

PREPARE *for marriage.*

MENTOR GUIDE





THE STREET
• CHURCH •

Prepare for Marriage Mentor Guide

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Mentor Guide

Investing in a couple as they prepare for marriage is an exciting opportunity. It is a time full of learning and growth and helps set a firm foundation for them to navigate life together.

About the Course

The Prepare for Marriage course is designed to help engaged couples prepare for marriage with a Biblical framework.

There are five sections to the course:

- Your Relationship with God
- The Bible and Marriage
- Becoming One: Words
- Becoming One: You and Me
- Becoming One: Unity

For each section, the couple will watch a series of short video clips to unpack God's design for marriage and explore practical topics and tools. Each clip is paired with a number of questions and activities in their Workbook to encourage conversation which they complete in their own time prior to meeting with you.

At the end of each section the couple will meet with you, their mentor couple. Within this face to face session you will work through a series of suggested questions from this guide to dive a little deeper. You are encouraged to discuss any other ideas, thoughts or issues that have come to the surface for the couple in each section. The Mentor Sessions are a key component to the success of this course.

About this Guide

This guide is a companion document to the couples Workbook. It will support you, as a mentor couple, to expand on and explore each of the topics covered.

In this guide you will see sections of text from the couples Workbook displayed within grey boxes. This enables you to see what they have read and what questions they have answered together in their own time. The couples Workbook includes space for them to write down their answers.

Following each section you will find the Mentor Session Discussion. This includes questions for you to ask and suggested discussions to have when you are meeting together.

At the back there are written scripts for each video clip. Some couples may wish to have a copy of these to refer to in the future, or they may prefer to read them alongside watching the video clips. Feel free to make copies available to the engaged couple if requested.

The video content of this course does not take the place of your individual personality and experience. There is enormous value in sharing who you are as a couple and the learnings from your own marriage. You are encouraged to share your own stories and include information that will add value on top of the video content.

While these guidelines will ensure any critical areas are not missed, you are encouraged to be yourselves and be flexible within the structure as fits with your mentoring style and adapt the questions and discussions as needed.

Mentor Sessions

The couple will meet with you a total of five times. Ahead of each session the couple will be required to watch the video clips and complete that chapter of their Workbooks.

- It is important that the couple complete the sections in order and do not jump ahead.
- The duration of each Mentor Session will be around 2 hours. Note: the content for Session One is relatively short, but paired with time for the Introduction this should take around 2 hours. If you know the couple well already, Session One will likely take less time and could be combined with Session 2 if you wish..
- During each Mentor Session you will spend time in discussion based on the theme they have just completed. Work through the questions after each section. You can use all of the questions or pick those that stand out to you as being most valuable for this couple to discuss.
- Listen to them and allow time for conversations to develop around each question as necessary. Use natural follow up questions and dive deeper into areas where the couple have a lot to talk about or are finding it hard to understand each other or to come to a place of agreement.
- Where appropriate, share openly some experience and examples from your own marriage, and other married couples that you know too.

During this course, you will not address all the issues that will arise within marriage. Rather the course will help to lay a Biblical foundation for them to navigate the journey of marriage going forward and the issues that may arise over time.

Mentor Tips

BEFORE:

- **Contact** the couple to arrange a time and place to meet for your first session together. Let them know that this will include time for an introduction and overview as well as looking at the couples

Workbook for Session One. You might want to pre-schedule the dates and time for the remainder of the course with them at this point, or let them know you will talk that through when you first meet.

- **Equip** the couple ahead of the scheduled meeting with a physical or digital copy of the Workbook. They will need a copy each. Also equip them with access to the video clips. Instruct them to read through the Introduction and watch the corresponding clip “Course Overview” and then to work through Session One in their Workbook which includes watching the corresponding video clips (“You and God”, “You and the Word” and “You and Prayer”).
- **Pray** for the couple you are mentoring and in preparation for your sessions together. Ask the Holy Spirit to use the course and to work through your relationship for transformation and encouragement.
- **Familiarise** yourself with this guide. This will help you know where to go to find specific information and to give you time to think about what you might share and include as a mentor couple from your own experience.
- **Watch** the video clips for the entire course and look at the couples Workbook information so you are familiar with the questions and activities they have been working through. While the couple will complete this independently from you, knowing the content will ensure that you are on the same page when you meet together.

DURING:

- **Lean on God.** He will have a unique plan for each couple you meet with. Lean into your own weakness and into His strength and direction.
- **Encourage** the couple to use their Workbooks. Each person will have their own learning style and may use the book in various ways. Encourage the couple to spend time together completing the suggested activities/questions. The old saying “you get out what you put in” is true for this course.
- **Be transparent.** If you are vulnerable it will encourage them to be vulnerable as well. Share your own experience and stories as much as appropriate.
- **Organise** a simple snack and hot/cold drinks for when you meet for your Mentor Sessions. Hospitality helps people to feel relaxed, creates a sense of warmth and prepares space for open conversation. Check about any food allergies that you may need to cater for.

AFTER:

- **Touch base.** Follow the guidelines to facilitate a catch-up with the couple 3-6 months after their wedding date.

Introduction

Before beginning to look through Session One, begin with an introduction. This gives you a chance to get to know each other and to talk through the expectations and structure of the course.

If possible, arrange to share a meal together and work through the following information. If a meal is impractical, simply begin your discussion with the following questions before heading into the study questions for Session One.

The couple will have watched the “Course Overview” video before meeting with you. This prepares them with a big picture of the course ahead.

Getting to know each other

You may not know the couple you will meet with. To help you get to know each other, you could start with some of the broad topics as suggested below. Try to keep it informal. You can ask questions to show interest and obtain more information where you think it is important for your future discussion. Focus on getting to know the couple, not addressing issues — that will happen as the course unfolds.

- Ask each person (mentors and engaged couple) to briefly describe his or her upbringing, key life events and spiritual journey so far. It is suggested the mentor couple go first. This gives the engaged couple an idea of what is expected – including the combination of upbringing, family situation, spiritual journey, courtship.
It is good for you as the mentors to share some reasonably personal stories to encourage openness. This is the time when you should aim to clarify if the couple are both followers of Jesus or not.
- If they have not already, invite the couple to share how they met and how their relationship has developed, including their current living situation. This question should help you figure out if the couple are living together. If they are living together, this is covered in Session Five.
- In Session Five, there is a question: “Have you discussed a suitable form of contraception?” If the couple is getting married within the next 3 months, ask this question during your first meeting to make sure they have time to sort out a plan for this.
- Ask them to explain why they want to get married. This is a simple question but can elicit quite a range of responses.

Introducing the course

Briefly talk through the elements of the course as outlined on the Contents page. Cover the content as it flows naturally ensuring the couple understand what is expected and have an opportunity to ask questions that they have.

Mention the questions/activities in their Workbooks after each video clip. Some of the questions/activities are best to discuss verbally, and others require filling in individually and comparing with each other. Their Workbooks have clear instructions for what is required at each step.

Course Objectives

- Understand the importance of unity within marriage.
- Consider Biblical principles relevant to marriage and discuss how you can apply these in your marriage.
- Get to know how you communicate together and look at effective ways of healthy communication and tools to deal constructively with conflict situations.
- Help you understand each other, and your differences and expectations.
- Explore the practical aspects of marriage through a Biblical framework.

It's time now to move on to work through Session One. If you have had a meal together, this is a nice time to offer a hot drink or a little something sweet. If you have not had a meal together, consider a light supper or snack to enjoy together as you discuss.

Pray before you transition into looking at Session One.

1

Your relationship with God

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” – GALATIANS 2:20 (NIV)

This section covers:

- reflection on your relationship with God
- how to maintain your relationship with God as your primary relationship
- how to grow your faith together as a couple

Watch ► *You and God*

Your relationship with God is to be your number one priority. The growth and health of this relationship is your individual responsibility. In marriage there is an incredible opportunity to spur one another on and grow together in your faith. A marriage relationship can enhance your relationship with God. This works best if you are both heading in the same direction spiritually.

Discuss Together

- Describe to each other how faith was or wasn't modelled in the home you grew up in.
- If you grew up in a home with the influence of Christian adults, in what ways has their influence impacted your own faith journey?
- Share where your relationship with God is at on a scale with zero being non-existent and 10 being thriving. Describe what this looks like for you right now.
- Share with one another an example of a married couple you know or have known who are seeking God together. What is it that you notice about them? What is it that attracts you to them or that you admire about the way they follow Jesus?

Mentor Session Discussion

- Take some time (as the Mentor couple) sharing your own story of how you have grown together as followers of Jesus and what changed for you as you went from being single to a married couple.
- How was or wasn't faith modeled in the homes they grew up in?
- Did either of them have a particular influence from adults (parents or others) or peers who were followers of Jesus in their childhood or young adult years?
- What example of a married couple did they identify as people who are seeking God together? What is it that they noticed about them? What is it that they admire about the way they follow Jesus?

Watch ► You and the Word

The Bible is the living Word of God and has the power to absolutely transform our living, our doing, and our being. Having an active and vibrant relationship with the Word is essential for our individual spiritual growth but can also be one of the most precious parts of your married life together. How you adapt and change to incorporate your learning and make spiritual conversations a natural part of your marriage will be unique for you as a couple. While you are preparing for marriage, identify what your current relationship is with the Word, and what this could look like as you join your lives together.

Discuss Together

- Describe a time when you found your Bible study to be the most satisfying in your life.
- What is most challenging to you about spending time in the Word each day?
- Discuss how you read the Bible and your thoughts on how you could adapt to learn and grow in this discipline together.
- Have a think together about the tools or resources you already have access to, or what you might like to find out about. If you would like some help in this area you could speak with your pastor or a person in your life who you know has a solid habit of reading and studying the Word. Or check out what tools are available online or through Christian bookstores.

Mentor Session Discussion

- In what ways did they discover they were similar and where are the major differences for them as a couple in the spiritual discipline of reading the Bible?
- What are some tools or resources they have identified they already have access to that may help them in maintaining the spiritual disciplines of reading the Bible? Are there any they would like to find out more about?

Watch ▶ You and Prayer

Prayer is an amazing thing, enabling us to boldly enter into the presence of God and converse with Him. Having a vibrant and dedicated prayer life is a foundation stone of being a follower of Jesus as well as being important as you lay the foundation of your marriage. As you come together as a married couple you can bring your prayer lives together. You can share together and grow together in prayer over the years of your marriage in all seasons.

Discuss Together

- Was prayer part of the home you grew up in? If yes, describe your experience.
- Describe your current prayer life to each other.
- How important do you think prayer is within a marriage?
- What do you observe about a role model in your life who has/had a rich and deep prayer life?
- Over the next 7 days commit to individually praying for each other and for your marriage relationship.
- If you do not already have a habit of praying together, start now. Talk about some ways that you could bring prayer into your relationship on a regular basis. How do you think you could incorporate this into life once you are married?

Mentor Session Discussion

- In what ways did they discover they were similar and where are the major differences for them as a couple in the spiritual discipline of prayer?
- What tools or resources have they identified that may help them in maintaining the spiritual disciplines of prayer? Are there any they would like to find out more about?
- What do they think about developing a habit of praying together as a married couple, as well as individually praying for each other and their marriage.
- How natural are spiritual conversations in their relationship?
- Is there anything else that they would like to discuss?

Draw the session to a close. Remind them of the video clips for Session Two, which they will complete before meeting with you again. Confirm the date and time for when you will next meet.

Pray for the couple before they leave.

*Devote yourselves to prayer,
being watchful and thankful.*

- COLOSSIANS 4:2 (NIV)

2

The Bible and Marriage

*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife,
and they become one flesh. — GENESIS 2:24 (NIV)*

Begin by enjoying some time together over a simple snack to catch up on general life since you last met. This is a good time to ask how the wedding plans are going.

Pray before you transition into looking at the course material together.

Work through the questions below. You can use all of the questions or pick those that stand out to you as being most valuable for this couple to discuss. Listen to them and allow time for conversations to develop around each question as necessary. Use natural follow up questions and dive deeper into areas where the couple have a lot to talk about or are finding it hard to understand each other or to come to a place of agreement. Where appropriate, share openly experience and examples from your own marriage, and other married couples that you know too.

This section covers:

- establishing a Biblical foundation for marriage
- considering a vision for your marriage

Watch ► *In the Beginning*

A Biblical design for marriage is of one man and one woman, leaving their family of origin and single life to be united with each other and to become one. It is a covenant relationship that brings every part of these two lives together. All marriage relationships have been affected by the sin. So therefore to have a marriage which reflects God's design takes intentionality and a lifelong pursuit.

Discuss Together

- What is your idea of marriage?
- Read together Genesis 2:18-25. Record in your own words what you think each of the verses or expressions mean about the relationship between a husband and wife.
- Leave, Unite, Become one flesh. What is important about the order?
- We live in a fallen world, in the period of time between the perfection of Eden and the perfection of Heaven. Therefore our sin nature, our fleshly desires, can impact our marriage relationship. Read Genesis 3 (especially verses 7, 8, and 16). What impact does mankind's rebellion against God have on relationships in general and the marriage relationship in particular?
- How ready are you to 'completely commit yourself' to each other?
- How will your wedding day signify a stake in the ground moment of your coming together as one and growing a new life together?
- What thoughts come to mind in regards to your wedding vows when you think about the verse in Genesis 2:24?
- What impact will the single, independent life you both have lived up until now have on your uniting together? How will you navigate this?

