

Pre-Marriage Course

Third Strand Ministries

A self-paced course that satisfies the requirements of the State of Tennessee for obtaining a discount on a marriage license from the county clerk's office.

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Attachments:

1. Basic Budgeting Worksheet.
2. Communication: Key to a Good Marriage.
3. Habits of Effective Communicators.
4. Things to Remember About Sex: Your spouse approaches intimacy much differently than you.

Required Text for this course:

Holy Bible in the New American Standard Version, or the New International Version

Note: Work through this class together with your soon-to-be-spouse and email all the assignment responses to timothy@3rdStrand.org or, weddings@greattennesseeeofficiants.com

Make sure you include your full legal names and mailing address in the email.

This is no extra charge for couples who have booked a wedding minister through Great Tennessee Officiants. For those who have not booked, the fee is \$35.00 to cover evaluation time and notary fees.

Session 1 Why Marriage?

Assignment: As a warmup, you both will write two or three paragraphs on how your life, up to this point, has led you to each other. How do you see the guidance of God in any of this?

In this writing, also answer:

- How did you meet?
- How did the courtship progress?
- How do you know you love this person?

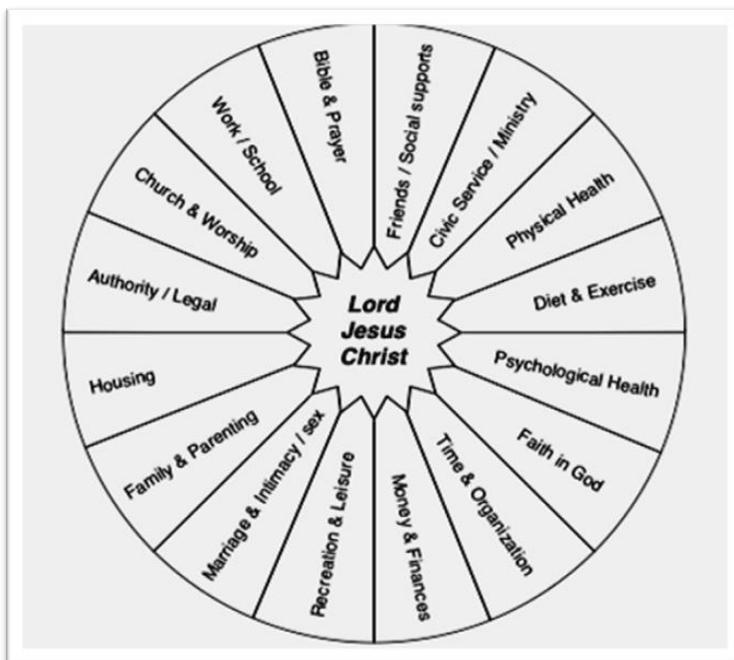
Why marriage? Common values undergird marital love.

Assignment: Each person lists 5-7 values that they espouse, do this separately and then share with each other. Make a **Venn diagram** showing the common areas and the separate values.

Marriage is woven through the Bible. Read out loud 1Corinthians 13.

The Spokes of Life form the Christian World View.

Take about 5-8 minutes numbering 1-16 the different pie wedges in order of importance in your life



Session 2 Money and Simplicity



Our perceptions about money influence the path for our lives. Our families and life circumstances can affect our view of money and its uses. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

Assignment: Look up these verses and discuss them. Write one sentence for each that explains the main idea.

Malachi 3:10

Phil. 4:6-7

1 Tim. 6:10

Eccl. 5:12

Haggai 1:6-7

The benefits of creating a budget:

1. A budget establishes a spending plan.
2. A budget encourages saving.
3. A budget reduces stress.
4. A budget allows for the unexpected.
5. A budget encourages giving.
6. A budget discourages debt.
7. A budget can be flexible.
8. A budget can encourage spouses to submit to each other in love as is God’s plan outlined in Scripture.

Assignment: Each of you fill out a family budget worksheet, then compare them with each other. Notice the similarities and the differences. Lastly, create a “compromise” budget together. This will be your initial working document on budget.

