

FOCUS ON FAMILY
RESOURCES

BLUEPRINTS *for a* SOLID MARRIAGE

BUILD  REMODEL  REPAIR

DR. STEVE STEPHENS



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS
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Blueprints for a Solid Marriage

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Introduction



YOUR PERSONAL WALK-THROUGH

*“Unless the Lord builds a house,
the work of the builders is useless.”*

—KING SOLOMON

I was glad to be home.

The church service was good, but now it was time to look at the newspaper and relax. I walked into the family room on a blue-sky Sunday afternoon and immediately knew something was wrong. My eyes were drawn to the center of the off-white brocaded ceiling. Then I saw a single drop of water fall soundlessly to the beige carpet below. I walked closer and saw it—the center of the ceiling was sagging. How could that happen?

I grabbed a bucket and pushed the blade of a pocketknife into the soggy sheetrock. Water rushed out and quickly filled half my bucket. Where is all this water coming from? I set the bucket beneath the sag, just in time to catch the next drip, and went upstairs in search of a renegade

water source. The master bathroom above the family room looked safe: no broken pipes, no leaky faucets, no overflowing toilets or tubs. Everything looked in order. But something had to be wrong.

I measured off the room in my mind and determined that the toilet was directly above the saggy ceiling, and then I remembered that the toilet had been slightly unlevel ever since it had been replaced some three years before. I had almost entirely forgotten about it. I was going to fix it one of these days, but hadn't gotten to it yet. After all, it flushed, it was sealed, and there had been no noticeable leaks.

I called Dan, my I-can-fix-anything friend, and he came over. Together we pulled out my toilet, and there was the leak. We then went downstairs and cut a hole in the family room ceiling. What we saw was not pretty—a layer of mold covered the top side of the ceiling sheetrock. We cut an eight-foot by twelve-foot hole in the ceiling to remove all the mold.

“What have you done to our house?” Tami asked when she came home.

“Just fixing a little leak.” I tried to smile.

For the next 45 days we had a great view from our family room sofa of the upstairs floor joists and our master bath plumbing. By then the toilet was resealed, the sheetrock replaced, the ceiling replastered. All it needed was a little repair and today everything looks great.

Your house is a bit like your marriage: Every marriage needs a periodic repair and remodel. Even the best marriages, like the best houses, need some work every once in a while. The sad thing is that most couples take better care of their house than their marriages. If you had committed to keep your house “Till death do us part,” how would you treat it? Would you ignore:

- sweeping the floors,
- fixing the leak in the ceiling,
- washing the windows,
- scrubbing the toilets,
- changing the light bulbs,
- and other small, routine repairs?

Even the most fantastic houses lose their appeal and excitement if they are not properly maintained. They grow stale and dingy. They start looking a bit run-down. If you let things go too long, you might be tempted to just sell the place and start looking for something new. Or complain to the neighbors about how things aren't as good as they used to be. Or maybe just stare at the cobwebs on the ceilings and shake your head at the filthy carpets. Instead of these dismal options, both houses and marriages benefit when you perform routine maintenance checks and determine what needs to be repaired, remodeled, or just cleaned up.

Sometimes you need a repair.

Things need to be fixed so they work the way they should. Unfortunately things in a relationship get broken over time. Maybe it's normal wear and tear. Maybe it's natural causes like termites or dry rot. Maybe it's breakage or neglect because you haven't treated things as carefully as needed.

Sometimes you need a remodel.

Things just don't look as good as they could. You might need more space or wish to reconfigure the space you have. Maybe you wish to update or upgrade a room. For whatever reason, you determine that some improvements will make your situation more efficient, more comfortable, more attractive, or more fulfilling.

Sometimes you just need to clean up.

Shelves need to be dusted and walls need to be washed. Rooms aren't in terrible shape, but they don't look as nice and shiny as they once did. Accessories need to be straightened up and the garbage needs to be taken out; it may be creating a bad odor or collecting bugs or overflowing into the rest of the house.

