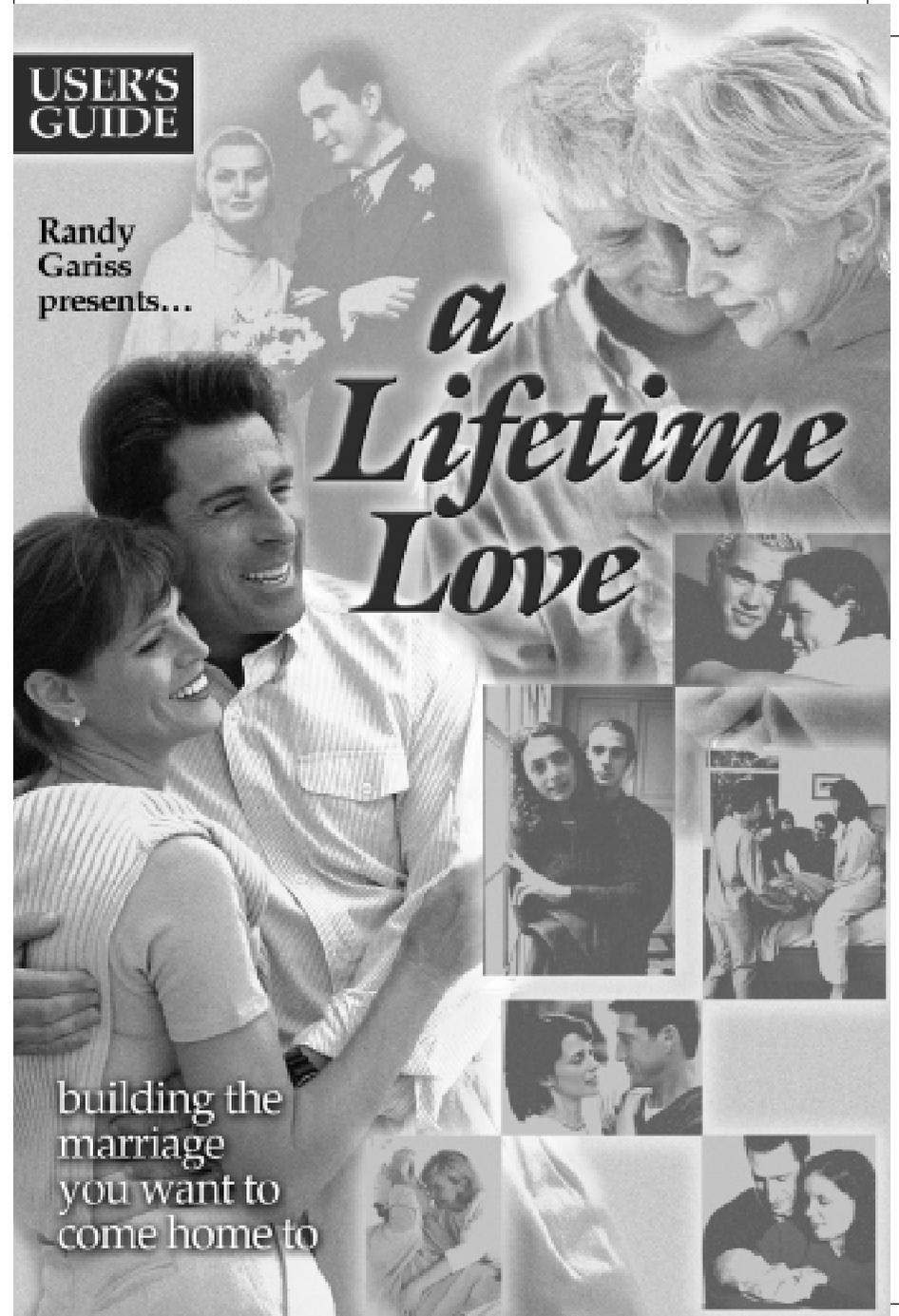


**USER'S
GUIDE**

Randy
Gariss
presents...

a Lifetime Love

building the
marriage
you want to
come home to



USER'S GUIDE

This series is designed for *individuals, couples, and/or small groups*. It will have direct impact for *engaged couples* preparing to marry, for *married couples* wanting to strengthen their marriage, and for *struggling marriages* looking for a way to rebuild.

