

Marriage Education and Enrichment Reading List for Couples (* study guide included)

A more extensive list is posted at www.marriagelovepower.net under “Best Practices Articles and Recommended Resources. See also “Resources for Couples Preparing for Marriage” and other articles at the same site. This annotated list of books includes some classics, as well as newer works based on more recent research and program development. Some address marriage in general, while others focus on specific marital issues. Even just reading these reviews will, I hope, provide marriage-strengthening information. Many of these would also work well as a resource for group study, including those marked with an asterisk to indicate that they include a study guide.

Unless otherwise indicated, these books are available through popular booksellers. An online search of a book title will help you find out where it is being sold. New or used copies, e-books, or audio editions of those indicated as out-of-print may still be obtained through online booksellers, or may be available at your local library or through inter-library loan.

These are books recommended and reviewed by United Methodists, not by any means a full list of all that are available. Please submit your reviews of other books to me for inclusion in this list.

Jane P. Ives, United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministries Consultant
10 Quaker Ln, Portland, ME 04103, 207-797-8930, JaneIves@aol.com

10 Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage (formerly “... Revitalize Your Marriage,”) by Claudia and David Arp, MSW (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997.) Spark romance with memory-making dates built on key, marriage-enriching themes. The book includes his and her copies of tear-out dating guides. Enjoy your dates alone as a couple or use this resource in a marriage enrichment group for your church or community.

And They Were Not Ashamed: Strengthening Marriage through Sexual Fulfillment, by Laura M. Brotherson (Boise, Idaho: Inspire Book, 2004). “As three books in one, this marriage book, sex book and parenting book: Shines light and truth on the intimate marital relationship, restoring sex to its proper position as ordained of God; Effectively addresses, with self-help solutions, the emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy issues that plague so many marriages; Provides principles and practices to help parents teach and better prepare their children for intimacy and lasting fulfillment in marriage.” (back cover)

****Anger: Handling a Powerful Emotion in a Healthy Way***, by Gary Chapman (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2007). The author states his belief that God designed human anger to motivate us to take action against injustice or wrongdoing. However, we often cause harm to others and ourselves by reacting without thinking through what has happened and how best to address our grievances – real or perceived. A study guide at the end provides suggestions for thirteen sessions.

Couples and the Art of Playing: Three Easy and Enjoyable Ways to Nurture and Heal Relationships, by Keith Hackett (Lincoln, Nebraska: iUniverse, Inc., 2003). The author, a United Methodist pastor and Marriage and Family Therapist, encourages couples to develop playful, creative habits to enrich and strengthen their marriages.

****Empowering Couples: Building on Your Strengths***, by David H. Olson and Amy K. Olson (Minneapolis, MN: Life Innovations, Inc., 2000). Each chapter begins with a quiz about a particular relationship topic to help couples or individuals assess their strengths and needs for growth in that area. Clarifying information is followed by couple exercises to help turn “stumbling blocks into stepping stones” (p. ix). Chapter topics include “Communication,” “Conflict Resolution,” “Role Relationship,” “Managing Finances,” “Sexual Relationship,” “Children and Parenting,” “Personal, Couple, and Family Goals.”

Fighting for Your Marriage: A Deluxe Revised Edition of the Classic Best Seller for Enhancing Marriage and Preventing Divorce, by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Susan L. Blumberg (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2010). This book teaches effective skills for handling conflict and disagreements, explains the attitudes and behaviors that promote a healthy relationship, and shows couples how to enhance and protect their love. Straightforward and easy-to-understand content includes helpful exercises and suggestions for practice. The same information is linked to Scripture and expressed with religious language in *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*, reviewed above.

****Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples***, by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 2008). This classic work describes the unconscious needs which lead us to choose our mates and how learned behaviors from childhood lead to conflict; shows how to learn positive ways to meet those needs; and outlines a ten-week course in relationship therapy couples can do on their own.

His Needs, Her Needs: Building An Affair-Proof Marriage, by Willard F. Harley, Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2011). Based on the simple premise that husbands and wives can find lifelong happiness in marriage by committing themselves to meet each other’s needs, this book offers information and exercises to help couples deepen their understanding of each other and intentionally behave in ways that will nourish the relationship. The author explains that with every encounter we affect each other positively or negatively, making deposits in or withdrawals from each other’s “Love Bank.” The author also clarifies the dynamics that may make spouses vulnerable to the temptation of an affair and offers strategies for healing relationships damaged by infidelity.

Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love, by Sue Johnson (New York: Little, Brown, & Company, 2008). This easy to understand and practical guide for couples stresses the importance of emotional attachment. The seven transforming conversations, which encourage the emotional responsiveness vital to healthy, lasting marriages, help couples recognize destructive dialogue patterns, find their emotional “raw spots,” revisit rocky moments, communicate needs, connect and engage with each other, forgive and repair injuries, bond through sex and touch, and keep their love alive.

