

the surprising
way to a
stronger marriage

*how the power of one
changes everything*

Michael & Amy
Smalley



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The Surprising Way to a Stronger Marriage: How the Power of One Changes Everything

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To David and Pauline

*After 50 years of marriage and still sweethearts,
you may never have written a book—but you have lived a
love story greater than anything we could ever write about!*

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is this book for you?

We want to be perfectly clear on the intended audience for this book.

The Surprising Way to a Stronger Marriage is for those who struggle with common issues that prevent the kind of intimacy most couples desire. It is *not* intended for anyone in an abusive marriage.

If any of the following is part of your marriage, you may be in an abusive relationship:

- physical abuse such as hitting or shoving
- verbal abuse including character assassination or threats of violence or other physical harm (simply yelling at each other is not necessarily verbal abuse; but when the language becomes threatening and violent, it is)
- a spouse with a serious personality disorder as diagnosed by a psychiatrist, medical doctor, or psychologist
- criminal activity
- drug or alcohol addiction
- serial infidelity, meaning that a spouse is having multiple affairs

This book is about taking personal responsibility in your marriage. But personal responsibility won't look the same for someone struggling with abuse as it will for someone facing irritations and disappointments. We would never recommend putting yourself or other family members in danger by remaining in an environment where abuse is taking place. Safety is your main concern when dealing with the issues we've just mentioned.

This book is for the vast majority of couples who do not face abuse—or other complex and dangerous problems that need the intervention of the police or a professionally trained counselor.



you've got the power

Their faces were filled with anguish as they approached us after one of our sessions at a marriage seminar. They wanted to smile, but years of unhappiness and regret had taken their toll on them. We saw their desperation, but we couldn't have been more surprised by what the husband said first.

"Can you fix this marriage in 30 seconds or less?"

Wow! We would like to fancy ourselves as talented marriage consultants. But this guy was asking for a miracle, and he was serious. *Thirty seconds or less? Are you kidding?*

Then it hit us, like Mike Tyson hitting Michael Spinks, and we came up with a reply.

"You want to fix your marriage in 30 seconds or less? Then start with changing yourself and decide to be a loving, supportive, active, and growing husband."

Not surprisingly, he didn't take to our answer.

This guy is like a lot of people in our culture. You might say we live in the land of the irresponsible and the home of the no-fault divorce; the demise of our relationships is the proof.

the power of one

When it comes to marriage, it's about time we all start growing up. Being an adult doesn't mean things become easier; in fact, it means things become more difficult.

That's because we, as adults, are responsible for our own actions

and feelings. We can no longer play the victim's role as we may have done when we were children. Instead, we must start assuming the freedom and power we have in Christ if we belong to Him—which is the surprising way to a happier marriage.

I (Amy) remember a couple I worked with. Both spouses were committed Christians. Parents of small children, they volunteered in their church. Yet something was missing.

This couple and I worked through a Marriage Restoration Intensive (MRI), a sharply focused effort to rescue relationships in trouble.¹ Both mates learned about communication, conflict resolution,

***Taking responsibility
takes time and
energy, but it's
surprisingly simple.***

boundaries, effective time-outs, validation, love languages, and more. Yet there was something about the wife that seemed to hold her back. I could tell her spirit wasn't open to her husband. I cry every time I think of them because they struggled and struggled.

The wife knew something was wrong, but didn't know what. Was she depressed? Did she not have enough faith? Or was there something wrong with her husband?

The answer didn't come right away. But slowly the clouds lifted in their lives. Today their children still have a mom and dad who are together.

So what made the difference?

They both wrestled with their own issues. But the change really began when the husband took responsibility and made the first move.

He took the lead in giving her so much unconditional love it humbled me. He dug so deep to try to find her, he became bloodied and bruised along the way, but he found her. He wasn't a doormat; he drew boundaries when needed. But he gently offered his love over

and over again. God did an amazing thing in their lives. Slowly she began to open up.