ENGAGED COUPLES

Viewing this series will powerfully impact any couple. While the couple can use it alone, we suggest that an “older couple” be recruited to partner with them in watching and processing the information. Choosing to watch it with another couple, one whose marriage and Christian life is admirable, is greatly beneficial! The discussion that follows each of the six sessions will be natural and easy. That discussion will not only reinforce the truth, driving it even deeper into their lives, but the discussion will create a lifelong bond with this mentoring couple, whose friendship will be invaluable. We recommend that the couple selected not be immediate family. We tell our couples, “You will want a couple who can be objective with you, perhaps even on occasion helping you to know what to do with immediate family!” This discussion guide is not necessarily to be rigidly followed, but rather to be used as an aid and starter tool. It is also recommended that no more than one session be viewed at a time. There is a need for truth to “settle in.” More than one session at a time will overwhelm the thought process.

Many churches use this material as a part of their pre-marital program for engaged couples. Normally, a preliminary meeting with the minister begins the process. The series, *A Lifetime Love*, is then watched, utilizing another couple in the process. After the series has been viewed, the minister or counselor will finish up the counseling in the manner of their choice.

*SMALL GROUPS USING THIS IN HOME OR
CHURCH SETTINGS:*

This series has six sessions and an additional bonus session. Each session can be watched within a fifty-minute time allotment, and many groups do so, but we do not recommend this as our first choice. It is better to allow some time for discussion, questions, testimonies, etc. For a group, if you have less than sixty or seventy minutes, we recommend that you break each session into two parts. Each session can be previewed by a leader and dealt with as two chapters. It is important that a natural break point be used, and www.alifetime.com has suggested break points for each session. In summary, you may choose to use it as a six-week or seven-week series (seven if you use the bonus session). Should you choose to break each session into two parts, it would be a twelve-week series. The discussion questions included in this guide will assist you in processing the material. You will find more than enough help to create powerful follow-up discussion within the group. However, due to the personal transparency required by some of the questions, not every part of every discussion question would be appropriate for group discussion. Use discretion.

*MARRIAGES WHERE DISCOURAGEMENT
AND STRUGGLE ARE PRESENT*

We realize that when a marriage is in distress, it is difficult to accomplish anything together, let alone watch a marriage series together. It is our recommendation that if the problems are somewhat severe and the tension in the marriage is high, that the material be viewed as individuals. Often, one individual will begin the process of restoring his or her marriage by working through the series, *A Lifetime Love*. Once they are impacted by its content, they have a clearer vision and a better understanding of what they need to do to help restore their home. Sometimes that in itself is enough to begin the healing. If tensions are indeed high, we find couples listen and

learn better when they are not sitting together and watching it in the same room. (In which case they tend to want to “coach” out of it, instead of simply “learning” from it.) Thought questions are enclosed to aid this effort. If the tension is high enough, a minister, counselor, etc. will then probably need to help the two work through what they have heard, helping them begin to decide what they are going to *do* with what they heard.

Couples that are not in crisis will find that the series is easy to watch together and discussion flows rather naturally out of each session. The questions will give depth to their discussion. Good marriages are a choice. Working through this series will help any couple make better choices.

*MAY GOD BLESS YOUR HOME WITH A LIFETIME LOVE,
AND MAY HE USE THIS SERIES TO HELP YOU
BUILD THE MARRIAGE YOU WANT TO COME HOME TO.*

Session One

Why Doesn't Love Last?

BIBLE REFERENCES FOR SESSION ONE:
BOOK OF PROVERBS — FOR EXAMPLE, PROVERBS 5:15-23

SUMMARY: Session One is about a number of things, but it primarily centers around the two following questions:

1. *How do you think love happens?* What we believe about love is probably the beginning place in all of this. If we believe wrong things (even if those wrong concepts are wrapped up in our culture's most popular packages), then those false beliefs will eventually collide with reality, and that family will have a crisis.

Couples in crisis have a choice. They can either believe something is fatally flawed in one or both of them and that the marriage is a mistake, or they can come to the conclusion that what they believe about love is wrong and choose to change what they believe in order to save the relationship. This session is intended to expose at least two of these wrong beliefs. (The next session is intended to show a better way.)

