

CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE

Getting Ready

Here's what you'll talk about:

- how marriage matures us
- lifelong commitment
- Christ-centered marriage

Survey Says...

We encourage you to take the Couple Checkup at www.FocusOnTheFamily.com/ReadyToWed. If you've done so, take a quick look at the Spiritual Beliefs section of your Couple Checkup report. Notice whether this is a "strength" or "growth" area in your relationship.

Selfie

Taking a Snapshot of Where You Are Right Now

Try completing the following survey in three minutes or less. Go with "off the top of your head" responses as much as possible. The point isn't to come up with "right" answers, but just to start

thinking about where you stand on some of the issues addressed in this session. You and your spouse-to-be should fill in your answers separately so that you can compare and discuss them later.

1. Which of the following song titles do you think reflect God's plan for your marriage? Why?

- "Endless Love"
- "Wrecking Ball"
- "Love Takes Time"
- "I Knew You Were Trouble"
- "Crazy Little Thing Called Love"
- "Lean on Me"
- "Happy Together"
- "Bridge Over Troubled Water"

2. If Jesus came to your wedding, which of the following do you think He would do? Why?

- turn water into wine
- propose a toast to the bride and groom
- stand up during the ceremony and object to your union
- give you advice instead of a gift
- berate you for spending so much money
- comfort the father-of-the-bride
- dance with the bride

If He did propose a toast, what might He say?

3. In 10 words or less, what is God's purpose for marriage?
Why?

4. Which of the following statements about marriage do you think are true?

- "If your marriage isn't happy, you must not be doing things God's way."
- "God doesn't care whether you're happy; He just cares whether you're becoming more like Jesus."
- "The closer you get to God, the closer you'll be to your spouse."
- "Jesus said there will be no marriage in heaven, so He must not think very highly of it."
- "God hates divorce."
- "Marriage should be honored by all."

5. Why are you getting married instead of just living together? If someone offered you a million dollars if you promised never to marry, would you take it? Why or why not?

WeTube

Getting the Most from the Video

After watching the Session 1 video on the DVD, discuss the following questions.

1. Ephesians 2:20 says, “Together, we are his house ... and the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself” (NLT). The foundation of a thriving marriage is having Christ at the center—as the cornerstone. Many people purport to have a Christian marriage; however, they may not be living out a Christ-centered marriage. What is the difference between two Christians who are married and having a Christ-centered marriage?

Marriage expert Dr. Gary J. Oliver highlights some of these differences:¹

MARRIAGE BETWEEN TWO CHRISTIANS	CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE
Jesus is valued. (A fan)	Jesus is Lord. (A follower)
Problem-focused	Growth-focused
You are here for me. (Self-focused)	I am here for you. (Other-focused)
I pray alone.	We pray together.
Reads the Bible. (Hearer)	Applies the Bible. (Doer)
Conditional love (Contract marriage)	Unconditional love (Covenant marriage)
I focus on me and you.	I focus on us.
I want you to make me happy.	I choose to make you happy.
I want to be understood.	I choose to understand.
I want to be served.	I seek opportunities to serve.
I assume the worst.	I assume the best.
I pray periodically.	I pray without ceasing.
Individual spirituality	Shared spirituality
Lord, change my spouse.	Lord, change me.
Happy	Joyful
I "should" sacrifice.	I enjoy sacrifice.
Has passion	Passionate

There are a lot of Christians who get married but there aren't a lot of Christ-centered marriages! Which words or phrases from the Christ-Centered Marriage list stood out to you? Why?

2. Why did the Spanish explorer Cortés burn his ships? Why not keep them around "just in case"? What do couples today keep around "just in case" marriage doesn't work out? How will you and your spouse "burn your ships"? As you approach your wedding, how much of each ingredient do you think you have?
3. What does "taking the word *divorce* out of your vocabulary" mean to you?
 - never speaking the word
 - never thinking the word
 - pretending divorce doesn't exist
 - believing "Failure is not an option"
 - other _____
4. It is said that Satan works tirelessly to destroy marriages because he knows what your marriage could be and fears it. What's your reaction to that statement?
 - Seems a little extreme.
 - I'm afraid he might succeed.
 - I want to know how to guard my marriage.

- Bring it on!
- other _____

5. One message of this session is that God's purpose for marriage is to help us grow spiritually, not necessarily to be happy. Which of the following comes closest to your reaction to that? Why?

- "I feel guilty, because I should want that—but I don't."
- "I feel angry, because it sounds like God doesn't care about feelings, just rules."
- "I feel tricked—like Christians say marriage will make you happy and then admit that it won't."
- "I feel like I want to hear more, since God invented marriage and knows how to get the most out of it."
- other _____

6. What does spiritual intimacy mean to you? How would you rank the following items in order of importance?

- praying together
- reading the Bible together
- learning to prayerfully make decisions together
- attending church together
- tithing 10 percent
- attending a small group
- reviewing each day for signs of blessing
- fasting together
- going on a missions trip together

7. Malachi 2:15 states, "God, not you, made marriage. His Spirit inhabits even the smallest details of marriage.... So guard the spirit of marriage within you" (MSG). How could you "guard the spirit of marriage within you" in each of the following situations?
- Your spouse-to-be wants a big "destination" wedding; you want a simple backyard ceremony.
 - On the morning of the wedding, the best man accidentally drops the rings in a sewer grate in the church parking lot.
 - A year into your marriage, your spouse admits that, contrary to what he said during your engagement, he doesn't feel ready to have kids.
 - Five years into your marriage, your parents split up.
8. Erin Smalley talked about Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage should be honored by all ..." (NIV). A part of honoring your upcoming marriage is to notice the things you value and love about your relationship. What are some of your favorite things about your relationship?
- shared spiritual faith in Jesus Christ
 - intellectually stimulating conversations
 - serving each other
 - expressing appreciation
 - deep emotional conversations
 - space for alone time
 - traveling together

- laughing and having fun together
- shared love for athletics
- the proposal story
- resolving conflicts
- being quick to forgive
- going on romantic dates

9. Author Gary Thomas says, “The happiest and most fulfilled marriages have a cause greater than their own happiness and their own comfort.” What “greater cause” will be part of your marriage? How will you be able to tell when it’s being fulfilled?
10. Try writing your wedding vows without using any of the following words: marriage, forever, lifetime, love, honor, promise, respect, God, both, two, one, husband, and wife. What are some words and concepts that many couples might want to avoid in their wedding ceremony these days? What three words do you think are “must-haves”? Why?

