I dream of a day when thousands of Christian husbands and wives will allow God to give them the attitude of Christ, and thus discover the key to enjoying the blessings of a thriving marriage.

- 1. To what extent do you have the attitude of Christ toward your spouse?
- 2. Be brave and ask your spouse how closely you emulate Christ's steadfast love.
- 3. What can you do today to demonstrate love to your spouse?

#### THE FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE

I am so grateful that in the early years of our marriage, I did not let my desire to resign control my behavior. I remember specifically asking God to give me the attitude of Christ toward my wife and He changed my heart. Our marriage was reborn and the thought of resigning has never crossed my mind again. I am a firm believer that unconditional love is the most powerful force in the world for good.

- 1. Have you ever thought that you married the wrong person? What have you learned from this chapter that counters that notion?
- 2. How has this chapter's explanation of covenant changed the way you view your marriage?
- 3. Discuss with your spouse your understanding of covenant marriage and how love and forgiveness reflect God's covenant relationship with His people.
- 4. Are you more committed to your spouse's happiness or your own? What changes can you make to bring your priorities in alignment with God's?
- 5. Have loving confrontations and willing expressions of forgiveness been characteristic of your marriage? How can you improve in these areas?

Certainly, love requires sacrifice. The choice to love is the choice which keeps emotional love alive long after the initial euphoric tingles have faded.

- 1. Do you know your love language? Your spouse's love language? If not, visit 5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/love-languages and learn each other's love languages.
- 2. How easy or difficult is it for you to speak your spouse's love language?
- 3. What can you do today to speak their love language and begin to fill their love tank? Ask them if your idea(s) will, in fact, fill their tank.
- 4. Have you read the book The 5 Love Languages®? Consider getting a copy and then read it together as a couple.
- 5. Check out the mobile app Love Nudge, available in the Apple and Android App Stores. This app provides an easy way to monitor your spouse's love tank level.

#### MAKING SEX A MUTUAL JOY

time to learn how to relate to each other sexually, in keeping with God's design.

- 1. How has the media/popular entertainment affected the way you view sex?
- 2. How does God's revelation of His design for sex change your view/understanding?
- 3. Have you confessed and repented of the ways you may have violated God's purpose and design for sex? Consider acknowledging these things to God and asking for His forgiveness, then consider if and how to share them with your spouse.
- 4. Research books on the sexual relationship authored by trusted Christian experts. Decide together which book will most benefit your marriage. Read the book and discuss it together, chapter by chapter.

has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). When we open our hearts to the love of God, we grow in learning patience with our spouses.

- 1. In your relationship, who is generally late to events? Who is early or on time?
- 2. Who is the more organized? Who is more spontaneous?
- 3. How have your differences tested your patience? How have you inappropriately expressed your impatience?
- 4. What did you learn from this chapter that will most help you be patient during times when your patience is most tested?

more important to the future of your children than building an intimate marriage.

- 1. Which of these five aspects of an intimate relationship do you find most natural? Why?
- 2. Which is the least comfortable for you? Why?
- 3. What steps can you take to strengthen all five?

1.	On an average day, what percentage of your and your spouse's communication falls within the five levels
	a% Hallway talk
	b% Reporter talk
	c% Intellectual talk
	d% Emotional talk
	e% Truth talk

- 2. Talk together about how you can lower the percentages on the first two and raise them on the last two.
- 3. Read John 13:1–20. Pray with your spouse about ways you can both demonstrate the attitude of Christ in your marriage.

If my wife doesn't tell me what she desires, I have no way of knowing. I don't mean to suggest that we must do everything our spouse requests. But sharing our desires makes it possible for the spouse to have a meaningful response. Incidentally, helping fulfill the desires of your spouse is one way of expressing your love.

The ultimate goal is to have a "daily sharing time" with your spouse. Couples who have a "sit down, look at me, let's talk" time each day have a higher level of intimacy than those couples who simply talk "whenever and wherever." With this goal in mind, your thoughtful questions, your empathetic listening when your spouse shares answers, and your taking initiative to share your own thoughts, feelings, and desires are all steps in the right direction. It is far better to take positive steps than to simply wait and hope that things are going to get better. Passing time does not build closeness—efforts at communication will.