2. *Are you mature enough to actually love someone?* There are many good and very likeable people who are still far too immature to really love another person. In this session we do not define the immature as an age group, but identify them as individuals who lack one or more of the three key ingredients of personal maturity:
 - a. A strong unshakable morality
 - b. Personal contentment and peace within themselves
 - c. The ability to generate their own joy and happinessPeople who do not possess these traits normally believe that somehow a relationship will magically provide wholeness to

their life, and while they do not recognize it, the “thing missing” is one or more of these essential elements. They tend to be willing to “trade love” for whatever ails them. This “crutch” relationship is often disguised and is difficult to spot, but the results are always the same. When another person is unable to provide what their own life lacks, they often blame their partner and become disillusioned and begin to spiral into a deep, dark hole of depression, addictions, etc.

Can someone become mature while in a relationship? Absolutely! But, they must recognize the problem for what it is and deal with it. While the terms “mature” and “immature” may sound a bit harsh to us, far more blunt are the biblical words normally used — “wise” and “foolish” (see the book of Proverbs). A fool will never do well in any relationship. Often “the marriage” is blamed when, in fact, it is not a marriage problem at all, it is simply time for “the fool” (or fools) to grow up!

THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Session One

1. What caught your attention in this session? Were there any “Wow, that makes sense!” moments for you?
2. Have you seen relationships that fit either of the first two patterns described by Randy?

EROS: “I’ll love you if (and as long as) you meet my needs!”
or *PHILIA*: “I love you because of . . .”

- Which one have you seen the most?
- Are there popular movies or books that illustrate these ideas?
- Did you come from a family that had some of these traits?
- Have you been in a relationship that looked like one of them?

- Are you worried that your present situation looks like either one of them?
- Do you agree with Randy that these are wrong ideas?
- If your relationship is based on one of these wrong ideas, are you willing to change your ideas to something better?

3. Randy strongly warned that it is easy for “needy people” to fall in love. He pointed out that falling in love is often an attempt to solve our own problems in life.

Ask yourself:

Is there any chance that I am in this relationship because I am (or was) running from the life I had? Am I in it because I am afraid of being alone? Were there any selfish interests that played a role? What about my mate and these things?

If you had to choose between the two, are you in this relationship because your greatest need is to give love, or is your greatest need to be loved? What about your mate?

What would worry you more; that you are not being responsible enough in giving love, or that you are not being loved well enough?

4. If being wise (mature) means someone has
- a. An unshakable character
 - b. A personal contentment
 - c. And they have their own happiness/joy . . .
- Would people describe you as wise?
 - Would wise people describe you as wise?
 - Do you believe you are wise?
 - Do you show the evidence of living wisely?
 - Do you think your personal immaturity contributes to any of the struggles you may have in this relationship?

- If you “stub your toe” in any type of relationship, what two flaws of yours are ordinarily the cause?
- Do others think of your mate as a wise person?
- Does your mate believe he or she is wise?
- Do you see your mate as wise?
- How much do you think your mate’s personal immaturity contributes to any of the struggles the two of you may have in this relationship?

5. What caused you to fall in love with your mate:

- We share so much in common (how will time affect this?).
- Life just seemed to throw us together.
- I admired the wholeness of their life.
- It was a rescue operation — he/she really needed me!
- It was a rescue operation — I really needed him/her!
- I am not sure that I have ever loved my mate.

What do you think causes people to be “in love” with one another for a lifetime? Why do you think people fail at it? What will make your relationship a success story?

Session Two

Staying In Love

BIBLE REFERENCES FOR SESSION TWO:

GENESIS 2:22-24

MALACHI 2:13-16

MATTHEW 6:21, 19:1-9

EPHESIANS 5:22-33

SUMMARY: Session Two points out that a real love, one that grows and deepens through the years, requires two essentials:

1. Essential #1: COMMITMENT

The “let’s love one another for the rest of our lives” kind of love is not child’s play. It requires a maturity that sets aside selfishness for the good of the other person and of the marriage. It requires an active, full-scale commitment both to the ideal of marriage and to the partner that I want to be in love with the rest of my life. It is not doing everything my partner might wish, but it is certainly doing everything I can that is right! Amazingly, it is only through such a complete and total commitment that our love for anyone can really last. The result is, we really do love them and we love them well.

