



Participant Workbook

Name: _____

Table of Contents

Lesson 1

Couple Time: Ciardi Poem	4
Couple Time: We Over Me	6
Principles of Becoming One in Marriage.....	7

Lesson 2

Couple Time: Deep Listening.....	9
Couple Time: Soft Starts.....	10
Relationship Warning Signs.....	11
Principles of Effective Communication	12

Lesson 3

Couple Time: Mental Preparation.....	15
Couple Time: Emotional Preparation.....	16
Couple Time: Physical Preparation	17
Couple Time: Spiritual Preparation	18
Sexual Response Cycle Differences.....	19
Sexual Anatomy Diagrams.....	21
Sexual Expectations.....	22
Elder Jeffrey R. Holland Quote	23
Resources on Marital Sexuality	24
Principles of Marital Sexuality.....	25

Lesson 4

Couple Time: Equal Partnership.....	27
Couple Time: Divorce Philosophy	28
Principles of Equal Partnership and Complete Commitment	31

Lesson 5


Couple Time: Magic 6 Hours	33
Couple Time: Mentors.....	34
Couple Time: Serving.....	35
Choosing a Marriage Therapist	36
Resources to Strengthen Marriages.....	37
Principles on Growing Together.....	39



Lesson 1: Becoming One in Marriage



Couple Time: Ciardi Poem



Most Like an Arch this Marriage
by John Ciardi

Most like an arch – an entrance which upholds
and shores the stone – crush up the air like lace
Mass made idea, and idea held in place.
A lock in time. Inside half-heaven unfolds.

Most like an arch – *two weaknesses that lean
into a strength. Two fallings become firm.*
Two joined abeyances become a term
naming the fact that teaches fact to mean.

Not quite that? Not much less. World as it is,
what's strong and separate falters. All I do
at piling stone on stone apart from you
is roofless around nothing. Till we kiss

I am no more than upright and unset.
*It is by falling in and in we make
the all-bearing point, for one another's sake,
in faultless failing, raised by our own weight.*



Couple Time: Ciardi Poem

Discussion Questions

The poet Ciardi compares a marriage to an arch.

- What jumps out at you about this?
- How are we as a couple doing with “leaning/falling in?”

Notes:

Couple Time: We Over Me

Discussion Questions

- What struggles do I have with prioritizing we over me?

- How am I effective at prioritizing we over me?
- What are some of the benefits of thinking of we over me?
- What parts of our relationship should we make sure to protect with the “invisible fence?”
- What is one thing that I can do this week that will help give greater priority to “we?”

Notes:

Principles of Becoming One in Marriage

Cleaving

- We are taught in the scriptures to “cleave” to our spouse.
 - Cleaving means being actively and completely devoted to our spouse.
-

Spousal Pre-eminence

- Spousal pre-eminence is an element of cleaving.
- This means we put our relationship with our spouse before all other relationships in our life.
- This is especially important in the first few years of a new marriage as we are establishing patterns for the way we interact with not only our spouse but the other people in our lives.

The Invisible Fence

- One of the ways we can safeguard the trust in our marriage is by creating a boundary (“invisible fence”) around the sacred ground of married life.
- Loyalty is the foundation of the invisible fence.
- We should discuss as a couple what we want to keep inside the fence.

Prioritizing We Over Me

- Moving from “me” to “we” can be an adjustment.
- This change in thinking usually takes *intentional* selflessness and sacrifice, and it takes practice.
- It is worth the effort as it brings us closer to becoming one.
- It’s not that we lose our individual “i-identity,” but it becomes less important to us than the “we-identity” we create over time with our spouse.
- Think about the arch metaphor--we become stronger as we “lean in” and “fall in.”



Lesson 2: Becoming One Through Effective Communication

Couple Time: Deep Listening

Listening skills:

As your partner shares his/her experience, practice deep listening with the skills below. When your partner is finished speaking, check off the skills you practiced while you were listening. Try to check off most of them.

