

UPDATED & REVISED

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SACRED MARRIAGE*

GARY THOMAS

THE  
SACRED  
SEARCH



What if It's Not about  
Who You Marry, but Why?

DAVID  COOK™

*transforming lives together*

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*This book is dedicated in celebration of my son  
Graham's marriage to Molly on July 12, 2014.*

*May you both grow in grace and love for each  
other as you enjoy the blessing of a lifelong love.*

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# A Tale of Two Tears

I'd like to share two true scenarios with you. Together they reveal how crucial it is to make a wise choice about whom you marry.

The first scenario is that of a man whose face grew taut as he confessed, "Let me be honest with you. My marriage has constituted the biggest cross of my life."

The tears that slipped out of this normally reserved man's eyes and rolled down his cheeks provided a sobering picture of the weight this man carries with him every day of his life. Though God has used him in some amazing ways, he said that his marriage acted more like a weight than an encouragement. He keeps moving forward because he believes it's the right thing to do, but he walks his journey with "a rock in his shoe" that hurts him every step of the way. His marital choice didn't *stop* his journey, but it certainly made it more painful.

The second scenario is of a thirtysomething woman who cried an entirely different sort of tears—happy ones. She spoke of her husband's care for her as she suffered more medical challenges before her thirty-fifth birthday than most people will face in a lifetime. She never expected life to be so difficult. But rather than her spouse being "a rock in [her] shoe," her husband has been a rock to hold on to in the storm, a source of tremendous encouragement. He has made her laugh during her darkest days and genuinely makes her

feel beautiful when she feels she looks her worst. “Next to Jesus, my husband has been the greatest joy in my life. I can’t even imagine where I’d be without him or how I would have faced all that I have without him by my side.”

One person is crying tears of pain, working as hard as he can to keep his marriage together, but he compares his relationship to a cross. It saps his strength, but he perseveres.

The other person is also crying, but not because she is struggling through a difficult relationship. She weeps because she is grateful for a man who loves her so well and so wonderfully that she can’t imagine life without him.

Tears of pain and tears of joy.

A marriage compared to bearing the cross.

A union compared to a foretaste of heaven.

Ten years after you’re married, what kind of tears will you be crying? Will they be the stinging tears of pain or warm tears generated by joy? The reality is, every marriage has plenty of both kinds of tears, but it’s also true that some marriages are marked primarily by pain while others are marked primarily by joy. No marriage is easy, but some marriages build each partner up while others tear each partner down. Every marriage takes time and effort, but some marriages sap the spouses’ strength while others generate joy and enthusiasm and intimacy.

I’m writing this book because I want you to cry tears of joy on your tenth anniversary. I want you to be able to say, with all sincerity, “Next to becoming a Christian, marrying \_\_\_\_\_ is the best decision I’ve ever made.”

I am not a psychologist, but I have spent the bulk of my adult life writing and teaching about marriage from a Christian perspective. I have studied the Scriptures and the best books I could find,

have talked to hundreds of thousands of couples all over the world via conferences, have pastorally counseled numerous couples, and have done premarital counseling and officiated at the weddings of many. I've given my life to helping people make marriage "work," and here's one thing I've discovered that might surprise you: it's just as important to ask yourself *why* you want to get married as it is to ask *whom* you should marry. It's not that the "who" doesn't matter (in fact, it matters very much); it's just that asking and settling the "why" question *first* will set you up to make a wise choice about the "who." Why do you want to get married? That's what you need to ask before you decide *whom* to marry.

It's a particularly important question because if you make one bad financial investment, you can always start over, but biblical marriage is a one-shot deal. Many Christians believe there are a couple of biblically "accepted" causes for divorce, but these are limited and severe. In most cases, should you become disappointed in your choice, your obligation as a believer will be to work it out instead of walking out and starting over. This fact alone makes it doubly worth the time, effort, and even the heartache of a breakup for believers to make sure they're making a wise decision before they enter into marriage. Once you get married, every evening, every weekend, every holiday, every morning will be marked, for good or for ill, by that relationship.