Here are five rules to follow on budget:

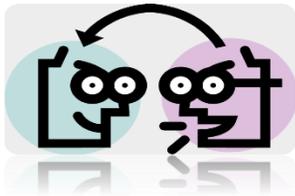
1. Always spend less than you bring in.
2. Establish a budget.
3. Set limits and stick to them.
4. Be creative.
5. Be open to change.

Assignment: Questions to answer:

Explain generally (without actual numbers) how were the budget worksheets you filled out different or the same for both of you?

How does that show the difference or similarities in your priorities with money?

Session 3 Communication and Character



Sender—Encoding—Transmission—Decoding—Recipient

Assignments

1. *Write* down your best definition of communication. What elements are involved in communication?
2. On a scale from one to ten rate yourself when it comes to listening. Now, have your partner rate how good a listener he/she thinks you are. In what ways could you improve your listening skills?
3. *Read* the articles on communication and then both do a 2-paragraph “quick write” that summarizes the articles. Share them with one another.
4. *Write* down your best definition of “character” using your own words.
5. What does it mean to be a person of integrity? What are some current cultural pressures that put integrity at risk? *List* those.
6. *Discuss* 3 people each of you know separately who are of honorable character.
7. *Write* a paragraph or two describing your partner’s character, as if you were reading it out loud at your wedding ceremony.

Five “Do Nots” of communication. Don’t:

- Placate
- Blame
- Keep Score
- Distract/Divert
- Dig up “Old Dirt”

Session 4 Sexuality and Discipline in Marriage

Life Practices for the Christian (a resource):

Prayer

We commit to an ongoing prayer (both together and individually), learning to pray for one another, our families and communities. We seek prayerful responses to any challenges and sorrows we face.

Integrity

We commit to be people of integrity in every area of our lives. To live honestly and in true humility.

Intensity

We desire a growing passion to see Christ lived out in our community and our own lives. We seek to serve the communities we work and live.

Intention

We actively pursue spiritual growth in every area of life, work, community and family.

Stewardship

We commit to live as stewards of the resources that have been made available to us through God's provision and providence.

Learning

We strive to be a people of the Bible through the study and reflection of Scripture. We center our world view (what we believe to be true) from what the Bible teaches.

Celebration

We decide to life with joyfulness, hope and freedom in our homes and community, centering those things in Christ's work for us.

It is true that one's first experience with sex may have been awkward and in some cases harmful. Pornography and/or previous and premature sexual encounters can lead to a shallow view of the proper place and role of the sexual relationship between and man and a woman. However, sex is a gift and a very fun thing that God gives us in proper context!

Here are some good strategies to consider for those seeking chastity before marriage:

1. Limit the alone time you spend with each other in privacy. Stay public.
2. Commit with each other to stay pure and celibate until your wedding—have that conversation.
3. Seek out activities that will refocus your sexual passions.
4. Be active physically and not idle.

Sex in Marriage is awesome because:

1. We crave relationship.
2. To consummate the marriage.
3. To keep us distinct in unity.
4. Male and female are compliments.
5. To create children.
6. For pleasure!

Sexual discipline in Marriage Because:

1. To strengthen the marriage, by creating trust.
2. To keep us grounded in integrity.
3. To create a welcoming home.
4. It clears our mind and conscience to commune with God.
5. Infidelity shatters lives and causes a level of shame hard to endure
6. It develops resistance to temptation. See James 4:7

Assignments:

1. Do a two-paragraph "quick write" for the two statements below. Compare your responses
Write a "blended response" that includes parts of both of your quick writes.
 - a. We are all sexual beings.
 - b. Sex is a gift from God.
2. Make a Venn diagram of your views of romance in marriage. How are your views similar and different?
3. Using the Spiritual Disciplines above as a reference, write together a paragraph on what discipline in your marriage will look like.