For those of us who are Christian, the ability to make and keep such a commitment flows out of our relationship with our Creator. Will our commitment produce perfect marriages? Of course not, for our spouse’s ability to love is contingent upon their own commitment, but be encouraged! Mates often learn from one another how this love thing works.

2. Essential #2: CHARACTER

While the desire to love is instinctive (something we were born with), the ability to love is not! The ability to keep our commitments is dependent upon having a strong, mature character. The words for someone who can really love are

strong words like “noble,” “honorable,” “wise,” “mature,” etc. While these may sound archaic in our modern culture, the absence of these qualities explains the merry-go-round of broken promises and dashed dreams within our homes. If you are to keep the commitment to love, you must have the ability to forgive, be resilient, be gentle even when angry, and the ability to speak honestly — and that’s just the short list! In other words, it requires that we be grown up! Thankfully, there is on-the-job training, but the foundation of these traits must be there.

THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Session Two

1. What caught your attention in this session? Were there any “Wow, that makes sense to me!” moments?
2. Have you seen relationships that look like the healthy pattern Randy is describing?
 - Where have you seen this kind of love? (Be specific)
 - Are there popular movies or books that illustrate this idea?
 - Did you come from a family that had this core trait?
 - Is this *AGAPE* love at the core of your relationship? If not, why?
 - Do you agree with Randy that this is the way love really works?
 - Do you want this for your marriage?
 - What stands in the way of your accepting this truth and living it out?
 - Are you prepared and able to live sacrificially in carrying out your commitment to love your mate?
 - Do you have the strength of character to do so?

3. Where and how are you currently investing your time, energy, resources, etc.? What does your behavior say about where your affections are? Are there changes needed?

4. Randy pointed out that while there are people who are difficult to love, our feelings of love are primarily the product of our own behavior toward them. Do you believe that to be true? If it is true, then what are the implications?

5. We seldom “invent a new lifestyle for ourselves” when we get married. In fact, we most often duplicate within our marriage the same kind of love we have been demonstrating to our parents, siblings, close friends, etc.

Examining your past and current relationships, what does that imply about your future? Looking around you, have you allowed hurt, bitterness, or anger to distance you from parents, siblings, or spouse? What about your mate?

- Do you have any pattern of “giving up” on family and friends?
- What do these relationships predict about your pattern with a mate? Are these patterns you want to continue?

6. Which, if any, of the following are true about you?

- I am loyal to my friends, but don't cross me. It is hard for me to forgive.
- I am best at shallow or surface relationships because I don't share or open up much.
- Others probably work harder at being a good friend to me than I do toward them. I “coast” a lot.
- I exert a lot of energy in relationships, but it may be a means of buying their love. I get my feelings hurt often.
- I don't really care if I have friends or not, and I hate questions like this!
- For some reason, I am not treated very fairly; people often seem to ignore me or walk all over me.

- I have good intentions, but I don't seem to follow through very well.

- I like having my way!

7. People who begin to withhold their investment in a mate normally do so because one of the following gets in the way:

- a. Selfishness
- b. Pride
- c. Some level of hurt and bitterness

- Which of these has taken place within your marriage?

- Which one holds the greatest potential danger for you? (Which one for your mate?)

8. The commitment to “treat someone right” does not mean we tolerate every choice they make. Some things are just flat wrong! (Abuse, lying, etc.) Do you have situations in your relationship now where real love would set boundaries?

- Do you see setting and holding boundaries as an act of love?
- Do you see how not setting boundaries can be unloving?
- Did you grow up in a home where boundaries were set, or one where they should have been?
- Do you know how to set boundaries?

Session Three

The Difference Between Men and Women

BIBLE REFERENCES FOR SESSION THREE:

1 PETER 3:1-7
EPHESIANS 5:22-33
SONG OF SOLOMON

SUMMARY: Session Three focuses on the nature of the two genders:

MEN AND BOYS are marked by the drive to be respected. For a man to do well, he has to be able to hold his head up, look at himself, and feel like he is succeeding (or at least courageously battling) in the things that matter. And in order to feel loved, he has to have a sense that the love comes with some admiration, and even a bit of honor. A woman who understands this tends to love her husband with attitudes that are reflected through simple words like "Thank you." "Did I ever tell you?" etc. That his wife honestly respects his life is the greatest gift that she will ever give him. The wife who fails to love her husband in wise ways tends to be far too silent about the appreciation and admiration she holds. But, even more likely, she tends to be far too critical and demeaning in her attitudes and language.

