

FINDING THE  
**RIGHT ONE**  
FOR YOU

**H. NORMAN WRIGHT**



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## **FINDING THE RIGHT ONE FOR YOU**

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# MARRIAGE—IS IT THE ANSWER FOR YOU?

**T**wo months out of college and a month away from graduate school, I took the plunge. I got married. Twenty-two years of being single came to an end, and I really looked forward to marriage. But did I actually know what to expect? No. Did I know how to function as a husband? Not really. So you could say I wasn't fully prepared for what I encountered. But I began to learn and grow.

Marriage. You want to be married or you wouldn't be reading this book. In fact, you're looking for that special someone who will be a wonderful companion, meet all of your needs, and totally complete you. *But you're not going to find such a person!* Every person you find will be flawed. But that's all right. All marriages begin with that condition. Keep searching, but realize that even with the best match you find, you won't really be 100 percent compatible in the beginning. However, you can *become* compatible. Plan on that as a major marriage goal for the first five to ten years. That's what it takes if you work at it. If you don't, you may never learn to mesh together. That's alarming, isn't it? I want you to be alarmed! I want you to be aware of what it takes to be

married and to make it a fulfilling experience for you. Let's think about you and marriage for a while.

If you're considering marriage, you must have some hopes and dreams about it. Exactly what are you hoping marriage will do for you? When I worked with a number of college departments and singles' groups in churches, I asked this question: "What will you get out of marriage that you wouldn't get if you were to remain single?" It's a question to think about, pray about, and discuss with a trusted friend or several married couples for realistic clarification. Please notice the word *realistic!*

### **What Happens When You Marry**

When you marry, you and your spouse will experience a momentous head-on collision if you expect to continue life as you now know it in your marriage. Each of you will need to do some housecleaning and abandon your world as you know it now, so you can form a new life and a new culture. Most of us aren't expecting that drastic a transition. But you're not marrying a clone who thinks, acts, and does things just like you. So who gives in, changes, and adapts? Which way is best? You'll have to discover that together. It's so much easier to confront as many of these issues as possible before you marry, rather than be devastated and disillusioned by them after the wedding. As one man said, "Marriage is not a 50–50 proposition. It's more like a 90–10 relationship. Sometimes you give 90, and sometimes you get 90. But don't keep score."

Getting married will change your dating relationship. All of the conscious and unconscious expectations you brought with you will now be tested, and some will be found wanting. The marriage itself acts as a trigger to unleash the underlying hopes, fears, needs, and desires that have been lying dormant for years, awaiting the time they could be exposed.

If you question whether or not getting married brings about significant changes, think about this. In a major national survey of what happened during the first year of marriage, 50 to 60 percent of newlyweds (and half of them had lived together prior to marriage) reported:

- The number of arguments they had changed after they were married.
- Their tendency to be critical of one another changed (most were more critical).
- Their feelings of self-confidence changed.
- Their relationship with their own family changed.
- Their attitude toward their work changed.
- Their interest in having an attractive home changed.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, between 40 and 50 percent said they had occasional doubts whether their marriage would last, had significant marital problems, and reported discovering that being married was harder than they ever thought it would be.<sup>2</sup>

This same survey found a disturbing and sobering fact that could be very beneficial for those planning to marry. There were as many regrets about the first year of marriage as people who have been married. Almost everyone wished they had done something differently. The most frequently mentioned factor concerned developing goals and specifying their needs before marriage. They wished they had assumed more responsibility for the success of the relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Of those in this survey who divorced, all of them said the problems began at the beginning of their marriage, but many denied or ignored the problems until it was too late.<sup>4</sup>

Sounds overwhelming and almost impossible, doesn't it? Well, on your own it is. I don't know how couples ever work it out without learning to submit to God. Claire Cloninger, in her book *When the Glass Slipper Doesn't Fit and the Silver Spoon Is in Someone Else's Mouth*, described the miracle of marriage extremely well:

I figure that the degree of difficulty in combining two lives ranks somewhere between rerouting a hurricane and finding a parking place in downtown Manhattan. I am of the opinion that only God Himself can make a marriage happen really well. And when He does it His way, it's one of His very best miracles. I mean, the Red Sea was good, but for my money this is better. What God can create out of...two surrendered lives is "infinitely more than we ever dare to ask or imagine."<sup>5</sup>

Through Him we can discover how to experience His grace in our marriage. Along with the abandonment of your single lifestyle is the need to abandon yourself to His will and His strength as you proceed through your marriage. There may be days in which no matter how well you prepared for your marriage you may stop and say, "This isn't exactly what I expected. Was this the best decision for me? I thought so at that time." When this happens, that's where the depth of realistic love (which is discussed in a later chapter) and commitment will have to sustain your marriage.

