



PRE-MARRIAGE



MEANINGFUL
RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

by Donald Miller

I wish Betsy and I would have had this online course when we got engaged. She wanted to go to pre-marital counseling, but because I'd chased her to D.C., I didn't know anybody in the area who could do it. And the last thing I wanted to do was pay somebody hundreds of dollars to sit and listen to us talk about sex and finances. Aren't there deeper issues than these?

Thankfully, Al and Nita Andrews were dear friends of ours and they let us know what was critical to talk about before we got married. With their friendly and informal guidance, Betsy and I talked about our families of origin, the critical scenes that shaped us, our fighting styles and the way we process emotions. These conversations set us up for a beautiful and successful marriage that, so far, has been free of drama. We love being married.

I could not be more excited to introduce you to Al and Nita. Thousands of couples will be saved countless hours of pain and hardship because of the conversations they were willing to have on camera with Steve and Gracie Moakler. What a treasure this course is.

And the course is simple. Just watch each video and answer the corresponding discussion questions, and you'll move into the upper echelon of couples who were willing to have these critical conversations before tying the knot. If you're already married but didn't do pre-marital counseling, you'll get just as much out of this course as anybody.

Congratulations on being the type of couple willing to talk about the stuff that matters. Your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren will all benefit from the heart-to-heart conversations you're about to have with each other. Your marriage may be saved because of the journey you're about to embark on.

Much love to you on your journey of intimacy.

Sincerely,

Donald Miller

Pre-Marriage

Discussion Guide

Learning to see the world from your significant other's perspective

The Pre-Marriage video series is broken up into four sessions, each addressing one of the major conversations you and your spouse should have before you tie the knot.

Unlike traditional pre-marital counseling curriculums, this is not a checklist guide. The goal is to create a paradigm shift. Finances and sex aren't what's going to make or break your marriage—they're symptoms of much deeper and complex issues at work. This isn't a list of do or don'ts or right or wrong answers, but a way to understand one another better.

There's a stream under the surface of most of our relational issues. Our hope is to help you get to the stream, which will better inform the surface issues that inevitably come up in every intimate relationship.

Let's get started, shall we?

SESSION 1

The Setting of Your Story

Marriage is two stories coming together. Everyone grew up with a certain setting and everyone's setting is different; the joining of two stories is the joining of two settings. And the more you know about the setting of your partner's story, the better your collective story will be.



Watch the Session 1 videos. Then follow up by asking each other the discussion questions below.

1. What is the setting of your story? How did you grow up thinking about or learning to deal with life, pain, and conflict?

2. The setting you grew up in will often be your default mode. It's important your spouse knows what your default mode will be. Does your partner understand your default mode? And do they have compassion for how you were taught to see the world?

3. Are you guilty of moralizing your preferences? Is the way you do dishes the right way? Can you agree to differentiate between moral issues and personal preferences in everyday life? And are you willing to compromise and work with each other to make a peaceful home and relationship?

4. Take a few minutes to write down how you see your future spouse’s worldview. Start with “Through his or her eyes, I believe this is what is most important to him or her on a given day.” Then talk about it. Ask, “Am I right?” You may be surprised what you find, and ultimately you’ll better understand what the other one’s setting really is.

5. God intends to use both of you to make the other person better. Answer this question: How is your partner going to make you a better person?

This is a conversation you should start before marriage, but it will keep going forever. It’s about making the effort to better understand and know each other’s stories over a lifetime. And seeing the world from your partner’s perspective changes everything.

SESSION 2

Critical Scenes

We all have memorable moments from our childhood that shape or impact what we believe to be true about ourselves, and ultimately, who we become as adults. Many times these scenes feel traumatic or mark a significant shift that changes how we approach life from that point forward. Al and Nita refer to these as the critical scenes in our stories.



Watch the Session 2 videos. Then follow up by asking each other the discussion questions below.

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1. What is a critical scene in your story that has named or hurt you?

2. What challenges have you faced because of this scene?

3. What would your phrase or statement be to describe how this scene has impacted the way you react to life? Examples: *You're a burden. You're a princess and deserve to be served. We don't talk about conflict. We are free to overreact.*

4. How can your future spouse help you heal from the hard things that have happened to you? Is there a central message you need to consistently hear from your partner?

5. Will you commit to participating in the healing of your spouse? Do you agree, before God, that you've been given the task of participating in your partner's healing?

Marriage is more than just two people coming together; it's about change. We get to participate in the healing of each other's stories.

SESSION 3

The Art of War

This session is all about how to do conflict. And you learn how to do conflict by what you observed growing up. Arguing is always more about the back story than it is about the moment. The reality is that all relationships have conflict, and the healthiest people know how to approach it rather than avoid it.



Watch the Session 3 videos. Then follow up by asking each other the discussion questions below.

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1. How were you trained to do conflict growing up?

2. How do you approach tension or conflict between each other? What have you found is most helpful for you both? And what have you found not helpful?

