

A Program for Premarital Guidance

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Introduction

This program provides suggestions for a series of eight sessions of approximately 90 minutes each between a couple and a pastor, counselor or other individual with training in the issues related to premarital guidance. Couple assignments for between sessions are included. The final selection of topics and adaptation may be made as necessary by the pastor/counselor to fit particular situations.

Objectives

1. To help the couple to establish a Christian foundation for marriage.
2. To prepare the couple for the transition to married life.
3. To assist the couple in development of relationship skills.
4. To confirm the couple's decision to marry each other or encourage them to postpone their wedding until further relational growth occurs.

One of the by-products of the program can be the development of confidence and trust in the pastor/counselor so that couples will have greater appreciation for specialized help for their marriage in the future.

Methodology

In this program, information and relationship skill-building elements are combined with personal and relationship assessment tools. The pastor/counselor provides information as necessary and models the skills involved, but primarily serves as a facilitator and coach of a process that enables the couple to discover their personal and relationship strengths and weaknesses and stimulates relational growth.

Preparing for Marriage Inventory

The Preparing for Marriage Inventory is the primary assessment tool in this program. It provides a means for the pastor/counselor to assess the personal and relational needs of the couple. The couple's responses to PMI also provides a source of material for counselor-couple discussion and couple dialogue in the presence of the pastor/counselor during the sessions.

Session 1: Foundations for Marriage

Couple's Assignments before Session 1.

- Write two or three paragraphs giving your definition of marriage. Include reflections on Genesis 2:25, 25; Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14. Why do you think God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16)?
- Complete the *Preparing for Marriage Inventory*.
- Complete Worksheet A: "Am I Ready for Marriage?"
- If additional testing instruments such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis or PREPARE are available, they may be assigned at this time.

Counselor's Outline for Session 1.

- **Get acquainted.** Ask each partner to introduce and describe the other to you. Share information about yourself that will enable them to relate to you as a person as well as a counselor.
- **Discuss their expectations of premarital counseling.** Ask: "What would you like to see accomplished during this period of premarital preparation?"
- **Ask about their reasons for marrying.** Invite the couple to describe to each other the specific reasons why they want to marry each other. Be attentive to their reasons, affirming the positives and making mental note of the more unhealthy reasons for later discussion.

Among the unhealthy reason of marriage: Attempting to improve ones negative self-image, fear of lifelong singleness, marrying on the rebound from a former painful relationship, escaping an unhappy home, guilt because of sexual intimacy or pregnancy. Positive reasons include: Companionship, partnership in work for God and others, fulfillment of ones own and ones partner's needs, fulfillment of sexual needs in the way God intends, conviction that marriage to this person is in harmony with God's will.

- **Discuss Christian foundations for marriage.** Invite the couple to share their written definitions of marriage and discuss with each other their understanding of the assigned texts. Additional questions might include: What is your present relationship to Christ and what role will He play in your marriage? What are your convictions about divorce as an option for Christians? How will your position affect the quality of your commitment to one another? "An Affirmation of Marriage" (Handout 1) may be used to continue the discussion on Christian marriage or given to the couple for reading and discussion outside the session.

- **Discuss the transition from premarital life to marriage.** Questions for the couple might include: What will be different about your relationship after the wedding day other than physical sexual intimacy? Do you foresee any hurtles you will have to surmount? If so, what might they be? Encourage them to discuss their responses with each other rather than directing their responses toward you.

Major issues in the transition from the premarital period to marriage include leaving ones family of origin and changing the relationships with opposite-sex friends and with parents to reflect the fact

that they now have a special relationship with each other. Explore with the couple what they think might be involved in each of these tasks.

- **Collect remaining homework assignments; Distribute next assignments.** Collect their copies of *Preparing for Marriage Inventory* and Worksheet A: "Am I Ready for Marriage?" These will help you in your on-going assessment of the couple's needs.

Session 2: Family and Relationship History

Couple's Assignments before Session 2

- If the couple has not completed the *Preparing for Marriage Inventory*, they should do so in preparation for Session 2.

Counselor's Outline for Session 2

- **Welcome, time for concerns and questions.**

- **Discuss each individual's family history.** Past family relationships tend to influence how we relate to others now and in the future. Parts XI, XII of PM I provide the raw material for this session. Additional discussion points: Who makes decisions in the family in which you grew up? Who "owns" what territory? How is your fiancé/fiancée similar to your father or mother? Is there any way in which there is still a dependency or something unresolved between you and your parents? What is there about your parents' marriage that you want or don't want? How would you like feelings of love, warmth, and tenderness shown to you in public and in your home?

- **Discuss related family systems issues.** If you are familiar with the use of a genogram, you may construct one for the couple and endeavor to identify problematic family linkages, as well as issues of addiction and co-dependent behaviors.

Questions that can create discussion with the couple at this time include: Is there anything about yourself or your past that you think might seriously affect your marriage? Was there alcohol or substance abuse in your family, lack of affirmation, or emotional, sexual, or physical abuse? How have you found the presence of any of these things to have an influence on your life today? In what ways will you make changes so that the presence of these in the past will enable you to have a different future together? In the light of what is happening to marriages today, why will yours be different?

Provide hope. Close with the hopeful and encouraging thought that, though difficulties and dysfunction may have marked one's history in the past, it is possible with God's help to create healthy patterns of relationship today that are different from those of the past.

Session 3: Celebrating Our Differences

Couple's Assignments before Session 3

- Written exercise: Candidly list fears, anxieties or worries that you have as you think about being married.