Basic Budgeting Worksheet

Courtesy of BetterBudgeting.com

Total Monthly Gross Income		\$ _____
- Taxes, Health Ins. & Other Payroll Deductions	\$ _____	
- Savings, 401K, etc.	\$ _____	
= Total Monthly 'Spendable' Income		\$ _____

Housing Expenses	Monthly Payments
Rent or Mtg.	\$ _____
Utilities	\$ _____
Insurance (set \$ aside each month if paid annually)	\$ _____
Repairs (set \$ aside for future expenses)	\$ _____
Taxes (set \$ aside if paid annually)	\$ _____
= Total	\$ _____

Car Expenses	
Loan Payment(s)	\$ _____
Gas	\$ _____
Insurance (set \$ aside if paid annually)	\$ _____
Maintenance & Repairs (set \$ aside for future expenses)	\$ _____
= Total	\$ _____

Debts	
Creditor #1 _____	\$ _____
Balance _____	
Creditor #2 _____	\$ _____
Balance _____	
Creditor #3 _____	\$ _____
Balance _____	
Creditor #4 _____	\$ _____
Balance _____	
(figure more on back if needed)	
= Total	\$ _____

Miscellaneous

(Set \$ aside each month for annual expenses, such as Ins.)

Church Tithes & Offerings	\$ _____
Other Charitable Contributions	\$ _____
Groceries, Lunches, Meals Out	\$ _____
Childcare	\$ _____
School Tuition/Supplies	\$ _____
Medical Bills and CoPays	\$ _____
Prescription Medicines	\$ _____
Pet Supplies & Vet Exams	\$ _____
Entertainment, Cable, Video Rentals	\$ _____
Club Dues (Homeowner's Assoc., Fitness, etc...)	\$ _____
Newspaper, Magazine Subscriptions	\$ _____
Clothing	\$ _____
Haircuts	\$ _____
Gifts	\$ _____
Cash	\$ _____
Other (continue on back if needed)	\$ _____
= Total	\$ _____

Monthly Expense Totals

Housing	\$ _____
Car	\$ _____
Debts	\$ _____
Miscellaneous	\$ _____
= Total Expenses	\$ _____

Monthly Surplus or Shortage

\$ _____

(Total Spendable Income *minus* Total Expenses)

Permission granted to photocopy for personal or non-profit use. Helpful tips for using this worksheet can also be found at <http://www.betterbudgeting.com/budgetformsfree.htm>

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E-mail: editor@betterbudgeting.com

Communication - the Key to a Good Marriage
by [Emuna Braverman](#)

Effective communication means verbalizing needs and listening carefully.

It can't be stated often enough. If you don't have a healthy way of expressing your thoughts and emotions to each other, of speaking and being heard, then everything else will ultimately crumble.

In order to have a successful marriage you have to make yourself an expert in communication. You have to try to understand what your partner is saying on a simple level as well as try to analyze the underlying message or desire.

For example, the last thing a woman wants to hear when she complains about her weight is a suggestion for a new diet plan. Actually the last thing she probably wants to hear is, "Yes dear, you do need to slim down a little!"

Nor does she want just a sympathetic ear (just when a man thinks he's mastered the art of good listening). What she really wants is for her husband to say, "You look terrific!" "You look thin!" "You look so young!"

Having said that it is important to look at what Virginia Satir calls the "metacommunication." This is the underlying message, the motivation behind the communication. We all need to be amateur psychologists and try to figure out what our partner really wants. For example, when Susan tells her husband that she isn't feeling well, that may be her way of saying "could you drive the children to ice skating lessons today dear?" or it may be her way of expressing a need for more attention from her spouse. As I'm about to illustrate we can't all be mind readers, but it is important to try to focus not just on the words being said, but what may possibly be implied as well.

It is important to hear what your spouse is really saying, but it is also important for the other side to give clues.

We shouldn't expect our mates to intuit our needs nor rely on some level of divine inspiration. If there's a special necklace you want for your birthday, point it out to your husband. It will save him the agony of choosing and spare you both needless pain. It works both ways -- maybe he doesn't want socks this year.

TELL YOUR PARTNER WHAT YOU WANT

Joe is the romantic type. Every week after he got engaged he brought his fiancée flowers. He even sent her flowers every day of the week before their wedding.

He continued this practice a number of years into their marriage.

Finally Emily, his wife, ever the unsentimental and practical one, spoke up. "You know Joe, I really love you and I like that you want to bring me flowers. But I actually don't like flowers that much. And besides, they die so soon after that I feel like we've wasted our money. I'd rather you saved up for a more lasting gift."

