

charis

A Care and Counseling Initiative



Building Healthy Marriages:

Supporting Marriage Relationships



Charis is an Urban Alliance initiative. www.urbanalliance.com

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*Through Charis,
Urban Alliance
works with churches
and parachurch
organizations to help
them communicate
about mental health
in ways that offer
hope and create safe
environments where
people feel comfortable
seeking help.*

Many people who are struggling with their relational, emotional and mental health do not receive the support they need. They often do not know where to turn for help, or are embarrassed to acknowledge they are struggling. Additionally, a lack of resources in the community, poverty and stigma are barriers that keep people from receiving help.

Research shows that the church is one of the most common places people go to seek help when they are struggling emotionally. This is why it is so important for pastors and care providers to be equipped to offer care and connect people to appropriate help. Many churches offer support groups, care ministries or pastoral care. And, professional counselors who offer care from a Christian perspective provide services in the community.

Through Charis, Urban Alliance works with churches and parachurch organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help. Urban Alliance also equips care providers to respond sensitively, effectively connect people who are seeking care to appropriate support, and provide care, so they may cope well and heal.

The Charis website is a tool, managed by Urban Alliance, that can be used by individuals and organizations to help connect people in need of support to high-quality professional counselors, support groups and specialized support services offered from a Christian perspective.

These collaborative efforts have helped hundreds of people overcome barriers and more effectively cope, have ongoing support, strengthen their relationships, experience hope, joy and peace, and persevere despite life's challenges.

*To learn more about Charis, visit www.urbanalliance.com/charis.
To visit the Charis website, visit www.charisnetworkct.org.*



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The apostle Paul wrote, “Let marriage be held in honor among all” (Hebrews 13:4). Marriage is something that should be honored, appreciated, cherished and held in high value. Marriage is a special relationship ordained by God in which two people make a life long covenant to love and care for one another.

Covenants are established by making an oath or promise. In marriage, husbands and wives make vows to God, each other, families and the community to love unconditionally, reconcile where there is conflict and remain sexually pure. It is a supernatural covenant that involves both people and God in which two people become “one flesh”. In Genesis it says, “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Genesis 1:27). “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Genesis 2:24).

Marriage relationships have a significant impact on children. Healthy marriages can offer children a stable relational environment to grow and develop, while unhealthy marital relationships may create instability and stress in children’s lives. Therefore, it is imperative that the Church support marriage relationships by strengthening them on an ongoing basis, acknowledging and addressing challenges when they arise, and supporting healing and reconciliation.

Marriage is Hard Work

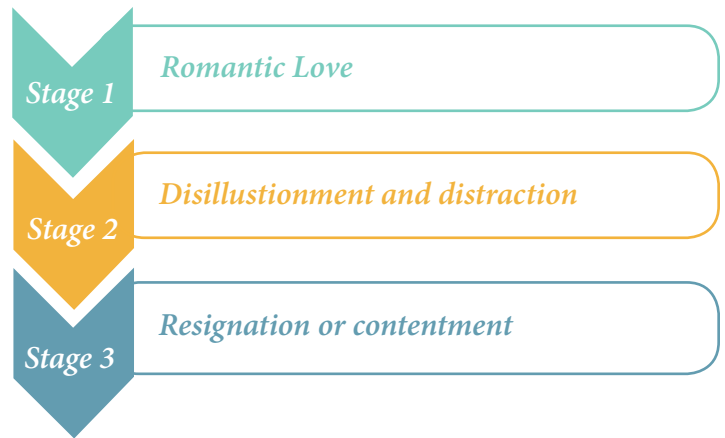
Many couples go through three stages in marriage relationships (Harris, 2012).

People often enter marriage during the “romantic love” stage, also known as the honeymoon stage. This stage usually begins before marriage and lasts for three to six months after marriage. During this stage, couples see the best in each other. They are excited to be married, feel strong positive emotions when they are together, feel a great sense of passion and commitment towards one another and cannot imagine significant challenges or conflict with their partner.

However, this stage is short-lived and after being married for a relatively short period of time (approximately 6-12 months), the second stage, “disillusionment and distraction,” begins. During this stage, each partner notices the others’ imperfections and may experience frustration and discontentment in the relationship. Each partner must face the reality that marriage is hard work and takes a great deal of emotional energy and sacrifice. Balancing school, work and family and making decisions together becomes more challenging.

The final stage plays out differently depending on how effectively the couple navigates the challenges of the second stage. The sad reality is that nearly half of all couples decide to dissolve their marriages through divorce. The rest adjust to their marriages with either “resignation or contentment”. Adjustment with resignation means that the couple decides to stay married but are unhappy in their relationship and/or have accepted that things are not going to improve. Adjustment with contentment indicates that the couple worked through the challenges faced during “disillusionment and distraction” and gained new knowledge and skills that deepened their relationship. These couples experience what some call “mature love,” marked by safety and security in the relationship (Larson, 2003).

The only way to get to the “mature love” stage in any relationship is to work through the earlier stages.



The experience of navigating differences, learning to communicate, sacrificing for one another, persevering through difficult times and comforting one another strengthens the relationship. “Mature love” is best described in 1 Corinthians 13: “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” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Churches can help couples navigate the various stages of marriage in healthy ways.

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Online Marriage Assessments

Marriage assessments provide opportunities for couples to answer questions and receive feedback about the strengths and challenges of their marriages.

