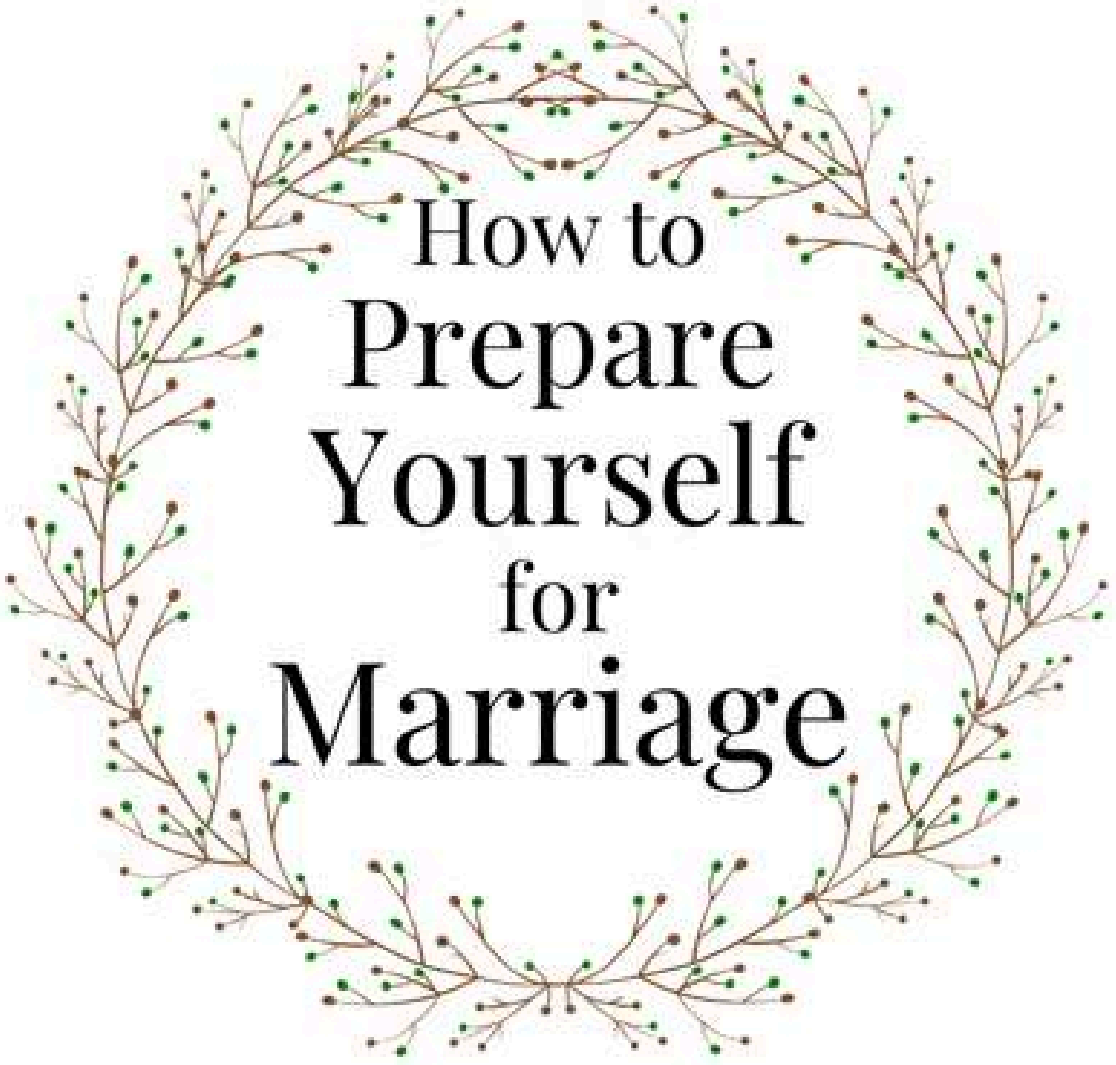


How to Prepare Yourself for Marriage

The practical & Christian path to prepare yourself to meet, date, marry, and stay married to the spouse of your dreams

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INTRODUCTION

In this book, I'll be going through all the things I can think of that could help you set yourself up for becoming an amazing pick, and picking an amazing person as your spouse, for a marriage that will last a lifetime.

Most people would rather be happy than stuck in a bad marriage. However, in most cases, the reason the marriage isn't good is because the two people who entered the marriage haven't prepared themselves for success, and seem to think that once you're married it should all be intuitive and self-explanatory. Some even believe that if you marry the *right* person, you won't fight.

All of these are of course misconceptions or flat-out lies. We're all humans and we're all different. Even two people who are extremely similar will have some differences, as God created each of us to be unique.

This means that in order to have an amazing marriage, some work needs to be put into it. Someone who wants to be an Olympic athlete knows that they need to keep working on their craft on a daily basis to reach their goals. Even if it's a day off, it's an intentional day off.

I'm certainly not saying that marriage is as hard as being an Olympic athlete, but I am saying that there are certain practices that need to be implemented daily in order for the marriage to be successful.

