



# marriage preparation

the MINISTRY PAPERS

## what are you preparing for?

“There’s so much to prepare. So much to organise and get ready. There’s the cars, the flowers, the rings, the musicians, the order of service. There’s the invitations: how many relatives need to come? How can we possibly squeeze all our friends in? There’s the speeches: who has to speak, who doesn’t? Does Uncle Fred really have to be the MC? Who’s going to make the dress? Who’s going to ice the cake? And then there’s just the cost of it all. Sure it’s exciting, but it’s daunting. It will all just have to get done somehow. There’s no short-cutting the preparation, we’re just going to have to get busy with it...

That’s a problem. You need to stop, take a breath, take one big step back and ask the question: “what are you preparing for?”. If your answer is “a wedding”, you’re wrong. What you’re really preparing for is a *marriage*.

The wedding will come and go. The marriage is ‘until you are parted by death’. The wedding is important in terms of the commitment you make within it, and the chance to celebrate with family and friends. But the marriage is the most important thing. When the last speech has been made, the last bit of cake has been eaten and the wedding day is over, how tragic if all your preparation went into the wedding and not the marriage.

So here’s the thing: get in and get organised with the wedding, not because it’s the most important thing but precisely because it’s not. Make it special but keep it simple. Do what it takes to make sure that wedding preparations don’t take over. Do what it takes to make sure you’ve got time for the preparation that really matters: marriage preparation. That’s what this paper is all about: building foundations for a Christ-centred marriage.

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: ‘the ministry training church’ and ‘meeting one to one’.

Connect. Grow. Serve. After **connecting** to God through trusting in Christ, a vital way we can **grow** is through a growth group and a vital way we can **serve** is through a ministry team. This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help your growth group leader (or pastor) prepare you for a Christ-centred marriage.



### read **Philippians 2:1-11**

1. All the “ifs” in verse 1 can be translated as “since”. What do all Christians share in being saved?

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2. What response should this produce in us (verse 2)?

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3. What attitudes will we avoid (verse 3)?

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4. What attitudes will we adopt instead (verses 3-4)?

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5. How can we best learn this attitude (verses 5-11)?

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6. The passage isn’t specifically about marriage relationships but applies very well to them. List some of the ways.

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7. From a different angle, what will it mean for you, as a couple, to look to the interests of others?

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# commitment

We were reminded in Philippians that any relationship is the coming together of two sinful people. They have the potential to be selfish and hurtful to each other. In Christ, however, it is also the coming together of two people who have been forgiven much. And there is the potential through keeping a focus on Christ to turn from selfishness to service. The point is, this will only happen through commitment. Relationships are hard work, and marriage is no exception. But commitment to Christ, and commitment to each other in Christ is the foundation for a healthy, growing marriage.



## read **Genesis 2**

1. What is the picture, *in creation*, of God, husband and wife?

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## read **Genesis 3**

2. What is the picture, *through sin*, of God, husband and wife?

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## read **Ephesians 5:21-33**

3. What is the picture, *in Christ*, of God, husband and wife?

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4. In what way does this passage offer us the possibility of marriage as God intended it?

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5. What will be the key to maintaining commitment in marriage (who does Paul direct both husband and wife to)?

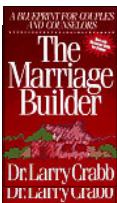
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6. Discuss the vows (in the column opposite) as an expression of this commitment to each other in Christ.

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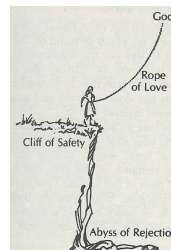


## 'the marriage builder' by L. Crabb

This is a great book to help you explore more deeply the biblical principles of a Christ-centred marriage. Here's a taste:

*"Christ has made me secure and significant. Whether I feel it or not, it is true. I am instructed by God to believe that my needs are already met, and therefore I am to live selflessly, concerned only with the needs of others. The more I choose to live according to the truth of what Christ has done for me, the more I will come to sense the reality of my security and significance in him"* (p21)

Our fear of rejection makes it scary to 'dive' into focusing on the needs of our spouse, instead of our own. But when we stay focused on God's love for us in Christ we know that we are never ultimately rejected. The security of Christ's love enables us to turn to love each other.