- ☐ 1. Turn on silent mode – your turn to listen

- ☐ 2. Be a focused listener
 - ☐ Eliminate distractions
 - ☐ Physically turn toward your partner
 - ☐ Make frequent eye contact
 - ☐ Sometimes reach out to physically touch your partner
- ☐ 3. Be an active listener
 - ☐ Could you repeat back what your partner just said?
 - ☐ Occasionally ask clarifying questions
- ☐ 4. Be a patient listener – give partner time and don't interrupt
- ☐ 5. Be an empathetic listener
 - ☐ Listen for the feeling/meaning behind the words
 - ☐ Suspend judgment
 - ☐ Express understanding

Speaker skill:

Think of a recent time when you were really excited about something (an achievement at work, an interesting school project, a family or roommate experience, etc.) Take 5 minutes to talk to your partner about that. When you are finished speaking, check the box if you completed the skill below.

- ☐ 1. Don't go on and on and on.
 - ☐ Pause to allow your partner time to clarify, express support, etc.

Couple Time: Soft Starts

Discussion Questions

- Thinking about the examples we just discussed as a group, how do we feel we are doing with regards to starting and responding softly?
- How do we feel that we could improve?

Notes:

Relationship Warning Signs

Most of us know what physical relationship violence looks like—hitting, kicking, shoving, pulling hair—but emotional aggression can be harder to recognize. The following are some indicators that your relationship could involve unhealthy emotional aggression.

If your partner

- doesn't let you make decisions
- threatens you

- says mean things to you
- keeps you away from friends, family and co-workers
- ignores your feelings
- puts you down, insults you and calls you names
- keeps you from sleeping
- does things that make you feel crazy
- tells you and others that you're crazy
- tells you your decisions are bad
- polices your day-to-day routine
- is excessively jealous
- shifts blame and won't take ownership

this is emotional aggression and abuse.

If you aren't sure if you are experiencing relationship aggression and abuse, that's okay; there are resources to help. It might be helpful to talk through your concerns with a trusted family member or friend. In addition, there are hotlines and websites where you can anonymously talk through your concerns with an experienced professional.

- National domestic violence hotline: (800) 787-3224
- thehotline.org/identify-abuse
- Love is respect: loveisrespect.org

Principles of Effective Communication

Stay on the same team

- Keep the problem causing the conflict outside of the relationship, work together to solve the conflict by prioritizing “we” over “me” and practicing selflessness. It is the two of you two against the conflict.

Be courageous and considerate

- It is important that our partner understands how we feel; it doesn't help to hide things.
- Honor the greatness in your spouse, share concerns in a way that respects that greatness.
- Trust that your partner can handle your honest and authentic self.

- Remember: this doesn't mean you have license to blurt out hurtful words or do hurtful things under the guise of authenticity.

Start soft

- Research shows that how a conflict starts is one of the greatest predictors of how the conflict will end – when we start hard, the conflict usually ends badly.
- A **hard start-up** is an accusation, an insult or an explosion. It almost always begins with the word “you” and is usually followed by “always” or “never.” It asserts a generalization about something, not the truth about it. (“You never pick up the kids from school. Why is it always my responsibility?”)
- A **soft start-up** is usually quieter, it is more specific and is focused on “I”—what I experienced and how I felt. It invites a solution instead of just complaining about the problem. (“I feel exhausted. Could you pick up the kids from school today?”)
- Whether we are responding to a hard or soft startup, we can choose a **soft response**—validating feelings instead of escalating emotional intensity with counter attacks, and working toward solutions without defensiveness.

Avoid contempt

- Examples: eyerolling, name calling, attitude of superiority and disgust.
- Contempt communicates that our partner isn't even worth engaging—he/she is worthless.
- Contempt can lead to **stonewalling** (refusing to engage at all) which is toxic.