In a book of essays on marriage, Mike Mason wrote, "Marriage involves a continuous daily renewal of a decision which, since it is of such a staggering order as to be humanly impossible to make, can only be made through the grace of God."<sup>6</sup>

## **The Results of Living Together Before Marriage**

What about living together? Many couples feel that's the solution

and will prevent divorce. One of the most damaging myths to aid in the destruction of long-term marriage is that “living together before marriage will give a couple a better foundation for marriage.” In every research study this pattern has been found to be deadly to the marriage relationship. To be blunt, when a couple lives together before marriage they can expect failure. The divorce rate is significantly higher for these couples. To give you a perspective on what happens to such couples, of 100 couples who began living together, 40 of them will break up before marriage. Of the 60 who marry, at least 35 will divorce, which leaves 25 out of the original 100 who make it.<sup>7</sup>

Many who read this amazing result will say, “But we’re the exception. We’re different. We’ll make it.” But those who protest so loudly usually become a statistic.

When couples live together there is a denial of reality that divorce could happen to them. Living with another person is not the same as auditioning for a part in a play and hoping to get it. You don’t play house and audition for the part of a husband or wife. When you live together or are just sexually active, your objectivity in decision making becomes clouded. I’ve seen this with many couples. When a couple becomes sexually active or lives together prior to marriage, it makes it difficult to make objective decisions or rationally view the problem areas. It’s much easier to learn and discern issues when you’re dating than when you’re sexual or living together.

It is impossible to duplicate the process of marriage by living together. There is always that underlying attitude, “This is a test. This is a trial run. Let’s find the problems now so I can bail out of this relationship.” This is a far cry from “Let’s find the problems so we can work on them and learn to be compatible.” When you live together there is a limit of what you invest, not only emotionally but financially as well. You don’t usually have children, and there is a



sense of awkwardness and uncomfortableness around other people with different values. There is still a limited and selective acceptance of this involvement depending upon the group you're with. It's like trying to be somewhat married but without the rules.

When you live together you reflect an ambivalence. You don't want the single lifestyle nor do you want marriage. It's not the best of both worlds. It is actually worse. You're single, but you don't have the freedom to cultivate new relationships. You're not fully married, so you cannot develop intimacy to its fullest degree either. There's a cloud of uncertainty that hangs over the relationship.<sup>8</sup>

Living together doesn't give you the opportunity to build intimacy; rather, it brings up issues of who shops, who cooks, who cleans, etc. You have one foot in the relationship and one foot out.

### **Premarital Sexual Involvement— Reasons to Wait**

These next statements are what I call “toe-steppers,” but they need to be said. When couples live together or have a sexual relationship, not only does it cloud the decision-making process, it also reflects the attitude of less mature, “instant gratification” people. The greater the level of maturity, the more you are able to delay gratification and establish healthy boundaries. You feel good about yourself and your identity.

Living together is usually more of a convenience for the man than the woman. A woman tends to live with a man to be wanted and taken care of. A lot of energy is exerted trying to determine “Is this going to work?” after you move in, instead of saying, “Yes, we will make this work!”

I've already mentioned the problem of instant gratification in premature sexual involvement. But there are three other major reasons to wait until marriage before engaging in sexual intercourse. One is the clear teaching of Scripture. If you are involved with a

person who says that the Bible isn't for today or that it doesn't teach sexual purity prior to marriage, you are involved with someone who is either biblically illiterate or puts his/her own desires ahead of God's plan—or both!

A second reason has already been mentioned: It clouds the rationality needed to make wise decisions.