The two most common marriage assessments are the **Focus on Marriage Assessment**, developed at Focus on the Family and based on materials originating with Dr. Greg and Erin

Smalley, and the **Couple Checkup**, developed by Dr. David Olson and Dr. Peter Larson at PREPARE/ENRICH in Minnesota. These two programs feature slightly different strengths and emphases. The following summaries describe the differences between the assessments. Both assessments can be accessed on the Focus on Family website: www.focusonthefamily.com.

Focus On Marriage Assessment

- *This program is designed for married couples. The goal is to provide a clear snapshot of the relationship, highlighting both strengths and growth areas.*
- *Questions are based on the research of Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley. Greg and Erin have found that there are twelve key behaviors that consistently make up great marriages, including such areas as communication, conflict, commitment and intimacy. Each spouse can take the quick and easy-to-use assessment by answering questions that zero in on these twelve essential traits.*
- *Along with the assessment results, the program provides references to sound, Biblical resources that Focus on the Family has created to help husbands and wives grow in those areas where their relationships need strengthening. Couples can also call the Focus on the Family Counseling hotline for help, counsel or personal assistance.*
- *This assessment is quick and easy to take. It only requires about ten minutes to complete! It's also web responsive, which means you can take it via your smartphone.*
- *There is no cost. The Focus on Marriage Assessment is free!*

Website: www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/promos/focus-on-marriage-assessment

Couple Checkup

- *This tool is designed to give couples a clear snapshot of their relationship, highlighting both strengths and growth areas, whether they are dating, engaged or married.*
- *Couple Checkup consists of between 110-130 questions, based on the couple's particular life stage. It takes about thirty minutes to complete. Both partners need to participate.*
- *Twenty important relationship areas are explored. Also included are questions about personality and family-of-origin.*
- *Couples will receive a fifteen- to twenty-page Computer Report, with their results broken down into relational categories. A Discussion Guide is also available to help them interpret the results.*
- *The Couple Checkup helps couples discover their strengths as a couple. These strengths will enable them to enjoy and continue developing a healthy relationship. It will also help them identify issues that are threatening the vitality of their relationship and that may need to be addressed.*
- *A powerful and unique aspect of Couple Checkup is that it is tailored to each couple. Based on the background questions answered, Couple Checkup will be customized to include questions specific to each couple-type (dating, engaged, married).*
- *The cost is \$30.00.*

Website: www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/couple-checkup

Qualities of Healthy, Unhealthy & Abusive Relationships

Healthy	Unhealthy	Abusive
<p>A healthy relationship means that both partners are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively communicating: They talk openly about problems and listen to one another. They respect each other's opinions. • Respectful and kind: They value each other as they are and treat each other with respect and kindness. • Trusting: They believe what their partner has to say. They do not feel the need to "prove" each other's trustworthiness. • Honest: They are honest with each other but can still keep some things private. • Sharing decision-making: They make decisions together and hold each other to the same standard. • Enjoying personal time: They enjoy spending time apart, alone or with others. They respect each other's need for time apart. • Making mutual sexual choices: They talk openly about sexual and reproductive choices together. Both partners willingly consent to sexual activity and can safely discuss what they are and are not comfortable with. • Economic/financial partners: Partners discuss and make decisions about finances together. Both partners have access to the resources they need. • Engaging in supportive parenting: Both partners are able to parent in a way they feel comfortable with. They communicate together about the needs of their child(ren), as well as the needs of the parents. • Experiencing emotional connection: Both partners feel safe and experience intimacy and emotional connection. 	<p>A couple may be in an unhealthy relationship if one or more partners is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffectively communicating: When problems arise, they fight or don't discuss them at all. • Disrespectful: One or more partner is not considerate of the other. • Not trusting: One partner doesn't believe what the other says or feels entitled to invade their partner's privacy. • Dishonest: One or more partner tells lies. • Trying to take control: One partner feels their desires and choices are more important. • Only spending time with their partner: One partner's community is the only one both socialize in. • Pressured by the other into sexual activity: One partner uses pressure or guilt on the other to have sex or do anything sexual at any point. • Ignoring a partner's boundaries: It is assumed that only one partner is responsible for making informed decisions. • Unequal economically: Finances are not discussed, and it is assumed only one partner is in charge of finances or makes decisions without input from the other partner. • Experiencing emotional distance or significant conflict: One partner does not feel emotionally close to the other. There is a lack of intimacy and connection and/or a high level of conflict. 	<p>Abuse is occurring in a relationship when one partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates harmfully: Communicates in a way that is hurtful, threatening, insulting or demeaning. • Mistreats the other: One partner does not respect the feelings, thoughts, decisions, opinions or physical safety of the other. • Accuses the other of cheating or having an affair when it's not true: The accuser may hurt the other in a physical or verbal way as a result. • Denies that the abusive actions are abuse: An abusive partner may try to blame the other for the harm they're doing, make excuses for abusive actions or minimize the abusive behavior. • Controls the other: There is no equality in the relationship. One partner makes all decisions for the couple without the other's input. • Isolates the other partner: One partner controls where the other one goes and who they talk to. They may isolate their partner from family and friends. • Forces sexual activity or pregnancy: One partner forces the other to have sex or do anything their partner doesn't want to do sexually at any point. In relationships where pregnancy is a physical possibility, one partner may force the other to become pregnant. • Exerts economic control: One partner controls the money and access to resources. Having an open dialogue about finances is not an option. This may include preventing a partner from earning an income or not allowing a partner access to their own income. • Engages in manipulative parenting: One partner uses their child(ren) to gain power and control over the other partner, including telling the child(ren) lies or negative things about the other partner. • Experiences fear: One partner experiences fear in response to the words or actions of the other.

