

marriage counseling guide for pastors

marriage counseling guide for pastors offers essential insights and practical strategies for clergy who wish to support couples in nurturing healthy, resilient marriages. This comprehensive resource addresses the unique challenges pastors face when counseling couples, including understanding biblical perspectives, developing effective communication techniques, and handling sensitive issues such as infidelity or conflict resolution. Pastors play a vital role in guiding couples through marital difficulties, and having a well-structured approach can make all the difference. This article explores key counseling principles, proven methods, and ethical considerations, equipping pastors with the tools they need to foster lasting relationships. Readers will discover step-by-step guidance for conducting sessions, setting boundaries, and integrating faith-based principles. Whether you are a seasoned minister or new to pastoral counseling, this guide provides actionable advice to enhance your effectiveness and confidence. Dive in to learn how to build trust, encourage honest dialogue, and promote reconciliation among couples within your congregation.

- Understanding the Role of Pastors in Marriage Counseling
- Foundational Principles of Pastoral Marriage Counseling
- Preparing for Effective Counseling Sessions
- Key Counseling Techniques for Pastors
- Addressing Common Marital Issues
- Ethics and Boundaries in Pastoral Counseling
- Incorporating Faith-Based Approaches
- Resources and Continuing Education for Pastors

Understanding the Role of Pastors in Marriage Counseling

Pastors serve as trusted advisors and spiritual leaders within their communities, making them natural confidants for couples facing marital challenges. Their unique position enables them to provide guidance rooted in faith, compassion, and understanding. The marriage counseling guide for pastors emphasizes the importance of balancing spiritual support with practical advice. Pastors must navigate the delicate intersection between their religious responsibilities and the emotional needs of the couples they counsel. By offering a safe, nonjudgmental environment, pastors encourage open communication and facilitate healing. Recognizing the boundaries of their expertise and knowing when to refer couples to professional therapists is also a critical aspect of the role.

Foundational Principles of Pastoral Marriage Counseling

Biblical Foundations in Marriage Counseling

Christian marriage counseling draws heavily from biblical teachings on love, forgiveness, and commitment. Pastors often rely on scripture to reinforce the sanctity of marriage and provide hope to struggling couples. Key passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Corinthians 13 are frequently referenced to illustrate mutual respect and unconditional love. Integrating these principles helps couples view their relationship through a spiritual lens and align their actions with biblical values.

Confidentiality and Trust

Confidentiality is paramount in building trust between pastors and couples. The marriage counseling guide for pastors stresses the necessity of safeguarding sensitive information shared during sessions. Couples must feel confident that their struggles will remain private. Establishing clear confidentiality policies at the outset of counseling fosters an atmosphere of safety and honesty.

Preparing for Effective Counseling Sessions

Initial Assessment and Goal Setting

Successful marriage counseling begins with a thorough assessment of the couple's history, issues, and expectations. Pastors should listen actively, ask open-ended questions, and encourage both partners to share their perspectives. Setting realistic goals ensures that counseling sessions remain focused and productive. This process lays the groundwork for measurable progress and helps couples stay motivated throughout their journey.

Creating a Supportive Environment

The physical and emotional setting of counseling sessions greatly influences their effectiveness. Pastors should provide a comfortable, distraction-free space where couples feel safe to express themselves. Neutrality and empathy are essential, allowing both partners to speak openly without fear of judgment or favoritism.

- Prepare a private meeting area
- Set clear session guidelines
- Use inclusive language
- Be attentive to non-verbal cues

- Encourage respectful dialogue

Key Counseling Techniques for Pastors

Active Listening and Empathy

One of the most powerful tools in marriage counseling is active listening. Pastors must hear not only the words spoken but also the emotions behind them. Demonstrating empathy by reflecting feelings and validating experiences strengthens the therapeutic alliance and encourages honest communication.

Facilitating Healthy Communication

Many marital problems stem from poor communication. The marriage counseling guide for pastors highlights proven strategies for improving dialogue between couples. Techniques such as "I" statements, conflict de-escalation, and structured turn-taking can transform interactions and reduce misunderstandings.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict is inevitable in any marriage, but learning how to resolve disagreements constructively is key to long-term success. Pastors should teach couples practical problem-solving skills, help them identify underlying issues, and guide them toward mutually acceptable solutions. Encouraging forgiveness and compromise fosters reconciliation and growth.