But the third reason is that sexually active individuals are more likely to divorce. The sociological evidence indicates that non-virgins increase their odds for divorce by about 60 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Jim Talley, in *Too Close, Too Soon*, gives an interesting insight concerning the sexual relationship. In his book, written with Bobbie Reed, he notes that “men and women have a tendency to approach intimacy differently. For men, physical intimacy often precedes emotional involvement; however, women usually relate emotionally before they are physically close to a dating partner.” This creates inevitable misunderstandings.

If a woman believes that physical contact follows emotional intimacy, then she may assume her partner to be as emotionally committed to the relationship as she... She may start expecting a marriage proposal once her partner initiates physical intimacy. Perfectly logical to her; possibly terrifying to him. The relationship may end at this point. The man, completely surprised by the depth of his partner's emotional attachment to him... may withdraw, explaining that he isn't ready for a serious relationship.

True intimacy takes time to develop as trust is built into each facet of a relationship by a series of shared experiences... Recognizing and accepting the fact that physical and emotional intimacies tend to have different priorities for men and women is the first step in resolving those differences. The second step is to exercise mutual patience.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, patience is *not* the characteristic of most modern romances—sexual intimacy is the norm, and it is like putting rocket boosters on a Ford and shooting it down a highway at high speed. Dr. Talley uses another image to describe the danger:

Premarital sex creates instability in the relationship. It is like trying to build the second floor of a building on a few sticks in the ground. There is guilt, an unrealistic expectation of marriage, when neither made that commitment, and an intensity in the relationship without a foundation of friendship to hold it up.<sup>11</sup>

You may say, “It’s not only too difficult to abstain, it’s an impossibility. It’s unrealistic. It’s unnatural.” Really? Consider this:

The attitude of much of society seems to be that our sexual appetite *must be satisfied*. We’re told that normal, healthy life requires it. We have to eat, drink, and have intercourse to live. But that’s simple falsehood. It is possible to live a fully normal, healthy, and happy life without sexual intercourse. You’ll die if you don’t eat and drink, but you won’t die if you abstain from sex. It’s the failure (perhaps I should say refusal) to recognize this fact that makes it impossible for many people to honestly consider self-control in regard to their sexual life. Self-control is not only possible, it’s also required of the Christian single. It’s God’s rule of life for us, and we must seek it if we mean to walk with Him.

Let me suggest some things that will help in the struggle for self-control.

First, self-control is simply impossible for the person who refuses to make a commitment to it. Self-control begins with a hard and clear decision to be a certain kind

of person. The single person who toys around with his commitment is simply guaranteeing his failure, but the person who honestly determines that he will refrain from sexual intercourse is going to have success.

I want to emphasize the *certainty of success* for those who make a personal commitment to refrain from intercourse. A real commitment made by a person who knows himself well will bring success. I'm talking of a life-and-death determination.<sup>12</sup>

## Factors That Make a Marriage Work

What are some factors that will bring about a marriage that survives?

Those couples who have fulfilling marriages put their partner as the number-one person in their life. Their family of origin (parents and siblings) is now secondary. They have either separated from them emotionally in a healthy way or have made peace with whatever the issues have been. They now function as adults without dependence upon their original family.

### Commitment

The glue that will keep marriage together is not love. There is a word that is becoming foreign in meaning and application to our culture in general—it's the word *commitment*. Oh, I hear many people who say they can commit to someone or something, and their commitment is in place when everything is going well. It's when things get tough that the true level of commitment is evident.

Marriage is an unconditional commitment and not a contract. Some psychologists, marriage counselors, and ministers have suggested that marriage *is* a contract, and many people are quick to agree. But is this true?

In every contract there are conditional clauses. A contract

between two parties, whether they be companies or individuals, involves the responsibility of both parties to carry out their part of the bargain. These are conditional clauses or “if” clauses. If you do *this*, the other person must do *this*, and if the other person does *this*, you must do *this*. But in the marriage relationship there are no conditional clauses. Nowhere in the marriage ceremony does the pastor say, “If the husband loves his wife, then the wife continues in the contract.” Or, “If the wife is submissive to her husband, then the husband carries out the contract.” Marriage is an unconditional commitment into which two people enter.

In most contracts there are escape clauses. An escape clause says that if the party of the first part does not carry out his responsibilities, then the party of the second part is absolved. If one person does not live up to his part of the bargain, the second person can get out of the contract. In marriage there is no escape clause.