A man will never feel loved if he does not feel respected; it is the oxygen he breathes! Is a man always respectable in all areas of his life? Of course not, and no one can pretend to admire that which is in reality a weakness. But a wife who loves her husband can always find parts of his life that can be respected, and even her belief in him will be a key part of his becoming what he would like to be. People tend to live up or down to what we think of them. (It does need to be noted that giving a husband respect is not the same as cowering under

every wish or want he might have. Real respect will sometimes come in the form of confrontation.)

WOMEN AND GIRLS are marked by the need to be valued and important to someone. Women tend to value close relationships and close friendships even more than the male gender does. A woman who feels deeply loved by her husband does so because she believes she really matters to him! She does not feel like she has to compete for his attention or affection. She believes that while he has many things that pull and tug at his life, he loves her with all his heart. His attitudes are communicated with simple phrases like "Thank you." "Have I told you today?" etc. To love her well, he is considerate, he is polite, he is kind, he is gentle, he has time for her, etc. A husband who fails, tends to do so because he takes her for granted. He tends to crush her heart with absence or with harshness.

It is an old phrase, but if a wife does not feel *precious* to her husband, she will struggle with feeling loved. Is a woman always easy to love? Of course not. She, too, has flaws, and those flaws cannot be "valued." But, as stated in the previous paragraph on men and boys, there are still parts of her life her husband can greatly treasure. And his valuing her will be a key part in helping her become what she would like to be.

Let a man love his wife and let a wife respect her husband.
— *EPHESIANS 5:33 (NIV)*

THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
Session Three

1. Were there any "Wow, that really makes sense to me!" moments?
2. In general, have you seen men or boys who:
 - Seemed to live in an environment where "admiration" and "appreciation" were freely lavished on them? What did you notice?
 - Seemed to live in a more critical environment — one where high criticism was given, or perhaps "nothing" was given? What did you notice?

If you are a male, (which kind of home did you grow up in?) How much difference was there between the parents? Grandparents?
3. Have you seen women or girls who:
 - Seemed to live in an environment where "great worth" and "precious to me" were freely lavished on them? What did you notice?
 - Seemed to live in an environment where high criticism was given, or perhaps "nothing" was given? What did you notice?

If you are a female, (which kind of home did you grow up in?) How much difference was there between the parents? Grandparents?
4. Discipline can be a part of real love and respect, or it can be done in such a way that it is destructive and demeaning. When you were growing up did discipline reinforce how much your parents loved and valued you, or did it reinforce that you were "worthless," a "disappointment," etc.?
 - How do you think that impacts how you receive criticism or correction now?

- How do you think that impacts how you give criticism or correction now?
5. Is it possible to communicate worth, value, and respect to someone who is disappointing you on important things? How do you do it? (Session Four will deal with this topic.)
 6. If you are a man, do you believe your wife feels deeply valued by you?
 - If not, what stands in the way of your living this out?
 - Are there past incidents where genuine apologies and forgiveness are needed?
 7. If you are a woman, do you believe your husband feels highly respected and appreciated in your eyes?
 - If not, what stands in the way?
 - Are there past incidents where genuine apologies and forgiveness are needed?
 8. While the answer to this question is not for group discussion, pre-marital sex does deeply impact the most basic beliefs we carry about one another.
 - Do you see how a wife can feel used and devalued by the memory of pre-marital sex?
 - Do you see how a husband can feel as if he has lost her (and his own) respect by the memory of this act?
 - Are there genuine apologies to be made, and is there forgiveness that needs to be given in your relationship?

Session Four

Words . . . How to Have a Healthy and Tender Fight

BIBLE REFERENCES FOR SESSION FOUR:

BOOK OF PROVERBS — FOR EXAMPLE, PROVERBS 12:8, 12:22

JAMES 3:1-12

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

SUMMARY: Words — a great marriage requires that we be able to use them well.

