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your marriage masterpiece

discovering
GOD'S AMAZING DESIGN
for your life together

AL JANSSEN



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL

Your Marriage Masterpiece

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For decades our society has fostered a “low view” of marriage and easy divorce. With *Your Marriage Masterpiece*, Al Janssen makes a compelling case for the sacredness and permanence God intended for this unique relationship. This book will not only enlarge your vision and understanding of matrimony, but it will deepen your understanding of the incredible love of Christ. This is exactly the kind of “high view” of marriage that is needed in the church and in our culture today!

BILL MCCARTNEY

Founder & President, Promise Keepers

Just as the North Star provides vision and guidance for seamen in various circumstances, so will *Your Marriage Masterpiece* provide vision and guidance for couples to maintain their bearings as they navigate the treacherous waters of life together.

DR. TONY EVANS

Senior Pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

President, The Urban Alternative

A book is only as great as the heart of its author. *Your Marriage Masterpiece* is a great book because it has a great author. I’ve known Al Janssen for several years, and he, like this insightful book, is legit. Marriage needs creativity, integrity, and all-out commitment, not just to stay together but to thrive joyously through the years! That is precisely the message of this book and the man who wrote it. This book is a first aid kit for the hurting, Gatorade for the exhausted, and the bow of William Tell for the marriage that’s succeeding but wants to get to the heart of the bull’s-eye.

JOE WHITE

President, Kanakuk Kamps

Your Marriage Masterpiece provides us with the most important ingredient for a successful marriage: understanding the purpose of marriage, from God's intention. What a refreshing and revitalizing message!

MICHAEL A. ROSEBUSH, PH.D.

Vice President of Education, Focus on the Family

Al Janssen in *Your Marriage Masterpiece* offers a unique picture of the tapestry of marriage that will inspire you to make yours go the distance.

DAVID AND CLAUDIA ARP

Founders of Marriage Alive Seminars and

Authors of *10 Great Dates to Revitalize Your Marriage*

Al Janssen combines creativity and a solid grasp of biblical truths to produce a fresh perspective for married couples. Whether you're a newlywed or celebrating your 50th anniversary, experiencing a fulfilling marriage or going through a heartbreaking separation, God has an important message to share with you. It's right here in *Your Marriage Masterpiece*.

RANDY ALCORN

Director, Eternal Perspective Ministries

Author of *Deadline* and *Safely Home*

Al Janssen has written a book on the Good Book that tells us how a sick marriage can heal, a good marriage can get better, and the best marriage can understand itself. No book I have read in recent years helps me understand how God feels and what the Bible has to say quite like this one.

DR. CALVIN MILLER

Beeson Divinity School

A foundation book for our time. No other institution is more basic to our nation than marriage. *Your Marriage Masterpiece* is a powerful, biblically based reminder of what God had in mind when He called two to become one. If you are looking for a wedding gift that will encourage a couple just starting out, or for a book that will breathe life into a marriage that needs a refresher, you've found it!

DENNIS RAINEY

Executive Director, FamilyLife

Most marriage books start and end with "how to." But Al Janssen asks a much deeper question, "Why did God create marriage?" The answer can provide each reader with the foundation for doing all those "how to's," as well as giving him or her a wonderful picture of just why marriage is so important to Almighty God. Art teachers say to their students, "Study the Masters." For those serious about having loving, lasting relationships, I say, study *Your Marriage Masterpiece*.

JOHN TRENT, PH.D.

Author, Speaker, and President, Encouraging Words

By delving into God's model for marriage in *Your Marriage Masterpiece*, Al Janssen gives a foundation for what I have been teaching all these years.

GARY SMALLEY

Author and Speaker, Founder of Smalley Relationship Center

Our longtime friend, Al Janssen, has completed a "touchdown pass" with this book, *Your Marriage Masterpiece*. We will be recommending it to couples, newly married to celebrating the golden years, who seek to go the distance in their marriages.

NORM AND BOBBE EVANS

Pro Athletes Outreach

To
Jo Ann
The woman God chose for me.
I love the picture He is painting in our marriage.



To
Focus on the Family
This is why we promote the institution of marriage as
“a permanent, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman,
regardless of trials, sickness, financial reverses, or
emotional stresses that may ensue.”