Mentor Session Discussion

- What is your idea of marriage?
- Discuss the answers the couple have from looking at Genesis 2:18-25

Verse 18: *God has designed people for companionship ("suitable helper" is discussed in detail later within this session).*

Verses 20b–23: *Woman is made from the same basic material as man. God presented the woman to the man (a gift, e.g. Prov 19:14). The man was excited (the repetition "bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh" is a strong emphasis).*

Verse 24: *"...a man will leave his father and mother" Applicable to men and women. Meant physically leaving one's parents but represents more than this: the establishment of a new family unit before God. We sometimes discuss the particular challenges that might arise if a newly married couple live in the same house as parents/in-laws.*

"...be united to his wife" "...they will become one flesh." Discuss the different ways in which a married couple can be united – includes: goals and dreams, ministry, careers, parenting, financial resources, relatives.

Verse 25: *The example here is that the couple is not ashamed of their physical nakedness (with each other and with God). This is also symbolic of an openness and transparency about all aspects of life – not hiding anything from each other.*

- Why is the order of leaving, uniting and becoming one flesh important?
- What impact does mankind's rebellion against God have on relationships in general and a marriage relationship in particular?

Genesis 2 describes the ideal in terms of relationships.

Genesis 3 describes the consequences of sin in the world – including messing up our relationships with God, with our spouse, with other people, with our work, and with the environment. Thus, we live – and work out our marriage – in a fallen world between the perfection that was Eden and the perfection we will know in heaven. Through faith in Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit we strive to build God's Kingdom here on earth – including in our own character, in our marriage, and other relationships – knowing we will not achieve perfection this side of heaven but assured that we can become more and more like Christ in every aspect of our life and relationships.

- What impacts will the lives the couple have lived up until now have on the full uniting of them as a married couple? How do they intend to navigate this change?

Watch ► *God's Design*

Through the words of Paul in Ephesians 5:21-33 we are given some clear instructions that are for husbands and clear instructions that are for wives. These verses, with the correct context and understanding can provide a wonderful road map to a beautiful unity within marriage.

Discuss Together

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 and record your thoughts.

- What does "submit to one another" mean in the context of general relationships between Christians (verse 21)? How is this applicable in marriage?
- What do you think "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord..." mean (verses 22-24)?
- What do you think "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." mean (verses 25-30)?
- How would you like to see these principles applied in your marriage?
- The Bible doesn't say the husband is to 'make' his wife submit. It is an instruction to the wife and is primarily between her and God. Talk about this together.
- Neither does the Bible doesn't say the wife is to 'make' her husband love her. It is an instruction to the husband and is primarily between him and God. Talk about this together.
- Often these verses are related to the topic of identifying the man as the head of the home, as Christ is the head of the church. What are your views on this? Consider the concept of love and submission.

Mentor Session Discussion

- Referring to Ephesians 5:21-33, what do you think “submit to one another” means in the context of marriage?
- How would you like to see these principles applied in your marriage?
- What are your thoughts on the man as the head of the home, as Christ is head of the Church?
- Ask the man, how much did Jesus love the Church?

Help the couple to get to a place where they understand that this passage of scripture means that the man is instructed to love his wife even to the point of dying for her. This is a huge help for her to understand the idea of submission, when she grasps the idea of a husband who loves her that much.

Watch ► *Companionship*

In the book of Genesis we read the story of creation which culminates in the creation of Adam and Eve. It is a beautiful story in which we see that God intended man and woman to be a perfect fit for one another. God creates exactly what is needed for humanity to be complete.

Discuss Together

- Looking more closely at Genesis 2:18, talk together about your thoughts and opinion on the description of ‘suitable helper’ given to Eve.

Mentor Session Discussion

- Discuss the idea of ‘suitable helper’ and the Biblical meaning of the word ‘ezer.

‘Suitable Helper’ is often misunderstood. In English, it sounds understated and almost substandard.

The English word helper, as we have come to understand the word, is not as rich and empowering as the Hebrew word ‘ezer, which is the word used here. Helper, as we might understand it suggests a mere assisting someone who could do the task almost as well without help. But ‘ezer is almost always used in the Bible to describe God himself. Other times it is used to describe military help, such as reinforcements, without which a battle would be lost. It means this idea of helper, given here to Eve, is an incredibly empowering word.

The word ‘suitable’ used here can also be misunderstood if we overlook the original definition of the word used in the Biblical text. Neged is much more than ‘good enough’ or ‘that’ll do’ as we might translate the word suitable to mean. It actually means ‘like opposite’ ‘perfect match’ Like two pieces of a puzzle that fit together because they are not exactly the same nor completely different, but they are perfectly complementary such that together they can create a complete whole.

*A good marriage isn't
something you find; it's
something you make.*

- GARY L. THOMAS

Watch ► *Crafting a Vision*

Marriage is less about the big day and more about the everyday. More than just planning a wedding day, planning for your marriage helps establish a firm foundation for your life together and gives you a matrix to use for all decisions and plans both big and small. Crafting a vision to articulate for yourselves your non-negotiables and what you are committed to and will fight for provides a common ground that you can work towards together.

Discuss Together

- What ratio of time do you spend thinking about your wedding versus your marriage?
- 15 years from now, what would you like your situation and achievements to be? Think about areas like children, living situation, career, travel etc.
- Thinking about married couples you know who have been married a long time, what stands out to you about them?
- Who are some married couples you know and admire that you could approach to talk with about their marriage?

Complete Independantly

Think about the following questions individually, then come together to discuss your answers with each other.

- Individually, what are you working towards right now or what direction are you heading in right now? Is this where you want to go together as a married couple?
- What are the key things that you personally are committed to and want to fight for?
- What do you feel is non-negotiable for you in life? Is there anything that is completely off the table or anything you consider to be absolutely necessary?
- Thinking about the idea that within deep Christian friendship in a marriage we can help each other on the journey to becoming more and more like Christ. How does that fit with what you envision your marriage to be about?
- Spend some time thinking about how you could become 'one'/'united' in these four areas:

Spiritually, with all your heart (For example; reading or studying either the Bible or other Christian literature, prayer, being an active part of a church community, serving, worship)

Emotionally, with all your soul (For example; taking marriage enrichment opportunities, keeping open and honest communication lines, sharing of hopes and dreams, needs and wants, prioritising time to spend just with each other).

Intellectually, with all your mind (For example; being available for vibrant discussion on topics

that are important to your spouse, listening well and asking questions in conversation, talking about topical issues and opinions you have, learning a new skill together).

Physically, with all your strength (For example; set a fitness goal together, intentionally plan time for regular physical intimacy, helping each other with practical tasks and projects, be present physically for comfort and support during difficult seasons).

Discuss Together

Considering the previous questions and other thoughts you have had, what are a few sentences you could bring together that begin to articulate a vision for your marriage? Record these so they are easy to revisit over time. Here are some sentence starters to help you begin:

- The heart of our marriage will be...
- I am committed to your...
- I am committed to seeing you...
- I am committed to help you to...
- We are committed to...
- We will work together towards...
- Together we will pursue...
- We will fight for...
- An absolute non-negotiable for us is...
- Completely off the table for us is...
- Something important to us now that we are prepared to change in the future is...

Mentor Session Discussion

- What are some things they have identified as non-negotiables for them? What do they want at the heart of their marriage? What are they committed to together and what will they fight for no matter what? Was there anything which was a non-negotiable for one which wasn't for the other person? Were any non-negotiable's surprising
- Is there anything that either of them need to reconsider based on the 'why' behind something the other has prioritised?
- How will they record these discussions and decisions? How often would they like to revisit them?
- Is there anything else they would like to discuss?

Draw the session to a close by the agreed finishing time. Remind the couple of the video clips for Session Three, which they will complete before meeting with you again. Confirm the date and time for when you will next meet. Pray for the couple before they leave.

3

Becoming One: Words

Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

— PROVERBS 16:24 (NIV)

Begin by enjoying some time together over a simple snack as the couple arrive. Use this time for general hospitality and fostering an open and caring relationship.

Pray before you transition into looking at the course material together.

This section covers:

- establishing healthy communication
- managing conflict

Watch ► Communication

Healthy communication is key to a great marriage. This includes clearly and assertively communicating with honesty and respect. This happens through the words we choose to say, how we choose to say them and what we do with our bodies. It also relies on the development of active listening, that seeks to fully understand, rather than only seeking to be understood. Within a marriage relationship there are different types of communication and all serve a different purpose in growing and strengthening your relationship together.

Discuss Together

- Read Ephesians 4:29-32 and record your thoughts. What do these verses say should and should not characterise our communication and attitudes toward each other?
- Ephesians 4:15 suggests our communication should be characterised by truth and love. What should you do when it seems that being truthful does not seem loving?

Complete Independantly

Fill in the following table individually, then come together to discuss your answers with each other.

Rate yourself and your partner on the following aspects of communication.

How good are you at: 1 (poor) - 5 (very good)	Me	You
Communicating information		
Sharing Feelings		
Hearing and understanding each other		
Recognising your body language		

How often do you: 1 (seldom) - 5 (very often)	Me	You
Compliment each other		
Criticise each other		
Compliment your partner to other people		
Criticise your partner to other people		
Use a harsh, sharp or sarcastic tone		

How often do you: 1 (seldom) - 5 (very often)	Both
Argue with each other	
Talk about each other's needs	
Talk about long term goals	
Have spiritual conversations	

Discuss Together

- Identify the listening principles in these verses: Proverbs 15:23, Proverbs 18:13, Romans 12:15, Ephesians 4:29
- Reflect on the example of communication in the video clip. What stood out to you the most? What aspect is most challenging for you?

Mentor Session Discussion

- According to Ephesians 4:29-32, what should and should not characterise our communication and attitudes towards each other?
- Discuss the results from the table they have filled in about communication.
The important thing to notice in the table is where the couple have a differing perspectives. Are there examples they can give each other of why they have put a particular rating for an area? This exercise is less about seeing how similar they are, rather that there is shared understanding around communication attitudes and behaviours and where some of these may need to grow, change or adapt.
- Where did the ratings align and where were there differences in opinion?
- Were there any ratings that caused you to think there needs to be growth or change in an area?
- Are there types of communication you find easy? Any that you find difficult or less natural?
- What reflections were made on the communication example? Could you identify with any of the communication strategies the couple used?
- Talk about the communion styles within the homes the couple were raised in. Were they typically good examples to be followed or poor examples to be avoided?

Watch ► Conflict

Dealing with conflict situations is part of being in a relationship with others, so are a certain feature of being a married couple. Conflict can be managed in a healthy way which maintains respect for one another and does not damage the unity between you. The key is to put your own victory aside and fight for restoration. With a few simple tools and a heart of humility and forgiveness, a healthy environment for managing conflict situations is possible.

Complete Independantly

Fill in the following table individually, then come together to discuss your answers with each other.

The following table describes styles of dealing with a conflict. In the columns Me and You record (individually) the styles that you think you both use: 0 (never), 1 (rarely), 2 (sometimes) or 3 (often).

Style	Description	Me	You
Bury	You bury the problem, hoping it will go away; you hide it, so neither of you can see the problem.		
Blast	You go off with a big blast like a bomb, hoping it will destroy the problem.		
Bolt	You bolt off and run away from the problem so that you don't have to face it.		
Bargain	You bargain with your partner and use another problem to put pressure on them about the original problem, and so you never sort it out.		
Be-a-baby	You try and manipulate your partner by going weak and pathetic.		
Buck-pass	You plead that you couldn't help it, because it was a result of the way you were brought up or from the impact of a life event, other key influence over your life or circumstance.		
Blame-shift	You present a cast-iron case as to why it was 'all their fault'.		

- Compare your answers and talk about examples of when these reactions have occurred.
- Do you think any of these are a satisfactory way of dealing with a conflict?

Discuss Together

- How did your parents, or the people in the home you were raised resolve conflict? Did the same person usually get their way?

*Before you marry a person,
you should first make them use
a computer with slow Internet to
see who they really are.*

- WILL FERRELL

Read Independantly

Read through the following independantly, then discuss together.

In addition to what you have heard in the Communication and Conflict videos, let's recap expressing your feelings, needs and wants in your relationship in an assertive and respectful way.

Rather than assuming your spouse can read your mind, good communication within marriage requires both people to share how they feel and ask clearly and directly for what they are needing or wanting.

Consider the use of 'I' statements, and avoid replying with 'yeah but' or using absolute statements like 'you never' or 'you always'.

Examples:

- "I am feeling out of sorts. While I love spending time with you, I also want to spend time with my friends. I would like us to find some time to talk about this."
- "I am feeling uncomfortable about the level of influence others are having in our wedding preparations. I understand you have a very close relationship with your family and I would like to know what your thoughts and expectations are, so we can agree what role others will have on decision making. Can we make time to discuss this together."

Good communication also requires active listening. Active listening is the ability to let someone know you understand them by restating their message to clarify this understanding and not make an assumption. It involves listening attentively without interruption and then restating what was heard. It is important to acknowledge the content AND the feelings of the speaker.

Examples:

- "I heard you say you are feeling 'out of sorts', and enjoy the time we spend together but that you also need time to spend with your friends. You want to plan a time to talk about this."
- "If I understand what you said, you are uncomfortable about the amount of influence others, particularly my family, are having on our wedding plans. You understand we are close and want to hear my thoughts and expectations so we can agree together on how we make the decisions we need to make. Is that correct?"

