



TO HAVE & TO HOLD

PREPARING FOR A GODLY MARRIAGE

BYRON & CARLA
WEATHERSBEE



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DR. BYRON *and* CARLA WEATHERSBEE

Byron and Carla Weathersbee serve as the Executive Directors of Summers Mill Retreat and Conference Center in Salado, Texas. In addition, they lead Legacy Family Ministries, a ministry they co-founded in 1995. Legacy's mission is to pass on biblical principles from one generation to the next by providing marriage preparation for pre-engaged and engaged couples. Byron and Carla authored *Before Forever: How do you know that you know?*—a book for seriously dating couples.

Carla currently leads the women's ministry at their church, and Byron serves as an Elder. Byron has served on church staff, as a university chaplain, and recently as the vice president for student life at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

Both Byron and Carla are graduates of Baylor University. Carla has done graduate work in exercise physiology and Byron earned his doctoral degree in leadership from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Carla and Byron live in Salado, Texas, and have been married for over thirty years. They have three grown children. Recently, two of their children were married.

INTRODUCTION TO THE VOWS: GETTING STARTED

“I’ll go anywhere with God, as long as it is forward.”¹

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

WHAT IS THE PROPER AGE TO GET MARRIED?

Isabella, an eight-year-old, says, “Eighty-four! Because at that age, you don’t have to work anymore, and you can spend all your time loving each other in your bedroom.”

Five-year-old Jacob had a different perspective. He thinks, “Once I’m done with kindergarten, I’m going to find me a wife.”

For us it was somewhere between kindergarten and age eighty-four. We met as college students and dated for a year and a half before I asked her the big question—“Will you marry me?”

There is no question that I invested more energy in buying her ring and planning the proposal than I ever did preparing for the marriage itself. Carla spent countless hours picking out her dress, organizing the wedding, and making sure everyone was pleased with her decisions. We spent a whopping one hour in premarital counseling with our minister, a month prior to our wedding day. In that hour, we spent thirty minutes on the details of the wedding ceremony, ten minutes on finances, ten minutes on in-laws, and ten minutes on sex. To this day, I can only remember ten minutes of our time together that last day—the last ten minutes.

As you begin the countdown toward your wedding day, we hope you will spend these days not only preparing for the perfect big day, but that you will also invest time and energy into building a healthy, lifelong marriage. In the days ahead you will need to be empowered by something greater than yourselves—or Someone. When you do not have enough power or ability to love your mate in your own capacity, God will enable you to love. We have a Savior who gives life, hope, and purpose. As you prepare for your marriage, make time in your calendar to develop your spiritual foundation as individuals and as a couple while you grow in your understanding of Jesus Christ and make family a priority. Allow Him to be your

teacher, instructor, guide, counselor, and coach as you discover biblical principles that govern the way life can be lived to the fullest.

To Have and To Hold offers a different approach to premarital counseling. Instead, we like to think of it as marriage education. We feel that through preventive education couples can be equipped to avoid divorce and to build strong marriages and healthy families. In preparing this course, we have taken into account your busy schedules, the importance of interaction, and the need for a simplified lifestyle during your engagement.

BUSY SCHEDULES

The days prior to a wedding can be hectic. Many couples make the mistake of collecting great resources and then becoming overwhelmed by the amount of information they've gathered. Oftentimes the resources are placed on a shelf only to be retrieved during a major crisis several years later—often too little, too late—when the damage is already done.

To Have and To Hold takes advantage of your leisure time—whatever time is left when you are not sleeping, eating, working, going to school, or planning a wedding. Of course, you will need discipline to maximize the impact of *To Have and To Hold*, but we have created weekly activities that allow you to capitalize on your time together as a couple. You will make time for each other, so why not use the time positively to work through some of the issues vital to a healthy, lifelong relationship? Some of the weekly assignments are designed to be fun, creative, and light. Remember, it is okay to relax, laugh, and escape from the wedding plans. Finding a balanced approach will help you gain insight during the fast-paced days before you.

INTERACTIVE

Each week you will be given four learning activities that coincide with the week's topic. You may be encouraged to meditate on a Scripture passage, do a biblical word study, go to a romantic place, or complete some other activity that creatively challenges your thinking. These assignments are not a major time commitment, but they are vital as you work through issues. Our ultimate goal in *To Have and To Hold* is for the two of you to interact, discuss, and possibly debate the subject matter. We believe it is better for you to discuss your thoughts, ideals, fears, and questions rather than simply read the latest resource regarding that issue. We encourage you to color outside the lines and creatively adapt each session to meet your needs as you work through the Bible study book. Remember, the keys are interaction and communication as you seek God's principles for a fulfilling marriage.