Qualities of Healthy, Unhealthy & Abusive Relationships



While there are a number of different models and frameworks available to describe healthy and unhealthy relationship patterns, this grid can be used as a tool to understand different marriage relationships. When supporting a couple, it is important to first assess their relationship to determine if it is healthy, unhealthy or abusive. Often, when a couple meets with a pastor or leader seeking marital counseling or help, the relationship is unhealthy or abusive. It is common for couples to wait until a relationship problem is significant to seek help.

People in relationships that are healthy, unhealthy and abusive need different types of support from leaders at their church. Once a leader has assessed the health of a relationship, they can offer support or help connect the couple to counseling or other resources. Leaders can assess relationship health by asking questions such as:

- *How do you make important decisions (e.g. parenting, finances, work)?*
- *What happens when you disagree about something?*

- *What does it look like when you argue?*
- *What do you enjoy doing together?*
- *How do you show affection and love to each other?*
- *How do you support each other through difficult or stressful situations?*
- *Have you ever felt fearful around your partner?*
- *What is your marriage's greatest strength?*
- *What is the greatest challenge present in your marriage?*

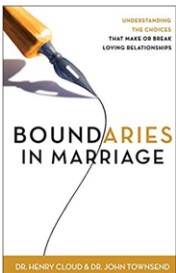
It is often difficult for couples to share their struggles and they may try to hide them. It is important for pastors and church leaders to create a safe and nonjudgmental atmosphere when asking questions to understand a marriage. When abuse is present in a relationship, the victim often does not feel safe sharing honestly and openly. They may fear that they will be punished later. In relationships where domestic violence is present, it is common for one partner to use fear and manipulation to control the other. These patterns can be difficult to detect and may require collecting information from each partner separately, if it can be done without compromising safety.

Healthy: Strengthening Relationships and Preventing Future Challenges

People in healthy relationships need support from their church to strengthen their relationships and build knowledge and skills to help them mature in their relationships. By investing in healthy marriage relationships, churches are able to help couples cope effectively with challenges and prevent relationship crises.

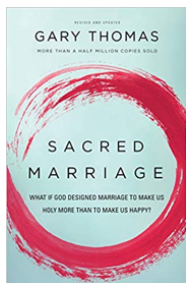
There are a number of excellent books and curricula available for couples to strengthen their relationships by building knowledge and skills. Each offers a unique knowledge-base and set of relational skills that increase relational health. The resources listed below can help strengthen marriages and offer a Christian perspective.

Books and Resources That Strengthen Marriages and Couples' Relationships and Offer a Christian Perspective



Henry Cloud, John Townsend *Boundaries in Marriage*

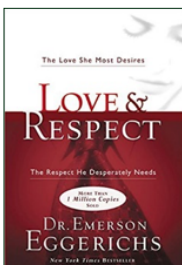
Learn when to say yes and when to say no—to your spouse and to others—to make the most of your marriage. Only when a husband and wife know and respect each other's needs, choices and freedom can they give themselves freely and lovingly to one another. Boundaries are the “property lines” that define and protect husbands and wives as individuals. Once they are in place, a good marriage can become better, and a less-than-satisfying one can even be saved. Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, counselors and authors of the award-winning best-seller *Boundaries*, show couples how to apply the 10 laws of boundaries that can make a real difference in relationships. They help husbands and wives understand the friction points or serious hurts and betrayals in their marriage and move beyond them to the mutual care, respect, affirmation and intimacy they both long for. *Boundaries in Marriage* helps couples set and maintain personal boundaries and respect those of their spouse, establish values that form a Godly structure and architecture for their marriage, protect their marriage from different kinds of “intruders”, work with a spouse who understands and values boundaries—or work with one who doesn't.



Gary Thomas *Sacred Marriage*

Happy is good. Holy is better. Your marriage is more than a sacred covenant with another person. It is a spiritual discipline designed to help you know God better, trust Him more fully, and love Him more deeply. What if God's primary intent for your marriage isn't to make you happy...but holy?

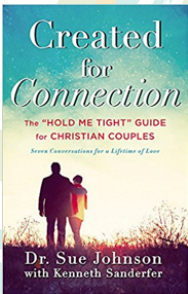
Sacred Marriage doesn't just offer techniques to make a marriage happier. It does contain practical tools, but what married Christians most need is help in becoming holier husbands and wives. *Sacred Marriage* offers that help with insights from Scripture, church history, time-tested wisdom from Christian classics and examples from today's marriages. *Sacred Marriage* reveals how marriage trains us to love God and others well, how it exposes sin and makes us more aware of God's presence, how good marriages foster good prayer, how married sex feeds the spiritual life and more.



Emerson Eggerichs *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs*

Reveals the secret to couples meeting each other's deepest needs—without love she reacts without respect, and without respect he reacts without love—and a painful, negative cycle begins.

Healthy: Strengthening Relationships and Preventing Future Challenges

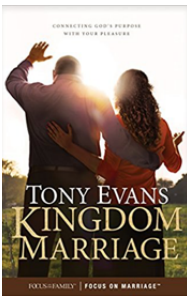


Sue Johnson, Kenneth Sanderfer *Created for Connection*

Are you looking to enrich a healthy relationship, revitalize a tired one or rescue one gone awry? Do you yearn to grow closer to God, and to further incorporate Him and His teachings into your marriage? We all want a lifetime of love, support and faith. But sometimes we need a little help.