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Foreword

Earlier this week, while taking a Sabbath rest from our busy schedule, I took my wife, Barb, out on a date. Married more than 32 years, after two kids and five grandchildren, dating my wife is more fun than ever. We had a late lunch in a quaint restaurant and then stopped at an art store where Barb had worked before we were married.

A portrait artist by training, over the years Barb's artistic talents had been pushed aside by the busyness of life, the time pressures, our ministry, and the needs of those who call her wife, mother, and Gaga. But as we walked the aisles of this artist's haven, I saw something in Barb's face. As she picked out brushes, paints, and supplies, her countenance lifted. She was envisioning time in her studio bringing a portrait of our five grandchildren to life on canvas.

Like the masterpiece in Barb's vision is God's masterpiece of marriage. The Creator did indeed dream up the whole thing called marriage. He envisioned it as a way to draw us to Himself. Throughout this great country, couples are establishing beachheads that champion marriage—marriages that celebrate God's original masterpiece—and have embraced the truth that at the end of the day our marriages are not about us . . . they are about glorifying Jesus Christ. Your marriage and my marriage do matter to God, our churches, our communities, and ultimately our culture, because marriage—biblical marriage—is God's first line of defense of the gospel.

Yet for so many in our culture, a perfect storm is choking out His creation. Many are choosing the counterfeit lifestyle of cohabitation, believing it will satisfy. Others are walking away from marriage

concluding that they must have made a mistake the day their marriage was entered into. And finally, others have given up altogether on the institution of marriage, believing that it is outdated and no longer effective in our time. Our flesh, our culture, and Satan—the enemies of our marriages—all conspire to destroy the masterpiece.

In the midst of this battle, Al Janssen's book *Your Marriage Masterpiece* paints the picture of God's design for marriage—marriage that honors Him and establishes a foundation upon which a husband and wife can capture His plan. Clearly, God's design is still as vibrant and foundational as it was in the Garden of Eden.

I've known Al and Jo for 20 years and they are the real deal. Al writes with passion, he draws us to the original Author of marriage, and he honors the reader by blending biblical truth, gut-level honesty and integrity, and a road map whereby we can be found faithful.

I can't wait until Barb someday pulls back the cover and shows me her masterpiece. Meanwhile, I'm thankful that you don't have to wait for Al Janssen's book, *Your Marriage Masterpiece*, because you're holding it in your hands. And like me, I'm certain you are grateful that before you were born, God had already painted a masterpiece, in His Word, of what a distinctively Christian marriage looks like.

Thank you, Al Janssen, for pulling back the cover and shining the light on *His* masterpiece of marriage.

—Dr. Gary and Barbara Rosberg—America's Family Coaches
Coauthors of *6 Secrets to a Lasting Love*, *The 5 Sex Needs of Men and Women*, and *The 5 Love Needs of Men and Women*

Prologue



Restoring the Masterpiece

Across the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel spans one of the greatest artistic triumphs in history. From 1508 to 1512, the artist Michelangelo lay on his back and painstakingly painted the creation, fall, and destruction of mankind by flood. One does not have to be an art expert to appreciate the genius of this creative work. Rarely has anyone so beautifully depicted the human form. Never has the scope of the divine and human drama been so powerfully portrayed.

Michelangelo's magnificent art started to fade almost immediately after he painted it. Within a century of completing his work, no one remembered what his original frescoes had really looked like. In subsequent centuries, well-intentioned restorers covered the work with a varnish in a short-lived attempt to revitalize the colors. That only served as a magnet for more smoke and dirt until, as painter Biagio Biagetti described it in 1936, "we see the colors of the Sistine ceiling as if through smoked glass."

In 1981, a scaffold was erected and plans were made to clean other artists' priceless frescoes that also adorn the chapel. At the top

of the scaffold, the restorers were able to reach one of the lunettes of Michelangelo's ceiling masterpiece—a representation of Mathan and Eleazar, ancestors of Christ. For Fabrizio Mancinelli, director of restoration work in the famous chapel, this was the chance he needed to perform a critical experiment. A special solution called AB-57 was given to chief restorer Gianluigi Colalucci. Carefully the pair climbed the scaffolding. Colalucci knelt down at the bottom corner of the lunette and gently washed a minute portion of the painting with distilled water. He brushed on the mild cleaning agent, let it sit for just a moment, then removed it with a sponge dipped in distilled water.

