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-Gary Chapman, Ph.D. author of *The Five Love Languages*

# unSTUCK

ESCAPING THE RUT  
*of a*  
LIFELESS MARRIAGE

BARRY D. HAM, Ph.D



# Endorsements

“Barry Ham has great passion for helping couples who have found marriage difficult. For those who are stuck, this book offers practical help on how to get UNSTUCK.

I highly recommend it.”

Gary Chapman, Ph.D.

Author of *The Five Love Languages*

“Many couples in America today do not find themselves in deep trouble. Nor, if pressed, do they find themselves at the highest precipice of joy. If they were to sum up their marriage, they might simply use one word—STUCK. Drawing on a lifetime of therapeutic experience and biblical insight, Barry Ham has written an extremely helpful book for couples in any stage of marital development. This book will help you get—UNSTUCK. Read it!”

Graham Baird

Lead Pastor of Mission Street Church, Camarillo, California,  
and author of *One Hundred Years of Ministry*

“In this book Barry identifies many of the pitfalls that have contributed to marriages becoming stale and lifeless. But more importantly, he offers clear guidelines and strategies to enable couples to reverse this trend, get unstuck, and experience the marriage that both they and God had in mind.”

H.B. LONDON

Pastor to Pastors Emeritus for *Focus on the Family* and author of  
*Pastors at Greater Risk*

“Barry has dialed into the life journey of so many couples, including Christian couples, who really are “stuck” and only “enduring” year after year. The raw honesty and clarity he has captured are both courageous and inviting. But Barry’s response to these and other couples has helped them discover that their story isn’t over—they get to discover that a new story of healing and restoration awaits them in the grace and truth that Jesus personally invites them into.”

BRENT WILLIAMS

Director of Pastoral Care Ministries, Woodmen Valley Chapel,  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

“Dr. Ham really gets it...long-term, intimate marriage is not based on emotions, but rather on commitment. Our generation has forgotten this fact, and Dr. Ham does an excellent job of providing both insightful and practical suggestions for how to return to this unavoidable truth. Following the roadmap in this book dramatically improves your chance of realizing your dream for a lifelong marriage.”

CRAIG CATO

Therapist and author of *Solo on a Tandem Bicycle*

“If you’re stuck in a painful and deeply disappointing relationship, there is hope and healing and even possible reconciliation. A well-seasoned counselor and author of *God Understands Divorce*, Barry understands broken relationships and offers practical, compassionate counsel. If you or a friend is “stuck” and sees no way out, this is a must-read. Share it with a friend.”

MARK SKALBERG

Creator of the “Starting Over” workshops

“*Unstuck* is real. With stories and examples that most couples will relate to, this book encourages couples to put God at the center and choose to love one another again. For many unhappy couples, the gloom of marriage came out of nowhere, and Barry helps them find the love they always wanted.”

DR. TIM CLINTON

President of the American Association of Christian Counselors

“Barry Ham’s *Unstuck* is a glorious mess. Barry writes not as a mere theorist but as a seasoned practitioner on the subject. As a marriage and family therapist, he has seen it all. *Unstuck* addresses God’s design for marriage and healthy relationships with fresh eyes and an eternal perspective. This book hits the target!”

JIMMY DODD

President of PastorServe and author of  
*Survive Or Thrive: 6 Relationships Every Pastor Needs*