- 1. On a scale of 1–10, rank how well you share your thoughts, feelings, and desires. Ask your spouse to do the same.
- 2. What can you do differently today to improve your number?
- 3. Do the same ranking for your empathetic listening skills. Ask your spouse to rank their own.
- 4. What can you do today to be a better listener?
- 5. Determine to take the initiative in asking your spouse thoughtful questions, listening empathetically as they answer, and openly sharing your own thoughts, feelings, and desires.

is your favorite scene from your favorite movie? Describe your parents' reactions on the day you moved out or left for college. Describe a couple who were friends with your parents when you were growing up. Can you recall the first date during which you immediately knew there would not be a second date? Recall a time when you got sick at a very inopportune time. Such a structured approach helps many couples ask questions they would never think of asking themselves.

I can assure you there is much more to be known about your spouse than you presently know, even if you have been married for thirty years. It is in knowing each other better that we build our sense of togetherness. To know and to be known in the context of a loving relationship is at the heart of what marriage is all about.

- 1. Write down one question from each of the above categories (or your own question corresponding to the categories). Begin today asking your spouse one of these questions. Ask the next question tomorrow, and so on.
- 2. Ask your spouse to do the same.
- 3. Consider reading one of the following books on marriage by Gary Chapman with your spouse and discussing it, chapter by chapter:
  - a. The Marriage You've Always Wanted
  - b. A Couple's Guide to a Growing Marriage
  - c. Now You're Speaking My Language
  - d. The 5 Love Languages®

it gets serious enough for surgery. Much of life's emotional pain could be avoided by clarifying meanings.

- 1. A reflective listening exercise: Ask your spouse to share an experience from their childhood, one that you have not heard before.
- 2. Practice reflective, or empathetic, listening by repeating the story back to them as clearly as you understand it. Include the emotions of the experience they shared.
- 3. Ask them if you fully grasp the facts and emotions. If not, go another round and seek a more accurate understanding.
- 4. Next, take your turn and share an experience from your childhood with your spouse. Follow the same steps.

Based on our thoughts and emotions we eventually make decisions. When the tailgater was following you on the highway and you felt angry, perhaps you had these thoughts: I wish they would lay off... I wish they would pass me... if I thought I wouldn't get caught, I'd press the accelerator and leave them in the twilight... I should slam on my brakes and let their insurance company buy me a new car... maybe I'll pull off the road and let them pass.

Eventually you made some decision, or the other driver backed off, turned, or passed you, and you arrived safely at work. In each of life's events, we have emotions, thoughts, desires, and eventually actions. It is the expression of that process that we call self-revelation. If you choose to learn how to have quality conversations with your spouse, that is the learning road you must follow.

Quality conversation is to the marriage what oxygen is to the brain. Without it both die. However, the good news is dying marriages can be revived when we take the time to engage in quality conversations.

- 1. Which of the practical tips for listening did you find most challenging? Develop a plan to work on this and share the plan with your spouse.
- 2. In the home where you grew up, were you encouraged to express your thoughts and feelings? Or were you discouraged from sharing them?
- 3. What in this chapter was most encouraging to you with respect to identifying and sharing your emotions?

within all of us that reaches out to make connection with the non-physical world. We have not been able to eradicate this need with modern scientific dogmas. In fact, much of human behavior is motivated by this search for peace with God. It often expresses itself in the desire to connect with other people in a meaningful way.

If you understand that your spouse's motive for joining a secular social club is to meet the need for "belonging," then maybe you can affirm their behavior even though you would rather they join a Bible study group. If you affirm their desire for community, then you may well have one of their friends invite them to an event sponsored by the church. This may be the beginning of their journey to God. Ultimately, only God can meet our need for spiritual reality.

Your willingness to affirm their search for meaning rather than condemn them for joining the social club makes you a friend rather than an enemy. Understanding motivation enables us to be companions rather than competitors.

- 1. What are your deepest needs—physically, emotionally, spiritually?
- 2. How are you seeking to meet these needs?
- 3. What motivates your behavior?
- 4. What needs is your spouse consciously or subconsciously trying to meet?
- 5. What motivates your spouse's behavior?

