

2FUN

"At-Home"

Marriage Preparation

Marriage Education Course
administered by

Minister Rob Bremer

*"Sometimes it is a great joy just to listen to someone we love talking to."
Vincent McNabb*

Additional Copies Available at:

www.smoky-mountain-wedding.com

COURSE INTRODUCTION

How did you learn to ride a bike? You didn't do it through listening to a lecture on "how to ride a bike."

Someone did give you some basic instruction & a little support, then you started trying - practicing until you learned how.

It took effort, and you got a few scrapes along the way, but you wouldn't describe it as "work" – learning this way was fun.

You were highly motivated from within to succeed – so excited about the benefits of success that you kept on until you could do it.

And it was so much fun, you just kept on using your newly learned skill every day.

The same principles can hold for marriage preparation.

For a long time, I said to couples, "You've got to work at your marriage!" Their faces said it all: "I work all week on my job, and now you tell me I have to come home and *work* on my marriage?"

It's true that a relationship requires attention. That's what you're doing by taking this course.

It's true too that conflicts arise and have to be resolved. This course can help you with that too.

Persistence & overcoming challenges is part of making a marriage great. (Please note: any couple who *does not* believe this should spend a lot of extra time talking about their expectations of marriage).

However, I've become convinced of some other things as well.

One, marriage is supposed to be fun.

Two, if couples don't lose sight of that, and continue to have fun, many of the problems that might have come about simply won't.

This is one place where "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is very true.

Three, a lot of people aren't going to continue to grow a relationship if it is all work and no play.

That's why this course is bent toward having fun. Actually, it is designed on current learning theory (how people best learn).

- ◇ People learn when learning is *self-directed and self-motivated*.
- ◇ People learn when they are *actively involved* in the learning process.
- ◇ People learn when they are *having fun*.

This course incorporates all three elements.

This course grows out my academic studies in counseling (including Masters & doctoral work); 27 years of ministerial experience in counseling couples & families; and 26 years of marriage. I also conduct marriage courses and am a member of the *American Association of Christian Counselors*.

*"You can tell people what they need to know very fast.
But, they will forget what you tell them even faster.
People are more likely to understand what they figure out for themselves
than what you figure out for them."*

(from intro to 101 Ways to Make Training Active, by Mel Silberman)

COURSE CONTENT

The bulk of this course is composed of *5 sections*, with an exercise or exercises in each section.

FIRST SECTION

2FUN Learning Activities provide a series of "fun" things you can "do" to learn about yourselves and marriage. You may choose 2 or 3, or as many as you wish that look like fun and would be helpful to you.

SECOND SECTION

What Do We Need to Talk About Now is very important. Here you'll find 12 key relationship components.

Follow the instructions to discover areas you especially need to discuss right now.

Many couples have told me that while they consider themselves very good communicators, the process of going through these 12 areas has brought out some items they had overlooked.

THIRD SECTION

Asking & Listening gives you both an opportunity to ask for what you want and to practice listening. Both of these skills are essential for a strong marriage.

FOURTH SECTION

I Feel Love By You When You... is a very positive activity you'll enjoy.

FIFTH SECTION

Two more optional exercises you may choose to do.

After the fourth section, there is a page listing some **additional resources for stepfamilies**. Stepfamilies have some special challenges. All the more reason to make sure there is fun in your marriage and family.

I strongly encourage you to make use of some of the resources listed.

The last page is **for Tennessee residents who wish to save \$60 on their marriage license.**

- Complete the verification and mail to me, *or email* your responses.
- I then can mail you the official government completion certificate.
- You take this certificate when you get your license to receive the discount.

Though it wouldn't hurt, you don't have to do everything in this course.

Choose the activities that look like are the most helpful to you.

The next page contains some general principles for good communication and conflict resolution. It'd be a good idea to review these before moving onto the exercises.