How One of You Can Bring the Two of You Together: Breakthrough Strategies to Resolve Your Conflicts and Reignite Your Love, by Susan Page (NY: Broadway Books, 1997). The author's insights and suggestions will help both those who feel stuck and frustrated with their relationships and those who, although happy and stable, feel some disillusionment or lack of connection. Page presents a series of "experiments" one person can use, based on 8 specific principles: 1) Act on your own. 2) Do the opposite of what you have been doing. 3) Reframe a power struggle. 4) Enlist your partner's help. 5) Express empathy for your partner's position. 6) Gracefully accept what you can't change. 7) Ask for what you want. 8) Men: tune in; Women: stop coaching. Detailed analysis and examples make this approach clearly understandable.

Keeping the Love You Find: A Personal Guide, by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. (New York: Atria Books, 1992). The author provides information and exercises to help readers deepen their understanding of who they are and what they long for in their relationships, then to learn the skills to make behavior changes needed in order to achieve an intentional, "conscious" relationship.

Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage, by Ed Wheat, M.D., and Gaye Wheat (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 2010). The authors provide comprehensive and clear information about many aspects of sex and sexuality from a Christian perspective: understanding the basics, techniques of lovemaking, solutions to common problems, and suggestions for specific situations such as pregnancy and aging.

Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs, by Emerson Eggerichs, (Colorado Springs: Integrity Publishers, 2004). Writing from a Christian perspective and frequently quoting Scripture, the author makes a clear case for the importance of honoring the primary needs of women and men. He identifies the "Crazy Cycle" (she reacts to a perceived lack of love and he reacts to a perceived lack of respect) and recommends clear steps to move toward closeness and a mutually satisfying relationship.

Love is Never Enough, by Aaron T. Beck, M.D. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988). The author explores how couples can avoid the misunderstandings and inaccurate interpretations of each other's behavior that lead to marital conflict. This book explains how "partners can learn to be more reasonable with each other by adopting a more humble, tentative attitude about the accuracy of their mind reading, and its resulting negative conclusions; by checking out the accuracy of their mind reading; and by considering alternative explanations for what a partner does." (p. 17)

Love, Marriage, and Money: Understanding and Achieving Financial Compatibility Before-and After-You Say "I Do," by Gail Liberman and Alan Lavine ((Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2005). The authors blend psychological, legal, and financial information into a helpful resource for couples. Topics include financial personalities, how to compromise, renting or purchasing a home, planning for children, preparing for retirement, and estate planning.

Making Love Last a Lifetime: Biblical Perspectives on Love, Marriage and Sex, by Adam Hamilton (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004) Based on learnings from secular research, his own experiences as a counselor, surveys, and interviews, this book provides biblical perspectives on

male/female differences, sexual intimacy, the role of faith in marriage, attitudes and behaviors that strengthen marriages, and ways to rekindle love in difficult times. Each chapter contains exercises for couple or group use. [Also available as a DVD curriculum kit from popular booksellers or order through Cokesbury, 800-672-1789 or www.cokesbury.com.]

Marriage Skills for Busy Couples: How to Avoid Supercouple Syndrome (formerly titled *Supercouple Syndrome*), by Wayne M. Sotile and Mary O. Sotile, M.A. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998). The authors challenge the myths and behavior patterns that cause stress and burnout and show busy couples how to “use their relationships as havens from outside demands, ...create appropriate boundaries, take time out to have fun, and nurture their partners by noticing everyday accomplishments.” (page x)

Passages of Marriage: Five Growth Stages That Will Take your Marriage to Greater Intimacy and Fulfillment, by Dr. Frank and Mary Alice Minirth, Dr. Brian and Dr. Deborah Newman, and Dr. Robert and Susan Hemfelt (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1991). These authors discuss five stages of marriage: Young Love, Realistic Love, Comfortable Love, Renewing Love, and Transcendent Love. The tasks of each stage are clearly described, with suggestions and self-assessment exercises to help couples make the most of each passage.

Rekindling Desire: A Step-by-Step program to Help Low-Sex and No-Sex Marriages, by Barry and Emily McCarthy (New York: Burnner and Routledge, 2003). Inhibited sexual desire and discrepancies in sexual desire damage marital intimacy and can drain joy from a marriage. The authors provide information for understanding and strategies for addressing these issues.

Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy? by Gary Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000). The author invites readers to view marriage as a spiritual discipline through which persons can come to know God more fully and intimately. Marriage teaches us to love and to respect others, exposes our sin, and encourages us to develop perseverance, forgiveness, and the ability to embrace differences.

The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially, by Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher (New York: Doubleday, 2000). Research reveals that marriage brings greater happiness, health, earnings, sexual satisfaction, and many other positive benefits to couples who commit to it, as well as to their children. The authors explode many negative myths about marriage, show how marriage transforms individuals and relationships, and document solid reasons for supporting marriage-strengthening initiatives.

The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships by Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Ph.D. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1997). “Close relationships are akin to circular dances, in which the behavior of each partner provokes and maintains the behavior of the other.” (p. 12) This book helps the reader clarify her feelings, learn to communicate them effectively, and interrupt negative patterns in relationships, not only with her husband, but also with children, parents, and others.