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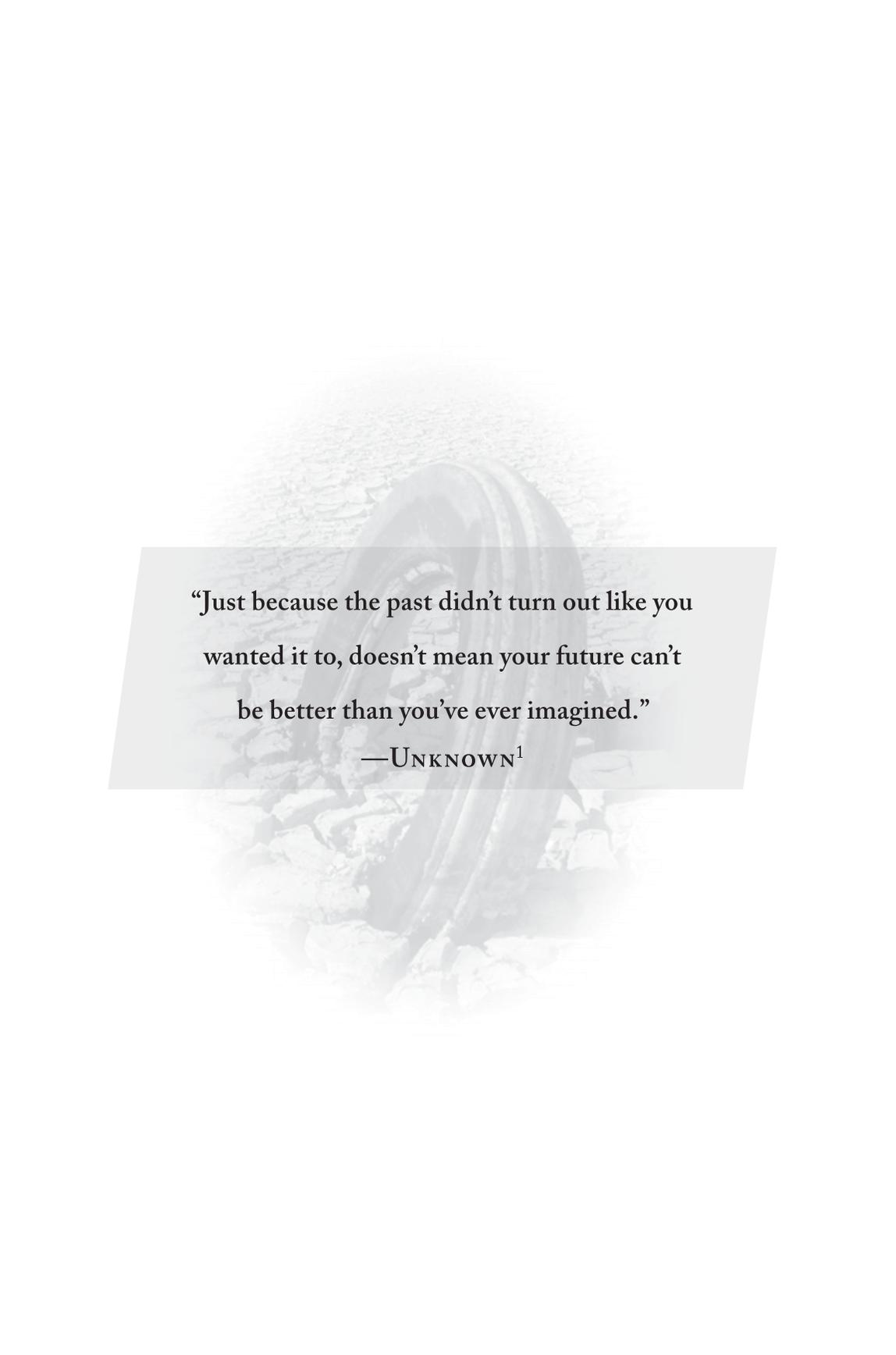
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“Just because the past didn’t turn out like you wanted it to, doesn’t mean your future can’t be better than you’ve ever imagined.”

—UNKNOWN<sup>1</sup>

# Introduction

“While the threat of divorce may appear to be the major motivation for change, the threat that the relationship will remain the same is far more powerful.”<sup>2</sup>

Why are you reading this? You may have picked the book up off the shelf because the title or the cover caught your eye. Perhaps you were online searching, stumbled across this, and ordered it. Or it may have been recommended or loaned to you by a friend. Those are all good pieces to the answer, but the question remains—why are you reading this?

While I most likely have not met you, I can make some educated guesses. In all my years as a marriage and family therapist, I have yet to have someone call me and say, “My marriage is in terrific shape and my spouse and I are thoroughly enjoying life and each other. We just had some free time on our hands so we thought we would see if we could make an appointment to come in and just chat. We saw your picture on the Internet and thought you looked like you would be a nice person to meet.”