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people"
Victor Borge

**Before Starting Your Couple Exercises
Review the Following Principles on
Communication and Conflict Resolution**

1. **Communication takes time.** Commit to take the time now & throughout your marriage to communicate. It is the lifeblood of your relationship.
2. **Truly listen to each other, without judgment.** Test your understanding by repeating back in your own words what you hear your partner say.
3. **Honestly express your thoughts & feelings to your partner.** On the other side, be ready to accept what your partner says.
4. **Remember that every relationship has conflicts.** To start with *men are from Mars and women are from Venus!* When you have a conflict:
 - Deal with it. Often resolving differences is a process over a period of time. But unresolved issues do not go away. Resentments can build over the years.
 - Control your anger. Anger & other defensive tactics shut off communication. You may need to take a walk & delay discussing something. But do come back to it.
 - Clearly define the problem. Specify how each of you may contribute to the problem, or difficulty in resolving the issue.
 - Brainstorm possible solutions. Decide, and if necessary, *negotiate* a mutually agreeable solution. Then put it to the test.
 - Stay committed. In most cases, people can resolve their differences. When you do, it will give you confidence that problems don't have to defeat you. Your relationship will be stronger & you will feel more secure in it.
5. **Seek outside help if needed.** If you hit a snag, sometimes having a third party to give feedback and direction can be helpful. Contact a minister or other trained helper for guidance.

Section One

2FUN LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Just go over the list below and pick out 2 or 3, or as many you want.

GIVE ME A HAND

One of you hold out your hand. The other person describes the hand from their vantage point. Now, you describe the same hand. Note how your descriptions are the same & how they are different. Which one of you is right? Of course, you're both right, your just looking at it from different perspectives. Is there a subject you've been discussing where there is no right or wrong? How does remembering this principle of "perspective" help in a marriage? What are some areas in which men and women have different perspectives?

RESEARCH 101

Does this sound too much like going to school? No need to go to the library for this research though. Each of you think of someone you know who has a successful marriage...not just long, but what you consider a good marriage. Each of you go separately & talk to the husband or wife and ask them about their marriage (your asking will be compliment to them). Come back together and compare notes. What did you learn about marriage from your research?

STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES

Can each of you think of a stupid argument you've heard (maybe you were in it). What made it stupid? Why do you think it became an argument? How could it have been avoided? Can't think of one? A husband was sitting in front of his TV eating from a bag of LAYS potato chips when he pulled from the bag the biggest potato chip you've ever seen in your life. He starts holding it in the air, waving it around and bragging as if you had made the chip himself. All is fine until his wife reaches over and crunches his potato chip! He got mad and an argument followed. Can you top this one? Email me your stupid argument (names always withheld to protect the guilty).

ROLE MODELS

Each of you describe a person or persons whom you consider to be a great father, or mother, or husband or wife. Of course, explain your choices...what makes them great in your estimation.

*"If you don't learn to laugh at troubles,
you won't have anything to laugh at when you grow old"*
Edward W. Howe

WATCH A MOVIE

Can you believe you can do marriage preparation watching a movie? Overhearing (and over-watching) others can be a great learning tool. Rent the movie *The Story of Us* starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Bruce Willis. Here's a relationship that gets into a lot of trouble. After the movie, discuss what went wrong and how they could have prevented things going so bad. (This movie is Rated R)

BE AN ARTIST

Some people like to draw. Whether you are good at it or not, this can be an interesting exercise. Each of you, separately, draw a picture of what you believe a family to be. Compare pictures and explain what you've drawn. If you're not an artist your explanation may be essential!

TAKE A FIELDTRIP

Remember taking fieldtrips in school? Now that was a fun way to learn. Go to the mall or a restaurant (she says, "that sounds like fun!") and observe couples. How do couples treat each other? Are they in love? Can you really tell by looking? This is not meant to judge people that we don't really know, but is a way of exploring your own notions of marriage. Your observations and answers will say a lot about your expectations for marriage (for instance, should couples show affection in public?)

TRY ON A PAIR OF NEW SHOES

Put yourself in the other person's shoes. (Ladies, if he literally wants to wear your clothes, you may want to get him help). Be the other person and describe what your day is like.

YOU ARE THE COUNSELOR

Imagine that you've been married for ten years. You're a little older, a littler wiser. What would you say to:

1. A young couple engaged to be married
2. A couple at the end of their first year of marriage
3. A couple in conflict and considering a divorce

"A friend is one who knows you and loves you just the same"
Elbert Hubbard

MY WONDERFUL UNCLE LEFT ME A MILLION DOLLARS

It's fun to dream, and dreams say a lot about us & what's important to us. Have fun imagining that someone left you a lot of money. What would you do?