So, what are those tools that will help you have a successful and healthy marriage? What can you do *now* that will prepare you for an amazing marriage once you find your spouse? And how do you find and pick a mate that is actually suitable for you? These are the questions we hope to cover in this book.

Some of what we write will be all you need in that area, whereas some other areas will require that you do more work and study beyond the pages of this book. Implementation can take some time when learning a completely new way of doing something, so I don't want you to think that reading this book once will be a quick fix.

In no way will we pretend like we have all the answers, but we do believe we have and can provide a great foundation that will assist you on your journey of preparing yourself for marriage. Now, let's get into it!

CHAPTER 1
WHAT EVEN IS MARRIAGE?

With all the divorces and people living together without being married in our day and age, what marriage actually is seems to have been lost.

As a Christian, I've always believed in marriage, but I wasn't sure exactly how to define it. I didn't know how to explain to someone what it means, or why it's not just, *"A piece of paper."*

One day I was talking to my husband of almost 3 years, and I heard myself explain it in a way that I hadn't previously been able to articulate.

"Marriage is a covenant. That means it's more important than my feelings or circumstances. If my feelings don't align with the covenant of marriage, I need to change my feelings, not my marriage status!" - Ann-Sofi K. Johnson.

What is a marriage covenant? A covenant is a deep, multi-dimensional commitment to another person. It's putting into your life a new piece of reality. Gravity is real, you can try to defy it, but it's probably going to win. This law is often referred to as a First Principle. Marriage is similar to this, except it's not as fixed as gravity. It's dependent on the commitment between two people to come into effect.

Once a covenant has been created, it's like a new law of reality has been formed. Something that is bigger than the people involved. It might seem like we can interact with it flippantly, but there is something much deeper at hand. A dimension often forgotten, yet commonly experienced. Like an undefined signal usually mislabeled and misunderstood. This is why a covenant supersedes someone's emotions and circumstances.

I start with this explanation of what a covenant is because I want you to feel the weight of a true marriage covenant, and why picking a good partner is vital.

WHAT GOD INTENDED WITH MARRIAGE

Since God is the creator of everything, including the covenant of marriage, let's start by taking a look through the bible for what God says about marriage.

What is it that you are actually aiming at when you are preparing yourself for marriage? What is the *vision* of a covenant marriage?

A healthy, successful marriage is where two people become one flesh. God made a helper suitable for the man. They are no longer two separate individuals doing their own thing, but one unit. Not two halves, but two whole's put together. Where one can slay 1,000, two can slay 10,000[1].

A marriage doesn't only include the roles of husband and wife, the two individuals are also partners, lovers, best friends, co-laboring, cohabitating, and co-parenting. Not all types of marriages do everything together in person, but they still hold the potential of all of these roles and more.

To clarify, not all couples have babies, but we humans were created to parent, so even if we don't have our own children, we will end up parenting in other ways. Some become teachers, some become managers, some become government officials and try to parent the

1 Deuteronomy 32:30

whole country, but let's get back to what God says about marriages.

After God created man in His own image[2], God said that it was not good for man to be alone and that He would make a suitable helper for him[3]. After Adam had named all the animals and no suitable helper was found, God put the man to sleep and created the woman from his side/rib[4].

This is when God established marriage. The reason the man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife is because the woman was taken out of the man and through marriage, they are reunited as one flesh[5].

God is the one who separated the woman from the man, and God is the one who reunites a man and a woman through marriage, which is why Jesus said, "What God has joined together, let no one separate."[6]

As the Pharisees kept questioning Jesus, He went on to explain that the reason Moses allowed divorce was because of the hardness of heart that the people had, but that divorce wasn't part of the original marriage design. He goes on to explicate that anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman for any other reason than sexual immorality commits adultery.[7]

Marriage is supposed to be a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman as one flesh, a new unit.

God is actually serious about marriage, and the marriage covenant. We have a tendency to try to shove things under the rug, but God sees all. It is better, to be honest with Him, repent of our mistakes, and change our ways as soon as we realize we've been messing up than to try to hide or ignore our mess-ups.

There is a very interesting and sobering passage in Malachi where

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2 Genesis 1:27

3 Genesis 2:18

4 Genesis 2:19-23

5 Genesis 2:24

6 Matthew 19:4-6

7 Matthew 19:7-12

God is confronting His people. It turns out that God will remove His favor from those who break the marriage covenant[8].

The man has the role of protector within marriage, but if he cheats on his wife, or is unfaithful in any way if he hates and divorces his wife, he does violence against the one he is supposed to protect. In this passage, God keeps repeating, "Be on your guard and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth." This is because God values marriage, because He knows that it is good for us to be in a committed marriage relationship, and it grieves Him when we harm ourselves and others by defiling this sacred covenant.

Now, let's take a look at some Proverbs. If you as a man choose your wife purposefully, you can avoid wanting to live on the corner of a housetop[9] and instead live inside the house you share with the prudent woman whom God gave you[10], and obtain favor from the Lord[11].

I know all of these Proverbs are angled towards men, but with a little effort, let's investigate how they relate to women.