Commitment means many things to different people. For some, the strength of their commitment varies with how they feel emotionally or physically. The word *commit* is a verb and means “to do or to perform.” It is a binding pledge or promise. It is a private pledge you also make public. It is a pledge carried out to completion despite obstacles and roadblocks. It is a total giving of oneself to another person. Yes, it is risky, but it makes life fulfilling.

Perhaps a better way to describe this is to compare it to bungee jumping. If you’ve ever taken the plunge, you know that when you take that step off the platform you are committed to following through. There is no time to think it over or change your mind. There is no turning back.

A friend of mine shared with me what made his marriage last. He said, “Norm, we each had a commitment to each other and to the marriage. When our commitment to each other was low, it was the commitment to the marriage that kept us together.”

Commitment to another person until he or she dies seems idealistic to some. When it suits us and we're not inconvenienced by the commitment, we keep it. But when certain problems occur, it's not valid. Commitment is more than continuing to stick it out and suffer with a poor choice of a spouse. It's not just maintaining; it's investing. It's not just enduring; it's working to make the relationship grow. It's not just accepting and tolerating negative and destructive patterns on the part of your spouse; it's working toward change. It's sticking to someone regardless of circumstances. Listen to this wife's story.

In 1988, I was diagnosed with Epstein Barr virus (chronic fatigue syndrome). It really changed my life, which had been filled with excitement and vibrancy. My husband Kelly has stood with me and become my protector through these past years of adjustment. He has taken care of our family, when my strength would not allow me. He has held my hand through depression, including 10 days in the hospital. He has insisted I get needed rest, even if it puts more of a burden on him. He has paid the price of any hopeful cure we have found, no matter the cost. He has been more than a husband, he has been my best friend. A friend that has stayed closer than any family member. He was my "knight in shining armor" when I met him and he has proven to be so throughout our 14½ years of marriage. I sometimes tell him that he has been "my salvation," because I don't know that I would still be going on, if it weren't for his strength. I don't know that I would still walk with the Lord if it were not for his encouragement. Knowing him has been the greatest experience in my life.

If you want your marriage to work, keep in mind there will be ups and downs throughout the life of your marriage. There will

be massive changes—some predictable and others intrusive. They hold the potential for growth, but are risky at the same time. Many marriages die because too many couples ignore the inescapable fact that relationships and people change.

A wife shared the following:

Since we have been married 50 years, you can just imagine how much change we have gone through: 3 wars, 11 presidents, 5 recessions, going from the Model A to the moon, from country roads to the information superhighway. While these changes around us have been great, the personal changes God has enacted within us through each other have been even greater. Although we often couldn't see how God was working in our lives at the time, we look back now and realize our marriage has been a school of character development. God has used my husband in my life, and He's used me in his life to make us more like Christ. So what are the lessons we've learned about how God uses marriage to change us? There are many. Through 50 years of marriage we've learned that differences develop us, that crises cultivate us, and that ministry melts us together.

First, God has used our differences to help us grow. There have been many, many crises that God has used to develop us and to grow us. The first one was the big, big one—the crisis of being separated as soon as we got married. Ours was a wartime romance. We met at church, dated two months, got married after three weeks of engagement, and just after two months of marriage, we didn't see each other for the next two years. Jimmy was shipped to the South Pacific during World War II. When he returned two years later, we were total strangers, but we were married to each other!

How would you have handled that situation? How do you

handle the difficult, sudden, and painful changes? You've got to be willing to face the fact that change exists. You will change, your marriage will change, your partner will want you to change, and you will want your partner to change.

I'm sure that when you marry there will be behaviors and responses on the part of your partner that you would like changed. That's normal. But keep this in mind:

It's always a mistake to depend on your partner magically changing after marriage. Everybody changes. But basing a marriage on the hope that helpful change will just happen is a dangerous hope. Many people marry believing that intolerable conditions will improve. Those conditions do improve if there is a sufficiently strong commitment to the marriage. However, things often get worse before they get better. This time of getting worse happens because we are so reluctant to make waves—we close our feelings, confront ourselves, and face our situation. The hope that the problems will just effortlessly go away is an enticing fantasy that is hard to let go.<sup>13</sup>

You can impact your future partner if you're an encourager rather than a critic, a forgiver rather than a collector of hurts, an enabler rather than a reformer. I've seen so many couples where the marriage has stifled and limited one or both of the partners. But a good marriage frees each person to be all he or she can become.