The person you marry is the last person you'll see every night before you go to sleep. Her face is the first one you will see when you wake up in the morning. His words will encourage or discourage you; her humor will make you laugh in amusement or cry in shame. His body will pleasure you or threaten you; her hands will hold you or hurt you. His presence will be a healing balm or a reminder of all that could have been.

## A Better Way

Let's briefly introduce the why of marriage to set you up to make a wise choice about the who.

The three things that lead most people to get married (which will be discussed later in more detail) are romantic attraction, sexual chemistry, and relational compatibility. Why don't these, or even all three of them together, predict future marital happiness and fulfillment?

- **Romantic attraction** can't be sustained, neurochemically, over the long haul.
- **Sexual chemistry**, like infatuation, doesn't last. Long-term sexual satisfaction in marriage has far more to do with character, spiritual maturity, and relational health than initial sexual attraction.
- **Relational compatibility** while dating tells you how well you'll get along *when you're on vacation*. It doesn't predict how well you'll handle managing a house, balancing careers, raising kids, or the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities that make up most of married life.

Even though these three realities are poor predictors of marital success, most people, even most Christians, when they experience all three (become infatuated, experience sexual chemistry, and have such a good time while dating), think, *I've found the one! This is it!*

Unfortunately, many find out much later that someone who was a tremendous dating partner turned out to be a disaster (or at least a huge disappointment) as a spouse. Dating and marriage are worlds apart.

Jesus' words in Matthew 6:33—"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (NKJV)—provide the two most important things to make a marriage work: purpose and character growth. We'll talk about what both elements of this promise mean and how to discern whether they're present. Just know that they constitute *Jesus'* opinion about what leads to fulfillment in life: serving the kingdom of God (not our own selfish aims) and growing in righteousness.

Notice that while this verse contains a command, it's also an exciting promise of a rich and meaningful life: "and all these things shall be added to you." When husband and wife are committed in Christ as their mission, growing together in the Lord, supporting each other in their spiritual walks, raising children in the fear of the Lord, and loving each other out of reverence for God, joy abounds and even miracles can happen. Selfish people become servants. Strangers become intimate friends. Daily life is filled with the fulfilling drama of kingdom building. There are plenty of mistakes, lots of repenting, times of frustration, sickness, and even doubts. But in the end, God's presence prevails, people are transformed, kingdom work is accomplished, and trials are overcome.

The friendship that results from facing all seasons of life together ... creates a bond that no initial sexual attraction or romantic infatuation could ever hope to match.

On the other hand, I've witnessed how miserable people can make each other when they live for themselves. Though their initial sexual attraction might have been off the charts, it is usually only a matter of months until they are saying and doing awful things to each other. There was a time when they couldn't live without each other. Now they can't bear to live together. When they're in the same room, or in the same car, or on the same phone call, they can't stop fighting.

It's made me realize that the old cliché is all too true: a good marriage is the closest two people will ever come to heaven this side of eternity; a bad marriage is the closest two people will ever come to hell.

Such problems usually erupt from trying to build a life together without purpose, without mission, without something that not only establishes a connection but keeps you caring about each other for the next fifty to sixty years.

Can I be honest with you? There isn't a person alive who can keep you enthralled for the next five or six decades. If that person is really funny, really attractive, and you're really infatuated, you can be enthralled for a few years. But selfish people—even wealthy selfish people or beautiful selfish people or famous selfish people—eventually get bored with each other, and the very relationship that once gave them security and life feels like prison and death.

Instead, I want you to have a spiritually enriching marriage, a marriage that spawns life, vibrancy, intimacy, a lifetime of memories with your best friend, and the overwhelming joy of creating a family together (or enjoying your freedom if you don't have kids or they are grown). Family life is such a good life, and intimate marriage is such an amazing gift. The friendship that results from facing all seasons of life together, praying together, raising kids together, serving

the Lord together, having fun, having sex, suffering heartaches and heartbreaks, overcoming setbacks and learning to deal with disappointments, and growing together through all of them creates a bond that no initial sexual attraction or romantic infatuation could ever hope to match.

