A WORKBOOK FOR COUPLES

Preparing for Marriage and Strengthening It

An Eight-Session Workbook for Couples



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Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

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A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Contents

Welcome....1
Session 1: God's Design for Marriage....3
Session 2: Talking and Listening....8
Session 3: Money and Marriage....12
Session 4: Conflict and Forgiveness....17
Session 5: Roles: Loving and Honoring Each Other....21
Session 6: Intimacy and Faithfulness....25
Session 7: In-Laws and Extended Family....29
Session 8: Faith at Home....33
A Closing Word....37
Monthly Budget....38
Our Agreements....39
Memory Verses....40
Notes for Group Leaders and Mentor Couples....42
About This Workbook....44

Welcome

> *The two **are** better than the one, in that they have a good reward for their toil.*
>
> Ecclesiastes 4:9 (SLB)

My wife and I met through friends in 1988. She agreed to one date. I like to think I made good use of it, because we have been together ever since. We were married on May 12, 1990. As I write this, that is thirty-six years of marriage and thirty-eight years together.

I would love to tell you those years were easy. They were not. We have been through money trouble, health trouble, hard seasons with family, and choices of mine that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. My biggest downfall as a grown man has been pride, and pride is poison to a marriage. There were years I put God on the back burner. There was a season when drinking had more of my heart than it should have. My wife's hurt, and her love, finally broke my pride, and she drove me to my first recovery meeting herself. I have been sober since May 29, 2020.

I tell you this up front so you know who is writing this workbook. I am not an expert who has never failed. I am a husband who has failed and been forgiven, by God and by my wife, and who has learned that God's way of doing marriage works when nothing else does.

Who This Workbook Is For

This is an eight-session workbook for couples. It is written for two kinds of couples:

- **Engaged couples** who want to build their marriage on solid ground from the start.
- **Married couples**, newly married or married for decades, who want to strengthen what they have, repair what is broken, or simply grow closer.

You can work through it as a couple on your own, with a mentor couple, or in a small group of couples. A few years ago I helped lead a marriage retreat at my church for about ten couples. I taught the men, a woman from our church taught the women, and then we brought the couples together. Some of the best moments came when the husbands and wives sat across from each other and actually talked about the questions. That is what this workbook is built to do.

How Each Session Works

- **Opening.** A short introduction to the subject.
- **Read it.** A key Bible passage, printed in full.
- **Understand it.** Plain teaching on what the Bible says, with practical help.
- **Fill it in.** Fill-in-the-blank questions from the Bible. Answers are at the back.
- **Each of you.** Questions to answer on your own first, with separate space for each of you. Do not peek at your spouse's answers until you sit down together.
- **Talk it over.** Questions to discuss together, after you have each written your own answers.

- **Memory verse, one step this week and a prayer.**

Plan on about an hour to work through the session on your own and another hour to talk it over together. One session a week works well.

Ground Rules for Talking It Over

1. Pray together before you start, even if it is one sentence.
2. Listen to understand, not to win.
3. Say "I feel" and "I need," not "you always" and "you never."
4. No bringing up the past as a weapon.
5. If it gets too heated, take a break and agree on a time to come back.
6. What you share stays between you.

If You Are Not Safe This workbook is for couples who are working on their marriage together. If you are being hit, threatened, controlled or afraid in your own home, your safety comes first. That is not a communication problem to work on with a workbook. Call 911 if you are in danger. Talk with a pastor, a counselor or a domestic violence program in your area. The National Domestic Violence Hotline can help you find local help.

About the Scripture

The Scripture in this workbook comes from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB), a word-for-word translation in today's language. Words added in English to make the sense clear are printed in bold italics.

Session 1: God's Design for Marriage

> *Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.*
>
> Mark 10:9 (SLB)

Before we talk about money, conflict or in-laws, we need to start where God starts. Marriage was not invented by people. It was God's idea, and He designed it on purpose. If we want to know how marriage works, we need to look at the owner's manual.

Read It

> *And the LORD God said, "**It is** not good **for** the man to be alone; I will make for him a helper corresponding to him."* (Genesis 2:18)

> *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.* (Genesis 2:24)

Understand It

It is not good to be alone

Everything God made in Genesis 1, He called good. Then, in Genesis 2, for the first time, God says something is "not good." The man is alone. God made us for relationship, first with Him and then with each other. Marriage is one of the deepest answers to that need.

God's answer was "a helper corresponding to him." The word helper is not a put-down. The same Hebrew word is used of God Himself, who is the helper of His people. A wife is not an assistant. She is a partner who fits and completes, someone who brings what the man lacks.