- Worksheet B: "Celebrating Our Differences"

Counselor's Outline for Session 3

- **Welcome, time for concerns and questions.**

• **Discuss test results.** If you have used a test such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis, or PREPARE, you may wish to discuss the results with the couple at this time. Treat all such information as private and, if you plan to share results with the couple together, do so only with the permission of each partner. Do not focus solely on the differences between the spouses. Look for opportunities to affirm the partners' accuracies in understanding each other.

• **Assist the couple in understanding, accepting and appreciating each other's differentness.** The completed exercise "Celebrating Our Differences" (Worksheet B) as well as results you have observed in their *Preparing for Marriage Inventory* will provide further insights into areas in which they may feel troubled by their differences.

Some differentness can be expected in couples, arising from differences in gender, temperament, family of origin, culture, and habits or personal preferences. Understanding, accommodation, adaptation, even appreciation come as the couple's love and commitment are aided by improved communication and conflict resolution skills. Provide opportunity for the couple to discuss their exercise "Celebrating Our Differences." Help them to identify each other's needs and to talk openly about how they expect to address these now and in the future. Be alert for the tendency to gloss over differentness or the expectation that the other person will change. Watch for warning signs of abuse, attitudes of superiority, manipulation, or emotional control that are inappropriate in relationships.

• **Discuss healthy self-worth.** You may wish to discuss the importance of a healthy sense of personal worth as it is rooted first of all in God's attitude of love and acceptance of us through Christ and then reinforced by experiences of unconditional love found with in marriage, with family, friends or church. Ask the couple to dialogue together so that you can hear them talk about: In what ways do each of you give affirmation to each other, build each other up (Rom. 14: 19; 1 Thess. 5:11), or lift each other up when you fall (Ecc. 4:12)?

• **Collect the couple's written exercise on fears in marriage.** You may wish to have this merely for information or to have the couples discuss these with each other during a later session.

Session 4: Communication

Couple's Assignments before Session 4

- Worksheet C: "Communication Checklist"
- Worksheet D: "Communication and Us"

Counselor's Outline for Session 4

- **Welcome, time for concerns and questions.**

• **Discuss responses to Worksheet C: "Communication Checklist."** Ask the couple to share their responses with each other.

- **Some instruction in communication and coaching of the couple to explore new communication patterns may be appropriate.** Help the couple to understand the relationship of verbal and non-verbal communication (Handout 2: "Communication Components"). As a general rule, couples should use both nonverbal and verbal messages when expressing positive feelings but rely heavily on words when they wish to communicate negative feelings. They should be able to listen attentively to the thoughts and feelings of others (Handout 3: "Listening Effectively"), and be comfortable with deeper levels of self-disclosure (Handout 4: "Levels of Communication"). Understanding male-female differences in communication style may also be helpful (See Handout 5: "Male-Female Differences in Communication").

- **Ask the couple to dialogue together on the topics covered in Worksheet D, "Communication and Us,"** employing the communication skills they are learning.

- **Distribute Handout 6: "Bible Hints on Communication."** Use this for further study during the session or for the couple to study together between sessions.

Session 5: Handling Conflict

Couple's Assignments before Session 5

- Individually complete Worksheet E: "Sometimes We Don't Agree."
- Complete together Worksheet F: "David and Michal."

Counselor's Outline for Session 5

- **Welcome, time for concerns and questions.**
- **Discuss responses to Worksheet E: "Sometimes We Don't Agree."** Invite the couple to share their responses with each other and to talk together about the following questions while you listen, observe and coach their communication process: What did you learn from the Bible study of David and Michal (Worksheet F)? In what ways could you identify with their experience? How has anger expressed itself in your relationship? What do you do about it?
- **Offer instruction on anger and conflict resolution as appropriate.** Explore texts such as Mark 3:5 and Eph. 4:26 to help the couple view anger as an emotion that, when rightly used, serves to protect and preserve human dignity and respect. In marriage, it provides a warning signal about areas that need attention if emotional closeness is to be achieved. Used destructively, anger leads to attitudes and behaviors that erode and destroy intimacy, but by getting behind the anger to the hurt feeling that has triggered it, the couple can learn something valuable and important about their relationship, discover each other's needs, and grow closer.

Study Handout 7: "Steps in Creative Problem-Solving" with the couple, which offers a problem-solving/conflict resolving sequence. Build the couple's skill in problem solving by having them work on a conflict issue of their own or on one or more of those found on Worksheet G: "Conflict Situations."

- **Discuss the Christian concept of forgiveness.** Possible questions might include: What is your understanding of forgiveness? How would you see forgiveness operating in a marriage? In your view, would forgiveness mean the acceptance of abuse? Help the couple to envision forgiveness as a God-

given process that, over time, can foster the healing of emotional wounds. Forgiveness includes an unconditional aspect in which the wounded one experiences release from a desire to retaliate and extends forgiveness in the spirit of Christ (Luke 23:34; Eph. 4:32). Such forgiveness does not mean reconciliation, but instead creates a climate that may lead to relationship healing. Forgiveness also has a conditional aspect that requires acceptance on the part of the offender expressed in repentance (2 Chron. 7:14; Luke 17:3, 4). Only when true repentance is evident—stopping the offending behavior, taking responsibility for the offense, recognizing the hurt that has been caused, and making such amends as are possible—can the fullness of forgiveness, which opens the door for possible reconciliation in the relationship, be experienced.