One day the husband contacted me, almost holding his breath for fear his wife might run away again. He could see that she was trying, that she was responding. This is an excerpt from an e-mail I got from him:

Vulnerability and honesty have freed her from her cage that had grown so dark and so deep. Amy, I could have never imagined the beauty of the woman that had become locked in that box—beauty you could see. I often wish that you were right around the corner so that you could step into our family for a moment and see how God has used you. . . . I am still truly amazed in God's grace; He spared our family from destruction. He restored freedom and love.

Are you willing to fight the same fight? God is. He's willing to look you squarely in the eye and give you the wisdom you seek to draw you closer to your spouse. Taking responsibility takes time and energy, but it's surprisingly simple.

why are you here?

One of our favorite first lines when working with a couple is, "What brings you in today?" We're not the first people to ask this question, but it does have special meaning for us.

"What brings you in today?" often reveals the heart of many people's issues. Their response to this question tells us a lot about how successful they'll be in getting helped. If they start reciting a long list of complaints about each other, we know we're in a battle.

But the problem with their marriages—and yours, we believe—is not a list of grievances. It's how much each spouse is willing to take responsibility for those problems. Issues are just issues.

Often couples are stressed out because neither mate is willing to do the right thing—unless the other does it first. Or one spouse wants to work on the marriage while the other has “checked out” long before the couple reaches our door.

There is hope for both! Whether you’re in marital limbo, crisis, or growth, God has a plan for you. We believe it includes releasing you from captivity (Isaiah 42:7) and freeing you to live a life worthy of your calling (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

When your own growth—not changing your spouse—is your goal, you won’t fail. God will never leave you nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6), even if a spouse does.

What brings you to reading this book today? Are you frustrated? Does your spouse not meet your needs as you’d like? Do you feel alone, rejected, or disconnected? Has life turned out to be one hugely disappointing experience after another?

It’s an important question, so be careful with your answer. If you begin your reply with “my spouse” or “my child” or “my boss,” you’re not ready for the following pages. In fact, they might even rock the very core of your being.

This book is not about what your spouse must do so that you can enjoy a satisfied and happy marriage. It’s about learning what *you* can do to help create an environment where a satisfied and happy marriage is possible.

does it really take two?

We are not slaves to our circumstances. We have options. The driver ahead of us doesn’t force us to blow up at him when he cuts us off. Every reaction we display is our choice. We decide whether or not we’re going to be upset, sad, frustrated, mad, or hurt.

We can control our own emotions. People, places, and things do not “make” us unhappy. We choose to feel unhappy as a result of what happens around us. We’ll address this concept later, but it’s im-

portant to note at the beginning of this book that you can choose how you respond to events.

True, you can't control what happens to you at the hands of other people. If you catch your spouse in an affair, your initial reaction will come from your gut. It's only natural. We're not talking about controlling that fear or frustration when faced with hardships or heartache. We're talking about controlling how you move forward and respond to tough circumstances.

If someone says something mean to me (Amy), it's natural for me to feel hurt—at first. But if I go home and take out my hurt on my kids or husband, that's my fault. If I lose sleep that night because I'm still ruminating over what happened, that's also my fault.

The old saying that it takes two to save a marriage isn't necessarily so. We've seen marriages experience the warmth and grace God intended because one spouse decided to make a change. That almost always results in the marriage—or any relationship for that matter—undergoing real change, usually in a positive direction.

one man who wouldn't give up

Authors Joe White and Lissa Johnson tell this story:

When the tsunami rolled over Banda Aceh, Indonesia on December 26, 2004, truck driver Mustafa Kamal was far from home. He returned to find his wife, three daughters, and brother had vanished.

Kamal stubbornly refused to believe his little girl, five-year-old Rina Augustina, was dead. Haunted by visions of her, the anguished father searched everywhere. He went from street to street, building to building, day after day.

On January 26, 2005 the Associated Press reported the result of Kamal's month-long search. A powerful, moving photograph documents the moment that father and daughter were

reunited, thanks to the efforts of the Save the Children organization. When Rina spotted her daddy, she ran into his arms.