3. Contending is choosing to believe that there is a higher and nobler version of your future spouse outside the present conflict. What would it look like to contend rather than fight with one another? How can you make one another feel less attacked and more cared for?

4. Often times we start arguments with content rather than addressing what our partner is feeling. How can you do a better job pulling away from a moment and lifting it to a heart-level conversation?

5. Do you find your arguments often move toward contempt? Will you agree that when an argument moves to insults or devaluing your partner, you'll cease the argument and come back to it later?

6. Words can concuss. And so they should be guarded. Some weapons are off limits because they lead to death. Is what you say or do to each other in a conflict "safe for children?" Do you find Nita's accountability phrase helpful? Will you implement it?

7. If conflict is prevalent and you feel like you just can't seem to get on the same page, who is a third person you both could sit down with?

The best kind of fighting is when you're fighting for each other. Be willing to tell the other person when he/she is acting in a way that is dishonoring and disrespectful to his/her own beauty and character. When you fight for one another, you'll make each other better, and thus contribute to making the world better.

SESSION 4

Emotions

Depending on how you learned to view and express emotions as a child directly affects your emotional tendencies as an adult. The word “emotional” is often spun in a negative light, but the truth is your emotions are God’s way of communicating what is going on inside of you. Learning to put words to what you feel will help you achieve intimacy, and these six discussion questions will help you do exactly that.



Watch the Session 4 videos. Then follow up by asking each other the discussion questions below.

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1. What was taught, by observation, on how to express emotions in your family? Did it feel safe for you to express your emotions?

2. What emotions do you fear or find yourself avoiding the most?

3. Do you see the word “emotional” as a negative adjective? Why do you think that is?

4. Did you feel suppressed from expressing emotion as a child? If so, do you find that this has made you uncomfortable or ashamed when you cry or are emotive as an adult? How can you better encourage this expression between each other?

5. Do you do a good job expressing what you feel in your arguments with one another? If not, practice saying “I’m feeling _____” the next time you argue, rather than focusing on the circumstances.

6. What can you do to get in the habit of having more intentional conversations where you express what you’re feeling? How can you do a better job of making sure you’re touching base when you come and go? What did you think of Al and Nita’s suggestions? (Examples: *Tell me one thing about your day that will help me to better know you. What do you need tonight?*)

Conclusion

Congratulations on completing this course. The very fact that you took the time to watch the videos and engage in the conversation with each other puts you in the top percentage of couples. Most couples just ride the wave of emotions without thinking through how they are going to live with each other. But that's not you. You saw the hard work ahead and faced it. You did the work. That means you're much more likely to stick together and enjoy life with each other.

Since you bought this course, it's yours for life. Feel free to watch it long after you're married. You may find you need a refresher and we are so happy to provide it for you.

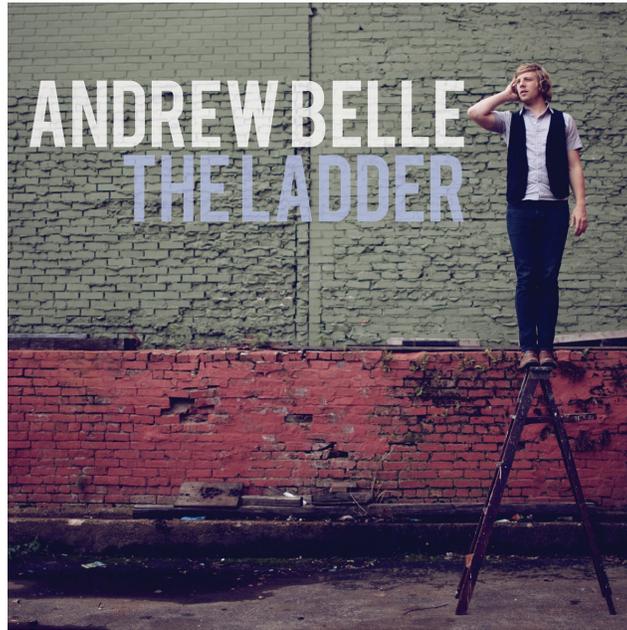
God created your future spouse for one reason, to bless you. That person sitting next to you was given to you to make your life better, to give you a sense of peace, to make you a more humble and loving person, and to give you a deep, beautiful sense of security. This is what a healthy relationship will do for you. And it's not just about you. When you're healthy, your children get to grow up in a family in which they understand that whether life presents them blessings or challenges, the core of their identity is safe. Mom loves Dad and Dad loves Mom and no matter what, everybody sticks together and works it out.

What a beautiful thing that you were willing to do the work. Many fights, broken hearts, misunderstandings and feelings of neglect were just prevented because you took the time to open up your story and your heart.

Much love to you on your journey. Have a terrific wedding!

Sincerely,

Donald Miller



Music from

The Ladder

by Andrew Belle



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