

# PREMARITAL COUNSELING WITH RODNEY A. FRY

## CHAPTER ONE

### What Is Marriage?

**Y**ou are about to begin one of the most important stages of your life—marriage. Marriage contains unique and interesting potential. As one bright optimist put it, “Marriage is the only game of chance in town where both players can win or both lose!” This counseling and homework has been developed to help you decrease the risk element from marriage. I trust that as you and your fiancé work through this, your present relationship will be strengthened and enhanced as a prelude to an enriching, fulfilling, and growing marriage. I also hope that you will have a much more realistic perception of yourself, your fiancé, and your upcoming marriage.

Side note I have compiled this from many sources over years of ministry and counseling. I try to source the material by no means do I desire to plagiarize any of this. I desire to give credit where credit is deserved. I give the Lord credit in all of this. Also if you see a typo please understand I am not an English major – I apologize. Sometimes I have put a wrong verse in (I pray I have not, I have spent many hours developing this. HOWEVER, if you find a typographical or a Biblical misprint please share it with me so I can correct it.

If you need more space use the back of the paper that is why I print on one side only. Or add a sheet.

**Marriage is more than a wedding, more than romance, and more than legal paperwork. A wedding is an event. A marriage is a covenant journey. Healthy marriages are not built only on attraction, emotion, or compatibility, but on shared commitment, Christ-centered love, daily sacrifice, honest communication, forgiveness, and steady faithfulness over time.**

**Many couples enter marriage with sincere love but unrealistic expectations. Love is important, but love must be taught, practiced, protected, and matured. A strong marriage is not found by accident. It is built intentionally.**

1. Define marriage. What is its purpose?
2. Do you believe that marriage is a contract? Why or why not?

3. How do you think your fiancé will answer these questions?

**Before you move further, take a few moments and answer these additional questions:**

- **What did marriage look like in the home where you grew up?**
- **What parts of that example do you want to repeat?**
- **What parts do you want to do differently?**
- **What do you believe makes a marriage feel safe, close, and strong?**
- **What are your greatest hopes and greatest fears about marriage?**

4. Read the following quotations. After you have read each of them indicate which portions you agree with and which portions you disagree with.

“Marriage resembles a pair of shears, so joined that they cannot be separated; often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing anyone who comes between them.”<sup>11</sup>

“Is marriage a private action of two persons in love, or a public act of two pledging a contract? Neither, it is something other. Very much other! Basically, the Christian view of marriage is not that it is primarily or essentially a binding legal and social contract. The Christian understands marriage as a covenant made under God and in the presence of fellow members of the Christian family. Such a pledge endures, not because of the force of law or the fear of its actions, but because an unconditional covenant has been made. A covenant more solemn, more binding, more permanent than any legal contract.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Sydney Smith, *Lady Holland's Memoir*, Vol. I (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1855).

2. David Augsburger, *Cherishable: Love and Marriage* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971), p. 16.

“A system by means of which persons who are sinful and contentious are so caught up by a dream and a purpose bigger than themselves that they work through the years, in spite of repeated disappointment, to make the dream come true.”<sup>23</sup>

“Marriage is a relationship between man and woman intended by God to be a monogamous relationship, intended to be a permanent bond in which many needs are satisfied—the need to love and be loved, the need for deep friendship, for sharing, for companionship, for sexual satisfaction, for children, the need to escape loneliness. Marriage ought to be a bond of love, reflecting the love Christ has for His people, a bond of sacrificial love where husband and wife have become one, one flesh, a unity.”<sup>4</sup>

***After discussing the quotes above, answer this question together: Which definition of marriage sounds closest to what you hope to build, and which parts challenge you the most?***

***Read Genesis 2:18-25***

1. Who originated the marriage institution?
2. What are the purposes of marriage, and why was it originated? (See Genesis 1:28; 2:18; Ephesians 5:22-32.)
3. How is marriage good? (Genesis 2:18; Hebrews 13:4.)
4. What is a *helper*, in your opinion? In your fiancé’s opinion?
5. What does “leaving mother and father” involve?

---

<sup>23</sup> D. Elton Trueblood.

4. Daniel Freeman, “Why Get Married?” *Theology News and Notes of Fuller Theological Seminary*, 1973 (December 1973, 19:4), p. 17.