First of all, if you as a woman want to have a healthy, fun, and intimate relationship with your husband, learn how to communicate respectfully rather than arguing or bickering. Women have gotten a bad reputation because unfortunately, a lot of women have been trained that it's okay and even expected for them to be naggy, or to complain to their husband about what he didn't know she wanted him to do, rather than kindly asking him to do whatever it may be.

In a later chapter, I'll go over how to stop hinting and how to dare to be vulnerable and ask for what you actually want explicitly, as there are tools that will help you learn a new and more functional way of communicating, especially with a man.

The other proverbs are significantly more encouraging to women, as the first one basically says that when a man finds and marries us, it

8 Malachi 2:13-16

9 Proverbs 21:9

10 Proverbs 19:14

11 Proverbs 18:22

means he has found something good, and obtains favor from the Lord. It sounds to me as if we are the gatekeepers to some of God's favor that can only be bestowed upon men who marry us! I find that extremely sobering and cool!

The last Proverb I reference doesn't necessarily apply to all women, but I would like to believe that it will apply to any woman who applies what we share in this book and learns to be a prudent woman, as a prudent woman is a gift to a man, specifically from God. Where God Himself is in charge of which man, or rather which quality of man, this kind of woman ends up with.

Since the word *prudent* isn't very commonly used in our current society, I looked up what it means. In the context of this Proverb, it refers to a sensible, wise, and discerning woman. A woman who manages resources well, exercises sound judgment, and acts with understanding in her responsibilities and relationships. It highlights her value in fostering a godly and harmonious household.

I've read Proverbs 31, and when I read the description of all that the word 'prudent' entails I instantly thought of her[12]. I'm not saying that all prudent women need to wake up before sunup and provide food for their families as the woman in Proverbs 31 does. I think there is a certain personality type that fits this description more exactly, which is why it is not automatically included in the description of what a *prudent* woman is. We night owls can also be prudent.

So, what is it really that Proverbs 31 is talking to us about? It's about a woman who is living out her full potential, with a loving husband. He doesn't hold her back but rather encourages her to do all that she is capable of, and because of this, and her heart for personal growth, she blesses everyone she interacts with. She is trustworthy, a companion, she brings prosperity to their household, and her husband marvels at the kind of woman he ended up with, all the days of his life.

To some of you, the idea of acting like the Proverbs 31 woman is completely foreign and maybe even painful. If you have more of an edge to your expression, and you have a high value for what works over cooperation, it might seem impossible for you to become a

12 Proverbs 31:10-31

prudent woman.

This is not true! God created you with these skills and this personality, and it is good. You are good. However, you might need to learn to hold your tongue or to learn healthy and kind ways of articulating your frustrations. The woman in Proverbs 31 is a fierce woman, who doesn't just go along with what others tell her, she gets stuff done, but she does it kindly and effectively.

These things can also apply to men, as men are generally more disagreeable than women, and that's okay and even good. However, we can disagree rudely, or kindly, and being a prudent woman, or man for that matter, means that the person has learned how to communicate effectively, and kindly. More on this later in the book, but for now, let's keep looking at what God intended with marriage.

Someone who is single only has themselves to rely on. They need to be responsible to get everything done themselves. Sure, we can have friends or mentors who will help us if we're feeling weak or discouraged, but having a spouse, someone who is always there, and actively going in the same direction, working on the same vision with us, is going to be far more intimate and might even notice if we're not acting ourselves *before* we ourselves notice that something's wrong[13]. If one is weak, the other is strong and will be able to help the weak one up.

It also comes with a built-in warmer if it's cold at night. My husband and I know something about this as we were doing van-life for the first few years of marriage, and it could get quite cold at times, so I'd stick my feet close to his and I would often find a pocket of heat emanating from his feet, while my body seemed to have decided my heart was the only thing that mattered and my feet were an acceptable loss.

Hebrews mentions how marriage should be held in honor among all because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous[14]. Unlike how sex outside of marriage is being promoted as something good in our time, God has made it clear in both the Old and New Testaments that He is *not* okay with it.

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13 Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

14 Hebrews 13:4

If we can't exercise self-control, it is better to marry than to burn with passion[15]. Temptations are everywhere, especially in the West where women have fallen for the lie that they can wear bikinis in public and it means nothing. The temptations aren't just for men, as they are visual creatures, constantly being bombarded not only by the actual women, but also by billboards, ads, and profile pictures. Nudity is everywhere nowadays, so a man who wants to stay pure needs to have extreme self-control to be able to sustain it. Women are also being influenced.

This is why the bible says that because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband[16].

Sure, men are visually affected, but women can burn with passion as well. There's a reason women read a ton of *Romance Novels* because most of them include sex scenes.

Feminism has also pushed women to be more promiscuous and to sexualize men to the same degree they believe men are sexualizing them. This is a huge problem and a lot of Christian organizations are trying to do their part in teaching people the value of purity, but as of right now, the ridicule of being virgins is unfortunately also widespread within the church, and the belief that if someone wants to wait until marriage, they won't be able to find someone else who has also made that same choice, is also prevalent.

