

Spiritual Relationships That Last

What the Bible Says
About Dating and Marriage

Gary DeLashmutt & Dennis McCallum

Leader's Study Guide



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Contents

Leader's Introduction	5
1. Marriage Success Today: What Are Your Chances?	7
2. Is "Love" Enough	9
3. What Does Christian Intimacy Look Like?	11
4. Learning Christian Love	13
5. Growing Together: Marriage and Community	15
6. Competent to Give: Marriage and Ministry	17
7. Building on a Solid Foundation	19
8. Sexual Love or Exploitation?	23
9. Are We Moving in the Same Direction?	25
10. Overcoming Obstacles From the Past: Relationships	27
11. Overcoming Obstacles From the Past: Addictions, Materialism, and Psychological Damage	29
12. Personal Maturity	31
13. A Fulfilling Marriage <i>Is</i> Possible!	33

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Leader's Introduction

This study guide follows, chapter by chapter, the book, *Spiritual Relationships That Last*, by Dennis McCallum and Gary DeLashmutt. We refer to ourselves in the third person in order to keep the focus on the text. The guide is arranged for use in any one of four venues:

- Individual enrichment
- Couples pre-marital study
- Married couples' enrichment
- Group study.

We have seen excellent results using this book as a basis for small group as well as in premarital counseling. If using *Spiritual Relationships That Last* as a premarital or marital counseling aid, you may want to read the chapter together before going over the questions.

Hundreds of couples planning their marriage have reported that this study brought to light the issues God wanted to call to their attention. May God use the material to richly bless your present or future marriage as well as the other relationships in your life.

How to lead a group study based on this book:

First, read the chapter from the book. Then, come to this guide to deepen and apply the principles you learn in the book. If studying in a group, obtain copies of *Spiritual Relationships That Last* for each member of the group. The book may be available at your local bookstore. You can order it directly from Xenos Christian Fellowship by calling 1-800-698-7884, or by placing an order on our Webstore (www.xenos.org/store). Quantity discount pricing is available. The facilitator may need to select which questions to cover on a given chapter because covering all questions may take too long.

You can obtain more copies of this study guide for free by downloading from the Web site (www.xenos.org/store/relationships/guide.htm). You can purchase study guide booklets for a nominal fee by calling 1-800-698-7884.

Please feel free to send us feedback about problems or positive results by email, to MccallumD@xenos.org, or DelashmuttG@xenos.org, or come to the Xenos Web Site at www.xenos.org, and send us response there.

one

Marriage Success Today: What Are Your Chances?

1. Are you from an intact, or a broken family? How do you think this may have affected you, and how have you adjusted?

2. How could you imagine divorce possibly impacting children and their future marriages?

Single-parent families offer decreased nurture to kids creating adjustment problems.

Kids who see marriage fail may become cynical about marriage or even fearful.

Unless divorcees are cooperative with each other, kids may get a negative view of the opposite sex.

Separation anxiety may cause kids to become insecure, depending on others for their sense of security, leading to hyper-dependence

3. The authors suggest it's possible to "prepare" for marriage. Do you find this suggestion plausible? Or does it seem contrived?

Think of other things we prepare for—job, parenting, sports.

Those who think we shouldn't have to prepare for marriage, betray an underlying belief that marriage should happen automatically—probably because of the eros myth.

4. The authors discuss the disturbing case of Esau. Record your reaction to the following:

God loves us, and if we mess up he will fix our lives.

Agree Somewhat agree Doubtful Disagree

If we ignore God's will we may suffer disaster in this life.

Agree Somewhat agree Doubtful Disagree

5. Marriage is harder than shining a pair of shoes. Before God, how far are you prepared to go in making your marriage all it can be?

You could share what you put on this question.

two Is "Love" Enough?

1. Have you ever had the experience of believing you were in love with someone, only to find later that you no longer had any interest in that person? How do you interpret such an experience?

At the very least, this must suggest the unreliability of eros love as a guide to the "will of God," or as a guide to finding everlasting love.

2. If a couple is "in love," shouldn't they get married? Why, or why not?

This question reveals people's reasons for getting married.

What would be a good reason for getting married if not being in love?

Ask the group, "What does being in love mean?"

3. Have you ever known a couple who believed they were in love and got married, only to fail? If so, what do you think accounts for the failure?

Answers to this question could reveal more about how people interpret eros mythology. Try to summarize the principle their answers imply.