Twenty-four hours later, the pair repeated the process. Mancinelli was pleased by the results. “We will clean the complete lunette!” he proclaimed. In the following days, Colalucci painstakingly repeated the cleaning process, covering only a square inch or two each time. After all, this was Michelangelo, and one didn't take chances with the great master!

As the two restorers proceeded, they grew increasingly excited. They invited art experts from the Vatican and throughout Italy to examine the work. When the lunette was completely cleaned, the result was a stunning display. No one had imagined that beneath centuries of grime lay such vibrant colors. This was not the Michelangelo known by art critics. That artist was the master of form, his paintings resembling sculpture more than paint on plaster. This “new” artist, never before viewed by modern eyes, was also a master of color—azure, malachite green, rose, and lavender of such nuance that one could only gaze in amazement.

The success of the first lunette emboldened the restoration team to tackle all of the lunettes on the entrance wall, and to make plans for the most ambitious restoration project in art history—the cleaning of the entire ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

A six-yard-wide bridge was built for the project and attached in the original holes used for Michelangelo's bridge. The restoration was done inch by inch. Cleaning solutions were adjusted. For portions where Michelangelo had painted on dry plaster, a different technique was used compared to those places where he'd painted on wet plaster.

The task was completed on December 31, 1989. It had taken twice as long to clean the ceiling as the artist had needed to paint the original. But the result was breathtaking. For the first time in nearly 500 years, people viewed this masterpiece the way it was originally intended, in all of its color and beauty.

Not surprisingly, there was controversy over the restoration. Some critics protested that the process had actually destroyed the work, and that Michelangelo would pound his head in frustration if he could view it today. But most experts agreed that years of meticulous research had uncovered the true intent of the artist. It's just that no one expected the results to be so stunning.¹



There is another artistic masterpiece that needs serious restoration work. It is the relationship called marriage, and it was designed by the greatest Artist in history.

Casual observation would lead one to conclude that the institution of marriage is not highly esteemed today. Each year millions of couples worldwide end their marriages via divorce. Movies and television programs glorify casual sex, cohabitation, gay unions—virtually any alternative to traditional marriage between one man and one woman for life. Some social observers are daring to suggest that marriage is no longer necessary or even desirable. Yet, for an institution in such supposed decline, it is striking that nine out of ten people worldwide choose to marry at least once in their lives.²

Most if not all of those couples begin their unions with the hope that their relationship will last for life. Sadly, many have their expectations of living “happily ever after” together dashed.

Perhaps it is time to answer the fundamental question—“Why marriage?” Why bother with the obligations, sacrifices, and even the joys of marriage? Why risk lifelong unhappiness if marriage is nothing more than a legal arrangement between two adults? Why remain in a tough marriage if there is little hope of lasting improvement?

To answer these and other questions, we need to examine what marriage looked like in its original state. How has the picture faded in the passage of time? Can we discover the Artist’s original intent? Are solvents available to clean the masterpiece and restore it to its initial luster?

Let us lift the veil and explore the great Artist’s work. Perhaps we can discover what our marriages should look like and how they can shine in their intended colors.



Whatever Happened to Happily Ever After?

Only seven months after my wedding day, my comfortable assumptions about marriage were challenged at the core.

Jim*¹ stood 6'4" tall and could throw a baseball 94 miles per hour. Yet, over the course of six years, he'd spent only four tantalizing weeks in the major leagues. The rest of his time was spent bouncing from one minor league team to another. Jim and I leaned against his Camaro and talked outside Diablo Stadium in Tempe, Arizona, where Jim had just pitched two innings in a spring training game. It hadn't gone well. Unless there was a dramatic turn of events, in about two weeks Jim would start his seventh season in the minor leagues.

In the late afternoon desert sun, we discussed his future. "Bonnie* thinks I should retire if I don't make the big club this spring," Jim said. "I simply can't do that. I can't give up when I'm this close. I'm no quitter!" Bonnie was Jim's wife, and at most games the striking blond was seen socializing in the wives' section.

"I didn't see Bonnie at the game today," I noted.

“She decided not to come. We had a big fight last night.”

A few evenings earlier, my wife, Jo, and I had enjoyed dinner with the couple and learned that they had been high school sweethearts. Bonnie was a cheerleader; Jim was the star three-sport athlete who signed a lucrative contract out of high school. They’d married after his first season and quickly spent his \$40,000 signing bonus.

