SERMON GUIDE

Marriage
Made in Heaven

Touching Lives with Dr. James Merritt

The Fire Starts Here

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 31 | Genesis 2:18–25

Introduction

The most nervous I have ever been in my life was the day I was about to say the two words that I knew would change everything. Looking into the eyes of the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen, having known her only six months, I said, "I do." At that moment, the word "marriage" took on a whole different meaning, from the hypothetical to the actual, from the imagined to the real, and from the abstract to the concrete. In this cultural moment, marriage is becoming like a dinosaur, with marriage rates at their lowest since 1867 and 40% of Americans viewing it as obsolete. But it is God's idea, and though it takes hard work, it is God's work. Through the first marriage in history, you will learn that when you align yourself with God's Word on marriage, you experience His freedom and blessing.

Key Points

1. Remember That Marriage Is a Divine Idea

For the first time in creation, we hear four words that had never been spoken: "It is not good." "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18, NIV). This wasn't because God made a mistake or there was dirt on the carpet. God's creation wasn't imperfect, but it was incomplete. Notice we're not told Adam felt lonely (you can't miss what you never had). But God knows what we need better than we do, even when we think everything is fine. Adam didn't imagine marriage; God did. Creating a mate for Adam was God's idea, not Adam's. The English word "helper" can be misleading. The Hebrew word *ezer* is actually a military term referring to a "defender" or "protector," used 11 out of 15 times in Scripture to describe God Himself. There's nothing inferior about this helper; she makes up what might be lacking in strength.

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> **Remember that marriage was God's ideal from the beginning, so be careful not to turn an ideal into an ordeal, and then look for a new deal.**

2. Realize That Marriage Is a Divine Initiative

Every other aspect of creation had its counterpart: Day had the sun, night had the moon, water had fish, sky had birds, and the ground had animals. But man had no partner. Before there was a man or woman, there was God, and He always intended to be Adam's first love. "So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh" (Genesis 2:21, NIV). See how God took the first woman from the man's side, to be by his side. Not above him, not below him, but beside him. "Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:22, NIV). Notice that God brought Adam a woman, not a man. Consider also that according to God's design, there are only two genders, and they alone make up a true biblical marriage. From beginning to end, marriage has never primarily been about a woman and a man; it's been about God. Whose idea was this marriage? God's. Who planned it? God. Who provided the husband and presented the bride? God. Eve becomes the only bride given away by God Himself. God is still in the building business and the bringing business, and when you respect marriage as His initiative, you will receive the person and blessing He brings.

> **The only person you should ever consider marrying is the person you truly believe God has brought to you.**

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3. Respect Marriage As a Divine Institution

When God brings Eve to Adam, we see the actual wedding ceremony. "The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man'" (Genesis 2:23, NIV). The Hebrew word for woman (*Ishah*) comes from *anash* meaning "fragile," while man (*Ish*) comes from *usah* which means "strength." God built masculinity into men and femininity into women, and male and female are the only two pieces of the marriage puzzle that fit together. The phrase "*suitable helper*" uses the Hebrew *kenegdo*—a combination of *ke* (like) and *neged* (opposite). Eve is like Adam as a human created in God's image, but different as a woman, not a man. "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NIV). The Hebrew word "one" (*echad*) describes unity with diversity, like God being one yet three persons. There's not uniformity, but there is unity. God's divine institution is woven into the very DNA of humanity. God's Word is not subject to change. What He has established in creation, He intends to transcend culture and time.

> **Honor marriage as God's first institution, designed to be the foundation of family, which is the foundation of nations.**

Key Takeaway

Every marriage should be made in Heaven, manufactured by Heaven, and mastered by Heaven. When you put Christ at the head of your marriage, you'll have a marriage that's made in Heaven.

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Reflection Questions

1. How does understanding that marriage was God's idea, not a human invention, change your view of its importance and design in today's culture?

2. What does it mean practically to respect marriage as a divine institution in your daily life, whether you're single, married, or supporting others?

3. What is one lesson from this study that will help you ensure that Christ remains at the center of your marriage or future marriage, making it truly "made in Heaven"?