Every house and every marriage needs a walk-through at least once a year to see what condition it is in. Even before you wed, it is a good idea to keep these things in mind. Think of it as a "home inspection" for the house the two of you are about to move into. As you walk through your relationship, discuss what you like, what you don't like, and what sort of work might need to be done. Here are 12 areas to consider:

1. The entryway: commitment projects
Knowing what love and relationship is really all about
2. The closets: emotional projects
Being in touch with each other's feelings
3. The kitchen: practical projects
Tackling everyday chores as a team
4. The dining room: social projects
Connecting with people who enrich your relationship
5. The family room: recreational projects
Finding the fun and laughter of life together
6. The study: intellectual projects
Sharing new thoughts, ideas, and opinions
7. The hallway: conflict projects
Resolving differences with respect
8. The safe room: crisis projects
Pulling close during challenges and difficulties
9. The patio: aesthetic projects
Enjoying the beauty that surrounds you, together
10. The master bedroom: sexual projects
Making touch and intimacy a way of strengthening your relationship
11. The addition: future projects
Dreaming and planning about tomorrow
12. The foundation: spiritual projects
Connecting with God and His purpose for life

A marriage walk-through allows you to evaluate your relationship and make it all that it can be. For those of you who have been married for a while, this helps you recapture the joy and excitement you had at the first. But the potential this walk-through holds is even better than that: The longer you are married, the more potential depth, sensitivity, and experience you are able to add. As long as you take proper care of your marriage, it will get better and better.

Seven years after Tami and I got married, we built a wonderful house. It was clean, fresh, and new. It was great. But over the past 13 years, our dream house has been lived in.

- Our dishwasher broke.
- Our carpets wore out.
- Our gutters filled with mud.
- Our family room got dry rot.
- Our walls became dingy.

However, Tami and I have regularly taken care of home improvement. Our house is now better than it was when we first built it. In the beginning our walls were all white; now they are full of all sorts of color. Over the years we have improved, fixed, and upgraded our house. We have added a room, built a cobblestone patio, upgraded our lighting fixtures, and turned a patch of dry, hard dirt into a lush, landscaped yard. Our house gets better every year, but it takes work. It's not easy, but it is certainly worth it. In every house, there are always projects. If you can't find any, you either aren't looking or aren't growing.

Tami and I have been married 22 years, and each year things have gotten better and better. We are both so glad we don't have the same struggles that we did our first year. All 12 areas of our marriage have improved, some naturally and some through intentional effort. We have had our fair share of repairs, remodels, and cleanups. Yet without these "home improvements" even the best relationships risk falling apart.

Too many couples divorce.

Too many couples live in relationships that are dissatisfying, disappointing, and at least partially dead. This doesn't have to happen. A regular walk-through alerts you to potential difficulties, shows you what must be dealt with next, and helps both of you to understand each other's needs and expectations. Walk-throughs can be fun. They are also one of the smartest things you will ever do.

If your needs aren't being met, don't give up.

If you are hurt or unhappy or disappointed, don't give up.

If you are bored and the excitement is gone, don't give up.

If you are considering divorce, don't give up.

If you can't even see the use in trying, don't give up.

If you wish you could start fresh with someone new, don't give up.

Please don't give up!

You can have a great marriage.

No marriage is perfect, but every marriage can be improved. Marriages fall apart because needs are not met. All 12 areas of your house represent a particular need in your marriage. Some of these might be major needs and some minor, but all of them are important. The ones which are most important to him might not be the most important to her. Yet the more areas of your house you feel good about, the better you feel about the whole house. Still, one damaged, dirty, or dry-rotted area can spread to adjoining areas, and soon it may feel like the whole house has deteriorated and depreciated in value.

Marriages, like houses, are meant to increase in value; when we discover their value is decreasing, we frequently fall into one of two dangerous patterns:

- Passivity: Things are bad, but there is nothing I can do about it. So I had better just face reality and accept the situation the way it is.
- Panic: Things are bad, but there is nothing I can do about it. So I had better end the relationship and get out of this situation as fast as I can.

There is a third more positive and productive option: home improvement.

It might not be quick or clever, but it works. Do you want a healthy marriage? Then get together and walk through the 12 areas of your relationship. Some of these areas look great and are just the way you like them. But there are other areas that need some work. Don't panic or get passive; simply set up your projects. Here are a few initial questions:

What areas need the most work?

When do you start?

What are your expectations?

How are you going to get started?

What materials are needed?

Can you do it yourselves or do you need some outside help?

So, are we ready? If you want to recapture the love you once had and upgrade all you currently have, let's go. Grab your partner's hand, open the front door, and let's begin your marriage walk-through. As you imagine your home improvements you will be on your way to making your relationship:

- stronger,
- deeper,
- warmer,
- better,
- and built to last a lifetime.



Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

1



THE ENTRYWAY

Commitment Projects

You start with the door. Ours is white with leaded glass at the top and a welcome mat in front of it. You knock or ring the doorbell and are invited into our entryway. This is where everything starts.

In some homes you take off your shoes or boots here and line them against a wall. Other entryways have a coatrack, an umbrella tree, or a table for the mail.

When I was eight years old, my parents bought a large house without an entryway. The front door just opened into the living room. This must have bothered my dad, because a year or two later he created an entryway. He set aside a six-foot by five-foot area inside the door and covered the floor with slate. Then he put a fancy light fixture in the ceiling and added a built-in planter to separate the entrance from the rest of the house.

What you see when you first walk through the front door tells you a lot about how a couple treats and even feels about their house.

- What are the colors?
- What items are on the walls?

- Do things appear to be in good repair?
- How does it smell?
- How clean?
- How cluttered?
- What is your first impression?

When you first walk into our house you'll see a chair, a quilt, a vase with fresh-cut flowers, and a wall full of family pictures. Tami has created an atmosphere that is simple, relaxing, and welcoming.

Entryways are important. They are the beginning. Yet in our fast-paced lives, we frequently ignore the entryway. We rush through the garage door or the back door. We forget the entryway, and this is a big mistake. This area might appear small or relatively purposeless, but it is very important for it sets the atmosphere for the whole house.

This area represents the commitments of marriage. They are what get you started on the right track. If the commitments are ignored or broken, you will have a drafty house. Several years ago my front door frame was knocked off-kilter and the door lost its seal. I had to slam it hard and it still wouldn't close properly. That winter the northeast winds blew hard against my door, stealing the heat of our house and creating drafts. Tami complained about the chill and the children wore sweaters to stay warm. In the meantime our heating bill became unreasonable. Finally, I hired a repairman who worked on the frame and replaced the seals. Now the door closes tight, the drafts are gone, and my heating bill doesn't create panic. Commitment is the seal that takes care of the drafts in your marriage and keeps your relationship warm.

So let's open your front door, step into your entryway, and look at commitment.

True Commitment

"I don't believe in commitment," said the attractive 20-something as she shifted in her chair. "All you do is give away your heart and then get hurt. I'd much rather live together for a year and see if it works. Then maybe

we'll get married. If that doesn't work, we'll just shake hands, say good-bye, and go our separate ways."

No commitment.

No hurt.

No hassle.

"Why bother?" I asked.

"What?" she said with a look of surprise.

"Why not just say good-bye today and go your separate ways?"

"But I love him and sooner or later we want to get married."

"With your philosophy toward relationships, I guarantee that your marriage will never last."

"Why not?" she asked, genuinely perplexed.

"Because commitment is everything," was my simple reply.

Commitment is the core of trust and trust is the core of every worthwhile relationship. If I trust you, we can build a friendship. If I can't trust you, we have nothing.

Getting married involves a commitment—one of the most important commitments you will ever make. This is a turning point in your life. It is opening the door to the greatest test of character you will ever face. You stand before friends and relatives. You hold the hands of your future and say those unforgettable words:

In sickness and health;

For richer or poorer;

For better or worse;

Till death do us part.

Now, do you have the courage and character to live those words? These are not meaningless, off-the-top-of-your-head, throwaway words. These words constitute a sacred vow. Marriage vows are made to:

- God,
- your spouse,
- yourself,
- your family,
- your friends,

- your community,
- and everyone who really cares about you.

At that moment you committed yourself—your heart, your will, your body. You committed 100 percent of who you are, no holding back.

But how can you commit to a future which might not turn out as you expect? What if something horrible happens? What if your world flips upside down? What if your beloved turns bad or lazy or abusive or fat?

What if you meet someone with whom you are more perfectly and passionately matched?

What if I said: “None of this matters!”

I once met an old veteran who had fought in WWII. “I’d rather die than break my word,” he said.

“Isn’t that sort of drastic?”

“No, sir,” he said. “Your word is your reputation and without a reputation you are nothing.”

Times sure have changed.

Hardly anybody keeps their word anymore.

Vows are broken.

People are broken.

Commitment need not fall by the wayside, however. Life is going to be tough; that’s just the way it is. But there is hope. Real commitment can work.

“Sure,” said a friend. “Now commitment is a synonym for hell or purgatory.”