Leave, cling, become one

Genesis 2:24 gives three steps that every marriage still follows.

Leave. A man leaves his father and his mother. Marriage creates a new family. Parents are still honored and loved, but they are no longer first. Your spouse is.

Cling. The word means to stick to, to hold tight. Marriage is a commitment, not a feeling. Feelings come and go. Clinging means you stay when it is hard.

Become one flesh. Two lives are joined into one: one name, one home, one bank account, one bed, one future. That oneness grows over a lifetime.

Jesus quoted this very verse when people asked Him about divorce, and then added the words at the top of this session: "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Marriage is a covenant God Himself makes. That is why it is worth fighting for.

A picture of something bigger

Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 too, and then says something surprising: marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. A husband's love is meant to show the world how Jesus loves His people. A couple's faithfulness is meant to show God's faithfulness. Your marriage is not just about the two of you. It is a living picture of the gospel.

> *"Because of this a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."* (Ephesians 5:31)

Three strands

Solomon wrote that two are better than one, and then added that "the threefold cord will not quickly be torn apart." Many Christians have seen a picture of marriage in those words: a husband, a wife and God, woven together. A rope of two strands can hold. A rope of three is far stronger.

> *And though **someone** may overpower the one, the two will stand against him; and the threefold cord will not quickly be torn apart.* (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

On October 19, 1995, I was baptized, and I had the privilege of baptizing my wife that same day. We had been married five years. Looking back, that day marked a turning point. We had built our marriage on love for each other. That day we said out loud that we wanted to build it on Christ. We did not always live up to it, and I am the first to say so. But every time our marriage held when it should have broken, it was because that third strand was still there.

Fill It In

1. And the LORD God said, "***It is*** _____ ***for*** the man to be alone; I will make for him a _____ corresponding to him." **(Genesis 2:18)**

2. Therefore a man _____ his father and his mother and _____ to his wife, and they become _____. **(Genesis 2:24)**

3. Therefore what God has _____, let man not _____. **(Mark 10:9)**

Each of You

1. What did marriage look like in the home you grew up in? What do you want to keep, and what do you want to do differently?

Husband (or husband-to-be):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife (or wife-to-be):

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Why do you want to be married to this person? Write three specific reasons.

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. In your own words, what does “leave, cling and become one flesh” mean for the two of you right now?

_____

_____

_____

2. What is one area where you are still more “two” than “one”?

_____

_____

_____

3. What would it look like for God to be the third strand in your marriage day to day?

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

One Step This Week Read your answers to question 2 to each other. Then pray together, thanking God for each other by name.

Prayer

Father, thank You for marriage, and thank You for bringing us together. Help us leave what we need to leave, hold on to each other, and grow into one. Be the third strand in our marriage. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Notes

Session 2: Talking and Listening

> *So then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*
>
> James 1:19 (SLB)

Ask couples who have been married a long time what matters most, and many will say communication. Ask couples in trouble what went wrong, and many will say the same thing. Talking and listening are skills. Nobody is born good at them, and every couple can get better.

Read It

> *Let no rotten word go out of your mouth, but whatever **is** good for building up of the need, so that it may give grace to those who hear.* (Ephesians 4:29)

> *He who returns a word before he hears, it **is** folly to him and shame.* (Proverbs 18:13)

Understand It

Swift to hear

James puts listening first: "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Most of us do the opposite. We are quick to speak, slow to hear, and quick to anger. Real listening means you stop planning your answer and try to understand what your spouse is saying and feeling.

Proverbs 18:13 is blunt. Answering before you hear is "folly" and "shame." How many arguments start because one person answered what they thought the other one meant?

Words that build up

Paul says to let no "rotten word" come out of your mouth, only what is "good for building up." Words have power. A husband or wife can build the other up or tear the other down, sometimes with a single sentence. Sarcasm, name-calling, eye-rolling and the silent treatment are all rotten words, even the ones that are never spoken out loud.

Men and women often talk differently

Not every couple fits the pattern, but many do. One spouse may want to talk a problem through to feel better. The other may want to fix it quickly and move on. One may need time to think before talking. The other may think out loud. None of these is wrong. The trouble starts when we assume our spouse thinks the way we do. Learn how your spouse communicates, and meet them there.

Simple tools that work

- **Repeat it back.** Before you answer, say, "What I hear you saying is…" and let your spouse correct you.