I'm not trying to shame anyone who has fallen for temptation. Any lies associated with that, like 'you are doomed because of your mistakes' are just that, lies! God is mighty to restore as long as we repent, accept His forgiveness, and forgive ourselves.

Self-forgiveness is a huge part of this, and will be covered later in the book.

There is a passage in Ephesians that talks about the husband being the head of the wife[17] and it's one of those passages that can really

15 1 Corinthians 7:9

16 1 Corinthians 7:2-3

17 Ephesians 5:22-32

irritate women who have been influenced by feminism. So, let's unpack what these verses are actually talking about.

A common misconception is that the man can lord it over his wife, and be a tyrant and control her every move, and the wife just needs to sit back, follow along, and take it. This is not at all what the scripture is actually talking about.

It starts with, 'wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord.' Does God control your every move? No. God gave us free will, and He is extremely patient with us exercising our free will. More often than not, we might wish God would decide for us so we don't need to, but He prefers a partnership where we also have a say.

However, we are submitted to God in the way of asking for His input and assistance when things are beyond our capabilities. God knows everything, and He wants us to ask for His help.

God doesn't want to decide for us, but if we partner with Him, He will let us know what our options are, what are good options, and what are not-so-good options, but then He still leaves it up to us to decide for ourselves.

This is the kind of submission wives do to their husbands. If my husband shares something he wants to do, he doesn't lord it over me. He includes me and is open to any feedback I might have.

In Kris Vallotton's book, Fashioned to Reign, Kris shares how his wife Kathy would sometimes have an "ah" moment. You know, one of those, "aah, something's off but I'm not sure what," kind of "ah's." Practically, the decision they were about to make seemed great, and she agreed, but there was still something she couldn't quite put into words, something inside her letting her know that something was off.

One of those times, they were buying a new car, and because Kris had decided to trust her "ah's" however frustrating they were, it turned out that Kathy's "ah" was because they didn't yet know that they were pregnant with another child, and the car they had been looking at wouldn't have worked out once the baby arrived.

Kris comedically refers to this phenomenon as "ah" moments that lead to him having "aha" moments, when the reason for her "ah" is

finally revealed.

My husband trusts my "ah" moments too, though I tend to explore what they might mean a bit more than others might. But even if it's just a feeling, sharing them has greatly helped in our lives as well.

This is probably a part of what is referred to as *female intuition*. It will be helpful for both women and men to take note of this phenomenon as it can greatly help what might otherwise come across as extremely irritating or frustrating interactions once married.

The passage goes on to talk about husbands loving their wives as their own bodies.

Men naturally want to protect and provide. Women naturally want to nurture and love. Hence why the passage points out that women need to submit to the role that God has bestowed upon the husbands, and for husbands to be reminded that their wives need to receive affection and love in order for the marriage to work. It's not all about protecting and providing, it's also about showing love. Women freely give it but we also need to receive it.

It also points out that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. This is the part that is usually skipped over. This is the part that will clear up all the misconceptions of men lording it over their wives.

Jesus didn't try to control His followers. He nourished them and cared for them as seen in the passages about feeding the crowds[18], and then sacrificing Himself even though He had done nothing wrong. He gave up His life for the joy set before Him, the joy of getting to see all of us set free from the curse and the old covenant of death and to be reunited with the Father. That's the role of the husband.

I'm not sure I'd like to have that role. I'd rather have my role and honor my husband, love him, respect him, and follow his lead because I know he's doing his best to lead me somewhere good. I wouldn't want all of that responsibility, and I think some women don't

18 Matthew 14:15-21 & 15:32-38, Mark 6:35-44 & 8:1-9, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-13

understand this part, and that's why it seems unfair or something.

Since getting married, I have gotten an up close and personal look at what this looks like, and it's a real weight that men are given that I don't have, and for that reason, I actually respect my husband all the more, and do my best to honor him and his role/responsibility as the provider and protector.

So, what is the vision of marriage? It's when two people are joined, a man and a woman. It's a partnership of mutual respect and love. The man has his role, the woman has hers, and they work together to respect and honor what the other is responsible for while doing their best to accomplish their own responsibility.

It's about having a suitable helper. It's about having a partner to resist temptation with and giving to each other what the other needs. It's about being there and lifting each other up when the other is weak. It's about a covenant that God created and obtaining favor from God. It's about building a relationship that will last a lifetime. It's about leaving a legacy.

A HOLLYWOOD MARRIAGE VS. A REAL MARRIAGE

Hollywood has played a huge role in diminishing the weight of what a real marriage is supposed to be.

They have taught us all that "true love" is seeing someone across the room, feeling some flutters, and "falling" for someone we know nothing about.

In my early 20's I found myself feeling scared to be alone with a guy, and I realized that I'd been affected by Hollywood. Movies had taught me that if a man and woman were alone together, even if they didn't like each other beforehand, at least one of them would start to get feelings for the other and want to kiss them.

I knew that wouldn't take on me because I've never even had crushes on movie stars like most other girls I grew up with had. So, if I wasn't going to fall for it, the guy I was with would inevitably be the one to fall for it.