Addressing Common Marital Issues

Infidelity and Betrayal

Infidelity can devastate a marriage, eroding trust and intimacy. Pastors must approach this sensitive topic with compassion and impartiality. Counseling should focus on understanding the root causes, exploring the possibility of forgiveness, and helping couples rebuild trust through honest dialogue and accountability.

Financial Stress and Communication

Money-related conflicts are a frequent source of marital tension. The marriage counseling guide for pastors recommends helping couples establish shared financial goals, develop budgeting skills, and communicate transparently about spending habits. Pastors can offer biblical insights on stewardship and generosity to reinforce positive financial behaviors.

Parenting and Family Dynamics

Parenting disagreements and extended family pressures often strain marital relationships. Pastors should assist couples in developing unified parenting strategies, setting healthy boundaries with relatives, and prioritizing their marriage amid family demands.

Ethics and Boundaries in Pastoral Counseling

Maintaining Professional Boundaries

Upholding ethical standards is essential in pastoral counseling. Pastors must avoid dual relationships, maintain appropriate physical and emotional boundaries, and refrain from imposing personal beliefs or judgments. Regular supervision and self-reflection can help ensure ethical conduct.

Referral to Professional Counselors

There are situations where pastoral counseling may not be sufficient, such as cases involving abuse, severe mental health issues, or legal concerns. The marriage counseling guide for pastors advises clergy to recognize their limits and refer couples to qualified therapists when necessary. Building relationships with local counselors can facilitate effective referrals and continued care.

Incorporating Faith-Based Approaches

Prayer and Spiritual Practices

Integrating prayer and spiritual disciplines into counseling sessions provides comfort, guidance, and hope. Pastors can encourage couples to pray together, study scripture, and participate in worship as a means of strengthening their bond and seeking divine intervention in their relationship.

Church-Sponsored Marriage Programs

Many churches offer marriage enrichment programs, retreats, and workshops. These resources complement individual counseling and create opportunities for couples to build community, receive ongoing support, and learn new skills. Pastors should promote these programs and encourage participation as part of their holistic approach.

Resources and Continuing Education for Pastors

Training and Certification Opportunities

Ongoing education ensures pastors remain current with best practices in marriage counseling. Many

seminaries and professional organizations offer specialized training, certification, and workshops designed for clergy. Pursuing these opportunities enhances pastoral competency and credibility.

Recommended Books and Materials

A wealth of literature is available to support pastors in their counseling ministry. Books, guides, and online resources provide valuable insights into relationship dynamics, counseling techniques, and biblical principles. Pastors should curate a library of trusted materials to share with couples and expand their own knowledge base.

Trending Questions and Answers about Marriage Counseling Guide for Pastors

Q: What are the key responsibilities of pastors in marriage counseling?

A: Pastors are responsible for providing spiritual guidance, emotional support, confidentiality, and practical advice to couples. They facilitate communication, help resolve conflicts, and integrate faith-based principles while recognizing when to refer couples to professional counselors.

Q: How can pastors maintain confidentiality during marriage counseling?

A: Pastors must establish clear confidentiality policies, keep all sensitive information private, and avoid sharing details discussed in sessions with others unless legally required or with explicit consent from the couple.

Q: What are common challenges pastors face in marriage counseling?

A: Common challenges include handling sensitive issues like infidelity, managing dual relationships within the congregation, respecting boundaries, and knowing when a couple requires referral to a mental health professional.

Q: Which biblical passages are helpful for marriage counseling?

A: Passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Corinthians 13, and Genesis 2:24 are frequently used to highlight themes of love, commitment, and unity in Christian marriage counseling.

Q: When should pastors refer couples to professional counselors?

A: Pastors should refer couples if they encounter issues beyond their expertise, such as abuse, severe mental health concerns, or legal problems. Referral ensures couples receive specialized care while maintaining pastoral support.

Q: What communication techniques are most effective in marriage counseling?

A: Techniques such as active listening, using "I" statements, conflict de-escalation strategies, and structured turn-taking are highly effective in fostering healthy communication between spouses.

Q: How can pastors incorporate faith into marriage counseling sessions?

A: Pastors can incorporate faith by encouraging prayer, scripture study, participation in church activities, and discussions about biblical values related to marriage and forgiveness.