The reward for making a wise marital choice is so tremendous that I don't want you to miss it. The consequences of making a foolish marital choice can be so painful and long-lasting that I don't want you to have to endure them.

I cannot overstate how crucial it is to be cautious and discerning in making such an important decision. This is not a time to fall prey to romanticized foolishness. If you remain rooted in Christ, fully engage your mind, and draw on all your resources—God's guidance, Scripture, your family, your church, your sensible friends—and approach this decision with all intention, purpose, and wisdom, you are far more likely to enter a rich, satisfying, and soul-building marriage.

Ask yourself: "Ten years from now, what kind of tears do I want to be crying? Tears of joy or tears of pain? Do I want to be in a marriage that lifts me up or one that drags me down? A union marked by a shared partnership or one where we're hiding from and hurting each other on a regular basis?"

Stick with me and I'll do everything I can to help you be crying tears of joy a decade from now.

## Searching Questions

1. Describe a marriage you respect: What is it about the couple that makes you admire their relationship?
2. Ten years after you're married, how do you hope someone will describe your relationship? Write out the ideal description of the relationship you hope to have.
3. Describe some of the marriages you've seen that you definitely do not want to model. What attributes do you hope to avoid?
4. Why do you want to get married?
5. How do you think getting married with the intention of "seek[ing] first the kingdom of God" will change the way you pursue someone to marry, as well as the type of person you might consider?



# What's Your Style?

A famous athlete explained that he was divorcing his wife because, “If I wanted a model or television star, I would have married one a long time ago. All I wanted was a housewife.”

There's nothing wrong with wanting to marry a woman who has an exciting career and enjoying the extra income that results—or marrying a woman who wants to focus on the home and be a full-time mom and wife. The problem is that couples often aren't honest about what they want *before* they get married, which leads to great conflict (and sadly, divorce) after marriage.

When it comes to this issue, don't ask yourself what's politically correct to desire or what you *should* desire. Be honest: What do you really want? Be careful about compromising on it because if you make an exception, a small regret can grow into a great frustration that leads to divorce.

“Seeking first the kingdom of God” is a very wide umbrella. There are different ways of seeking that kingdom and expressing God's righteousness. You can be businesspeople or missionaries, you can live focused on the arts or athletics or media. Your goal is to bring the light and truth of Christ into whatever sphere God places you. The kingdom becomes more important than your own agenda, reputation, comfort, or financial gain. The sports broadcaster or

veterinarian is no more or less called to seek first the kingdom of God than a nurse or pastor.

The challenge, when applying this to marriage, is getting two people together who agree on the same path. Don't assume that you and a potential partner's motivations are the same or that you even mean the same thing when you say "married." There are many different styles of marriages, and too few singles ever explore this disconnect.

As you embark on your search for a sole mate, ask yourself what your ideal marriage will look like. Will the two of you spend your lives "sucking the marrow out of life" or working hard to establish a business and/or ministry (and often spending evenings and weekends recovering)? Will you seek to build a child-centered family, focusing on the kids, or have you always thought you'd like to do a lot of foreign travel or maybe adopt one or two children? Will you have separate hobbies, or would you prefer to do everything together?

Many people assume their partners are looking for the same things they are when they talk about "being married," but that is rarely the case. We have an image in our minds of what our marriage will be like, but we don't usually label it or even express it. We just assume that our partners share it.

Two people who are both hungry don't necessarily want to eat at the same restaurant; two people who want to get married are not necessarily seeking the same style of relationship. In fact, many people often aren't aware of what they want. They have unspoken, unnamed assumptions. Until you see marriage patterns listed, your wants may not occur to you.