Those who cannot or will not speak wisely eventually tear up their home and their partner's heart. If we withhold the right words, we emotionally starve our mate, and we grow distant and far apart. On the other hand, to use words rashly or harshly is to crush the very ones we love. There are three essential ingredients to wise and godly speech:

- a. Speak honestly (and speak that truth today).
- b. Speak words that value and build up the other.
- c. Speak with humility.

When these three parts are practiced together, you have the ability to work through the hard things of life; you will find that you heal and build up, not tear down and destroy. Those who do not practice them together, don't practice them at all! To speak the truth without balance, and then two days later build up or express humility, etc. is simply to be inconsistent. And, inconsistent people feel dangerous to us. We "fence them off," never really believing them or letting them get too close to us. To be a sweet gift to your mate, speak the three parts together.

In this session, we also point out that one of the most fatal flaws to relationships is resentment and bitterness. If we do not use words correctly, we not only bruise our mate, but we also create the breeding ground for our own resentment. If you want to keep the hurts of life from becoming permanent

fixtures on your heart, twisting it into an embittered one, you must learn to speak with godly wisdom.

Words – great marriages are built on them; failed marriages are destroyed by them.

THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Session Four

1. What caught your attention in this session? Were there any "Wow, that makes sense!" moments for you?
2. When it came to disagreements, hurt feelings, etc., what were some of the unwritten rules of your family-of-origin?
Did your family . . .
 - Pretend there were no problems?
 - Explode?
 - Give the silent treatment?
 - Fight unfairly by bringing up old grudges as well?
 - Get physical or intimidate?
 - Shout?
3. Randy said people often fight unfairly by taking on one of the following three habits:
 - Artillery Barrage
 - Sniper
 - Shut-down siege (starve them out!)Normally, not everyone has the same pattern in a family . . .
 - What "roles" did the members of your family take (what did Dad do? Mom? Older brother? etc.)?
 - What was your pattern?
 - What is your pattern now?
4. What were the patterns in your spouse's family? What role did your spouse take?

5. Bitterness or resentment is almost always a “fatal flaw” to relationships. Have you allowed this as a practice . . .
 - In your relationship with parents, siblings, or others?
 - In your marriage?
6. What do you need to do about it? Are you willing? Do you agree that “separating our edification and humility from our honest talk” creates problems?
 - Do you practice all three?
 - Do you practice all three at the same time?
 - Which one (or ones) are you weakest at?
7. Non-verbal language reveals the heart — what do your non-verbals reveal about your honesty, edification, or humility? Have you asked others what they see in you?
8. How do you decide which thoughts to share and which thoughts to keep to yourself?
 - *I gauge what I think their reactions will be.* Doesn't that just create an unhealthy game?
 - *The mood I am in determines it.* Doesn't that make you pretty hard to live with?
 - *I try to decide what the best way is to love and build a marriage.* Do you have the courage of character to actually practice this?
9. *Not every thought has to be shared.* Sometimes our desire to “share” is just our need to be “in control” and have everything our own way.
 - Do you have a control problem?
 - Are you too inflexible?
 - What about your spouse?

Session Five

Finances, In-Laws, and Sex . . . How being wise matters

BIBLE REFERENCES FOR SESSION FIVE:

I TIMOTHY 6:6-19

HEBREWS 13:4-6

PROVERBS 16:8, 17:1, 18:20-22, 21:13, 22:7

PROVERBS 16:20-24, 16:28, 16:32, 17:9

PROVERBS 19:18

Summary: The quality of a marriage is seldom established through great, dramatic moments. Far more often we define and frame our lives by being wise and considerate in the countless daily, dare we even say routine, items of life.

Being wise with the details matters, because that is where our life is. This session on finances, in-laws, sex, and children tries to communicate that the daily decisions you make on these issues will determine the quality of your marriage. In general, each of these areas presents daily opportunities to grab for personal power or opportunities to share it. They present opportunities to “protect myself” or to “protect our marriage,” opportunities to be self-centered or mate-centered, opportunities to steal trust or to build it. The following is a very brief start to very important issues.

Being wise with *FINANCES* means:

- It is *OUR* money. Anything that emphasizes my personal ownership robs our marriage of unity.
- Deal with finances together. You can either have a husband/wife relationship or a parent/child relationship. The difference starts here.
- Work from a written budget, which provides a framework for shared decision making and helps avoid unintentional offenses.