Upon realizing how this lie had taken hold of me, I decided to start countering it. I went to a Best Buy with my friend once, and as we looked around, I wasn't sure if we were at Best Buy or Best *GUY*. I needed help to find a new phone, and my insides told me to get as little help from the guy helping me as possible, so as to not have anything romantic happen, but logically I knew that he was just doing his job, and being at work, he surely wouldn't try something with a random customer!

So, I took a breath and allowed him to keep helping me until I was actually done with my choice, at which point we moved on without anything romantic having happened, what a shocker!

Later, I was at home and my brother had invited two of our guy friends over, and at one point, my brother and one of the guys both got up from the table and left the room. My insides told me to get up to follow them, but noticing how the third guy stayed seated, and knowing they'd be right back, I relaxed back into my seat. And wouldn't you know it, nothing happened that time either!This is how I broke free from that lie, and it hasn't had any influence over me ever since.

So, what is a *REAL* marriage? A real marriage looks like a partnership. It's two people who come together because they know they'd enjoy life with the other person. They'd enjoy going on adventures together. It's the first person they'd like to share it with whenever they achieve a dream, and if they end up with children, they'd be excited to raise kids together with this person.

It's about being intentional and purposeful, instead of simply letting emotions or circumstances lead. It's about actually knowing the other person, instead of having a stand-in for the emotions that Hollywood has told us that we're supposed to experience when we're in a romantic relationship.

It includes taking out the trash, and dealing with hard things together, as well as romance and fun. Some guys don't see the point of romance, at least not the way Hollywood has told us it looks like, but that doesn't mean they don't care. They might have different love languages and values, and how they relate and show their spouse that they cherish and love them isn't by bringing flowers and chocolate, but

maybe by giving them a massage, going exploring together, or ordering in their lady's favorite dinner.

So, in order to have a real marriage, it's going to take work. You need to know yourself first so that you can pick a spouse who will actually fit what you want out of life, and how you want to spend the quiet parts of your life. It's about putting the effort in to grow in love, to love real things about the other person, and not just how you feel when someone pays attention to you.

It's not about seeing someone across the room, it's about having real and raw conversations about real things, and still liking the other person afterward. It's about getting to know and liking their values and dreams, and accepting their vices and where they differ from our own. It's about finding someone that you can love 70-80% of, and that you can accept the remaining 20-30% of.

This means you need to know if there are any deal breakers before you commit to them. Like, you want kids and they don't. That's a huge one. But if they smoke on occasion, and you have a 0% tolerance for that, it may not be something that you notice while dating, so it's something you'd need to have a conversation about to find out. Hence why intentionality is so important.

So, in order to get yourself a good lifelong marriage, a true marriage covenant instead of a simple marriage deal that can break easily, you need to put in the necessary work to get to know yourself, what you want and don't want, and start dating to find out who might be an actual good match for you, rather than simply following some romantic feeling you experienced when someone you don't know paid attention to you, or touched you, or flirted with you.

It's a lot easier to have a good marriage if you let go of the Hollywood image of what "*falling in love should look and feel like*," and instead focus on what you truly want out of life, and intentionally go after those things in your own life, and finding someone who wants to go in a similar or complementary direction.

GROWING IN LOVE VS. FALLING IN LOVE

Even though *falling* in love feels nice, *growing* in love is how to build a lasting relationship. You still need those romantic feelings, but they're not supposed to be the driver. They're actually much better suited to being the destination.

My husband led me extremely well when we were dating. We're both logical and strategic people, so it worked really well for us. He was explicit with his intentions, asking me for a Skype Coffee Date, instead of simply a video call. Telling me at the end of the date that he had a good time and wanted to take me on another one.

We ended up chatting in between the official dates, which was good because, at one point before the official second date, he let me know that if things were still going well after the third date, he'd ask me to be his girlfriend.

I kind of freaked out internally upon hearing that, because I wasn't anywhere near being in a relationship with this man I had only just met. Especially after having gotten out of an almost four-year-long relationship with no end in sight. I was burnt out on being a girlfriend and ready to be a wife!

At one point, I noticed that it seemed like my now husband had started getting feelings for me, but I still felt nothing. I was thoroughly enjoying our conversations, but I wasn't really there emotionally.

I asked God about this because I had no intention of leading him on without a romantic end in sight. We weren't friends, we were dating! So, I asked God to either help me end things in our next conversation or to help me begin to feel.

It was as if God opened the floodgates between my heart and mind pretty quickly in our next conversation. I have had a tendency to shut off the connection between my heart and mind, and only listen to my head.

It's great in most circumstances since leading with your emotions seems to get a lot of people in trouble. However, having your heart show you signals that you take into account when letting your head

lead is actually the best way to do things. Your feelings are valid even if they're not always accurate.

Like a child who feels abandoned when one of their parents goes on a work trip, the reality is obviously that they haven't been abandoned, but their feelings are still valid and need to be affirmed.

Let's go back to what God was doing in that conversation. Upon having my heart access restored, I saw a picture in my mind that I'd seen once before while dating my husband.