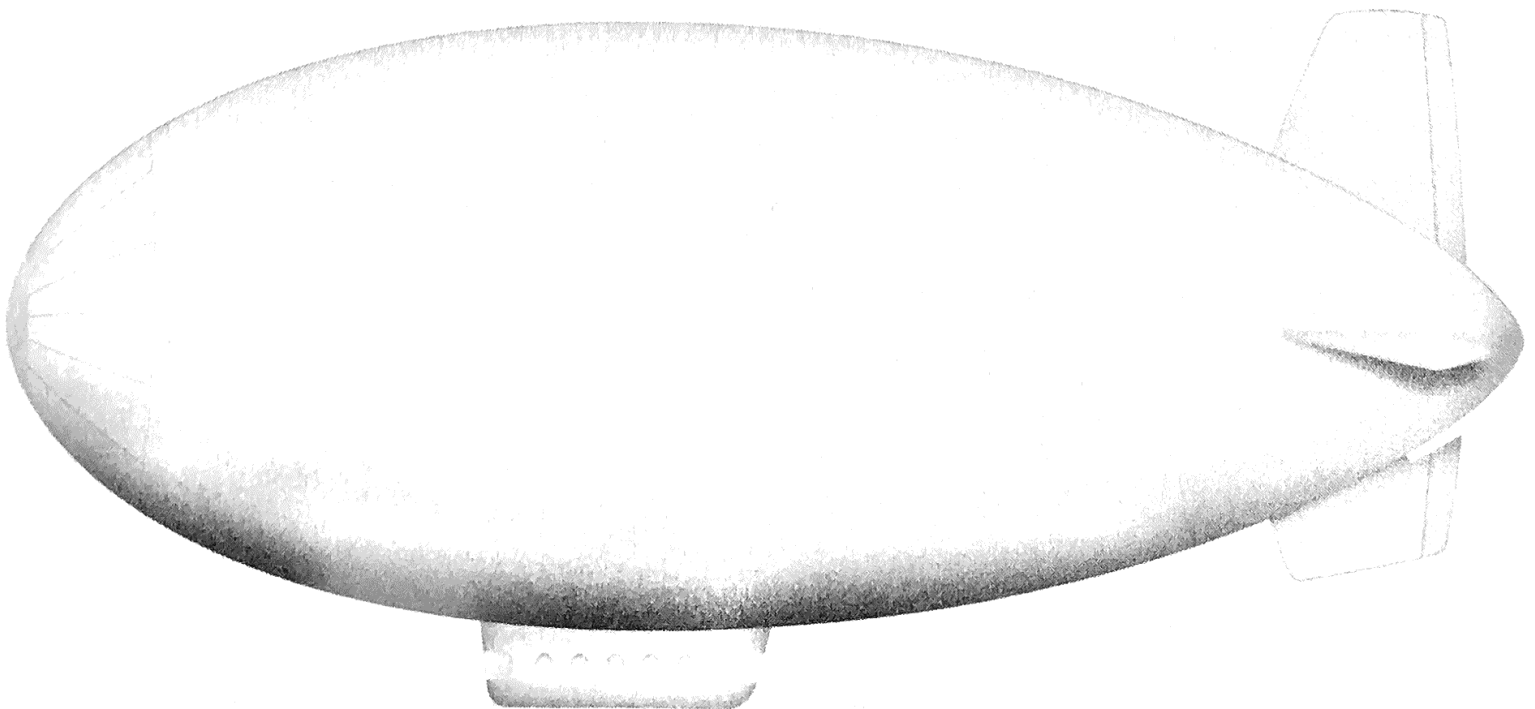
Application)

Taking Things Personally

It's time for an Action Step—a specific, measurable thing you can do to carry out a principle you've been discussing.

You've probably heard of PDA—a Public Display of Affection. Some people like them; others find them embarrassing. But have you heard of a PDC—a Public Display of Commitment?

Some couples make a highly visible declaration of love when they get engaged. One prospective spouse, usually the guy, might ask a waiter to bring the ring to the table on a platter, interrupt a TV show taping to make his plea on bended knee, or pay for his proposal to flash from the Jumbotron at a baseball game.



Whether or not you took the PDC route, here's your chance to publicly announce your commitment to each other. Dream up a short message, and write it on the blimp above. Then choose a way to share it with the world. Here are some ideas:

- Make a YouTube video and post it.
- Spread the word through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or a blog.
- Pick a song and organize a “flash mob” to sing it with you in a public place.
- Host an engagement party so both families and close friends can meet and celebrate.
- Write the message with removable paint on the rear windshield of your car.

FaceTheBook

Going Deeper with Ready to Wed

To learn more about—and apply—the principles you've just discussed, read the following in the *Ready to Wed* book during the week:

Chapter 1, “God’s Design for Marriage,” by Dr. Greg Smalley and Erin Smalley

Chapter 3, “The Power of Commitment,” by Scott Stanley, PhD

Chapter 5, “Soul Mates: Building Spiritual Intimacy,” by Joe White