4. DeLashmutt and McCallum think Christian love has to do with serving others more than it does with feelings. What do you think of the passages they cite on p. 14 to back this up?

Observe that the Samaritan (The good Samaritan, 1 John 3:17) both felt compassion and did something about it.

For those who think love is mainly a feeling, ask how this can be reconciled with the biblical material. Isn't our modern definition of love more focused on feeling and sentiment than the biblical view which focuses more on serving and giving?

5. The authors mention married couples whose "love seems to desert them" after marriage. Are you aware of any cases where this occurred? If so, what does it mean?

Under the eros myth, it might suggest that they married by mistake and that their love was not "the real thing."

To biblical Christians, it should suggest the inadequacy of eros feelings for discovering eternal love.

6. Are you aware of any cases where a married person came to believe that he or she was in love with another person other than their spouse? If so, what lesson(s) can be drawn from such episodes?

Again, eros feelings for another woman or man are impossible to distinguish from eros feelings we originally felt for our spouse.

7. Your friend says, "I wouldn't buy a car without driving it around the block, and I wouldn't marry someone without a trial marriage." How would you assess such a statement?

That which is reasonable when buying a machine is hardly appropriate for a personal being.

Note the "self-first" ethos in this thought: "I have to check to make sure I'm getting all I can get." This direction is seeking to take, not to give.

three**What Does Christian Intimacy Look Like?**

How would you rate yourself in the following areas: (Circle the one that is most true.)

1. I'm a careful listener.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

2. I'm committed and faithful in expending time on my relationships.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

3. I'm able to share deeply in the emotional realm.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

4. I'm able to get outside of myself and draw others out.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

5. I'm a warm and enthusiastic person.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

6. I avoid excessive "pigtail pulling" with my friends, and can express direct affection.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

7. I am able to take an interest in others' hobbies, sports or special interests.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

8. I'm not afraid to confront others for their own good.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

9. I am receptive to criticism from my friends.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

10. I think and pray about my loved ones when I am not with them.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

11. I don't look to other people for my sense of worth.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

12. I control my feelings, avoiding unnecessarily hurtful expressions.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

13. I feel good about my ability to help my loved ones maximize their potential.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

14. I often encourage my loved ones, and let them know I love them.

Yes, very much Average Area of some weakness

Check your work

If you are studying with a fiancée or spouse, compare your answers. Do each of you agree with the other's self-assessment? Discuss any differences.

If you are studying with a group, you need not say which one you circled unless you want to. Discuss what someone who feels weak in each area could do to develop more in that area.

four **Learning Christian Love**

1. Do you agree with the authors that people need the experience of building one or more successful intimate relationships (non-romantic) *before* they can feel confident they will succeed in marriage? Why or why not?

For those who answer no, why do they think they will be able to do something in marriage that they have not been able to do before marriage? (See #3 below.)

For those who feel intimate relationships with dating partners is adequate, ask whether they believe the feelings that now buttress that relationship will continue to do so within marriage? Do they feel they are different than other married couples?

2. Can you suggest an alternative method that would point toward likely marriage success?

3. Respond to the authors' question: "If we are not successfully loving people at the intimate level before marriage, what makes us think we will be able to do so after marriage?"

4. The authors also say: "Likewise, if we are married, but find no examples of intimate relationship outside our marriage, perhaps the problem is not with our spouse after all!" What are they suggesting? Do you agree?

Married people having relational problems tend to blame their spouses. But if none of their other relationships are successful at an intimate level, perhaps they themselves are unable to relate at an intimate level.

Help your married members turn their eyes away from blaming their spouses and onto themselves.

5. Do your own relational inventory. What areas do you see as areas of strength? What areas need improvement?

five
**Growing Together:
 Marriage and Community**

1. Biblical teachings about modesty suggest that privacy is appropriate in a marriage relationship. Yet, as the authors show, marriage is often cast in the context of Christian community. Where do you see the boundaries between the privacy of the marital relationship and the shared life of the Christian community?

Try to imagine things that might be inappropriate in the direction of encroachment by the community into marriage.

Try to imagine things that might be inappropriate in the direction of unqualified individualism and privacy.

The purpose of these questions is to make members wrestle with the issue of privacy versus community.

2. Would you ask counsel of older Christians on your readiness for marriage? Or do you feel this is an area that is nobody else's business?