Complete Together

Think of two things that you would like more or less of in your relationship. Practice using good communication skills such as:

- expressing your feelings, needs or wants clearly and assertively
- using 'I' statements

- avoiding statements like 'you never' or 'you always'
- listen actively to ensure you understand completely
- consider your tone and body language

Take turns sharing with each other, and repeating back what you heard the other person say until you reach full understanding. You could begin by saying:

"I would like..." and then describe how you would feel if this were to become a reality in your relationship.

After completing the activity above discuss the following questions:

- How good were each of you at communicating clearly?
- In what ways did you each effectively use active listening skills?

Read Independantly

As we have discussed, all married couples will have conflict situations and need to face differences and disagreements big and small. The amount of conflict is not related to marital happiness as much as how the conflict is managed.

Below is a Ten Step Model that you can use as a simple and effective tool.

Ten Step Conflict Resolution Model

- Set a time and place for a discussion.
- Define the conflict/problem you are having - be specific.
- List the ways you each contribute to the conflict/problem.
- List any past attempts to resolve this that were not successful.
- Brainstorm ideas and try to list 10 possible solutions. Do not judge or criticise any of the suggestions at this point.
- Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions. (Be as objective as possible and talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for gaining resolution to the issue.)
- Agree on one solution to try .
- Agree how you will each work toward this solution.
- Set up another time to discuss your progress.
- Reward each other for progress. (If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.)

Complete Together

Think of a conflict situation that has been recent for you or is something that you have struggled to reconcile in the past and practice using this model together. If you have no experience of a conflict situation together, then pick a scenario that you can imagine would bring a conflict situation and role play this scenario.

Read Independantly

Time Out - a helpful tool for when you need it.

Sometimes a conflict situation causes one or both of you to need some space and time before you come back together and seek to resolve the conflict and restore unity. Physiologically, when this is the case, the “fight or flight” response is triggered and a person goes into protection mode with little or no regard for the other person. In this state it is not uncommon for someone to say or do things they later regret. Also, it is nearly impossible while in an intensive, heated frame of mind to have a productive conversation or use active listening techniques which will lead to a mutually agreed upon resolution.

Here are five simple things to help you when a Time Out is needed.

1. **Indicators a Time Out is needed**

Notice what your body is doing, if there are significant changes to your physical stance pay attention to these. For example: Are your fists clenched? Is your face red? Has your breathing quickened? Are you crying excessively? Are you having thoughts of causing harm to yourself, someone else or the environment around you? Do you feel emotionally closed off?

Learn to recognise the signs that things are spiraling out of control for you and that you are no longer able to have a productive conversation with your spouse.

2. **Requesting a Time Out**

Call a time-out for yourself, even if it is not you who visibly needs it. It is usually unhelpful to suggest the other person take a time out. Be direct and say exactly what you need. For example: “I’m too angry/upset to talk right now and I need a time-out. Just an hour to calm down and collect my thoughts.” It is important to follow this up with a suggested time when you think you’ll be ready to come back to the conversation/conflict and work towards reconciliation.

3. **Relax and calm down**

Do something physically that will help your body to expel energy and calm down. For example: Take some deep breaths. Go for a jog. Take a walk. Have a hot bath or shower. You could try doing something to help your emotional self to relax also. For example: Write in a journal. Read or watch something uplifting or easy going. Spend time in prayer. Listen to calming music. This will be unique to who you are and what will bring your level of intense feeling down to a calm and manageable place where you can think, converse and react in a rational manner.

4. Take time to process what is going on

Try to identify what you were thinking and/or feeling that became so difficult to discuss and caused tension to rise within yourself or between you as a couple. Think about “I” messages you could use to tell your spouse about how you were feeling or what you were thinking .

Spend a few moments considering your spouse’s point of view, what they might be feeling and why they may have reacted the way they did.

5. Get back on track

Resume the conversation together and revisit the original cause of conflict. Try using some of the communication skills you have learnt and active listening skills as well. You could use the Ten Step Method approach as suggested.

Remember to include space for forgiveness. You may both need to extend and receive this. Forgiveness is the decision to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts toward your spouse in order to be free from anger and resentment. This process promotes restoration and it can allow reconciliation to take place in the relationship.

Holding onto unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. In reality unforgiveness affects ourselves. Remember what we discovered in the book of Matthew within the video clip. As followers of Jesus we are called to, and responsible for, the seeking of forgiveness and to freely give forgiveness.

Discuss Together

The above is information for you to draw upon over your marriage relationship. But if there has been a situation recently or you find one or both of you need to have time out as a regular way of dealing with conflict then take some time now to discuss what this could look like for you going forward. Perhaps you want to revisit a conflict situation you faced recently that you now realise you would have done better with a time out. Consider the following questions:

- How would taking a Time Out have helped you?
- Would having a Time Out have resolved the issue and reached reconciliation with more or less hurt?
- If your spouse asks for a Time Out, describe to each other how you intend to respond in that moment.

Mentor Session Discussion

- How did they see conflict resolution growing up?
- Discuss the results from the conflict styles table in their Workbooks. Why are none of these a satisfactory way of dealing with conflict?
The important thing to notice in the table, as with the previous table on communication, is where the couple have a differing perspective of themselves to their fiancé. Are there examples they can give each other of why they have indicated a particular way of responding to conflict?
- Are there unsatisfactory or unhealthy ways of dealing with conflict that you would like to improve?
- What did you discover doing the Communication Activity together? Were there parts that were more successful and more tricky for you to navigate? How similar or different was this to your usual style of communication and listening?
- Have you tried using the Ten Step Conflict Resolution Model? Is there a current need for this in your relationship?
- Talk about your own (Mentor couple) experience in learning to deal with conflict situations in a healthy way.
- Talk about if there is a need for a Time Out. For some couples this is not necessary but some this is a hugely beneficial tool. And it may be in the future rather than now. Point out that the key to this being successful is the clear boundaries on a timeframe. A clear indication of how long the person needs for a Time Out, which is suggested to be no less than 30 minutes, and a set time of when they will come back together again to carry on the conversation to resolve the issue, which should be within the same day.
- Has anything come up that they are finding challenging to work through together or to understand?
- Is there anything else they would like to discuss?

Draw the session to a close by the agreed finishing time. Remind the couple of the video clips for Session Four, which they will complete before meeting with you again. Confirm the date and time for when you will next meet. Pray for the couple before they leave.

*In sharp contrast with
our culture, the Bible teaches
that the essence of marriage is
a sacrificial commitment to the
good of the other. That means
that love is more fundamentally
action than emotion.*

- TIM KELLER

*As God by creation
made two of one,
so again by marriage
He made one of two.*

- THOMAS ADAMS

4

Becoming One: You and Me

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. — COLOSSIANS 3:14 (NIV)

This section covers:

- exploring our differences
- managing expectations
- learning how we give and receive love

Watch ▶ *Exploring Differences*

Our differences come in all shapes and sizes. We are a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. In a marriage our differences complement each other and help us to be more balanced, even though at times our differences can create tension. Knowing your differences and identifying strengths and weaknesses is healthy understanding.

Complete Independantly

The following Character Assessment is to help you get to know each other better and to identify combinations of character traits that may pose challenges in your marriage. Each pair of traits on the following pages are approximate opposites. For each, put a tick in the column that best describes you, and your fiancée, in respect to that pair of traits. DO NOT discuss the assessments together before you meet with your mentors.

When you meet with your mentors, focus on the character traits for which the two of you assessed the same person differently. Remember, these traits are neither right nor wrong — they are just what you are like.

Some couples find it useful to complete more detailed personality inventories (e.g. Four Temperaments; Myers Briggs; Strengths Finder) to better understand themselves and each other and how they can relate effectively.

Me

	Very	Somewhat	Neutral	Somewhat	Very	
Tense						Relaxed
Optimistic						Pessimistic
Light-hearted						Serious
Reserved						Affectionate
Social						Private
Procrastinating						Urgent
Lethargic						Energetic
Spontaneous						Restrained
Vocal						Quiet
Ambitious						Content
Compliant						Stubborn
Insensitive						Sympathetic
Emotional						Unemotional
Logical						Intuitive
Tolerant						Intolerant
Methodical						Disorganised
Free-spender						Thrifty
Forward planner						Live in the moment
Self-sufficient						Reliant
Practical						Dreamer
Early riser						Night Owl
Cautious						Bold

My Partner

	Very	Somewhat	Neutral	Somewhat	Very	
Tense						Relaxed
Optimistic						Pessimistic
Light-hearted						Serious
Reserved						Affectionate
Social						Private
Procrastinating						Urgent
Lethargic						Energetic
Spontaneous						Restrained
Vocal						Quiet
Ambitious						Content
Compliant						Stubborn
Insensitive						Sympathetic
Emotional						Unemotional
Logical						Intuitive
Tolerant						Intolerant
Methodical						Disorganised
Free-spender						Thrifty
Forward planner						Live in the moment
Self-sufficient						Reliant
Early riser						Night Owl
Practical						Dreamer
Cautious						Bold

- From your point of view, note the most important strengths and likeable qualities in your fiancé.
- From your point of view write down the key weaknesses or difficult characteristics in your fiancé.
- Do you believe these weaknesses and difficult characteristics will disappear over time or that you can change them?
- If they were not to disappear or change, could you live with them long-term?
- In what areas do you think you can help meet the needs of and complement your fiancé?
- In what areas do you hope that your fiancé will help meet your needs and complement you?

Mentor Session Discussion

The couple should have completed the Character Assessment table. They were asked NOT to discuss the results until they met with you for the Mentor Session.

Use the following pattern to discuss the character assessment:

- Ask one of them to say how they rated themselves on the first characteristic (tense/relaxed). Then ask the other person how they rated the other person on that same characteristic. Do this for the first five characteristics
- Ask the couple to swap roles and repeat for the first five characteristics. For the next five characteristics ask the person who didn't lead into the first characteristics to take the lead.
- Continue to alternate the lead through the list, in groups of five characteristics.
- For each characteristic, the first thing to look for is whether they have a similar understanding of the person they are rating. If their assessments are within one of each other (e.g., very tense and somewhat tense) we take that as being a good alignment.
- If their ratings are quite different, explore these a bit further. Ask each to describe why they gave that rating. It is often they find that they are describing different situations (e.g., methodical at work; disorganised at home). The discussion is more important than the rating itself.
- Once they have alignment of the ratings on a characteristic, we then discuss the implications. If the two are very different, discuss the challenges that will bring, how they can manage the difference, and how they can use the difference as a strength within their marriage. For example, if one is optimistic and the other pessimistic there may be tension between them. But the difference is also a strength because, as a couple, they can be more balanced, and they can avoid the weakness as a couple if both are very optimistic or both pessimistic.
- If the two are the same on a characteristic, note they will likely relate easily on that characteristic but may be weaker as a couple. For example, if both are optimistic, there may be the associated weakness of naivety. We discuss how they can guard against such weaknesses (e.g., be aware of the potential weakness, agree that one will act 'out of character' to bring balance, and associate with others who are different on that characteristic).
- What are the most important strengths and likeable qualities you identified in each other?
- What are the key weaknesses or difficult characteristics you identified in each other?

*Unity is oneness of purpose,
not sameness of persons.*

- TONY EVANS

Watch ► *Managing Expectations*

We develop expectations over our lifetime. Whether you realise it or not you will already have expectations of your marriage and for your marriage. Working out as a couple what your expectations are, and if they are realistic or not can help provide a framework as you plan ahead together. Exploring where your expectations come from and which ones you will work together to meet can take time and this conversation will need to be revisited more than once. Walk forward with honesty, openness and some flexibility as you discover your expectations together.

Discuss Together

The following section includes some areas to think about together to become aware of your expectations and where these may differ. This may also help you to identify any unrealistic expectations you have that you are unaware of. For the next few pages of questions fill in the blanks individually and then discuss your answers together. If there are expectations that surprise you or are vastly different, take some time to uncover where these expectations have come from and why they are so important to you going forward. You may need to pause on some of these and spend more time in discussion to bring your expectations into alignment.

- How long do you want to keep your careers? How far are you expecting to progress in your career?
- Were there distinct male/female roles and tasks in your family of origin? What are your expectations of how these will impact the roles and tasks you undertake or have responsibility for?
- **At home or in our family** I would enjoy and/or I expect to...
I don't enjoy and/or I don't expect to...
I expect my partner to...
I don't expect my partner to...
- Do you want to have children? If so, how many? How soon?
- Infertility is a reality for some couples. How would you respond as a couple if you found that one or both of you is infertile?
- If you have children, what are your expectations around discipline in your home?
- Do you expect any interference in your marriage from your parents or in-laws?
- What do you expect are some key aspects of your family of origin that you would like to repeat in your family?
- What are you expecting to not repeat from your family of origin in your family?
- Have you decided what changes, if any, you will make to your surnames?
- What are your expectations around leisure time, both individually or together? Have a general discussion but also fill in the blanks for you individually and then discuss your answers together. If there are answers you have that clash, discuss why you feel this way and why this is important for you.