Luckily this is a very trivial example. But being able to express yourself in the small areas will lead to open discussion in the big areas as well. If we want something, we need to say it.

It sounds so obvious, but how many hurt and angry couples come in for counseling saying "he should have known..." or "she should have realized..."? How should he have known? How should she have realized? Did you tell him/her?

DON'T RELY ON INTUITION

I have a friend who never makes grocery lists. She goes to the supermarket and relies on her intuition. This led to, at one point, 12 jars of mustard in her refrigerator.

This approach to life has relatively little impact on her, other than maybe leading to excessive consumption of hot dogs, but in marriage it could be disastrous.

Don't rely on your intuition. Ask. Don't rely on his/her intuition. Tell.

"You knew I wasn't feeling well. Why didn't you offer to make dinner?" This and many similar dialogues often lead to tension around the home. Yet the solution is so simple. "I'm really not feeling well dear. Would you mind making dinner?"

It is a common assumption that prophetic power is proof of your spouse's undying love and devotion. Let's destroy that myth right now. Tell your spouse what you want. His or her thoughtful response to your explicitly expressed needs is a sign of commitment.

While we're on the topic, don't ask for signs or proofs. It will get you in trouble. Everyone expresses their caring and develops their love in differing ways and at varying rates. A confrontation over "do you love me?" will be just that -- a confrontation. Express yourself in a way that shows understanding of your spouse's personality and he will respond in kind.

Perhaps the most essential quality for good communication in any relationship, and particularly in a marriage, is to be a good listener.

Take a minute to ask yourself if you listen attentively when your partner speaks. Or is your mind on tonight's dinner, tomorrow's business meeting, Bloomingdale's sale ... Do you comprehend clearly what your mate is saying?

LISTEN TO YOUR PARTNER

Sometimes when my husband and I are quarreling, he'll stop me in the middle to say: "What am I saying, and what are you saying, and what's the difference?" It's infuriating but effective.

Frequently I find that I've been so caught up in hearing myself talk or the passion of the moment that I haven't really been listening. I'm amazed to discover that our positions aren't that far apart, in fact they're not apart at all.

If this is a difficult issue for you it sometimes helps to establish structure. You could set aside a time where you are required to listen to your mate without interrupting for 10 minutes. Don't plan your defense or rebuttal. Just listen. You'll be surprised at how much you'll learn and when it's your turn you'll realize a unique pleasure in being able to express yourself freely.

Another technique psychologists favor is called active listening. There are many variations on this theme but the basic style is mirroring back what your partner says. "I hear you saying..."

Keep doing it until you get it right. Maybe many of your misunderstandings are because your heard your partner wrong the first time, or you didn't hear your partner at all.

We have numerous distractions in our lives today -- telephones, televisions, and now the Internet. If we want to be listened to with concentration, we must provide the same. Hang up the phone when your spouse walks in the door. Turn off the TV. Escape from the Web. Otherwise your mate feels like second best, and when you have something to say it will also fall on deaf ears.

We have to remember that marriage creates a unity, a oneness. We can use our powers of communication to solidify that unity or, God forbid, to tear it asunder.

As the Chazon Ish, a great Jewish scholar, wrote "Treat your wife as a left hand protecting the right one ... and not an independent limb." If we accept this attitude we will recognize that spending time and energy to improve communication is the way to achieve a true marital bond.

This article can also be read at: <http://www.aish.com/f/m/48938377.html>

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Habits of Effective Communicators: Being Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak and Slow to Become Angry – from the Boone Center for the Family, Pepperdine University

[By Drs. Emily Scott-Lowe and Dennis Lowe](#)

"Well, I cried myself to sleep again last night" Jennifer mutters to her husband as he is preparing to leave for work. "What was wrong?" asked Steve, her husband. "You know!" Jennifer replies. "No, I don't know what you're talking about," says Steve. "I can't believe it" continues Jennifer, "as always, you made fun of me in front of our friends last night and now you're acting amnesic! How many time have I told you how much that hurts me?" "Oh no" Steve retorts, "let's not go through that stupid discussion again. If you would just lighten up a bit, you wouldn't get so upset."