Kamal screamed, “By the grace of God! I knew you were alive! I knew it!” Then he added, “My precious little one. I did not give up. I kept looking.”²

That dad was relentless.

He never gave up, never stopped hoping, never quit.³

That father also exercised the power of one. He took personal responsibility even if he had to do it alone.

The power of one is the way to many goals, including a stronger marriage. You can’t just hope that your spouse does the work that you need to do. If you want your relationship to be better, then be better yourself. You have tremendous influence over a relationship when you focus your energy on being the kind of person you want your spouse to be.

getting results

What can you do to make a difference in your marriage?

We wish we could develop a magical pill to make your bond the absolute best, but we can’t. What we *can* do is show you how to change and how to use the power of your change to make a positive impact on your relationship.

The old saying that it takes two to save a marriage isn’t necessarily so.

Does this book guarantee a happy marriage? No. There are no guarantees, and anyone who tries to sell you one is a liar. But if you take the time to respond in as healthy a way as you can, you will change. When you change *you*, you change the way you move as a couple. When you decide not to engage in the unhealthy reactions of the past, you push your marriage in a better direction.

As we once wrote in *The DNA of Relationships*, God created all of us for relationships. That's good news for those who want to be closer to a spouse. When we start behaving well toward others, how will they respond? Will they get mad because we're treating them so well? Probably not.

More than likely, your spouse will respond in kind. He or she will treat you well because he or she is being treated well. It's the results of the Golden Rule!

Loving your spouse to the best of your ability ends up positively. Even if it takes time, hang in there and keep learning how to do the right thing. This book is about doing the right thing.

The more you know about what the right thing is in various situations, the better your marriage will be. That's why, toward the end of this book, we give you "Surprising Solution Scenarios." These are everyday examples of how to apply the lessons you've learned.

You'll also find a Study Guide at the back of the book. You can use it for personal reflection, discussion with your spouse, or group learning. This guide highlights the most important concepts we hope you'll get from each chapter.

today is the first day of the rest of your marriage

You are now ready to begin *The Surprising Way to a Stronger Marriage*. If you're reluctant to keep reading this book, remember there are forces that don't want your marriage to succeed. Resist! Keep moving forward and keep learning everything you can to make yourself a better lover, wife, husband, father, or mother.

With that in mind, let's start with a simple prayer:

Dear heavenly Father,

Please forgive me for the wrongs I've committed against You and against my marriage [feel free to pray about any specific problems God brings to mind]. I ask for Your protection

as I read this book. If there is anything that would distract me from the truth, I ask that You keep it away. Help me keep an open heart and an open mind to Your will. I want Your goals accomplished in my life and my marriage. Amen.

You don't have to wait for your spouse to fix your marriage. Start doing it yourself. Experience the life-changing freedom of taking action—even if your mate doesn't seem ready to lend a hand.

Study Guide

by Michael and Amy Smalley

Chapter 1—You’ve Got the Power

The Challenge

What can *you* do to improve your marriage? Take a look at your attitude in the last week. What tone did you set in your relationship?

Key Verses

Isaiah 42:7

“I have set you among my people to bind them to me,
and provided you as a lighthouse to the nations,
To make a start at bringing people into the open, into light:
opening blind eyes,
releasing prisoners from dungeons,
emptying the dark prisons.”

2 Thessalonians 1:11

“Because we know that this extraordinary day is just ahead, we pray for you all the time—pray that our God will make you fit for what he’s called you to be, pray that he’ll fill your good ideas and acts of faith with his own energy so that it all amounts to something.”

Questions

1. What’s the quickest way for your marriage to get better?
2. Are you focused on your spouse’s neglect? On his or her bad attitude? If so, how’s that working for you?
3. Do you have a choice in how you respond to your spouse’s attitude or tone? If so, what are your options?

Chapter 2—When the Truth Is Hard to Swallow

The Challenge

How have your actions affected your marriage? If you have a relationship with God, find a quiet place somewhere and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you things that you've done that negatively shaped your marriage. Then talk to your spouse about the results, asking forgiveness for what you believe was unproductive, unhealthy, or reflected a selfish attitude.