Why should marriage be the only major decision in life for which we ask no advice? Probably, those who feel no one can advise them on this question are betraying a belief in the eros myth—"Others cannot help because they can't possibly tell how deep our love feelings are."

3. Why do the authors think parents and older Christians are a source of counsel but not a "chain of authority?" What is the difference? Do you agree?

Be aware of the desire of some to off-load responsibility for tough, dangerous and scary decisions. Stress the union of responsibility and decision-making authority: Who will live with the outcome of the decision?

Would orthodox Muslim parents ever agree to a Christian marriage?

4. Are you aware of any time when a troubled marriage was helped by the Christian community?

Many married couples report being helped by other Christian married couples. If this is not the case in your church, it may be a sad comment on the level of intimacy in that community. Perhaps your group will be different!

5. Is your own involvement in body life superficial? Do you merely go to meetings? Or are you vitally involved in relationships and ministry? What are some steps you could take to upgrade your level of involvement?

Begin with theological and moral convictions. Find like-minded people, or convince others. Begin devoting time and energy to one another in meetings and other venues to develop body life.

six

Competent to Give: Marriage and Ministry

1. DeLashmutt and McCallum say that the same things that prevent people from developing a successful ministry also create problems in marriage. How true do you think this is?

2. Considering your own ministry, select the answer that most accurately represents your current standing: (Circle the one that is most true.)

Ministry Should Be Concrete.

Yes, mine is Partially true Not really

Ministry Should Include the Personal.

Yes, mine is Partially true Not really

We Should Be Able to Minister Separately.

Yes, mine is Partially true Not really

We Should Be Able to Minister When Together

Yes, mine is Partially true Not really

Check to see if those marking "not really" see this as a problem, or as the way it should be.

3. For each of the categories above you marked as partially or not true, think of ways you could possibly upgrade your involvement:

Ministry Should Be Concrete.

Ministry Should Include the Personal.

We Should Be Able to Minister Separately.

We Should Be Able to Minister When Together.

This question lends itself to discussion more than the first.

4. Do you agree with the authors' claim that a couple who minister only to their own family is engaging in corporate selfishness? Does God call us to serve others outside our family?

In the American evangelical church, ministry to one's family is often considered sufficient. Indeed, some church leaders feel lucky if they can extract even this from their preoccupied members. The result is that all other types of ministry are left to the professionals or to singles.

5. "The best time to get married is when two people feel that both will be more effective for Christ married than single." How do you react to this statement?

seven

Building on a Solid Foundation

1. The authors claim, "Many dating couples erroneously believe that positive spiritual habits will be easier to develop after they are married. In fact, the opposite is often true." Do you believe that married couples find themselves sharing, praying etc. less than they did when single? If you are single, interview several married couples and raise this question. What do they say?

2. For dating or engaged couples, assess where you stand as a couple in each of these areas recommended by the authors. For each recommendation, check the statement you identify with most:

Encourage Independent Growth

- Neither of us are possessive. We both pursue independent growth.
- One of us is a bit possessive. We are not always free to pursue independent growth.
- We don't see the importance of independent growth. We believe we are trying to forge unity, not independence.

Regular Scheduled Time

- We schedule time at least weekly for spiritual sharing.
- We don't schedule time, but we do well with spontaneous sharing and prayer.
- We hope to see improvement in this area.

Seek to Balance One Another

- We find that we compliment each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- We are similar in strengths and weaknesses, so this doesn't apply to us.
- We sometimes experience tension over our different ways of expressing our spirituality.

Mutual Respect and Patience

- We both feel secure even sharing deeply about our weaknesses.
- We have had a few problems feeling judged by each other, but not many.
- We know we need to work on this area.

Build Common Ministry

- We serve together often which leads to shared burdens for prayer, study and sharing.
- We get to work together once in awhile.
- We don't have this now, but we hope to have it later.

Ask if anyone wants to share where they checked one of the second-, or third-level boxes. If you can get people to offer their answers and discuss them, fine, but don't push them to share against their will.

3. Why would a Christian dating partner or fiancée resist praying, sharing or studying Scripture together? Can you think of a possible motive other than those suggested by the authors? How serious do you think this problem is?

4. The authors say it's *always* wrong for a Christian to marry a non-Christian. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Find out whether your members feel bound by the authority of Scripture. Are their arguments against this idea (if any) exegetical? or experiential?

5. Do you know any couples who are “unequally yoked” either in the sense that one is Christian and the other is non-Christian, or that one is interested in spiritual things and the other is not? How is that situation working out? Would you consider entering such a future yourself?