Enter Dr. Sue Johnson, developer of Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and “the best couple therapist in the world,” according to best-selling relationship expert Dr. John Gottman. In *Created for Connection*, Dr. Johnson and Kenneth Sanderfer, a leading EFT practitioner in the Christian community, share Johnson’s groundbreaking and remarkably successful program for creating stronger, more secure relationships not only between partners, but between us and God.

The message of *Created for Connection* is simple: Forget about learning how to argue better, analyzing your early childhood or making grand romantic gestures. Instead, get to the emotional underpinnings of your relationship by recognizing that you are attached to and dependent on your partner in much the same way that a child is on a parent, and we are on the Heavenly Father, for nurturing, soothing and protection. The way to enhance or save our relationships with each other and with God is to be open, attuned, responsive, and to reestablish safe emotional connection. Filled with Bible verses, inspiring real-life stories, and guidance, *Created for Connection* will ensure a lifetime of love.

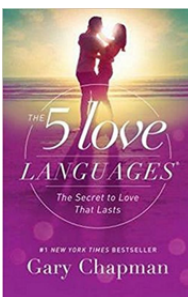


Tony Evans *Kingdom Marriage*

What happens when a Kingdom man marries a Kingdom woman? *Kingdom Marriage: Connecting God’s Purpose with Your Pleasure* helps couples grow together as a Kingdom couple to fulfill God’s design and purpose for their marriage. Through practical insights and powerful stories, Dr. Tony Evans inspires and instructs so couples will discover the hope, challenge and guidance God’s Word provides for their journey together.

“You can reflect the glory of God and the unity of the Trinity through your shared purpose, honor and love as a true Kingdom couple.” —Tony Evans

Kingdom Marriage shows couples that the key to influencing our society and world with lasting impact is found in solidifying Biblical marriage in the way God intended. It starts with **both wife and husband** reflecting God and His image and modeling that reflection within the roles and responsibilities of their union. This is based on a correct understanding of God’s Kingdom and their responsibilities in it.



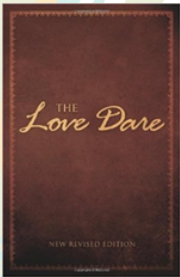
Gary Chapman *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*

Simple ideas, lasting love. Falling in love is easy. Staying in love—that’s the challenge. How can you keep your relationship fresh and growing amid the demands, conflicts and just plain boredom of everyday life?

In the #1 New York Times best-seller, *The 5 Love Languages*, you’ll discover the secret that has transformed millions of relationships worldwide. Whether your relationship is flourishing or failing, Dr. Gary Chapman’s proven approach to showing and receiving love will help you experience deeper and richer levels of intimacy with your partner—starting today.

The 5 Love Languages is as practical as it is insightful. Updated to reflect the complexities of relationships today, this new edition reveals intrinsic truths and applies relevant, actionable wisdom in ways that work.

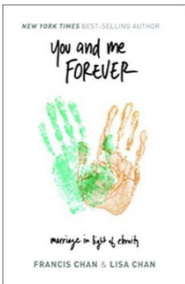
Healthy: Strengthening Relationships and Preventing Future Challenges



Alex Kendrick *The Love Dare*

Unconditional love is eagerly promised at weddings, but rarely practiced in real life. As a result, romantic hopes are often replaced with disappointment in the home. But it doesn't have to stay that way.

The Love Dare, the New York Times No. 1 best seller that has sold five million copies and was major plot device in the popular movie *Fireproof*, is a 40-day challenge for husbands and wives to understand and practice unconditional love. Whether your marriage is hanging by a thread or healthy and strong, *The Love Dare* is a journey you need to take. It's time to learn the keys to finding true intimacy and developing a dynamic marriage.



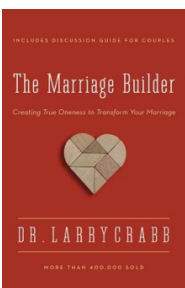
Francis Chan *You and Me Forever*

Marriage is great, but it's not forever. It's until death do us part. Then come eternal rewards or regrets depending on how we spend our lives.

In his latest book, Francis Chan joins together with his wife Lisa to address the question many couples wonder at the altar: How do I have a great marriage? Setting aside typical topics on marriage, Francis and Lisa dive into Scripture to understand what it means to have a relationship that satisfies the deepest parts of our souls.

In the same way *Crazy Love* changed the way we saw our personal relationship with God, *You and Me Forever* will radically shift the way we see one of the most important relationships in our life.

Jesus was right. We have it all backwards. The way to have a great marriage is by not focusing on marriage. Whether you are single, dating or married, *You and Me Forever* will help you discover the adventure that you were made for and learn how to thrive in it.

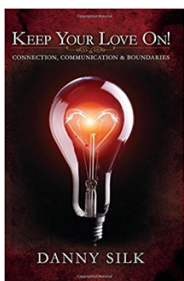


Larry Crabb *The Marriage Builder*

Bestselling author Larry Crabb cuts to the heart of the Biblical view of marriage: the “one-flesh” relationship. He argues convincingly that the deepest needs of human personality—security and significance—ultimately cannot be satisfied by a marriage partner. We need to turn to the Lord, rather than our spouse, to satisfy our needs. This frees both partners for “soul oneness”, a commitment to minister to our spouse’s needs rather than manipulating them to meet our own needs. With “soul oneness” comes renewed “body oneness”, where couples enjoy sexual pleasure as an expression and outgrowth of a personal relationship.

The Marriage Builder also identifies three building blocks essential to constructing marriage: the grace of God, true marriage commitment and acceptance of one’s mate. Discussion questions are included to aid couples who want to dig into it and apply the principles to their own lives and marriages. *The Marriage Builder* is for anyone who longs to transform marriage from trial to triumph.