Donald Harvey, author of *The Drifting Marriage* says,

Making a commitment to marriage as an institution is not meant to be a sentencing. Its intent is to offer security and stability. All couples have conflicts. Every marriage has to make adjustments. Feeling secure in a mate's commitment to the marriage allows the opportunity for dealing with conflicts and for needed adjustments to occur. This is what makes marriage resilient.



A marriage can endure many affronts, whether from within or without, if the commitment to marriage as an institution is strong. It takes this kind of commitment for growth to occur.<sup>14</sup>

What in your life have you made a commitment to and stuck with through the good times and the bad? What have you made a commitment to but discarded because of difficulties? Think of these questions in regard to a job, school, friends, promises made to others, and giving to your church. Have you ever been more committed at times than uncommitted? If you're interested in another person (or when you do become interested), how has that person handled the commitments in his or her life? Do you know? Have you discussed it? It's essential to discover this pattern prior to marriage.

Commitment has little to do with your feelings; it's an act of the mind and the will. Basically, you make a decision and stick with it. If you are considering marrying someone, this is the time to look at your and the other person's level of commitment.

Your decision to stick to a relationship can be what makes a marriage last. If you enter a marriage with the belief that this marriage will last "until one of us dies," your perspective is different than if you believe divorce is an option. The key word here is *attitude*, and it's based upon God's Word.

A verse that has meant so much to me is one which I ask couples in premarital counseling to build their marriage upon: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing [or trying] of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:2-3). It's easy to read a passage like this and say, "Well, that's fine." It is another thing, however, to put it into practice.

What does the word *consider* or *count* actually mean? It refers to an internal attitude of the heart or the mind that allows the trial and

circumstance of life to affect us adversely or beneficially. Another way James 1:2 might be translated is: “Make up your mind to regard adversity as something to welcome or be glad about.”

You have the power to decide what your attitude will be. You can approach a problem and say, “That’s terrible—totally upsetting. That is the last thing I wanted for my life. Why did it have to happen now? Why to me?”

The other way of “considering” the same difficulty is to say: “It’s not what I wanted or expected, but it’s here. There are going to be some difficult times, but how can I make the best of them?”

The verb tense used in the word *consider* indicates a decisiveness of action. It’s not an attitude of resignation: “Well, I’ll just give up. I’m stuck with this problem. That’s the way life is.” If you resign yourself, you will sit back and not put forth any effort. The verb tense actually indicates that you will have to go against your natural inclination to see the trial as a negative force. There will be some moments when you won’t see it like that at all, and then you’ll have to remind yourself: “No, I think there is a better way of responding to this. Lord, I really want You to help me see it from a different perspective.” And then your mind will shift to a more constructive response. This often takes a lot of work on your part.

God created us with both the capacity and the freedom to determine how we will respond to those unexpected incidents that life brings our way. You may honestly wish that a certain event had never occurred. But you cannot change the fact.

My wife and I fell in the high-risk group for marriages. Our second child was profoundly mentally retarded. Having a handicapped child with any type of problem has a destructive effect on marriages in our society. About 80 percent of marriages in which there is a disabled child end in divorce. When our son was 22, he died. Seventy to 80 percent of couples who lose a child in death

get a divorce. We learned to be survivors through the grace and comfort of God and the stability of His Word.

The attitude reflected in James 1:2-3 means that when you encounter problems, disappointments, and difficulties in your life, why be surprised or shocked? Your partner will not be all you expected and will disappoint you, as you will your partner. That really isn't new. The question is, How will you handle it? What can you make out of the situation? How can you grow? How could you respond differently?

If you want a healthy relationship, make it that way. Today there's a sense of entitlement. "I deserve to have what I want and, if not, I'll bail." There's a sense of immediate fulfillment reflected in "I don't want to wait ten years for this. I want it now." I see this quite often with couples who want to live at an economic level in the first few years of their marriage that took their parents 30 years of hard work to attain. A marriage relationship will take years to develop into what you want it to become.