6. What do the words “shall cleave” or “will be united” mean?
  
7. What do the words “be one flesh” mean to you?

**In today’s world, “leaving and cleaving” also includes emotional, financial, and relational maturity. It means that while parents and extended family may still be loved and honored, your spouse becomes your primary human relationship. It means learning to build new traditions, make shared decisions, and protect the unity of your home.**

8. List six ways that you can promote and maintain the oneness characteristic in your upcoming marriage.

**List three ways outside relationships or outside pressures could threaten your oneness if you are not careful.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**List three boundaries you believe will help protect your future marriage.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

9. List three of the most important Scripture verses upon which you would like to base your marriage relationship. (Please use passages other than Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Corinthians 13; and 1 Peter 3:1-7, as most couples automatically look to these. They are important, but think through other important passages that will assist you in establishing the type of marriage you are seeking.)

Here is another definition of marriage that you may want to consider. “The marriage relationship is a school, a learning and growing environment in which (if everything is as it should be) both partners can grow and develop. The relationship grows along with them. If you can see marriage as an opportunity for growth, you can be satisfied and can satisfy your spouse.”

Dr. David Hubbard graphically described the marriage relationship when he said, “Marriage does not demand perfection. But it must be given priority. It is an institution for sinners. No one else

need apply. But it finds its finest glory when sinners see it as God's way of leading us through his ultimate curriculum of love and righteousness."<sup>35</sup> Have you ever thought about the purpose of marriage in that light?

Here's another definition of marriage. Consider it carefully, and then talk over your feelings with your partner: "A Christian marriage is a total commitment of two people to the person of Jesus Christ and to each other. It is a commitment in which nothing is held back. Marriage is a pledge of mutual fidelity; it is a partnership of mutual subordination. 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 that God will use to have us become the man or woman He wants us to become. Think about it. God will use your marriage for His purpose. He will mold and refine you for your own benefit and for His glory."

**Marriage is not simply about finding the right person. It is also about becoming the right spouse. God often uses marriage to reveal our selfishness, deepen our sanctification, strengthen our character, and teach us how to love in ways that are patient, humble, truthful, and enduring.**

You may be thinking that when you marry there will be two individuals involved in that marriage. That is true, but there is a third party who can give an even greater meaning to your individual and married life—that person is Jesus Christ. In what way will the presence of Jesus Christ in your life make a difference in your marriage?

**What practical habits will help keep Christ at the center of your marriage? Check any that you desire to practice and discuss why:**

- **Praying together**
- **Attending church faithfully**
- **Serving others together**
- **Reading Scripture together**
- **Having spiritual conversations regularly**
- **Inviting accountability from mature believers**
- **Confessing sin quickly and forgiving often**

Read Matthew 7:24-27. This passage is talking about building your house upon a firm foundation. List what you believe are ten firm foundations which will go into making a solid marriage relationship.

---

<sup>35</sup> From a message by Dr. David Hubbard, president of Fuller Theological Seminary.

## Reasons for Marriage

---

There are many reasons and motivating factors for marriage. What are yours? Have you ever thought about them? Respond to the following and discuss your answers with your fiancé.

1. What will you receive out of marriage that you wouldn't receive by remaining single?
2. On a separate piece of paper, list the reasons why you are marrying your fiancé. After you have done that, list the reasons why you think your fiancé is marrying you. Then share the results.

Now compare your reasons for marriage with the following list, which has been compiled by several specialists in marriage and family life education. These are unhealthy reasons for marriage. If you find that any of these appear either on your list or in your mind, you should spend time discussing them with your fiancé and your marriage advisor.

1. To spite or get back at your parents.
2. Because of a negative self-image—marrying your fiancé will make you feel worthwhile and will give meaning to your life.
3. To be a therapist or counselor to your fiancé.
4. Fear of being left out—being single forever.
5. Fear of independence.
6. Marrying on the rebound—you were hurt in a former love relationship and to ease your hurt you immediately choose another.
7. Fear of hurting the other person—you're afraid of what will happen to your fiancé if you break up even though you know that marriage is not the answer.
8. To escape an unhappy home.
9. Because you are pregnant or your fiancé is pregnant.
10. Because you have had sex.

A few of the positive reasons for marriage include:

1. Companionship.
2. To work together and fulfill your own and your future mate's needs.
3. To fulfill sexual needs in the way God intends.
4. Love (an adequate blending of the various types of love, as explained in chapter 3).
5. Because you are convinced that it is God's will for you to marry this person.

**Evaluate your “marriageability”** by examining the personality traits of yourself and your fiancé. List eight character or personality traits that you feel would help a marriage.

Turn in your Bible to Galatians 5:22,23 and read over the fruit of the Spirit. Would these traits, manifested in a person, increase the potential of success in marriage?

If so, indicate which of these you manifest and which of them you are still having difficulty displaying.

**Now answer honestly: Which fruit of the Spirit does your fiancé experience most easily from you right now? Which fruit do they probably need more from you?**

In addition to using the fruit of the Spirit as a guide for evaluating the potential success of a marriage, consider these eight marriageability traits that give a person a greater possibility of having an enriched and satisfying marriage.

