Introduction

Planning a wedding can take so much attention that there is little time left for the important pre-marriage talks that prepare the way for a successful marriage. That's why this communication resource was created. It offers an easy-to-use format for busy couples planning to be married. The talk sheets in this book will guide you on a conversation journey that will help to set the stage for a lifetime of positive communication in your marriage. Each talk sheet is duplicated, one is "His Copy" and one is "Her Copy." They are perforated for easy removal from the book. The book in itself provides a place to "file" the talk sheets after you have completed each conversation. To get started please read through the introduction beginning on page 2.

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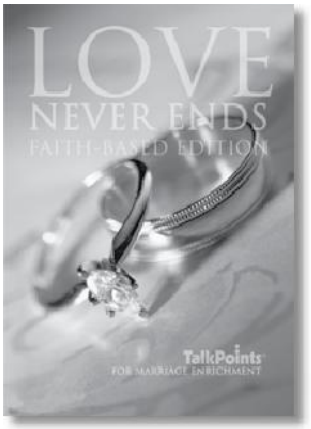
Also available for marriage enrichment:
Love Never Ends: Faith-Based Edition



8 Before We Say "I Do!"

Step 1. Introduction *(he reads outloud)*

Side One of this conversation is an enjoyable and important time to speak words of appreciation and love as you prepare for marriage. **Side Two** gives you time to think and talk about the meaning of the promises you will make to each other on your wedding day.

Step 2. Scripture *(she reads Genesis 2:21-24)*

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Step 3. Prayer *(he reads)*

Dear God of love, thank you for giving us the love we have for each other. Bless and guide us on this journey as we prepare for marriage. Help us to express our love each day in the way we choose, help, esteem and know each other. Please prepare us for our wedding day when we will speak our promises to each other and begin the journey of marriage. Amen.

Step 4. Reflection and Prayer *(in silence)*

Hold hands for 60 seconds of silent prayer. Be grateful to God for each other and offer this time of conversation to God.

Step 5. Journal *(separately and in silence)*

Remove the next two perforated pages from the book and write responses on both sides of the talk sheet.

1. When we first met, one thing that impressed me about you was...

   And I remember thinking that you were...

2. Some of your best qualities include...

*	*
*	*
*	*
*	*

3. To say that I appreciate you means that I appreciate the way you...

   And I appreciate that you express your love for me by...

   I appreciate that you have been willing to...

   And I appreciate that when I'm with you, I feel...

4. One of the first times I remember telling you (or wanting to tell you) "I love you" was...

5. To say "I love you" means that I...

6. Love is a choice. From all those I might have chosen I have chosen you because...

7. When we are married, I'm especially looking forward to...

Continue writing on Side 2…

Express in your own words the meaning of the promises you will speak to each other on your wedding day:

1. "To honor and cherish you" means that I will always…

2. "To be faithful to you" means that I will…

3. To love you "in good times and bad, plenty and want, sickness and health" means that I'm willing to…

4. To love you "all the days of my life" means that I promise you that I will…

5. If I were asked to write a prayer expressing my hopes for our life together in marriage, I'd pray, *Dear God...*

Talk & Listen

When you are both finished writing, find a place where you can sit close.
Hold hands and, beginning with Side One, take turns sharing your responses.

8 Faith

Step 1. Introduction *(he reads)*

Faith in God and participation in a community of faith are among the most cherished of life's values. Since no two persons think exactly alike, it's important to talk about your spiritual beliefs and views. How will you practice faith in your life and home? If there are children, how will you teach them by your example? Your beliefs and religious background may be very similar, or you may come from very different places. Know that sharing the spiritual journey and being active in a community of faith will help to strengthen your loving relationship.

Step 2. Scripture *(she reads Hebrews 11:1-3)*

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Step 3. Prayer *(he reads)*

Dear God, we have been created to love one another, and You are the author of love. Give us a stronger faith in You, and help us become active together in a faith community where we can grow together in faith and love. If we are blessed with children, teach us to make our home a place where faith is expressed daily in the way we live and love. As we grow in our love and understanding for each other, deepen our love and understanding for You. Amen.

