

Class Synopsis

Fit to Be Tied

1. Covenant Marriage

Marriage is not a contract. It is a covenant. It involves the exchange of promises and vows. It presents an opportunity to express faithfulness (or unfaithfulness) to those promises. Because our faithfulness is imperfect, forgiveness is a necessary part of keeping covenant. The result of all this is a constant renewal of covenant relationship.

2. Vive la difference/Intimacy

Differences are built into the very fabric of marriage—gender, backgrounds, perspectives, values, assumptions, etc. It is an illusion to think that intimacy in marriage is a function of similarities. It is not. Intimacy is a result of differences and coming to appreciate those differences in selfless and respectful ways.

3. Family of Origin/Roles and Expectations

We all inherit a great deal from our Family of Origin—not least a set of expectations, world-view, and relational habits that color all subsequent relationships. The better we understand that inheritance, the better equipped we will be to consciously adopt or reject patterns for our own marriage.

4. Intentional Marriage

Good marriages do not happen accidentally ... or because we are nice people ... or because we feel so deeply about each other. Good marriages happen *intentionally*: making deliberate, disciplined, consistent efforts to become the spouse you want to be and to treat your spouse in ways that communicate love, value, and respect.

5. Personality/Baggage

Not only do we bring (often unconscious) stuff from our Family-of-Origin, we also come to marriage as scarred people ... people with mistakes, hurts, weaknesses, flaws, and history. Knowing that baggage, being honest with it, confessing it, and addressing it frontally equips us to live beyond our scars and to let God use our weaknesses to demonstrate his strengths.

6. The Sexual Relationship

Sex is God's idea. It is a holy, pure, good, joyful, clean celebration of the love between husband and wife. At its core is love (passion, tenderness, and acceptance), communication (listening and expressing), and celebration (joy, culmination, climax). The sexual relationship is anchored in marriage by trust, mutuality, giving, and intimacy. It is boundaried by commitments not to withhold, not to be unfaithful, not to be selfish, and not to be ashamed.

7. Finances

Money is a constant stressor for most married couples (especially early on) and a frequent source of conflict. Setting a standard of living (rather than letting the culture set it for you), agreeing on a plan (including that dirty word "budget"), avoiding debt, and determining not to let money be your master—these are all critical components to financial health and well-being in your marriage.

8. Communication

Learning how to really *connect* when you converse is not something every couple does well. There are words. And then there are all the layers that lie beneath the words: emotions, hurts, hopes, needs. Listening to the entire bandwidth, developing sensitivity to frequencies beyond our normal perception, makes us better communicators and better spouses.

9. Conflict

The single greatest determinant of marital satisfaction is the quality of marital conflict. Conflict is a "universal" in marriage. So long as marriages are made up of sinful, selfish, failed people ... so long as marriages continue to address issues of great importance and complexity ... there will be conflict. It is not the *presence* of conflict but the *management* of that determines whether we will be happy in our marriage relationship.

10. Help!—Maintenance for Marriage/Evaluation

We change our oil. We clean the gutters. Why not do something to regularly maintain our marriage? An annual visit to a counselor—just to check up on how we're doing. A marriage enrichment experience—just to remind ourselves of the importance and priorities of marriage. A book we read together to help us talk about and understand better our relationship. A marriage that is not maintained regularly is a marriage headed for breakdown.