- Avoid irresponsible surprises. The temptation is to buy our way out of emotional difficulties.
- Avoid debt. While there is “good debt,” bad debt will enslave your future.
- Be generous. Life is a lot more fun, and it is sure closer to the heart of God.

Being wise with *IN-LAWS* means:

- Being fair. When one side is valued more than the other, nothing good comes from it.
- Living balanced. Love your family, spend time with them, but have your own family.
- Always speak well of your mate. Help your family think well of your mate.
- Bloodlines speak if hard things must be spoken. It is heard better and forgiveness comes easier!

Being wise with *SEX* :

- Acknowledge that you are and will be “wired” in very different ways from one another. Can you unselfishly love and meet needs that are different from yours?
- Satisfying sex primarily meets emotional needs. Sex is less about a physical drive and more about an emotional one.
- Tenderness and gentleness will still define passionate love. Our pornographic society has painted a false and artificial picture. From its influence, sex has primarily become a solo act that simply uses someone else to “satisfy” us. No wonder we stay so emotionally unsatisfied!
- Something wonderful and mysterious does occur. You may share many things — mailboxes, closets, etc., but somehow it is in giving yourselves sexually to one another that unity of life is created.

Being wise about *CHILDREN*:

While there was far too little time to do more than to briefly introduce the subject of children, the following observations were made.

- Children add to the depth of love in a family. They are a blessing.
- There is enough love for several children. There may be reasons for a small family, but not having enough love is not one of them.
- Give yourselves some time, but don’t think everything must be perfect before you have children. Don’t let money or careers be your master on when to have children.
- Watch and discuss how others parent. The two of you must parent with the same philosophy; establish that philosophy by watching great parents. Know your philosophy before you have children.

THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Session Five

FINANCES:

1. Were there any “Wow, that makes sense to me!” moments?
2. As a single, did you handle money in wise ways?
 - Were you self-disciplined with it?
 - Were you generous?
 - Did you have a good work ethic and earn it responsibly?
 - How did you handle debt?
 - Did you have a written budget? (Why or why not?)
 - What was the best thing you did in your habits with money?
 - Do you show signs of being excessively addicted to “stuff”? (Entertainment? Eating out? Anything else?)

- What in your character has changed?
- How about your mate? What were their patterns as a single?

In your marriage (or marriage to be):

- Can you honestly talk with your mate about money and spending habits?
 - Does one or both of you get defensive if the other wants to talk about it?
 - Are you using money to give yourself a sense of power or for the good of your marriage?
 - Do you try to heal emotional longings or wounds with money?
 - Do you try to buy love with it?
 - Does the word “budget” scare you? Why or why not?
 - Do you keep any “secrets” from your mate regarding money you spend?
 - Are you comfortable with the concept that all the money is “our” money?
 - How would your mate answer these questions?
 - How would your mate answer these questions about you?
3. What would you like to change in your marriage concerning the handling of finances?

IN-LAWS:

1. Were there any “Wow, that makes sense to me!” moments?
2. In what ways have you put your family, or your spouse’s family, in an awkward position regarding your mate? Is your mate’s reputation safe when you are speaking to your family? What about your mate and these same questions?

3. Are you personally taking an interest in your spouse’s family? Does your mate take an interest in yours?
4. Are you being fair with how you spend time with family? Are there boundaries you need to set? Why?
5. Are either of you hurting your marriage by being too close to your family of origin?
6. Are there awkward issues that should be talked about with family now? Do you both agree it should be done? What is it doing to the two of you?

SEX:

1. Were there any “Wow, that makes sense to me!” moments?
2. Why did Randy say that sex is much more about emotional needs than it is a physical drive? What does that say about satisfying sex?
3. *This question is far too personal for group discussion!*
As a married individual, do I put my sexual wants above those of my mate’s? Is sex in any way a “power play” in my home? Does your mate believe that you are trying to put their needs first? Do you believe your mate is trying to put your needs first?
4. Being involved sexually with each other prior to marriage is damaging. Do you understand why? Have you talked with your mate about it? If you crossed lines with your mate, have you honestly apologized and asked forgiveness?
5. If in your marriage the sexual life is not as it should be, would you be willing to talk to a Christian counselor or minister about it?