6. What would you say to a Christian who was planning to marry either a non-Christian or a disinterested Christian, in the belief that things will change after marriage?

eight **Sexual Love or Exploitation?**

1. The authors say, “Married sexuality will never conform to the standards of modern pornography.” Name some ways in which married sex is different from pornography and different from the sex relationships portrayed in porno-type media.

The stimulation of immorality is absent.

Our physical appearance can rarely measure up to the models in movies and magazines.

Sex with someone you live with and relate to in an ongoing way involves resolving conflicts and nurturing good feelings in the relationship, unlike casual sex, where you walk away from each other after the act.

In real, marital sexuality, the insecurities and emotional needs of the other must be constantly considered, whereas in the make-believe sex of porno, others have no emotional needs other than sexual desire.

Think of others. . .

2. The authors also list some factors that successful married couples say are key to sexual success. For each feature, try to imagine (without getting graphic) what sort of problem(s) might be generated if this feature is missing:

Mutual trust

distrust can lead to frigidity or impotence

Vulnerability

if we sense our partner only wants to relate sexually, not personally, we feel used

Security based on a life-long commitment

we have difficulty responding freely unless we know we are secure

Ongoing personal sharing

personal closeness leads to sexual responsiveness

Sexual self-control

inability to control one's sexual desires may lead to harmful aggression, masturbation, or lack of sensitivity, all of which may crush sexual responsiveness

3. Is it wrong to want your spouse to have a pleasant-looking body?

Some feel this way. They feel their spouses should appreciate and desire them sexually, even though they have not exerted any effort to look attractive.

Over-eating could be a way to "get back" at an insensitive, violent, or unloving spouse.

4. DeLashmutt and McCallum claim, "Those who practice premarital sex on an on-going basis are also deliberately reserving the right to exit the relationship easily, should they decide to. In other words, when someone calls on you for premarital sex, this person is really saying, 'I want to use your body to meet my sexual appetite, but I want to remain free to reject you afterward.'" Can you suggest a different motive for premarital sex?

5. Does loss of sexual self-control necessarily inhibit communication in a dating relationship? Does it necessarily inhibit development of good spiritual habits?

Perhaps if an incident is isolated and is resolved spiritually immediately, the harm might be minimal. However, honest singles will admit that sexual immorality is very damaging most of the time.

nine**Are We Moving in the Same Direction?**

1. The authors claim that the Bible teaches different sexual roles for men and women in marriage, including male leadership. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Are the views your members share exegetical (i.e. how the Bible reads) or experiential/affective (e.g. "look how bossy men misuse these verses" or "this kind of claim just makes me sick!")? What role should biblical teaching have in framing our answer to this question?

For those who feel gender roles in marriage are just a cultural issue, like giving one another a holy kiss, why are the statements on roles grounded in the theology of the Old Testament rather than in cultural norms (Ephesians 5:24ff; 1 Timothy 2)?

2. Why do the authors think centering a marriage around God's authority is a basis for closeness?

Provides a basis for resolving conflicts.

Provides a basis for seeking goals other than "what I want."

3. Name some of the limitations you see on the idea of headship in marriage.

Only applies to that which does not contradict higher authority.

Should be exercised only in the context of self-giving love.

4. The authors say, "Our postmodern aversion to authority is incompatible with Christianity, not only because it flies in the face of biblical teaching, but because it is based on our fear of corrupt and self-serving authority figures." How significant do you think "aversion to authority" is in our culture? Do you ever struggle with aversion to authority?

5. The authors also say, "Both partners in a marriage should understand and agree on their concept of headship before getting married." If you are engaged, do you agree?

ten

Overcoming Obstacles From the Past: Relationships

1. DeLashmutt and McCallum say that romantic love is blind. What do they mean by this? Drawing from your own experience in this area, do you agree with this assertion?

Eros love feelings are so strong that they tend to create an idealized picture of the loved one, filtering out character flaws and other personal problems. Couples who are “in love” also tend to put their best foot forward and relate to each other in very positive settings.

Perhaps those in the group have experienced sudden and distressing changes in their feelings about their romantic partners. Ask them to share this along with how they responded to it and what they learned from this experience.

2. How can you gain a more realistic assessment of the other person before marriage?

Delay serious decisions (engagement, marriage) until the eros feelings die down enough to get a more objective picture. Sometimes you can do this by taking the dating relationship slowly. If the relationship has become too “hot and heavy,” it may be wise to take a break from the relationship in order to get some objectivity.