Time-outs

- You can only call a time-out for yourself, not your partner.
- Ask for a specific amount of time – 20-30 minutes – to calm down.
- Separate and calm yourself down physiologically and psychologically.
- When you feel rational, re-engage and employ your best communication skills.
- Remind each other that you are on the same team



Lesson 3: Becoming One Through Marital Sexuality



Couple Time: Mental Preparation



Discussion Questions

- How did I first learn about sex?
 - What beliefs have I gained about sexuality from home, friends, church, the media, etc.
 - Are there any beliefs that I may need to change or work on?
 - What do you think about sexual intentionality and planning times for sex?
-

- How can we make sure that we have healthy communication about our sexual experiences, preferences, fantasies, boundaries, etc.?
- Discussing our sexuality can sometimes bring to the surface fears, worries, or shame that we have been hiding from ourselves.
 - Am I noticing any new fears or worries about our future sexual relationship?

(Practice your best listening skills today during Couple Times: while one partner shares, the other should listen and reflect back what s/he is hearing. Don't feel like you have to resolve anxieties right now. Use this experience as an opportunity to be vulnerable together and to be there for each other.)

Notes:

Couple Time: Emotional Preparation

Discussion Questions

- Fill in the blank: "I feel emotionally safe with my partner when s/he ____."
- How do I currently feel about our emotional connection as a couple?
 - Are there any improvements we could make?
- Wedding night anxieties: For many couples, their wedding night will be the first time they experience sex.

- What anxieties/fears do I have about our first time being together sexually?
- How would I define “emotional infidelity?” How can we help prevent either of us from becoming emotionally unfaithful?

Notes:

Couple Time: Physical Preparation

Discussion Questions

- What specific questions do I have about the mechanics of sex?
- What general expectations do I have for our sexual relationship?
- What specific sexual expectations do I have for our wedding night?
- What are we doing together and separately to help us be ready for a healthy sexual relationship?
- Given that a woman’s sexual response is more complex than a man’s, how can we make sure we are both sexually satisfied?

Notes:

Couple Time: Spiritual Preparation

Discussion Preparation

- How has my faith affected the way I view marital sexuality?
- Do I sense a spiritual dimension in sex or is this something that I feel I need to work on?
- What are my attitudes about how sexuality and spirituality go together?
- How is my sexual testimony?

Notes:

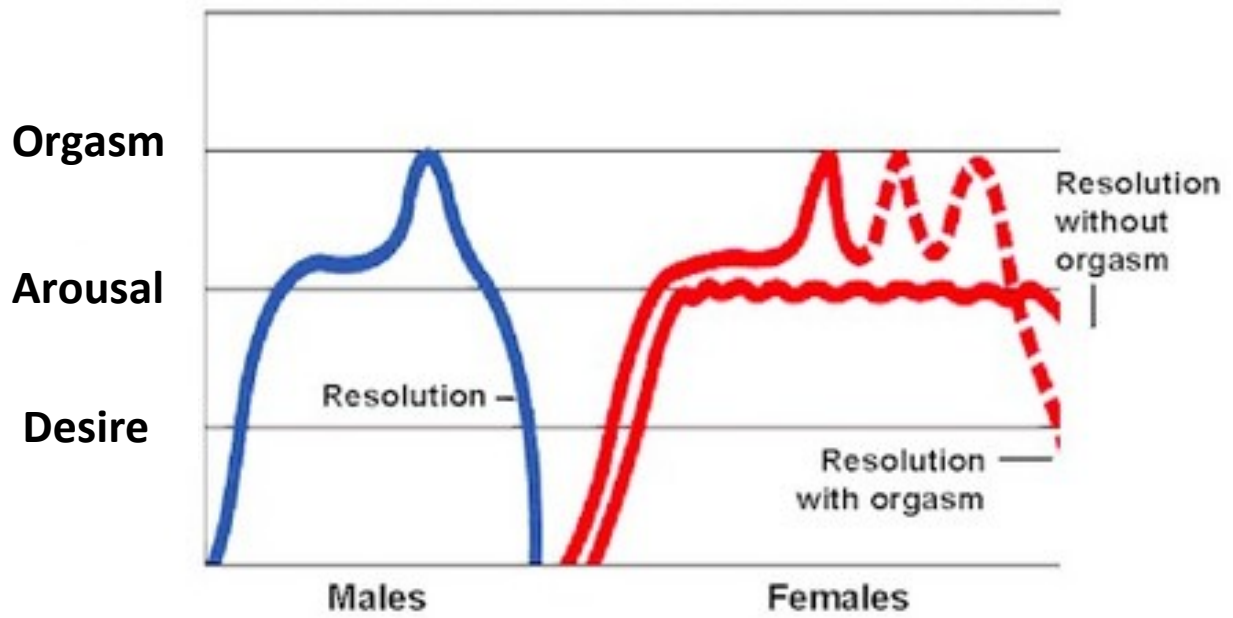
Sexual Response Cycle Differences

Men	Women
Men usually jump from desire to arousal quickly and continue to go through the cycle at a fast pace.	Women often take (up to 10x) longer to start having a physical genital response, and the buildup through arousal is slower.

Before the age of 50, most men can reliably orgasm every time, and usually orgasm just once per sexual experience.	Only about 40% of women orgasm “almost always.” However, when women do orgasm, they are capable of orgasming multiple times in a row.
A man’s resolution phase after an orgasm is quick.	A woman’s resolution phase is slow, leaving her in a heightened state of arousal after orgasm.
Men feel desire for sex as a <i>first step</i> , which acts as a catalyst to having a sexual experience.	Women usually experience sexual desire <i>after</i> a few other steps.

Sexual Response Cycle Differences Graphic

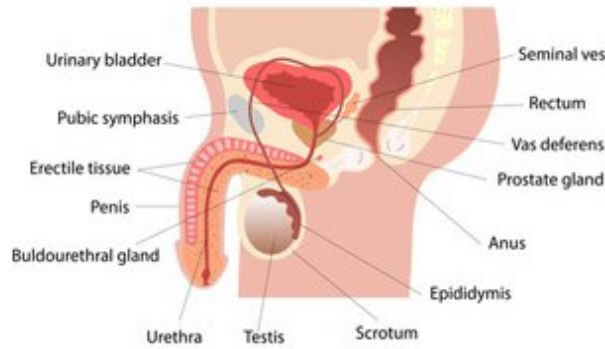




Notes:

Sexual Anatomy Diagrams

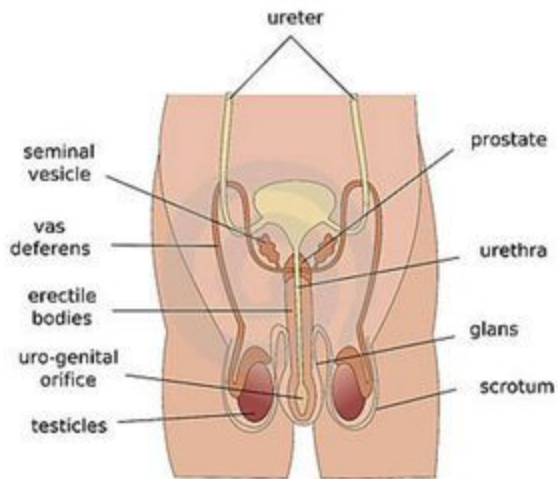
Male Anatomy



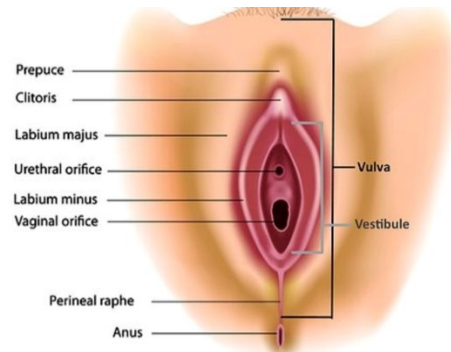
Female Anatomy



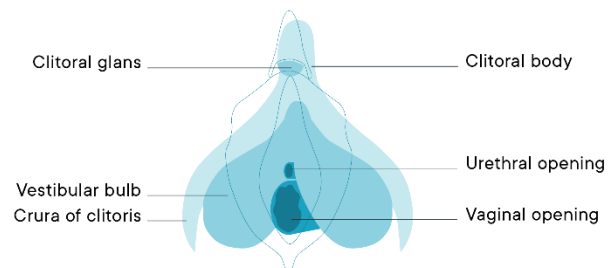
shutterstock.com 1682185156



dreamstime.com



The Clitoris



Sexual Expectations

Unrealistic	Realistic
Sex is elegant and right after sex you get to just lie in the soft, clean sheets together.	Sex sometimes gets sweaty, and both individuals and the bedding get a bit sticky with bodily lubrication and ejaculation, not to mention if you choose to use extra oils, lubrications, lotions, or if the woman is on her period. Sex may be a little messy.
If we do things right, we'll both orgasm.	Orgasm is complicated and impacted by emotional, mental, spiritual and physiological factors.
We'll both orgasm at the same time.	Maybe, but not very often.
We'll both want sex at the same time.	Differences in sex drives can make it hard to want sex at the same time. There is usually one partner who wants sex more frequently. Typically, men have a higher sex drive than women, though this is not always the case. Additionally, some individuals have a higher sex drive in the morning, others at night.

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland Quote

“Of Souls, Symbols and Sacraments”

“I submit to you that *you will never be more like God at any other time in this life than when you are expressing that particular power (sexual intimacy)*. Such an act of love between a man and a woman is—or certainly was ordained to be—a symbol of total union: union of their hearts, their hopes, their lives, their love, their family, their future, their everything...such a total, virtually unbreakable union, such an unyielding commitment between a man and a woman, can only come with the proximity and permanence afforded in a marriage covenant, with the union of *all* that they possess—their very hearts and minds, all their days and all their dreams. . . . And the external symbol of that union, the physical manifestation of what is a far deeper spiritual and metaphysical bonding, is the physical blending that is part of—indeed, a most beautiful and gratifying expression of—that larger, more complete union of eternal purpose and promise.”

(BYU Devotional 1988)

Resources on Marital Sexuality

Books

- *Sexual Wholeness in Marriage: An LDS perspective on integrating sexuality and spirituality in our marriages* Dean M. Busby, Jason S. Carroll, Chelom Leavitt
- *Becoming One: Intimacy in marriage* Robert F. Stahmann, Wayne R. Young, Julie G. Grover
- *And They Were not Ashamed: Strengthening marriage through sexual fulfillment* Laura M. Brotherson
- *The Act of Marriage* Tim LaHaye
- *Real Intimacy: A couple's guide to healthy, genuine sexuality* Kristin B. Hodson, Alisha Worthington, Thomas G. Harrison
- *From Honeymoon to Happily Ever After: 23 keys to prepare for a sextraordinary marriage* Laura M. Brotherson
- *Purity and Passion* Wendy Watson Nelson
- *A Better Way to Teach Kids about Sex* Jason S. Carroll, Chelom Leavitt, Dean M. Busby, Laura M. Padilla-Walker

Websites and Podcasts

- The Marriage Bed (TheMarriageBed.com)
- Strengthening Marriage (www.strengtheningmarriage.com)
- The Sexual Mindfulness Project (www.chelomleavitt.com)
- Jennifer Finlayson-Fife podcast archive (finlayson-fife.com)

Articles

- "Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments" Jeffrey R. Holland, BYU Devotional, January 12, 1988
- "Love and Marriage" Wendy Watson Nelson, Worldwide YSA Devotional, January 8, 2017
- "How I Overcame Sexual Intimacy Problems as an LDS Newlywed" Anon, 2018
- "Fulfilling the Sexual Stewardship in Marriage" Sean Brotherson, 2012
- "Conversations about Intimacy and Sex that can Prepare you for Marriage" Ensign, 2020

Principles of Marital Sexuality

The wholeness of marital sexuality is comprised of four aspects, each of which impacts our sexual relationship:

Mental Dimension

- Our ideas and understandings about sex.
- Barriers: incorrect beliefs, distractions, negative thoughts.
- Expanders: sexual communications, sexual decision making, sexual intentionality.