TOYS – R – US

Like toys? Which of the following toys illustrates what marriage is like to you?
Slinky - Silly Putty - Yo-yo – Puzzle - Other:

MY BEST VACATION

Each of you describe your very best vacation and tell what made it so great.

I KNOW ONE WHEN I SEE ONE

Describe a really bad marriage that you are aware of. What makes it bad? Where did it go wrong? How will yours be different?

2-WAY LEARNING

What is something each of you knows a lot about that the other knows little about. Take time to listen and learn from each other.

TALK TO ME LIKE THIS

Take a free, short personality test at www.personalitytype.com/quiz.htm/
Once each of you has taken the test, you can click on a button that tells you the most effective way to communicate to your spouse, given their personality type. Talk about your discoveries.

**Can you think of a fun learning activity you'd like to share with other couples?
Email it to me and maybe hundreds of couples
will benefit from your idea.**

*"The definition of a beautiful woman is one who loves me."
Sloan Wilson*

Section Two

WHAT WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT NOW

PURPOSE: There are a number of components that impact couple relationships. Twelve components include:

- (1) communication
- (2) resolving conflicts
- (3) expectations of marriage
- (4) money matters
- (5) recreational activities
- (6) children & parenting
- (7) family & friends
- (8) husband / wife roles
- (9) family backgrounds
- (10) religious views & practices
- (11) personality concerns
- (12) the sexual relationship.

While you may have discussed many of these areas in your courting, the following exercise provides an organized approach to help you focus on the most important things you need to talk about right now.

DO THIS: On the following pages:

(1) Read through the questions and statements in each of the 12 relationship areas. *Place a check mark beside each question or statement you believe you need to discuss together now.*

(2) *Each of you should place the letter "N" beside three of the twelve relationship components you consider to be your greatest needs right now. Don't*

be discouraged to recognize that you have relationship needs. All couples do. You will also find it interesting to see if you both marked the same areas as needs, or if there are some differences in your perceptions. Discuss your reasons for marking a component as a need.

NOTICE! This is a fun & helpful exercise.

Should you hit some bumpy spots, remember to practice good communication principles like these:

♥Let your partner to be honest with you. You don't have to like or agree with what you hear, but negative reactions cause your partner to shut down. These reactions could include defensiveness, anger, put-downs, and threats.

♥Listen. Give your partner the time they need to express their viewpoint & seek to truly understand. Ask questions, & put in your own words what you hear said.

♥Speak to each other in a normal tone of voice.

♥Remember the goal is to strengthen your relationship. This will enable you to work together toward solutions.

Go to the next page for the exercise →

"What we need to talk about now" Exercise

Men ✓ to the left & ladies to the right questions or statements you believe you need to discuss. Also place the letter "N" beside three of the twelve relationship areas you consider to be your greatest relationship needs right now.

Communication . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

The amount of time we have to talk
Differences in our communication styles
What I/you do when we have trouble communicating
The topic hardest for me to discuss with you is: _____
My/your ability openly & fully express ourselves
My/your tendency to use put-downs
My/your lack of being a good listener
My/your honesty
My/your tendency to become quiet
My/your tendency to interrupt
My/your tendency to dominate the conversation
My/your lack of interest in what I say
What we talk about most of the time
Our acceptance (or lack) of what one of us says to the other
Becoming negative in our communication
Keeping secrets
Our need to find someone to help us learn to communicate better

Resolving Conflicts . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

Our general ability to resolve conflicts
My/your tendency to give in too quickly
My/your need to be right & get our way
My/your tendency to say one thing, then do another
My/your getting upset over trivial things
My/your lack of taking issues seriously enough
My/your not saying enough
My/your talking too much & not listening
My/your avoiding dealing with conflict
My/your ability to share feelings/thoughts
My/your ability to accept other's feelings/thoughts
Our unresolved issue of: _____
An issue we have not discussed is: _____

Continue Resolving Conflicts Area →

Continuation of **Resolving Conflicts** . . .