CHILDREN:

1. How were you raised? Is that how you want to parent? In specific, what do you want to do differently with your children? Do you like how your mate was parented? How does your mate feel about the way he/she was raised?
2. So, do the two of you see parenting alike? How flexible are each of you? How willing are you to parent as an “us” (not each doing his/her own thing)?
3. What is the “right number” of children for your home? When? What if God gave you a surprise?
4. Who are some parents that you watch and think you might want to learn from?

Session Six

How to Have a Spiritual Home

BIBLE REFERENCES FOR SESSION SIX:

PSALMS 23, 127, 139

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-13

COLOSSIANS 3:12-21

1 PETER 1:3-9

SUMMARY: When we were children, we believed that physical nakedness would be the most difficult thing to overcome in marriage. We were wrong. It turns out that “spiritual nakedness” is the greatest barrier every couple has to overcome. To let my spouse see my heart before God is to reveal the most intimate part of my life. Individuals often attempt to hide that portion of their lives — sometimes because they have secrets they want to hide. It is one thing if God knows how shallow, weak, afraid, or hypocritical I am; it is another thing if my mate really knows. So, we simply keep the spiritual blinds pulled tightly down.

For other couples, it is not so much secrets as it is “we don’t know how.” They have never learned to share their heart and deepest faith with anyone. If spiritual transparency never comes to these couples, they will never be as completely one as they would like to be. The starting point for change is having the courage to begin to let your mate hear you pray for them. To let your husband or wife hear your heart as you reveal it to God is to fully include your mate in your life. The couple who practices this will become one in heart.

Those who are transparent before God are also changed by Him. To live before my Creator with humility and reverence, to live with my God in obedience to Him is to restore my own life to wholeness. Anything less produces a lesser me. If I have trouble living in harmony with my Creator, I will also have

trouble with most everything else in life. The best marriages have both people running to God and sharing the journey. There are, of course, marriages where that journey is not fully shared. Those marriages can still have love and tenderness, they can still raise their children and be a home; they are just never quite the homes they could be.

THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
Session Six

1. Were there any “Wow, that makes sense to me!” moments?
2. What does it mean to have “a spiritual home” vs. just having a home “where two Christians live”?
3. What kind of spiritual home was your family-of-origin?
 - How was prayer handled?
 - Did you talk about spiritual things?
 - Did the talk match the lifestyle?
 - Did you learn to read the Scriptures there (so that the Bible came alive and made sense when you read it)?
4. What does it mean to be “transparent” when you are praying or talking about spiritual things?
 - Are you embarrassed to talk to or about God with your mate?
 - Can you talk at a heart level and not just a “surface or fact only” level?
 - If you are embarrassed, what kind of barriers does that create for your marriage?
 - How could joint prayer (transparent prayer) join you closer as a couple?
5. Are there any aspects of your relationship with God that you are reluctant or afraid to share with your spouse?
 - For example, admitting sin, asking for forgiveness, praying for others, etc.?

- Have you learned to read the Bible so that it makes sense to you?
 - Have you learned to pray in such a way that you are talking to God, or does it feel like you are just going through the motions?
6. Of course, all of this really comes down to what we believe about God:
 - Do you believe Jesus revealed who God is and what He is like?
 - Do the two of you see Christ in the same way?
 - Do you believe that you can or should walk “in faith” (trusting Him with your lives)?
 - Are you trusting Him with your life?
 - Do you believe God can be trusted?
 - Does God seem close and personal to you, or does He seem far and distant?
 - Do you believe God loves and forgives?
 - Do you believe God could love and forgive you? Do you believe He has?
 - Do you believe God is the one we will all stand before one day?
 - Do you believe God is pleased with you?
 - Are you content with the faith you have?

While many aids are available to help individuals answer these questions, www.alifetime.com and two books within the Bible would be great starting places. We would encourage you to read Luke and John in the New Testament. These books illustrate how and why the eye-witnesses came to believe in and love Christ. Their testimony will help you find your answers.

Notes

7. When it comes to living out your faith and worship, what would you like your home to look like?
- What do you need to change to bring it about?
 - What is the scariest part about that change?
 - What do you believe God would have you do?
 - What can you start today?
 - Where could you get help if you felt like you needed it?

For additional information and resources, please go to
www.alifetimelove.com