- For my or our **leisure time** I would enjoy and/or I expect to...
I don't enjoy and/or I don't expect to...
- Do you expect to have pets? If yes, what sort and how many?
- How are you expecting to celebrate Easter and Christmas? Birthdays and anniversaries?
- **For Easter** I would enjoy and/or I expect to...
I don't enjoy and/or I don't expect to...
- **For Christmas** I would enjoy and/or I expect to...
I don't enjoy and/or I don't expect to...
- **For birthdays** I would enjoy and/or I expect to...
I don't enjoy and/or I don't expect to...
- **For anniversaires** I would enjoy and/or I expect to...
I don't enjoy and/or I don't expect to...
- Do you have particular expectations around other holidays? Like annual leave or long weekends?
- **For Holidays** I would enjoy and/or I expect to...
I don't enjoy and/or I don't expect to...
- Do you expect to always live in the area you currently live? Or do you see yourself living in a particular country or area? How often would you think it reasonable to move your family around?
- Do you expect to own your own home? Or would you prefer to rent your accommodation?
- What do you expect to be your greatest challenge in the early years of marriage?
- What do you expect to be your greatest joy in the early years of marriage?

Some of our expectations are around priorities of time. We all have the same number of hours in a week and how you spend these hours will impact your marriage relationship. If you have considerable differences in your expectations around how you spend your time, points of tension can develop in your relationship. For your relationship you may find these differences bring balance. But if as you discuss them you feel they may cause ongoing tension, discuss what you can do to move closer together in your expectations.

- Talk about working or studying from home. Either within normal work or school hours or when overtime is needed. Consider if this was only sometimes or if it was happening very often.
- What are your expectations around the length of time for commuting to and from your workplace? Will this impact your accommodation options?
- Do you have expectations around your personal time? Consider things like exercise, watching programmes or movies, computer games, hobbies, social media, time with friends either together or individually, volunteering and sleep.
- What expectations do you have for completing tasks around home? Consider tasks like cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping and home maintenance.
- Talk about expectations you have for your time as a couple. Consider activities that you want to do together, dates, time for conversation, eating meals and sexual intimacy.

Mentor Session Discussion

Talk specifically about expectations around each of the couples family of origin. Consider the following information to guide you in this conversation:

- Look at the beginning of Genesis 2:24 in more detail. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother” The word ‘leave’ in this verse is strong. It means “to forsake dependence upon,” “release,” and “let go.” Leaving your parents does not mean you permanently withdraw and no longer have a relationship with them. It is speaking to the nature of your relationship with them from here on. The commandment in Exodus 20:12 to honour your parents means that when you leave them, you go with respect, love, admiration, and affirmation for their sacrifices in raising you.

It is important to recognise that our family of origin will always play a large part in who we are and who we will be, while at the same time recognising that as we marry, from that day forward, we are completely separate, we sever our dependence on them and forge a new family.

Without understanding just how deeply ingrained your upbringing is to who you are, regardless of whether you wish to re-create that experience or create the polar opposite, there is a danger in over commitment to these thoughts that can sink your marriage. Once you are married, you are a new decision making unit. And you will begin developing new patterns and new ways of doing things together.

- From the list of expectations you talked through, where were your expectations most similar, and where were they very different? How do you plan to navigate the areas where your expectations are very different?
- Children, career, and extended family are some areas that are very important to understand what you are both expecting and agree on shared expectations or how you will support each other to meet these expectations. What were your answers around these areas?
- **ACTIVITY:** Tell the couple they have 30 seconds to look around the room and look for everything they can see that is blue (or another colour more appropriate to your setting). Start a timer and when it hits 30 seconds ask the couple to close their eyes. Keeping their eyes closed, ask them to list the things they identified. As they start to slow down in their list, tell them to keep their eyes closed, but now list everything that they saw that was red (or another colour). Hopefully they find this much more of a challenge! Ask them to open their eyes and explain the following.

Sometimes what we experience in life, or what we find in a situation or hear when someone is talking, is due to what we are looking for. This is called ‘filtering’ and we develop filters throughout our lifetime based on our experiences and attitudes. Filters impact our expectations. Our expectations can be conditioned over time to expect what we have found before, or to not expect what we have not found before. Often you get what you are looking for, and miss what you are not. Just like in the exercise you just did - when you are looking for blue, blue is often what you see.

If you are only looking for the negative, the wrong thing, the flaws and imperfections, the 'always' and the 'never' you'll miss all the good and the 'mostly' and 'often'. Or if you are only looking for the perfect, how my family did it or what I would do, then you'll miss the beauty of this new family you are creating and the growing together that is in front of you. This is a good time to check your own filters when it comes to your expectations of each other.

- Can you identify any filters that are causing you to only see a certain part of your fiancé's behaviour or attitudes? Or is there a certain aspect of marriage or a picture of marriage that you are looking for that may cause you to miss what actually is reality?

Watch ▶ Defining Love

When we think about a marriage relationship, love is one of the primary words that comes to mind. A Biblical model of marriage prioritises three types of love and actively pursues growth in each of them. Agape love, Philia love and Eros love.

Discuss Together

- List examples where you have observed other married couples demonstrate Agape or Philia love to one another.
- How might 'dying to self' be expressed in marriage?
- How do you define intimacy?
- Read 1 Corinthians 13 verses 4-8 together. For each of the definitions this gives for love, talk about how you might see these displayed within your marriage. For example: "How can our love for one another be patient? How can it be kind? What does it mean for us to keep no record of wrong?"

We give and receive love in a variety of ways. Sometimes though love is given out towards us, it is in a way that we do not easily interpret. Dr Gary Chapman explains this in a simple way through 5 different love languages. Identifying which love languages speak the loudest to you can be a helpful tool within your marriage to ensure that you are filling each other's tanks rather than loving in ways that are misunderstood or missed entirely.

Complete Independantly

Complete the online Love Languages quiz and record your results: www.5lovelanguages.com/quizzes

*Love is patient, love is kind.
It does not envy, it does not
boast, it is not proud. It does not
dishonor others, it is not self-
seeking, it is not easily angered,
it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but
rejoices with the truth. It always
protects, always trusts, always
hopes, always perseveres.*

- 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7 (NIV)

Read Individually

Take a look over the additional information for each love language before discussing your results together.

GIFTS

Connection - "You know me and were thinking about me when I wasn't even around." Giving them something that is personally meaningful to them shows that you know them which translates as love.

Disconnection - "I feel like you don't love me because you don't know me." This is what they can interpret from a gift that doesn't hold any meaning to them. If a lot of time passes without being given a gift they may feel like you haven't thought about them which feels like a lack of love.

PHYSICAL TOUCH

Connection - "I feel connected when we are touching." This does not have to always be sexual. It is a simple closeness and proximity to each other that matters. They appreciate an initiation of physical closeness and touching that is frequently given.

Disconnection - "I feel rejected and neglected when you don't touch me or are physically distant from me."

ACTS OF SERVICE

Connection - "I feel loved when you take care of things that are important to me." Help matters a great deal. Anticipating needs and meeting them and accomplishing specific tasks are all felt as expressions of love.

Disconnection - "I feel like you don't love me, because you don't care about things that are important to me." They can feel unloved if they perceive they are doing it alone.

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Connection - "I feel loved when I believe that you like me." Words are life. They feel like words contain the value someone has for them.

Disconnection - "I feel rejected when your words are harsh." They feel like they are not enough or not going to make it without verbal affirmation and encouragement.

QUALITY TIME

Connection - "I feel loved when you show interest in me." Sharing in an activity or conversation that is important to them shows love. Being present in what you are doing together is important. For them, actively listening to them makes all the difference.

Disconnection - "I feel rejected when you don't value my interests." Not spending time together can communicate: "I don't have time for you and I'm not going to make time." They may hear: "Other things are more important to me than you." Being with them, but not being present, can feel the same as not being there at all.

Discuss Together

- How similar or different are you in the primary ways you receive love?
- Talk about how you think or feel these similarities or differences will impact your marriage relationship?
- Over your relationship, describe to each other a way that you have felt especially loved.
- Describe to each other one thing you would appreciate as an ongoing expression of love

Mentor Session Discussion

- Talk about Agape and Philia. What good examples have you seen of these types of love demonstrated in other married couples?
- How might 'dying to self' be expressed in marriage?
- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. How might you display these in your marriage?
- What are your primary love languages? How similar or different are they and how do you think these differences will impact your marriage relationship?
- Share your (mentor couple) primary love languages and if these differ from each other, how you have navigated these differences in how you show love to each other.
- Is there anything else they would like to discuss from this section?

Draw the session to a close by the agreed finishing time. Remind the couple of the video clip numbers for Session Five, which they will complete before meeting with you again. Confirm the date and time for when you will next meet. Pray for the couple before they leave.

*Love, as distinct from
“being in love”, is not merely
a feeling. It is a deep unity,
maintained by the will and
deliberately strengthened by
habit; reinforced by the grace
which both partners ask, and
receive from God. They can have
this love for each other even at
those moments when they do not
like each other.*

- C.S. LEWIS

5

Becoming One: Unity

“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.” — 1 PETER 3:8 (NIV)

Begin by enjoying some time together over a simple snack as the couple arrive. As this is your last session together, give the couple time to share any wedding or honeymoon stresses.

This section covers:

- sexual intimacy
- financial management
- the purpose of marriage beyond just the two of you

Watch ▶ *Sexual Intimacy*

Sexual intimacy is an incredibly important aspect of marriage. God designed it and the Bible has a lot to say about it. Sexual intimacy within marriage is for fun, it is for protection, it is for procreation and it is integral to the building of unity and oneness. It is a lifelong journey, one to be enjoyed and accepted as a wonderful gift from God.

Discuss Together

- Where have you learnt about sex and sexual intimacy? (We recommended that, prior to your wedding, you read a book on sexuality written from a Biblical perspective.)
- In your opinion, what have you thought to be true about sex within marriage?
- How are you managing your sexual attraction to one another during your engagement? What boundaries have you set?
- If you are sexually active together, or you are struggling to stick within the boundaries you have set for yourselves, consider the following points and discuss together your thoughts about each.

- In what way is your sexual behaviour contributing to your holiness?
- In what way could your sexual behaviour be putting a stumbling block in your life? Consider Ephesians 5:3
- How could your choice to not obey the Lord in this area compromise your spiritual growth?
- How could your decisions about sexual behaviour before marriage be stealing from the honour and dignity of your wedding celebration and establishment of your new home?

Discuss the boundaries you will set for yourselves when you are married to guard sexual integrity. Consider travel for work, time alone with friends or colleagues of the opposite sex and positions within church ministry. You may also want to consider the material you watch and read either independently or together as a couple.

- Note down any boundaries you have agreed upon:
- Have you discussed with each other any past sexual experiences? If applicable, is this an area you have accepted?
- Have you discussed a suitable form of contraception?
- Your wedding night is a special and precious moment. For some couples this night can be filled with particular expectations or a lot of pressure. Talk about your expectations for your wedding night. What you are looking forward to and what you are nervous about?
- Talk about your honeymoon. What expectations do you have?

There will be time with your mentor couple to have discussions separately as 'men only' and 'women only'. This is an opportunity to discuss any concerns or anxieties you may have about the sexual aspect of your future marriage relationship.

Mentor Session Discussion

- Where did you learn about sex and sexual intimacy?
- Have you discussed any past relationships or other experiences you have had that could impact your sexual intimacy going forward?
- Have you sorted a suitable form of contraception?
- What boundaries have you put in place as you prepare for marriage? How are you navigating this and are you both comfortable with where you are at?

Some engaged couples will have a sexual relationship, in which case the discussion on this issue may be challenging – your role is to speak grace and truth to their situation. Discuss with them the Biblical instruction that sex is right only within marriage and that sex before marriage steals from the wonder of marriage as designed by God.

If they say it is already too late (because they already have a sexual relationship) you can encourage them that God forgives, that as believers each of them is a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and it is never too late to obey God.

If the couple is living together, encourage them to consider living separately for the remainder of their engagement – to help them experience the fullness of marriage as designed by God. If the cost of living separately is an issue there may be people in the church or a family member who would be willing to have one of the couple, private board with them at little cost.

- What boundaries do you intend to set within marriage? Are there situations where you may be vulnerable to sexual temptation? What are some appropriate boundaries you will put in place to guard against immorality?

- What are your expectations for your wedding night and honeymoon?

It is important that they understand that the key point is to enjoy each other, rather than to experience intimacy in a particular way or at a particular frequency. They have the rest of their lives to explore this area of marriage. Some couples make a commitment to not expecting sexual intercourse on the wedding night, but rather commit to enjoying each other.

Take some time to discuss ‘man to man’ and ‘woman to woman’ (separately) to give the engaged couple an opportunity to discuss any concerns or anxieties they may have about the sexual aspects of their future marriage relationship. Talk again about the wedding night and honeymoon specifically as well as ongoing intimacy.

This is a good time to talk with them about any pornographic influences they may have experienced and if they have, how they intend to deal with that unhelpful influence. Having an accountability partner is a helpful strategy to deal with this issue.

*Therefore, there is now no
condemnation for those who are
in Christ Jesus, because through
Jesus the law of the Spirit who
gives life has set you free from
the law of sin and death.*

- ROMANS 8:1-2 (NIV)

Watch ▶ Money, Money, Money

Money is a practical and necessary part of life. Coming together in marriage to create a new economic unit will require some time to establish a shared understanding between you and to develop a plan for how you will navigate this area together.

Nearly all married couples will experience periods of financial difficulty and challenge. Therefore, it is wise to lay a firm foundation on Biblical principles as you begin.