## *unstuck*

People come to my office because they are struggling with relationship issues. Things are not going as they had anticipated and now their marriage may be in crisis. They need help and they are looking for answers. My guess is that you are reading this book because you feel that your marriage is far from what you had dreamed it would be. You may have envisioned a spouse who would fully accept you, emotionally support you, treat you with grace and kindness, and, well, love you like no other. Yet the point in time arrived, whether it was a year ago or this morning, when you realized: “This is as good as it is ever going to get.” You may have contemplated divorce but are petrified by the prospect of how your children will be impacted, ways that your family might react, or how you would survive financially. Perhaps you have been married for decades when you came to this “status quo” realization and it seems too late now to get out. The bottom line seems to be—you’re stuck!

My guess: this is why you are reading this book. You feel depleted, dejected, perhaps even rejected, and you don’t know what to do. You are tired of settling for what feels like a loveless relationship. You want to experience the fulfilling marriage of which you once dreamed. What you have now does not ignite your spirit or feed your soul. You want more!

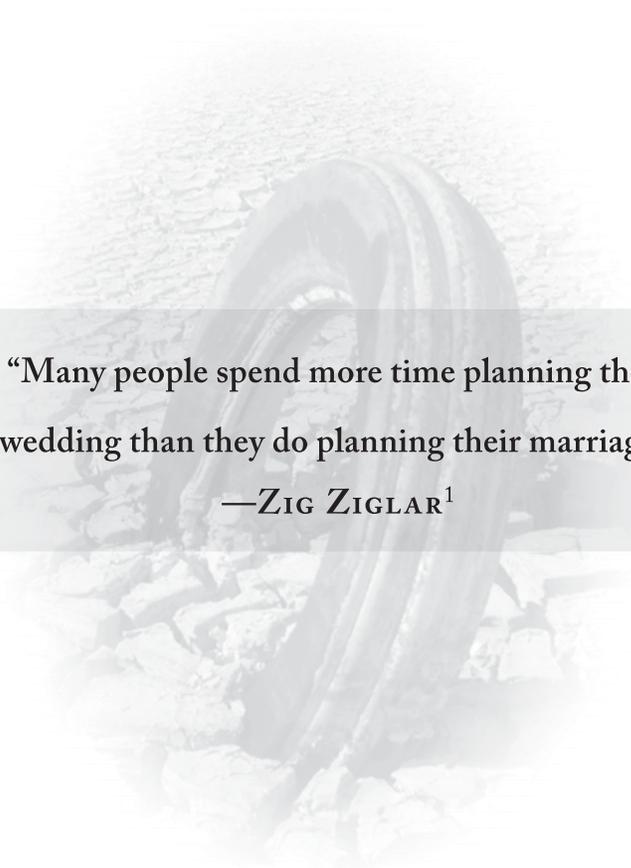
The quote at the beginning captures the motivation that can be generated by the threat of divorce. Still even in a divorce, good or bad, there will probably be some kind of change. But this—this empty stuckness is miserable! Being alone is one thing, but being alone in the context of a marriage, having to face the constant reminder of your disconnectedness, can be all-consuming.

You are reading this book because you no longer want to be stuck. You desire a life that is vibrant and energized. And I am here to tell you, it can be. You don’t have to settle into relational rotteness. Neither do you have to escape on the next ship to some isolated island on the other side of the planet. Life can be different—very different. Your marriage can be reignited and rejuvenated. Will it be?

## *Introduction*

That I don't know. But what I do know is that many couples have been able to adopt successfully the principles set forth in these pages, and they are now doing life very differently—and loving it.

So, if you are tired of being stuck, I encourage you to travel through these pages with me. The potential gain is immeasurable.



**“Many people spend more time planning their wedding than they do planning their marriage.”**

**—ZIG ZIGLAR<sup>1</sup>**

## **The Ideal Plan**

Wow! Could this really be happening—finally? Doug and Annie were standing among the aspen trees, with the sun shining brightly, as they were about to recite those treasured words: “I do.” It was a picture-perfect day in Colorado, with their family and best friends all part of this anticipated occasion.