My/your getting angry too much
My/your saying hurtful things
Our need to find someone to help us learn to resolve conflicts
Who has to have the last word
Will we ever discuss our conflicts with friends/family members
Will we ever discuss our differences in public or in front of our children
Our ability to compromise

Expectations in Marriage . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

Your expectations of our marriage
My expectations of our marriage
Do you expect me to meet all your needs
What happens if unexpected problems come our way
What do we believe about commitment in marriage
Are you going to try to change me
How we view romantic love in a marriage

Money Matters Questions . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

Our expenses & can we pay the bills
Who will "keep the books."
When & for what will we borrow money
Are we going to keep a budget
Will we have credit cards & for what use
Current debts one or both of us have
Will both us work now, or later
Would we move if one of us received an offer of better pay
Will we have separate checking and/or savings accounts
Each others spending habits
When do we need to consult with each other before spending money
How much of our income will we save
What we will save for
Would we ever lend money to a friend/family member
Would we ever borrow money from a friend/family member
Will we shop for discounts
How much will we spend on fun stuff
How important should money be in our thinking & lives

Next area →

Recreational Activities . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

What we will do for fun
How much time you spend away from me
Our balance of work and play
Number & kind of activities we both can enjoy
This is something I'd like us to do together: _____
This is something I'd like to do with others: _____
I'm concerned about the money you spend on this activity: _____

Children & Parenting . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

Birth control
When we will have children
How many children we will have & spacing
How we will nurture our children
How we will discipline our children
Who will discipline our children
Private, public, or home schools for our children
The role of the father
The role of the mother
If we discover we can't have children, what then
Value we'll place on spending time with our children
Value we'll place on showing affection to our children
Value we'll place on family mealtimes
Will one parent always be home with the children
How parenting will affect our marriage

Friends & Family . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

How supportive our friends/family are of our marriage
How your family feels about me
How my family feels about you
The time you spend with your family/friends
Family members that nose into our business

Continue Family & Friends Area →

Continuation of **Friends & Family** . . .

A family member/friend of yours that concerns me is: _____

A family member/friend of yours that I really like is: _____

How close/far away we'll live from our parents

Will we accept/ask for financial help from our parents

How we will decide where to go for Christmas

How you speak to/treat my family

What happens if one of our parents needs special care

Roles . . . *I believe we need to talk about . . .*

Will we both work outside the home

Our division of labor at home

How we will make major decisions

My/your role as father

My/your role as mother

Who will keep up with the money

Who will do the yard work

Who will keep the house clean

Who will help children with homework

Who will discipline the children

Family Background Similarities/Differences . . . *I believe we need to talk about...*

How our families expressed love to each other

How much time our families spent together/apart

How decisions were made

How children were disciplined

Who disciplined the children

How conflicts were handled

Who did what (roles)

The stability of our parent's marriages

How holidays & birthdays were celebrated

What we did for vacations

What we did on weeknights

The time our parents spent together alone

The way children were taught about money

Continue Family Background Area →

Continuation of **Family Background Similarities & Differences . . .**

How crises were handled
The place of religious faith in my/your family
The person I like most in my/your family is: _____
The person I like least in my/your family is: _____
Family secrets
What we can learn from our families, good or bad

Religious Values / Practices . . . *I believe we need to talk about. . .*

Our views on the importance of spiritual life
The role of our spiritual practices in our relationship
How our faith will help us deal with problems
How active we will be in a church
What I/you believe about _____
A non-negotiable belief/practice for me is _____
What we will teach our children about _____
How our parents will feel about our choices in faith practices
Our devotional time together as a couple
Our devotional time together as a family
What the Bible teaches about marriage, husbands & wives
How much we will give to our church
What we will do about any religious differences
Our difficulty in discussing religious matters
Our need to discuss our viewpoints with a minister

Personality Concerns . . . *I believe we need to talk about. . .*

My/your stubbornness
My/your temper
My/your honesty
My/your jealousy
My/your moodiness
My/your bad habits
My/your domineering behavior
My/your negativity
My/your _____