Commitment is only miserable if you make it that way.

When two people get married there are seven commitments that are absolutely critical.

Commitment to Oneness

The Bible says that the two joined in marriage shall become one. You are both on the same team. You either win as a team or lose as a team. You

laugh together and cry together. What hurts your spouse should hurt you. What excites your spouse should excite you.

It's like a three-legged race: If you've got the rhythm, you move. If you are out of step, you fall.

When you are working as one, you do nothing that would hurt, belittle, discourage, frustrate, or limit your spouse. In fact, you do just the opposite: You do everything within your power to heal, compliment, encourage, build up, and strengthen your spouse.

Whatever you do for your partner, you are in fact doing for yourself. That's what oneness means. You do what's best for the relationship, not just what's good for the individuals. Thus a sacred "we" is formed, and in every circumstance the "me" submits to the "we." The "me" is not lost. It is just that as the "me" strengthens the "we," the "we" strengthens the "me." And so the two are truly one.

Oneness means sharing, and the more you share, the more you become one. So share your feelings, thoughts, experiences, and laughter.

You can even share your pain, needs, worries, and dreams. But in the midst of the stress and a hectic pace, don't forget to share your love.

Commitment to Positive Communication

When you go to a restaurant you can tell who has been married a long time. It's those couples who sit face-to-face and rarely talk to each other. Sometimes they don't even look at each other.

Too tired.

Too angry or hurt.

Too bored or lonely or disconnected.

Something has gone wrong; the words that once brought understanding and laughter and romance have run dry. Words are the lifeblood of healthy relationships. You give them and receive them. They inform and comfort and compliment and connect.

Committed couples communicate.

Positive communication is the top predictor of a strong marriage. Two people who wish to have a real relationship share their thoughts and feelings, their hopes and fears. They listen carefully and respond with respect. They don't belittle or assume the worst or call names. Instead they encourage and compliment and look for ways to build up each other. They ask questions and allow for individual differences—differences of opinion, preference, perspective, and even communication.

Communication isn't always easy, but it is always worth it. Joshua Harris, in his book *Boy Meets Girl*, provides the following principles for authentic communication:

- Communication problems are usually heart problems.
- Your ears are your most important communication tools.
- Good communication doesn't happen by accident.
- The absence of conflict doesn't equal good communication.
- Motive is more important than technique.

Commitment to Quality Time

Gary Chapman lists quality time as one of five “love languages.” The more intentional and deliberate the time spent together, the closer you feel to one another. “How long has it been since you've had quality time together?” I asked one young couple.

They both laughed—nervously.

“We have three kids,” she explained.

“I have a demanding job and I'm working for a big promotion,” he added.

“So how long?” I insisted.

“Two years,” he said.

“And how long has your marriage been stuck in its current rut?”

“Two years,” she said.

That night the two climbed out of their rut and had some quality time. It probably saved their marriage.

How can you be sure you have the quality time your marriage needs?

Make it a top priority to spend time together doing things you both enjoy. Have a good conversation, a good walk, or just a good time. Life gets crazy and hectic and moves way too fast. If you don't schedule quality time, it doesn't happen. So pull out your calendar and write it down. Set aside a time alone, without distractions, where the two of you can really connect. This needs to be an oasis from the external, time where you don't talk about kids, finances, work, or difficulties. Time where you can relax and develop your friendship on a deeper level.

Here are a few ideas for your quality time:

- Cuddle on the couch.
- Dream new dreams together.
- Take a drive.
- Read a book to each other.
- Explore someplace new.
- Talk about your passions.
- Meet at a coffee shop.
- Go on a real romantic date.

Commitment to Growth

Make every year better than the last. Tami will tell you that our first year of marriage was the most difficult. Since then, it has kept getting better and better. But it takes work. Any endeavor that's truly worthwhile takes effort and commitment. If you want good grades or a good job, you put in the time. If you want a great garden, you plant, weed, water, and fertilize. These actions, with a little help from the weather and the One who controls the weather, cause the plants to grow. Tami has a great garden. She takes care of it, and from spring through fall it produces a diverse variety of food and flowers. She takes care of the garden, and the garden takes care of her.

So be committed to the growth of your marriage and you will be blessed. Do not focus on changes you wish your spouse would make. Instead, do whatever you can to be the best husband or wife you can be. Learn what your spouse's needs are and meet them. Find out what it takes

to have a good marriage and do it. Whether you are a reader or not, read at least one book on marriage each year. Go to a relationship seminar, a marriage encounter, or a couples' retreat.