Once you become serious about someone to marry, you and your potential spouse need to get vulnerable and be as honest as

you can. The temptation will be to say what you think the other person wants to hear, but that's setting up both of you for considerable disappointment and even lifelong frustration. *Lying about what you want out of marriage because you're afraid you'll lose the relationship if you're honest is one of the worst kinds of fraud you could ever commit.*

You're asking someone to give his or her life over to a lie. And you'll eventually be found out. You can't sustain a lie for fifty years. You may worry about hurting someone's feelings if you begin to sense that the two of you aren't compatible, but be more concerned about hurting that person's life.

To give you a practical tool to help you do this, we're going to look at some of the more common marriage "styles."<sup>1</sup> Some of these are terrible reasons to get married, while others are morally neutral—preference more than values. You shouldn't get too serious with someone until you've carefully considered your own motivations and future desires and then gained a decent understanding of what your partner is looking for.

We all have a mixture of motivations, but this tool will help you understand your unspoken assumptions. If you allow yourself the freedom that comes from the truth that there isn't just one person you can marry, you'll be more objective and honest when going through this exercise.

Rank your desire for each of the following styles of marriage on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = this isn't me at all and it would be difficult for me to be married to a person who wants a marriage like this; 10 = this describes my assumed view of the marriage relationship very accurately). The best way to be objective here is to rank yourself independently of your partner (or, for many of you, take this test before you even get a partner).

## A Spiritual Sole Mate

This person is passionately committed to getting married for the glory of God first and foremost. Such people want to build families that will model God's ministry of reconciliation to the world. They want to raise kids who will follow and serve God. They want to create homes that are a fortress for God's work on this earth. They want to partner with someone who will help them grow to become ever more like Christ.

Seeking a spiritual sole mate above all else doesn't mean you don't have *other* motivations and additional marital styles, however. I'm hoping that the spiritual sole mate model will rule every Christian's heart and that these other styles will be subsets, but I'm also realistic that spiritual maturity is something we grow into and that maturity brings evolving motivations.

If you're already in a serious relationship, try to be honest and ask, Would my partner truly pursue a "spiritual sole mate" marriage, or does he or she just want to be married to me and know I wouldn't have it any other way? And then ask yourself, Is the spiritual sole mate model of marriage something I'm willing to compromise on, something I feel only mildly interested in, or something I am passionately committed to?

I can't tell you how many discouraged women have come to me because they compromised and married spiritually anemic men. They thought that everything else going well in the relationship would make up for a lack of spiritual fervor. To a woman, every one I've talked with has regretted making this compromise. If you want a spiritually rich marriage, you must marry a spiritually alive (and growing) man or woman.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## Business Buddies and Romantic Idealists

After Prince Charles and the future Princess Diana announced their engagement, an interviewer asked Prince Charles if the couple was “in love.” Diana jumped in and answered for her future husband by saying, “Of course.” Obviously flustered and taken aback, Charles added a famous addendum: “Whatever ‘in love’ means.” It was a painful moment, and one that proved prophetic. In hindsight, they were seeking two very different things in their relationship. Charles seemed to be seeking a good match for a future king; Diana appeared to be seeking romance, fulfillment, and a storybook life.

Some people, like Charles, are looking for a life partner who is a “good fit.” Together they can build a business, a family, a church, a name, or even rule a nation. They are not carried away by romantic notions or expectations; all that seems rather silly to them. They want a suitable partner for a satisfying and productive relationship.

Such a pragmatic matching isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Famous director Alfred Hitchcock and his wife, Alma, had a passion to produce iconic movies that strengthened and renewed their passion for each other, leading to a rich partnership and marriage (and work that produced many Academy Award nominations).

