



8-SESSION  
LEADER GUIDE

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# *TO HAVE & TO HOLD*

PREPARING FOR A GODLY MARRIAGE

BYRON & CARLA  
WEATHERSBEE

 Lifeway  
Biblical Solutions for Life



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PREPARING FOR A GODLY MARRIAGE

BYRON & CARLA  
WEATHERSBEE

LifeWay Press® Nashville, Tennessee

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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.

# CREATING AN EXPERIENCE: GETTING STARTED

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

**DAVID LIVINGSTONE**

In America, the average money, time, and energy spent on a wedding is astronomical. According to The Knot's 2016 *Real Weddings Study*, in a survey of nearly thirteen thousand couples, the average price of a wedding was \$35,329, up eight percent from 2015. The biggest expense was the venue, \$16,107,<sup>2</sup> followed by the engagement ring, \$6,163, and photography/videography, \$4,778. The smallest expense on the list was the \$100 typically spent on wedding day makeup.<sup>3</sup> While thousands of dollars are spent for the wedding day, little, if any, money, time, and energy are spent in preparation for the marriage itself.

In helping prepare couples for their special wedding day, may you be challenged to allow Almighty God to work powerfully in the lives of the couple as the Holy Spirit mysteriously brings about oneness. In the days ahead, both the leaders and couples attending will need to be empowered by something greater than themselves. Allow God to be teacher, instructor, guide, counselor, and coach as you help couples discover biblical principles that govern the way life can be lived to the fullest. **Remember: a good instructor teaches people, not simply material.**

## **DIFFERENT APPROACH TO PREMARITAL COUNSELING**

*To Have and To Hold* offers a different approach to “premarital counseling.” **We like to think of ourselves as marriage educators rather than counselors.** Through preventive education, we believe couples can be equipped to avoid divorce and build smart marriages and healthy families. In preparing this course, we have taken into account couples’ busy schedules, the importance of interaction, and the need for a simplified lifestyle during the engagement season.

## BUSY SCHEDULES

The days prior to a wedding can be busy and hectic. We have attempted to maximize the study time by giving couples important information in a simplified and condensed version—an outline version of sorts. One of the biggest mistakes many couples make is that of collecting great resources and then becoming overwhelmed by the amount of information gathered. Oftentimes, resources are put on the “I’ll get to that later” shelf, only to be pulled down during a major crisis several years later—often too little, too late—when the damage is done.

*To Have and To Hold* takes advantage of couples’ leisure time—*yeah right, what leisure time?* The time when they are not sleeping, eating, working, going to school, planning a wedding, or other non-negotiable times set into their schedules. Of course, a couple will need to discipline themselves to get the most out of this study, but we have created weekly activities that allow them to capitalize on their time together. They will make time for each other; why not use it positively to work through the issues vital to a healthy lifelong relationship?

## INTERACTIVE

Each week the couples will be given four to five prep activities concerning that session’s topic. Couples will be encouraged to meditate on a Scripture passage, do a biblical word study, go to a romantic place, or do some other activity to creatively challenge their thinking. These assignments are not a major time commitment, but they are vital as a couple works through issues.

Some of the weekly prep activities are designed to be fun, creative, and light. Remember, it is okay for couples to relax, laugh, and escape from the wedding plans for awhile. Finding a balanced approach will help couples gain insight during the more fast-paced days.

*To Have and To Hold’s* ultimate goal is for the couple to interact, discuss, and possibly debate the subject matter. We believe it is better for couples to discuss their thoughts, ideals, fears, and questions rather than simply read the latest resource regarding an issue. We encourage you, leader, to creatively adapt each session to meet your needs and the needs of your couples as you journey through the Bible study book. Remember: interaction and communication are key as you help couples seek God’s principles for a fulfilling marriage.

The *To Have and To Hold* Bible study book is designed to guide couples through the following structure:

- **Attend the introductory session, if in a group.**
- **Intro and Prep Work of the next session**—The Intro section of each week introduces a marriage topic along with the biblical principles that apply to that topic or part of the vows. Then couples are challenged to explore their understanding of these concepts and practically apply those biblical guidelines to their own relationships.
- **Driving Questions**—At the next group meeting, these questions guide the conversation. Note: the questions throughout this Leader Guide are for you, as the leader, to ask of the couple (or couples) to kick off discussion.
- **Synopsis**—Conclude each session here to reinforce the content you've been discussing.

This rhythm is repeated for each session until completion.

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

The Leader Guide will assist you in developing your marriage preparation course. However, it was not written as a “Quick Lesson Approach” to leading a marriage preparation session/class. Please be innovative and creative. Remember to make it personal. This needs to be a grassroots movement where you meet the needs of your community of influence.

## PRACTICAL AND SIMPLE

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

## GETTING STARTED

Before you, as the leader, get started, you will need to understand a few more things.