I was sitting across from a friend outside of a cafe that had seating on the sidewalk closest to the wall of the cafe. Think in the style of maybe Rome, or Paris. My husband had walked up and struck up a conversation with me. The first time I saw the picture, I was still sitting while he was standing there talking to me, but this time, the image changed. I saw myself standing up, and as I stood, I realized that I could fit fully erect and still be covered by his arm.

Although we had never met in person, this image turned out to be true. However, the image meant so much more to me than simply how we would fit physically. It was speaking to my dreams and my potential.

In both of my previous relationships, I'd felt the need to lead, but I was done with that and was looking for a man who could actually lead me. The man I was video chatting with seemed like such a man.

God was showing me through that image that regardless of how far I'd go, and how much of my potential I'd achieve, this man would still be able to cover me and lead me. The relief I felt was great! It was like taking a breath for the first time in a long time. With this man, I'd be able to soar high, and wide, and he'd not only be able to keep up but even *lead* me in it.

After over three years of marriage, I can attest to the reality of that realization.

We both agree that we didn't *FALL* in love, but we *GREW* in love. The more secrets we shared, and the more we got to know about each other, the more we liked each other. Not to mention how God was our wingman to each other. That really made a difference.

In conclusion, it's better to grow in love than to fall in love, as falling in love means it happens without commitment, whereas growing in love means that you're doing something purposefully and intentionally, and together with the other person, instead of separately.

Another thing that I made sure to do was to pray before our first date, and even invite some friends to pray with me, so that when I went on the first date, I'd be able to stay clear-headed and present as to where we were, instead of letting my heart, or imagination run away with the possibilities of where this could lead. We were going on a first coffee date, which meant no commitment, no future plans, no relationship.

Women have a tendency to be in relationships while men date. My husband shared with me that even though we weren't in a relationship yet, he wasn't going to go on a date with another woman as long as we were still dating. It's not wise for a man to do so, even if the woman is aware that they're just dating, because her heart may not agree, and that can damage something that could become something more, given time.

There's a difference between dating exclusively, and simply not going on dates with others while going on dates with a certain person. One is a commitment, and the other is courtesy.

A lot of people use rose-colored glasses while dating, and have a hard time hearing from their friends who can see red flags, which is why I highly recommend starting to practice letting your imagination and heart stay at the level of commitment that you are at, and grow naturally, rather than letting your mind take you down the aisle before you are even in an official relationship.

This is one of the ways that will help you see clearer if this is actually a person you want to be with, without getting your emotions all tangled up and involved, as emotions can make it hard to see reality.

Learning to grow in love will also set you up for continuing to have a healthy and loving relationship once you are married, as you have been practicing connecting and sharing secrets and getting to know the other person already before you said 'I do'.

The foundation of the relationship will be a whole lot more solid than if you just spent time together and shared emotions. Having asked the hard questions, first of yourself and then of the person you are dating, having gradually shared more and more secrets and dreams, means that you're way more likely to end up with someone whom you will enjoy spending time with for decades rather than just months or a few years.

You will have started to integrate your dreams and theirs, and are able to check if where they wanna go is actually where you wanna go.

One of the reasons I broke up with my first adult boyfriend was when I realized that I didn't want to live in either of the countries that he wanted to live in and that he didn't really like one of the countries I wanted to live in. There was another option but neither of us would have really wanted to live in that fourth country. There were other reasons as well, but that was a big one that I hadn't really allowed myself to consider before.

I had *picked him,* so I wanted to make things work. But it's a really bad idea to think like that, especially if it means to compromise yourself and your dreams.

This is part of why I invited my husband to add a chapter to this book about "Dating is a sorting game", as that was what he was doing for years before we met. He wasn't looking for a relationship, he was looking for a wife, sorting for a wife, and he didn't waste time on women who didn't fit what he wanted.

Once you are married, there will be moments where you will compromise what you want for what your spouse wants, but if you have chosen your spouse purposefully, those moments will be temporary, and done with an end in mind, where you both get what you want in the long run.

This is why growing in love is a much better idea than falling in love, as the intentionality and purposefulness of learning to grow in love will set you up for knowing what you're getting into, and learning how to handle things that come up that you may not fully agree with.

PICKING A LIFE PARTNER, NOT JUST A HOTTIE

Media tells us to go for the person we find attractive, and it is true that we need to find our spouse attractive, but that isn't the main component in picking a spouse.

As I observed people as a single, I realized that I would place men in 3 categories, not appealing, fine, and appealing. Most men were somewhere in the fine section, as the scale was more gradient than simply 3 points.

Another observation I made was that when a man showed his passion, he climbed the scales. Someone who was close to the not appealing side would jump closer to the appealing side, simply by expressing his passion, even if I wasn't personally interested in that passion.

If he had a bad character, he'd sink in the scales. Movies usually make Jocks out to be hot, full of themselves, and sometimes even cruel. These kinds of men never appealed to me. The super nice guys who would do anything anyone asked without standing up for themselves and showing who they were, weren't appealing either, regardless of their cuteness factor.