PRACTICAL AND SIMPLE

Not many people enjoy reading long, involved, and complicated technical manuals. Thus, our attempt to challenge your thinking is simple and practical. This Bible study book is not intended to be a comprehensive, in-depth, “all-answer” resource. Instead, we hope to equip you with some basic tools that are as old as time. Oftentimes simplistic principles are easy to understand but complicated to live out. Hopefully, as you work through each section, your teacher, the Holy Spirit, will help you find practical ways to implement the biblical principles we present. As you build a biblical foundation, it is important to begin with the basics and then add on what you know. The focus of *To Have and To Hold* is life change—practical and simple life change.

GETTING STARTED

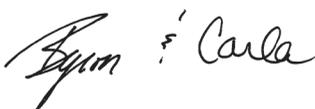
Before you get started, you will need to understand a few more things regarding the *To Have and To Hold* Bible study book.

As you will notice, most sections of the study parallel part of the traditional marriage vows and the study concludes with keys to living out those vows. Each session has been designed for you to work through as a couple and then to meet with a pastor, mentor, or small group of other engaged couples to gain encouragement, share insight, and debate opinions. The focus is not on the Bible study book or teacher but on the learning process that God is bringing to your lives.

If you would like to do further study on a topic or dig deeper, our website, LifeWay.com/ToHaveandToHold, provides helpful and comprehensive resources.

As the wedding countdown begins for you, we hope marriage will be as rewarding and fulfilling for you as it has been for us. To be honest, it is the hardest thing we have ever done. The old cliché of “Anything worth having is worth working for!” really does ring true here.²

During the next several weeks, work hard, invest much, be real, and be honest. The return on your investment will be huge. As you meet at the altar, may your wedding day fulfill your dreams; but more importantly, may you be adequately prepared to fulfill your vows—and enjoy the process. Have fun! The *best* is yet to come!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Byron & Carla". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Byron and Carla Weathersbee



SESSION 1:

THE PURPOSE *for* MARRIAGE

WHY AM I GETTING MARRIED?

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this section is to help you understand the biblical foundation for marriage. Marriage is an earthly picture of a divine institution. Thus, your marriage has the potential to glorify God and to provide an example to the world of what God's home will be like. Our hope is for you to establish a firm spiritual foundation upon which to build your lives and your marriage.

"A good marriage is not finding the right person so much as it is being the right person."¹

STEPHEN CROTTS

“I TAKE THEE TO BE MY WEDDED WIFE/HUSBAND”

“... they are no longer two, but one.”

MATTHEW 19:6

I (Carla) will never forget the feeling of watching my last bridesmaid walk down the aisle, leaving only me and my dad. The moment I had anticipated for a lifetime was finally here. I wanted our wedding to be more than a mere formality. I wanted to soak in every moment and every detail. My dad was silent and calm as usual. Yet I could sense how proud and happy he was to present me to the man with whom I was to spend the rest of my life.

When my dad placed my hand in Byron’s hand, calmness and assurance replaced my anxiety. I knew without a doubt that this moment was right. I had never been so sure of a decision in all my life. That hot summer day, we began the process of two becoming one. I took Byron to become part of me—all of me.

LIVING OUT THE VOWS

Three children (one of which had childhood cancer), twelve moves in five cities, and thirty plus years of ministry later, I now realize how crucial it is to grasp God’s purpose and plan for marriage. During our engagement, my expectations of marriage reflected reasonable and God-given desires. I wanted companionship, affection, and someone with whom to share life. However, oftentimes my motives for pursuing these desires were self-centered. Unfortunately, too many couples enter marriage with a consumer mentality, each person focusing on his or her own happiness rather than that of his or her partner. We are, instead, to enter into a loving covenant, considering the other as more important than self.

UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE

Most engaged couples come to their wedding days with hopes of a satisfying companionship. Why, then, do many newlyweds lose hope and allow isolation to replace oneness? Neither spouse feels loved, respected, or understood. Boredom replaces romance. Wonder turns to a wandering relationship. One thing I have learned: good marriages require work, commitment, and laughter.

As your journey begins, our desire is to help you establish a firm spiritual foundation. Take the time to prepare by working through the questions behind the question, “Why am I getting married?”

Faithful Guide,

You are the Creator God, so I am not going to attempt to stretch the truth—You know why I want to be married. You know I want it to be a good marriage. As I pursue what I want, I need You to lead me to do what I ought to do, keep me in check, and please keep my emotions from controlling my mind and spirit. Help each—mind, spirit, and emotion—to work in harmony. Teach me to be content with who I am but more importantly to understand You and Your purposes. Upon that realization, teach me deep truths about trust, love, and hope. I seek to know You and Your intention for marriage. I recognize that we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

PREP WORK

ONE

List ten reasons why you want to be married.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

List ten reasons why you feel you are ready for marriage.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

TWO

Study the following Scripture passages and what they say about marriage.

Genesis 2:18-25

Matthew 19:2-9

Mark 10:6-9

Ephesians 5:21-33

Hebrews 13:4-7

After reflecting on the verses above, in your opinion, what are some of God's purposes for marriage?