#### CHANGE WITHOUT MANIPULATION

Irritations can be processed in a positive way. When we do, we are likely to get change. When change is not forthcoming, we choose to focus on the positive things they have changed, and accept those things that they are unable, or unwilling to change.

In summary, here is the plan for making your wishes come true: (1) deal with past failures; (2) express love consistently in a language that is meaningful to your spouse; and (3) make requests, never demands. I predict if you follow this plan, many of your wishes will become reality.

- 1. Start a list of things your spouse does that irritate you. Ask your spouse to do the same.
- 2. Discuss with your spouse the idea of sharing one of your irritations every other week. Make sure the two of you alternate so each shares a total of twenty-six over the course of a year. Agree on what day of the week you share your grievance.
- 3. Always give your spouse three heartfelt compliments before you share your irritation. Make sure they know how much you love and appreciate them.

- 1. Think about the last decision you made as a couple where you were not unified.
- 2. Who made the final decision?
- 3. How did the decision-making process affect your relationship?
- 4. Looking back on the decision, was it the right one?
- 5. What did you learn from the decision, its outcome, and this chapter that will change your approach the next time you and your spouse disagree?

#### THE ART OF APOLOGIZING

languages, you will give them credit, realizing that they are likely apologizing in the way they were taught to do so by their parents.

Forgiveness is the godly response to a sincere apology. This is God's pattern of forgiveness, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God loves us, and His Spirit convicts us when we do wrong. The moment we are willing to apologize, God stands ready to forgive. He is our model. Forgiveness means that we lift the penalty and show mercy instead of demanding justice. God forgives us because Christ paid our penalty. We forgive others for the same reason. Because we have been forgiven, we extend forgiveness.

Having a healthy marriage requires apology and forgiveness. Learning how to apologize in the language of your spouse makes the process much more effective.

- 1. Visit 5lovelanguages.com/quizzes and take the 5 Apology Languages quiz. Ask your spouse to take the quiz and share your results with one another.
- 2. For what do you need to apologize to your spouse? Why not do it today?
- 3. Use all five apology languages, if necessary, but make every effort to communicate that you sincerely apologize. I predict that you will be greeted with genuine forgiveness.
- 4. For more insights on the apology languages, read the book The 5 Apology Languages.

with mistreatment. However, this approach leads us spiraling downward in our relationship. Taking the high road of "blessing for cursing" creates a climate where we can more readily process our differences and learn to work together as a supportive team.

But what about an abusive spouse? Care must be taken when the one who is mistreating is a chronic abuser. For this kind of person, verbal abuse can escalate to physical abuse. When this happens, it may become necessary to separate from the spouse, perhaps temporarily, until their behavior is corrected.

Still, it is worth keeping in mind the words of the apostle Paul, who summarized the teachings of Jesus when he said, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

- 1. Have you ever applied Jesus' instruction, "Bless those who curse you," in any of your relationships? What response did you get?
- 2. In your marriage, when are you most inclined to respond to your spouse with harshness?
- 3. Why not memorize Luke 6:28 and seek ways to use it in all your relationships?

- 1. What did you learn in this chapter that challenged your thinking about forgiveness?
- 2. Have you been hurt by your spouse or others in ways that stir up painful memories or emotions?
- 3. If you have forgiven the offenses, remind yourself of that and continue to surrender your memories and emotions to God.
- 4. If the offender has not apologized and sought your forgiveness, turn them and their offenses over to God, remembering that He is the righteous Judge.

celebrate, or what is the best course of action to deal with a painful situation. God is always there to help us when we reach out and ask for His wisdom.

- 1. Do you talk with God about your emotions, both positive and negative? Give it a try right now.
- 2. Are you comfortable sharing your emotions with your spouse? If not, how does this chapter encourage you to step outside your comfort zone and begin to open up about your feelings?
- 3. When you experience positive emotions, what would be a good way you and your spouse can celebrate?
- 4. What might make it less threatening for you to share your negative emotions with your spouse?

battle between us?" The purpose of a new treaty is to learn from past experience. If we simply wait until it happens again, we are likely to respond in the same negative way we did before and thus entrench our destructive behavior patterns.