Key Verses

1 Kings 8:46

"When they sin against you—and they certainly will; there's no one without sin! . . ."

Luke 6:31

"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!"

Philippians 4:8

"Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse."

Questions

1. Are you ever truly innocent in conflict with your spouse?
How would you describe your tone, nonverbal signals, and the way in which you're usually interpreted?
2. What happens to your marriage when you don't recognize your own faults?

3. What happens when you blame your spouse for the problems in your marriage?

Chapter 3—“It’s Not My Fault!”

The Challenge

Take control of how you respond to your spouse’s issues or hurts against you.

Key Verses

John 8:31-32

“Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. ‘If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you.’”

Genesis 3:12

“The Man said, ‘The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it.’”

Matthew 7:1-5

“Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It’s easy to see a smudge on your neighbor’s face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, ‘Let me wash your face for you,’ when your own face is distorted by contempt? It’s this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.”

Romans 14:13b (ESV)

“Decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”

Questions

1. Have you and your spouse been blaming each other for conflicts in your marriage? If so, how can you point a finger back toward yourself?
2. Why do we like to blame our spouse so much?
3. Why is it arrogant to make excuses for our actions?

Chapter 4—Getting Off the Defense

The Challenge

Instead of trying to defend yourself, seek to understand your spouse’s needs and feelings. Lay down your emotions for a moment, go to your mate, and ask him or her to describe the situation before you get defensive.

Key Verses

Proverbs 3:13-14 (NIV)

“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom,
the man who gains understanding,
for she is more profitable than silver
and yields better returns than gold.”

Matthew 5:21-24

“You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

“This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.”

Questions

1. Why do we get defensive with our spouse? Could it have something to do with our own issues or guilt?
2. Does getting defensive ever help calm the situation down? Why not?
3. If defensiveness doesn't work with a spouse, what does?

Chapter 5—You Don't Have to Be a Victim

The Challenge

Instead of reacting to your spouse, try taking a time-out instead.

Key Verses

2 Corinthians 5:10

“Sooner or later we'll all have to face God, regardless of our conditions. We will appear before Christ and take what's coming to us as a result of our actions, either good or bad.”

James 1:19-20 (NIV)

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

Questions

1. Do you have a story like the one about our birthday card incident? What did you do after that to repair your relationship?

2. Do you agree that your spouse doesn't *make* you react the way you do, and that your response is a choice? Why or why not?
3. What's the first thing you can do to respond differently to your spouse when he or she has hurt you?

Chapter 6—Letting God Handle the Hard Stuff

The Challenge

Stop trying to change your spouse.

Key Verses

2 Timothy 2:24-25

“God’s servant must not be argumentative, but a gentle listener and a teacher who keeps cool, working firmly but patiently with those who refuse to obey. You never know how or when God might sober them up with a change of heart and a turning to the truth . . .”

Romans 12:2

“Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

Questions

1. What have you been trying to change in your spouse? How have your efforts been received?
2. Instead of fixing attention on our spouse, where does our focus need to be?

3. Do you think it would be important to build your own PIT Crew? Who would you want to include?

Chapter 7—Which Way Are You Leaning?

The Challenge

Instead of avoiding the hurt or conflict in your marriage, lean in toward each other—and toward God.

Key Verses

Matthew 6:14-15

“In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can’t get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God’s part.”

James 1:2

“Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides.”

Questions

1. Is there something you need to forgive your spouse for, but haven’t seemed able to? If so, what is it?
2. Why is it important to forgive your spouse?
3. What kind of attitude do we need to have if our spouse wrongs us?

Chapter 8—It’s Never about the Facts

The Challenge

Instead of focusing on the facts of an argument, try to discover the feelings underneath the frustration or hurt.

Key Verses

Proverbs 11:2 (NIV)

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with humility comes wisdom.”

Psalms 37:11 (NIV)

“But the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy great peace.”

Proverbs 27:17

“You use steel to sharpen steel,
and one friend sharpens another.”