- **Ask, do not assume.** "What did you mean by that?" saves a lot of hurt.
- **Pick the right time.** A serious talk at 11 p.m., or as soon as someone walks in the door, rarely goes well.
- **Put the phone down.** Look at each other.
- **Check in daily.** Ten minutes a day, with no screens, asking "How are you, really?"

For years in my work I taught classes in a very structured, analytical way. That works for training people on equipment. It does not work at the kitchen table. I had to learn that my wife did not need a lecture or a solution most of the time. She needed me to listen. I am still learning it.

Fill It In

1. So then, my beloved brothers, let every man be _____,
   _____, _____ **(James 1:19)**

2. Let no _____ go out of your mouth, but whatever ***is*** good for
   _____ of the need, so that it may give _____ to those who hear.
   (Ephesians 4:29)

Each of You

1. When do you feel most listened to by your spouse? When do you feel least listened to?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Which "rotten words" (spoken or unspoken) are you most likely to use when you are upset?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. Share your answers to question 1. Then each of you name one thing the other can do to help you feel heard.

_____

_____

_____

2. Do you tend to talk problems through, or fix them and move on? How has that caused trouble?

_____

_____

_____

3. When and where will you have a daily ten-minute check-in?

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

So then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger

James 1:19

One Step This Week Try the "repeat it back" tool at least three times this week. At the end of the week, tell each other how it went.

Prayer

Lord, set a guard over our mouths. Make us quick to hear and slow to speak. Let our words to each other build up and give grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Notes

Session 3: Money and Marriage

> ***Let your** way of life **be** without love of money, being content with the things present; for He Himself has said, "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you,"*
>
> Hebrews 13:5 (SLB)

Money is one of the most common things couples fight about. Usually the fight is not really about money. It is about trust, fear, control, security and what each person thinks is important. Getting on the same page with money is one of the best gifts you can give your marriage.

Read It

> *For which of you, wanting to build a tower, does not first, having sat down, count the cost, whether he has the **means** for completion?* (Luke 14:28)

> *The plans of a diligent **one are** only to advantage, and everyone who hastens, only to poverty.* (Proverbs 21:5)

> *A rich **one** rules over poor **ones**, and a borrower **is** a servant to a man who lends.* (Proverbs 22:7)

Understand It

It all belongs to God

The first truth about money is that none of it is really ours. God owns it all, and we manage it for Him. When a couple sees money that way, the question changes from "Whose money is this?" to "How does God want us to use what He has given us?"

Giving is part of that. Proverbs 3:9 says, "Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your yield." We do not give to get something back. We give to honor what we have already been given.

Plan before you spend

Jesus pointed out that nobody builds a tower without first sitting down to count the cost. Proverbs says the plans of the diligent lead to advantage, but everyone who hastens comes to poverty. A budget is simply a plan, made together, for how you will use what God has given you.

Debt is a kind of servant

"A borrower is a servant to a man who lends." Debt is not always sin, but it always costs something. It limits your choices and adds stress to a marriage. Couples who work together to stay out of debt, or to get out of it, often find their marriage gets stronger as the balance goes down.

Be content

Hebrews 13:5 says to be free from the love of money and "content with the things present," because God has promised never to leave us. Comparing what we have with what others have is a fast road to discontent. Contentment is learned.

Practical steps for couples

- **No secrets.** Each of you should know every account, every debt and every password. Hidden money hurts trust.
- **One plan.** Make a monthly budget together. Sit down once a month to review it.
- **Agree on a limit.** Pick an amount above which neither of you spends without talking to the other first.
- **Give, save, then spend.** Decide together what you will give, what you will save, and then live on the rest.
- **Build a cushion.** An emergency fund takes a lot of pressure off a marriage.
- **Personal money.** Many couples give each spouse a small amount each month to spend without asking. It prevents a lot of small arguments.

Fill It In

1. For which of you, wanting to build a tower, does not first, having sat down, _____, whether he has the ***means*** for completion? **(Luke 14:28)**

2. A rich ***one*** rules over poor ***ones***, and a _____ ***is*** a _____ to a man who lends. **(Proverbs 22:7)**

3. ***Let your*** way of life ***be*** without _____, being _____ with the things present; for He Himself has said, "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you," **(Hebrews 13:5)**

Each of You

1. How was money handled in the home you grew up in? Was it talked about, fought about or kept secret?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Are you more of a saver or a spender? What worries you most about money?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. List every account and every debt you have, together. Is there anything either of you did not know about?