Q: What resources are available for pastors seeking to improve their counseling skills?

A: Resources include training programs, certification courses, books on marriage counseling, online seminars, and professional support networks for clergy.

Q: How do church-sponsored marriage programs support couples?

A: Church-sponsored programs such as retreats, workshops, and enrichment classes provide ongoing education, community support, and opportunities for couples to strengthen their relationships in a faith-based environment.

Q: Why is goal setting important in marriage counseling?

A: Goal setting helps create structure, focus, and measurable outcomes for counseling sessions, keeping couples motivated and ensuring progress toward healthier relationships.

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Marriage Counseling Guide for Pastors: A Shepherd's Guide to Nurturing Marital Bonds

Navigating the complexities of marriage is challenging for anyone, but for pastors, the weight of expectation and the constant public scrutiny can amplify these difficulties. This comprehensive guide provides pastors with practical strategies, biblical insights, and ethical considerations for effectively counseling couples facing marital distress. Whether you're a seasoned pastor or just starting your ministry, understanding the unique needs and sensitivities involved in pastoral marriage counseling is crucial. This post will equip you with the knowledge and tools to offer compassionate and effective support to the couples in your congregation.

H2: Understanding the Unique Challenges Faced by Pastor's Spouses

Before diving into counseling techniques, it's crucial to recognize the specific pressures faced by pastors' spouses. These individuals often bear a significant burden, shouldering the emotional and social demands that accompany their spouse's ministry role.

H3: Public Scrutiny and Expectation: Pastors' wives are often under intense public scrutiny. Their lives are often viewed as exemplary, leading to unrealistic expectations and potential for judgment. This constant pressure can significantly impact their marital relationship.

H3: Time Constraints and Work-Life Imbalance: The demanding nature of pastoral work often translates to long hours and limited personal time, leaving little space for nurturing the marital relationship. This imbalance can lead to feelings of neglect and resentment.

H3: Emotional and Spiritual Strain: Pastors' spouses frequently carry the emotional weight of their community's burdens, often acting as confidantes and caregivers. This constant emotional investment can strain their own emotional and spiritual well-being, affecting their marriage.

H2: Ethical Considerations in Pastoral Marriage Counseling

Providing marital counseling requires a high degree of ethical sensitivity, especially within the context of a pastoral relationship.

H3: Maintaining Boundaries: It's crucial to establish clear boundaries to prevent blurring the lines between pastoral care and personal friendship. This includes limiting the frequency and duration of counseling sessions and ensuring confidentiality.

H3: Avoiding Conflicts of Interest: Pastors must be mindful of potential conflicts of interest. If a conflict arises, referring the couple to a secular counselor might be the most ethical course of action.

H3: Confidentiality and Disclosure: Pastoral confidentiality is paramount. However, there are

exceptions, such as cases of abuse or imminent harm. Pastors should be well-versed in these exceptions and relevant laws.

H2: Practical Strategies for Pastoral Marriage Counseling

Effective marriage counseling requires a blend of biblical principles and practical strategies.

H3: Active Listening and Empathetic Understanding: Creating a safe space for couples to express their concerns without judgment is crucial. Active listening involves paying close attention, asking clarifying questions, and reflecting back their emotions.

H3: Identifying Root Causes: Digging beneath the surface issues to uncover the underlying root causes of conflict is key to achieving lasting change. This often involves exploring communication patterns, unmet needs, and unresolved past traumas.

H3: Utilizing Biblical Principles: Integrating biblical principles of love, forgiveness, grace, and commitment can provide a strong framework for healing and reconciliation. However, avoid imposing personal interpretations and instead focus on guiding the couple to discover these principles within their faith journey.

H3: Practical Tools and Techniques: Consider introducing practical tools and techniques such as communication exercises, conflict-resolution strategies, and forgiveness practices to equip couples with the skills to navigate their challenges effectively.

H3: Referral to Specialized Counseling: Recognizing the limits of one's expertise is crucial. When necessary, refer couples to licensed marriage and family therapists for more intensive or specialized support.

H2: Building a Strong Foundation for Marital Health

Beyond crisis intervention, pastors can play a proactive role in strengthening marital health within their congregations.