Steve and Jennifer are about to experience another frustrating interaction--maybe even a meltdown--in the same way they have every time this topic has arisen. Sound familiar? The good news is that they can learn to have more constructive conversations, even about these difficult topics. What we've learned is that successful communication requires following rules and taking time outs when needed.

James 1:19 gives us some rules to follow in our communication. It reads "therefore be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry." Sounds easy when we read it, but it's difficult to implement.

So what steps can we take to make this scripture a reality in our day-to-day relationships?

1. In order to listen, speak, and manage our anger effectively, we need to start by selecting the right time and place to have a discussion. Most of us have discovered the wrong times to introduce a sensitive topic. Jennifer approaches Steve as he's leaving to go to work, increasing the likelihood of friction. Other bad times are when either or both people are hungry, tired, stressed, or preoccupied with a task.

In the book *A Lasting Promise*, the authors recommend that when topics emerge at inopportune times, couples agree to continue the discussion within twenty-four hours when the timing is better. We've made an agreement in our own marriage not to continue discussions during those times that are ripe for conflict with the understanding that we'll pick it back up at a better time that is jointly determined. Arranging to continue the discussion within twenty-four hours allows for a postponement of the topic without totally avoiding or ignoring it.

After selecting the right time to have a discussion, what other rules aid fulfillment of James 1:19?

2. Although this sounds obvious, to promote good communication one person needs to be the "listener" and one the "speaker." Usually what happens is both want to be the speaker and no one really listens. To counteract this tendency, researchers at the University of Denver

(Markman, Stanley and Blumberg) have found that the "listener" and "speaker" need clearly defined roles and rules.

Rules for the listener:

- No interrupting. Interruptions are not only difficult for the speaker, but often indicate that the listener is focusing more on a rebuttal than really listening to what is being said.
- Paraphrase back what the speaker says. Just assuming that you understood the speaker's intent is deadly. Stating what you heard to the speaker provides an opportunity to clarify that you heard correctly. Being able to summarize the speaker's perspective does not mean you agree, just that you have captured his or her viewpoint.
- If you do not understand, request clarification. Keep asking until you are able to rephrase exactly what the speaker intended.
- Agree to be the speaker when your turn arrives. Each person has a perspective that needs to be expressed.

Rules for the speaker:

- Speak for yourself. Avoid accusations or blaming. Use phrases such as: "What I recall is..." or "My perception was that..." or "I feel hurt when stories are told about me in public." These phrases make it easier for the listener to listen.
- Be concise. Use only three or four sentences and pause. This allows the listener to digest what has been said. After four or five sentences even the best listener can get confused.
- Use a calm voice. Even if you are very upset a quiet voice is easier to hear.
- Agree to be a listener when your turn arrives. Taking turns assures that each person gets a chance to truly understand the other's perspective.

3. Time outs. In a basketball game, time outs are called when the play is getting sloppy or the flow of the game is moving in a negative direction. It is a surprise for some couples to learn that they can also call a halt to interactions that are becoming destructive. *When discussions get heated, both people not only have the right but the responsibility to call a time out before things get out of hand.*

During a time out, the communication rules may need to be reviewed. Each person needs to evaluate his or her part in the conflict. This is also a good time to focus clearly on the one or two points that need to be clearly communicated. Some couples invoke prayer during these times so they can utilize God's power to make their future discussions more constructive. Then, after 15-20 minutes (the time it takes to neutralize negative physiological arousal), the "play" can be resumed.

In *A Lasting Promise*, Scott Stanley and his colleagues describe the rules for speakers and listeners in depth. They recommend having an object represent the "floor." It can be a pencil, a book or any handy, small object. Whoever has the "floor" is the speaker. The "floor" is passed back and forth so it is clear who is speaking and who is listening. This helps keep order and prevent escalation.

Sometimes the barriers in a relationship are so big, couples have difficulty sticking-to the speaker-listener rules without a referee. An unbiased third person may be needed to help both keep the rules and call "time outs." This could be a church leader, marriage mentor, or Christian therapist who helps the couple learn to resolve conflict. It is better to utilize a referee than let an important relationship deteriorate beyond repair.