Cautiously, I inquired about the cause of their marital discord. Jim shook his head. “The same things we’ve fought about for a couple of years now. Bonnie wants to settle down. She counted the number of homes we’ve lived in since we married. Between nine minor league towns, spring training, and our off-season home, we’ve moved 21 times. She wants me to get a real job, buy a house, and start a family.”

Though I’d only been married for a few months, that didn’t sound unreasonable to me. However, I certainly didn’t feel qualified to be a marriage counselor, so I figured the best thing to do was listen.

“I can’t seem to please her,” Jim said. “She doesn’t understand that I have to do this. I have to go as far as I can in baseball. I simply can’t walk away from the game.”

Of course, every athlete’s career ends sooner or later—usually sooner. In my work with Pro Athletes Outreach I’d met a number of athletes who refused to recognize when it was time to move on to a new phase of life. “Have you given any thought to what you might do after baseball?” I asked.

“Of course I have! I’ve taken a few college classes in the off-season. But nothing really interests me. Bonnie keeps reminding me that I need to plan for the future. I know that! Why does she have to keep nagging me? She’s always bugging me about money—we never have enough to satisfy her.” Unspoken was his hope that

he might someday exchange a paltry minor league salary for a lucrative major league contract.

Jim turned and faced me. He could be an aggressive, intimidating person. That attitude served him well on the pitcher's mound, but I could imagine this in-your-face approach might not be appreciated by his petite wife. Bonnie had already confided to my wife that she was scared of Jim, afraid that one day he might hurt her in one of his fits of anger.

"Al, I'm thinking of leaving Bonnie."

"What! Why?"

"I'm not happy." The words hung there. "God wants me to be happy, doesn't He? Since I'm not happy, then I think I should get a divorce."

"What about her feelings? You can't just leave her!"

"Why? I suppose you are going to tell me that God doesn't want me to divorce."

"Well, yes, that's true. God hates divorce." Since I'd spoken several times to the team in chapel services and Bible studies, Jim was willing to ask me hard questions. But I could tell he didn't really want to know God's views on this particular subject.

"What if I made a mistake? We got married just a year out of high school. We were young. We didn't really know what we were doing. Are you telling me I simply have to gut it out for the rest of my life? God doesn't want me to be miserable, does He?"

I stammered. "No, He doesn't. But surely you two can work things out. I know you must love each other."

"Maybe we did at one time. But now, I just don't have any feelings for Bonnie."

"Feelings come and go. You can get the feelings back!"

Jim shook his head and pulled his car keys from his pocket. "I don't know. Is it worth fighting for an unhappy marriage?"

As my friend drove away, I stood in the parking lot and mulled over his words:

“I’m not happy.”

“I just don’t have any feelings for Bonnie.”

“God doesn’t want me to be miserable, does He?”

“Is it worth fighting for an unhappy marriage?”

Something deeply troubled me. I knew statistically that many marriages failed, but this was my first confrontation with a marriage that was disintegrating before my eyes, and I didn’t know what to say or do. I wasn’t confident that I really understood what the Scriptures taught about this subject; my reactions were more intuitive. Both Jo’s parents and my parents had been married for more than 30 years, and we believed that God had brought us together for life. Were we naïve to believe that our marriage would go the distance just because our parents’ marriages did? Could we really survive against the overwhelming cultural trends of the time?

My conversation raised questions that begged for answers. If someone is not happy, why should he or she stay married? For singles confronting the risk of potential unhappiness within marriage, why get married at all?

The Culture of Self-Fulfillment

When Jo and I were married on August 6, 1977, it was “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, and for as long as we both should live.” At least, those were the words we repeated back to the pastor. Unspoken in those vows was the expectation that we would live happily ever after. Isn’t that what every couple thinks? Of course, we soon realized that our marriage, like every marriage, has its rough spots. Every day doesn’t provide a “happily ever after” experience. Still, the dream persists.

I’ve thought a lot about Jim and Bonnie over the years. They

didn't separate that spring, and he played one more season in the minor leagues before being released. They moved back to their hometown on the East Coast, where Jim found work as a car salesman. Jo and I soon lost touch with them. A few years later, I learned through a mutual friend that Jim and Bonnie never had children, and eventually they did divorce. When I heard that news, I felt a wave of sadness. Again, I wondered what, if anything, might have made the difference for them. Must we simply accept the cultural realities that nearly 50 percent of married couples will eventually divorce?²

But then I wonder, if Jim and Bonnie were unhappy together, why not part company? If marriage hinders the things we seek—self-fulfillment, personal growth, spiritual wholeness—why stick it out? After all, if we marry in order to be happy, then it makes sense that many who are unhappy today opt out, doesn't it?