_____

_____

_____

2. What will you give, and what will you save, each month?

_____

_____

_____

3. What spending limit will you agree on before talking to each other first?

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

***Let your** way of life **be** without love of money, being content with the things present; for He Himself has said, "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you,"*

Hebrews 13:5

One Step This Week Sit down together and write a simple budget for next month. Use the Monthly Budget page at the back of this workbook.

Prayer

Father, everything we have comes from You. Teach us to give gladly, plan wisely, stay out of debt and be content. Make us one in how we handle money. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Notes

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Session 4: Conflict and Forgiveness

> *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*
>
> Ephesians 4:32 (SLB)

Every marriage has conflict. Two sinners living under one roof will disagree, hurt each other and let each other down. The question is not whether you will have conflict, but how you will handle it. Couples who learn to fight fair and forgive fully can come out of conflict closer than they went in.

Read It

> *Be angry, and do not sin; let the sun not set on your anger, nor give place to the devil.* (Ephesians 4:26-27)

> *bearing with one another and forgiving each other, if anyone has a complaint against anyone; just as Christ also forgave you, so also you.* (Colossians 3:13)

Understand It

Be angry, and do not sin

Paul does not say, "Never be angry." Anger is a feeling, and some things should make us angry. But he says, "do not sin." Anger becomes sin when we use it to hurt, control or punish. It also becomes sin when we hold on to it. "Let the sun not set on your anger." That does not mean every problem has to be solved before bedtime. It means you do not go to sleep holding a grudge. Sometimes the best thing a couple can say at midnight is, "I love you. We are not done with this, but we will finish it tomorrow."

A soft answer

> *A soft answer turns away rage, and a word of pain raises anger.* (Proverbs 15:1)

The tone of your voice can matter as much as your words. A soft answer lowers the temperature. A harsh word raises it.

Rules for fighting fair

- Stick to one issue. Do not bring up everything that has ever gone wrong.
- Attack the problem, not the person.
- No name-calling, cursing, threats or shouting.
- Never threaten divorce in an argument.
- Take a time-out when either of you needs one, and agree on when you will come back.
- Look for the part that is your fault, and own it first.

Pride, the root of so much conflict

I have said that pride has been my biggest downfall. In conflict, pride says, "I am right, and I am not backing down." Pride keeps score. Pride would rather win the argument than keep the marriage. For a season I stepped back from leadership roles outside work because I knew I needed to work on humility. It was one of the best decisions I ever made, for my marriage and my walk with God. Philippians 2:3 says, "in humility considering one another as surpassing yourselves." That verse ends a lot of fights before they start.

Forgiveness

Paul says to forgive "just as Christ also forgave you." How did Christ forgive us? Fully, freely and before we deserved it. Forgiveness is not saying that what happened was all right. It is choosing to stop holding it against the other person, to give up the right to get even, and to hand the hurt to God.

When Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive, he suggested seven, which sounded generous. Jesus said seventy times seven. In other words, keep forgiving.

Forgiveness and trust

Forgiveness can be given in a moment. Trust is rebuilt over time. When I came home after the choices that had hurt my marriage, I had to learn that doing the right thing today did not mean everyone had forgiven me yet, or trusted me again. That was not mine to demand. My job was to keep doing right, give the rest to God and not dwell on what others thought. If you are the one who broke trust, be patient. If you are the one rebuilding trust, be honest about where you are.

Fill It In

1. Be _____, and do not _____; let the sun not set on your _____, nor give place to the devil. **(Ephesians 4:26-27)**

2. And be _____ to one another, _____, _____ each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you. **(Ephesians 4:32)**

3. A _____ turns away _____, and a word of pain raises anger. **(Proverbs 15:1)**

Each of You

1. When you are hurt or angry, what do you tend to do: blow up, shut down, walk away, or something else?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

2. Is there anything you have not fully forgiven your spouse for? (You do not have to share this. Take it to God first.)

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. Agree on your own rules for fighting fair. Write them here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What signal will either of you use to call a time-out?

_____

3. Is there a hurt you need to talk through, or a "please forgive me" you need to say? Set a time to do it.

MEMORY VERSE

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

One Step This Week Each of you finish this sentence out loud to the other: "One thing I have done that hurt you is... I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

Prayer

Lord, we have both hurt each other. Forgive us, as You have forgiven us in Christ. Break our pride. Teach us to give a soft answer and to forgive quickly. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Notes

Session 5: Roles: Loving and Honoring Each Other

> *in brotherly love devoted to one another, in honor preferring one another*
>
> Romans 12:10 (SLB)

What does the Bible say about husbands and wives? Few subjects get more argument, and few get misused more. Some people use the Bible's words to excuse harshness or control. Others throw out the passages altogether. Let's read what it actually says and see how beautiful God's design is.