Fanning the Flames (Part One)

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 32 | Ephesians 5:21–24

Introduction

You may remember Frank Sinatra's classic hit about love and marriage going together. Now, that may have been true 70 years ago, but it's not the same today. In 1960, 59% of adults ages 18 to 29 were married compared to only 20% today. It seems our culture has become one of "hook up, shack up, and break up." As a result, many think doing a series on marriage is a fool's errand. But from the very beginning of time, God's Word says, marriage has mattered, and it always will. It's not coincidental that God's Word begins with a wedding between Adam and Eve and ends with a wedding between Christ and the church. We face something unprecedented in our country, with marriages failing and the very institution of marriage being questioned. But God calls you to remember what He says about marriage instead of being conformed to the world's view of marriage, because healthy homes, communities, and nations depend upon it.

Key Points

1. Be Reverently Surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus

Have you ever wondered why the word "submit" creates such controversy in marriage discussions today? The Apostle Paul writes, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22, NIV). Before anyone gets hot and bothered, let's take another look at that word. In almost every area of life, everybody submits to somebody: Privates submit to generals, citizens submit to police, and employees submit to bosses. Society can't function without submission. The key to not just doing this but being willing to do it is remembering who you are really submitting to: "as you do to the Lord." The road to a relationship with God is paved with the submission of God the Son to God the Father. In other words, if Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father, you can surrender to Jesus in complete trust. When a wife is surrendered to the Lord, she can have confidence that submitting to her husband

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Fanning the Flames (Part One)

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aligns with God's purposes. She can trust that whatever Jesus asks her to do is not just for her good; it's for her best and for His glory.

> **Husbands and wives must both submit themselves to Christ. When you truly place Jesus as Lord over every area of your life, He will give you the peace and confidence to submit to one another.**

2. Wives, Be Respectfully Submissive to the Leadership of Your Husband

Marriage works when the husband and wife understand their roles. Paul says, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23, NIV). The way the wife relates to the husband is the way the church is to relate to Jesus. Just as Jesus is the head of the church, the husband is the head of the wife. Now, the head of the church also gave His life for her; this is the model for every "head of the household" thereafter. Every plane needs a pilot, every ship needs a captain, and every train needs a conductor. The church submits to Jesus willingly because the church knows that Jesus loves her and wants only what is best for her. No woman should ever submit to a husband if he asks her to do anything unscriptural or immoral, and you should never submit to being physically or verbally abused. Submission is not about inferiority; it's about maturity, responsibility, and authority. One of the greatest marks of maturity is when you're willing to accept the responsibility of submitting to legitimate authority.

> **Submission doesn't limit you in any way; it actually frees you to be everything that God wants you to be.**

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3. Remember That Marriage Reflects Christ and the Church

How does understanding Christ's relationship with the church transform your marriage? In Ephesians, Paul uses the word "church" six times because marriage is meant to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:24, NIV). This is the sweetest relationship in the world, the kind of relationship that husband and wife ought to have. When they do, the wife will willingly and respectfully submit to the husband's leadership because it will be so easy to do when that husband loves her the way Christ loves the church. Both husband and wife are created in the image of God, and both have God-given roles to fulfill. When you submit to Jesus, He gives you the freedom to be who you are called to be and to do what you are called to do.

> **When marriage functions as God designed, husbands love sacrificially and wives relate respectfully, honoring Christ and displaying His glory and goodness in the community.**

Key Takeaway

Your primary relationship is with God. Then, husbands, you can love your wives sacrificially, and, wives, you can submit to Jesus first, freeing you to respect your husband. When you do, you discover that the key to a happy marriage is not in finding the right person; it is in being the right person.

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Fanning the Flames (Part One)

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Reflection Questions

1. In what areas of life do you currently submit to authority without question? How does this help you understand that submission isn't meant to be demeaning, but is necessary for society to function?

2. How does your relationship with Jesus as Lord affect your willingness to follow His design for marriage? What might need to change in your surrender to Him first?

3. When you think about Christ's relationship with the church, what encourages you most about the kind of loving leadership a husband should provide? How does this picture help you understand God's design for marriage?

Fanning the Flames (Part Two)

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 33 | Ephesians 5:23, 25–33

Introduction

What if finding the right person to marry isn't actually the secret to a happy marriage? Everyone wants a fairy-tale marriage, but it's a tragedy when fairy tales turn into horror stories because we misplace our expectations. The real problem is this: Every person wanting to get married is looking for the right person, but it will do you no good to find the right person if you are not the right person to be married to. That's why every marriage should begin with not just a husband and wife, but a *godly* husband and a *godly* wife. A marriage made in Heaven begins with a spouse given by Heaven. Learn the three specific things every heavenly-given husband must do for his wife to create a marriage that truly is happily ever after.