This had been a long time coming, as they had been dating for a few years. From the time of their initial meeting, their relationship had experienced a variety of twists and turns. Doug had been working for a large nonprofit business in a public relations position. He had enjoyed this work immensely—perhaps even more so when Annie joined the company, becoming his supervisor. They quickly hit it off as friends and found their ability to collaborate in business to be both personally satisfying and beneficial to the organization.

Neither of them was looking for a romantic relationship. Annie had recently ended a disappointing long-term relationship and was more than content to be doing life “unattached.” While Doug had not been in a relationship for a few years, he also had found solace

and even a peace in focusing on his work and hanging out with his friends and his dogs (not always necessarily in that order).

However, as is often heard said, “when they least expected it,” things took a sudden turn—for the better. Annie was transferred to another branch of the company. While she had always enjoyed Doug’s company and thought he was attractive, she never really considered having anything but a friendship with him. She had strong principles when it came to appropriate workplace relationships, especially since she was his supervisor. However...now that she was no longer in that role...hmm.

That summer, during the company-wide barbeque, the two of them had the chance to chat, catching up on both work and personal developments. And it was during this conversation that something happened. While they weren’t quite sure what it was, they both left the evening with a new perspective on possibilities. The following weekend, they went out to dinner for the first time—well, the first time as an official date. A spark had ignited, and they were both, as they called it, “smitten.”

Over the next few years, their relationship grew to a level of health and connectedness neither had believed possible, and they were thrilled. They were frequently heard to comment to their friends, as well as each to other, about just how “easy” this relationship seemed to be. Following the past challenges of other relationships, this seemed like a dream come true.

So, here they were, four years later, preparing to say their wedding vows to one another. Annie looked gorgeous in her dress, and Doug cleaned up pretty well too. Their families liked their respective son- or daughter-in-law-to-be. The dream they both had nearly given up on was about to become reality. This was perfect!

For most of us, we find ourselves reading this story and thinking, “Yes! This is what it is supposed to be.” We have read and reread stories of the knight in shining armor who rescues the beautiful damsel

in distress. From the time that we were children, we have heard tales ranging from “Sleeping Beauty” to *The Princess Bride*—and they all seem to end with “happily ever after.” That is what we want—the fairy-tale love story with the happy ending. Over time this vision has become ingrained in our brains. This is what we want!

However, the experiences of most of us have been far from these rosy narratives. Even so, deep down inside, if we are honest, we still long for the kind of love and relationship that is described above. Why? Where does it come from? Is it a cruel hoax that has been woven into our psyche? Is it remotely achievable? If so, how in the world do we find it?

## The Design

As we journey together through these pages, we will endeavor to answer these questions—and many more. But let me begin by assuring you that yes, these desires have been implanted deep inside our souls, and no, this is not some cruel hoax.

Individuals have reasons for wanting to get married that run the gamut. While we usually imagine that “love” is the great motivator, that is not necessarily always the case.

Not surprisingly, “expectations” is frequently cited as the impetus behind marriage. It may be that a person’s family expects their son or daughter to be married by a certain age because for generations, family members may have fulfilled that unspoken role. This, in turn, can make that person feel as though if he or she is not married by that magical age, then something must be wrong with him or her.

About twenty years ago, I was in Japan visiting my friend Mike and his wife, who had traveled there to teach English. An interesting term I discovered was when they referred to a woman as a “Christmas cake.” I was puzzled by this until he explained to me the tradition. The idea is that if one has cake on Christmas, while it is sweet and tasty, nobody really wants it after December 25<sup>th</sup>. If

a young woman isn't married as she approaches thirty, she is viewed as "left on the shelf too long" or "past her expiration date." In other words, she is in danger of becoming a "Christmas cake."

I recall years ago in California working with a young woman who had heard the message loud and clear, "If you are to attain your rightful place in this family, then you will get married and give us grandchildren." Expectations, oftentimes communicated using guilt, can be a strong motivator.

Along the same lines as family expectations may be self-expectations—beliefs that "I am about to be too old and will no longer be 'marketable'." I hear this especially from women who feel that their best days are behind them and all that lies ahead are wrinkles and sagging body parts: "Before long, no man will find me attractive and I will be destined to wander through life rejected and alone."