Healthy: Strengthening Relationships and Preventing Future Challenges



Danny Silk *Keep Your Love On!*

Keeping your love on. It's a hard thing to do. Sometimes it's the hardest thing to do. But if you want to build healthy relationships with God and others, learning to keep your love on is non-negotiable. Adults and children alike thrive in healthy relationships where it is safe to love and be loved, to know and be known. Yet for many, relationships are anything but safe, loving or intimate. They are defined by anxiety, manipulation, control and conflict. The reason is that most people have never been trained to be powerful enough to keep their love on in the face of mistakes, pain and fear.

Keep Your Love On reveals the higher, Jesus-focused standard defined by mature love—love that stays 'on' no matter what. Danny Silk's practical examples and poignant stories will leave you with the power to draw healthy boundaries, communicate in love, and ultimately protect your connections so you can love against all odds. As a result, your relationships will be radically transformed for eternity. When you learn to keep your love on, you become like Jesus.



Focus on the Family

Focus on the Family is a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. They provide help and resources for couples to build healthy marriages that reflect God's design, and for parents to raise their children according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles.

Web Resources: Focus on the Family hosts a website containing a number of articles written on a variety of relevant topics as well as a marriage assessment available for free to support marriages.

Hope Restored: Hope Restored offers intensives, or extended periods of counseling over multiple days. This intensive approach allows a team of marriage counselors to work with reach couple to get to the root of the problem.

www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage



Family Life

Family Life is a Christian ministry whose mission is to effectively develop godly marriages and families who change the world one home at a time. Their tools to strengthen marriages include:

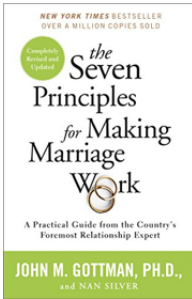
Curriculum and Bible Studies: Nurture the relationships in your life with Passport2Purity®, The Art of Marriage®, Stepping Up®, and FamilyLife's Art of Parenting™ and more.

Daily resources: Family Life articles cover a wide range of topics that matter to you in marriage, parenting, blended families, and spiritual growth. Family Life offers everything from prayer cards to infographics to an interactive nativity.

Weekend to Remember: Forming a weatherproof marriage sometimes means getting away to build it together. Family Life offers couple getaways, a seven-day cruise, men's gatherings, and special events and training for blended families, stepfamilies, and single parents. 96 percent of Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway guests say it has positively impacted their marriage.

www.familylife.com/

Books That Strengthen Marriage and Couples Relationships



John Gottman

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work

Just as Masters and Johnson were pioneers in the study of human sexuality, so Dr. John Gottman has revolutionized the study of marriage. As a professor of psychology at the University of Washington and the founder and director of the Seattle Marital and Family Institute, he has studied the habits of married couples in unprecedented detail over the course of many years. His findings, and his heavily attended workshops, have already turned around thousands of faltering marriages.

This book is the culmination of his life's work: the seven principles that guide couples on the path toward a harmonious and long-lasting relationship. Straightforward in their approach, yet profound in their effect, these principles teach partners new and startling strategies for making their marriage work. Gottman helps couples focus on each other, on paying attention to the small day-to-day moments that, strung together, make up the heart and soul of any relationship. Being thoughtful about ordinary matters provides spouses with a solid foundation for resolving conflict when it does occur and finding strategies for living with those issues that cannot be resolved.

Packed with questionnaires and exercises whose effectiveness has been proven in Dr. Gottman's workshops, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* is the definitive guide for anyone who wants their relationship to attain its highest potential.

Premarital Counseling Resources that Offer a Christian Perspective on Marriage

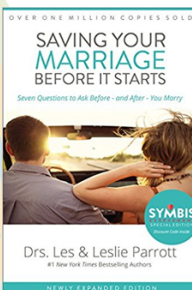


Ready to Wed Engaged Couples Toolkit

Ready to Wed Engaged Couples Toolkit is a comprehensive guide to marriage preparation. The kit features an engaging 10-session DVD series, a leader's guide, two copies of the couple's workbook, and the humorous and insightful Ready to Wed book co-authored by Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley along with other marriage experts. From in-laws and finances, to intimacy and chores, Ready to Wed is the perfect pre-marital counseling program to help a pastor or mentor couple prepare engaged couples for the joys and challenges of a lifetime marriage. Promotional materials for church program launch are also included on a resource disk.

This kit includes:

10 Sessions on Two DVD's, One Leaders Guide, Two Participants Guides, One Ready to Wed book



Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott

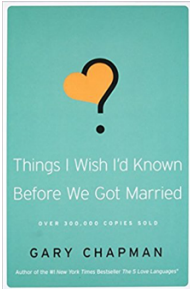
Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts is the most widely used marriage prep tool in the world.

- Uncover the misbeliefs of marriage
- Learn to communicate with instant understanding
- Discover the secret to resolving conflict
- Master the skills of money management
- Get your sex life off to a great start

A compelling video, featuring real-life couples, is available, and with this updated edition Les and Leslie unveil the game-changing SYMBIS Assessment. Now you can discover how to leverage your personalities for a love that last a lifetime.

Healthy: Strengthening Relationships and Preventing Future Challenges

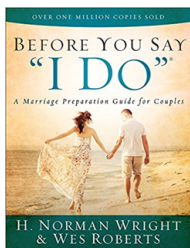


Gary Chapman *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married*

Most people spend far more time in preparation for their vocation than they do in preparation for marriage,” No wonder the divorce rate hovers around fifty percent.