The experience of Jim and Bonnie is not unusual among our friends. Here are just three examples:

1. I sit in a barber chair as my hairstylist, waving scissors for effect, asks me, "God hates divorce, right?" Yes, I answer, God hates divorce. "So God must hate anyone who gets a divorce?" No, I explain, God loves all, but He hates divorce because it destroys a beautiful creation of His. Why, I probe, is she asking this question? Fighting back tears, she says she has just consulted with a divorce attorney. What should I say to her?

2. My wife talks on the phone with an out-of-state friend who cries as she says, "I've lived without hope for 14 years." Her husband is addicted to pornography. He's perceived as a "good" Christian man, active in the church. But his secret addiction has destroyed the person closest to him and their three children. The man, unable to confront his condition, buries his guilt with alcohol. He frequently comes home drunk and lashes out at anyone within reach. She is considering a separation for her safety and that of the children. Is this a marriage worth fighting to save?

3. A longtime friend, Benjamin*, reveals that he has lived a lie for much of his adult life. He now claims he is really a homosexual. He is leaving his wife and two teenage sons, who are absolutely devastated. The older of the boys is exhibiting destructive behavior, but Benjamin is unmoved. He says he can no longer deny himself sexual fulfillment, even if his family pays a terrible price. Is he right?

Isn't it obvious in these cases that the people involved are unhappy? I wish these were unusual situations, but unfortunately I could recite many examples, and, no doubt, so can you. So why should these people remain married? And why should any young adult observing them even consider marriage?

Why Be Married If I'm Not Happy?

It should come as no surprise that many, in fact, would rather not risk such heartache. *Time* magazine ran a cover story in August 2000 on the phenomenon of many women choosing not to marry. Why? They have decided that "being on their own was simply better than the alternative—being stuck with a man, and in a marriage, that didn't feel right." Thus one woman ended a seven-year relationship because "I wasn't happy. I didn't think I could make him happy and retain my spirit, what makes me shine." Another woman ended a 10-year relationship with a man she says she loves but "is behind her in personal and professional growth."³

Behind such thinking is the view that marriage is disposable, entered into and exited according to an individual's needs. There is a growing sense among some that marriage is a nice thing to have if it fits your lifestyle. If not, there are alternatives. For example, writer and businessman Philip D. Harvey declared in an editorial for the *Washington Post* that "a reasonable level of divorce may be a symptom of a healthy and mobile society." Sure, long marriages can be rewarding for some couples. But for most of us, it's simply not

“natural.” Doesn’t it make more sense, writes Harvey, to have different mates during various stages of life?

Is it not possible that the ideal companion for our younger, child-rearing years will not be the ideal companion for our middle and later years? Is it not reasonable to suggest that the radical differences in the way we live in our fifties and sixties and beyond may be, under many circumstances, most appropriately lived with a different person from the one with whom we reared children?⁴

Manhattan psychotherapist Dr. David M. Fromm doubts whether 30-plus years with one spouse is “natural.” He calls life-long marriage an “old-fashioned idea.” Why? “People really need to feel fulfilled.... I think ultimately it’s individuals [rather than families] that are the foundation of society.”⁵

Articles like this make me wonder why Jo and I are still committed to our marriage after 30 years. Why do I stay with her when she’s in a snippy mood at a certain time of the month? Why do I stay with her when she’s so busy shuttling kids to school and activities, managing the household, and trying to write her own books that I can’t convince her to drop everything for a romantic interlude? I can’t say I’m deliriously happy at those moments.

A far more amazing question is why Jo remains committed to me. What causes her to stay with me when I’m so obsessed with work that my mind isn’t home even when my body is? What causes her to stay with me when I snuggle next to her late at night and snore so loudly she can’t sleep? What causes her to stay with me when I explode in anger because, being no Mr. Fixit, I can’t repair a simple plumbing problem?

Those who know us might explain why we stay together by pointing to Scripture. They could refer to familiar Bible passages

such as Genesis 2:24, which says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, or Malachi 2:16, where God says He hates divorce, or Ephesians 5, where wives are exhorted to submit to their husbands, and husbands are ordered to love their wives.