THREE

Go on a walk with your (future) spouse, make sure to choose one of your favorite places to walk. Take this opportunity to discuss your ideas, dreams, and fears about marriage. Complete Prep Work #3 and #4 together.

Consider the following questions to prompt your thinking:

What are you most excited about regarding your marriage?

In what ways are you and your partner similar? Different?

What fears do you have about marriage?

*What have you learned this week about your readiness for marriage?
How does all that match up with what you found in the Bible regarding
God's purpose for marriage?*

DRIVING QUESTIONS

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO GET OUT OF MARRIAGE?

What are some expectations you have for your marriage?

Our expectations often dictate our direction for marriage. How?

What needs do you hope are met?

What are some of God's expectations for marriage?

WHY ENTER A MARRIAGE COVENANT?

Read Genesis 2:15-25. What is Adam's dilemma?

What is God's solution?

What are some challenges to maintaining oneness?

How are a covenant and a contract similar? Different?

Covenant literally means "cutting [or] passing between pieces of flesh."² The Hebrew word picture was the joining of flesh, hearts being meshed, sacrifice being made.

"Too many couples enter marriage blinded by unrealistic expectations. They believe a high level of continuous romantic love should characterize the relationship. As one young adult said, 'I wanted marriage to fulfill all my desires. I needed security, someone to take care of me, intellectual stimulation, and economic security immediately—but it just wasn't like that!' People are looking for something 'magical' to happen in marriage. But magic doesn't make a marriage work: hard work does."³

H. NORMAN WRIGHT

WHY DOES DISILLUSIONMENT COME WHEN THE HONEYMOON IS OVER?

Disillusionment is the gap between what is expected and reality. H. Norman Wright says, "I think that almost everyone who marries eventually experiences some degree of disillusionment ... it's usually an increased awareness that the relationship isn't going as well as expected."⁴

How does a newly married couple establish realistic expectations for the first few years of marriage?

What can a couple do to prepare for the disillusionment phase?

HOW CAN DISILLUSIONMENT LEAD TO FULFILLMENT AND SATISFACTION?

How do we find freedom from the expectations of others?

In the margin, list a few ways to keep from losing hope and becoming discouraged during the disillusionment phase.

What can be learned from times when we let one another down?

SYNOPSIS

“Strong families hold the key to a strong society...because every other institution in society is predicated on and dependent upon strong families. And you can't have strong families without God as the centerpiece of the marriage union that ties that family together.”⁵

DR. TONY EVANS

God's purposes for marriage are much higher and greater than our own. In Genesis 2:18, God said “It is not good for the man to be alone,” and He created Eve as an answer to that aloneness. Even though Adam had a perfect relationship with God, a perfect environment, and all of the possessions he wanted, there was still a void of intimacy. Blending two individuals into oneness was the divine goal. Adam and Eve were made to become suitable counterparts who could balance and back one another in every way.

THE TWO BECOME ONE FOR A REASON

In all of life's struggles, pain, and disappointment, you will need each other's companionship and intimacy. This intimacy develops from an attitude of servanthood in seeking to meet each other's needs and desires.

One can only have this attitude as one realizes that his or her ultimate well-being depends on God and not fully on a spouse. Only when I allow my relationship with God to be the most important relationship in my life can I find a sense of security, fulfillment, and satisfaction that does not depend on my husband's response. I can love Byron out of the love I receive from Christ and then use that love to help meet needs in his life.

God ordained marriage to be an earthly picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Jesus Christ's love for the church, according to Ephesians 5, is sacrificial and unconditional. He laid down His life to present the church, His bride, whole and complete. Likewise, when a husband and wife love each other as they do their own bodies, nurturing and caring for each other, they live out the beautiful picture of Christ's oneness with the church.

The task of developing oneness will probably be one of the most challenging jobs you will face. Apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, oneness in your

marriage will never be fully realized. After all, it was God who created marriage for our well-being. Therefore, His plans, purposes, and ways can be trusted.

GOD'S PURPOSES ARE BIGGER THAN ANY WEDDING CEREMONY.

Even in the midst of God's plan, marriage is not easy. Life's disappointments and irritations combined with our own self-centeredness remind us of how much we need a Savior. It makes sense that so many marriages fail in America. Christ is not central for most couples and a consumer view of marriage is the norm; therefore, self-centeredness erodes intimacy and companionship. Without Christ, the vows promised at the altar can never be fully realized.

The key to a healthy marriage is for each of us to focus on becoming the person God created us to become. As author David Egener states, "The issue is not just what our Lord says about marriage. Solutions are found by discovering what He has said about basic issues of faith and character and then applying those perspectives to the seasons of marriage."⁶

In various ways, we are daily reminded of the first part of our marriage vows, "I take thee to be my wedded wife/husband." As we journey through the next seven sessions, our hope is for you to fully appreciate the significance of these powerful words. What an incredible privilege to be married!