Another incentive for marriage might be "someone wants me." While there is nothing wrong with being wanted (that is a good thing), it is the fear of not being wanted and perhaps even winding up alone that leads some people to jump at the first opportunity. Consideration may not be given as to whether or not this is a good match because the prospective bride or groom is worried that he or she won't find a match at all. They reason that someone (whomever it may be) is better than no one.

Being "complete" is often a subtle and unspoken incentive for marriage. There is a misguided notion that "if I am not married, then I am not complete." For these individuals, marriage is seen as the highest status of existence. How many times have you encountered someone who has never been married and viewed him or her with pity? Our unspoken logic is "that poor thing. Her life just can't be full and complete unless she has a mate." Continuing that logic: "And if she can't be full and complete, then she must be unhappy and is probably even miserable. Oh, what a shame. I feel so sorry for her. I certainly don't want to be viewed as pathetic so...I guess I had better get married."

There are any number of reasons that compel us to marry, some wise and others not so much. But it is no accident that my deepest longings include a desire for a spouse, a partner, a helper, a person who knows me better than anyone else and loves me anyway. We come by this desire quite naturally.

Marriage, contrary to the opinion of some, is not an invention of man. It originates from the Creator of man. The One who designed us, who knows us best, placed within our makeup, within the fabric of our DNA, a longing for “another.”

Look at the Genesis account of creation, where we see God acknowledging the fact it was not good for man to exist alone (see Gen. 2:18). Marriage is God’s idea. He brings together a man and a woman to unite them in the first marriage.

In Genesis 1 we have the account of God’s authorship of you and me and creation. You get a summary statement at the end of the first chapter in verse 31: “*God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. [So] there was evening, and...morning—the sixth day*” (Genesis 1:31). Everything He had done He said was good. But you read a little bit later and the phrase “not good” enters the picture. Chapter 2, verse 18: “*The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone...’*” (Genesis 2:18). Now, what’s the context of that? You flip back to the first chapter, to verse 26, and you read, “*...Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground*” (Genesis 1:26).

We’ve got a scenario here where God has created out of nothing, calling matter into being. He is creating, not out of a sense of need or out of a sense of boredom, but out of the reality of His character. Now in the midst of all that, you’ve got Scripture stating that everything is good; yet there is one thing that’s not good—that the man should be alone (see Gen. 2:18). You see, God is about relationship. We go back to Him saying “let Us,” meaning “Us”

within the Godhead. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is a perfectly sufficient community; there is complete relationship. God created men and women, not out of a need for a relationship, but out of a desire. He yearns to relate to human beings, and He has placed within us that same innate desire to relate—to Him as well as to each other.

So you've got God creating a finite human being to bear the image of an infinite God. For that to happen, plurality has to enter the picture. There's no way that one man, one woman, one boy, or one girl can bear His likeness. Yes, we all carry the thumbprint of God individually, but our ability to reflect God's image happens most fully when plurality enters the picture. Plural—not just one individual, not just male but female.

As a result, regardless of your personality type—you can be the biggest introvert in the world or the biggest extrovert; it doesn't matter—we all have the same flashing indicator light for intimacy on the dashboard of our hearts. It is a yearning for fulfillment that God has placed in our awareness. We have this innate understanding that we need each other.

Out of this context comes “the design.” Within various cultures, marriage traditions may look very different from one another. One country may have arranged marriages while another, like the United States, champions the right and ability to select one's own mate. Even within this country, we may find wedding traditions that entail simple church ceremonies, couples meeting with the justice of the peace, or elaborate, multiday feasts and events. Practices of how marriages come together vary, but the intrinsic desire to be bonded, connected, wedded happily and permanently comes directly from the heart and makeup of God. It is not by accident. “... *God created [man] in His own image...*” (Genesis 1:27).

## All I Want Are Two Things

I was shocked a few years ago as I listened to a group of single women in their forties and fifties discuss their criteria for dating candidates. I will readily admit that I was a bit naïve, but I was stunned nonetheless. I expected to hear that they would marry for love, compatibility, and so on. Instead, they listed items such as “six-figure incomes” and “someone who could fund all their travel desires.”