Certainly those are important verses to us, but none of these passages mentions happiness. Is it assumed? Or, once we're married, do we just grin and bear it? Obviously some of our Christian friends aren't willing to stick it out. They may acknowledge the same verses as we do, but if they're miserable at home, they seem intent on finding an escape clause for their marriage. Are Jo and I any different? Or are we also vulnerable to the forces that tear other couples apart?

Looking for Help

During the course of my career as a writer, editor, and publisher, I have known many wonderful teachers on the subject of marriage. Back in 1980, Jo and I hosted a conference for a dozen couples in Portland, Oregon. The speaker, Gary Smalley, was conducting just his second marriage seminar. Gary's messages have greatly encouraged Jo and me over the years, and millions have benefited from his "Keys to Loving Relationships" videos and conferences. We have also sat under the teaching of Dennis Rainey and others from FamilyLife seminars. We have interacted with outstanding authors like James Dobson, Scott Stanley, John Trent, Kevin Leman, Archibald Hart, Mike Mason, and many more. Each of them has enriched our marriage. They've provided the tools we need for effective communication, problem solving, and intimacy, plus encouragement to stay the course. Certainly there are more than enough seminars, books, research findings, diagnostic tools, tape series, and radio programs addressing the needs of marriage to aid any couple that wants help.

Yet all of that wonderful information won't keep a couple

together if they believe that unhappiness is a good enough reason to separate. We've never heard more great tips about how to have better sex, communications, financial planning, anger management, or goal setting. Still marriages continue to fail.

While I was writing this book, a nationally known ministry leader—someone Jo and I know personally—was exposed for having an affair. We were shocked, and Jo grieved for a week. On long walks, we talked about this couple. What had gone wrong? How could this man have violated his wedding vows? Were there warning signs that could have alerted someone and perhaps prevented this tragedy? Jo particularly worried about the man's wife, telling me how devalued she must certainly feel.

There is no doubt that this leader had enough information to protect and build his own marriage. He'd met most of the same marriage communicators I've known. He'd read their books and heard their teaching. But that knowledge didn't prevent his moral failure. Was it because he was unhappy or unfulfilled? It probably goes back to Jim's question: Does the promise to remain faithful "till death do us part" go out the window if we're miserable?

Lately, there has been a welcome increase in talk about commitment to lifelong marriage. A coalition of 50 organizations has produced the Covenant Marriage Movement. FamilyLife Ministries has conducted "I Still Do!" conferences in large arenas. Focus on the Family has as one of its six pillars a commitment to the permanence of marriage. But is a promise enough to keep a marriage going? What do we say to someone like Jim who believes he has made a terrible mistake? Or to the wife of the ministry leader who has fallen morally: Why should she stick it out?

That's why I've had to find an answer to Jim's question. Not just for him and Bonnie, not just for my friends, but for my own marriage as well. Toward that end, Jo and I have observed long-term marriages. We've smiled at the couple in their nineties, married

more than 70 years, that still act like two teenagers on their first date. We've admired another couple that endured some rough times to raise five kids and in retirement now have a vibrant outreach to their community. We've noted the faithful wife whose husband suffered permanent brain damage 23 years ago, and how she has cared for him and honored him. Or the couple whose daughter suffers from life-threatening medical problems, who faithfully work together day after day even though he's lost his job. Each time we view such long-term committed marriages, our hearts are warmed and we feel intuitively that this is how it should be. These couples have endured far tougher problems than those of Jim and Bonnie. Why did they succeed when others in similar or easier circumstances failed?

I've also studied the Bible, read books, and attended more than 35 seminars to try and gain a sense of God's perspective on marriage. My questions were very simple. Why did God create marriage? And was it for our happiness? I knew that if ever a couple should have experienced happiness, it was the original couple in Eden. Assuming they did so, perhaps I could determine why, and that might provide insight into how happiness and marriage go together.

I am a writer and storyteller, not a theologian. So after immersing myself in the writings, teachings, and commentaries of biblical scholars and church fathers, I have attempted to "translate" all of that information into a form that communicates to me—that is, story. What follows in chapter two is the first of nine biblical vignettes or pictures that I want us to observe together. In between each drama we will search to understand the meaning of marriage.

