you'll discuss how many children to have, what you'll do with your careers and even what your perfect house looks like. While it's important to share those thoughts, you don't want to forget the subject that is a major cause of failed marriages.

An important element of any successful marriage is the ability to handle money together. And that can be a challenge. Think about it for a moment. If you put any two people together you can almost bet that their views on money will differ. One may look at money as a way to buy things. To another money equals status. Still others seem to go through life without any real regard for money. And that's not surprising. We relate to money uniquely due to a number of different influences in our lives. Everything from our childhood experiences to our philosophy on life will impact the way we use and view money. Each of us will make financial decisions based on a framework that seems logical to us.

Why is that important for engaged couples? Because during the course of a marriage many choices that are made will be effected by each person's outlook on money. Many disagreements that seem to be about one issue will actually be about the way money is viewed. Unless the underlying problem is realized, it is difficult to resolve the argument.

Let's look at some practical steps that newlyweds can take to help put a firm financial foundation under the marriage to come.

1. Explore how each person feels about money. It doesn't need to be Harvard MBA type questions. Just ask your mate how money affected their childhood. Did they feel particularly rich or poor? Perhaps they felt that their parents were trying to buy affection. Just get an idea of what role money played in their families at that age.

2. Talk about your current ideas about money. Do you have a fear of having too little (or too much) money? Is money something that you'd rather not discuss? You might spend a lot of time thinking about money or perhaps never think of it at all. Share your feelings with each other.

3. Define what constitutes a major purchase. For some people and budget situations an unplanned \$10 expense is a big deal. Other people think nothing of putting a couple of hundred dollars on their charge card if the timing seems right. At what level is it appropriate to consult the other before making a purchase? All this information will be useful later in your marriage. When your partner comes home with an unexpected purchase or gets excited over a small increase in the phone bill, you'll have a better understanding of what the real issues are. It might not be that long distance call to your mother that's the problem. It could be a fear that you won't have enough money for the rent.

4. Discuss joint checking and savings accounts. Will you share one set of accounts

or try to keep your finances separate? This can be an emotional issue for many couples. For some, joint assets are a way of signaling their commitment to the marriage. For others, having a checkbook that they alone control is a sign of self-worth that they won't want to relinquish.

5. Consider how debt will affect your finances. One or both partners might bring debts, alimony or child support payments to the marriage. Decide how you'll handle those costs before the wedding bells ring. It might even be a good idea to have a lawyer review your plans to make sure that one partner is not assuming liabilities from the other needlessly.

6. Decide who will be responsible for paying the bills and balancing the checkbook. If possible, you might want to consider splitting those responsibilities. That way both partners will have a working knowledge of the family finances. It's also advisable for both husband and wife to sit down once a month and review financial affairs. In many cases you'll be able to solve problems before they become big blow-ups later on.

7. Consider whether you want to make any changes in your wills or IRA's. The inheritance plans that were in place as a single person are unlikely to work well after you're married. A new plan is required. This is especially true in the case of blended families. Decisions on inheritance and guardianship need to be considered carefully. If you die without a will the government will decide where your money and children go. There's a good chance that they'll make a different decision than you would. Not updating your will can be costly. A person who has been divorced and remarried faces a unique danger. A will made during the

earlier marriage could leave all your assets to your first spouse if you should die without creating a new will. Even if you ended the earlier marriage on friendly terms, that could prove to be quite a surprise to your current spouse.

The months preceding the wedding are a busy time for most couples. Even if you don't plan a big wedding, there are a lot of things that will demand your attention. And many will have urgent deadlines. Don't forget to spend a little time talking about the unromantic subject of money. After all, it's a key element to helping you keep that 'till death do us part' promise you'll be making soon.

Gary Foreman is a former Certified Financial Planner who currently edits The Dollar Stretcher at www.stretcher.com. There you'll find hundreds of free articles to save you time and money. Visit Today!



Filling Our Garden: Annuals or Perennials?

I love spring! The winter is great, and the first few snows are absolutely wonderful. After a few months of it though, I am so anxious to see green grass and flowers! Rarely does a year go by when I don't fall in love once again with nearly anything that is in bloom, and buy too much for me to deal with that day. On a number of occasions I've even been known to buy enough for the flower beds, and then decide to either plant additional patio pots or dig up a new area to hold "the leftovers" from my spring fling at the garden center. (We can't let them go to waste, can we?) Whether it is the bright red tones of salvia, or a brilliant sunshine yellow of a group of Inca marigolds, the vibrant colors catch my eyes and make me smile.