What do you most desire in your marriage? Is it the two-story brick house, the fully funded pension, or the vacation condo? Or is it something more relational?

In my years as a marriage and family therapist, I have found—and my own personal experiences would support this—that people generally want two things. Just two? Yep. Now you may be guessing, but I want to encourage you, before you read further, to search deep within yourself for what these two things might be. I mean, at your core, the things that would fill you the most, the longings you have had since you were a child—what would they be?

For most individuals, when they feel safe enough to take the risk and put it out there, they say this: “I want to be fully known and fully loved.” You may be looking at those words and wondering why I am emphasizing them so. You may say, “Well, sure, that makes sense. I would want that.” But think for a minute about what I am saying.

“I want to be fully known.” As a kid, I felt like no one understood me. My parents thought that...well, that I was a kid, that what I thought was silly, that my desires were immature and my feelings were to be dismissed. My siblings weren't much better. And my friends—oh, my friends. I wanted that “best friend”—the kind that Scripture refers to as “*closer than a brother*,” the kind that “*loves at all times*” (Proverbs 18:24; 17:17). Yet those who would be my friends might hang out with me one day and appear to be loyal, only to belittle and make fun of me and talk viciously about me the

next day. They probably thought that I was weird and went to find other friends.

“I want to be fully known AND fully loved.” There is the rub. While I want to be fully known, to do so I run the risk of being ostracized and abandoned. So, I let you know me—sort of, but not fully. I protect myself and avoid being vulnerable. I allow you to see the good parts of my personality, the parts that you might like. If I show you only the attractive, generous, magnanimous me, you may stick around. However, even if you do stay close, I will know that you are doing so because you think that you know who I am. Truly though, you know only a part of me. When you “love” the picture of me that I have painted without really knowing all of me, the love feels empty.

If I am honest, I want to be BOTH fully known AND fully loved. I have longed for a lifetime to have someone know me—good stuff, flaws, blemishes, warts, idiosyncrasies, weirdness and all—AND when she does, to completely, unconditionally love me! Think about it—isn't that really what you desire? Wouldn't that be the ultimate relationship?

We typically either let someone know us completely, which can be a very frightening experience, or we paint an unrealistic picture of ourselves that we think perhaps someone will love. Either way it feels hollow.

Now I recognize that only God is capable of knowing and loving without conditions, and we will look more at that in a later chapter. But I would contend that most of us have grown up longing for that kind of relationship with another human being.

I remember reading the book *The Shack* a few years ago. If you read it, you may have loved it or hated it for a myriad of reasons. There were certainly components of it that rattled against the traditional bubble edges of my Christianity. But the thing at which I thrilled was the relationships between Papa (God), Jesus, and Sarayu (the Holy Spirit). Getting a glimpse of what the relationship within

the Godhead might be like was exhilarating! Why? Because I long to relate to others like that. I long to be known for all that I am—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and then to be loved with a love that doesn't stop, to be admired like there is no tomorrow, to have a loyal partner and companion for all of life.

Isn't that the image that fairytales paint for us? Isn't that why we repeat those stories over and over again? As we began to be aware of the opposite sex, aside from just the hormonal drives, weren't we looking for that individual who would finally love us with a knowing love, a love that we had always desired but never obtained? As we talk about and ponder the "ideal," isn't that it?

Rarely does anyone approach marriage hoping for less than the "ideal." I have yet to meet anyone who says, "Well, it's time. I guess I am supposed to find a mate. I don't care much what he is like. Actually, it would really be great if, after five or ten years, he would talk down to me, ignore my desires, and trample on my feelings. You know, the more I think about it, that would be perfect. That is really what I am looking for!"

If someone said this, we would think that he or she had a screw loose. If we knew that was what we had to look forward to, we would quickly run in the other direction. Nobody desires that. We desire a connected, satisfying, absolutely rocking relationship. Yet I see more and more marriages that are anything but that. They are dissatisfying and unfulfilling. I don't know about you, but I don't want that. I suspect that you don't either.