With Gratitude

The message for this book began to crystallize on a dry-erase board in Kurt Bruner's office. Kurt was vice president over the Focus Resource Group and my boss at Focus on the Family. We were brainstorming what message our organization should develop that might add a fresh perspective to the many books already published on marriage. We began looking together at the Scriptures, and many of the concepts you've just read emerged in that session. Kurt, thank you for allowing me to write this book. This is as much your message as it is mine.

Several members of the Focus on the Family book development team played major roles in this project. They include Larry Weeden, managing editor, who guided me through the early drafts of the manuscript; Mick Silva, who also read early drafts and helped to write the study guide; and Ray Seldomridge, who did the final editing of the manuscript.

There were many who reviewed the manuscript in various stages and provided valuable input. I particularly wish to thank Jim Ware, Steve and Lisa Halliday, Kent Hill, Dave Tillstrom, and Craig and Kat Osten for their advice and encouragement.

Thanks also to members of our international team who reviewed the manuscript, including Bruce Peppin, Jonathan Booth, Jef De Vriese, Wee Min Lee, Tim Cole, and Win Morgan.

Our brand management team has worked many hours on the strategy, packaging, and promotion of the book. Many thanks to Julie Kuss, Stacey Herebic, Edie Hutchinson, and Clark Miller, as well as the marketing and sales team at Tyndale House.

A special thanks to my assistant, Kim Atkins, for finding books, typing notes, making phone calls, running copies, condensing the manuscript for the audio book, and covering for me during the many days when I was hiding away in order to finish writing.

And most important, a special thank-you to my wife, Jo. She read every word of this manuscript in various drafts and provided a listening ear as I talked through the content. Jo, the message of this book is *our* message. It's a joy making this journey with you!

Notes

Prologue

1. Information about Sistine Chapel gleaned from *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration* by Fabrizio Mancinelli and Carlo Pietrangeli, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994; *An Unfamiliar Michelangelo* by Robert Hughes, *Time*, Feb. 11, 1985, pg. 82; *Out of Grime, a Domain of Light* by Robert Hughes, *Time*, April 27, 1987, pg. 86; *High Tech and Old Masters* by William D. Marbach, *Newsweek*, March 30, 1987, pg. 70; and *He Didn't Paint by the Numbers, but He's Digitized Now; Michelangelo* by Gina Maranto, *Discover*, May 1987, pg. 8.
2. According to a United Nations survey. See "Survey: 9 of 10 Still Say 'I Do'" by Joan Lowy, Scripps-Howard News Service, June 29, 2000.

Chapter 1

1. Jim and Bonnie are pseudonyms. Details have been changed about their story to protect their identity. Throughout the book, where a name is marked by an "*", it means the names and other identifying characteristics have been changed.
2. See *The State of Our Unions 2000: The Social Health of Marriage in America*. Regarding the divorce rate, the report states that it is slightly less than it was in the early 1980s. "In view of the lowering of divorce rates in the last few decades, the statement '50 percent of all marriages will end in divorce' may no longer be accurate. If the divorce rates of the late 1990s were to persist into the future, not much more than

40 percent of today's first marriages would end in divorce, and less than 50 percent of all marriages would end in either divorce or permanent separation" (pg. 17).

3. *Flying Solo* by Tamala M. Edwards, *Time*, August 28, 2000.
4. "Divorce for the Best" by Philip D. Harvey, *Washington Post*, July 11, 2000, pg. A23.
5. "Are Traditional Marriages a Thing of the Past?" by Cheryl K. Chumley, *CNS News*, August 9, 2000.

Chapter 2

1. Genesis 1:27.
2. This work of speculation and imagination is based on Job 38:4-7, where God speaks to Job and says, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together *and all the angels shouted for joy?*" (emphasis added). Apparently God had quite an appreciative audience for His work of Creation! Other scriptures that imply that angels observe the drama taking place on earth include 1 Timothy 5:21, Hebrews 12:22, and 1 Peter 1:12.

Chapter 3

1. Genesis 1:28.
2. Genesis 1:29.
3. Genesis 2:25.
4. Genesis 1:27.
5. Genesis 3:8.
6. Genesis 1:28.
7. Genesis 1:27.
8. Genesis 2:24.

Study Guide

The problem with writing a book like *Your Marriage Masterpiece* is that so much more could be explored. An author has to make hard choices about what to include, or the text quickly becomes too long. In this book I decided to concentrate on one big idea, then allow readers to meditate on it and consider how it might apply to their own circumstances.