Discuss Together

- What do the following passages say about finances and possessions? Matthew 6:25 -34, Proverbs 11:24-25, 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Timothy 6:6-10.
- Describe the financial situation in your family of origin and your adult life. Do you want the same for your marriage?
- Have you discussed all the debts and savings/assets each of you will bring into your marriage? Does this cause any concern?
- Share your thoughts with each other on operating your accounts as joint, everything coming together, or maintaining separate accounts. Consider this in light of Genesis 2:24 and the practical implications both of these models would have in your marriage.
- If you plan to combine your finances, do you think you should have money for personal spending that you are not answerable to your spouse for? If so, how much (per month)?
- Do you think you should agree on a price limit above which each of you would check with your spouse before committing to buy something? If so, how much?
- Do you think it is important to give regularly to the church or other areas of God's work? Have you discussed how much or what proportion of your income you should give?

Complete Independantly

Fill in the following table individually. For each expense indicate if it is: a priority in your budget, a maybe, or not a priority for you to include in your budget. Once you have completed the table, compare your answers and discuss any that you have a particular difference of opinion over. How will you reconcile your differences of priority?

Expense	A priority	Maybe	Not a priority
Owning a house			
Owning a holiday house			
Overseas travel			
Owning a car			
Owning 2 cars			
Online streaming subscriptions			
Sports or gym memberships			
Updated home furnishings			
Personal grooming			
Regular new clothes			
Upgrading digital devices e.g. phone			
Hospitality			
Help for family members			
Eating out			
Investments e.g. shares, rental property			
Retirement savings			
Insurances e.g. life, health, income			
Lotto tickets			
Hire purchases			
Credit Cards			
Giving to church			
Giving to charity			

Complete Together

Having a budget can be an extremely helpful tool to remain on the same page with your finances as well as to avoid getting into financial trouble. This is something that should be regularly revisited and adjusted based on your circumstances and changes in life. You can begin by using the template below or find a local budgeting service. Our recommendation is to visit capmoney.org and if a CAP Money course is available in your area to prioritise attending this before, or soon after you are married.

Monthly Income (after tax)	
	Him
	Her
	TOTAL Income

Monthly Expenses		Budgeted Amount
Giving	Church	
	Charity	
	Hospitality	
	Extended family support	
	Gifts (birthdays, weddings etc.)	
Household	Rent or Mortgage	
	Power/gas	
	Internet	
	Phone plans	
	Streaming Subscriptions	
	Home and/or contents insurance	
	Home maintenance	
	Groceries	
Health	Doctor appointments	
	Dentist	
	Medications/perscriptions	
	Health Insurance	

Mentor Session Discussion

- What did you pick up from the following passages? Matthew 6:25 -34, Proverbs 11:24-25, 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Timothy 6:6-10

As Christians we should strive to be good stewards of what God has given us.

All we have belongs to God (not just 10%).

Providing for our immediate family is a higher priority than providing for extended family and non-family. This can be a particular issue for some cultures where there is a strong expectation that family members will financially support their extended family – even if it imposes an undue burden on their immediate family. Where one of the couple has such family expectations it is important that the couple discuss these and how they will manage these expectations.

- What are your thoughts about joint or separate financial accounts? Are they both comfortable and happy with this decision? Consider this in light of Genesis 2:24.
- Have they made time to put together a budget?
- To what extent are material possessions important to you?
- Have you discussed all the debts and savings/assets each of you will bring into your marriage? Does this cause either of you any concern?
- Do you think it is important to give regularly to the church/charity/other areas of God's work? Have you discussed how much or what proportion of your income you should give?
- Talk about major differences between them in how they manage their finances or how their family of origin managed finances. How will they navigate these differences?

Watch ► Beyond Us

In every area of your life you will have opportunities to share your faith in Jesus and your marriage is a fabulous example of this. While you are preparing for marriage this opportunity is highlighted as you will find yourself in many conversations with people who may ask questions about some of the decisions you are making.

Discuss Together

- Talk about what stood out to you or surprised you in the video.
- Consider your wedding service and wedding reception programme and what you could include that would testify to your relationship with God and His love.

Mentor Session Discussion

- What opportunities have you come across while you have been preparing for marriage for outreach or to share a testimony of what God is doing in your life?
- What components of your wedding service or reception programme could you use for this purpose?
- What are your thoughts about your marriage being used by God to bless and encourage others and be salt and light to the community around you?
- Is there anything else they would like to discuss from this section?

Draw the session to a close by the agreed finishing time. Let the couple know you will be back in touch within 3-6 months after their wedding day. The purpose of this time is to talk through anything that has come up over the first few months of their marriage. Point them to the 3-4 month Debrief suggestion in the Couples Workbook. It is suggested that they complete this ahead of meeting again with you. Pray for the couple before they leave.

3-6 Month Debrief

The 3-6 month Debrief in the Couples Workbook runs through questions to prompt conversation in all the major areas of the course. Use these questions as a base for your conversation. This touch base works well over a meal. Keep the conversation flowing naturally. There is no need to cover off the questions in order, as long as you cover what you think is necessary for this couple. Allow them space to expand on areas they have particularly found challenging or have yet to come to an agreement on. Share your own experiences where possible and point them back to scripture for a plan of action going forward.

- Describe three highlights of being married.
- Talk about any aspects of marriage that are very different from what you expected.
- Describe the greatest challenge you have experienced.
- Talk about any issues you have had establishing your new family unit separate from your families of origin.
- Describe to what extent you feel you are becoming united.
- Talk about the spiritual temperature in your home. Are you having spiritual conversations with each other? Discussing what you are reading about in the Bible? Praying together?
- Talk about how your schedules are working out. Do you feel you are getting enough time together?
- Talk about your roles within your marriage. How is the leadership and decision-making working out? What about love and submission?
- Think about the character assessments you did in the pre-marriage course. How are you managing those areas where you are very different? Any issues arising from areas in which you are similar? How are you going to support each other in areas of weakness?
- How would you rate your communication and management of conflict situations? Is there an example you can give that explains an area of growth you want to work on?
- Talk about your financial situation. Any particular issues? Different expectations? Do you feel your budget is still realistic?
- Tell each other three things that you have appreciated in the way your spouse has shown love to you. What is one other thing that you would appreciate?
- Talk about your sex life. Are your expectations being met? Is there anything you would like more or less of? Are there any issues from the past that have cropped up that you would like to discuss?
- How are you ministering to others?
- Talk about areas of marriage or your experience so far that were not covered in the Prepare for Marriage course. Is there anything you would like your mentor couple to hear to perhaps add for the next couple?
- Any other issues you would like to talk about?

*The real soul mate
is the one you are actually
married to.*

- J.R.R. TOLKEIN

Video Scripts

Some individuals or couples may want a copy of a specific script or all of the scripts either to read through or to reference in the future. You are welcome to print and distribute these to the couple as requested.

▶ *You and God*

At the very start of preparing well for marriage, we turn to look at another relationship. Taking a deeper look at your relationship with God is the best place to start.

In Matthew 22:37-38 (NIV) when Jesus was asked what the greatest command was he replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."

Having a personal relationship with God is an incredible thing. So incredible that it is hard to wrap your head around. The God who created everything, created you and knows you by name. God desires to have a relationship with you, for you to walk with Him throughout life. And this relationship with God the Father, his son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, sits at the very top of our relationship priorities.

Once we enter a marriage relationship, our spouse becomes our most significant human relationship. But it must be in second place to our relationship with God. Therefore our relationship to our spouse should enhance, and not take the place of, our relationship with God - which must always remain our first goal. Marriages will never be all that God intended them to be if we put all our focus on our spouse rather than God.

When you are in a dating relationship or are engaged and preparing for marriage, you can get the feeling that you have found the one. That in all the world this one is the perfect fit for you. Someone to complete you. But if we are not careful this actually puts incredible pressure on a relationship. Rather, our relationships with others should flow out of a healthy relationship with God. God is number one and our spouse becomes number two. But having it this way around actually ensures our spouse gets what is best from us.

Over our life we are each responsible for our own relationship with God. This is true for single people those who are dating, engaged couples and married couples. My spouse is no more responsible for my growth and relationship with God than they are for my breathing in and out. I own that. But one of the most beautiful things about a marriage is that we can support and encourage one another, spur each other on and we can develop habits together and be accountable to one another. There is so much joy in a marriage when we seek God together, and serve Him as a couple. In Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) the Bible says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Marriage fits this criteria. It is a unique relationship that encourages us to become better, sharper, and more refined

as people who can more clearly reflect the characteristics of Christ. The closer you grow to God the closer you will grow to one another.

So what about a marriage relationship where one spouse is a follower of Jesus Christ and one is not? One is seeking after God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and one has slipped into a more casual and distant relationship with God? We read in Corinthians 6:14 (NIV) that followers of Jesus should not be yoked together with those who are not. This word 'yoked' simply means bound or joined together, and is most commonly interpreted when it comes to marriage. Paul expands on this to say "For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" It is not that there are no similarities in all areas of life, of course, but those in Christ are not the same spiritually, and because this is such a critical aspect of our lives, it is unwise to be bound together. It's really important to take a look at this before marriage and check which direction you are both heading in.

To seek God together in a marriage relationship is where you find true strength in marriage. You are equally yoked together to serve and be obedient to the call He has placed on your life. You are walking in the same direction for the same purpose and in a deepening relationship with the Lord.

▶ *You and the Word*

One of the most significant ways we connect with and grow in relationship with God is through time spent in His Word, the Bible. Relationships are fostered through communication, and one of the main ways God communicates to us is through His scriptures as we let His living and active Word sink deep into our souls and change how we live.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV) "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The Bible has the power to totally transform what we do, how we do it and what we believe really matters. Spending time fellowshiping with God through reading it, studying it, memorising it and living it will put you on the fast track for growth.

Learning together from the Bible as a married couple can be one of the most precious and wonderful parts of your married life together. The Bible can guide us as we move through the seasons of life. At every step along the way seek what God is saying through the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 (NIV) says "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Time spent with God through His Word may be spent, but it is never wasted, and there is always something new for God to reveal and to be relevant for your circumstances.

The Bible is where we learn about who Jesus is and about His life. And the gospels are rich and vibrant with lessons and encouragement for us as we journey through life.

As you move into a marriage relationship some things will obviously change. You will be tightly woven with your spouse and as we will find out later in the course you have essentially become one unit. However, your personal relationship, your love and growth in Jesus comes from your heart. The responsibility for spending time in the Word is still 100% your own. But now you have the blessing of the two of you entering into communication and time spent with the Lord together. How you read the Bible and how you spend time with God in this way may look different from each other. Regardless of whether you read out loud physically together, or silently together or at different times of the day, the greatest benefit comes as you share together about what you have read and what you think God is saying to you. To open up spiritual conversations and make these a normal part of your married life.

There is no rule or expectation to share EVERYTHING that you read or learn, but the principle of openly sharing is more the key here.

Making a commitment to prioritise time in the Bible and sharing together is a great foundation stone for your marriage. It'll change your life. So as you prepare for marriage take time to discuss and to make some decisions around how you will fill your marriage with the living Word of God.

► *You and Prayer*

Prayer is indeed a wonderful thing. It is where we can express praise and gratitude, find grace and ask for help. Along with time in the Bible, prayer is at the heart of our relationship with God. To pray, which is simply to talk with Him and to listen to His Spirit, is at the core of building a healthy and vibrant relationship with God. In prayer our will is aligned with the will of the Father, and therefore prayer is an incredibly important thing to invest into.

How would you describe your prayer life? What is the communication situation between you and God?

A wonderful example of vibrant prayer is through the life of Jesus. Jesus set us the perfect example of a man who depended on prayer. He would often go up a mountain or retreat in private to spend time alone with the Father in prayer. He taught His disciples to pray and He asked them to pray for Him when He was suffering. He prayed for Himself and for His disciples and even for us. And He prayed while He was dying on the cross. Prayer was an absolute priority in the life of Jesus.

In the book of Philippians in chapter 4 it tells us that we should rejoice in the Lord and pray about anything and everything. The result of this is that the peace of God will guard our hearts and our minds. That is an incredible promise.

You are about to enter a whole new season. As you prepare for marriage, now is the perfect time to stop and reflect on this part of your spiritual growth. You may also start to think about how your prayer life will change as you go from being single to being married. If you've already been praying together as a couple that's wonderful! If not, now is a good time to start. Statistically couples who pray together, stay together.

I know of couples who start the day with prayer together - sending each other off for the day covered in prayer. Even for a moment on the way out the door. Whereas, some find that prayer at night works well after they have reflected over the day. Other couples I know pray incredibly differently and this is something that has limited their prayer time together. One prays very fervently and uses their whole body and the other is more quiet and reserved. So they chose to pray together on occasion but mostly pray independently. What's important is that they commit to praying for each other and for their marriage and to talk openly about what God is revealing to them through prayer.

However you choose to spend your time in prayer, remember that your personal prayer life is super important but there is beauty and strength that comes from praying together over all areas of your lives.

So pray, about anything and everything, always. And watch God work in you and through you with power as you are transformed to become more and more like Jesus.

▶ *In the Beginning*

There are many ideas about what marriage is and what marriage isn't. The word marriage will elicit different emotions and descriptions from person to person. We consider cultural contexts, personal experience, worldviews, imagination and dreams. So what is your idea of marriage?

Over the next few minutes we are going to take a look at what the Bible says about God's design for marriage.

In the New Testament, Jesus quoted the Genesis account of creation by saying: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

These words give us the idea of what God created marriage to be.

There are three key parts, and the order is important.