A new treaty means a new approach. Perhaps Jeff and Lauren will agree that when either of them wants to be sexually intimate, they will inform the other at least six hours ahead of time so that mentally and physically they can prepare themselves for a moment of genuine love making. Perhaps they can agree that if one of them is physically or emotionally unable to be responsive, they will verbally assure the other of their love so that inability will not be taken as rejection. To the degree that the new treaty works, we have resolved the problem. To the degree that it fails to work, it calls for repeating the process of Plans A–D and making new treaties. Negative emotions need not destroy our relationship.

- 1. Is the statement "negative emotions are not necessarily sinful" a new revelation to you? How will it affect the way you process your negative emotions in the future?
- 2. What name would you give the most recent negative emotion you have experienced?
- 3. Was the source of this negative emotion external or internal, or a combination?
- 4. Journal a prayer to God sharing your negative feelings, asking for His help, and surrendering your emotions to Him. Request His wisdom in acting on your feelings in a way that pleases Him.

encourage you to pray for the wisdom of God.

I'm convinced that there are thousands of Robs in the world, many of them extremely successful in their vocation, and for many years untroubled by their hidden anger. But sooner or later, unprocessed anger will express itself in harsh words and often violent behavior toward innocent people (often a spouse), or it will lead to depression, which keeps the individual from reaching their potential for God.

If you or your spouse are suffering from long-term anger you may want to read and discuss my book *Anger: Taming a Powerful Emotion.* You may also wish to reach out for the help of a Christian counselor who can help you process your anger in a constructive manner.

- 1. Are hurts and betrayals from your past negatively impacting your marriage?
- 2. You may or may not have deep-seated hurts and anger like Rob in this chapter. However, consider doing the exercise he was instructed to do.
- 3. Get alone with God and ask Him to reveal the names of people who have hurt you (use the two columns described on p. 149).
- 4. Take each person and corresponding offense to God, and release them all to Him.
- 5. Decide whether or not to go to these people and seek peace and reconciliation.

- 1. Can you recall a time in your life when anger was kindled within you and it resulted in something good? Perhaps your righteous anger prompted you to lovingly confront someone and they responded with confession and repentance. Share this with your spouse.
- 2. Was there a time when sinful, selfish anger prompted you to do or say the wrong thing? How did the other person react? What did you do in response? Share this with your spouse.
- 3. Ask your spouse to share their own experiences with personal anger.
- 4. What are some lessons on anger management you can draw from these experiences?

they often respond to the wrong issue. Listening helps us focus on the heart of the conflict. When we listen, understand, and respect each other's ideas we can then find a solution in which both of us are winners. Love leads both of us to be willing to give in order to bring pleasure to the other. When a husband and wife lovingly seek solutions to conflicts, they find the harmony and teamwork which they are trying to build.

Argumentative patterns from the past will not die quickly, but you can learn a better way. It will take time and effort, but it is effort well invested. Resolving conflicts in a healthy manner deepens a marriage relationship. You can learn to resolve conflicts without arguing.

- 1. Think of the last argument you had with your spouse. What was the outcome—you won, you lost, or it was a draw?
- 2. How did you feel afterward?
- 3. How did your spouse feel after the argument?
- 4. How did it affect your relationship?
- 5. How will you approach the next conflict you experience?

#### GETTING RID OF BITTERNESS

a powerful way in the hands of God. We must never allow hurt, anger, bitterness, and hatred to become a way of life.

- 1. How can a person's anger lead to bitterness and even hatred?
- 2. Have you ever experienced bitterness toward another person?
- 3. What damaging effects can a bitter spirit produce in a person's life?
- 4. What can one do to prevent anger from turning into bitterness?

in the differences, we will focus on the creativity rather than the disorganization. All of us have strengths and weaknesses in our personality and lifestyle patterns. We will come to delight in the differences when we focus on each other's strengths.