- Most sections parallel parts of the traditional marriage vows and the study concludes with keys to living out those vows.
- The focus is not on the Bible study book or leader/teacher but on the learning process that God is bringing to their lives. We hope the Holy Spirit will be your instructor. However, couples love hearing stories from your own marriage.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

A strong Christian marriage provides a foundation for generations to come. Be real, honest, and transparent as you lead these couples in marriage preparation. The church needs leaders who will work hard, invest much, pray often, and love abundantly. The return on your investment will be huge. As the couple whom you have guided meets at the altar, may they be adequately prepared to fulfill the marital vows—and enjoy the process. Have fun! The best is yet to come.

## HELPFUL TIPS

- Make this study yours. Invest time in preparing. Consistently refine your teaching plan each time you lead a group.
- The first time you lead a couple or group through this study will be the most labor intensive.
- You are creating an experience, not just passing information along.
- Remember you teach couples; you *do not* teach curriculum. Personal relationships are the key.

## TOOLS

We'd like to provide you with as many tools and illustrations as possible as you lead couple(s) through this journey. We'll include suggested illustrations at the end of each session. We've also put some tools in the appendix in the back of the Leader Guide; you can find additional tools online at [LifeWay.com/ToHaveAndToHold](https://www.lifeway.com/ToHaveAndToHold). As you begin, you may find these resources particularly helpful:

- Consent to Premarital Education (See Figure 1 in the appendix.)
  - Clergy and/or Counselor Permission (See Figure 2 in the appendix.)
  - Optional Introductory Group Session—ideal for retreat and small or large group settings. (See the appendix.)
- 

*Dear Leader,*

*Discipling a couple as they learn how to navigate marriage is a sacred privilege. We want you to customize your teaching plan. Although we have provided thought-provoking discussion questions, illustrations, and learning activities, our hope is that you will provide the muscle and personality around the skeletal structure in this Leader Guide. It is important to open each session with an icebreaker question that references participants' Prep Work answers in the Bible study book. This provides accountability and encouragement for them to continue working through those assignments. Please allow the couple(s) to express their thoughts, opinions, and questions. Remember, God is not intimidated by our questions. In fact, a question that seems off the wall may lead a couple to discover truths about God that could not be known in any other way. Remember to pray specifically that the Holy Spirit will be the instructor. God desires to give a correct opinion of Himself through marriage. In the process, we learn to love others. We are thankful for your investment.*

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

Byron and Carla Weathersbee

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## 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."<sup>1</sup>*

**STEPHEN CROTTS**

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

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

**MATTHEW 19:6**

## SESSION GOAL

To understand God's biblical foundation and purpose for marriage in order to establish a theological foundation that provides stability and oneness in the marital relationship.

## KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- Genesis 1:26-27; Ephesians 5:31-33—Humans mirror God's image uniquely in marriage.
- Genesis 1:28a—Families are to multiply a godly heritage.
- Genesis 2:18—God intends marriage for partners to experience companionship and to complement each other.
- Deuteronomy 6:1-12; Psalm 78:3-8; Mathew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2—God intends marriage for partners to evangelize and disciple the world by passing on a legacy to children.

*Dear Leader,*

*This may be the first time you've met with this couple. Be sure they each have their Bible study books. They should read through the first session and complete the Prep Work before you meet together for Session 1. Together, you'll work through the Driving Questions and then the Synopsis provided following the session. If doing this study in a group environment, we encourage you to use the optional introductory meeting we've provided in the appendix (p. 165). Thank you again for your investment in the next generation of marriages and godly families.*

I (Carla) will never forget the feeling of seeing 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 day with hopes of a satisfying companionship. Why, then, do many excited newlyweds lose their hopes 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 time to prepare by working through the questions behind the question, "Why am I getting married?"

## PREP WORK

(10 minutes)

*How did working through the Bible study book go this week?*

STARTER QUESTIONS FROM THE BIBLE STUDY BOOK WILL LEAD INTO THE SESSION.

*What are some reasons why you want to marry?*

*What are you most excited about regarding your upcoming marriage?*

*In what ways are you and your (future) spouse similar? Different?*

*Name one fear you have about getting married.*

TRANSITIONAL QUESTION: *What was your definition of marriage?*

STATE THE PART OF THE VOWS AND PRESENT THE KEY QUESTION (P. 11) FOR THIS SECTION.

PRAY.

## DRIVING QUESTIONS

(40 minutes)

### 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?*

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**HELPFUL TIP:** *Our hope is to spur conversation and discussion between the couple. Do not feel as if you have to cover all of the details in a section.*

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Our expectations often dictate our direction in marriage. Honestly, most couples are entering marriage to have their needs met regarding affection, companionship, family, and financial security. Some may have the need to leave home. Many of these expectations reflect reasonable God-given desires. However, when we pursue these desires with shortsighted strategies and motives, we'll run into problems.