1. Leaving
2. Uniting
3. Becoming one

We begin with leaving. You may or may not be living at home with your parents as you prepare to be married, however this still is an intentional leaving of the former family unit to create the new family unit. It is also a leaving of your single, non-married life. There is a letting go that is required here to embrace the new.

Essentially your spouse now becomes your most important and prioritised family member.

Marriage requires a man and a woman to bring their whole self into marriage. To leave one foot in your family of origin or in your single life can cause problems to arise in your marriage as priorities are torn and the position of your most significant other is compromised.

Also problems can arise if you choose to hide some parts of your life from your spouse. To have secrets or compartments of your life that you are not willing to bring into this relationship but still continue to engage with. This can create roadblocks to the full uniting, and oneness that is needed to complete this union.

Which brings us to the moment of uniting. For most engaged couples, you'll be in the middle of planning a wedding ceremony right now. This is an exciting and momentous occasion and is most often shared by family and friends. The Bible is filled with covenants, binding promises, which were made at a point in time. Your wedding ceremony creates a moment in which the covenant of marriage takes place. Your wedding is when you stand before God and your family and friends and you unite your life with your spouse. It is a moment you can come back to and say 'it was then, at that moment, I completely committed myself in marriage.' As a follower of Jesus Christ we encourage you to make this a significant moment where you bring glory to God and honour and dignify each other by taking that moment as defining the start of your married life together.

And finally becoming one. The third key in a Biblical framework of marriage is the idea of becoming one flesh. This is often reflected in the sexual union between a husband and a wife, they physically become one flesh. But this is also a picture of the complete unity of the of their entire lives. Marriage is a union between a man and a woman that is so profound that they virtually become a new single person. The covenant of marriage unites every aspect of two peoples lives together. They essentially merge into a single legal, social and economic unit. And in that unit they lose much of their independence and become interdependent. Fully uniting with, becoming one with your spouse, does not mean being with them every moment, or becoming the same, or not having meaningful friendships or activities outside of your marriage. It means from the moment you are married rather than living your life independently and making decisions for yourself, you are living life as one unit and the decisions you make and the actions that you do take you do so through the lens of 'us'.

This amazing design, God's design for marriage was given before people disobeyed God. In Genesis 3 we read how people chose to disobey God, and go their own way, which is called sin. The consequences from this include damage to four key relationships:

- Our relationship with God
- Our relationship with Creation
- Our relationship with ourselves
- Our relationship with others - which includes our spouse.

We see that damage to our very selves when Genesis 3 says Adam and Eve felt shame and were afraid. We now have insecurities and flaws that we bring to our relationships.

But what was the first thing Adam said when God asked him "what have you done?" Adam pointed to Eve - "it was her fault" he said. He turned against his wife: broken relationship. God then explains the fallout of their tragic decision to rebel against Him:

In Genesis 3:16 (NIV), God says to the woman "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule

over you”, another translation (NET) says it like this “you will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you”. One of the consequences of sin is that women have a natural tendency to want to control their husbands and men have a natural tendency to want to dominate their wives. Neither of these things produce unity.

Therefore we live our lives – and build our marriages – in a world suffering the consequences of people, us included, disobeying God. So God’s design for marriage does not come naturally – we have to work to make it a reality. We will continue to explore this over the remainder of the course. The good news is that God hasn’t left us to it. He is not far off. He is close to us and through His teaching in the Bible and through His Spirit He gives us instruction for what we need to build such a marriage.

▶ *God’s Design*

After looking at God’s design for marriage based on Genesis 2, it is incredibly helpful to then jump into Ephesians chapter 5 to continue to explore a Biblical framework.

Paul writes in verses 21 - 33: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, since we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband.”

So what does it all mean? How do we take these instructions into marriage today? You’ll notice that this passage ends with the familiar words we have already looked at from Genesis - the two become one flesh. In this passage Paul describes how we can achieve this given that men and women have been made with differences to consider.

The instruction in verses 22 – 24, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” can cause difficulty for some people. The instruction ahead in verse 33 for wives to respect their husbands is a little less confronting but the instruction to submit remains. Context is very important to consider here and there are three key parts of this.

Firstly, previous to this in verse 21 Paul instructs all of us both, women and men, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”. So, all believers are called to submit to each other, but then there is an emphasis on wives submitting to their husbands. We see the same pattern in the

instruction later in the same passage, “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church.” In the Bible there are many instructions for all believers to love one another. So, we see the same pattern: all believers are called to love each other but here within marriage there is an emphasis on husbands loving their wives.

Why the emphasis on the wife submitting to her husband? And why the emphasis on the husband loving their wife? Perhaps it relates to those tendencies we saw in Genesis 3 – that one of the consequences of people rebelling against God, of sin, is that women have a natural tendency to control their husbands and husbands have a natural tendency to dominate their wives. Perhaps the antidote to a tendency to control is a call to submission and the antidote to a tendency to dominate, a call to love.

Secondly, in order to fully understand the context of a wife fully submitting to her husband we can specifically look at the very challenging instruction for a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church. How much did Jesus love the church? He died for the church. That’s how much he loves us. God gives a very clear instruction to husbands to love their wife so much that they are willing to die for her. So the idea of submission is linked to the idea of deep sacrificial love. Many wives think the idea of submitting to a husband who loves her so much he is willing to die for her isn’t so bad!

Third, the instructions to wives and husbands are separate instructions from God. Husbands are not instructed to make their wives submit. And wives are not instructed to make their husbands love. Husbands, if you think your wife is not submitting to you, talk about it with God – and keep loving your wife. And wives, if you think your husband is not loving you enough – talk about it with God – and keep submitting to and respecting your husband.

For both of you, there will be many times when you think your spouse is not following God’s instruction to them. None of us are perfect, we are a work in progress so we should not be surprised when our spouse (or we) fall short of what we expect. As in all areas of disappointment, we need to take our concerns to God; we pray. And continue to do what we are instructed to do, what we are responsible for.

But – and this is important – there is no instruction in the Bible that validates any physical, emotional or sexual abuse in marriage. If you experience any abuse, the best way to love your spouse is to get to a safe place and seek help.

Keep in mind, Paul’s instruction here is certainly less about what you are entitled to, and rather are more about what you are willing to give up and give in order to experience a marriage more like what God has desired for you.

The instructions to wives and husbands in Ephesians 5 are challenging and something you will need to work on throughout your marriage. Each couple needs to decide how they will reflect these instructions in their marriage relationship. You can get ideas from others but, ultimately, it is up to the two of you to figure out what submission, respect and love will look like in your marriage.

► *Companionship*

There are so many new things that come with getting married. Some of these changes are reflected in the 'how' you will do life from here, both in the day-to-day things as well as the bigger picture . But one of the more practical changes is another new title of husband or wife. Two parts which when they come together, complete the creation of God and make it very good.

In Genesis 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

God declares that there is a problem. Adam was alone. Which is interesting really as he clearly had a relationship with God. He had animals around him. He was surrounded by life. And yet something was missing because he was alone. Notice too that it's not Adam's complaint. This is God telling Adam - it is not good for you to be alone. God has the perfect solution. At the end of verse 18 it says that God would make a helper suitable for Adam. Having looked at every other living thing, God declared that none were suitable for the kind of community that Adam was created for.

"But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

God's solution to Adam's isolation was another person. And yet there is something much bigger going on than just another person being created. God could have created another man. A friend for Adam. But he doesn't. God not only introduces community but diversity. Not only another, another type. There's sameness but there's also distinction. In Genesis 1:27 God affirms he made men and women in the image of God and in chapter 2 we read that God looked at what was needed to complete creation and He hand-crafted a woman.

Let's take a closer look at the description of 'suitable helper' as it is often misunderstood. In English, 'suitable helper' sounds so understated and almost substandard. The English word helper, as we have come to understand the word, is not as rich and empowering as the original Hebrew word 'ezer, which is the word used here. Helper, as we might understand it suggests a mere assisting someone who could do the task almost as well without help. But 'ezer is almost always used in the Bible to describe God himself, which makes it difficult to interpret it as being inferior. Other times it is used to describe military help, such as reinforcements, without which a battle would be lost. It means this idea of a helper, given here to Eve, is an incredibly empowering word.

The word 'suitable' used here can also be misunderstood. The original Hebrew word is neged. It means much more than 'good enough' or 'that'll do'. It actually means 'like opposite' 'perfect match' Like two pieces of a puzzle that fit together because they are not exactly the same nor completely different, but they are perfectly complementary such that together they can create a complete whole.

The God given purpose to rule and be fruitful and fill the earth could not be completed alone. Adam and Eve each needed a counterpart. They needed someone different who could bring something

they alone could not provide. Adam needs Eve and Eve needs Adam. To go after their God-given commission, they would need to cooperate.

Which brings us to marriage, the coming together of man and women in a way that no other human relationship can. Marriage is the ultimate expression of what God declared was very good. A man and a woman, with some sameness, both created in the image of God, but also with different strengths and giftings.

So as you prepare for marriage as husband and wife take time to uncover how you are made and what each of you bring to this relationship. Celebrate this complementary design and that together you have been given a commission and mandate that as individuals you cannot achieve but that together you can.

▶ *Crafting a Vision*

Your wedding day is an epic celebration and major life event. One of the most exciting days of your life. Often we can have a very clear idea of what it is we are working towards for this day. Lifelong hopes and dreams for how this occasion will look and feel. And we work hard at achieving these goals.

For some people the wedding day can become a tick box for marriage. They are captivated with a vision to marry. And when they finally get to that moment at the altar and say 'I Do', there is a danger in thinking, "Done! Vision accomplished! Marriage achieved".

I have heard it said that marriage is less about the big day and more about the everyday. Therefore the aim is not to prioritise getting married so much that you forget about the marriage itself. It may not be intentional but we move on without being clear on where it is the two of us are moving on to.

We plan a lot. For our education, finances, retirement, housing, career, maybe fitness plans and travel plans. So why would we not plan for our marriage beyond our wedding and consider a vision for a lifelong marriage which defines the non-negotiables, the picture you have for your marriage and what the heart of your marriage is going to be about.

So we suggest three areas you could explore together.

Number one. A great deal of wisdom is found in listening to and learning from others who have gone before you. You will have observed some marriages that you admire and some that you may even find a little frightening.

Find people who have been married for a while that you admire, that you hold in high regard when it comes to the way they do life together and spend time with them. Perhaps invite them to share a meal with you so you can learn and understand how they have made a great marriage and consider including some of these things in your vision for marriage.

Number two. Think about where you are going. What will be at the heart of your marriage? What

will drive you? What will you be committed to? What will you fight for? And the key here is working out how you will navigate these together. Which usually comes back to the why. Whatever you decide as the non-negotiables and your goals, if you have a clear understanding as to why these are important, then you will more likely be able to achieve them. Because with a clear why, you have a matrix to put all your planning and decisions through. Both big and small.

This is important in all areas of marriage, but there is a risk to be focussed only on your goals that are material and physical. The realities of life are important to consider in a practical way of course. But what if the vision for your marriage could also include something much deeper. What if your vision for marriage included helping your spouse become a total follower of Jesus Christ.

Timothy and Kathy Keller in their book titled *The Meaning of Marriage* share a most beautiful vision that as husband and wife, within deep Christian friendship in a marriage we can help each other on the journey to becoming the new creation that God will eventually make us.

I quote here: "Within this Christian vision for marriage, here's what it means to fall in love. It is to look at another person and get a glimpse of the person God is creating and to say, "I see who God is making you, and it excites me! I want to be part of that. I want to partner with you and God in the journey you are taking to his throne. And when we get there, I will look at your magnificence and say, 'I always knew you could be like this. I got a glimpse of it on earth, but now look at you!'"

Think about words like inner beauty, greatness, perfection, honesty, passion for the things of God. Holiness and becoming more like Jesus. Until eternity you can never reach these goals or fulfil this vision completely. There is always another step to take and another celebration to be had. This part of a vision for marriage can have it's seasons and it's share of highs and lows, but together as you continue to spur on one another in your faith and your relationship with Jesus you will share a depth and a preciousness that is unlike anything you will experience with another person.

And Number three. As we have looked at marriage from a Biblical perspective we have discovered that marriage is about leaving behind, being united and then in complete unity becoming one flesh. The understanding of one flesh is difficult to get your head around in that you become one when you are married. And you are continually becoming one over your married life. It's a lot like when you accept Jesus as your Saviour you are saved in a moment, but you have a lifetime of growth of discipleship to become more and more like Jesus.

So what does becoming one look like for you? How are you going to become one spiritually, with all your heart. Emotionally, with all your soul. Intellectually, with all your mind. Physically, with all your strength?

Using these as part of your vision helps you to be really intentional about unity. There are some examples in your study guide to get you started on practically how this could look for you as a couple.

So where to from here? It may seem like an overwhelming and daunting task. But it doesn't need to be. Simply start a conversation about this and reflect on the above areas and what in your heart are your dreams for what you want your marriage to be about and what you will fight for together over time.

► *Communication*

Communication: it's the lifeblood of every relationship and a marriage can flourish with intentional and effective communication.

Key components of good communication, and especially true within marriage, is cultivating respect and assertiveness which communicates your needs and understanding clearly. While your spouse will have many amazing qualities, reading your mind will unfortunately not be one of them. Part of building unity is developing openness and direct communication. This leaves little room for misunderstanding and empowers you to love and meet the needs of the other most effectively.