Key Points

1. Provide Humble Leadership

What kind of leadership do you think a husband should provide in marriage? In Ephesians five, Paul says this: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior" (Ephesians 5:23, NIV). The word "head" means "authority," but being an authority does not mean being an authoritarian. The husband is to exercise authority over his wife in the same way that Christ exercises authority over the church. Jesus never forced anybody to do anything. He doesn't bully the church, throw His weight around, yell, scream, or demand anything. Jesus led His disciples by serving them. He was a servant leader who said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NIV). Husbands need to have a foot-washing mentality when it comes to their wives. Lyrics from an old country song say it this way: "A woman wants a man she can look up to that won't look down on her."

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Fanning the Flames (Part Two)

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> **If a husband looks up to his wife by serving her, she will look up to him by following his leadership. But his leadership cannot be haughty; it must be humble.**

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2. Practice Heavenly Love

How should a husband love his wife according to God's design? Paul commands this, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her …" (Ephesians 5:25, NIV). When the husbands in Ephesus first heard these words, they probably fell out of their chairs because this was absolutely revolutionary. Paul uses the word *agape*—the same word used in John 3:16. It's the love you give when someone's unlovable, and seems undeserving. This kind of love is not a feeling; it's a command. It's an act of the will that always puts the other person first. Paul asks the bigger question: Do you love your wife enough not just to die for her, but to die to yourself and live for her? You've got to die to what you want out of the marriage and start living for what you can give to the marriage. Paul says to love your wives "as [your] own bodies" (Ephesians 5:28, NIV). We love our bodies every day: When it's hungry, we feed it; when it's thirsty, we water it; when it's tired, we rest it.

> **A husband is to love his wife the way he loves his body—by providing for her, protecting her, and putting her needs above his own.**

3. Promise Divine Loyalty

Paul concludes by going back to the first marriage: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Ephesians 5:31, NIV). Marriage is a covenant relationship where the husband is to be united to his wife through a covenant, an oath, a binding promise. Malachi 2:14 calls the wife "your partner, the wife of

Fanning the Flames (Part Two)

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your marriage covenant" (NIV). The number one thing a man and woman must remember is that marriage is not a contract or even just a commitment; it is a covenant. Paul explains, "This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32, NIV). Marriage is like a photocopy of the relationship between Christ and the church. Every marriage is to mirror that divine relationship, and that relationship is based on keeping the covenant. Each husband is responsible before God, others, and himself to keep that promise.

> **When you continuously ask Jesus to help you love your spouse, the One who keeps His promise to you will give you the power to keep your promise to your spouse.**

Key Takeaway

It's extremely difficult for a marriage made in Heaven not to end up happily ever after when the husband provides humble leadership like Christ, practices heavenly love like Christ, and promises divine loyalty like Christ has for the church.

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Fanning the Flames (Part Two)

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Reflection Questions

1. How does Jesus' example of servant leadership challenge the way husbands think about being "head" of their home? If you are a husband, what would humble leadership look like in your daily interactions with your wife?

2. What does it mean to you that marriage is a covenant, not just a contract? How does understanding that your marriage mirrors Christ's relationship with the church change your perspective on your commitment?

3. For husbands: Paul emphasizes that if your wife is not being drawn closer to Jesus by the way you're leading and loving her, you're not the husband you ought to be. How are you providing spiritual leadership in your home?

Marriage Math

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 34 | Matthew 19:4–6

Introduction

I heard a story about a daughter who wrote her dad about marrying someone she met online: "We met on eHarmony, became friends on Facebook, had long chats on WhatsApp. He proposed on Zoom." Her dad replied, "I suggest you two get married on X, have fun on Tango, buy your kids on Amazon, and, when you get fed up with this new husband, just sell him on eBay." There are lots of views today on what marriage is, but the one opinion that should really matter is that of the One who invented marriage—Jesus. Even though Jesus was single and never married, He knew more about marriage than any marriage counselor because marriage was His idea. When the Pharisees asked Him about divorce, Jesus didn't answer their question about how to get out of marriage. Instead, He explained why you should stay in marriage. In one simple but unbelievably strong sentence, Jesus taught that in marriage math, 1 + 1 = 1. In this passage, Jesus outlined the three principles you need to guard what God has established and, in doing so, fulfill His purpose in your life.