- 1. In what ways are you and your spouse most different?
- 2. What have you learned from this chapter that will help you more deeply appreciate these differences?
- 3. What are the strengths that your spouse brings to your marriage that complement your personal weaknesses? Take time to tell them you value these strengths.
- 4. What strengths do you bring that complement their weaknesses? Discuss with one another reasons you both believe you make a great team.

Both Trent and Beth have positive strengths in their personality patterns. If they can focus on the strengths and give each other verbal affirmation, they will create a more positive emotional climate in their marriage. For example, Beth may say to Trent, "I really appreciate the fact that you keep the bills paid on time. I never have to worry about that, and I really appreciate it." Trent may say to Beth, "I want to thank you for encouraging me to go to the concert last Tuesday. I would not have done that if you had not made it sound like so much fun. I'm really glad we went, and I appreciate you." Verbally affirming each other's differences builds our self-esteem and creates friendship rather than a battlefield.

- 1. Make a list of what you consider to be your own strengths.
- 2. Make a similar list of what you consider to be your spouse's strengths.
- 3. Ask your spouse to do numbers 1 and 2. Then compare your lists and discuss the differences and similarities.
- 4. Look for opportunities to affirm each other for these strengths.

- 3. What are your basic beliefs about God and how have they changed over time?
- 4. What religious organizations have you been affiliated with? How active was your involvement?
- 5. What is your view of the Scriptures? How have you best practiced reading, studying, and memorizing Scripture?
- 6. How do your religious beliefs affect your daily lifestyle?
- 7. How can we build spiritual intimacy in our marriage through what we hold in common?

Honest answers to such questions may reveal that your spiritual intimacy is lacking a foundation on which to build. We must recognize that we cannot force our spouse to change their religious beliefs or practices, but we do deeply influence our spouse by the manner in which we process these differences. Mutual respect and an honest effort to find a meeting place is far more productive than critical, condemning statements about the other person. We are all on a spiritual journey. None of us is perfect. My prayer is that as you seek to understand each other, God will give you wisdom in how to show respect and, at the same time, have a positive influence on each other, moving you to a greater sense of unity in spiritual matters.

- 1. Take some time to discuss the seven questions above.
- 2. Where are you and your spouse most spiritually similar?
- 3. Where are you most different?
- 4. How will you navigate these differences in the future?

They are likely as frustrated as you with the present situation.

Sit down individually and make a list of the things that you enjoyed most in your marriage before the children came. Share your list with each other and relive some of the moments you enjoyed in that stage of marriage.

Make a list of five things that you think would improve your marriage at this stage of parenting. Evaluate these five by placing the words "realistic," "unrealistic," or "maybe" beside each of your five. Share your list with each other. See if you can agree on at least one thing on each of your lists that you will attempt to do this week.

- 1. If you are parents, how healthy was your marriage before the baby came?
- 2. After the arrival of your baby did the health of your marriage improve or suffer? Why?
- 3. What can you do today to set in place a trajectory of growth in your marriage?

tomorrow." But God is always "here," never "gone" today or tomorrow. So, in hard times, we put our hand in His and use whatever money we have to feed our families and help others. Our security is not in money, but in a loving and faithful God.

Great marriages are not dependent on money, but on an attitude of love and concern for each other. Yes, that concern motivates us to work in order to have enough to provide food, clothing, and shelter. When those basic needs are met, we are not looking to more money to make us happier. We have found happiness in our relationship with God and with each other. Living with little often prepares us to live with much. Those couples who have built a loving, supportive relationship with modest financial means are far more likely to be good stewards if God chooses to bless them financially.

The good news is any couple can have a loving, supportive, caring marital relationship. Money does not determine marital happiness.

- 1. Are you and your spouse on the same page when it comes to money and its importance? If not, where do you differ?
- 2. In the stories above, which home life would you prefer, the three-room house or the spacious brick luxury house? Why?
- 3. How can you better use the money and possessions God has blessed you with to honor Him and cultivate love in your home?

- 1. Talk with your spouse about the ways you experienced household roles of husband and wife growing up in your family.
- 2. How has this influenced the way you view your roles in marriage?
- 3. How has it influenced the way you view your spouse's roles?
- 4. How does your view of "who does what" need to change?