Discover what you do that offends, frustrates, or hurts your spouse, and stop doing it. Listen closely to the things your partner has asked from you for so long, those things you ignore, put off, or just refuse to do. Ask yourself why you haven't done these things and unless you have a really good reason, do them. As you practice this loving attentiveness, you will find that you grow deeper and closer to your mate. You also grow more committed.

Commitment to Faithfulness

"Never take off your wedding ring."

"Why?" I asked my grandmother.

"Because it reminds you and everybody else that you're married."

That was pretty good advice.

Too many people seem to have forgotten that they are married and what that really means: You are taken. You belong to your spouse and to nobody else. Look at your wedding ring and remember the day it first slipped on your finger. If you're engaged, reflect on the ramifications of what you're preparing for.

The ring symbolizes your total commitment to that one special person. So why visit a chat room, flirt with a coworker, or let your mind go where it shouldn't go?

You are married and married people are faithful to each other. That means you don't let anyone—real or imaginary—get between you and your spouse. You guard your heart and avoid situations that might tempt you. Be careful where you look, what you say, and how emotionally close you get to the opposite sex. Never allow emotional or sexual needs that should be met by your partner be met by someone else—even if that someone else is kinder, cuter, smarter, or more understanding than your spouse. A faithful spouse refuses to be tempted by cybersex or pornography, fantasies or affairs, intimate friendships or an inappropriate touch.

They are 100 percent emotionally and sexually committed no matter what. Here are a few ways to protect your faithfulness:

- Wear your wedding ring.
- Don't flirt.
- Don't be alone with the opposite sex.
- Avoid secrets.
- Let your spouse know the wheres, whens, whos, and whys of your schedule.
- Run all gifts or favors to the opposite sex past your spouse.
- Talk positively about your mate.
- Always carry each other's picture.
- Flee areas of romantic and/or sexual temptations.
- Remember the great times you have had together.
- Never look at pornography.
- Recognize how much unfaithfulness would hurt your spouse, your children, and your reputation.
- Don't discuss sexual issues with members of the opposite sex unless within a medical/psychological setting.
- Pray for your marriage.

Commitment to Honesty

“Should I tell my wife?”

“Why wouldn't you?” I asked the CEO of a multimillion-dollar company.

“She might lose respect for me and it could seriously damage our marriage.”

“If you don't tell her the truth, she will lose respect for you.” Ultimately the truth is always discovered. Sooner or later it comes to the surface. If you don't tell your spouse, he or she will ultimately find out and feel deceived by your dishonesty. Truth is basic to trust. Lies and secrets and silence create deep cracks in your relationship that can break apart the best of marriages.

The two of you are one and within one there need be nothing hidden. Secrets between a husband and wife will sooner or later get you into trouble. The first problem is that secrets are progressive. You start with one, and then you need another to cover up the first. And then another and another and another.

A second problem is that secrets remove you from accountability. When your spouse knows all, you tend to be more responsible and less prone to fall into temptation. Your partner protects you from your weaknesses and you do the same for your partner. This can only be done in an atmosphere of honesty and trust. Therefore, before you do anything in the least bit questionable, ask yourself:

- Do I feel comfortable telling my spouse everything I'm about to do?
- How will my partner respond to this?
- Will this activity distance us or bring us closer together?

When honesty and love is the currency, a marriage is bound to be rich. I believe in a commitment to total honesty, but there are three exceptions to this rule. I encourage individuals to be very cautious about sharing:

- information that is both hurtful and unnecessary;
- information about any sexual partners you may have had from before you met each other;
- if there has been an affair, information about the specific details of the sexual encounter. (To share this data potentially creates visual images that can make it difficult for the offended party to heal.)

Commitment to the Long Haul

A young couple who was struggling through their first year of not-so-wedded-bliss asked me how long I'd been married.

“Sixteen years,” was my reply.

“What?” the wife asked with a look of shock.

“Sixteen years,” I repeated.

“You’ve got to be kidding!” she said in amazement.

“Sixteen years, and it gets better every year.”

“I’ve never met anybody who’s stayed married that long and still likes it,” was her response.