After learning about these guidelines, Steve and Jennifer first practiced using them on less potent topics than her hurt feelings in social situations. When they felt prepared to discuss the more sensitive topic of her feelings, they each kept a copy of the rules nearby. Steve heard the depth of Jennifer's feelings for the first time. His previous efforts to defend himself prevented him from totally hearing what she had tried to say. He agreed to stop telling stories about Jennifer that would hurt her. Also, Jennifer learned that Steve did not have the malicious intent to hurt her that she had long imagined.

Jennifer and Steve learned that, by applying the James 1:19 principle of "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry," they were able to begin removing barriers that had become difficult to penetrate. They were surprised to discover that they were actually drawn closer together through this more effective method of managing conflicts.

Originally Published in 21st Century Christian Magazine.

Things to Remember About Sex Your spouse approaches intimacy much differently than you. Bob Lepine
From Family Life website

It's no surprise that many husbands and wives think differently about sex. And these differences can easily become a source of conflict in marriage.

With that in mind, I want to suggest seven things men need to remember about sex and seven things wives need to keep in mind as well:

What husbands should remember about sex

1. Hollywood sex is made up. It's a fantasy. The people in romantic scenes in movies are actors. Don't try to measure your marital sex against what you see in a romantic film.
2. Sex is probably (but not necessarily) a lower priority for your wife than it is for you. Are you as committed to meeting her needs and desires as you'd like her to be with your desire for sex? Could you even name her top three relationship needs? Here is one of them ...
3. Your wife needs a safe and secure relationship. In order for her to engage in sex with heart and mind and body, she needs to know that you will be there for her, that you are committed to her, and that she is your one and only.
4. Your wife wants to have sex with a companion, not with someone who simply shares her mailing address. If you're not spending time having fun together in all kinds of settings, she's going to be less motivated to be with you sexually.
5. You don't need to have an affair to be an unfaithful husband. Whether you look at pornography or at other women, the Bible makes it clear that any lust for a woman who is not your wife is adultery.
6. There is no secret formula to arousal. If you think you have found a secret formula, and you attempt to repeat the recipe, your wife will change the secret. Women don't want to be figured out. They also don't want to be manipulated.
7. Your wife is insecure about her physical beauty. She sees all the flaws. Watch what you say to her.

What wives should remember about sex

1. Sex is God's idea. He created it and gave it as a good gift to husbands and wives in marriage. It is a key part of His plan for how we become one in marriage.
2. For most men, this is a big deal—and it's not because men are perverted or ungodly. God delights when a husband and wife enjoy marital intimacy.

3. How you respond to your husband when he initiates is critical. To be uninterested can communicate a lack of respect and honor for him. I'm not saying you need to say yes every time he initiates. But when you say no, explain why in a way that still affirms your desire for him.
4. Sex is a marital discipline. It's a part of how we serve each other in marriage. It is wrong for a wife to use sex as a reward or a lack of sex as punishment. The Bible clearly teaches that husbands and wives are not to deprive each other in this area.
5. Men are visually oriented. No matter how you see yourself, he is stimulated by sight. Again, God is the One who made men with a desire to see women naked. And the only legitimate way for your husband to satisfy this God-given desire is for you to let him see you naked.
6. Men in romance novels and soap operas are made up. The strong, sensitive, caring men portrayed in most romance novels are fictional characters. No husband can live up to the near perfection an author presents.
7. Creativity is good. The Bible says that the marriage bed is undefiled. This means that a husband and wife have freedom to explore what brings them pleasure and enjoyment in the sexual arena of marriage. Neither of you should be pressured to do something you're uncomfortable with in the sexual relationship. But passion can be stirred by variety and creativity in the sexual relationship.

You can hear a talk about intimacy given by Bob Lepine at a Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway on a recent broadcast of FamilyLife Today by clicking [here](#).

Related resources

[*Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*](#), by Dr. William Cutrer and Sandra Glahn

[*The Five Sex Needs of Men and Women*](#), by Dr. Gary and Barb Rosberg

[*God on Sex*](#), by Daniel Akin

[*Intimacy Ignited*](#), by Joseph and Linda Dillow and Peter and Lorraine Pintus