But romantic idealists—like Diana—expect to get much of their joy and fulfillment in life from a consistently intimate marriage. They expect their true love to be their best friend and constant lover and to work hard at keeping the romance alive. Romantic idealists can be marked by obsessive clinginess, fear, jealousy, frequent feelings of being slighted, and even acts of desperation. (I don’t mean to make this sound unnecessarily negative. It’s possible to be a mature and even secure person with a romantic bent; my descriptions, for the sake of clarity, travel to the extremes.) For whatever reason, a romantic idealist’s sense of security, self-worth, and happiness are

directly tied to the current health, vibrancy, and romantic intensity of the *romantic* relationship. If either partner sacrifices relational time in pursuit of success, hurt feelings will follow.

If you're a romantic idealist, you're going to become very disappointed when your partner focuses on his or her business or hobby. If you're married to a romantic idealist and you're not one yourself, you may become exhausted with the demands placed on you emotionally, physically, and relationally.

What are *your* expectations in this regard? Do you want to join yourself to a suitable partner, or do you want to get lost in a wild, never-ending romance? Without critiquing which you think you should be, admit honestly who you are. (If you think you're in between, you can simply rank yourself a 5 in each category.)

Your rank:

Business Buddy: \_\_\_\_\_

Romantic Idealist: \_\_\_\_\_

## Adonis and Aphrodite

This is a relationship based on sexual attraction and beauty. In its crassest form, it's when you see the bodybuilder marry the petite woman who has had various cosmetic enhancements. I'm not trying to suggest that every such coupling is so superficial—many times it may not be—but it helps to point out a potentially troublesome motivation. While physical attraction is a key component for marital satisfaction, if it becomes the *main* attraction, what are you going to do when your body ages?

To be fair, sometimes such attractions are due to lifestyle more than appearance. Healthy living, healthy eating, and fitness are noble values. If physical attraction is the main thing drawing the two of

you together—even if it’s through things like exercise and competition—what happens if your health-loving spouse gets cancer or suffers a stroke? Mutual attraction is a shaky foundation because marriage is about growing old together more than it is about being young together.

Is this a person for whom age will *increase* your devotion and respect, or will this person gradually lose what most draws you to him or her now? Are you in this relationship because the sexual chemistry and attraction is so strong or because the respect and honor you feel for this person is so deep? Beauty and strength serve a ten-year Hollywood career very well, but they’re painfully short-lived servants of a fifty-year relationship.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## Cookbook Couple

A “cookbook” relationship exists when one partner thinks all that’s needed is to just find the right strategies, add in the correct ingredients, and then this person gets just what he or she wants out of the relationship. Such people typically read a lot of how-to books, fill out several relationship surveys, and want many sessions of relationship-oriented discussion.

I’m not suggesting that advice books aren’t helpful, but if you’re going to marry a cookbook spouse, you’d better be ready to participate in these kinds of discussions. This type of spouse is going to want to be in marital counseling (which is a *good* thing; every couple could benefit from counseling now and then), reserve some weekends for marriage conferences, and give you books and articles that he or she will want you to read—and be very frustrated if you don’t. Many positive things come about from being married to someone who wants to continually improve skills as a communicator and

spouse, but some people would see such a relationship as exhausting. If a cookbook partner is marrying someone who despises that approach, the couple will feel great frustration. If they both enjoy that sort of thing, their common bent will help them build deep intimacy rather than threaten it. They may, indeed, end up with an all-star marriage.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Passionate Partnership

A passionate partnership is marked by two people who are committed to making each other the highest priority—above recreation, child-rearing, vocation, extended family, hobbies, and just about anything else (notice I didn't say "God"). A passionate partnership can seem intimately intense and satisfying when two people enjoy it and suffocating when just one of them wants it.

A person with a passionate partnership mentality reads this and thinks, "Of course, doesn't everybody want this?"—not realizing she may be dating someone who really enjoys focusing on his business but doesn't want to talk about it when he comes home. Or a guy marries a woman who is so into her kids and homeschooling that she would perhaps rather her husband take the kids out for a nature walk when he gets home from work than spend forty-five minutes reliving his day with her. Some guys would rather play eighteen holes of golf on Saturday morning *without* their wives. Other couples think any hobby in which both can't participate is simply unacceptable.