Read It

> *submitting yourselves to one another in **the** fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves to **your** own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ **is** head of the church, and He Himself is Savior of the body. But as the church is subjected to Christ, so also the wives **are** to **their** own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your own wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:21-25)

Understand It

It starts with both

Paul's teaching on husbands and wives begins with a verse for everyone: "submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God." Every Christian is called to put others first. Marriage is where that gets tested every day.

Wives

Paul asks wives to "submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord." This is a choice a wife makes freely, out of her trust in Christ. It does not mean she is less than her husband. Peter calls husbands and wives "co-heirs of the grace of life." It does not mean she has no voice, no gifts or no opinions. And it never means she must accept abuse or follow her husband into sin.

Husbands

Then Paul turns to husbands, and the bar goes even higher: "love your own wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Christ led by serving. He washed feet. He went to the cross. A husband's leadership is not about getting his way. It is about laying his life down for his wife's good. Paul tells husbands in Colossians not to be "harsh toward them," and Peter tells them to live with their wives "according to knowledge" and to render them honor, "so that your prayers may not be cut off."

> *Husbands, likewise, dwelling with **them** according to knowledge, as with a weaker vessel, the female **one**, rendering honor **to them** as also co-heirs of **the** grace of life, so that your prayers may not be cut off.* (1 Peter 3:7)

What it looks like day to day

In practice, a loving, serving husband and a respecting, supporting wife look like two people who are both trying to outdo each other in honor. They talk things through. They listen. When they cannot agree, the husband carries the weight of the decision before God, and he had better make it with his wife's good at heart.

The day-to-day jobs, who cooks, who handles the bills, who mows the lawn, who drives the kids, are not set in Scripture. Work them out together, based on your gifts, your schedules and what is fair.

Fill It In

1. _____ yourselves to _____ in ***the*** fear of God.
   (Ephesians 5:21)

2. Husbands, _____ your own wives, even as Christ also loved the church and _____ up for her **(Ephesians 5:25)**

3. in brotherly love _____ to one another, in _____ preferring one another
   (Romans 12:10)

Each of You

1. What does it look like when your spouse makes you feel loved and honored? Be specific.

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Husband: In what ways can you lead more like Christ, by serving? Wife: In what ways can you show your husband respect and support?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. Make a list of the household jobs. Who does each one now? Is it fair? What would you change?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. How will you make decisions when you do not agree?

_____

_____

_____

3. What did you learn about husbands and wives growing up that does not match what the Bible says?

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

Husbands, love your own wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her

Ephesians 5:25

One Step This Week Each of you do one thing this week to serve the other without being asked, and without pointing it out.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You led by serving and loved by giving Yourself. Teach us to honor one another, to put each other first and to reflect Your love in our home. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Notes

Session 6: Intimacy and Faithfulness

> *Marriage **is to be** honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.*
>
> Hebrews 13:4 (SLB)

God created sex. It is His gift to marriage, meant for closeness, pleasure, comfort and children. The world cheapens it and the church is often too embarrassed to talk about it. This session talks about it plainly and respectfully, along with the closeness of heart that makes physical intimacy what God meant it to be.

A Note for Engaged Couples If you are engaged, God's design is that sex waits for marriage. If you have already crossed that line, God forgives, and you can choose to wait from here. Talk about these questions with that in mind.

Read It

> *Let the husband render to the wife the goodwill due **her**, and likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife does not have authority over **her** own body, but the husband **does**; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over **his** own body, but the wife **does**. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by mutual agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.* (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)

Understand It

Honorable and undefiled

Hebrews 13:4 says marriage is "to be honorable among all, and the bed undefiled." Sex within marriage is not dirty or shameful. It is good and holy. But the same verse warns that God will judge sexual sin outside of marriage. Faithfulness guards the gift.

Giving, not taking

Paul writes that husband and wife each owe the other "the goodwill due." Neither has sole authority over their own body. This is not permission to demand. It is a call for both to give themselves freely to each other. Paul's only exception is a time apart by mutual agreement for prayer, and then to come together again, so that Satan does not tempt them.

Intimacy starts outside the bedroom

For most couples, closeness in the bedroom grows out of closeness everywhere else: kindness, time together, listening, help with the kids, a touch that does not expect anything in return. If one of you feels unloved during the day, it is hard to feel close at night.