But communication is also so much more than the words that we use. It is also what we chose not to say, our use of body language, our tone and how we listen.

So let's take a quick look at each of these.

Tone. Simply put, tone is not what you are saying, it's how you are saying it. And the tone you use will communicate a lot more about how you are thinking and feeling than the actual meaning of the words you are using. How about this one? "I'm fine." Fine means everything is OK, but it doesn't sound like it does it. Think about what it is that you are trying to say, how you are saying it, and how it will be heard.

Body Language. Actions speak louder than words. It is easy to recognise that when someone is focussed and attentive towards you with their body and eyes, it encourages you and helps you to feel included and comfortable. But when you are met with a scowl, lack of eye contact, the cold shoulder, rigid and folded arms or even physical withdrawal altogether, you can feel unsure, excluded, hurt and pushed away. Take note of what your body is saying in all sorts of situations. What are you communicating to each other by the way you use your body? Body language is a powerful communicator. We are going to 'hear' the body language of our spouse far louder than we are going to hear the words that they are using.

Listening. Hearing and listening are two different things. Listening well is a skill that takes practice and intentionality. Often we speak for the purpose of seeking to be understood. But rather, it is far more effective when we seek to listen and understand. This takes time to listen and not interrupt. To fully gain understanding between each other, so that you can walk forward together to reach where it is that you want to go. Marriage is not a competition. An argument, disagreement or even a simple everyday dialogue are not opportunities to be right or to win. Rather opportunities to cultivate unity. Focus on what you are trying to achieve and together work towards that. If we only focus on me and my ideas and thoughts and my opinions, and forget to listen, the conversation can easily turn from where you are trying to head, from 'us' being the primary goal and end up in a place of disconnect.

With all of this in mind, take a look at these examples of good communication and poor communication.

[Angela and Matt role play some conversations]

Great examples. It's so clear that good communication is so important.

Lastly, let's look at four types of conversations that we have within marriage.

Informal conversations. These are those everyday, little conversations about nothing much. The answer to "how was your day" or a short phone call to explain a funny situation you experienced. However small and insignificant they may seem, these conversations are still important in your marriage. They establish a simple connection between you and your spouse that doesn't require exhausting emotional vulnerability. These are moments where you relate as friends, companions sharing life together.

Second. Administrative 'meetings'. If informal conversations were like simple chitchat, these administrative meetings are more business-like. These conversations are loaded with action items – changes to the daily routine, to-do lists, appointments, social obligations, financial decisions, etc. This mode of communication is really important. It ensures that your marriage, your family and your lives operate smoothly and operate together. We simply need to have these conversations or someone will end up stuck somewhere, or in the wrong place at the wrong time or completely unprepared. Developing good habits in this area helps produce an 'us' mentality. It encourages respect and oneness as you are both on the same page.

Challenges/conflict. We are going to look at this area of communication in depth in the next clip as the management of this type of communication has a great influence on a marriage relationship. Conflict and challenges can be small or sometimes they can be huge. So it is worth taking some intentional time to look into this as a couple.

The fourth type of conversation is Life Giving Conversations. The three modes of communication we just discussed are reactive conversations – spurred on by some need or event. This fourth type of communication is often overlooked because it's proactive. Life-giving conversations are about getting to know your spouse better and strengthening the bonds between you. They're playful and affirming. They express gratitude and demonstrate curiosity. You can ask your spouse questions you've never asked before and unpack hopes and dreams.

Reactive communication will monopolize your time unless you intentionally make space for proactive communication. Even just 10 minutes a day to engage in conversation like this is life giving. You can do this over a meal, or over a coffee, out for a walk or at the end of the day in bed. Married couples who put time aside to engage in life giving conversations on a regular basis are generally happier and have greater unity.

So in all of this, pay special attention to all the aspects of communication. The quality of your marriage relationship is reflected in the way you communicate with one another. So regularly take stock of how this is going for you. Seek help early if you need it and learn and grow together as great communicators and sharers of life.

► *Conflict*

Relationships bring so much joy. We were created for community and to share life with others. A marriage is no exception. It is within a marriage relationship where we experience the deepest sense of joy and togetherness, but with this brings the other side of the coin, conflict. And this has the potential to hurt your marriage deeply.

This is because your spouse is the most significant 'other' on earth. The most important person, the closest human relationship you will ever know.

Your spouse knows you better than anyone else and probably even sees you clearer than you see yourself. And their opinion of you and their love for you matters a great deal.

Think back to that picture of the unity between a husband and a wife being essentially like you are glued together. Have you ever tried to pull two pieces of cardboard that are glued to each other apart? It's a bit of a mess. While you are in a conflict situation, it can feel a bit like you are coming undone.

All married couples experience conflict from time to time. This is not if, but rather when, and it is not a sign that you are failing or coming undone.

Healthy couples approach conflict situations in a fair way that above all else fights for restoration, and unity. The opposite of this is fighting for victory and can often end up being a fight over the very way in which you are managing the conflict. You can easily lose sight of what the actual issue was in the first place.

Listen to James 1:19 (NIV): "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

James encourages us to listen carefully. We are often quick to argue back and make a point or to keep sharing our own opinion until we win.

Proverbs 18:2 (NIV): "Fools find no pleasure in understanding, but delight in airing their own opinions."

A fool says "I don't really care what you are saying but I want to tell you what I am thinking." And in this frame of mind we fail to listen well and focus on our own victory.

Like in the good communication example from the previous, to maintain unity and prioritise 'us' rather than me, a practical tool here is to stop, listen fully and repeat back to our spouse what our spouse has just said.

It might sound a bit like "So what you are saying is..." or "When I did.... It made you feel"

It keeps your focus on the issue at hand, and helps gain clarification. You can take turns at this until you are both fully understood. This approach validates each other's feelings and leads to each person being heard. You are not necessarily agreeing with the issue but you can validate the feelings. Then from a place of understanding you can move to finding a resolution and to restore your relationship.

James then moves on to say, slow to speak. We need to guard our words faithfully.

A practical check of what you are about to say is to ask yourself:

1. Does it need to be said? and
2. Does it need to be said now?

Sometimes you have to let things go. Is saying what you'd like to say worth it? Is what you want to say worth the impact it will have? This is not implying that you sweep things under the carpet because they are too hard. But rather is what you have to say beneficial for your marriage, or simply for your own victory. And if the answer is yes, it does need to be said, then is now the right time to do so? There may be a better time for discussion than in the middle of a conflict scenario.

While you are preparing for marriage it is a great time to make some commitments to each other for what is and is not ok when you are in a conflict.

Things like. I will not call you names, I will not raise my voice, I will not bring up things from the past. I will avoid using "you never" or "you always".

Commit to simply telling the truth, what is actually happening, not the worst case scenario or an amplified version. And "yeah buts" - they are out. If want to add "Yeah but...", don't. Wait for your turn to speak and be heard, rather than justifying something while your spouse is sharing.

And lastly James says, we should be slow to become angry. Ask yourself if an anger response is worth the damage it could cause. In Ephesians 4:26 (NIV) we read, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

Anger in and of itself is not the problem. But in anger you can fall into sin. So the warning here is to not react in the flesh but rather respond in the spirit and to do so quickly. Not letting the situation simmer or linger or fester.

Forgiveness is a crucial part of conflict resolution within a marriage. The Bible tells us in the gospel of Matthew, on two separate occasions, that no matter who the initiator of the conflict is, if you have grieved someone, or if they have grieved you, that it is still your responsibility to seek restoration. And the more readily we do this and the more humbly we offer and request forgiveness the more we continue to grow in unity and love which as we continue to discover over and over again within this course, is the bottom line of what God has in store for us as a married couple.

► *Exploring Differences*

I read somewhere that "A good marriage is one where each partner secretly suspects they got the better deal." Prior to marriage we can often look at our future spouse and see everything they do and all of their quirks as qualities to be admired. We fall in love with this person. We notice their strengths, giftings, and even their weaknesses and are drawn to them. There are certainly things we

don't understand or can't identify with, but we love that about them too. And out of our head over heels, in-loveness, we feel like we got the better deal.

The rose tinted glasses eventually fade and we realise that just as we are not perfect, neither are they. It doesn't mean you begin to love them any less, it simply helps us to understand better how to relate to each other and how our differences, strengths and weaknesses can impact our marriage relationship.

People are never exactly the same. That is the beauty of creation. We are all wired and handcrafted in a slightly unique way. There is no other you to have ever walked the earth.

Married couples then, though they unite to become virtually a new single person, still maintain their uniqueness and differences. And there are many, many differences we may have. Some of which we see as a strength and some that we may identify as a weakness.

Rather than seeking to be the same, what brings a deep richness to marriage is to celebrate and encourage the way we complement each other.

Where you are the same in your strengths there is a risk that you can develop or encourage blind spots and this can result in a loss of softness and compassion for others or another point of view or way of doing something.

However, when you share a weakness you can spin into a negative spiral or lack the ability to encourage one another to grow in this area. You can give up and allow this weakness to control an area of your life, your thoughts, your behaviors or attitudes.

Differences are a blessing and an outworking of God's design of unity. They are not something to fear or strive to change in the other to make your spouse just like you. Differences can pose a risk of conflict. But this actually can be the healthiest of places as you complement each other and encourage each other to grow and mature to see things another way.

For example, Christmas. Early in our relationship I spent a Christmas with Jerram's family for the first time. They spent almost the whole day off doing their own activities. I thought it was crazy. In my upbringing we spent Christmas Day doing everything together. At first this difference was unsettling but over time we've both learned to appreciate these differences.

There will be basic differences between you. Preferences or habits that have developed over your lifetime. Some will be from your family of origin and some you will have developed all by yourself. These tend to be those things that you admire most about each other as you fall in love. These are endearing differences and attractive to you because you don't see them in yourself.

But there also may be major differences between you. These are the areas you may need to work through together and find some compromise on. These are best worked out with grace, prayer and intentional communication. The goal is always unity and complementing each other, rather than intending to change the other person to view things or operate exactly how you do.

Finally it is important to consider how your strengths and weaknesses will change over time. The man or woman you are about to marry is this way today, but in time will change. You may be

celebrating that! But in all honesty you both will look, think, act and operate very differently as time moves on. There are life events that change us, shape us and grow us. We mature over time. Circumstances can change us and the influence of others can also impact who we become. You will also change together and where you may have had strong differences in the past, over time you may notice a blending and growth in similarities.

There are many different tests and quizzes you can do to uncover personalities and different strengths. These are helpful and it gives you a window into how you both tick and why you might react or feel particularly passionate about various things. But these are not set in stone and you will need to continue to get to know each other and be a student of each other.

So the important thing to take away from all of this is to embrace who you are with a willingness to grow, to complement one another and to approach major differences with grace and knowledge that we are all a work in progress as we seek to become total followers of Jesus Christ.

► *Managing Expectations*

Do you dream of what your marriage will be like? Imagine how the future will look as you walk through milestones together? What comes to mind as a bride, when you picture the moment you walk towards your waiting groom? Or as a groom, how do you picture that moment your bride is led into your arms?

And when you imagine yourselves making a home together, do you picture yourself cleaning the oven? Do you see your spouse mopping the floor? Are there tradesmen fixing your fence? Or is there a hammer in your hand? Do you dream about the day you will welcome your first child into the world, your second, third, fourth? What does your bank account look like? Is your dream home surrounded by a quiet countryside or the hustle and bustle of the inner city?

There are expectations about all sorts of things in your marriage relationship, both the big picture and the practical, that you may or may not be consciously aware of.

Our expectations for something are built over a lifetime of experiences and sometimes it is not till they are met or not met, that we understand the expectation we had.

Having expectations, especially for such a momentous milestone like marriage is a good thing. It is completely natural. But knowing what your expectations are, and the why behind them is important.

So if some of your expectations will be known to you and some are more subconscious, where do you begin? Talking about a wide array of areas which are common in most marriage relationships will be a good start. This will help you sort out what are the expectations that each of you have individually and then to work out from these things what are the expectations that you both can work on together, either as shared expectations or how you can help each other's expectations to become reality.

You'll likely have expectations about employment, accommodation, children, time spent on various

activities, who will be responsible for certain practical tasks and much much more. Talking through these things together will uncover too which expectations are realistic and which ones are not.

When expectations are realistic, as you walk together through the months and years and find that some of these expectations are not being met, it's a fairly straightforward matter to talk with your spouse about how to address things in a way that you both can feel satisfied with.

The real challenge comes when we have unrealistic expectations in marriage that go unmet. That's because unrealistic expectations can't be met – no matter how much you demand or wish they would be. And the disappointment that comes from this can fester and transform into other more defeating emotions and choices.

So it is an incredible help to you to try and uncover some of these before you begin in marriage.

Many unspoken expectations are based on your family of origin and their values, past relationships, life experience and friends. So it is helpful when you are having these conversations to think about and recall where you have seen or heard the patterns and behaviours that you are describing as an expectation for you. Even if you walk into painful parts of your past, or your expectations surprise you, practice extending grace to each other and bravely navigate these areas together.

As a second point about expectations, there is conflicting literature on whether in marriage we should lower our expectations, and therefore will be less likely to face disappointment, or if in fact we should set our expectations high.