1. Adaptability and flexibility—the ability to change and adapt.
2. Empathy—the ability to be sensitive to the needs, hurts, and desires of others, to feel with them and experience the world from their perspective.
3. The ability to work through problems.
4. The ability to give and receive love.
5. Emotional stability—accepting and controlling one’s emotions.
6. Communication skills.
7. Similarities between the two people.
8. Similar family background.

The natural inclination is to look at this list and say, “Oh yes, that’s us. We are like that and have these characteristics.” If you feel these traits are present in your relationship, give a specific example of how each of the first six traits was manifested in the past two weeks. Then, for traits seven and eight, give examples of each type of similarity.

Now that you’ve taken a close look at the fundamental issues of marriage, it’s natural to move to organizing and implementing the details of your wedding day. “Planning Your Wedding Together” will help both of you make this a special, unifying time of preparation.

**I would also strongly encourage you to evaluate the following areas before marriage:**

### **1. Conflict Style**

**How do you each respond when upset? Do you pursue, withdraw, shut down, raise your voice, become sarcastic, or try to fix things too quickly? Healthy marriages are not marriages without conflict. They are marriages that learn how to repair conflict in a godly way.**

## **2. Expectations**

**What are your expectations about roles, chores, children, sex, in-laws, holidays, church involvement, money, and time together? Unspoken expectations often become future resentments.**

## **3. Friendship**

**Do you enjoy one another? Can you laugh together, talk together, and genuinely like each other beyond romance? Friendship is one of the strongest pillars of lasting marriage.**

## **4. Financial Stewardship**

**Have you discussed debt, giving, spending habits, saving goals, financial priorities, and who manages what? Financial disagreement is one of the most common stressors in marriage.**

## **5. Technology and Boundaries**

**What are your expectations regarding phones, privacy, texting others, social media, pornography, entertainment, and online accountability? Modern marriages must talk openly about digital integrity.**

## **6. Family of Origin Influence**

**What patterns from your home are you carrying into this marriage? Some will help you. Some may hurt you. You must identify both.**

## **7. Emotional Safety**

**Can both of you share fears, hurts, and disappointments without being mocked, ignored, or punished? A strong marriage must become a safe place for truth.**

## **8. Spiritual Compatibility and Direction**

**Do you agree on church involvement, biblical convictions, future family leadership, discipleship of children, and how faith will shape your home?**

---

## **Discussion and Reflection Questions**

**Use these questions to deepen your premarital conversations:**

### **Communication**

- **When I feel hurt, what do I tend to do first?**
- **What helps me feel heard and understood?**
- **What shuts me down in conflict?**
- **How did my family handle disagreement?**

### **Expectations**

- **What does being a good husband look like to you?**
- **What does being a good wife look like to you?**
- **What role should extended family play in decisions?**
- **How much time do you expect us to spend together, with friends, and with family?**

### **Finances**

- **What are your current debts, spending habits, and savings goals?**
- **Do you tend to be a spender, saver, giver, or avoider?**
- **How will we make financial decisions together?**

### **Spiritual Life**

- **What does spiritual leadership look like in a practical sense?**
- **How will we respond if one of us feels spiritually dry?**
- **What kind of home do we want to build spiritually?**

### **Conflict**

- **What usually triggers me?**
- **What helps me calm down?**
- **How do I prefer to repair after conflict?**
- **What does forgiveness look like to me?**

### **Intimacy**

- **What do trust, tenderness, and emotional closeness mean to you?**
- **How do we guard purity before marriage and faithfulness after marriage?**

- How will we talk about sexual expectations in an honest and respectful way?

## A Pastoral Reminder

A healthy marriage is not built by two perfect people. It is built by two humble people who are willing to repent, forgive, grow, and keep choosing one another. Every marriage will face moments of disappointment, misunderstanding, fatigue, temptation, and pain. The question is not whether those moments will come. The question is what foundation you will stand on when they do.

If Christ is at the center, if truth is spoken in love, if forgiveness is practiced, and if covenant remains stronger than changing emotion, a marriage can grow stronger even through hardship.

**Now that you've taken a close look at some of the foundational issues of marriage, it is natural to begin thinking about the details of your wedding day. But never forget this: a beautiful wedding lasts a day, while a healthy marriage is built over a lifetime. As you prepare for your ceremony, give even greater attention to preparing your hearts, your habits, your communication, your convictions, and your commitment before God. "Planning Your Wedding Together" is designed to help both of you make this a special and unifying season of preparation, not only for a wedding, but for a Christ-centered marriage.**