*Illustration: Compass—True North vs. Magnetic North (See p. 22.)*

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*"You must know for which harbor you are headed if you are to catch the right wind to get you there."<sup>2</sup>*

**SENECA**

---

*What are some of God's expectations for marriage?*

God's expectations for marriage include:

- *Sanctification: Marriage will change us for the better.*
- *Servanthood: Marriage enables us to serve someone else.*
- *Spiritual growth: Marriage places us under the mutual spirit of love.*
- *Model: Christians need to see marriage as a picture of Christ's relationship to the church.*

WHY ENTER A MARRIAGE COVENANT?

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

*What is God's solution?*

Go back to the beginning, where God initiated marriage in Genesis 2:15-25. Adam's dilemma (Gen. 2:18a) was that God believed, "It is not good for man to be alone." Therefore, God provided a solution (Gen. 2:18b) by stating, "I will make a helper suitable for him." Therefore, God designed oneness in Genesis 2:24 (NASB): "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Basically this means that marital oneness is in agreement with God's will and purpose.

*What are some challenges to maintaining oneness?*

*How are a covenant and a contract similar? Different?*

Remind the couple(s) that there is a difference between a covenant and a contract. A contractual agreement can easily be canceled or adapted by the signing of

names and is simply legally binding. A marriage covenant, however, is both spiritually and legally binding.<sup>3</sup> “A covenant calls for the binding of hearts.”<sup>4</sup>

A covenant implies that a couple is being spiritually glued together where nothing but death could separate. This kind of agreement involves a lifetime commitment.

Covenant literally means “cutting [or] passing between pieces of flesh.”<sup>5</sup> 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 that.’ People are looking for something ‘magical’ to happen in marriage. But magic doesn’t make a marriage work: hard work does.”<sup>6</sup>*

#### **H. NORMAN WRIGHT**

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### **WHY DOES DISILLUSIONMENT COME WHEN THE HONEYMOON IS OVER?**

It is important for couples to have realistic expectations. When the honeymoon is over, if the couple is not prepared, disillusionment can destroy a marriage. 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.”<sup>7</sup>

*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?*

During the early days of marriage, couples bare all and see all for the first time. The closeness that comes with intimacy exposes our hearts and often unearths our own selfishness. It is easy to give in to the sinful nature. Reality sets in, and unfortunately, it often looks different from what was originally expected.

## HOW CAN DISILLUSIONMENT LEAD TO FULFILLMENT AND SATISFACTION?

*How do we find freedom from the expectations of others?*

Longtime marriage and communication expert Gary Smalley said, “The more we place our expectations on another person, the more control we give them over our emotional and spiritual state. The freer we are of expectations from others—and the more we depend upon God alone—the more pure and honest our love for others will become.”<sup>8</sup>

To keep couples from losing hope and becoming discouraged, leaders need to help them learn how to allow their relationships with God to become a source of marital fulfillment.

In addition, couples need to be taught that Mr. or Mrs. Right is not a superhero nor a savior. A person cannot and will not meet all our needs. Unfortunately, we will let one another down no matter how hard we try. Leaders need to help couples learn to accept Mr. or Mrs. Right for who he or she is as a person. A couple should not marry with the intent to change one another.

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*“Don’t marry someone who has characteristics that you feel are intolerable.”<sup>9</sup>*

**DR. JAMES DOBSON**

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*Ask couples to 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?*

As marriage educators, our job is objectively to help the couples purposefully move away from unrealistic expectations and grow in understanding the truth about themselves, their mates, and their marriages. It is such a privilege and honor to be married. Help couples understand this high calling.

Hopefully we can help them live out Psalm 62:1,5 that says, "Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him...Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him."

## SYNOPSIS

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*“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.”<sup>10</sup>*

**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.

### **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."<sup>11</sup>

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!

## THE TOOLS

### COMPASS ILLUSTRATION: TRUE NORTH VS. MAGNETIC NORTH

True north is the North Pole. "It's a fixed position that never changes." Maps are drawn from true north. "A compass . . . does not point to true north. Rather, it points to a magnetic field that is located roughly 1,300 miles away from the North Pole. This is called 'Magnetic North.' Every pilot and every sea captain must make constant adjustments from what a *compass* says is north and what the *map* says is true north. Failing to make this adjustments of even a few degrees early in the journey could mean missing the destination by hundreds of miles."<sup>12</sup>

- *True north = God's Word ("fixed, certain and absolute"<sup>13</sup>)*
- *Magnetic north = "Can be deceiving; Looks right. . .feels right, yet it will not direct you to your desired destination"<sup>14</sup>*

Challenge couples to chart their spiritual journeys (both individually and together) by the true north of God's Word. Guide them to reflect on and ask God to reveal who or what they have allowed to guide them thus far. Talk through practical ways they can intentionally build their lives and marriages on biblical principles.

# NOTES