Bestselling author and marriage counselor, Gary Chapman, hopes to change that with his newest book. Gary, with more than 35 years of counseling couples, believes that divorce is the lack of preparation for marriage and the failure to learn the skills of working together as intimate teammates.

This is not a book simply to be read. It is a book to be experienced. The material lends itself to heart-felt discussions by dating or engaged couples. To jump-start the exchanges, each short chapter includes insightful “Talking it Over” questions and suggestions. And, the book includes information on interactive websites as well as books that will enhance the couples experience. Dr. Chapman even includes a thought-provoking appendix. By understanding and balancing the five key aspects of life, dating couples can experience a healthy dating relationship. A revealing learning exercise for dating couples is included at the end.



Norman Wright & Wes Roberts *Before You Say “I Do”*

At a time when more people are delaying marriage or writing it off altogether, those ready to walk the aisle will appreciate a frank and trusted resource to help them start marriage on the right foot.

This interactive guide will help you explore your relationship in depth and will provide new insight into your partner and how the two of you relate to one another establish your wants and needs as individuals and a couple before your marriage begins lay the groundwork for open and honest conversation for a stronger, healthier marriage reveal how life events and family background can influence decision making in finances, family, education, faith, and career engage you in activities that lead to thought-provoking discussion addressing your past experiences and current expectations.

Engaging and easy-to-use, *Before You Say “I Do”* is full of tried and true wisdom to help you plan for your future and build a lasting relationship with the one you love.

Unhealthy: Establishing Healthier Patterns, Facilitating Healing and Reconciliation

Many couples seek help when they are facing a crisis situation or experiencing significant marital struggles. Mild challenges may be addressed with the resources listed above, lay care or pastoral counseling. However, when a couple is well into the unhealthy range they will likely benefit most from meeting

with a professional counselor in addition to learning from the resources listed above. The Charis website offers information about support groups and professional Christian counselors who offer services in central Connecticut:
www.charisnetworkct.org

Crises in Marriage

The following situations are more complex in nature and generally require professional help or significant intervention. When these types of situations occur, both individual partners and the relationship as a unit need time for healing and reconciliation.

Mental Illness. When one spouse suffers from a mental illness it often results in significant marital stress. Mental health conditions can manifest in a number of different ways depending on the specific diagnosis. It is important for the struggling spouse to build adequate support and professional

When a couple engages in unhealthy relational patterns for a long period of time, they become difficult to break out of.

counseling into their life and daily routine. It is essential for the 'healthy' spouse to offer support and sympathy, but not take on the role of therapist or enabler. In addition to emotional support, they may also need extra practical support if they need to take on extra responsibilities as a result of the severity of their spouses' mental health symptoms.

Addiction. Addiction can be described as a condition that results when a person ingests a substance (e.g. alcohol, marijuana or heroin) or engages in an activity (e.g. gambling, sex or eating) that is often initially enjoyable but becomes compulsive and causes harm over time. People who struggle with addiction have an intense focus on using certain substances or engaging in certain types of activities. In many cases, the substance or behavior interferes with overall functioning and a person's ability to carry out ordinary responsibilities, such as work, relationships and maintaining their health. It is important to take struggles with addiction seriously. Addictions are very difficult to overcome and need to start with the addicted spouse's own desire for change and willingness to receive ongoing treatment and support. It is important for the other spouse to not enable unhealthy behavior or take responsibility for the struggling spouse's recovery.

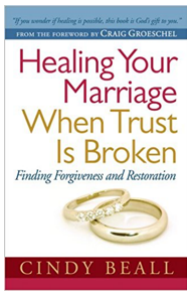
Pornography. Over the last decade, access to pornographic images has dramatically increased. Increased access to the internet makes sexually explicit images just a click away at all times. In fact, 12% of all websites and 25% of all web searches are pornographic in nature. The prevalence of pornography consumption is alarmingly high; 70% of men aged 18-24 visit a porn site in a typical month. Pornography consumption is harmful to marriages. Real relationship is sacrificed for imitation, the true purpose of sex becomes twisted, partners' sexual expectations can become unrealistic, and many argue that pornography

consumption can become a compulsive and addictive behavior and is a form of infidelity.

Infidelity. Infidelity is the act or state of being unfaithful to a spouse. Often, the term "affair" is used to describe an act of infidelity. In some cases, an affair is physical and involves a sexual encounter. In other cases, it is emotional— an affair of the heart — and involves a relationship with a person of the opposite sex that is more than a friendship, lacks healthy boundaries and often includes an element of romantic attraction. When an affair occurs, it is often devastating to the marriage. Trust is broken and feelings of hurt and betrayal are often overwhelming. Reconciliation is possible after an affair, but it is essential to build in support and counseling as early as possible and recognize that it takes time for trust to be restored and healing to occur.

Significant Conflict or Unhealthy Patterns. When a couple engages in unhealthy relational patterns for a long period of time, they become difficult to break out of. Examples of unhealthy patterns include poor communication, a lack of emotional connection, ineffective conflict resolution, controlling or manipulative behaviors, poor boundaries, or unkind or disrespectful words or actions. Couples that engage in these types of behaviors for long periods of time report less marital satisfaction, more resentment and are more likely to divorce. Professional counselors can help couples identify and break out of their unhealthy patterns and learn to relate to one another in healthier ways. Many books are available that can be used in conjunction with professional counseling to help marriages that are in crisis or struggling in significant ways. The resources listed on the following pages strengthen struggling marriages and offer a Christian perspective. Focus on Family and Family Life (described on p. 10) both offer weekend retreat and intensives that can help marriages that are struggling.