Ideally, every marriage should prioritize the marital relationship above work and even parenting—but passionate partners take it a notch higher. Whatever they experience, they want to experience together, so if one is called away on a business trip, the other will try

to come along. Long conversations, plenty of time alone as a couple, and making each other the emotional center of their existence are expected, enjoyed, and cherished.

Two people sharing this vision will, indeed, maintain an intensely intimate and satisfying relationship. They will not have problems with leaving the kids for a date night or a weekend away; indeed, both will be committed to this and even look forward to it. They may well look forward to becoming empty nesters so that they can once again focus on each other. The problem arises only when you have one who wants to have a passionate partner relationship and one who doesn't.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Horror-Show House

This is a relationship style that has no upside, and I mention it so you can avoid it. Some people become interested in a relationship only when they are terrorized by or terrorizing their partner. It's true. These couples fight, argue, make each other miserable and afraid, and may even have quite vigorous makeup sex. Exhausted and spent, they peacefully coexist for another short season until routine sets in and they start the horror cycle all over again.

The problems with such a relationship are many. Often, the one who once felt comfortable being terrorized eventually gets tired of it. And this form of love is so directly in opposition to agape biblical love and marriage that it's a relationship doomed to fail.

If you feel most connected to someone when he is terrorizing you, or you feel closest to someone when you are terrorizing her, you need to know this is a spiritual sickness and a fake intimacy. You need to get healed, not married, *and in that order*. You can't build a

healthy relationship on an unhealthy pattern of relating. You need to deal with this before you even think about making a lifelong choice. Not only is it personally destructive, it's a prescription for parental disaster. Kids crave stability and are harmed significantly by never-ending crises.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## House and Home Marriage

We lived by a neighbor who was obsessed with her yard. She mowed the lawn every other day. Just about every other week she was spreading some new fertilizer or growth aid on the grass. Every time she spoke with us, she talked about her plants, her edging, her landscaping, and the health of her trees as if they were her children.

Other people fixate on a home's interior. If you added up how much time they spent on the internet checking out new furniture, fixtures, home accessories, and the like, it would put their Bible study to shame. Remodeling is to them a fulfilling hobby, and they will never truly be done tinkering with their house or yard.

Others see the house as a place to retreat to and may even enjoy living in an aesthetically pleasing house, but they certainly don't want to sacrifice several weekday evenings and Saturday or Sunday afternoons to keep it up. They'd rather exercise, go to a movie, take a walk, or even take a nap.

This is largely a matter of choice, but when it becomes a problem is if one partner is more concerned about hospitality than house projects or if one would rather spend three thousand dollars on a trip to Europe than on a new sofa. You're also going to run into problems if one would rather get more aggressive in his or her financial giving than spend the money on lawn equipment or plants.

Be honest. How will you focus your energies: on a mansion or a mission? If you're a mission person marrying a mansion person, you're going to be very frustrated.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Kids Are Us Couple

Kids Are Us couples can't wait to have children—sometimes lots of children—and have a relationship that is often focused on the children. They may have occasional date nights, but even this might be done with a view toward modeling a good marriage—for *the children*. Homeschooling or expensive private schooling may often be a priority. This means an extra part of the budget, space in the house, and time on the clock are spent focusing on the kids. Even vacations may be chosen with educational or family fun in mind.

You can love and enjoy kids without being a Kids Are Us couple. But if you are truly a Kids Are Us man who marries a woman who wants, at most, two children, and can't wait until they enter preschool at age three, you will be sorely tried and deeply disappointed with your life. If you're a woman who dreams of having three natural-born children and adopting another three or four and you're marrying a man who might, at most, be willing to put up with two of his own biological children, you're making a big mistake.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## Bohemian Buddies

Do you envision Sunday mornings or early afternoons taken up with reading through the *New York Times*, checking out the latest indie movie, having a home full of books, going to concerts,

regular foreign travel, and fulfilling (as opposed to lucrative) vocations? That's fine, unless you marry a person who is dedicated to business or devoted to ministry to the down-and-out or centered around the life of the local church. This is also one of those lifestyles that usually precludes having lots of kids. It's one thing to raise ten kids on a farm or five kids in the suburbs, but it's a little more difficult to have a large family while living in Manhattan or downtown Seattle.