Step 4. Reflection and Prayer *(in silence)*

Hold hands for 60 seconds of silent prayer. Express gratitude for each other and ask God to help you deepen your faith as individuals, as well as, strengthen the bond of faith and love you enjoy as a couple.

Step 5. Journal *(in silence)*

Remove the next two perforated pages from the book and write responses on both sides of the talk sheet.

1. An early religious experience I remember was when…

2. As a young child I thought of God as...

3. As an adult, I believe that God is...

4. I believe that prayer is...

5. I believe that worship is...

6. I believe that being active in a faith community involves...

7. I believe that unconditional love is...

8. I believe that evil is...

9. I believe that life is...

10. I believe that when we die...

11. In my own faith and spiritual life, I hope and pray that I will...

Continue writing on Side 2…

1. Things I respect about your beliefs and the way you practice your faith include...

2. One question I'd like to ask you about your faith is...

3. "Believing in God's love and sharing religious traditions can strengthen our marriage."
   ❑ I agree ❑ maybe ❑ I disagree Explain:

4. Religious traditions and/or holidays I want us to share in our marriage and home include…

5. "Active involvement in a faith community will be important for us."
   ❑ I agree ❑ maybe ❑ I disagree Explain:

6. In choosing a place where we can both worship and grow in our faith, I would look for a faith community where...

7. In sharing the spiritual life with you, my prayer is that we will both learn to...

Talk & Listen

When you are both finished writing, find a place where you can sit close.
Hold hands and, beginning with Side One, take turns sharing your responses.

Guidelines for Pastors, Educators, Retreat Leaders and Mentor/Sponsor Couples

The following suggestions are for those who work with engaged couples to guide them through the preparation process for marriage. In addition to using this resource, many will also be interpreting the results of a pre-marriage inventory. You'll quickly discover that *The Greatest Is Love – Faith-Based Edition* will add a new dimension of dialogue to the process.

OPTION ONE: Meet a mínimum of three times with your couple. If you meet for three sessions with your engaged couple, the following schedule is recommended:

Your First Meeting: Use the Conversation "Before We Say 'I Do.'"

1. Get acquainted with your couple -- how they met, the proposal, their wedding plans. Next, go over page 1 and the Table of Contents to introduce the topics covered during this course.
2. Review the Introductory pages 2-6. (Either summarize or take turns reading the different sections.)
3. Invite the couple to read through the Introduction on page 8, and then, tear out the two pages for their first conversation. Give them a space to write and plenty of time to complete their responses for both Sides One and Two.
4. When they are finished writing, invite them to sit close, hold hands, and take turns sharing their responses with each other. (Your role will be to listen and not comment until they have finished.)
5. Administer the pre-marriage inventory or give instructions for them to complete the online version of the inventory. (It's best to do this toward the end of your meeting.) Let your couple know that during sessions two and three you will review with them the report from the pre-marriage inventory.
6. Go over their homework assignment, which is to complete the next three conversations.

Your Second Meeting: Use the conversation "Faith"

Choose parts of the report from the pre-marriage inventory to discuss with your couple. In addition, communicate the importance of faith in marriage. (At the end of this session, you might consider giving the couple a box of "Table Blessings" prayer cards available at www.talkpoints.com.)

Your Third Meeting: Use the conversation "Issues"

Continue discussing the report from the inventory. During this meeting, the couple will choose a decision or issue they need to work on. Before they begin, review the step-by-step process on both sides of the conversation. At the end of this session you may want to give your couple a copy of "Love Never Ends" for marriage enrichment available at www.talkpoints.com. In addition, consider giving two blank "Marriage Journals" so the couple will have a place to record the milestone events of their marriage, as well as, a place where responses to the conversations in "Love Never Ends" can be recorded. Highlight specifically the three conversations "Refreshing Our Marriage," "Issues," and "Our Wedding Anniversary."