- 1. What things are most annoying to you and your spouse relative to your relationship with the in-laws?
- 2. How can the two of you address these things in a way that is both honest and respectful to them?
- 3. Do you consistently prioritize your spouse above your parents? Ask your spouse if they feel prioritized.

- Use the mealtime as a time to share some of the things that have happened throughout the day. (If you have children, include them in the conversation.)
- Once the logistics of dinner and dishes are over, invest your energy in one of the projects your spouse has requested.

The old saying is, "An apple a day will keep the doctor away." I would like to suggest that a hug, a kiss, a conversation, and a project completed daily will keep the divorce attorney away. It may also enrich your sexual intimacy. Mutual sexual fulfillment flows from a healthy marriage. So, do something different tonight with your spouse. Get out of the routine. Minimize the phone and maximize the activity and conversation. Keep your marriage alive and growing.

- 1. How has your job and its demands negatively impacted your marriage?
- 2. What adjustments can you make that will compensate for these negatives?
- 3. Discuss with your spouse how your job(s) can help, rather than hinder, your relationship.
- 4. What level of understanding does your spouse have about your job/position? How well do you understand their job? Spend some time discussing why you do what you do.

# As You Face the Future

IF YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE have worked through the chapters of this book as I suggested in the introduction, my guess is that you have seen growth in your relationship. I never talk about "perfect" marriages, because none of us is perfect. I talk about *growing* marriages. As long as we live, there is room for growth. If you have found this book helpful, I hope you will share it with your friends.

Now, as you face the future, I would also like to give you a personal challenge. It is the challenge I give to all those who attend my 5 Love Languages® Marriage Conference. I recommend two things that will keep your marriage growing in the future. First, each year share a book on marriage. By "share" I mean each of you reads the same chapter and then ask: What can we learn from this chapter? There are enough good books on marriage to keep you busy the rest of your life. If you share a book each year, I predict that you will continue on the road of marital growth.

My second challenge is that once a year, you attend a marriage enrichment event. It may be a class offered by your church. Or it may be one of the many Christian marriage conferences available. Some of these conferences are one-day events, like my 5 Love Languages® Marriage Conference. Others are weekend events, normally Friday evening until Sunday noon. I have always felt that if my wife and I attend a marriage conference and learn at least one thing that will improve our relationship, it was worth the time and effort to attend.

A growing, thriving marriage requires an openness to make positive changes. Such changes lead to the loving, supportive, caring relationship you dreamed about when you were first married. Remember, marriages are either growing or regressing. The choice is yours.

Here's a short list of helpful resources on marriage.

#### **BOOKS BY GARY CHAPMAN**

The 5 Love Languages®: The Secret to Love That Lasts

The Marriage You've Always Wanted

Now You're Speaking My Language: Honest Communication and Deeper Intimacy for a Stronger Marriage

Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married

The One-Year Love Language Minute Devotional

A Couple's Guide for a Growing Marriage

The Four Seasons of Marriage

5 Simple Ways to Strengthen Your Marriage . . . When You're Stuck at Home Together

Anger: Taming a Powerful Emotion

The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationships

Married and Still Loving It: The Joys and Challenges of the Second Half

101 Conversation Starters for Couples

#### AS YOU FACE THE FUTURE

#### OTHER BOOKS ON MARRIAGE

- Your Marriage Today . . . and Tomorrow: Making Your Relationships Matter Now and for Generations to Come, Crawford and Karen Loritts
- The Grace Marriage: How the Gospel and Intentionality Transform Your Relationship, Brad and Marilyn Rhoads
- The Marriage Knot: 7 Choices That Keep Couples Together, Ron and Jody Zappia
- Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs to Make, Paul David Tripp
- The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God, Timothy and Kathy Keller
- Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More than to Make Us Happy?, Gary Thomas
- Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs, Emerson Eggerichs
- You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity, Francis and Lisa Chan

#### WEBSITES AND EVENTS

5LoveLanguages.com

5LoveLanguages.com/Events

FocusOntheFamily.com/Marriage/

FamilyLife.com/Weekend-to-Remember

Marriage.WinShape.org/