Books and Resources to Help a Struggling Marriage



Cindy Beall

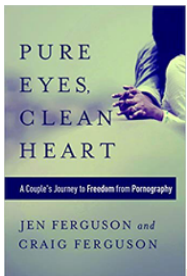
Healing Your Marriage When Trust Is Broken

Finding Forgiveness and Restoration. A few days after an ordinary Valentine's Day, Cindy Beall's life changed forever. She listened with disbelief to her husband, Chris, a respected pastor, confess to pornography addiction, numerous affairs, and the startling news that a woman was pregnant with his child.

With raw honesty and intimate knowledge of pain and of God's power to resurrect something new out of the debris of betrayal, Cindy reveals how to:

- Seek guidance, counseling and prayer support when deceptions surface
- Help the family heal from the grief and humiliation
- Rebuild trust after porn, sex and other addictions undermine a relationship
- Protect a marriage from lies and unfaithfulness
- Rely on God to pursue forgiveness and move forward in new promises

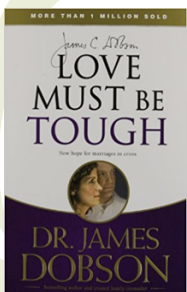
Cindy's compassion, grasp of God's Word, and the Bealls' remarkable story will help wives and husbands trust God with their broken hearts and follow His leading, hope and redemption.



Jen Ferguson and Craig Ferguson

Pure Eyes, Clean Heart: A Couple's Journey to Freedom from Pornography

In this candid account, Craig and Jen Ferguson share their personal story of the shame, anger and hopelessness associated with Craig's porn addiction. It threatened to destroy their marriage until they discovered how drawing close to Christ could lead them out of the pit of sinful habits, unhealthy responses, and personal despair toward true recovery. Marked by Biblical and practical guidance for addressing the heart issues that lead to addiction, *Pure Eyes, Clean Heart* offers encouragement and hope to those who struggle or whose loved ones struggle with the lure of pornography. Includes Scripture-based prayers, discussion questions for couples, and other helpful resources.



Dr. James Dobson

Love Must Be Tough

You've forgiven a thousand times. You've bent over backwards to make your partner feel loved and accepted. But the only reward for your loyalty has been anger, indifference, infidelity or abuse. Your spouse may even be ready to walk out the door.

Do you feel like all is lost? Are you ready to give up? There IS still hope.

Dr. James Dobson's "tough love" principles have proven to be uniquely valuable and effective. Unlike most approaches to marriage crisis, the strategy in this groundbreaking classic does not require the willing cooperation of both spouses. *Love Must Be Tough* offers the guidance that gives you the best chance of rekindling romance, renewing your relationship, and drawing your partner back into your arms.



Dave Carder *Anatomy of an Affair*

When it comes to adultery, never say, “It won’t happen to me.” Just when you think your marriage is safe from adultery is when you may be the most vulnerable.

With eye-opening stories, clinical insights and up-to-date data, Dave Carder reveals what adulterers learned the hard way—and what they want the rest of us to know to save us the pain.

Dave Carder, counselor and author of the best-selling *Torn Asunder* (100,000 in print), is a sought-after expert on issues of adultery. Here he helps you make your marriage adultery-proof by showing you:

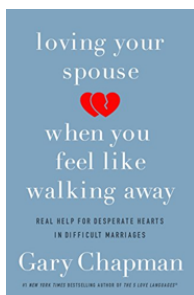
- How attractions can lead to affairs
- Ways you may be vulnerable to affairs
- The common ingredients of adultery
- How to restore intimacy to your marriage
- How to make wise, protective decisions

Marriage is too sacred to be taken casually. Affairs are a very real threat, and they can destroy lives and families. For this reason, *Anatomy of an Affair* should be on every church leader’s and marriage counselor’s required reading list, and in the home of every married couple.



Gary Chapman *One More Try*

What should you do when your marriage is at the breaking point? Chapman says don’t give up! With wisdom and compassion, he takes a realistic look at issues that pull couples apart, circumstances surrounding separation, dealing with painful emotions, trusting after infidelity, and more to help you and your spouse work toward healing and reconciliation.



Gary Chapman *Loving Your Spouse When You Feel Like Walking Away: Positive Steps for Improving a Difficult Marriage*

What should husbands and wives do when they feel like giving up? In this updated guide, veteran counselor Gary Chapman offers Biblical insight and positive steps for embattled couples in a wide range of situations. Find targeted advice for dealing with workaholicism, unfaithfulness, addictions, depression, abuse, controlling personalities and more.

When a couple is well into the unhealthy range they will likely benefit most from meeting with a professional counselor in addition to learning from the resources listed above.



The “Power and Control Wheel”, developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN, illustrates strategies used by perpetrators to maintain power and control over their victims.

Domestic violence (also called intimate partner violence) can be described as a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over the other. It includes behaviors that physically harm, arouse fear, prevent a partner from doing what they wish or forcing them to behave in ways they do not want. Tactics such as physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse and economic deprivation are often used to maintain power and control. Anyone, regardless of race, age, sex, religion or gender, can be a victim or perpetrator of domestic violence. When the relationship is abusive or there are signs of domestic violence it is essential that professional counselors or domestic violence service providers be engaged.

The “Power and Control Wheel”, developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN, illustrates strategies used by perpetrators to maintain power and control over their victims.