Emotional Dimension

- Our personal emotional state and relationship climate.
- Barriers: stress, mental health, trauma, negative relationship climate.
- Expanders: intimacy, trust, safety.

Physical Dimension

- Our physical pleasure we experience together as a couple.
- There are gender differences in sexual response and paths to orgasm.
- We should work together to create our sexual expectations.


Spiritual Dimension

- Our understanding about marital sexuality as a sacred expression of our complete union.
- Sexual intimacy has divine origin and is one of the ways couples can feel most like God.




Lesson 4:

Becoming One Through Equal Partnership and Complete Commitment



Couple Time: Equal Partnership



Discussion Questions

- What did I see growing up in my family (and/or in other married couples that I was close to) in terms of an equal partnership?
- Do I hold any beliefs that don't view men and women as equal? If so, how can I work on overcoming those beliefs?
- What is my vision of an equal partnership? What do I want in our marriage? (Both general and specific.)
- Talk through the following scenario to practice how you might handle a decision as equal partners. You don't need to actually make these decisions but rather think through HOW you will make these decisions.
 - The car you brought to the marriage has died and you need to purchase a new one. How will the two of us decide on a budget? financing? what kind of car? what features? insurance?

Notes:

Couple Time: Divorce Philosophy

When two people get married, they usually aren't thinking that the marriage will end in divorce. But then hard times arise and sometimes they find themselves thinking either casually or seriously about divorce. However, most

people haven't really thought carefully about their philosophy of divorce. When is it justified? How hard and how long should people try to work things out? This exercise invites you to think more intentionally about these kinds of questions and share them with your partner.

Instructions: Thinking about marriage and divorce in general (*not your marriage specifically*), answer these questions one at a time as honestly as you can for yourself and then share your answer with your partner. Then go on to the next question.

1. What circumstances do you think could justify divorce?

2. What circumstances do you think do *not* justify divorce?

3. If the married couple has children, does that affect your answers in 1 and 2 above? Do the ages of the children matter?

4. How long do you think a married couple should try to work things out? Does your answer to this question depend on some of the circumstances you wrote about above?

5. What steps do you think people should take before deciding to get divorced? (For instance, get counseling.)

6. Why do you think you have these beliefs? What has shaped your beliefs? (For instance, religious principles, family experiences growing up, friends you have observed going through a divorce, your ideological or political views).

7. If possible, write a brief summary of your personal philosophy of divorce based on your thinking in this exercise.

8. Take some time for meaningful prayer this week and pray for the ability to commit fully to your spouse and your marriage, through good times and bad. Then create a special time and way to share your commitment with your spouse.

Principles of Equal Partnership and Complete Commitment

Developing an Equal Partnership

- Our religious leaders have been clear that husbands and wives are to be equal partners.

- We must overcome any false traditions and incorrect cultural understandings of the roles of men and women and commit to equal partnership in all aspects of our marriage.

Complete Commitment

- Committing completely to each other is a powerful act of becoming one.
- *“Marriage is the sort of thing where it’s safer to go all in, and it’s dangerous to go in half-hearted.”* - David Brooks (*The Second Mountain*, p. 146)

Divorce

- The number one reason divorced individuals give for their divorce is lack of commitment (of one or both partners).
- When we are considering divorce, is helpful to think about James E. Faust’s 3 wise tests:
 - Length of marital difficulties
 - An “apparently irredeemable” relationship
 - Destructive of our dignity as a child of God



Lesson 5: Becoming One Through Growing Together

Couple Time: Magic 6 Hours

Discussion Questions

- How can we make time each week for the “Magic 6 Hours”?
- How can we make partings and reunions more special?