Focus on what others say about the person. Ask friends and mature people who know you both for some honest feedback.

Probe more deeply when you see something problematic instead of ignoring it.

3. Take an honest inventory of the sexual damage you have incurred. What kinds of sexual sin have you been involved in? To what extent and over how long a period of time? What negative effects can you identify? How much healing has occurred in this area? What negative effects should you look out for in marriage?

The key here is to be honest about your problems in this area, while also affirming the power of God to change you.

Close friends are a big help in considering this issue. They will often have insight on these questions, and they can also encourage you.

4. When would be the best time to frankly discuss each other’s past sexual involvement?

Shortly before engagement seems best. We should resist lengthy and detailed sharing in this area until we know (based on things discussed in this book) we are both ready for marriage. This kind of intimate confession tends to deepen couples’ commitment to one another, whereas the decision to become committed should be made on other bases.

In the meantime, we should share this area with our close Christian friends.

5. Can you clearly articulate how you contributed to the failure of your marriage or serious romantic relationships? How have you made progress in these areas?

Inability to answer this question may indicate that we need to do some praying and careful thinking about this area.

6. For engaged and married couples, talk to each other about your relationships with your parents. Do you agree on what are your most serious problems with them? Devise a plan for how you can address these problems and still initiate genuine love toward them.

Check these areas:

*unresolved resentments that should be forgiven
lack of loving investment on their part or yours
failure to stand against parental manipulation
failure to discipline in love.*

eleven

Overcoming Obstacles From the Past: Addictions, Materialism and Psychological Damage

1. For those who have a history of alcohol or drug abuse, consider the following questions:

How did this sin area affect your relational life?

How long have you been free from actual abuse?

How have you replaced the stimulation you got from drug or alcohol abuse?

How are your relationships now different from when you abused?

2. Take an honest inventory of the questions posed concerning materialism:

Do you experience conflict between materialistic and spiritual desires?

What makes up your private fantasies of the “ideal life?”

How do you habitually respond when spiritual and secular responsibilities and opportunities conflict?

Are you able to be content with what you have materially? Do you consciously distinguish between “wants” and “needs”? What is your history of consumer credit debt?

How regularly and generously do you give your money to God’s service?

What are your short-term and long-term spiritual goals?

How do you view retirement?

3. For seriously dating or engaged couples, discuss your history of serious psychological problems. What help have you received for these problems? To what extent are they under control?

Problems are “under control” when they do not substantially interfere with our ability to sustain close love relationships.

twelve **Personal Maturity**

1. If you are single, have you spent a significant time as a Christian without romantic involvement? What has God taught you about trusting him and about your own character during this time?

Those who have responded to the trial of loneliness properly, will be thankful for that trial because they have learned valuable lessons. Such lessons include: increased confidence that God will truly meet their needs, a lifestyle built around love-giving rather than love-taking, and transformation of character issues that affect relational ability (forgiveness; loving confrontation; emotional sensitivity; active listening).

2. If you are seriously dating or engaged, explain why you are confident that your partner is committed to spiritual maturity.

Watch to see if the answers are only subjective (I can just feel his love for God) or if they include the objective. We should be able to point to concrete things like successful close love relationships with other people, deepening involvement in the wWord, fellowship, prayer, and Christian ministry.

3. Take inventory of your maturity in functional responsibility: fiscal management and performance at school and work. If you have problems here, what practical steps can you take to improve?

thirteen

A Fulfilling Marriage *Is* Possible

We leave this chapter open for you to discuss as you see fit. The issues are simple and discussion may very well be included with the previous chapter in group study or counseling.

We hope you enjoyed your study of *Spiritual Relationships That Last*. You may also benefit from similar study guides for the authors' other books. These books and study guides are all available at the Xenos Web site (www.xenos.org/store), or at your local bookstore.

Books by Gary DeLashmutt:

Loving God's Way (Kregel). Discussion questions available at the end of each chapter.

Books by Dennis McCallum:

Christianity: The Faith That Makes Sense (Tyndale House).

The Death of Truth: What's Wrong With Multiculturalism, The Rejection of Reason, and the New Postmodern Diversity? (Bethany House).

Walking in Victory: Experiencing the Power of your Identity in Christ (Greydon Press).

The Summons a novel (Navpress). No study guide available.