Guard your marriage

Unfaithfulness rarely starts with a big decision. It starts with small ones: a private conversation that goes too far, a friendship that crosses a line, a screen that should have been turned off. I have made choices that hurt my marriage, and I can tell you the road back is long and painful. Build guardrails now:

- No secret phones, passwords or accounts.
- Be careful about time alone with someone of the opposite sex.
- Keep pornography out of your home and your phone. It poisons intimacy.
- Tell your spouse when you feel drawn toward someone else, before it grows.
- Have a trusted friend who will ask you hard questions.

When there are problems

Hurts from the past, health problems, pain, exhaustion and stress can all affect intimacy. Do not suffer in silence. Talk about it with each other. A doctor or a Christian counselor can help.

Fill It In

1. Marriage ***is to be*** _____ among all, and the bed _____; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. **(Hebrews 13:4)**

Each of You

1. What helps you feel close to your spouse emotionally? What gets in the way?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What guardrails do you need in your own life to stay faithful?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. Share your answers to question 1. What is one thing each of you will do to build closeness this week?

_____

_____

_____

2. What guardrails will you agree on as a couple?

_____

_____

_____

3. Is there anything from the past that affects your intimacy that you need to talk through, or get help with?

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

*Marriage **is to be** honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.*

Hebrews 13:4

One Step This Week Plan a date: just the two of you, no phones. It does not need to cost much. What matters is the time.

Prayer

Father, thank You for the gift of intimacy in marriage. Keep us faithful to each other in our eyes, our hearts and our bodies. Heal what is hurt, and draw us close. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Notes

Session 7: In-Laws and Extended Family

> *Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the ground which the LORD your God is giving you.*
>
> Exodus 20:12 (SLB)

When you marry, you do not just marry one person. You marry into a family, and your spouse marries into yours. Holidays, traditions, expectations, advice and opinions all come with the package. Handled well, extended family can be a great blessing. Handled poorly, it can be a constant strain.

Read It

> *Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.* (Genesis 2:24)
>
> *Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the ground which the LORD your God is giving you.* (Exodus 20:12)

Understand It

Leave and honor

These two verses work together. In marriage, a man "leaves his father and his mother." Your spouse now comes before your parents. At the same time, God's command to "honor your father and your mother" does not end when you get married. The goal is to leave without abandoning, and to honor without being controlled.

Leaving well

Leaving looks like this:

- You make decisions together as a couple, not with your parents.
- You do not share your marriage problems with your family before you talk with your spouse.
- You do not compare your spouse to your mother or father.
- You do not depend on your parents for money if you can help it, because money often comes with strings.
- When your parents and your spouse disagree, you stand with your spouse, kindly and respectfully.

Honoring well

Honoring looks like this:

- You speak respectfully to and about each other's parents.
- You stay in touch and include them.

- You listen to their advice with an open mind, even when you do not take it.
- You care for them as they grow older.

Each spouse handles their own family

A good rule of thumb: when there is a problem with your family, you talk to them, not your spouse. A wife should not have to confront her mother-in-law. A husband should not have to correct his father-in-law. Back each other up, but deal with your own side.

When family relationships are hard

Not every family is healthy. Some parents are controlling, critical or hurtful. Some families are divided. Our own family has had strained seasons, and I know how much those can hurt. Honor does not mean letting anyone harm your marriage. Sometimes it means setting kind, firm limits. Pray for the hard relationships, do what is right on your side, and leave the rest with God. Romans 12:18 says, "if possible, so far as it is from you, being at peace with all men." Some of it does not depend on you.

Holidays and traditions

Holidays bring family expectations to a head. Talk about them early. Where will you spend Thanksgiving and Christmas? How will you split time between families? What traditions do you want to keep from each side, and what new ones do you want to start as your own family?

Fill It In

1. _____ your _____ and your _____, so that your days may be long on the ground which the LORD your God is giving you. **(Exodus 20:12)**

Each of You

1. How is your family different from your spouse's family? What do you appreciate about your spouse's family?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Is there anything about how your spouse relates to their family that worries or hurts you?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. What boundaries, if any, do you need to set with either family? Who will talk to whom?

_____

_____

_____

2. Plan your next holidays. Where will you be, and with whom?

_____

_____

_____

3. What traditions from each family do you want to keep? What new ones will you start?

MEMORY VERSE

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the ground which the LORD your God is giving you.

Exodus 20:12

One Step This Week Each of you write a short note or make a call to one of your spouse's parents or relatives, thanking them for something specific.