I like what Neil Warren said about one of the advantages that commitment provides for a relationship.

Commitment significantly eases the fear of abandonment. It is this fear that is central to so many persons. It is often the most potent fear of all. When we were young and unable to take care of ourselves, we worried about becoming lost in a crowd, forgotten while waiting to be picked up at school, or left alone by dying parents. Fears like these persist throughout our lives. We shudder at the very thought of abandonment.

That's why a spouse's promise to remain devoted means so much. Your partner will be loyal through every kind of circumstance. That frees you in a radical way. It allows you to be yourself at the deepest of levels, to risk and grow, to be absolutely authentic without any fear of being abandoned.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps one husband's description of commitment sums it up best of all:

Commitment is dangerous. It can be exploited. If my wife takes my commitment for granted, she may rest too easily on her laurels. Perhaps commitment should be not simply to each other as we are but to the highest potentialities we can achieve together. Commitment then would be to marriage not simply as a status but as a dynamic process. Let me commit myself to a lifelong adventure, the adventure of living with this woman. The route of this adventure has been only dimly charted by those who have gone before. Because I am unique and my partner is unique, our marriage will also be unique. We commit ourselves to undertaking this adventure together and to following wherever it may lead. Part of the excitement of marriage is not knowing in advance what either the joys or the sorrows will be. We can be sure, however, that we will be confronted with countless challenges. Commitment provides the momentum for going forward in the face of those challenges.<sup>16</sup>

Are you able to make such a commitment? If so, consider marriage.

Is there anything else a person needs to know before plunging into marriage?

### *Resolving Conflicts Successfully*

It is helpful to look at the various studies that have been conducted on marriages that succeed or fail. In the book *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, the results show that marriages will last when a couple has the ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship. Too many couples over the years have said a sign of a healthy marriage and marital happiness is

having a lower level of conflict. “We never fight” is their motto. But relationships are built and strengthened by facing and reconciling differences. This is what leads to a greater level of happiness and satisfaction in marriage.

Everyone differs, however, in the way they resolve differences. The author of the book just mentioned has found there are three different styles of problem-solving that are reflected in healthy marriages. There are *validating marriages* in which couples compromise frequently. They work out their differences in a calm manner to each individual’s satisfaction whenever a problem surfaces.

There are two other styles which used to be considered unhealthy patterns, but that doesn’t seem to be the case reflected in *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*. In *conflict-avoiding marriage*, couples agree to disagree but rarely confront their problems head-on. They avoid discussions they know will end up in deadlock. They focus on what they appreciate in the relationship, accentuate the positive, and accept the rest of what is unresolved. (Personally, I think there are some drawbacks to this style and the next one as well.)

The third style is the *volatile marriage* in which there are frequent and often intense disputes. Voices are raised and listening is not the best. They seem to enjoy these times, and these couples tend to be more affectionate than others as well.

So all three solve their differences in various ways.

Is there a common thread in these three varied styles that is the ingredient which brings happiness? Yes, and it’s very simple. When there are *five times* as many *positive* as *negative* moments together, then your marriage is more likely to be fulfilling.<sup>17</sup>

What about it? If you’re in a relationship now, what is the positive level compared to the negative? Going into a marriage from a position of strength is far better than with a deficit. My own feeling is if you don’t learn to resolve conflicts before you marry, wait. Why proceed when you haven’t learned how to develop

harmony? This is a skill that anyone can learn, but the time to refine it is before the commitment is made.

### *Vulnerability and Intimacy*

What else can you do to enhance the prospects of having a successful marriage? Following the guidelines and suggestions in this book in selecting a life partner is a beginning step. Going through extensive premarital counseling with a trained and knowledgeable counselor or minister is a must as well.

In healthy marriages there is a high degree of vulnerability and intimacy. Both persons are aware of their feelings and needs. They're willing to express what these are and how they would like them fulfilled. And they don't withdraw when conflict emerges. But keep in mind that both of you need to be able to do this. Just one doesn't carry the marriage.

### *Acceptance*

Marriages that make it have two people who can accept imperfections and differences. They have learned how to influence one another in positive ways and bring out the best in each other. They've learned what can be changed and what cannot. Personality types and characteristics won't change; behavioral habits certainly can. What is your capability in this area?