H3: Premarital Counseling: Offer premarital counseling as a vital preparation for marriage, focusing on communication, conflict resolution, and shared values.

H3: Ongoing Support Groups: Establish support groups for married couples, providing a safe space for fellowship, sharing experiences, and receiving encouragement.

H3: Educational Resources: Provide access to relevant books, articles, and workshops focusing on building healthy marriages.

Conclusion:

Pastoral marriage counseling is a demanding yet rewarding aspect of ministry. By understanding the unique challenges faced by couples, adhering to ethical guidelines, and employing effective counseling techniques, pastors can be instrumental in guiding couples toward healing, reconciliation, and lasting marital health. Remember that your role is not to solve their problems but

to provide guidance, support, and a pathway towards a stronger, healthier relationship rooted in faith and love.

FAQs:

1. What if a couple reveals infidelity during counseling? This requires careful navigation. Maintain confidentiality while upholding ethical standards. Consider referring the couple to a therapist specializing in infidelity.
2. How can I deal with a couple who is resistant to counseling? Patience and empathy are crucial. Explore the reasons behind their resistance, and offer alternative approaches or resources.
3. Should I counsel couples from different denominations? While you can offer general pastoral care, referring them to a counselor from a similar faith background might be more beneficial.
4. What resources are available to help me improve my marriage counseling skills? Seek out workshops, seminars, and professional development opportunities focused on marriage and family therapy.
5. How do I manage my own emotional well-being while providing pastoral counseling? Self-care is essential. Prioritize your personal time, engage in spiritual practices, and seek support from fellow pastors or mentors.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling* Robert W. PhD Kellemen, 2020-09-15 Pastors and counselors regularly minister to people whose marriages or families are in crisis. Tempers run high and feelings are brought low when a marriage is hurting or a family is in disarray. Pastors and counselors need practical, biblical help in order to connect their theological training to the reality of modern messy relationships. These how-to training manuals provide relevant, user-friendly equipping for pastors, counselors, lay leaders, educators, and students, enabling them to competently and compassionately relate God's Word to marriage and family life.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: Counsel for Couples Jonathan D. Holmes, 2019-03-05 Many pastors feel ill-equipped to handle the challenges that arise when a couple is going through marital difficulties. If you are or have been in this situation before, this book shows church leaders how to counsel married couples from both a logical and biblical perspective. Author and pastor Jonathan Holmes offers you a practical guide to get started with the first sessions and then offers specific guidance on nine of the most common topics that come up in marriage counseling. In *Counsel for Couples*, Holmes provides you with: a biblical methodology that navigates you through the world of marriage counseling based on God's word a theological counseling approach addressing the deepest of marital issues advice from several respected voices in the biblical counseling community In each chapter, you'll meet a new couple dealing with a different issue, much like the people in your church, office, and neighborhood. Whether you're a novice or already knowledgeable, *Counsel for Couples* provides theologically sound and biblically practical tools to help you as you help couples in need.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: *Tying the Knot* Rob Green, 2016-01-13 *Tying the Knot* by Rob Green offers soon-to-be-married couples a practical vision of Christ-centered marriage that is realistic, hopeful, and actionable. With homework to help any counselor or couple put crucial lessons into practice, *Tying the Knot* is a highly relevant premarital counseling book. This eight-session study guides couples through issues like conflict, expectations, communication,

finances, and intimacy, showing how each can be successfully resolved with Christ at the center of the marriage. Knowing the stresses and needs of a couple in their season of engagement, Green has helpfully designed the study to require a manageable (and healthy) 60 minutes of at-home work per session, with questions and exercises to build communication and intimacy at the end of each chapter. Tying the Knot also includes an appendix for mentors, making it easy for a married couple, lay leader, or counselor to lead an engaged couple through the book. Field-tested and recommended by multiple counselors in a thriving counseling practice, Tying the Knot has already guided many couples into a stronger and more joyful union. Let this eight-week premarital study reorient your life and marriage around Christ, so you both will experience all the blessings of marriage as God designed it.

