

# **INTRODUCTION**

And they lived happily ever after.

The End

So ends every romance novel and romance movie. However, once you finish the book and close the cover, or once you step out of a darkened theater, reality confronts you.

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

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

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

In the same way, there is a cost to having a godly, lifelong relationship with your spouse. We face a multitude of circumstances in life. Some of them are pleasant, and some of them are unpleasant or, worse, they are extremely painful. That is why traditional marriage vows include the words *in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, until death us do part*. The so-called negative aspects have been emphasized because we tend to overlook and avoid them.

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

### *Why another workbook?*

There are many resources such as books, seminars, and weekend encounters. I didn't start out to write a premarital workbook. Why write on a subject that has already been adequately covered? However, from being in premarital ministry, we saw the need for a *workbook* that covered issues not being addressed. When we did not find such a book, I decided to write one that would address issues prevalent in our culture and our churches.

One goal of this book is to present material relevant to a wide audience having very differing upbringings and life situations. Some workbooks take a more lighthearted approach, which might be okay for virgin couples who come from wonderful families and who have well-balanced lives. This book will certainly work for them, but it also addresses those who have had their lives messed up or who, apart from God, have made a mess of their lives.

I thought long and hard about whether these two groups should be combined in one book. On the one hand, I did not want to trouble young virgin couples with material that did not apply to them and that could be offensive to their tender hearts. On the other hand, from our experience with the other type couples and from conversations with pastors about the state of affairs within the church, I opted for a single resource. I tested this decision by using this book in premarital sessions with a very sweet and tender young virgin couple who epitomize faithfulness, purity, and godliness in their relationship. They were not offended by the blunt approach used in various parts. They knew some of it did not apply to them, thus they merely skipped it. They understood and appreciated the desire to leave no stone unturned.

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

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

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

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

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

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