Picking a good spouse is more than just how they look, it's about picking someone you want to do life with. Someone you wanna clean the house with when neither of you want to clean but you want your house to look nice before guests arrive. It's about going to the DMV. It's about being stuck in traffic with someone who will make the time feel shorter. It's about picking someone who you are okay to come home to after a rough day when you don't want to see anyone. It's about partnership and companionship.

It's about picking someone who will be strong when you're weak, still respect you when you're different from them, and someone who wants the best for you, and you for them, regardless of the situation.

My husband has mentioned learning that there are three kinds of marriages, but he's only remembered two out of the three. As I tried to look into where he found this information, I was having a hard time since what came up didn't seem to align with my husband's memory of

what the three kinds were referring to.

I kept coming across two positive types and one negative type. The first one is from a book called "Marriage on Mission: How Strengthening Your Marriage Multiplies Your Missional Impact" by Tom and Sandi Blaylock, but this is not where my husband got his information. My husband mentioned getting it from Alison Armstrong, and the two likely places he came across this were from "Celebrating Partnership" or "The Queen's Code", though neither of these explicitly mentions three distinct styles, according to my research.

However, based on what my husband has shared and my own observations, I came up with three healthy styles of marriage.

My husband and I do everything together, and fall into the face-to-face, connected, or inseparable marriage style.

Next, there is the shoulder-to-shoulder, missional, or balanced partnership marriage style. These spouses are highly task-oriented and will have a balance between togetherness and connection with a higher value for getting things done. They might work on separate projects but their values and vision still align.

The last style is a healthy version of a couple who spend a lot of time apart. They have a much higher need for independence and doing their own thing, and it can be completely different than what their spouse spends their day doing. From the outside, it can look like they're living apart but they're actually still together. They have figured out how to stay connected even if they're not physically together very often.

This means that not every marriage is going to look the same, but it can still be healthy and good. As I mentioned, my husband and I spend all of our time together, and after over three years, we still love it.

We've met up with one of my husband's friends a few times but I've never met his wife, as they are not like us. The instinct in us to wonder if they're actually doing okay is strong, but we're pretty sure they're just a different kind of couple. Knowing that there are different kinds of marriages is really helpful.

It can be really helpful to figure out what kind of marriage you think would suit you. For me to be with someone who would prefer to do everything on their own and then come together only on some occasions would pretty quickly be devastating.

A clue to figuring out which kind of marriage is best suited for you might be to look at the 5 Love Languages. I'll cover them in a later chapter, but for now, I'll just leave you with this point.

If you are a high quality time person, you are more likely to be a person who would prefer to spend a lot of time with your spouse, compared to someone who is a high gifts person, as they can feel loved at a distance, as long as there's a gift involved. Most people have more than one love language though, so it probably depends on more than just your top love language.

Marriage is way more than just those romantic moments with a hottie that Hollywood pushes on us. It's about picking someone you enjoy life with. Someone who suits your pace and style of life. It's about picking someone whom you feel attracted to, but whom you would also like to do boring or disgusting things with.

If you're the kind who wants to walk your own path and to only come together with your spouse on certain occasions or in the evenings, that's okay too. If that's the right fit for you, your marriage can thrive in such a situation as well, even if someone who is more of the constantly together kind might express concern.

This is another reason why being intentional about who you choose as your spouse will make your marriage easier or harder. If you are suited for one kind of marriage but marry someone who is better suited for a different kind, it can create a lot of conflict. It can still work, but you'd probably need to make a lot of deals and have a lot of conversations about it, so you both get what you want and can have a thriving married life. I'll be going into how to make deals in a later chapter, so you can learn how to handle situations where you realize you are different from your chosen spouse.

MARRIAGE IS MORE ABOUT THE LITTLE THINGS THAN ROMANCE

One of the common pitfalls in relationships is letting our imagination run away from us. It's easy to see someone we like and then imagine what might be. Girls might practice writing their name with the last name of the boy they like, even if they're not even dating. Young women have a tendency to start imagining their wedding day when a man asks them out on a first date. I believe some men also have this tendency but it's probably focused on other things.

However, most people forget to think about what happens after the wedding. Movies tend to show it as a drag and awful and everything going downhill, but that is not true.

Marriage can be amazing and the best adventure you ever went on.

A lot of people struggle with loneliness, and the best way to fill this void is actually to ask God to fill it. However, even God said, "It is not good for man to be alone", and then He created the woman.

As I was growing up, I did a lot of traveling where I would make friends on mission trips or at bible schools, but then I had to go back home where I was pretty much alone.

This created a longing inside me to find a spouse because, unlike all my other friends who would disperse across the globe, a husband would be going to the same place as me.

Movies make romance very appealing. The thought of a guy coming to pick up a lady, giving her flowers and chocolate, and taking her to a fancy restaurant where he whispers sweet little nothings in her ear all night, sounds fun but has no substance. It's all about emotions, but life is about so much more.

