

Things I Wish I'd Known
Before We Got Married

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Hope for the Separated

Parenting Your Adult Child

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C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION 9

I Wish I Had Known . . .

CHAPTER ONE 15

That being in love is not an adequate foundation for building a successful marriage

CHAPTER TWO 21

That romantic love has two stages

CHAPTER THREE 33

That the saying “Like mother, like daughter” and “Like father, like son” is not a myth

CHAPTER FOUR 41

How to solve disagreements without arguing

CHAPTER FIVE 51

That apologizing is a sign of strength

CHAPTER SIX 65

That forgiveness is not a feeling

CHAPTER SEVEN 75

That toilets are not self-cleaning

CHAPTER EIGHT 83

That we needed a plan for handling our money

CHAPTER NINE 93

That mutual sexual fulfillment is not automatic

CHAPTER TEN 101

That I was marrying into a family

CHAPTER ELEVEN 115

That spirituality is not to be equated with “going to church”

CHAPTER TWELVE 127

That personality profoundly influences behavior

EPILOGUE 145

APPENDIX 149

Developing a Healthy Dating Relationship

NOTES 163

RESOURCES 165



Introduction

In my undergraduate studies, my academic major was anthropology. Later, I completed a master's degree in the same field. For over forty years, I have continued to study human cultures. One conclusion is inevitable. Marriage, between a man and woman, is the foundation of all human societies. The reality is that when children become adults, most of them will get married. In the United States, each year there are over two million marriages; that is four million people who are saying "I do" to the question, "Will you have this man to be your wedded husband?" or "Will you have this woman to be your wedded wife?" Almost all these couples anticipate "living happily ever after." No one gets married hoping to be miserable or to make their spouse miserable. Yet we all know that the divorce

rate in Western cultures continues to hover around fifty percent, and the highest percentage of divorces occur within the first seven years of marriage.

People do not get married planning to divorce. Divorce is the result of a lack of preparation for marriage and the failure to learn the skills of working together as teammates in an intimate

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relationship. What is ironic is that we recognize the need for education in all other pursuits of life and fail to recognize that need when it comes to marriage. Most people spend far more time in preparation for their vocation than they do in preparation for mar-

riage. Therefore, it should not be surprising that they are more successful in their vocational pursuits than they are in reaching the goal of marital happiness.

The decision to get married will impact one's life more deeply than almost any decision in life. Yet people continue to rush into marriage with little or no preparation for making a marriage successful. In fact, many couples give far more attention to making plans for the wedding than making plans for marriage. The wedding festivities last only a few hours, while the marriage, we hope, will last for a lifetime.

This is not a book on how to plan a wedding. This is a book on how to have a successful marriage. I've spent the last thirty-five years of my life counseling with couples whose dreams of a happy marriage have been shattered in the real world of dirty dishes, unpaid bills, conflicting work schedules, and crying babies. With hard work and months of counseling, many of these couples have gone on to have good marriages. For that, I am grateful.

It is my conviction that many of these struggles could have been avoided had the couple taken time to prepare more thoroughly for marriage. That is why I am writing this book. I want you to learn from their mistakes. It is much less painful than learning from your own mistakes. I want you to have the kind of loving, supportive, mutually beneficial marriage that you envision. However, I can assure you, that kind of marriage will not happen simply because you get married. You must make time to discover and practice the proven marital guidelines that make such a marriage possible.

For the individual who is not in a dating relationship and has no immediate prospects of marriage, the book will provide a blueprint on moving from singleness to marriage. For the couple who is dating but not yet engaged, it will help you decide if and when to announce your plans to get married. For the engaged couple, it will help you examine the foundation and learn the skills that are necessary for building a successful marriage.

As I look back over the early years of my marriage, I wish someone had told me what I am about to tell you. I honestly think I would have listened. However, in my generation, the concept of “preparation for marriage” did not exist. I’m hoping that my openness about my own marriage will help you avoid some of the pain and frustration that Karolyn and I experienced.

This is not a book simply to be read. It is a book to be experienced. The more you grapple with the realities discussed in the following pages and share honestly your thoughts and feelings on these topics, respect each other’s opinions and find workable solutions to your differences, to that degree you will be prepared for marriage. To the degree that you ignore these issues and choose to believe that the euphoric feelings that you have for

each other will carry you through, you set yourself up for failure. It is my desire that you will prepare for your marriage as though it were the most important human relationship you will ever have. If you give it your full and best attention, you will be on the road to seeing your dreams of marital happiness come true.

I'd like to invite you to visit Startmarriageright.com where you'll find a variety of helpful resources both for preparing for marriage and building a successful, lifelong marriage. Most of these resources are free so, I hope that you'll check it out. And, remember, your wedding day is just the beginning!

—Gary Chapman



I Wish I Had Known . . .

That being in love is not an
ADEQUATE FOUNDATION
for building a **SUCCESSFUL**
MARRIAGE

It should have been obvious, but I missed it. I had never read a book on marriage so my mind was not cluttered with reality. I just knew that I had feelings for Karolyn that I had never felt with any other girl. When we kissed, it was like a trip to heaven. When I saw her after an extended absence, I actually felt chill bumps. I liked everything about her. I liked the way she looked, the way she talked, the way she walked, and I was especially captivated by her brown eyes. I even liked her mother and volunteered to paint her house—anything to let this girl know how much I loved her. I could not imagine any other girl being more wonderful than she. I think she had the same thoughts and feelings about me.