This study guide is intended to help you dig deeper into the rich depths of God's model for marriage. You may want to work through the questions alone, perhaps reflecting on them in a journal. Or you and your spouse may choose to go through this study together. You may even prefer to use this as a framework for a small-group study. Whatever manner you choose, I encourage you to prayerfully ask God to reveal how His marvelous love relationship with you can be reflected in your marriage.

The structure for each of the 12 sessions is as follows:

1. **Points to Ponder:** This will refer to specific content in the book.
2. **Contrasting Pictures:** You are asked to lay the Masterpiece of God's marriage next to what our culture portrays about marriage.
3. **Reflections on the Masterpiece:** You are invited to delve deeper into the Scriptures.
4. **Application of the Masterpiece:** God's marriage should inspire us in our marriages. This section will suggest possible applications.

Do not feel you must answer every question. This is simply a guide, giving you some suggestions of where to go for further reflection and discussion.

Session 1: Whatever Happened to Happily Ever After?

Covering the prologue and chapters 1–3.

Points to Ponder:

1. What was your first reaction to Jim's declaration that he wanted to divorce Bonnie because he was unhappy?
2. What is your reaction to the idea, expressed by Philip Harvey and Dr. David Fromm, that marriage is "an old-fashioned idea"?

Contrasting Pictures:

1. What reasons have you heard among friends or family for getting divorced?
2. If you have any acquaintances who have chosen not to marry (remaining single, cohabiting, or following some other alternative), try to answer these questions: "Why are they making this choice?" "Would you try to change their minds?" "Why or why not?"

Reflections on the Masterpiece:

Read slowly Genesis 1 and 2.

1. If God is truly the Artist, what is your first impression when you look at His creation?
2. Why did God create Adam and Eve in a manner so differently from the rest of the creatures?
3. Why did God make Adam wait before He created Eve? Why show Adam all the other creatures first?

4. Mike Mason writes: “To ‘fall in love’ actually means...to have a revelation from God.” Why do you think he says that?

Application of the Masterpiece:

It has been suggested that in the first marriage Adam and Eve (a) had a three-way relationship among God, husband, and wife, (b) enjoyed a shared adventure, (c) grew together in knowledge, and (d) reflected the image of God as a couple.

Do any of these four things characterize your marriage?
Which one(s)?

Try to quantify your answer by rating your marriage in each of these areas (relationship with God, shared adventure, growing in knowledge, and reflecting God’s image) on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being ideal. What might move your marriage closer to 10?

Session 2: Every Marriage Needs a Hero

Covering chapters 4 and 5.

Points to Ponder:

1. After reading the first five chapters, do you believe Adam and Eve were happy in the Garden of Eden? Why or why not?
2. What do you think attracted the first couple to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Contrasting Pictures:

“Happiness and self-fulfillment were a natural byproduct of marriage as God intended it, but not the primary purpose for marriage.” Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

Bibliography

There are so many books about marriage. Over the years I have read many, and in preparation to write this book, I looked at many more. Still, I've read only a fraction of what is available to the couple who want to build a strong marriage. This bibliography is not exhaustive but rather reflects my own journey. Not all of the titles are explicitly about marriage, but all touch on the subject in some way. It is my hope that within this list readers will find tools to help them develop their marriage relationships and let God make their marriages into reflections of His Masterpiece.

Allender, Dan B., and Longman, Tremper. *Intimate Allies*.

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Every newlywed couple should read *Love for a Lifetime* and *Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives*, and every husband should be required to read *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*. For those couples who are struggling and contemplating divorce, *Love Must Be Tough* deals with the core issues.

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Dennis is cofounder and executive director of FamilyLife, a division of Campus Crusade for Christ. I would encourage every couple to attend a FamilyLife marriage conference. Also consider participating in a FamilyLife HomeBuilders study for couples. For more information on a conference near you, or a list of the HomeBuilders studies, contact FamilyLife, P.O. Box 23840, Little Rock, AR 72221-3840, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY, or visit www.familylife.com.

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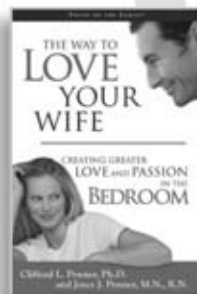
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