## the consents

[groom], will you take [bride] to be your wife, to live together according to God's Word, Will you give her the honour due to her as your wife and, forsaking all others, love and protect her, as long as you both shall live? I will

[bride], will you take [groom] to be your husband, to live together according to God's Word, Will you give him the honour due to him as your husband and, forsaking all others, love and protect him, as long as you both shall live? I will

## the vows

I, [groom], in the presence of God take you [bride] to be my wife to have and to hold from this day forward for better for worse for richer for poorer in sickness and in health to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live This is my solemn vow and promise

I, [bride], in the presence of God take you [groom] to be my husband to have and to hold from this day forward for better for worse for richer for poorer in sickness and in health to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live This is my solemn vow and promise

## exchange of rings

[bride], with this ring I wed you with all that I am and all that I have I honour you in the name of God. Amen.



[groom], with this ring I wed you with all that I am and all that I have I honour you in the name of God. Amen.

**Discuss the vows together. Why do you think "for better, for worse" needs to be promised?**



# communication

The picture is of an ear for a reason. God gave us one mouth and two ears for a reason. When we think of communication we might most immediately think of what we say. That's clearly a part of it. And some of us need to learn how to better express ourselves. But the part that we all need to get better at is listening. Listening really well is the key to good communication. If we're going to dive off that cliff into serving the needs of our spouse, we're going to have to do some listening to know what the needs are. That's what this diagram is all about.

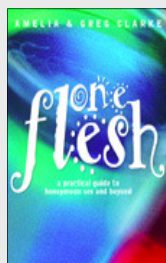
## God talk

This page of our marriage preparation paper is devoted to the issue of communication. That makes sense because communication is so important. Good communication is crucial to a healthy marriage. However, if all we discussed here is your communication with each other, there'd be something even more crucial missing: and that's communication with God. A very practical way to make real the 'focus on Christ' we've studied so far is to make Christ the basis of your communication. By reading the Bible and praying together, you're not just talking, you're talking in Christ. You're listening to him in his Word and talking to him in prayer. You're talking together about him. And in terms of the 'level 5' discussed in the diagram on the right, it's hard to read the Bible & pray—and communicate with God in that way—without entering into that important sort of communication with each other. **Discuss how you can better grow this habit together in the time leading up to your marriage.**

## sex

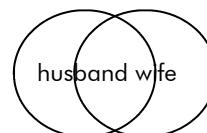
There we are, we've mentioned it. And our reluctance to mention it, talk about it and think biblically and helpfully about it is a real problem. God isn't embarrassed by sex—he invented it and gave it to us. It's a wonderful gift when used properly. But it can also be a source of great frustration and hurt if not used properly. It's going to be important for you to listen well to each other in this part of your relationship. You will need good communication for good sex. Indeed, in terms of the intimacy discussed in the diagram opposite, it's easy to see how good communication grows the sort of intimacy that is expressed in sex.

*It's a good idea to find an older Christian couple you can talk to about sex. Also, 'One Flesh' by Greg & Amelia Clarke is a helpful book on the subject.*



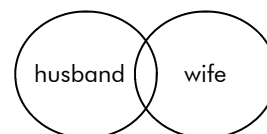
## 5. sharing needs

e.g. "I need to spend more time with you rather than work taking over our lives"



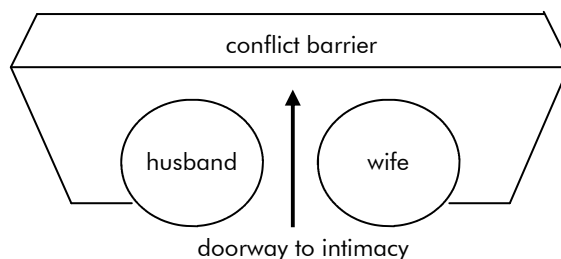
## 4. sharing feelings

e.g. "I'm really worried about our finances and I'd like you to treat this seriously"



## 3. sharing opinions/ concerns/expectations

e.g. "this weather could be bad for business"



## 2. sharing facts

e.g. "apparently this is the hottest summer on record"



## 1. speaking in clichés

e.g. "hot enough for you?"



## communication, communication, communication

Communication is the key. It's the key that turns the commitment we've been studying so far into a growing healthy relationship. Take a look at the diagram above. It shows five levels of communication. The goal for a healthy marriage is to be able to communicate regularly at level 5. That's going to mean making plenty of time to talk, because we don't always move straight into that level of communication. But there's a reason other than time that often stops us dead at level 3. It's the tendency we can have to shut down communication rather than opening it up when we feel threatened in some way. We have a choice to make at that point. We can choose not to listen, and we will slide back down to levels 1 & 2. Or we can choose to listen and go through the doorway to intimacy... to levels 4 & 5. It's about putting the 'cliff' idea from 'The Marriage Builder' into practice.