Next Area →

Sexual Relationship . . . *I believe we need to talk about. . .*

- Your expectations of me sexually
- What I need from you sexually
- Sexual acts I am not comfortable with
- Amount of affection in our relationship
- Our method of birth control
- Previous sexual experiences and/or abuse
- My comfort level in talking to you about sex
- How often we will make love
- Concerns or fears I have about sex
- What sex means to our relationship
- Male / female viewpoints in regards to sex
- How I feel about my body/sexual attractiveness
- Using sex as a punishment or reward
- Should the man always initiate sex
- Can we be affectionate without sex

“These are some other things I’d like for us to discuss that were not listed anywhere above”

His:

Hers:

Section Three ASKING AND LISTENING

PURPOSE: Husbands & wives need to both ask for what they want and listen to their mate ask for what they want.

We all have needs and there is nothing wrong with wanting those needs met.

But it must go ways for a healthy relationship. Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition, rather both give 100%.

The following exercise will give you both practice in assertively asking for what you want and in listening to what your partner wants & needs.

DO THIS: Separately, each of you look over the list on the next page.

Guys, to the left, **rate from 1 to 3** how important each item is to you ("1" is of lesser importance & "3" is of greater importance).

Ladies, do your rating to the right. Whoever goes first, the next one should cover the responses of their partner . . . don't get ahead of yourselves.

There is a blank at the end for "other" if there is something else you think of that's important to you.

When both are finished, discuss your 3's & then others as you wish.

NOTICE! As you share your responses:

♥ Listen carefully to your partner as they express their needs and why these are so important to them.

♥ This is not meant as an opportunity to make selfish demands.

♥ Be realistic in your expectations and be willing to compromise in some areas.

*"The real test of friendship is: can you literally do nothing with the other person?
Can you enjoy those moments of life that are utterly simple?"
Eugene Kennedy*

Go to the next page for the exercise →

Your "Asking & Listening" Exercise

See instructions on previous page

___	Spend most of your free time with me	___
___	Let me make my own decisions	___
___	Change a personal habit if it bothers me	___
___	Always tell me what you are thinking	___
___	Discuss with me before spending money	___
___	Join in with me in things I like to do	___
___	Go shopping with me	___
___	Have sex with me whenever I wan	___
___	Kiss me every day	___
___	Show / don't show affection to me in public	___
___	You take care of birth control	___
___	Have no contact with former girl/boyfriends	___
___	I'd like to spend regular time with my parents	___
___	Both of us be involved in religious activities	___
___	Speak about me & to me with respect in public	___
___	Remember special days with presents	___
___	Call if you are running late	___
___	Clean up your own messes	___
___	Throw away old love letters	___
___	Have good personal hygiene	___
___	Talk to me face to face daily	___
___	Always tell me what's bothering you	___
___	Compliment me often	___
___	Keep the house clean	___
___	Keep yourself attractive	___
___	Be home in the evenings	___
___	Help with dinner	___
___	Make me feel better when I'm do	___
___	Take care of me when I'm sick	___
___	Support me in my dreams	___
___	Plan fun dates for us	___
___	Be nice to my family	___
___	Other: _____	___

Section Four

I FEEL LOVED BY YOU WHEN YOU . . .

PURPOSE: It's important to keep your relationship positive & loving.

This exercise further helps you to express to your partner how you are made to feel cared for.

This keeps your partner from having to guess (and maybe guessing wrong) about what you appreciate most.

DO THIS: Each of you complete the statement "I feel loved by you when you..." on the next page.

Again, whoever goes first the next one covers the other's responses.

Write down **between 3-5** caring things your partner can do.

Once you've both written down your responses, share your list with your partner.

Discuss and explain if necessary, but most importantly do the things your partner has listed . . . and enjoy!

NOTICE! As you write down your responses apply these principles:

♥Keep it positive. Don't write, "*I feel loved when you don't nag me.*"

Instead, "*I feel loved when you remember to call me during the day*" or "*I feel loved when you tell me you love me.*"

♥Make the cost of the behavior free or inexpensive.

Not "*I feel loved when you buy me jewelry*" but, "*I feel loved when you rub my back*" or "*I feel loved when you bring me a romantic card*"

♥Choose something that can happen every day or with some regular frequency.