## **The Vows**

My guess is that if you're reading this book, you are doing so because your marriage is less than ideal. It is not anything like the marriage that Doug and Annie began with at the beginning of this chapter —YET. But there is hope! Yes, you believe in the "ideal" about which we talked about—or at least you used to. You recognize

the fact that there is an inner longing at the root of your being to be connected to that person, to have a love that is unbreakable. And the discussion of wanting to be fully known and fully loved resonates with every fiber of your being—if you are honest enough to be vulnerable.

You ache for this kind of God-designed relationship. This desire is nearly always reflected with some pretty serious wedding vows.

Over the years, I have been privileged to conduct numerous wedding ceremonies. Walking alongside a couple oftentimes begins with premarital counseling. It can be an incredibly energizing journey for them as they make this wedding come to life. Watching as two people pour out their love for each other in the birth of a new life—“*the two [shall] become one*”—is exhilarating (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31).

I work closely with couples to custom-design their ceremony. While some pastors have a pretty tried-and-true service that they like to use, I prefer to give couples the opportunity to make it richer and more meaningful by putting a flavor of them into it. After all, it is their wedding.

I have officiated weddings that have looked extremely different from one another. Some couples want to include a poem that was a favorite of their grandmother. Others wish to incorporate special phrases or thoughts they have heard in another ceremony. Still others have a particular Scripture or reading they want included.

Wedding ceremonies may utilize a unity candle or sand ceremony, participation by parents or grandparents, or even children or pets. I have seen a wide variety of components. The wedding vows may be traditional or more contemporary. You get the picture—there can be lots of variety.

And yet, even with the unlimited possibilities of looks, most ceremonies still exhibit some basic similarities around words of commitment.

I like to include two sets of vows. The first one is a commitment that is made before God and witnesses (family and friends). For example: “I ask you, Doug, do you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together after God’s ordinance in the holy state of matrimony; do you promise to love, comfort, honor, and keep her in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keeping only unto her as long as you both shall live?”

Everyone who is present is a witness to the commitment that was made. God is also in attendance as well. We are making some serious, covenantal statements. These are actually statements for which we can, in some sense, be held legally and morally accountable.

The second set of vows, while still made in front of God and others, is really a more specific group of vows that one individual makes to the other. These vows are substantial, and they are personal. While the first set of vows is typically responded to with “I do,” the second set of words is spoken by the bride and groom to each other. For example: “I, Annie, take you, Doug, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forth, for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love, to cherish, till death do us part, according to God’s holy ordinance, and thereto I pledge you my faith.”

While you may have heard these phrases repeated dozens of times, contained in the singular sentence above are words of enormous depth and significance. Again, we utter them because we want the “ideal” in marriage, and I sincerely believe that most people want to mean them. Let’s look for a moment at just what it is we are committing to.

We are promising with the force and reputation and enduring truthfulness of our word. In that sentence we have promised to take (have) this individual as our spouse and to hold him or her with a secure and lasting love in three sets of circumstances: for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; and in sickness and in health.

I find it interesting that we don’t typically say, “for better *or* for worse,” as often the words used are “for better, for worse.” Now

you may be thinking, “What is he talking about? ‘For,’ ‘or’—what’s the difference?”

Think back to when you stood in the front of the church, the gazebo in the backyard, or the overlook at the Grand Canyon. You were gazing at your spouse-to-be, heart beating quickly, thinking, “Wow! He is the most handsome man on the planet” or, “She is radiant and stunning.” As you recited these vows to each other, you probably thought about the three circumstances described above more in the following terms: “To have and to hold from this day forth, for better, for worse”—*oh my goodness, she is the best. This could never be worse. I am so fortunate to be marrying her. Of course I will commit to this circumstance. It is easy because it will always be better*—“for richer, for poorer”—*he has a great job and is a hard worker. I know some people that get married are poor, but we won’t have that issue. We are doing fine financially, and this will always be good*—“in sickness and in health”—*I am standing here looking at this beauty. She seems to be in pretty good health to me so I know this won’t be an issue.*”

In other words, we find ourselves basically making a commitment more like this: “Of course I will embrace him forever. I will love him for better, for richer, and in health. I can do that.” And, as long as that boat isn’t rocked, we just might be able to do so.