At one point, I realized that I didn't like butterflies. No, I'm not referring to the creature, but rather the feeling in one's stomach. The reason I didn't like them was because they were an indicator that things were progressing faster physically than substantially. The commitment level wasn't there yet, and the connection wasn't there yet. It could literally be anyone. To me, it felt almost selfish rather than a way to

connect to another human being.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I grew in love with my husband, instead of falling in love with him. But there was another part of that that I didn't mention.

Our entire dating relationship happened over video calls. This required us to use our words, instead of relying on physical affection. There were many times after getting really close to him, when I wished I could have just thrown myself on him to hug him, but I couldn't.

This was actually a blessing, as we were physically incapable of accidentally getting swept up in a moment and crossing boundaries that we didn't want to cross.

Because we got married the day after I arrived in the country, my husband suggested waiting to kiss me until I was his wife, and I agreed. When he picked me up from the airport, we finally hugged for the first time and it was great! Even though we had never met in person before, I knew him really well, so there was only one awkward moment.

As he was pulling my suitcase at the airport, we bumped into each other's arms a couple of times, and then I decided to take charge. I grabbed his arm and put mine around it, in an arm hook, while telling him, "Let me fix that," or something along those lines. This removed all the awkwardness and established a physical connection that we had yet to establish due to only dating over video calls.

We stopped halfway back to his parents' place, where we would get married the next day. He claimed to need to get gas, but it turned out it was really just an excuse. He had told me he hoped it would rain, and it did. In fact, when he pulled up to the pump, I had to carefully jump out of the car to avoid a huge, deep puddle right outside my door!

When I came back from the bathroom, he directed me to one of the few dry spots under the awning and pulled out a ring, and proposed. I later found out it was a reenactment of how Jim finally proposed to Pam from The Office. Yes, this was romantic, but I wouldn't say the four hours we spent driving in the car were very romantic. They were fun, but they were normal life.

If you are single and hoping to get married, it would be better to

look at your own life and take note of what you do when no one else is around. What do you do when you come home after a long day at work? What do you want to do on the weekends if you could have it all your way? But also, what do you actually do even if you think you might have wanted to do something else?

Marriage is about spending those moments with someone else. To have a spouse in your space when you're wasting time, or relaxing.

One thing I realized I wanted in a husband was someone who was good at driving, as when I grew up, I was the "designated driver". I don't mean I drove drunk people, as no one in my family drinks. I mean, if we were going anywhere, most of the time I was the driver.

I enjoy driving, but not all the time. For part of our honeymoon, my husband took me to the California coast and drove through the redwoods. The roads there are really windy, and at one point, he was driving kind of fast, and yet he was able to stay within the lines of the lane. I was impressed at his competence and was able to relax and enjoy the ride.

Marriage isn't about complacency but about growing comfortable with another person whom you know is going to be by your side for the rest of your life.

So, how do you keep the feelings alive as time goes by? One of my old mentors mentioned how whenever she started feeling distant from her husband, she needed to learn something new about him.

I shared this tip with my husband and he really liked it. Feelings of love are not something that happens to us, but something that we are responsible for.

I've noticed that if I start telling my husband what I like about him, I start to feel connected to him again, and I start crushing on him.

When we were first married, my husband would say that he was in love with me. Though I knew I *loved* him very much, I would then question if I was actually *in love* with him. Then I noticed my own reaction to him, how I would light up when we got eye contact, or I saw him coming. "Yep, I am *in love* with him too!" I just hadn't been sure of what the definition was.

How is marriage more about the little things than romance?

Romance usually refers to big events. The guy picks up the lady and goes out to eat, but life is so much more than that.

Marriage is having dinner together almost every night, and still enjoying each other's company. It's about the inside jokes. It's about glancing over at the other person while they're sleeping and smiling to yourself because you got yourself a cutie.

So, really, the little things *are* the romance. They're the things that connect me to my husband and cause me to begin to crush on him.

A while ago, I was having issues with charging my phone. The cord was breaking and super finicky to use, but so was the charging port in my actual phone. My husband had offered to get me a new cord but hadn't gotten around to it yet.

One day, I was really suffering with it, to the point of considering not using my phone anymore, because nothing seemed to work.

Even though part of what caused him to want to assist me that day was to stop getting splashed by my suffering, he also actually wanted to help me. He found an old wireless charger he still owned and altered an older USB cord to fit into the awkwardly angled port in the wireless charger so it was able to get power.

Even though he technically didn't do what he had said he would, what he did ended up being a much better solution, solving two of the issues I was having, and one that I hadn't been able to figure out myself. Simply getting a new cord would have still left me with the issues of getting the port in my phone to actually connect to the charger.

It's a relatively small thing, but it meant so much to me. I felt noticed, and respected because he wasn't rude or dismissive towards me, he simply solved the problem he had already asked if he could help me with.

This is also part of why partnership is so great! Having a spouse that you can change ideas with is really helpful. It's someone who can point out something that simply didn't cross your mind, however obvious it

might seem when you've heard it.

There are way more little things in life than big ones, and this is why finding someone you can get along with and are compatible with when it comes to the little things is going to make marriage so much easier than if you're only focused on the big things that might only happen a few times a year.

How to Prepare Yourself for Marriage

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