With all of these thoughts and feelings, we fully intended

to make each other happy the rest of our lives. Yet, within six months after marriage, we were both more miserable than we had ever imagined. The euphoric feelings were gone, and instead, we felt hurt, anger, disappointment, and resentment. This, we never anticipated when we were “in love.” We thought that the positive perceptions and feelings we had for each other would be with us for a lifetime.

Over the past thirty years, I have done premarital counseling sessions with hundreds of couples. I have found that most of them have the same limited perspective about being in love. I have often asked couples in our first session this question: “Why do you want to get married?” Whatever else they say, they always give me the big reason. And the big reason is almost always the same: “Because we love each other.” Then I ask a very unfair question: “What do you mean by that?” Typically they are stunned by the question. Most say something about a deep feeling that they have for each other. It has persisted for some time and is in some way different from what they have felt for other dating partners. Often they look at each other, they look at the ceiling, they giggle, and then one of them says, “Well, ah . . . oh, you know.” At this stage of my life, I think I do know—but I doubt that they know. I fear that they have the same perception of being in love that Karolyn and I had when we got married. And I know now that being in love is not a sufficient foundation on which to build a successful marriage.

Some time ago I had a call from a young man who asked if I would perform his wedding ceremony. I inquired as to when he wanted to get married and found that the wedding date was less than a week away. I explained that I usually have from six to eight counseling sessions with those who desire to be married.

His response was classic: “Well, to be honest with you, I don’t think we need any counseling. We really love each other and I don’t think we will have any problems.” I smiled and then wept inwardly—another victim of the “in love” illusion.

We often speak of “falling in love.” When I hear this phrase, I am reminded of the jungle animal hunt. A hole is dug in the midst of the animal’s path to the water hole, then camouflaged with branches and leaves. The poor animal runs along, minding his own business. Then all of a sudden it falls into the pit and is trapped.

This is the manner in which we speak of love. We are walking along doing our normal duties when all of a sudden, we look across the room or down the hall, and there she/he is—wham-o, “we fall in love.” There is nothing we can do about it. It is completely beyond our control. We know we are destined for marriage; the sooner the better. So, we tell our friends and because they operate on the same principle, they agree that if we are really in love, then it is time for marriage.

Often we fail to consider the fact that our social, spiritual, and intellectual interests are miles apart. Our value systems and goals are contradictory, but we are in love. The great tragedy stemming from this perception of love is that a year after the marriage, a couple sits in the counselor’s office and say, “We don’t love each other anymore.” Therefore, they are ready to separate. After all, if “love” is gone, then “surely you don’t expect us to stay together.”

When “the Tingles” Strike

I have a different word for the above-described emotional experience. I call it “the tingles.” We get warm, bubbly, tingly feelings for a member of the opposite sex. It is the tingles that motivate us to go out for a hamburger with him/her. Sometimes we lose

the tingles on the first date. We find out something about them that simply shuts our emotions down. The next time they invite us for a hamburger, we are not hungry. However, in other relationships, the more we are together, the tinglier the feeling. Before long, we find ourselves thinking about them day and night. Our thoughts are obsessive in nature. We see them as the most wonderful, exciting person we have ever known. We want to be together every possible moment. We dream of sharing the rest of our lives making each other happy.

Please do not misunderstand me. I think the tingles are important. They are real, and I am in favor of their survival. But they are not the basis for a satisfactory marriage. I am not suggesting that one should marry without the tingles. Those warm, excited feelings, the chill bumps, that sense of acceptance, the excitement of the touch that make up the tingles serve as the cherry on top of the sundae. But you cannot have a sundae with only the cherry. The many other factors that we discuss in this book must be a vital consideration in making a decision about marriage.

Being in love is an emotional and obsessive experience. However, emotions change and obsessions fade. Research indicates that the average life span of the “in love” obsession is two years.¹ For some it may last a bit longer; for some, a bit less. But the average is two years. Then we come down off the emotional high and those aspects of life that we disregarded in our euphoria begin to become important. Our differences begin to emerge and we often find ourselves arguing with the person whom we once thought to be perfect. We have now discovered for ourselves that being in love is not the foundation for a happy marriage.

For those of you who are currently in a dating relationship and are perhaps contemplating marriage, I would encourage you

to read the Appendix of this book, located on page 149. I believe that the primary purpose of dating is to get to know each other and to examine the intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical foundations for marriage. Only then are you able to make a wise decision—to marry or not to marry. The questions contained in the learning exercises in the Appendix will assist you in discussing these foundations.

Talking It Over

- 1.** On a scale of 0–10, how strongly do you feel the “tingles” for the person you are dating?
- 2.** If the average “life span” of the tingles is two years, how much longer can you expect to have the euphoric feelings?
- 3.** To what degree have you explored the more important issues of compatibility in the following areas?
 - intellectual dialogue
 - emotional control
 - social interests
 - spiritual unity
 - common values
- 4.** If you would like to explore these areas more fully, you may wish to use the questions found in the appendix, “Developing A Healthy Dating Relationship” on pages 149–161.