Session 6: Roles, Finances and In-laws

Couple's Assignments before Session 6

- Study Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:21-33; Philippians 2:4 and discuss how the gospel principle of mutual submission will be expressed in your marriage.
- Work together on Worksheet H: "Roles Exploration."
- Work together on Worksheet I: "Household Budget." Think in terms of the first year of marriage.
- Write a letter to your respective in-laws stating reasons why you are glad to be joining their family. Ask for suggestions on how to make a good adjustment in marriage to their son/daughter.

Counselor's Outline for Session 6

- **Welcome, time for concerns and questions.**
- **Discuss responsibilities in marriage. For couple dialogue:** What did the study of the assigned passages mean to you? What new understandings did you have? What did the process of doing the "Roles Exploration" worksheet do for you? What did you learn about the pattern your marriage will take? How does your choice of "who does what" compare with your family of origin?
- **Discuss finances.** Invite the couple to describe their experience in preparing their budget for the first year. For couple dialogue: What is your spiritual understanding of stewardship over your finances? What expectations did you discover that you have for each other? If your parents or parents in-law offered to give you a generous sum of money, how would you relate to this? How much money from your family finances should your partner be able to spend without your permission? How did you arrive at your figure?
- **Discuss in-law relationships.** Some entry points for discussion and couple dialogue might be: What were your feelings about writing the letter to your future in-laws? How did you feel about their response? What are some of the wishes of both families that you intend to include in your wedding plans? Describe your parents' attitude toward your marriage. Do the two sets of parents like each other? Describe things about your future in-laws that you really like. Describe things about your future in-laws that you do not like. What do you plan to do about the characteristics you do not like in your future in-laws?

Session 7: Sexuality, Wedding Plans

Couple's Assignments before Session 7

- Complete individually Worksheet J: "Sexuality."

Counselor's Outline for Session 7

- **Welcome, time for concerns and questions.**
- **Discuss sexuality.** Invite the couple to dialogue together about their answers on Worksheet J "Sexuality." Other points for discussion and couple dialogue: When you were growing up, with whom did you feel comfortable when talking about your questions concerning sex? What made that person easy to talk with? How important is sex in a Christian couple's marriage? What difference would being a Christian make in a couple's sexual relationship in marriage? How will you respond and deal with it if, after you are married, another person is attracted to you and approaches you? What if you find yourself attracted to another person? Other questions might be: What is your level of comfort at this time in your relationship? What if you learn that another person is attracted to your spouse? What if you find that your spouse is attracted to another person?
- **Discuss pair-bonding.** Using Handout 8: "Pair Bonding," discuss the steps in the formation of a strong and healthy pair bond. These steps provide information of use to couples in understanding aspects of their current relationship, in strengthening their future marriage, and in guarding against the formation of inappropriate bonds outside the marriage.
- **Discuss family planning.** It is important that opportunity be given for discussion and questions by the couple on the topic of family planning. For couple dialogue: How many children would be ideal for you? When will you plan for the first to be born? Will you use contraceptives, or how will you accomplish family planning? How does your fiancé(e) feel about these issues? What are your attitudes about abortion?
- **Review the couple's wedding plans with them.** Wedding planning often is a time of stress for couples. During this session, or at an additional session, they may wish to review their planning with you. You can reassure and comfort them as they consider the details of their wedding day. Help them anticipate what their respective families may expect and to empathize with other family members. They may need help with the resolution of difficult details, such as who's in charge of the wedding plans and reception, placing limitations on spending, etc. Invite the couple to make a list of what they want their wedding to reflect and what would be pleasing to both sets of relatives. Help them focus on the central purpose of the ceremony—a celebration of their love and the public affirmation of their promises to each other before God.
- **Make an appointment for the post-wedding session.** This session, described below, should occur approximately six months after the wedding.

Session 8: Post-wedding Session

- **Help during the first year.** Prior to marriage and for a period thereafter, couples are often in a state of bliss—emotionally detached from reality, and not very open to input. Some research shows that after the sixth month they come to see themselves in more realistic terms and are ready for help

that they would previously have ignored. The early months of marriage are a time when the pair develops their interaction patterns, which then become habitual to them. If these patterns are growth-promoting, they will move toward emotional closeness and true oneness. Otherwise, the relationship will tend to move toward disillusionment and alienation.

• **Topics to be addressed.** Areas of concern which might be addressed include: 1) adjustment; 2) communication; 3) enrichment. Invite them to talk with each other and to you about: What are the most positive experiences you have had during the first months of marriage? Where have you had the greatest difficulty? On which areas are you working together well? On which are you having difficulty? Have tensions or blocks developed in your communication? How are you doing in conflict resolution?

Encourage the couple to set aside regular time for couple devotions and for marriage enrichment, through reading, attendance at a marriage enrichment retreat, or regular visits with a pastor or counselor.

Any areas not thoroughly covered during the pre-marriage sessions (incomplete discussions, reading, worksheets) may be re-visited at this time. Additional sessions may be planned as the needs are expressed by the couple.

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Handout 1

AN AFFIRMATION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is very good. In response to a question about marriage, Jesus pointed His hearers back to marriage as ordained at creation (Matt. 19:3), when God pronounced all things "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The marriage of the first human pair portrayed God's ideal for this relationship. They were "one flesh" and "naked and unashamed" (Gen. 2:24, 25). In their union God provided for love, affection and companionship as well as the perpetuation of the human family (Gen. 2:18; Prov. 5:18; Gen. 1:28). Marriage is honorable (Heb. 13:4). A man who finds a wife "finds what is good" (Prov. 18:22 NIV).