Questions

1. What truly matters in a marriage when conflict erupts?
2. Why does focusing on facts create disharmony?
3. If most conflict isn't about “truth,” what is it about?

Chapter 9—Why Your Spouse Is Always Right

The Challenge

Try putting your own concerns aside this week and validate your spouse, especially if you're not feeling validated.

Key Verse

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Questions

1. Instead of rushing to judgment against your spouse, how could you respond differently next time you feel controlled or ignored?
2. What happens to your spouse when he or she feels validated? Do things get worse or better?
3. What keeps you from validating your spouse?

Chapter 10—Taking Time-outs

The Challenge

Perhaps by now you've practiced taking a time-out. Now take another one, looking inward to see how God lets you know where you need to change. Look to Christ to humble, strengthen, and mold you into who He wants you to be.

Key Verses

Psalm 86:15

"But you, O God, are both tender and kind,
not easily angered, immense in love,
and you never, never quit."

Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

"But those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint."

Questions

1. What's the most important thing for you to do during a time-out?

2. Who has an easier time calling a time-out—an escalator or an avoider? Why?
3. How does taking a time-out demonstrate love and personal responsibility?

Chapter 11—Correcting and Connecting

The Challenge

Try to change one negative belief about your spouse. Challenge it with a reality check. Practice extending grace to your mate in that area this week.

Key Verses

Romans 8:6 (NIV)

“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”

Psalms 106:25 (NIV)

“They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD.”

Ephesians 4:29

“Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.”

Questions

1. What’s so destructive about having negative beliefs regarding your spouse?
2. Why are clarifying questions so important to a happy marriage?
3. If you find out that you’re holding negative beliefs about your mate, what should you do next?

Chapter 12—The Trillion-dollar Question

The Challenge

Instead of assuming you know what your spouse needs from you, ask the Trillion-dollar Question (TDQ) in the next three days. It might take one of these forms:

“What can I do to make this right?”

“What do you need from me at this moment?”

“How can I help you right now?”

“Is there anything you need from me?”

Key Verses

Matthew 5:48

“In a word, what I’m saying is, Grow up. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

Matthew 22:34-40

“When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault. One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up: ‘Teacher, which command in God’s Law is the most important?’

“Jesus said, ‘“Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.” This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: “Love others as well as you love yourself.” These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.’”

Questions

1. Why is it important not to assume that we know what our spouse needs?
2. How could the TDQ help jump-start happiness in your marriage?
3. If your spouse asked you the TDQ, what kind of message would that send to you?

Chapter 13—The Power of the Positive

The Challenge

Choose this week to focus on the things your spouse is doing right.

Key Verses

1 John 5:4-5

“Every God-begotten person conquers the world’s ways. The conquering power that brings the world to its knees is our faith. The person who wins out over the world’s ways is simply the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God.”

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

“These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There’s far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can’t see now will last forever.”

1 Corinthians 13:13

“But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.”

Questions

1. Are you in charge of your own happiness, or are you dependent on what your spouse does or doesn't do?
2. What's one way in which you could see your spouse from a fresh, positive perspective this week?
3. Max Lucado writes, "Focus on giants—you stumble. Focus on God—your giants tumble." What "giants" in your marriage do you tend to focus on? What could happen if you focus on God instead?

Chapter 14—The Miracle of the Mirror

The Challenge

What are the key areas in *your* life that need attention? Work on those things and stop worrying about your spouse's issues.

Key Verses

Romans 2:1-2

"Those people are on a dark spiral downward. But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one. Judgmental criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors. But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done."

Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Matthew 5:7-9 (NIV)

“Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.”

Questions

1. Which of your spouse’s issues do you need to “let go of” so that you can work on your own?
2. How do you feel when your spouse judges you? How do you think it makes your spouse feel when you judge?
3. If you focus on your own issues, how might your spouse respond?

Chapter 15—Loving Your Spouse No Matter What

The Challenge

Next time you’re irritated at your spouse, choose love, patience, kindness, mercy, and grace. First, though, decide: How will these qualities probably look when the time comes?