- discuss together how you can grow in your communication
- discuss ideas for how might you move through the conflict barrier (e.g. asking more questions rather than making accusations, clarifying what your spouse means, really wanting to know how they feel, etc)
- refer to 'The Marriage Builder' ch4 on communication for more ideas.

# getting to know each other

Growing a relationship is all about getting to know each other. You may feel that you already know each other very well. But in reality, there's always more to discover. Set yourself the goal to learn more and more about the other: their background, family experience, their hurts, their hopes, their fears. Essential in "getting to know each other" is the 'God Talk' mentioned on page 3. It's God who knows us best, and his Word cuts to our hearts. So reading it together, talking honestly, and praying is necessary not only for knowing each other, but also for knowing the God who made and loves you both.



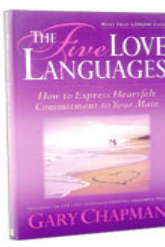
## useful resources

Here's a few resources that can help with getting to know each other, and the particular challenges you might face as a couple.

Below is a table showing "The Five Love Languages" from Gary Chapman's book. Refer to the book for explanations of the languages.

Rate from 1 to 5 (where 1 is most important) each of these love languages, first for you, and then for your partner. Don't cheat!

	you	your partner
words of affirmation		
quality time		
receiving gifts		
acts of service		
physical touch		

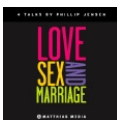


- compare and discuss what you each wrote
- how well do you know each other?
- was there anything you found surprising?
- develop a plan for regular 'get to know each other' time



An excellent resource to help with the 'getting to know each other' process is the 'PREPARE' questionnaire. You need

one session to fill out the questionnaire and a few more to discuss the results. It is a very effective diagnostic tool. It identifies issues you need to communicate more about (from finances to sexual expectations to personality issues to leisure time...). More importantly, it assesses the health of your communication across the board. It comes with a workbook of suggestions to help make progress on the issues identified.



## love, sex and marriage

The above resources, along with many others around are useful in helping your marriage. But let's keep coming back to God's Word. Without a biblical framework, the insights of these resources will be useless. Good bible teaching on marriage is essential. Phillip Jensen's biblical and down-to-earth teaching on this very important topic in his talks on 'love, sex and marriage' have helped many people in negotiating the minefield of sexuality, dating and marriage. Topics covered include:

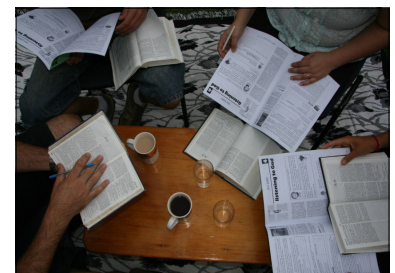
- The Sexual Revolution and Modern Culture*
- Guidance and the Voice of God*
- The Concept of Marriage*
- The Reasons for Marriage, Sex and Singleness*
- Making Decisions about Love, Sex and Marriage*
- Separation, Divorce and Remarriage*

## growth groups, accountability & marriage

The table below shows a number of key goals that our growth groups are aiming for as we seek to encourage each other. It's all about relationships. The growth group is a context in which we can be accountable for all the important relationships in our lives.

The third goal relates to growing relationships with those in our **family/household**, as servants. We are to serve our spouse by having the servant attitude of Jesus. And we need a great deal of encouragement and prayer in doing this. We need accountability that we are reading the Bible and praying with our spouse. We need accountability that we are growing a healthy Christ-centred marriage. We need the input of learning from God's word to keep shaping Christ-like character and commitment. We need the opportunity to ask others to pray for our marriage.

Of course, it's not just about us either. As you prepare for your marriage don't get so consumed with each other that you forget the needs of those around you. Involvement in a growth group will not only be vital to meeting your needs, but is a great opportunity to serve others.



a growing relationship with **God**, especially through personal Bible reading and prayer

growing relationships with **other believers**, especially through the growth group

growing relationships with those in their **family/household**, as servants

growing relationships with **unbelievers**, especially through personal evangelism

growing relationships with the **whole church** in mission, serving in a ministry team