"*I feel loved when you kiss me hello and/or good-bye*" or "*I feel loved when you compliment me on my appearance.*"

Go to the next page for the exercise →

"I feel loved by you when you . . ." Exercise

"His"

I feel loved by you when you . . .

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

"Hers"

I feel loved by you when you . . .

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

"A diplomat is a man who always remembers a woman's birthday but never her age"

"Women like silent men. They think they are listening."

Section Five
OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

A. Read these Bible passages & discuss together each one's meaning to your marriage:

1. Serving Each Other (Matthew 7:12; Philippians 2:1-8; I Corinthians 10:24)
2. Honesty (Ephesians 4:25 / Colossians 3:9)
3. Christ's love as the model for marital love (Ephesians 5:21-33)
4. Positive communications (Ephesians 4:29)
5. Dealing with unexpected problems (Romans 8:28 / Jeremiah 29:11)
6. God's design for marriage (Genesis 2:18-25)
7. Forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32 / Matthew 18:21-35)
8. The Bible's description of love (I Corinthians 13)
9. Sexual needs (I Corinthians 7:1-5)
10. Parenting (Ephesians 6:1-4)
11. Money & priorities (I Timothy 6:10; Philippians 4:11-12; Matthew 6:33-34)
12. Sources of conflicts (James 4:1; Proverbs 15:1)

B. Willard F. Harley, Jr. in his book *His Needs, Her Needs*, identifies what he believes are the top five needs of men and the top five needs of women. See if you would rate your needs the same, and discuss with each other what these needs mean to you.

HIS NEEDS:

1. Sexual Fulfillment
2. Recreational Companionship
3. An Attractive Spouse
4. Peace and Quiet
5. Admiration From Her

HER NEEDS:

1. Affection
2. Communication
3. Openness & Honesty
4. Financial Support
5. Family Commitment: A Good Father

RESOURCES FOR STEPFAMILIES

There are many special challenges for stepfamilies . . . too many to delve into here.

There are however a number of excellent resources available.

If you are becoming a stepfamily, I urge you to make use of some these materials. Listed below are a number of websites to get you started.

If you do not have Internet access, visit a bookstore and look for resources in the family section.

●**The Blended Family Ministry** - <http://www.blendedfamilyministry.com/> Resources from Edward & Sharon Douglas, authors of *The Blended Family: Achieving Peace and Harmony in the Christian Home*

●**Stepfamily Association of America** – <http://www.saafamilies.org/> A national, non-profit organization that sells a variety of books and materials for families and professionals.

●**Family Medallion** – <http://www.familymedallion/> Medallions that can be used as gifts in the marriage ceremony

●**Stepfamily Living** – <http://www.steplife.com/> Resources and practical information based on biblical principles

●**Your Stepfamily (Magazine)** – <http://www.yourstepfamily.com/> Bi-monthly magazine for dads, moms, & kids to help them evolve as a stepfamily

●**Stepdads.com** – <http://www.stepdads.com/>

●**Stepfamily information** – <http://stepfamilyinfo.org/> Wealth of info including an 8-module remarriage preparation course

●**The Family Law Advisor** – <http://www.dicorcenet.com/> Provides divorce & post-divorce resources by state

●**Stepfamily Services** – <http://stepfamilyservices.com/>

●**Successful Stepfamilies** – <http://successfulstepfamilies.com/> Offers Christian based book and video resources

**VERIFICATION OF COMPLETION OF THE
AT-HOME MARRIAGE PREPARATION COURSE**

◇ To receive your Certificate of Completion, complete this page & send to me by mail or email. Your responses below are part of your learning process, as well as confirming your course work.

1. Something I learned about *us* during this course:

He said:

She said:

2. Something I learned about *me* during this course:

He said:

She said:

3. This course was helpful to us in this way:

4. This course could be improved in this way:

◇ Please include the following information to receive your completion certificate by mail:

Groom's name/address: _____

Bride's name/address: _____

Where to mail the certificate: _____

Total time spent on the course: _____

(you must spend at least 4 hrs. in the course to receive a certificate of completion)

Date completed: _____

(must be within one year of applying for your marriage license)

Send responses to me by email at rob@smoky-mountain-wedding.com

It's my genuine hope that your marriage is enriched as a result of completing this course!