Marriage has been perverted by sin, but restored by grace. The sin of the first couple altered their relationship. In obedience to God, their married lives had been harmonious and peaceful. Disobedience brought consequences that adversely affected them personally and in their marriage (Gen. 3:6-16). Power struggles in marriage, blaming, distrust, and abuse have been exhibited everywhere since the fall of the first married couple. The entrance of sin changed the way couples experience marriage. The selfishness of human hearts caused it to be something far less than God's ideal. But the good news of the gospel concerning marriage is that sin's power is broken. By the grace of God the experience of marriage can be very good.

Marriage is a three-fold, lifelong covenant. When a man and woman marry they enter into a covenant with each other, with society, and with God to be faithful to one another until death (Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). As the gospel is experienced in marriage, the relationship of the partners with each other is fashioned after the likeness of the divine covenant with humanity (Psalms 89:34; Lament. 3:23). They are to love, serve and forgive as He loves, serves and forgives (John 15:12; Matt. 20:26-28; Eph. 5:21-33; Titus 2:4, Eph. 4:32). The couple draws strength from the provisions made in the divine covenant, God promising grace and power to enable them to do what they could not do on their own (Eph. 6:10; Phil. 4:13). His covenant love knits together what sin separates (Col 2:2). This covenant, with the cross of Christ at its center, makes possible the intimate union of a man and a woman in marriage. As the cross is uplifted, spouses who have become alienated may be brought near to God and to each other. The blood of Jesus breaks down the walls of hostility that the enemy has built up (Eph 2:13, 14).

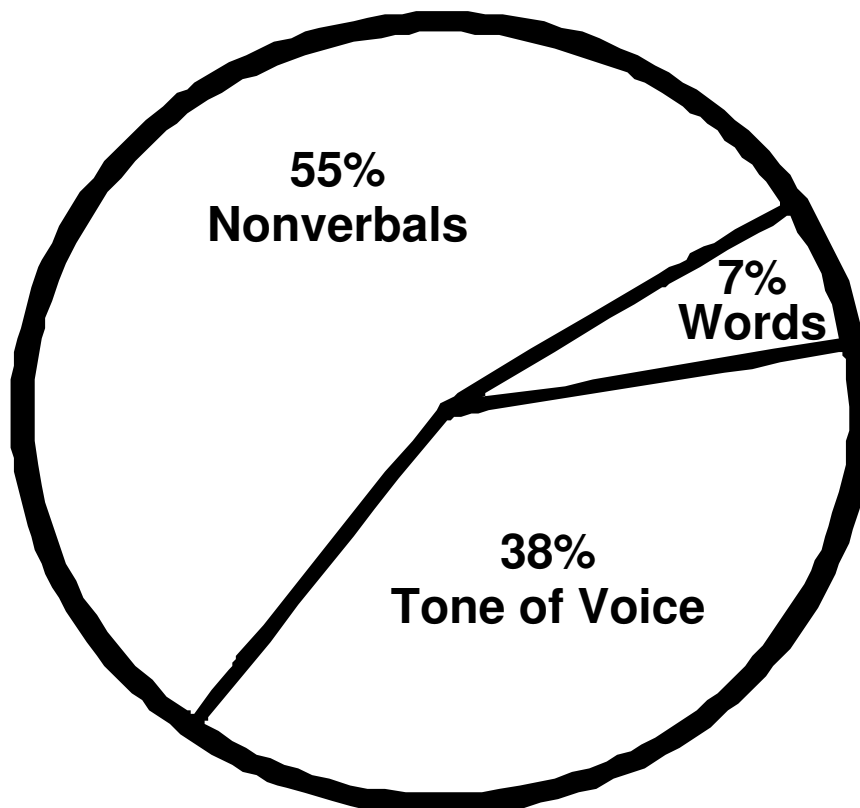
Marriage is a union of equals. From the very beginning, male and female were equally formed in the image of God, equally blessed, and made co-regents over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). Jesus elevated the partially lost status of women, treating them with love and respect and restoring their original creation equality with men (Mark 10:2-12; 14:3-9; John 4:7-30; 8:1-11). The apostle Paul declares that all human beings, regardless of race, sex or age are one by virtue of creation (Acts 17:26) and redemption (Gal. 3:28). He proclaimed that Christ has broken the barriers of prejudice, religious tradition and customs that cause one group to view another as inferior (Eph. 2:14, 16). Paul upheld the rights of husbands and wives as equals in their marital relationship (1 Cor. 7:3-5). Peter speaks of married couples as being "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). While some obvious capabilities pertaining to human reproduction belong uniquely to each of the sexes, the potential of each spouse is not otherwise limited or fixed by gender. In their loving, trusting relationship, each is able to pursue interests, fill roles, and take responsibilities according to their spiritual giftedness, aptitudes, talents and abilities.

Marriage is a dynamic relationship. Marriage is a union of two people who undoubtedly share

some common values, but who will nevertheless need to work at making numerous adjustments throughout their lives together. Spouses frequently are very different in temperament, habits and tastes. Education and backgrounds, lifestyle and the structure of the families in which they grew up all have an impact on the new marriage. The two who link their lives in marriage bring to their union their hopes, their plans, their strengths and their weaknesses. At their wedding they begin a process of blending their dreams, modifying their expectations and dealing with each other's imperfections. Forces at work within and around them will produce changes in them personally, in their marriage and in their relationships with others. In their passage through life, various phases will be encountered, each with some built-in, predictable crises that can and often will occur. These life-cycle stages and other stresses in living will require on-going adaptation.