### *Ability to Speak Each Other's Language*

When two people plan to spend their lives together, they have to communicate in such a way that they connect. And since in many ways you marry a foreigner, you had better learn the other person's language. If there is one key ingredient to the complex process of communication it's this: Learn to speak your spouse's language, and the closeness and intimacy you're seeking can happen.

For example, such a simple difference as one of you being an

“amplifier” when you talk and the other a “condenser” can drive a wedge between the two of you. An amplifier is someone who uses several detailed, descriptive sentences in explaining something. This person wishes his or her partner would do the same. Unfortunately, they often pressure their condenser partner to open up and use a multitude of sentences. The condenser is a bottom-line sort of person who may give a two-sentence response, but often one line is sufficient. This person would like his or her partner to do the same. They can tune out quite readily when their spouse amplifies. If each would adapt their natural style to their spouse’s style when they talk, each would respond better. We’ll talk more about this later.

In a counseling session one day a man said, “I’d like to find a woman that I could understand and get along with as well as I get along with my male friends, but it’s impossible.” I said, “No, it’s not. It’s very possible if you are willing to become flexible, realize that you and a woman are aliens, that you need to learn about male-female cultural differences, and learn to see them as a learning challenge that can enrich your life rather than view them as a pain in the neck. If you do that, you’ll get along!”

There are many factors that contribute to our unique way of communication, including personality, gender, and learning style. When you learn and implement what you have learned, the intimacy in your relationship will develop. (For complete information on personality types, gender differences, and help in learning how to speak one another’s language, see chapters 4-9 in *How to Change Your Spouse Without Ruining Your Marriage* by this author and Gary Oliver, Servant Publishers).

Couples where both people are secure in who they are and aren’t looking for their partner to be the solution to their self-identity or esteem problems are much happier in their relationship. The other person’s calling is not to be a current substitute for what was lacking in your life or for what was missing between you and

a parent when you were growing up. Keep in mind that you can't be happily married to another person unless you're happily married to yourself. Your partner is not responsible for making you feel good about yourself or for giving you an identity. You receive that from your relationship with Jesus Christ.

### *Spiritual Intimacy*

There is one final ingredient which will stabilize a marriage and open the doors for the depth of intimacy that couples are seeking. Spiritual intimacy is that element of marriage in which the couple's heart, mind, and soul are open to the Lord and one another. It means you have similar beliefs which are important to you, including a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It also means you have the freedom to share your feelings and thoughts of where you are spiritually. You share new insights with one another that you have learned from Scripture or a resource you're reading. You pray for and with each other and worship together. You feel comfortable and close in relating spiritually and endeavor to make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life and your relationship. I said relationship, rather than marriage, because this dimension of intimacy needs to be part and parcel of the development of the growth of your relationship. It won't just happen after you marry. When it's intertwined with the developing of your love relationship as you consider marriage, it becomes an integral and natural part of your relationship.

### **A Marriage Definition**

There are so many other elements that could be mentioned about making a marriage work. Let me sum it up with a definition of marriage that I've developed over the years. It states what a marriage is, what it can be, and what it takes for it to be all you want it to be: "A Christian marriage is a total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to one another. It



is a commitment in which there is no holding back of anything. Marriage is a pledge of mutual fidelity in all areas. It is a partnership of mutual subordination and servanthood.”

A Christian marriage is similar to a solvent, a freeing up of the man and woman to be themselves and become all that God intends for them to become. Marriage is a refining process God will use to develop us into the men or women He wants us to become.

Is marriage still something you want? If so, it may take more than you realize. Keep this last thought in mind:

True success is never an easy achievement. Happy and fulfilling marriages are products of extreme effort. They are desired, sought after, fought for, and planned. They never *just* happen. Couples frequently complain to me how their marriage *just* fell apart. All of a sudden they just fell out of love...just lost interest in a husband...just fell in love with another person or career. If experience has taught me anything, it is this: Nothing *just* happens...whether good or bad.

Healthy marriages follow a road...a road that is planned. You do not have to plan to fail. That can be accomplished without planning...and usually is. But you DO have to plan to succeed.<sup>18</sup>