If you truly aspire toward an arts-oriented lifestyle, you'll be frustrated hanging around with a partner who puts mass-produced prints on the walls and listens to exclusively mainstream music. And this is one preference that really is difficult to compromise on. A woman can join a book discussion group if her husband doesn't read, but what about vacations? What about weekends and evenings? If he just wants to read the *Wall Street Journal* and listen to Fox News or CNN while she was hoping to check out a movie or browse a used bookstore, neither partner is going to feel much rest or intimacy on any given weekend or evening.

A quick warning here: I'm throwing around a lot of stereotypes. It's certainly possible for someone to read the *Wall Street Journal* and still be into the arts. This is intended to start a discussion. The main point is to encourage you to consider who you really are rather than base your marriage on an ideal view of yourself that doesn't square with reality. It's also designed to help you push past the blindness inherent in infatuation so that you can objectively evaluate whether someone you're crazy about is a good fit.

Think about your passions here, and write the appropriate number in the blank below.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## Police Partners

Some people find themselves energized by a police arrangement—either they want to have somebody they can keep checking up on, or they need somebody to keep checking up on them. If one spouse is or was an addict, the other spouse will regularly check the garbage for bottles, the internet history for sites visited, the bank statements for unexplained withdrawals.

Some people feel most comfortable fulfilling the role of a traffic cop, as it preoccupies their attention and keeps them from having to think about their own shortcomings. It gives them a sense of purpose, and sometimes even feeling fear and suspicion is more energizing than feeling bored or apathetic.

Other people like to be policed; it absolves them from having to look after themselves. They'll keep running into trouble because their partner acts like a safety net, ready to catch them so they don't hit the ground too hard. They may act like they resent the interference, but deep down, they know they need it.

There are considerable problems with entering this kind of marriage. First, if you're the "police," you're assuming you don't need someone to hold *you* accountable. If you're the criminal or in the "save me" role, you're indulging your laziness by refusing to love, look after, or serve someone else. That makes this relationship character-corrupting rather than character-forming.

There can be a sense of satisfaction in thinking you're the only one who really understands her or you're the one he desperately needs because it can feel good to be needed. There's nothing wrong with wanting to help someone out; there is something wrong with choosing an untrustworthy, crisis-prone person to become your spouse. When it comes to choosing a marriage partner, avoid the messianic complex. There is only one Savior, and it's not you.

We'll touch on this more later: Do you really want to raise kids with someone who needs to be rescued from himself or herself? Is that truly the kind of father or mother you want to give your children?

One engaged man admitted he was already “exhausted” with his fiancée’s clinical mood swings. If he’s exhausted *now*, in a dating relationship, how tired do you think he’s going to be when they have three kids and he has a full-time job? Plenty of other men could handle this without being depleted by it. Be honest about what you’re capable of handling for the rest of your life.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## Warriors

Some people like to argue. Maybe it’s what they grew up with; it’s how they process emotions; it’s what keeps life from being so boring. And they may even think that makeup sex is the best kind of sex.

Fighting releases adrenaline, which can make us feel more fully alive. But it’s a destructive way to stave off boredom, and it’s a disastrous living arrangement in which to raise children. If you can’t express what you really feel about each other without using four-letter words and hurtful comments, you lack the basic relational skills necessary to build a satisfying marriage. Either you’re not ready for marriage, or the person you’re with isn’t capable of having an intimate marriage.