Key Points

1. Commend God's Plan for Marriage

Why do you think Jesus started His teaching about marriage with God's original design? In Matthew 19, Jesus declares, "Haven't you read … that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'" (v. 4, NIV). Jesus is not just giving His opinion on marriage. He goes back to the very beginning to establish the foundation of God's original plan for marriage. This one statement tells us what the inventor of marriage intended for marriage to look like from creation: a male and a female joined together. Jesus builds three characteristics into marriage. First is duality: It takes two human beings to get married. You can't marry your dog or your car. Second is heterosexuality: He did not create them male and male or female and female, but male and female. Third is monogamy: He created one male and one female, not many males and many

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females. His intention from the beginning was one man and one wife, to be one for life. If God had intended polygamy, He could have easily created one man and two women. If God had intended homosexuality, He could have created two men or two women.

> **When you try to deviate from God's plan, you're going to wind up with a bad marriage, a sad ending, or both.**

2. Consider God's Purpose for Marriage

What is the primary purpose that God designed marriage to fulfill? Jesus explains, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5, NIV). It may surprise you, but the primary purpose of marriage is not to procreate children; couples who cannot bear children are just as married as couples who can. The sexual difference between a man and a woman is why we have marriage in the first place. Marriage is based on gender and would never exist without the sexual differences between a man and a woman. With marriage comes disunion—when you get married, you have to leave your mom and dad—and then union as you become one flesh. The preeminent relationship in a family is not child to parent or parent to child, but husband to wife. A parent and child are two, a brother and sister are two, but a husband and wife are one. That's the math of marriage, and when you view marriage His way, you experience the peace of unity and alignment.

> **Jesus does in marriage what is impossible in math. We all know 1 + 1 = 2, but in marriage, 1 + 1 = 1.**

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3. Commit to God's Permanence for Marriage

Jesus concludes, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6, NIV). Why does He say that? In one fell swoop, Jesus makes it plain that the only kind of sexuality that is proper is sex between a man and a woman who are in a marital relationship. "Joined together" literally means "to be glued to," which means not to be separated. Marriage is not what culture joins together, not what nature joins, not what sex joins, not what law joins, not even what love joins; marriage is what God joins together. When I'm asked to perform a wedding, I let the couple know I can't do a wedding. I can perform the ceremony, but God is the one that brings two people together. It is God who brings a couple together, bonds them together, binds them together, and builds them together. After 49 years of marriage, I can tell you that the hard work never ends, but it is worth it because marriage is made in Heaven.

> **If you cannot keep a promise to God about marriage, you will not be able to keep promises with anyone else. But with God's help, you can understand the math, Master, and miracle of marriage.**

Key Takeaway

Marriage is hard work, but it's extremely doable when you practice marriage math by commending God's plan, considering God's purpose, and committing to God's permanence for the sacred union He designed.

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Marriage Math

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Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean practically for a married couple to "become one flesh"? How should this divine mathematical approach (1 + 1 = 1) change the way spouses relate to each other daily?

2. Jesus teaches that God is the one who joins couples together in marriage. How does this truth impact your view of the permanence and sacredness of the marriage covenant?

3. Whether single or married, how can you better support God's design for marriage in a culture that is increasingly moving away from His original plan?

An Old-Fashioned Love Song

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 35 | Song of Solomon

Introduction

Ever wondered the secret to marriages that last 60 years? I heard about an elderly couple celebrating their diamond anniversary who shared their story: On their honeymoon at the Grand Canyon, the wife's mule stumbled, and she said calmly to the animal, "That's once." When it stumbled again, she said, "That's twice." The third time, she got off and shot the mule right between the eyes. When her husband asked why, she looked him in the eyes and said, "That's once"—and they never had another major disagreement! While there's humor in that story, the truth is that God desires for everyone who gets married to truly live happily ever after. When two people get married, it's God's will for that marriage to be a happy union instead of a civil war. He wants every marriage to end in celebration, not separation, enjoying marriage, not enduring it. That's why God's Word gives us a marriage example through an old love song: It's King Solomon's Song of Songs. In this book, you find the four essential keys to building a marriage that lasts.