This process of maturing, coping with change and adjusting to each other in ways that provide satisfying levels of intimacy--this growing--is a continuous experience. Marriage is therefore not static, but dynamic. Some couples are better equipped than others in dealing with their differentness, handling changes and in making the adjustments necessary for a healthy, lifelong marriage. Virtually all, however, need some help in anticipating change, preparing for it and living successfully through the seasons of their lives and marriages. Enrichment programs which assist couples in developing relational skills, support networks of caring couples, and marriage counseling are important resources to enable couples to meet the demands of contemporary marriage and life together.

Marriage is a ministry. Each couple is a ministry unit which can be highly effective in reaching out to strengthen and encourage other couples and individuals. A great need is present in the lives of countless husbands and wives for guidance and encouragement in their marriages. Fewer and fewer couples have models of lasting, committed, satisfying Christian marriages at which to look for a pattern for their own relationship. Societal pressures against marriage are such as to necessitate the enlistment of every available Christian couple in outreach and support for other married couples. In the presence of such caring couples, many husbands and wives will see a practical demonstration of God's love, find reassurance for their identity, comfort in the midst of difficulty and hope to carry them forward.

COMMUNICATION COMPONENTS

Of the total feeling conveyed in a spoken message, 7% is verbal feeling, 38% is vocal feeling, and 55% is facial feeling. Because we are more likely to censor our words than our actions in expressing our words, it is very common to find inconsistencies between these two levels of communication. We are more likely to use words to comment on the other's actions and more likely to use nonverbal messages to comment on the other as a person. It is the latter set of messages that appears to dictate both satisfaction with the encounter and attraction to the other person, as well as to qualify the ways in which the spoken words will be understood.

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Handout 3

LISTENING EFFECTIVELY

Listening is a learned skill and it can be developed. More effective listening will show our love, care and support more fully and help our relationships grow.

Listen non-verbally. Do not listen passively; listen actively. Listen for words, tone of voice, facial and body language. When a person's words and body language send different messages, believe the body language. Remember that just as her non-verbals convey feeling messages, so do yours. As you are listening, send non-verbal messages with your body: Maintain good eye contact, give appropriate facial expression, nod your head, smile or gesture with your hands occasionally as appropriate, stay close physically, with your body position leaning slightly toward the speaker, and touch occasionally.

Listen verbally. When we listen actively, we also give some verbal response to indicate to the other person that his message has been heard and correctly understood. Some responses are simple "door openers," they encourage the individual to continue speaking. Such responses let them know you are still with them, still actively listening:
 "Mm-mmm, I see," "Yes," "Oh? Really?" "Then what happened?" "Wow!" "Tell me about it."

Allow a person to express himself as completely as he wishes without interrupting, except to summarize as often as is necessary for you to accurately reflect his message. At an appropriate juncture you can say, "Let me see if I've heard what you said." Then endeavor to briefly summarize both the content and feeling. You can introduce your summary with "I hear you saying . . .", "You seem to be saying . . ." or "It sounds like you feel . . ." Then rephrase the person's comments in your own words, incorporating the feeling words he or she has used or synonyms for them. If the individual has not used feeling words, then endeavor to identify their feelings and express them in words in your summary. "It sounds like you're confused about whether to try out for the team." "You feel good about your test results, but you were anxious during the exam." "So, your boss asked Sally to take over the open position instead of you? That must've really hurt!" After each summary, you can say something like, "Is there anything more?" or "I'm interested in hearing more" to encourage further sharing.

Listening actively conveys empathy, acceptance, and freedom with support. Although others may sometimes communicate anger, frustration, disappointment, embarrassment, pain and other negative emotions, they need to know that they are accepted even feeling the way they do.

Listening summary. A person who really listens:

- Listens for both feelings and content.
- Accepts the one sending the message, even though his words and/or feelings may not be pleasant.
- Checks back with the speaker to determine whether the message has been received correctly.
- Repeats the process if the message was incorrectly received.

Listening formula: Listen . . . accept . . . check back.

LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

Level One: Cliché Conversation . . . This type of talk is very safe. We use phrases such as "how are you?" "How's the dog?" "Where have you been?" "I like your dress." In this type of conversation there is no personal sharing. Each person remains safely behind his defenses.

Level Two: Reporting the Facts about Others . . . In this kind of conversation we are content to tell others what someone else has said, but we offer no personal information on these facts. We report the facts like the six o'clock news. We share gossip and little narrations but we do not commit ourselves as to how we feel about it.

Level Three: My Ideas and Judgments . . . Real communication begins to unfold here. The person is willing to step out of his solitary confinement and risk telling some of his ideas and decisions. He is still cautious. If he senses that what he is saying is not being accepted, he will retreat.

Level Four: My Feelings or Emotions . . . At this level the person shares how he feels about facts, ideas, and judgments. His feelings underneath these areas are revealed. For a person to really share himself with another individual he must move to the level of sharing his feelings.

Level Five: Complete Emotional and Personal Communication . . . All deep relationships must be based on absolute openness and honesty. This may be difficult to achieve because it involves risk -- the risk of being rejected. But it is vital if relationships are to grow. There will be times when this type of communication is not as complete as it could be.

Adapted from Powell, J. (1969). *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?* Niles, IL: Argus Communications and Roberts, W., & Wright, H. N. (1978). *Before you say "I do"*. Irvine, CA: Harvest House Publishers.

MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION

Key conversational differences between men and women, which seem to be derived from the different subcultures of boys and girls, can be summarized as follows:

- Women seem to regard questions as a way to maintain a conversation, while men view them as requests for information.
- Women tend to connect "bridges" between what their conversational partner has just said and what it is that they have to say.
- Men do not generally follow this rule and often appear to ignore the preceding comment by their partner.
- Women seem to interpret aggressiveness by their partner as an attack that disrupts the relationship. Men seem to view aggressiveness simply as a form of conversation.
- Women are more likely to share feelings and secrets. Men like to discuss less intimate topics, such as sports and politics.
- Women tend to discuss problems with one another, share their experiences, and offer reassurances. Men, on the other hand, tend to hear women (as well as other men) who discuss problems with them as making explicit requests for solutions, rather than as simply looking for a sympathetic ear.

Beck, A. T. (1988). *Love is never enough*. New York: Harper Perennial.

BIBLE HINTS ON COMMUNICATION

1. The sure way to have appropriate words is to have a prepared heart. Matthew 12:34-35; James 3:17-18; Proverbs 25:11.
2. The secret of communicating is not talking but listening. James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13.
3. Accentuate the positive. Romans 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.
4. Admit when you're wrong. Forgive and forget. James 5:16; Colossians 3:13.
5. Avoid arguments over trifles. Don't criticize each other, restore one another. 2 Timothy 2:14; Galatians 6:1.
6. Nagging grates on the nerves like a dripping faucet. Proverbs 27:15.
7. Accept the feelings of others and be tender and courteous to one another. Ephesians 4:2, 32.

STEPS IN CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

1. Deal with issues, grievances and potential conflict situations as they occur. Work on the current situation without bringing up the past.
2. Listen and share. Use communication skills. Attack the problem or the conflict, not the partner. "None of you should think only of his own affairs, but each should learn to see things from other people's point of view" (Philippians 2:4, Phillips).
3. Think of the problem in terms of each one's needs. Look beneath the surface for factors in each person's life which are driving him or her to take the position being taken. Are there health, safety, or security needs? Needs for love, belonging, acceptance, or self-worth?
4. Try to accommodate. When your partner expresses a need, ask yourself the question, "Is there any way I can accommodate him/her to show my respect and my love?"
5. Consider alternative solutions. When needs conflict or accommodation cannot be made, mutual respect mandates that a solution be found that meets the needs of both. Explore all possible alternatives, looking at every possibility that might solve the problem. Do not judge or evaluate alternatives at this point. It will be helpful to actually write down these alternatives, even those that may appear farfetched.
6. Evaluate your possibilities, selecting the "best" solution. Discard any that are unacceptable to either of you. (Generally, if they are unacceptable, one or the other's inner needs are not being satisfied.) Generate more alternatives if necessary. Make sure both feel that their needs have been met. The important thing is not which alternative you choose, but that both feel good about what has been worked out.
7. Plan to reassess the solution. If the problem involves more than a one-time situation, plan a future time that is acceptable to you both when the effectiveness of the solution can be evaluated.
8. Attend to the needs for healing in the relationship. Conflict creates stress. Sharing deep feelings is often difficult and emotionally exhausting. Pray together. Take time for some positive, relationship-building experience together.

Handout 8

PAIR BONDING
naked, unashamed.”

12. One flesh union: Genital to Genital

11. Arousal: Hand to Genital

one flesh . . .

10. Nurturance: Mouth to Breast

“For this reason

9. Unconditional acceptance: Hand to Body

a man shall . . .

8. Trust: Hand to Head

7. Self disclosure: Face to Face

6. Shared vision: Arm to Waist

5. Belonging: Arm to Shoulder

cleave . . .

4. Connectedness: Hand to Hand

“What God

3. Communication: Voice to Voice

joins together

2. Awakened interest: Eye to Eye

let no one

leave . . .

1. Discovery: Eye to Body

put asunder.”

Sequence for establishing a life-long, exclusive, one-flesh bond.

Adapted from Joy, D. (1996). *Bonding: Relationships in the image of God*, 2nd ed. Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House; Morris, D. (1971). *Intimate behavior*. New York, NY: Random House.

AM I READY FOR MARRIAGE?

If you are contemplating marriage, think carefully about the following questions. Can you answer each one Yes? Which answers are No? Of which are you uncertain? In the space provided place a "Y" if your answer is Yes, "N" if your answer is No, and "?" if you are uncertain. Discuss your answers with God in prayer. Also seek confirmation of your marriage plans from your parents, your pastor, a relative, or another whom you trust as a spiritual guide.

Evaluating your personal preparation. Is my relationship with Jesus Christ personally satisfying? Do I have a positive outlook on life? Can I carry responsibility? Have I chosen my life career? Am I a source of encouragement for others? Do I relate to my parents in an adult way? Do I recover quickly when I am emotionally hurt or angry? Am I ready to make a commitment to one person? Do others feel I am ready for marriage?

Selecting a potential life partner. Is this person committed to Jesus Christ? Is he/she personally prepared for marriage? Do I have a strong conviction that this person values much the same things in life as I do? Do I love this person deeply even with his/her flaws? Can I be flexible and accommodating of the ways in which this person is and will be different from me? Would a marriage between us help both of us spiritually? Can this marriage be blessed in our church? Do others feel I know this person well enough?