There will be seasons of life when you need encouragement, forgiveness, and acceptance; a marriage style defined by fighting usually lacks these essential qualities. Conflict is an inevitable and necessary part of every healthy, mature relationship, but I wouldn’t want to be married to someone who is *energized* by altercations. I’d

rather my spouse be energized by service, motivated by love, and moved by compassion, kindness, and God’s gentle leading.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## Student-Teacher

One person likes to learn; one likes to teach. The most common form is the much older, usually financially successful man or woman marrying a considerably younger spouse. He thinks it’s “cute” that she is enthralled by fancy restaurants she’s never been to before, and when he explains the wine list to her and she looks at him with awe, it makes him feel like a *man*.

Women can get an ego rush having a younger man chase after them, and for a while they may enjoy doing “younger” things, reliving an earlier life. But if that’s the main attraction in your marriage, how long can you sustain that kind of bond? Your “young” man won’t be so young in another decade.

There can also be a “spiritual” parent-teacher relationship—the mature believer leading an unbeliever to the Lord and being his or her primary spiritual influence.

The most solid marriages are mutual—where each partner contributes to and challenges each other and the “power balance” shifts rather than centers on one or the other. Students eventually grow up and want to be in a more mature relationship. Being a student is okay for a while, but eventually you want to graduate. If the person you’re married to won’t let you do that, resentment is inevitable. You want to kill a sexual relationship? Sow the seeds of resentment. It works every time.

These are short-term situations at best and usually don’t make a healthy basis for a long-term marriage.

Your rank: \_\_\_\_\_

## Finding Your Match

Perhaps I've yet to describe your ideal marriage style. That's okay; I'm just trying to get the conversation going. Jennifer liked to go out several times a week; she was a social butterfly. Her husband, Riley, developed properties for contractors and worked long days. The hard labor made him want to plop on the couch as soon as he got home. When Jennifer mentioned a party or friends getting together at a restaurant, Riley felt that taking a shower and heading back out was the last thing he wanted to do.

Neither Jennifer nor Riley were right or wrong in their evening preference. Working hard was what Riley did. Needing to enjoy a good dinner party on a regular basis was part of Jennifer's DNA. Jennifer and Riley eventually got divorced. I'm not saying their dramatically different social preferences were the main cause, but they certainly didn't help. This is something I wish they would have considered *before* they got married.

You shouldn't get too serious with someone until you've carefully considered your own motivations and future desires and then gained a decent understanding of what your partner is looking for.

Take the time to write out a description of your ideal marriage style. It might not be one that I mentioned above. Describe

with *detailed* scenarios what sounds most exciting and rewarding to you.

- How will you spend your evenings?
- How close will the two of you be?
- Will you try to spend every hour outside of work together, or will you sometimes pursue separate hobbies and ministry opportunities?
- How central will church involvement be in your life?
- Will you take vacations with the kids, without the kids, or even perhaps individually?
- When you've daydreamed about the most satisfying moments of marriage, are you and your loved one walking on a beach, scouring antique stores, working on a mission field, taking your children to the park, or doing something else?

If you're already in a dating relationship, compare your answers, and then bring them up in a group setting. This group step is important because sometimes men and women are more likely to be honest when they see others sharing their views. Guys might be shy telling their girlfriend, "Yeah, I'm not so into the handyman thing," but when *another* guy says it first, your guy can laugh and say in a little moment of truth, "You got that right." When a woman says, "You know, I don't really know if I want to have children," your girlfriend's unfiltered facial expression in response will tell you a lot about how she really feels.

Labels aren't nearly as important as how well your assumptions about married life match up with those of the person you're thinking

about marrying. If your partner is antagonistic to an activity or style that's important to you, don't try to make yourselves fit into each other's lives; there are other people out there. Remember, if there's not "one right choice," there is likely a more compatible person out there with whom you can share your life in a more fruitful and satisfying manner.

## Searching Questions

1. What style of marriage best describes the kind of marriage you've always imagined having?
2. How should a couple respond if the two of them feel deeply in love but recognize that they envisage two very different styles of marriage? How important do you think agreement on marriage styles should be in deciding whom to marry?
3. What differing styles would be most compatible? Which ones would be most toxic if put together?