What does “till death do us part” mean anymore? Couples marry and divorce and marry someone new with such regularity that it has become the norm. Divorce doesn’t shock anyone anymore. It’s just a part of life. We have to realize that this is tragically wrong, unhealthy, and extremely dangerous. Divorce damages your children, family, and community. It scars your emotions, beliefs, and spirit. It traps you in a position of selfish immaturity. One famous psychologist says he does not believe in divorce because terminating a relationship blocks personal growth. He says that the tough times in marriage develop character. But we live in a time when comfort takes priority over character.

Tami and I have made an agreement with our kids that we will not divorce. We stood in our kitchen and held hands with our three children and promised that we would stay together for the long haul. There are at least 10 benefits of a healthy long-haul relationship.

- It teaches love.
- It develops patience.
- It conquers loneliness.
- It lengthens life.
- It nurtures children.
- It models responsibility.
- It enriches memories.
- It builds character.
- It passes on heritage.
- It pleases God.

Wrap Up

Without commitment no marriage will last. In the last third of the twentieth century, our culture tried a massive social experiment that was a miserable failure. People tried “free” love, “open” marriage, “no-fault” divorce, and “serial” monogamy. None of it worked. Millions of people were left

scarred and broken. A generation has grown up not understanding that commitment is basic to marriage.

It is time to stop this stupid game.

It is time to grow up and build a real marriage—a marriage with good days and bad, with boredom and excitement, frustration and fun, hurt and joy. Marriage is a mixed bag, but in the end its benefits far outweigh its difficulties. A committed marriage takes maturity, confidence, and courage.

But a committed marriage is worth it. What it lacks in comfort, it makes up for in character. And character does matter.

Entryway Projects

1. Talk to your spouse about what commitment really means.
 - Which of the seven commitments is the most important to you?
 - Which is the hardest?
 - Why?
2. Make a vow to never threaten divorce. (Write it down, sign it, frame it, and hang it in your bedroom.)
3. Ask each other for one thing you'd like that would help you have a better marriage. Then do it.
4. Go on a date twice per month. (She plans the first date and he plans the second. Repeat the sequence each month.)
5. Read at least one book on marriage or relationships every year.

APPRAISAL CHECKLIST

How Do I Evaluate My House?

Where do I start? Which rooms are in great shape? Which rooms need some immediate attention?

When we don't know where to begin, it is easy to not do anything. Yet that would be a big mistake. Right now, today, this very moment—evaluate your house. An easy way to do this is to walk through the following checklist, peeking into each room, and noting the condition each is in. Once you discover which rooms need work, read the corresponding chapter in this book for ideas about how to make the best repairs. Then do what needs to be done.

In the future, walk through your marriage at least once a year with this checklist, carefully evaluating your needs. There are a lot of things you do, or should do, at least once a year. They include:

- Speak with your physician.
- See your dentist.
- Change the filter on your furnace.
- Tune up your car.
- Check the batteries in your smoke alarm.

Yet your marriage is just as important, maybe even more important, than the items listed above. So do the marriage checkup now and in the future, every single year. You will never regret it.

Remember, anything truly worthwhile must be cared for. If you neglect regular maintenance of your house, your car, your body, and especially your marriage, sooner or later, something will break down. So here is your marriage checklist. Work on it as a couple or do it separately. Either way, it can be a whole lot of fun and save you a great deal of grief.

Appraisal Checklist Instructions

Read through each question, then mark whether you agree or disagree. If you agree with the question, put a checkmark in the space beside the corresponding number on page 224. If you disagree, leave the space blank. When you are finished, add the number of checks horizontally and place that number to the right of the capital letter. Repeat this for all 12 lines.

Now transpose your number to the capital letters on page 225. That will give you a rating for each of the 12 rooms of your marriage. Note that the higher the number, the better you are doing in that room. (See “How to Score Your Ratings” on page 225). Next, mark down your three highest scores and your three lowest scores. Finally, celebrate your high scores and talk about the things you each do to make those areas so successful. Then study your low scores and talk about what you can do to improve those areas.

	Agree	Disagree
1. I feel strongly committed to my marriage.	_____	_____
2. I am aware of my spouse’s current emotional state.	_____	_____
3. We agree on how to manage our finances.	_____	_____
4. I feel comfortable with all my spouse’s close friends.	_____	_____
5. We know how to relax together.	_____	_____
6. I know and appreciate my spouse’s intellectual strengths.	_____	_____