OPTION TWO: Meet four or more times with your couple.
If there are areas of special concern from the inventory or special issues they may want or need to talk about, you will want to schedule more than three meetings with your couple.

OPTION THREE: Use the two options above with two or more couples.
Instead of meeting with one couple, a pastor, educator or sponsor/mentor couple may choose to meet with two or more couples in a small group setting. Follow the same agenda above, but when couples have filled out their talk sheets, invite them to find a private place in your home or church for their conversation. When each couple returns from the conversation, invite them to give feedback and have discussion related to the topic..

OPTION FOUR: Use the weekend retreat format below to cover most of the conversations.

Sample Outline for an Engaged Couples Retreat
Saturday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Set-up suggestions:
Arrange the room with tables so that two couples are seated at each table and able to view the front of the room. If you have the equipment, create a PowerPoint to go with your agenda for the day and project it onto a screen with a video projector. It's a good idea to have couples pre-register and pay their fee before the event. Plan to send or email a copy of the agenda for the day so couples can be prepared for what to expect. Have pens, books, and handouts on each table as couples arrive.

8:30 Registration: Collect fees if couples have not already paid. It's a great idea to serve coffee and a continental breakfast.

9:00 Begin with a warm welcome and congratulations to the couples for their engagements. Lead in prayer. Invite couples to introduce themselves by asking brides to say their first name and the date of their wedding and grooms to say their first name and the location for their wedding. Next, invite the two couples sitting at each table to get acquainted by having the grooms tell the story of their first meeting and brides tell the story of the proposal (if there was one).

Continued on next page…

9:20 Invite a volunteer to read the introductory paragraph at the top of page 1. Next, review the ten topics that are a part of this course. Emphasize that much of their time during the retreat will be spent talking one-on-one with each other about many of these topics. Review the introduction on pages 2-6. Be sure to call attention to the "Communication Bucket" illustration on page 2 and have them hold their hands and arms to form an imaginary bucket. Invite them to discuss as couples when they had a "good talk" recently and what it was about. Then invite the whole group to offer ideas of what makes a "good talk" good. You can invite volunteers to read the sections of this introduction.

9:35 Conversation # 1 "Before We Say 'I Do"
For each conversation couples will begin by following the guide on the introductory page. Invite couples to turn to page 8 and follow the step-by-step instructions. Let them know that when they have both completed their writing, they may leave the room and find a private place where they can have their conversation. When they are done with the conversation, they can return to the room, take a break and wait until all have returned.

10:15 Couples return from their conversations and take a break until all couples have returned.

10:30 Conversation # 2 "Parents"

11:15 Conversation # 3 "Our Love Life"

12:00 Lunch (Optional gift for each couple - a box of the "Table Blessings" prayer cards available at www.talkpoints.com. The cost can be added to the retreat fee.)

1:00 Conversation # 4 "Children"

2:00 Conversation # 5 "Faith"

3:00 Conversation # 6 "Issues" Note that the step-by-step process for this conversation is different from the others.

4:00 As a mini-lecture go over the "Rules for Resolving Issues" on page 61. Next, invite couples to turn the page over and follow the directions for the activity on page 62.

4:15 Gifts: You may want to give the couples copies of "Love Never Ends" for marriage enrichment. These are available at www.talkpoints.com. The cost can be added to the retreat fee. Two blank journals make another wonderful gift, a place for couples to keep a record of the milestones and events of their marriage, as well as, a place to record responses to the conversations in "Love Never Ends." Next, lead an evaluation of the experience by giving each person a blank sheet of paper to write their thoughts about the retreat, what they liked about it as well as what could be an improvement. Ask couples to exchange their evaluations with each other so they can read what their partner has written.

4:25 Prayer and consecration of couples.