Prayer

Father, thank You for our families. Help us leave well and honor well. Give us wisdom where relationships are hard and grace where they are strained. Make our home a place of peace. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Notes

Session 8: Faith at Home

> *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that* ***were*** *on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling. And I and my house, we will serve the LORD.*
>
> Joshua 24:15 (SLB)

We started with God's design for marriage. We end with God at the center of the home. A couple can have good communication, a budget, healthy conflict and good in-laws and still be missing the most important thing. The strongest marriages are built by two people who are each growing closer to God, and growing closer to each other in the process.

Read It

> *Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain came down, and the torrents came, and the winds blew, and they fell against that house; and it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.* (Matthew 7:24-25)

> *And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them to your sons, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.*
> (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

Understand It

Build on the rock

Jesus said the wise man built his house on the rock. The rain came, the floods rose, the wind blew, and the house stood. Every marriage faces storms. Ours has faced several. The house that stands is the one built on hearing Jesus' words and doing them.

Faith is talked about at home

Moses told Israel to keep God's words on their hearts and talk about them "when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road" and when they lay down and got up. Faith is not just for Sunday. It belongs at the dinner table, in the car and at bedtime.

Simple habits for a couple

- **Pray together.** Even a short prayer at night, holding hands, changes a marriage. Many couples find it awkward at first. Keep at it.
- **Read the Bible together.** A chapter a day, or a short devotional. Talk about what you read.

- **Go to church together.** Find a church where you are both fed, and get involved. Serve together if you can.
- **Have Christian friends.** Spend time with other couples who are trying to follow Jesus. Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron grows sharp by iron."
- **Pass it on.** If you have children or will have them, let them see you pray, read and serve.

When one of you is further along

It is common for one spouse to be more eager about spiritual things than the other. If that is you, do not nag or preach. Pray for your spouse, live it out, and invite without pressure. If you are the one who is slower, be honest about where you are and take one small step.

When you drift

There have been times in my life when I put God on the back burner, especially when I got busy. My marriage felt it every time. If you find yourselves drifting, you do not need a dramatic fix. Come back to the simple habits. Pray together tonight. Open the Bible tomorrow. Go to church this Sunday. God is faithful to meet you there.

A lifetime of growing

Marriage is not a finish line. It is a lifelong road. You will keep learning about each other until one of you goes home to be with the Lord. Keep talking, keep forgiving, keep praying, and keep putting each other first. It is worth it.

Fill It In

1. And if it is evil in your eyes to _____ the LORD, _____ for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that ***were*** on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling. And I and my house, we will serve the LORD. **(Joshua 24:15)**

2. Therefore everyone who _____ these words of Mine and _____ them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the _____. **(Matthew 7:24)**

Each of You

1. Where are you in your walk with God right now? Be honest.

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What would help you grow spiritually? How can your spouse help?

Husband:

_____

_____

_____

Wife:

_____

_____

_____

Talk It Over

1. When and how will you pray together? Read the Bible together?

_____

_____

_____

2. Is your church a good fit for both of you? Where could you serve together?

_____

_____

_____

3. Look back over all eight sessions. What is the one change that would make the biggest difference in your marriage?

_____

_____

_____

MEMORY VERSE

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that ***were*** *on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling. And I and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

Joshua 24:15

One Step This Week Pray together every night this week, even if it is only one sentence each. At the end of the week, write a short letter to each other about what this workbook has meant to you.

Prayer

Lord, be the center of our home. Teach us to build our marriage on Your words, to pray together, to love Your church and to pass our faith on. Keep us growing in You and in love for each other for the rest of our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Our Notes

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

A Closing Word

> *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 13:7 (SLB)

You made it through all eight sessions. Whether you are getting ready for your wedding day or have been married for decades, that took time and honesty. Thank you for doing the work.

Here is what I would encourage you to do next.

1. **Keep your daily check-in.** Ten minutes a day, no screens.
2. **Keep praying together.** Nothing has done more for my marriage.
3. **Do a monthly money meeting.** Same day each month, with the budget page.
4. **Come back to this workbook.** Work through it again next year. Your answers will be different.
5. **Find a mentor couple, or be one.** Every couple needs someone a few steps ahead of them, and someone a few steps behind.
6. **Get help early.** If you get stuck, talk with your pastor or a Christian counselor. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not failure.

After thirty-six years of marriage, I can tell you this. God has been faithful to us through every season, including the ones I made harder than they needed to be. He will be faithful to you too.