The Five Languages of Apology, by Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2006). The author identifies five languages of apology: Expressing Regret, Accepting Responsibility, Making Restitution, Genuinely Repenting, and Requesting Forgiveness. By understanding and using the Apology Language or Languages that are most important to each other, couples can more effectively repair and heal their relationship.

The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts, by Gary Chapman (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010). The author identifies five languages of love: Quality Time, Words of Affirmation, Gifts, Acts of Service, and Physical Touch. By learning to speak and understand these unique languages, persons can more effectively communicate love and feel more truly loved as well.

The Five Secrets of Marriage from the Heart, by Jack Rosenblum and Corinne Dugas (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, LLC, 2006) Through the engaging story of a couple whose marriage is in crisis, the authors explain and illustrate five keys to strengthening and/or healing a relationship. This easy-to-read, well-grounded book would be an excellent gift for couples or a resource for a study group.

The Love Dare by Stephen Kendrick and Alan Kendrick (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008). Featured in the movie *Fireproof*, this book offers forty days of faith-based relationship information and challenges to be used by a spouse hoping to improve his or her marriage.

The Power of Commitment: A Guide to Active, Lifelong Love, by Scott M. Stanley (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass 2005). The author offers practical and spiritual guidance to help couples understand commitment, handle everyday pressures, deal with the pain of disappointment and unfulfilled hopes, overcome extramarital attractions, and transform “me versus you” to “we” thinking in order to experience the joy of lifelong devotion and loyalty.

The Second Half of Marriage: Facing the Eight Challenges of the Empty Nest Years, by Claudia and David Arp, MSW (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998). When children leave home, it’s time for couples to renew their love and refocus on their marriages. The second half of marriage can be a time of incredible fulfillment. No matter what challenges a couple previously faced, they can surmount them and turn this phase of their relationship into a second honeymoon!

The Secrets of Happily Married Men: Eight Ways to Win Your Wife’s Heart Forever, by Scott Haltzman, M.D. with Theresa Foy Digeronimo (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006). The author shows men how to use their natural masculine talents to enhance their marriages. The determination to do a job and to do it right (focusing, prioritizing, developing strategies, problem-solving, paying attention to details, negotiating and compromising, resolving conflict, working through step-by-step processes, and achieving goals) can be used to build a strong, healthy, and lasting marriage.

The Surprising Way to a Stronger Marriage: How the Power of One Changes Everything, by Michael and Amy Smalley (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010). The

authors describe how one spouse, strengthened by God and Biblical principles, can bring about positive change and growth in a marriage. The authors emphasize the importance of taking responsibility for your own emotions and reactions, focusing on what you want to have happen, and repairing hurts by asking your spouse what he/she needs in order to heal. A Study Guide in the back of the book provides scripture and discussion questions for each of the eighteen chapters.

Venus on Fire, Mars on Ice: Hormonal Balance-The Key to Life, Love, and Energy, by John Gray, Ph.D., (Coquitlan, BC: Mind Publishing, Inc., 2010). The author discusses how hormonal differences affect male and female behaviors and reactions to stress. While men tend to withdraw under stress, women become more anxious and driven. Increased levels of testosterone reduce stress in men, while women's stress is eased by increased levels of oxytocin. By understanding, accepting, and respecting these differences, couples can reduce tension and build more satisfying relationships.

You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, by Deborah Tannen, Ph.D. (New York, Ballantine Books, 1990). The author analyzes how boys and girls develop different perspectives and communication styles because of differences in how they are raised. By trying to see things from the other's perspective, rather than reacting negatively, men and women can prevent these differences from undermining their relationships.

****What Children Learn from Their Parents' Marriage: It May Be Your Marriage, but It's Your Child's Blueprint for Intimacy***, by Judith P. Siegel, Ph.D., C.S.W. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001). Because the marriage relationship serves as the child's "blueprint for intimacy," couples need to discover how they have been impacted by the relationship of their parents and what they, in turn, are communicating to their children. Each chapter of this book discusses and gives clear examples of an aspect of healthy intimacy ("Establishing the Priority of the Marriage," "Teaching the Value of Interdependence," "Instilling the Importance of Mutual Respect," "Maintaining Trust in Word and Deed," "Negotiating Differences Constructively," "Understanding the Long-Term Effects of Conflict," "Emphasizing the Positives," and "Building a Better Marriage." Questions at the end of each chapter encourage couples to reflect on their own relationships and to move toward healthier patterns both for their own happiness and for that of their children. This would be an excellent resource for a nine-week group study for young parents or a helpful gift for individuals or couples.

Why Talking is Not Enough: Eight Loving Actions that Will Transform Your Marriage by Susan Page (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, 2006). The author encourages individuals and couples to treat their relationships as spiritual disciplines, practicing acceptance, compassion, restraint, and kindness. By focusing on loving each other, in a spirit of good will, couples can build a true spiritual partnership. The author's insights and "experiments" can be utilized by both or by just one party in the relationship.

Jane P. Ives, United Methodist Marriage and Family Ministries Consultant (10/15/2013)
10 Quaker Lane, Portland, ME 04103, 207-797-8930, JaneIves@aol.com
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