When we bought our first home, suddenly the possibilities multiplied at the garden center. Not only would I wander the aisles looking at the annuals, I began to venture into the areas filled with perennials. These plants would not just bloom for a season and die; they would come back each year. Even if they looked like they'd died in the fall, the next spring I would see signs of new life coming out of the ground.

I wonder, dear one, if you were to look at the garden of your heart, would the love found there for this man be more like annual flowers or perennials? Some people have a love that is based on something temporary, and when the

season passes, they find that love in short supply. Others have found that there is a strong, lasting love that characterizes the relationship. It sees beyond the surface. Somehow even when the winter winds blow and the surface feelings die, there are strong roots. Those roots, in time, shoot up fresh, vibrant blooms once again.

Your marriage will have seasons. Life's events and external pressures will challenge you, and there may even be "snow" dumped on you. You'll need to clear the walk, and it will take effort. Be encouraged, friend. Spring will come, and a deep love will bloom once again, if you both allow it. There may be a lot of teamwork needed. You may even need to call in help from outside. That's okay. Don't pull up the roots and cast it off as if it were last year's annuals. Clear out the weeds, do the hard work (often involving communication and forgiveness), and look forward to the vibrant colors of summer once again.

"If you were to look at the garden of your heart, would the love found there be like annual flowers or perennials?"

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. If you were to compare the love you share with your boyfriend or husband to some type of flower, would you compare it to an annual or a perennial?
2. In Song of Solomon 2:15 in the Bible, the author mentions “the little foxes that ruin the vineyards.” What are some of the “little foxes” that can damage or destroy the love you share? *There are many actions, thoughts, attitudes and habits that can undermine the success of a marriage. What have you seen harm other marriages? Have you identified, as a couple, any challenges that may weaken your own?*
3. How does forgiveness allow love to bloom once again? If one person refuses to forgive, what impact will that have on the relationship’s ability to endure?
4. What steps can you take this week to tend the garden of your marriage, your love?

CHAPTER 10

Living, Loving and Laughing

Planning a wedding is exciting, tiring, joyous and challenging—sometimes all at once. After the wedding, though, there's a marriage to be worked out together.

Like the preparation for a wedding, your marriage will have times of excitement, exhaustion, enthusiasm and effort. You've seen enough of life to know that sometimes it takes all you have, and just a bit more.

What then? How do you make an effective transition from an event to settling in for the long haul? Let me share a few observations with you.

Remember it is for the long haul. I've never yet been to a wedding where the bride and groom exchanged vows, "Till we get tired of it all."

Yet, the statistics tell us that a huge number of marriages do fail; many factors play into the pressures a young couple face. It takes two people deeply committed to one another to have a beautiful, lasting marriage. Neither of you can make it work on your own. Determine to do your part. The pressures you face on Friday may be gone by Sunday. The challenges of this season will melt as you work through them together.

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "When

all else fails, read the instructions." The Bible, God's Word to mankind, gives us many insights in how to best live and relate to one another. Marriage is, after all, God's idea. It seems the

Designer may have some great insights in how to make yours the best it could be. Read the Bible, take it to heart, and apply it on a daily basis.

You cannot build a marriage alone. The two of you working together will be far stronger. Invite God into your relationship. Consider Ecclesiastes 4:12b: "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Psalm 127:1a makes a bold statement: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain." Invite Him to build your home. Welcome Him into every

nook and cranny of your marriage.

If you've not already done so, learn to laugh together. "A joyful heart is good medicine" (Proverbs 17:22a).

Loving one another deeply is a precious gift from God's hand. Treasure it. Guard your heart, and let nothing steal that love. After the wedding, I pray you have many days, months and years of living, laughing together, and loving one another well. May God bless your new home!