> *Father, bless every couple who has worked through these pages. Keep them faithful, kind and patient with each other. Build their home on Your words. Let their marriage be a picture of Your love to everyone who knows them. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Monthly Budget

Take-home income this month: _____

Category	Planned	Actual
Giving		
Savings		
Rent or mortgage		
Utilities		
Phone and internet		
Groceries		
Gas and transportation		
Insurance		
Medical		
Debt payments		
Childcare		
Eating out and fun		
Personal money (each spouse)		
Gifts		
Other		
Total		

Our Agreements

Use this page to write down the agreements you made during the eight sessions.

Our daily check-in time: _____

Our rules for fighting fair: _____

_____

Our time-out signal: _____

Spending limit before we talk first: $_____

Our guardrails for faithfulness: _____

_____

Our holiday plan: _____

When and how we pray together: _____

Our church and where we serve: _____

Memory Verses

MEMORY VERSE

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

MEMORY VERSE

So then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger

James 1:19

MEMORY VERSE

***Let your** way of life **be** without love of money, being content with the things present; for He Himself has said, "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you,"*

Hebrews 13:5

MEMORY VERSE

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

MEMORY VERSE

Husbands, love your own wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her

Ephesians 5:25

MEMORY VERSE

*Marriage **is to be** honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.*

Hebrews 13:4

MEMORY VERSE

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long on the ground which the LORD your God is giving you.

Exodus 20:12

MEMORY VERSE

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that ***were*** *on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling. And I and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

Joshua 24:15

Notes for Group Leaders and Mentor Couples

Thank you for investing in marriages. Here are some suggestions.

Before You Start

- **Keep it small.** Three to six couples works well. One mentor couple with one other couple works even better.
- **Plan for eight weeks.** One session a week.
- **Ask couples to work through the session before you meet,** including the Each of You questions on their own and the Talk It Over questions together.
- **Consider separate time.** Some groups split the men and women for part of each meeting, then come back together. That worked well at our retreat.

A Simple Meeting Plan (about 90 minutes)

Time	What to do
15 minutes	Welcome and a meal or snack.
5 minutes	Open in prayer. Ask how last week's step went.
10 minutes	Read the main passage and say the memory verse together.
25 minutes	Men and women in separate groups to talk through the teaching.
25 minutes	Couples together, each couple talking privately through one Talk It Over question, then sharing what they want to with the group.
10 minutes	Read this week's step and close in prayer.

Sessions That Need Extra Care

- **Session 4 (Conflict and Forgiveness):** Old hurts may come up. Do not let a couple air private wounds in the group. Offer to meet with them separately.
- **Session 6 (Intimacy):** Keep the group discussion general and respectful. The details are for each couple in private.
- **Session 7 (In-Laws):** Some couples have painful family situations. Listen with compassion.
- **Any session:** If you learn that someone is being abused or is unsafe, their safety comes first. Help them get to safety and connect them with help. Do not try to counsel the couple together.

Know When to Refer

Leaders are not counselors. If a couple is dealing with addiction, abuse, an affair, serious mental illness or a marriage in crisis, encourage them to see your pastor or a licensed Christian counselor. Stay in their lives and keep praying for them.

Session 1: God's Design for Marriage

1. Genesis 2:18: not good; helper
2. Genesis 2:24: leaves; clings; one flesh
3. Mark 10:9: joined together; separate

Session 2: Talking and Listening

1. James 1:19: swift to hear; slow to speak; slow to anger
2. Ephesians 4:29: rotten word; building up; grace

Session 3: Money and Marriage

1. Luke 14:28: count the cost
2. Proverbs 22:7: borrower; servant
3. Hebrews 13:5: love of money; content

Session 4: Conflict and Forgiveness

1. Ephesians 4:26-27: angry; sin; anger
2. Ephesians 4:32: kind; tenderhearted; forgiving
3. Proverbs 15:1: soft answer; rage

Session 5: Roles: Loving and Honoring Each Other

1. Ephesians 5:21: submitting; one another
2. Ephesians 5:25: love; gave Himself
3. Romans 12:10: devoted; honor

Session 6: Intimacy and Faithfulness

1. Hebrews 13:4: honorable; undefiled

Session 7: In-Laws and Extended Family

1. Exodus 20:12: Honor; father; mother

Session 8: Faith at Home

1. Joshua 24:15: choose; serve
2. Matthew 7:24: hears; does; rock

About This Workbook

Preparing for Marriage and Strengthening It is one of a set of free Christian books from Trinfinity Enterprises. All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible. This workbook is not a substitute for pastoral care or professional counseling. Questions or corrections are welcome at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.