Unfortunately, we need to go back to that word *for*. Why do we use that word? Because we are not committing to “better or worse,” “good or bad,” “easy or challenging”; we are vowing to do both. You see, while today at our wedding it may be better, you can be assured that somewhere along the way it will be worse. Making a commitment to when it is good is not that difficult. Promising to love when it is extremely difficult—“for worse”—now there is the real commitment.

Promising to be there for your spouse when he or she is rich—does anyone find that a tough promise to make? It is like having a

discussion with the bank about paying your credit card statement on time after you have just won millions in the lottery—not too much of a challenge. But how about having that same conversation with them following a major layoff, when you are out of work with no job prospects? In your vows you are acknowledging that along the way, there will certainly (at least for most couples) be some hard, maybe even devastating, financial hurdles (“for poorer”). There is a meaningful promise.

And what about our health? “Well, if he is healthy, I can certainly promise to continue to embrace him.” That is easy. Let’s make it a little more realistic: “I promise to be there, loving him even when he is sick with the flu.” Or “I will unwaveringly cherish her even when she is experiencing her monthly cycle.” That’s a start. How about when he has a disabling blood pressure condition or she has a complicated pregnancy? Or when she has Alzheimer’s or he has Parkinson’s disease?

You see, as we stand at the altar, drinking in the vision that stands before us, the last thing that we are pondering is “worse, poor, and sick.” And yet, that is where the rubber truly meets the road. That is where genuine lasting commitment takes place. There will be worse. There will be poorer (financial obstacles and challenges). And if we live long enough (although it may not even require advanced years), there will be sickness—I promise.

## **The Hope**

Like most people, you came to the marriage altar with some hopes. While you may not have fully understood God’s plan or His design, you knew that marriage was one of the core components of family and community. You came to it planning for a lifetime with your mate. It is for this reason that we make promises before God and to each other to be loving and faithful for a lifetime. Whether we had seen parents who were happily married or who stayed

together but were miserable, we knew that WE wanted something that was loving, lasting, and fulfilling!

Most of us carried with us hearts that longed to be FINALLY completely accepted. We were ready to have the “someone” whom we had chosen to fully know everything about us and to have that person unconditionally wrap their arms around us, holding us close with a tender, understanding, and treasuring love. Oh to be fully known and fully loved!

With those hopes and desires in place, we made promises of lifelong friendship and faithful companionship through the most challenging of circumstances, which most of us will encounter in our marital journey.

But then something happened—a change occurred: the wheels slowly began to come off the bus, and we found ourselves possibly having feelings of guilt, second thoughts, or regrets. We may have tried to ignore the problems and pretend that all was well. But our guts told us—maybe screamed at us—otherwise.

I see this with couples in my office on a weekly basis. They have avoided acknowledging what is caving in around them until there is little left to hang on to. Then they call in crisis, desperate for help. Perhaps you are tackling issues before you get to that desperate place.

Regardless of where you may be in the journey, I want to assure you that there is hope. God has indeed wired you for companionship. His design for partnership will work. Our longings are innate and with purpose. And we can make promises that are possible to follow through with—and I don’t mean in a grit-your-teeth-and-gut-it-out manner. I am talking about promises that, even when difficult to keep, can be rich, fulfilling, and, as strange as it may sound, pretty exhilarating.

If you are depleted by your journey, I encourage you to read the chapters that follow. My goal is help you turn

## *The Ideal Plan*

your seemingly energy-draining “death march” into a life-infusing adventure.

# About the Author

**BARRY HAM** is an educator in a variety of forms: as a college professor, a Marriage and Family Therapist in practice in Colorado Springs, as well as an author and speaker.

He received his BA and BS degrees in ministry and music from Dallas Christian College. His first graduate degree was an MS in Psychology from Abilene Christian University, followed by a Masters in Marriage and Family Counseling from California State University. Finally, he received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Southern California University.

He was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma and was raised there and in Houston, Texas. He currently lives in the Colorado Springs area with his wife and two golden-doodles. He also has two grown children who also live in Colorado. Dr. Ham is available to speak at your church or gathering and is also available for Weekend Seminars

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