Preparing as a couple. Have we prayed often together? Have we shared our thoughts and feelings about God, church, Christian service, careers, money, sexuality, in-laws, children? Do we know and accept each other's family? Have we planned how to reach our goals in life and how to adjust should we fail to reach them? Have we discussed our marriage pattern—what his/her responsibilities will be? Can we trust each other with our deepest fears? Have we honestly compared our expectations of each other including the things we'd like to change in one another? Does our love bond allow for the individuality of each other? Do we know by experience that we can solve problems and handle conflicts well together? Will we have the support of relatives and friends in our marriage? Have we sought the wisdom of our parents, a pastor, a counselor or someone else who knows us well to help us make our final decision to marry?

Worksheet B

CELEBRATING OUR DIFFERENCES

1. Some ways my fiancé(e) and I are alike are:
2. Some ways my fiancé(e) and I are different are:
3. We tend to deal with our differences by:
4. Some areas in which I would like to see changes in my fiancé(e) are:
5. Ways in which our differences could be considered as positive factors in our marriage are:
6. Ways in which the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives will help us adjust to differences in our future marriage are:

Worksheet C

COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

Answer the following questions for yourself and as you see your partner. Use the following four point scale: 1 = Usually; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Seldom; and 4 = Never.

Yourself	Your Partner	
_____	1. Do you/your partner have a tendency to say things which would be better left unsaid?	_____
_____	2. Is it hard to understand your/your partner's feelings and attitudes?	_____
_____	3. Do you/your partner withdraw from talking about areas which make either or both of you uncomfortable or which are a source of conflict between you?	_____
_____	4. Do you/your partner pretend to listen when actually you are not listening?	_____
_____	5. Do you/your partner put the other down?	_____
_____	6. Do you/your partner say one thing when you really mean another?	_____
_____	7. Do you/your partner find much of interest to talk to together about?	_____
_____	8. Are your/your partner's verbal and non-verbal messages in agreement when you communicate?	_____
_____	9. Can you/your partner disclose your innermost thoughts and feelings to the other without fear?	_____
_____	10. Do you/your partner frequently affirm the other verbally?	_____

Adapted from Trathen, D. W., Editor. (1992). *A Christian pre-marital manual*. Littleton, CO: Southwest Counseling Associates.

Worksheet E

SOMETIMES WE DON'T AGREE

To presume that you will not argue after you are married is idealistic; it simply is not true. You will argue. Many psychologists would say that a good argument is often healthy because it promotes dialogue (couple talk with one another) and good communication.

To get in touch with your feelings and the manner in which you argue, answer the following questions and share your responses with your partner.

1. When I get angry, I tend to . . .
2. When your are angry, you tend to . . .
3. Our last argument was when . . .
4. That argument was caused by . . .
5. We solved our problem by . . .

Look over the behaviors listed below that are often used to express or respond to anger or negative feelings. In each case, decide whether it characterizes you, your partner, both of you, or neither of you. Place a check mark in the appropriate column.

	Me	You	Both	Neither
Silence				
Blaming				
Yelling				
Pouting				
Sarcasm				
Avoidance				
Appeasement				
Crying				
Threatening				
Physical violence				

Adapted from Trathen, D. W. (Ed.) (1992). *Fighting fair: A Christian pre-marital manual*. Littleton, CO: Southwest Counseling Associates.

Worksheet F

DAVID AND MICHAL

Read together 2 Samuel 6:12-23. Discuss the following with your fiancé(e):

1. How was David feeling about himself as he came home?
2. How was Michal feeling when David came home?
3. Imitate what you think her body language and tone of voice was like as she spoke to David.
4. Describe the feelings in each of them as they exchanged their heated words.
5. Think of modern-day terms or expressions that David and Michal would have used.
6. How do you think their words made each other feel inside themselves.
7. Why do you think Michal never had any children?
8. How could Michal and David have handled the situation in a less destructive manner?

CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Use the following situations to build your problem-solving skills. Employ the steps in problem solving in each case.

Case Study #1

Sue, who likes to wear the latest fashions, returns from a shopping trip with several unexpected outfits. Doug, reared in a home where every penny was pinched, knows that they have already overspent their limit and tells her she cannot keep them.

Case Study #2

Lloyd's mother did everything for him—from straightening his tie to picking up his underwear and pajamas. Janet, after only a month of marriage has grown weary of constantly reminding him to clean up after himself. Lloyd enters the bedroom in mid-afternoon and wants to know why it's still a mess.

Case Study #3

Barry's parents, who live in the same town as Barry and Donna, have telephoned to say they're dropping by for a short visit. Donna, reminding Barry that they've visited in this manner for three weeks in a row and have stayed the whole evening, complains of invasion of privacy. Barry refuses to do anything about it.

Worksheet H

ROLES EXPLORATION

In your marriage, who will do the following things?

Check the appropriate space under Husband, Wife, Both or Other. Endeavor to be realistic. Too many "Boths" will be suspect!