Key Verses

John 3:16

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.”

1 John 4:8-11

“The person who refuses to love doesn’t know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can’t know him if you

don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other."

Romans 8:38-39

"I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us."

Questions

1. What are you willing to do for the sake of your marriage?
2. Does unfaithfulness necessitate divorce? Why or why not?
3. What's one way in which you can show your spouse Christ's love for you?

Chapter 16—When Your Spouse Lets You Down

The Challenge

Make sure the expectations you have for your spouse are fair. If stress in your marriage makes it hard to evaluate your expectations, ask a mentor, pastor, friend, or counselor to help you.

Key Verses

Romans 5:2-5 (NIV)

"Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings,

because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

John 16:33

“I’ve told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I’ve conquered the world.”

Philippians 4:11-12

“Actually, I don’t have a sense of needing anything personally. I’ve learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I’m just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I’ve found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty.”

Questions

1. Have you ever shared with your spouse your expectations about time together, sexual frequency, or romance? If not, please do so now.
2. What are three things you’d like to stop in your marriage?
3. What are three things you’d like to start?

Chapter 17—Don’t Miss a Good Thing

The Challenge

Are you missing out on a good thing? Be open to noticing even the smallest positive change in your spouse’s behavior or actions toward you.

Key Verses

Matthew 8:13 (NIV)

“Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.’ And his servant was healed at that very hour.”

Mark 9:23 (NIV)

“‘If you can?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for him who believes.’”

Questions

1. What are some good things you can say about your spouse and marriage?
2. What needs to happen in your marriage for change to begin?
3. To whom can you turn in times of hurt or frustration to give you guidance and hope? What role would you like God to play in that process? Who might be able to help you find human comforters and counselors as well?

Chapter 18—Surprising Solution Scenarios

The Challenge

Compare conflicts in your marriage to the cases described in this chapter. Then, based on the advice offered, decide how to apply the principle of personal responsibility to your situation.

Key Verses

James 1:22-24

“Don’t fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don’t act

are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.”

Proverbs 15:22

“Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail;
take good counsel and watch them succeed.”

Questions

1. Which of these scenarios comes closest to one you face in your own marriage?
2. Which parts of the solution make the most sense to you?
Which are you unsure of? Which chapter in the book might help most if you reread it?
3. What role does “the power of one” play in your solution?
How will it help to take responsibility for your own feelings and actions?

notes

Chapter 1

1. If you haven't heard about our MRI program, go to <http://smalley.cc/hope> to learn more. In brief, an MRI is a one-day or two-day counseling experience in which couples from all over the country come to Houston, Texas. The intensive format is extremely successful in helping couples in crisis turn their marriages around, stay together, and increase their overall marital satisfaction.
2. "Five-Year-Old Girl Found After a Month," Associated Press, January 25, 2005, found at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6862983.
3. Joe White with Lissa Halls Johnson, *Sticking with Your Teen* (Focus on the Family/Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), pp. 117-118.

Chapter 3

1. Found at http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/Author/33_ben_reaoch.
2. Widiger, T.A. and Sanderson, C.J., "Personality Disorders Affect 10-15 Percent of the Adult U.S. Population," *Psychiatry* (Philadelphia: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1997), pp. 1291-1317.

Chapter 8

1. Found at <http://pastors.crossmap.com/article/blessed-are-the-meek/item331.htm>.

Chapter 10

1. Drs. Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Susan Blumberg, *Fighting for Your Marriage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

Chapter 13

1. Found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logotherapy>.

Chapter 16

1. Phillip J. Swihart, Ph.D., and Wilford Wooten, eds., *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers/Focus on the Family, 2006), p. 158.

Chapter 18

1. Janis Abrahms Spring, Ph.D. and Michael Spring, *After the Affair: Healing the Pain and Rebuilding Trust When a Partner Has Been Unfaithful* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1997).

Epilogue

1. Found at <http://www.jimmyv.org/remembering-jim/espy-awards-speech.html>.