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In preparing for the wedding, what have you found most exciting? Most exhausting? Most surprising?
2. If you are already married, how do you find “making a marriage” similar to planning the wedding? How is it different? If you are not yet married, but are nearing your own wedding, how do you expect the marriage to be similar or different from the work of wedding preparation?
3. Marriage is intended to be for the long haul, for life. What pressures do couples face in our world today that can draw them away from the commitment of marriage?
4. “Neither of you can make it work on your own. Determine to do your part.” Do you agree or disagree? Why? *Another way of asking this is, if only one of you is committed, how might that impact your marriage? Can you do it all alone? Do you expect your husband to do it on his own?*



1. God LOVES you and offers a wonderful PLAN for your life.

God's Love

"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God's Plan

Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" [that it might be full and meaningful] (John 10:10).

Why is it that most people are not experiencing the abundant life? Because...

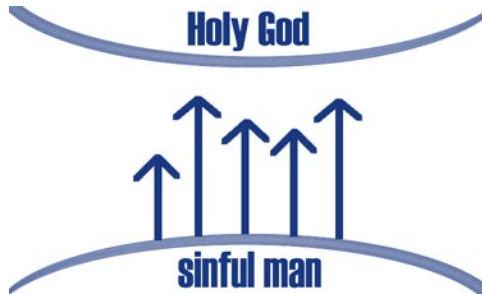
2. Man is SINFUL and SEPARATED from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.

Man Is Sinful

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Man was created to have fellowship with God; but, because of his stubborn self-will, he chose to go his own independent way, and fellowship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

Man Is Separated

“The wages of sin is death” [spiritual separation from God] (Romans 6:23).



This diagram illustrates that God is holy and man is sinful. A great gulf separates the two. The arrows illustrate that man is continually trying to reach God and the abundant life through his own efforts, such as a good life, philosophy, or religion - but he inevitably fails.

The third law explains the only way to bridge this gulf...

3. Jesus Christ is God's ONLY provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.

He Died in Our Place

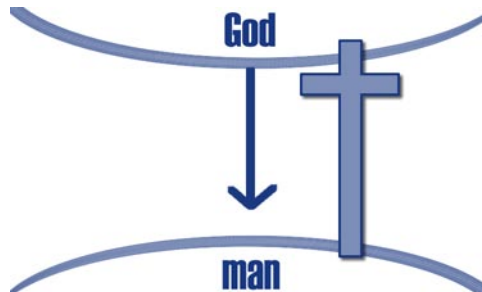
“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

He Rose From the Dead

“Christ died for our sins...He was buried...He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

He Is the Only Way to God

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’” (John 14:6).



This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf which separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.

It is not enough just to know these three laws...

4. We must individually RECEIVE Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

We Must Receive Christ

"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12)

We Receive Christ Through Faith

"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

When We Receive Christ, We Experience a New Birth

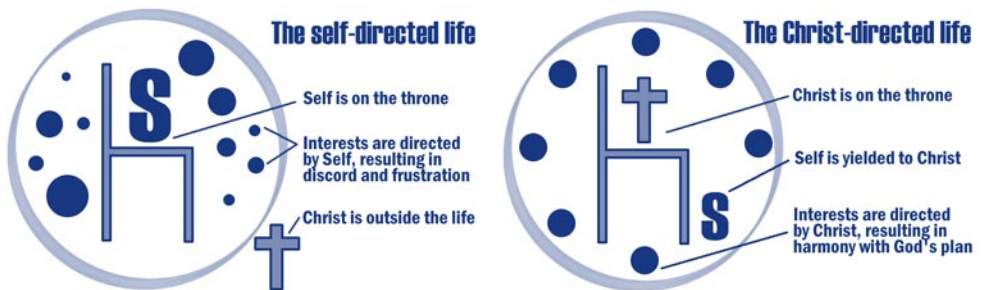
(Read John 3:1-8).

We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation

[Christ speaking] "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Revelation 3:20).

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of the will.

These two circles represent two kinds of lives:



Which circle best describes your life?

Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

The following explains how you can receive Christ:

**You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer
(Prayer is talking to God)**

God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. Here's a suggested prayer you can pray right now, and Jesus Christ will come into your life, just as He promised:

Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.

If you invited Christ into your life, thank God often that He is in your life, that He will never leave you and that you have eternal life. As you learn more about your relationship with God, and how much He loves you, you'll experience life to the fullest.

We would love to hear from you! If you prayed this prayer, please let us know. We will e-mail you some helpful information and respond personally to your questions. Or select one of the following responses. We look forward to your comments.

- 1. I have a question I'd like answered first.**
- 2. I just asked Jesus into my life.**
- 3. I just re-dedicated my life to Christ.**

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start today