Abuse in any relationship should be taken very seriously. In many cases, other entities such as the police or Child

Protective Services need to be called to ensure the safety of the family. While the word domestic violence is not found in Scripture, Strickland (2016) suggests the concept of “oppression,” which is frequently used in Scripture, can be applied to domestic violence. According to Strickland, “The biblical category of oppression describes the manipulative domination of one person by another. It captures the idea that someone is subject to another’s harsh control. Oppression is not a one-off incident, but the use of systematic punishments to maintain power and control in a relationship.” Sadly, oppression sometimes occurs in marriage and family relationships. The Bible is clear that God hates oppression and defends the oppressed:

“O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.” (Psalm 10:17-18)

“From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.” (Psalm 72:14)



Creating Safety

When a person is in an abusive relationship, the first thing to consider is safety. If a spouse or their children are in danger, it is important for them to get to a safe place immediately. For some this means staying with friends or family until a longer-term plan can be made. For others, it involves staying at a hotel or domestic violence shelter. Once a person is in a safe place it is important for them to build a support network of people who will help them make very difficult decisions about their next steps. In many cases, it is best for the perpetrator to not know the location of his/her spouse and family. Victims of domestic violence are more likely to be harmed after they have left the home or relationship.

Sometimes a pastor or leader has the opportunity to create a safety plan with a person before they leave the home or when a person is living in an abusive situation but is not ready to leave. A safety plan is a specific plan that helps a person anticipate danger, problem solve about potentially dangerous situations, and increase control and safety in various situations. They can be made for a variety of situations,

including leaving a relationship, dealing with an emergency, continuing to live with or date a partner, or protecting oneself once they have left the relationship. See below for examples of safety plan considerations during episodes of violence and when getting ready to leave.

Example: Safety Plan During Episodes of Violence

- *If I decide to leave, I will _____.*
- *I can keep a bag ready and put it _____ so I can leave quickly.*
- *I can tell _____ about the violence and have them call the police when violence erupts.*
- *I can teach my children to use the telephone to call 9-1-1.*
- *I will use the code word _____ for my children, friends or family to call for help.*
- *If I have to leave my home, I will go _____ . (Be prepared even if you think you will never have to leave).*

Abusive: Supporting Safety, Working Towards Healing and Reconciliation When Possible

- When an argument erupts, I will move to a safer room such as _____.
- I can teach these strategies to my children: _____.
- I will use my instincts, intuition and judgment. I will protect myself and my children until we are out of danger.

Example: Safety When Getting Ready to Leave

- I will leave money and an extra set of keys with _____.
- I will keep important documents and keys at _____.
- I will open a savings account by this date _____ to increase my independence.
- Other things I can do to increase my independence are: _____.
- The domestic violence hotline is _____.
- The shelter's hotline is _____.
- I will check with _____ and _____ to know who will let me stay with them or who will lend me money.
- I can leave extra clothes with _____.
- I will review my safety plan every _____ (time frame) in order to plan the safest route.
- I will review the plan with _____ (a friend, counselor or advocate.)
- I will rehearse the escape plan and practice it with my children.

Connecting to Support

The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the National Domestic Violence Hotline are agencies that offer support to people experiencing domestic violence. Church leaders can share information about these resources

with victims and offer support as they decide next steps and seek safety. Both agencies have a website and hotline where trained staff are available to help victims think through their options and connect them to resources.

Agency	Contact	Description
<i>The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence</i>	Website: www.ctcadv.org Hotline: Call 888.774.2900 for help or to talk to someone	Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those organizations that serve them. Their website offers a wealth of information about domestic violence in CT and their hotline is staffed with advocates who help victims think through their options and determine which steps and services will work best. They help connect victims to counselors, shelters and safe homes, support groups, children's programs, and court and advocacy support located in CT.
<i>The National Domestic Violence Hotline</i>	Website: www.thehotline.org Hotline: 1.800.799.SAFE (7233)	The National Domestic Violence Hotline is the only 24/7 center in the nation that has access to service providers and shelters across the U.S. Their website provides valuable information about domestic violence, safety planning, healthy relationships and resources in the community.

Abusive: Supporting Safety, Working Towards Healing and Reconciliation When Possible

While healing and reconciliation are possible in relationships where domestic violence is present, professional help is essential and the road to recovery is long and complex. It is important for victims to use great discernment, wisdom and prayer if they choose to seek reconciliation. Sometimes a victim's fear, false guilt or sense of responsibility for the

perpetrator gets in the way of healthy relationship choices. As Dr. Dobson advises, "Do not be quick to return if your spouse has abused you. A simple 'I'm sorry, I won't do it again' is not enough in this case. Your spouse must demonstrate change for a prolonged period, and you must feel completely safe before you return."

Conclusion

Marriage is an important relationship designed by God in which two people make a life-long covenant to love and care for one another. It is important for church leaders to understand the significance of this relationship and do all they can to strengthen marriages and support couples when they experience challenges and crises.

Relationships can be thought of on a spectrum ranging from healthy to abusive. When a couple seeks support or counseling from a pastor or lay leader, it is important to consider where their relationship lies on this spectrum. Online marriage assessments are available to help in this process.

Relationships that are characterized as healthy need churches to invest in them by building couples' knowledge-basis about healthy relationship patterns. They also need relational support when struggles arise. Relationships characterized as unhealthy may also benefit from books and resources that build knowledge and skills as well as professional counseling and lay support and care.

Marriage is an important relationship designed by God in which two people make a life-long covenant to love and care for one another.

When patterns of abuse or domestic violence are present, the initial concern is safety and connecting the victim to needed supports in the church and community. Once the victim is safe, a network including both professional counselors, as well as lay care, can be built to offer support as the victim makes important decisions about next steps.

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