Dr John Gottman who has done a considerable amount of research into marriage relationships talks about the 'good enough' marriage. He talks about completely reasonable expectations to have which at face value are actually high expectations of a thriving relationship. However he suggests that what puts some expectations out of kilter is when people expect a marriage or their spouse to be perfect, to heal childhood wounds, to solve all of their problems and to be void of conflict and pain. But he explains that a 'good enough' relationship could expect the following "They are good friends. They have a satisfying sex life. They trust one another, and are fully committed to one another. They can manage conflict constructively. That means they can arrive at mutual understanding and get to compromises that work. And they can repair effectively when they hurt one another. They honor one another's dreams, even if they're different. They create a shared meaning system with shared values and ethics, beliefs, rituals, and goals. They agree about fundamental symbols like what a home is, what love is, and how to raise their children."

I too believe these things are worth fighting for and having non negotiable expectations about.

Having expectations is a healthy and good thing. Spending some time on this area as you prepare for marriage is time well spent.

► *Defining Love*

When we think about a marriage relationship, love is one of the primary words that comes to mind isn't it. So what is it all about? Let us consider three types of love.

Agape. God's love. Unconditional, servant hearted love. Agape love is the love that God demonstrated when He sent Jesus to die for us, and the love that Jesus displayed as He sacrificed His very life as He hung on the cross. It is a love that remains and is poured out freely from one to another, regardless of how that person is behaving or how loveable they may seem in that moment.

1 Corinthians 13 verses 4-8 (NIV) is a description of Agape.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

This is a totally unselfish and complete love. Love that we can expect to grow within as we are transformed from the inside out.

Agape love is often displayed richly in a parenting relationship. Parents love their children with no expectation of receiving something in return. Parents often continue to pour out love for them in the deepest of challenges and most difficult of seasons. Because Agape love changes the attitude of the giver as much as it encourages the receiver. Doing the actions of love freely and generously means that the feelings of love grow.

Philia. Which speaks of friendship, companionship, intimacy and openness. It's an affectionate kind of love. Philia is beautiful, tender and strong all at the same time. When trials come and you are in the storm, it is a friend that you need beside you to help weather the storm. And in times of celebration, it is a friend that you need beside you to share the joy with.

To love your spouse in this way doesn't just happen. It is a choice and a love to not take for granted. Be intentional about fueling this flame so that it does not grow dim.

Eros - sexual love. In Bible times, culture had degraded this word so much that this kind of love is not mentioned in the New Testament. Why? Because this kind of love can easily be misused and degraded to be sinful rather than pure. However, in God's design, Eros love is not sinful or impure. It is a beautiful gift from God to married couples to express their love for one another, strengthen the bond between them, and ensure the continuation of the human race.

The world has taken Eros love and made it all about me. My desires, my passion, my satisfaction, my self esteem and what feels good for me and my needs. This kind of love can so easily awaken our sinful nature if not kept in check. Whereas Agape and Philia are about relationship, a giving of love, Eros love can be focussed on self. But within God's boundaries of purity within marriage, erotic love, sexual love, Eros, plays a key role of a means by which we cultivate unity and oneness. We will talk more about sexual intimacy in the next clip, for this is an area which demands a conversation all on

it's own as you prepare for marriage.

We suggest you take some time now to pause this clip and discuss what you have heard so far. You can use the section of your workbook to help get you started.

* * *

After looking at three specific types of love, we now take a moment to look at love in a more practical way.

Everyone gives and receives love differently, but with a little insight into these differences, we can be confidently equipped to communicate and receive love well. As a married couple it is important to find out the primary way you both give and receive love. Without this you can spend years misunderstanding one another. Thinking you are lavishing love on your spouse only to find that it is not being received.

Think of it like a tank that needs to be regularly filled. If your tank is empty or low, you won't feel like you can pour out love to your spouse. But if your tank is full, you feel a closeness and an overflowing of love. A full tank encourages unity and you feel like a team sharing and doing life together.

A simple way to identify your primary way of giving and receiving love is through The 5 Love Languages®. The author Dr. Gary Chapman suggests 5 key languages that naturally fill our tank. The 5 languages are: Gifts, Physical Touch, Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service and Quality Time.

If you naturally speak a different love language to each other, then you will need to become a student of your spouse and learn how they best receive love. There is a level of sacrifice required here to intentionally love your spouse in a way that best communicates this to them, rather than in a way that is natural and easy for you to give. Most of us experience one or two of these languages most strongly.

Love is something we all need and crave and within marriage love is something to be prioritised and fought for. As a newly married couple you will likely float around in the 'in love' phase for a while.

Once this fades then true love, the breadth and depth of love, the 'I choose to love you and put your needs and feelings ahead of my own' love can begin. And this love that is worked for and fought for, and is given freely, is love that will cause your marriage to flourish and thrive.

▶ *Sexual Intimacy*

Sexual intimacy is an incredibly important aspect of marriage. And usually, over our lives, we are not given one clear message on the topic. Rather a wide array of differing information, some that is helpful and some that is not.

So what does the Bible say?

The Bible teaches that sex is to be reserved for marriage alone and that Biblical marriage is between one man and one woman.

Let's return to Genesis 2:24 again. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh"

Remember the order here. Leaving, uniting and then one flesh. We have already explored 'one flesh' meaning the joining of your whole lives together. And this is true. But the greatest expression of 'one flesh' is within the sexual union of a husband and a wife.

So what about sex before marriage?

The Bible tells us not to unite with someone physically or sexually, unless you are also willing to unite with that person emotionally, personally, socially, economically and legally. In other words, don't become physically naked and vulnerable with another person without first becoming vulnerable in every other way. Which is within the covenant of marriage. To become one flesh only sexually, is like trying to get a plane flying without an engine or a tail or a wing. It just doesn't work. It all needs to come together otherwise you are setting yourself up for disaster. And you can plant regret and remorse and guilt and even hardness to the Lord into one another in a marriage if you start off without bringing it all together.

So we move on to talking about sex within marriage. What is it all about and why is it such an important expression of love and unity?

The Bible affirms that sex within marriage has at least four main purposes.

1. For unity. As already covered, sex is the greatest expression of unity between a husband and a wife. It is where you are totally naked. Totally vulnerable. Giving all of yourself to the other for mutual benefit.
2. To produce children. Genesis 1:28 Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.

When God designed sex as part of a marriage relationship, he had the continuation of the human species in mind. One of the reasons God intended sex to be within a marriage relationship was because of the possible outcome of a child being conceived. And He knew that within a loving and healthy marriage is the best place for a child to be nurtured and raised. However, it is important to understand that having children does not complete a marriage and is not essential for a Christian married couple. Some couples choose not to have children for various reasons while others face infertility and this can be a great grief for them. But rather the point to understand here is that having sex can produce children.

3. For meeting sexual desires and managing temptation. The Bible is a practical book and acknowledges the reality of our sexual drives. God has made us sexual beings with a sexual appetite, and sex within marriage is designed to meet these needs. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, while addressing the Christians living in Corinth at the time, that regular sexual intercourse is not only beneficial for their relationship, but also helps curb the temptations around them.

- And 4. Sex is for fun! This is the main point. The Bible is filled with poetic and powerful descriptions of sexual union between a husband and a wife. Sex is an opportunity to enjoy one another "naked and without shame" as it was in the beginning. If you take time to read the Song of Solomon, you will see this is a whole book devoted to a description of the physical intimacy of marriage. The imagery

of pleasure is obvious and the balance of roles between the man and the woman are strong as both take the lead and both experience great joy. Our physical structure, how God designed us, also points to the fact that God intended sex to be pleasureable and for enjoyment. Also, sexual intimacy begins long before the bedroom. Even possible in the kitchen! Your expression of sexual intimacy with each other is not just found in sexual intercourse. As you grow and learn about each other in this area be prepared for intimacy to be present in many ways.

Before we close off this topic we want to cover a couple of important points.

Often for followers of Jesus, couples can struggle to get their heads around the fact that before marriage sex has been something to avoid. It has been talked about as sinful or dirty or not at all. Yet suddenly you are meant to flick a switch and accept sex as celebrated and intended for pleasure, a gift from God. God is all for it but there can still be a deep sense that somehow He looks away from sexual union and is somehow displeased.

It is not sex itself that is wrong or sinful, it is the context in which it is expressed that leads to sin. God blesses the sexual union within marriage that is beneficial to both parties. And in terms of rules, within marriage there are actually no rules. If you both agree something is OK, so it is mutually beneficial and God has said it is OK, and if it is just the two of you within marriage, then you are free to enjoy each other and accept this wonderful gift.

Another common misunderstanding is that sexual impurity disappears within marriage. That when you are welcomely having sex with your spouse, that all other sexual temptation or baggage from the past will magically vanish. This is simply not true. As we read in Corinthians it certainly can help, but we have an enemy who uses sexual temptation to lure us into sexual sin. And sexual sin is critically damaging to a marriage relationship. Sexual integrity is not just withholding from sex before marriage, but also is required of us throughout marriage. The marriage bed is to be kept pure.

The journey of sexual intimacy within marriage is lifelong. You will continue to learn new ways of enjoying each other, you'll need to adapt to be sensitive to each other's needs within certain seasons of life and ultimately commit to continue to grow in how to best express love and the deepest sense of unity between you as you unite together naked and without shame.

► *Money, Money, Money*

Money is a practical and necessary part of life. Coming together in marriage to create a new economic unit will require some time to establish a shared understanding between the two of you and a plan for how you will navigate this area together. Nearly all married couples will experience periods of financial difficulty and challenges. Therefore it is wise to lay a firm foundation on Biblical principles as you begin.

Planning. Having a plan for your money is called a budget. A budget is telling your money where you want it to go, rather than wondering where it went. In Luke 14:28 we read "Suppose one of you wants

to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?

Budgeting might sound like a simple and obvious thing, but a workable budget could be one of those things that keeps getting pushed aside in all the organisation and fun that you encounter when heading into marriage.

Having a realistic view of the money that comes in and where you decide together it goes out, is important. It brings you to a common place of understanding and expectation, and it can help you from ending up in unnecessary debt.

The key to budgeting is to be realistic, plan for the miscellaneous and have a contingency for those unforeseen costs. But also within your budget you can ensure you prioritise those things that enhance your relationship and life.

Budgets are flexible, so you can revisit and adapt these as your income or expenses change. Financial situations are never certain. But committing to budgeting as part of managing your finances will determine how you navigate any financial situation. In plenty and in want.

Stewardship. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are owned by God. In fact, you are twice owned. God knit you together in your mothers womb – he created you. Then he redeemed you at the cross. Your life is His, and all you have is given to you by Him.

And so, as people, owned by the Lord, we are stewards of all he has given us. We are managers, not owners. We are caretakers of His assets which he has entrusted to us for a season. How we handle our money and possessions demonstrates who we really believe is the true owner, God or us.

A great question to ask when making financial decisions is: in spending this money, am I acting as if I owned it, or am I acting as a steward of what God has entrusted to me? When we grasp that we are a steward and not an owner of what we have, it totally changes our perspective.

Generosity. This flows out of stewardship. Generosity is being open handed and not tight fisted with what we have been given for the blessing of others. If you view your money as not your own, it is much easier to give it away! Also consider Matthew 6:19–21

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

In these verses Jesus challenges us with a choice. Accumulate stuff here on earth, which ultimately has no value. Or use it in such a generous way that you are investing it in the coming Kingdom.

Freedom. Living is expensive! When you first get married there can be so much that you want to purchase. But the principles you live by and the habits you form to fund your living are important. There is a warning in Proverbs 22:7. “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.” Borrowing money may seem like an easy way to buy what you want. However without

restraint, it can lead to debt that will significantly impact your financial means or even end up unmanageable which leads to a place of deep distress.

Unity. Navigating differences in how you manage your finances will be one of the areas that brings the greatest challenge to unity within your marriage. Therefore, considering how you will achieve 'oneness' in your financial management is worth some conversation.

Part of this is making a decision if you will have a joint account or if you will develop a system to run separate accounts. Having joint accounts doesn't mean you can't have individual spending or that you need to sign off every dollar together. Within your budget you can determine how this will work for you as a couple. Whatever you decide, take some time to practically put this decision through a lens of building unity

In bringing all this together, your financial management will have a great impact on your life and relationship. Poor management or disunity can bring deep distress and is one of the leading causes of failed marriages. So as you work through the foundation setting for your financial decisions, keep in mind these Biblical principles. Then when the storms come or the disagreements arise, you know where you stand and you can more easily stand firm together.

► *Beyond Us*

As followers of Jesus we are called to be salt and light, people who live their lives as integral parts of communities in a way that shines who Jesus is.

In the gospel account of Matthew, Jesus said we are the light of the world. If you take a moment to say that out loud, "I am the light of the world!" It sounds like a crazy, outlandish statement to make. But it's true.

In and through every area of your life you will have opportunities to share your faith in Jesus and your marriage is a wonderful example of this. The way you approach situations, make decisions, choose to love, respect and honour each other. All of these things and more can be used as a testimony that points people back to who Jesus is and His work in and through your lives.

In preparing for marriage this opportunity is highlighted as you will find yourself in many conversations with people who may ask questions about some of the decisions you are making. Perhaps this will be in the way you choose to live before marriage or maybe even why you are choosing marriage at all. But also as you prepare your wedding day, there are opportunities to glorify God and share about the hope you have in Him.

So as you grow as a married couple, your evangelistic outreach can be both individual but also united. We talked earlier in the course about marriage being a picture of Christ and the church, God and His people. Consider your marriage as much more than being for you both to enjoy each other and for your own reward. Rather through your marriage, God can use you in the lives of many, many others.