	HUSBAND	WIFE	BOTH	OTHER
1. Earn income	___	___	___	___
2. Plan the family budget	___	___	___	___
3. Supervise husband's spending	___	___	___	___
4. Supervise the wife's spending	___	___	___	___
5. Supervise child(ren)'s spending	___	___	___	___
6. Pay the bills	___	___	___	___
7. Make major purchasing decisions	___	___	___	___
8. Make decisions re his vocation	___	___	___	___
9. Make decisions re her vocation	___	___	___	___
10. Make decisions re his education	___	___	___	___
11. Made decisions re her education	___	___	___	___
12. Decide community for home	___	___	___	___
13. Choose the actual dwelling	___	___	___	___
14. Choose decor and furnishings	___	___	___	___
15. Plan the menu	___	___	___	___
16. Do the grocery shopping	___	___	___	___
17. Put away groceries	___	___	___	___
18. Decide when to eat out	___	___	___	___
19. Do the baking	___	___	___	___
20. Prepare the meals	___	___	___	___
21. Set the table	___	___	___	___
22. Wash the dishes	___	___	___	___
23. Vacuum or sweep	___	___	___	___
24. Take out the trash	___	___	___	___
25. Clean the refrigerator	___	___	___	___
26. Clean the oven	___	___	___	___
27. Clean the bathroom(s)	___	___	___	___
28. Wash the windows	___	___	___	___
29. Change the beds	___	___	___	___
30. Make the beds	___	___	___	___
31. Choose his wardrobe	___	___	___	___
32. Choose the wife's wardrobe	___	___	___	___
33. Choose child(ren)'s wardrobe	___	___	___	___
34. Wash the clothes	___	___	___	___
35. Iron the clothes	___	___	___	___
36. Put away the clean clothes	___	___	___	___
37. Care for minor household repairs	___	___	___	___
38. Arrange for major repairs	___	___	___	___
39. Cut the grass	___	___	___	___
40. Trim shrubbery	___	___	___	___
41. Plant flowers and/or vegetables	___	___	___	___
42. Keep walkway clean	___	___	___	___
43. Weed flowers and/or vegetables	___	___	___	___

44. Rake leaves	___	___	___	___
45. Decide the kind of vehicle to buy	___	___	___	___
46. Select the actual vehicle	___	___	___	___
47. Care for the vehicle's exterior	___	___	___	___
48. Care for the vehicle's interior	___	___	___	___
49. Care for auto servicing	___	___	___	___
50. Decide the kind(s) of pet(s)	___	___	___	___
51. Feed the pet(s)	___	___	___	___
52. Keep the pets(s) clean	___	___	___	___
53. Decide the kind of entertainment	___	___	___	___
54. Decide which TV program to see	___	___	___	___
55. Decide on recreation	___	___	___	___
56. Choose friends	___	___	___	___
57. Keep social calendar	___	___	___	___
58. Decide the church you attend	___	___	___	___
59. Decide how often you attend	___	___	___	___
60. Lead in family worship	___	___	___	___
61. Decide church & charity gifts	___	___	___	___
62. Plan holiday activities	___	___	___	___
63. Plan the vacation	___	___	___	___
64. Decide vacation expenses	___	___	___	___
65. Decide gift expenses	___	___	___	___
66. Decide when to visit in-laws	___	___	___	___
67. Decide when to invite in-laws	___	___	___	___
68. Initiate sexual intimacy	___	___	___	___
69. Decide about contraceptives	___	___	___	___
70. Decide if you will have children	___	___	___	___
71. Decide the number of children	___	___	___	___
72. Name the child(ren)	___	___	___	___
73. Change diapers	___	___	___	___
74. Wash diapers	___	___	___	___
75. Feed the child(ren)	___	___	___	___
76. Bathe the child(ren)	___	___	___	___
77. Play with the child(ren)	___	___	___	___
78. Put child(ren) to bed	___	___	___	___
79. Care for child(ren)'s toys	___	___	___	___
80. Get up at night with child(ren)	___	___	___	___
81. Nurse child(ren) when sick	___	___	___	___
82. Discipline child(ren)	___	___	___	___
83. Help child(ren) with homework	___	___	___	___
84. Transport child(ren) to school	___	___	___	___
85. Transport child(ren) from school	___	___	___	___
86. Transport them to activities	___	___	___	___
87. Instruct child(ren) spiritually	___	___	___	___
88. Teach child(ren) about sex	___	___	___	___
89. Select baby sitter	___	___	___	___
90. Make decision to adopt child(ren)	___	___	___	___
91. Decide which child(ren) to adopt	___	___	___	___

HOUSEHOLD BUDGET

		Monthly	Yearly
Tithe		_____	_____
Offerings		_____	_____
Charitable Contributions		_____	_____
Rent/Mortgage Payment		_____	_____
Utilities	_____	_____	
Electricity	_____		
Gas	_____		
Trash Pickup	_____		
Water	_____		
Telephone	_____		
Food		_____	_____
Loans		_____	_____
Car Payment	_____		
School Loan	_____		
Installment Purchases	_____		
Other	_____		
Insurance		_____	_____
Medical	_____		
Life	_____		
Auto	_____		
Other	_____		
Clothing Purchases		_____	_____
Laundry/Dry Cleaning		_____	_____
Medical & Dental Fund		_____	_____
Savings	_____	_____	
Professional Dues & Journals, Etc.		_____	_____
Car Expenses		_____	_____

Marriage Enrichment		_____	_____
Household Supplies		_____	_____
Personal Allowances		_____	_____
Recreation, Entertainment & Vacations		_____	_____
Miscellaneous		_____	_____
Haircuts	_____		
Newspapers/Magazines	_____		
Gifts-Christmas, Birthdays, etc.	_____		
Other	_____		
Total Expenses		_____	_____
Total Income		_____	_____
Balance (+ or -)		_____	_____

Worksheet J

SEXUALITY

1. Sexual expression between me and my spouse will be sacred because . . .
2. How would you describe the differences and similarities between sex and love?
3. As I think about my sexuality, I feel good about . . .
4. As I think about my sexuality, I worry that . . .
5. In our marriage, I believe I will enjoy our sexual experience as we . . . (Identify some appropriate sexual behaviors within your marital relationship.)
6. Identify ways you as a husband and wife may teach your children about sex.