- What does a “stress-reducing conversation” look like to me?
 - Do I like to talk about work/school right when I get home? Wait until later?
- What are some ways I could best show love, appreciation and affection to you?
- What are some dates we’ve been on in the past that you’d like to repeat?
- What are some new date ideas we’d like to try?
- How do we feel about the idea of a “State of the Union” meeting?
 - What do we think about starting that now, before we get married?

Notes:

Couple Time: Mentors

Discussion Questions

- What are some ground rules about how we will talk to others about our marriage?

- Who are some people that we could include in our “go-to” marriage-support system?
- What do we think about the idea of a marriage mentor?
- Who is a couple we could consider asking to mentor us?
- What is one resource from the list we can commit to read or listen to together?

Notes:

Couple Time: Serving



Discussion Questions

- What are some causes we might join to make a difference? What are things we especially care about protecting, supporting, or improving in our families and community?
- What are some of our personal missions/ministries? How can we support each other in our personal ministries? Who are some people we could minister to together?
- How can we promote measures that strengthen marriages and families?

Notes:

Choosing a Marriage Therapist

Here are some articles giving guidelines on how to choose a good marriage therapist:

- “How to Find a Couples Therapist Who Can Actually Help You” by Kyle Benson (Gottman Institute 2020)
- “Finding a Mental Health Professional Who’s Right for You” by Kevin Theriot (Ensign 2019)
- “Finding a Good Marriage Therapist” from Focus on the Family (2010)

Resources to Strengthen Marriages

Books

- *Covenant Hearts* by Bruce C. Hafen
- *Successful Marriages and Families* by Alan J. Hawkins, David C. Dollahite, & Thomas W. Draper
- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John M. Gottman & Nan Silver
- *Sexual Wholeness in Marriage* by Dean M. Busby, Jason S. Carroll, & Chelom E. Leavitt)
- *The Marriage Compass* by Jason S. Carroll
- *Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness* by Blaine J. Fowers
- *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict* by The Arbinger Institute
- *Drawing Heaven into Your Marriage* by H. Wallace Goddard
- *Hold Me Tight* by Sue Johnson
- *Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World That Pulls Us Apart* by William J. Doherty

Articles and Speeches

- “Mending Our Marriage” Ensign, October 1996
- “What Happily Married Couples Do” Ensign, January 2012
- “How Do I Love Thee?” BYU devotional, Jeffrey R. Holland, February 15, 2000
- “As I Have Loved You: Agency-Based Love in Dating and Marriage” Jason S. Carroll, BYU devotional, April 2, 2019
- “Repentance and Forgiveness in Marriage” Richard B. Miller, BYU devotional, January 19, 2010

Miscellaneous Resources

- Email newsletter (1-minute micro-lessons)

- *Marriage Minute* - The Gottman Institute
(www.gottman.com/marriage-minute/)
- Relationship Inventory
 - RELATE Questionnaire – Brigham Young University
(<https://relateinstitute.com/the-relate-assessment>)
- Online Relationship-Strengthening Classes and Resources:
 - ePREP: <http://www.lovetakeslearning.com>
 - Forever Families*: <https://foreverfamilies.byu.edu/>
 - Serving as Couples:
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/serving-together-as-a-couple/>
- Making Decisions about Divorce:
 - *Should I Keep Trying to Work It Out? Sacred and Secular Perspectives on the Crossroads of Divorce* by Alan J. Hawkins & Tamara A. Fackrell

Principles on Growing Together

Our marriages will naturally lose energy and unity over time unless we consistently and intentionally nurture them.

Investing

- The nurturing we as spouses give to each other and our relationship.
- As we invest time and energy in our marriage by following Gottman's "Magic Six Hours," our unity as a couple will increase.

Learning

- The nurturing others give to us as we reach out to those around us to continue to learn and grow.
- Our marriages can become stronger as we learn from a marital support system that includes marriage mentors and other resources.

Serving

- The nurturing we as a couple give to others as we strengthen our unity by teaming up to be a force for good outside our marriage.
- As couples work together and support one another in serving others, they share valuable experiences, learn about each other's strengths, and feel the power of their joint purpose.