

LoveYourSpouse

“... JUST AS CHRIST
ALSO LOVED THE CHURCH”
EPHESIANS 5:25

John and Daria Greening

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Love Your Spouse

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INTRODUCTION

Think back to when you and your spouse became engaged. Remember talking endlessly with great excitement about your future together? You discussed topics such as careers, children, location, church, and wedding gift registries. You looked forward to the purchase of a home, speculating about its style, number of rooms, colors of paint, and types of furniture. Dreams are fun and, better yet, inexpensive!

The challenge comes when it's time to turn pipedreams into reality. Home ownership brings with it an expensive price tag, many tough decisions, and sweat equity. Most likely, you and your spouse discovered that your initial dreams were bigger than what your wallet, time, and energy would allow.

Proverbs 24:3–4 contain valuable insights about the process of turning a house into a home, “Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” Turning a house into a home involves more than just buying and fixing up a house. The construction tools must go beyond those purchased at the hardware store. Wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are as important as hammers, saws, and drills.

People make a home. Having the desirable features of a house with a two-car garage, three bedrooms, and two-and-a-half baths—all on a half-acre lot—is only part of building a home. An attractive house can seem empty and cold if no love is present. Of greater importance than the house's physical structure is the work that marriage partners invest in growing a happy, healthy marriage. The source of a joyful, godly family is the Word of God, the supplier of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. When you know and love the Word of God and live according to its principles, you and your spouse can turn your

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house into a pleasant dwelling place, where you demonstrate the love of Christ.

This study presents a blueprint for building a Christlike marriage. It centers around the essential concepts in Ephesians 5:22–33, conveyed within the book’s theme of Christ’s great love for His Bride, the church, and the church’s response to that sacrificial love.

As with any building or remodeling job, constructing a sound marriage takes hard work and effort. You may have to demolish some shoddy construction before you can build the marriage right. At times you will feel like you’ve hit your thumb with a hammer and want to give up. Angry words will be spoken. You may wonder if the relationship can really work. Don’t quit! Christlike marriages can be built. Roll up your sleeves; it’s time to get to work on learning how to love your spouse. Your marriage is worth the effort!

LESSON

1

PRACTICES OF LOVE

“Our culture says that feelings of love are the basis for actions of love. And of course, that can be true. But it is truer to say that actions of love can lead consistently “to feelings of love.” —TIM KELLER

What makes a good marriage? One happily married person might say patience is the key; another might insist that respect is essential; still another might say humor is a must. Certainly these traits are beneficial in building relationships. Couples who enjoy a good marriage possess these qualities and more. They know that to cultivate a close relationship, they must practice selfless acts day in and day out. The collection of positive choices that guides behavior between spouses could be termed the *best practices* of marriage.

1. What does the term *best practices* suggest?

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2. In what context would you typically hear the term *best practices*?

Think of best practices in relation to a business or organization that is striving to create a positive and productive work environment. The company uses best practices when it implements sound and sustainable procedures that benefit employees and produce operational success. When a business aims for excellence, it makes the best choices possible.

3. How might the following businesses implement a “best practices” approach?

(a) Grocery store

(b) Hotel

(c) Preschool

4. Name areas in your marriage relationship that would benefit from implementing best practices.

During a wedding ceremony, a couple pledge their vows to each other. Essentially those vows are a lifetime commitment to best marriage practices. The pastor might say to both the bride and the groom: “Repeat after me . . .

I, ____, take thee, ____, to be my wedded husband/wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God’s holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself to you.

5. How does each phrase in the above vow express a commitment to best practices in marriage?

To have and to hold, from this day forward

For better, for worse

For richer, for poorer

In sickness and in health

To love and to cherish

Till death do us part

According to God's holy ordinance

I pledge myself to you

6. What symbols do brides and grooms typically exchange as constant reminders of their commitment to best marriage practices?
7. Think about three couples you know who evidence a commitment to best practices in marriage. List their names and the characteristics of their marriage that indicate a best-practices approach.

8. To what degree do you think the couples listed above are committed to best practices as conveyed by their wedding vows?
9. What situations might influence couples to not follow best practices?

As couples inevitably discover, vows are easier said than done. The romance of a wedding day is often far different from the reality of everyday living. For both partners to consistently carry out best practices, they must work hard on strengthening their relationship. Both partners must strive to find ways to achieve marital compatibility. Unity doesn't just happen by saying "I do," pledging a vow, exchanging rings, and sharing a kiss in a ceremony. To develop a strong marriage, each spouse must set aside some engrained behaviors and replace them with new behaviors.

Consider newlyweds Robert and Marie, a ministry couple. Little did they realize the change in behavior they needed to make as marriage partners.

Robert: "I was consumed with ministry details. Even as a newlywed, I seemed to be thinking constantly about how to do ministry better. I thought nothing of loading my schedule to the max with ministry activities."

Marie: "I was looking for love and affection. I thought Rob and I would spend more time together, have more date nights, and hold hands more often. In my quest to gain Rob's attention, I became more demanding."

It is quite a process to join two individuals with different expectations and habits into one united couple! Both partners must honestly yet graciously communicate their expectations to each other and pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance and control.

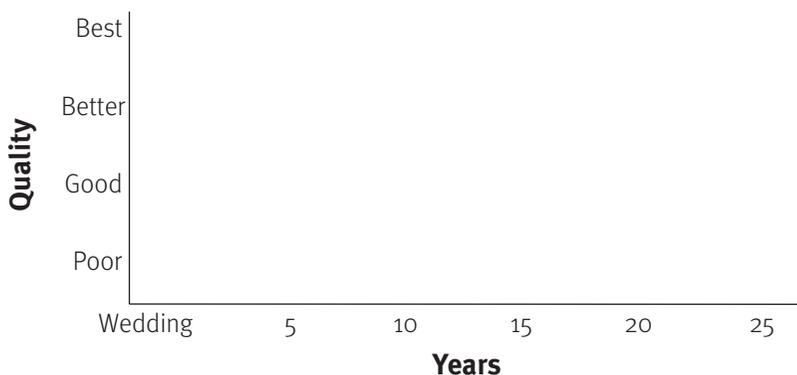
10. What expectations did you have of your marriage partner at the beginning of your marriage?

(a) Husband's expectations of wife:

(b) Wife's expectations of husband:

When you pursue best practices, you seek the highest standard for marriage. It is the top level on a rating scale—not good, not better, but the best!

11. Take a moment to try this self-assessment. Draw a line on the graph below representing your ability to follow best practices during the length of your marriage.



An honest assessment probably shows ups and downs on your graph. The line on the graph may have even dipped below good into the poor rating at times. Expectations, traits, personalities, immaturity, self-centeredness, fatigue, stress, health, emotional baggage, and sin can and do cause you to follow less than best practices.

As a couple, don't get stuck on the question of whether you or your spouse has followed best marriage practices in the past. The more important question is if you are willing to learn how to follow best marriage practices starting today. The goal of this study is to help you

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achieve best practices toward one another in your marriage.

12. Jot down your thoughts on what you'd like to accomplish in your marriage through this study. Share your thoughts with your marriage partner.

Take a moment and quietly ask God to help you start the journey toward learning best marriage practices. He wants to help you achieve those practices. As a matter of fact, He was so committed to you developing a quality marriage that He willingly made the supreme sacrifice to make it possible. Now how is that for a wedding gift!