Key Points

1. Communicate Love Through Treasured Talk

Happily married couples talk to each other in the right way and use the right words. Solomon knew the way to a woman's heart is through her ears, telling his wife, "How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful!" and "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you" (Song of Songs 1:15; 4:7, NIV). He's telling his wife she's perfectly beautiful and to him beautifully perfect, affirming her and building her up. World-renowned relationship expert John Gottman discovered the 5:1 ratio. That is, for every one negative interaction in a relationship, you need five positive interactions. Always be looking for the good and the positive. You are to seek to say the right thing, the right way, at the right time, but what's even more important is that you keep saying things and keep talking.

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An Old-Fashioned Love Song

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 35 | Song of Solomon

The danger is "sour silence"—silence motivated by anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness that builds a wall so high and thick that the couple cannot or will not get back together.

> **No marriage can survive without the oxygen of communication; tender talk can give oxygen to the fire in a marriage, making it burn hotter and brighter.**

2. Rejuvenate Love Through Together Time

Do you know how to spell "love" in a relationship? You spell it T-I-M-E. Marriage needs time like a plant needs water; it's essential for survival. In the Song of Songs, the bride asks, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me" (2:10, NIV). She's asking for some together time. Nothing will communicate to your spouse that they're the number one priority over all other relationships like giving them the most valuable thing you possibly can—your time. Go back to your dating days. What were you giving someone when you were dating them? Your time! Single women and married women both have one thing in common: They like to be courted and dated, and that desire never ends. When the bride says, "Come, my beloved, let us go to the countryside …" (Song of Songs 7:11, NIV), she wants the two of them to get away just so they can have time together. Don't let yourself make excuses. Make time instead. Where there's a will, there's a way.

> **Both of you need to communicate to the other that the most important thing is to make time to spend with one another.**

3. Demonstrate Love Through Tender Touch

What's the difference between touching and taking in marriage? Twice in this song we read, "His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me" (Song of Songs 2:6; 8:3, NIV)—an expression referring to true loving sexual affection. Generally speaking, for most men, the number one need is

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An Old-Fashioned Love Song

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 35 | Song of Solomon

sexual fulfillment. That's his "touch." For most women, however, the number one need is affection; that's her "touch." Men, if the only time you ever touch your wife is when you want sex, that's not touching; that's taking. Show your wife you love her with occasional, extemporaneous, unplanned touches: a pat on the back, a kiss on the cheek, holding hands, putting your arm around her. Don't give the excuse, "Well, I'm just not affectionate." Learn to be! Women crave affection and conversation the same way men crave sex and recreational companionship. The majority of a woman's needs are nonsexual; she wants to be hugged, held, and heard.

> **Husbands, show your wife frequent non-sexual affection. Wives, remember and prioritize your husband's desire for sexual fulfillment. We demonstrate our love through tender touch.**

4. Illustrate Love Through Timely Thoughtfulness

Do the little things really matter in marriage? In the Song, the bride says, "Let us go early to the vineyards … there I will give you my love. The mandrakes send out their fragrance, and at our door is every delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my beloved" (7:12–13, NIV). She wants to go out, pick flowers, gather fruit, and give it to her husband. How thoughtful! Marriage is built on the little things. You don't have to spend a lot of money to be romantic or do big things to demonstrate your love. The little actions of love can be like a bucket of kerosene on a match: a text telling them you love them, an occasional love note, a card for no reason, or flowers when there's no special occasion. Nothing is dynamic unless it's specific, so here are practical tips: Spend time talking daily without interruption, do something together every day, show physical affection throughout the day, and occasionally do thoughtful, unexpected things.

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An Old-Fashioned Love Song

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 35 | Song of Solomon

> **The strongest fires aren't the ones that roar, but the ones that quietly never burn out. By God's grace, it can be an old-fashioned love song that never ends.**

Key Takeaway

We are to love our spouse the same way Jesus loved the church: with selfless, sacrificial, sweet, unconditional, and unending love. Let your love be communicated through treasured talk, time together, and tender touch and illustrated through daily acts of thoughtfulness.

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An Old-Fashioned Love Song

Marriage Made in Heaven | Week 35 | Song of Solomon

Reflection Questions

1. John Gottman's research shows you need five positive interactions for every negative one in marriage. How would you rate your current ratio, and what specific positive words could you speak to your spouse this week?

2. How are you currently spelling love (T-I-M-E) in your marriage? What creative ways could you carve out more together time, even with busy schedules or limited resources?

3. For husbands: How can you show more non-sexual affection to meet your wife's need to be "hugged, held, and heard"? For wives: How can you be more sensitive to your husband's need for sexual fulfillment?