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marriage counseling guide for pastors: The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage & Family Counseling Dr. Tim Clinton, Dr. John Trent, 2009-09-01 We all know of families or marriages in crisis. When those suffering in such situations turn to us for help, where do we turn? The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage and Family Counseling provides the answers. It is an A-Z guide for assisting people--helpers--pastors, professional counselors, youth workers, and everyday believers--to easily access a full array of information to aid them in (formal and informal) counseling situations. Issues addressed by Clinton and Trent include affairs and adultery, communication in marriage, parenting, sibling rivalry, and many more. Each of the forty topics covered follows a helpful eight-part outline and identifies: 1) typical symptoms and patterns, 2) definitions and key thoughts, 3) questions to ask, 4) directions for the conversation, 5) action steps, 6) biblical insights, 7) prayer starters, and 8) recommended resources. About the series The Quick-Reference Guides are A-Z guides that assist people--helpers--pastors, professional counselors, youth workers, and everyday believers--to easily access a full array of information to aid them in (formal and informal) counseling situations. Each of the forty topics covered follows a helpful eight-part outline and identifies: 1) typical symptoms and patterns, 2) definitions and key thoughts, 3) questions to ask, 4) directions for the conversation, 5) action steps, 6) biblical insights, 7) prayer starters, and 8) recommended resources.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: Marriage Counseling Everett L. Worthington Jr., 2009-09-20 Marriages are in trouble today. That is clear. Effective methods of combating this trend are less evident. Counselors, pastors and social workers need more than mere theories or mere moralizing. They need a practical and comprehensive model for understanding couples and their problems. They need a thoroughly Christian perspective that is biblical, compassionate and human. Everett Worthington provides this in an integrated, biblically based theory of marriage and marriage therapy with analysis at three levels: the individual, the couple and the family. The model he has constructed, with techniques drawn from the major psychological schools, is standard enough to guide counselors in actual interventions and powerful enough to produce change. A thoroughgoing overview of the assessment process includes practical, workable guidelines for: creating realistic, mutually-agreeable goals for counselor and clients; estimating the number of sessions needed to reach those goals; and planning the actual assessment, intervention and termination sessions. Next Worthington offers specific techniques for enhancing cooperative change, intimacy, communication, conflict resolution and forgiveness within the marriage. But keeping couples from slipping back into old patterns is one of the counselor's most difficult tasks. So Worthington concludes with suggestions for solidifying change and effectively concluding the counseling relationship. Here is a

text that will be a standard for counselors, pastors and mental health professionals in the years to come.

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marriage counseling guide for pastors: *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* Les Parrott, Leslie Parrott, 2015-10-27 OVER ONE MILLION COPIES SOLD! With this updated edition of their award-winning book, Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott help you launch lifelong love like never before. This is more than a book--it's an experience, especially when you use the his/her workbooks filled with more than 40 fun exercises. Get ready for deeper intimacy with the best friend you'll ever have. *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, which has been translated into more than 15 languages, is the most widely used marriage prep tool in the world. Why? Because it will help you . . . Uncover the misbeliefs of marriage Learn to communicate with instant understanding Discover the secret to resolving conflict Master the skills of money management Get your sex life off to a great start A compelling video, featuring real-life couples, is available, and with this updated edition, Les and Leslie unveil the game-changing SYMBIS Assessment. Now you can discover how to leverage your personalities for a love that lasts a lifetime. Make your marriage everything it is meant to be. Save your marriage--before (and after) it starts.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling Robert W. PhD Kellemen, 2020-09-15 Pastors and counselors regularly minister to people whose marriages or families are in crisis. Tempers run high and feelings are brought low when a marriage is hurting or a family is in disarray. Pastors and counselors need practical, biblical help in order to connect their theological training to the reality of modern messy relationships. These how-to training manuals provide relevant, user-friendly equipping for pastors, counselors, lay leaders, educators, and students, enabling them to competently and compassionately relate God's Word to marriage and family life.

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and opportunity for pastoral intervention in troubled marriages how the marriage counseling process begins with the initial pastoral contact with one or both spouses help for the pastor in preparing for individual counseling sessions with each spouse important topics for marriage counseling regardless of which approach or model is used the last two sessions of counseling: deciding whether to end counseling, to refer the couple to other professional resources, or to contract with the couple for further counseling sessions

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Norman Wright sets you at ease about the counseling process, even if you've had only limited counseling experience. As the author of the popular *Before You Say I Do* and numerous other books on marriage, H. Norman Wright documents in *The Premarital Counseling Handbook* methods that have proved successful. These will help insure that the marriages performed in your church will resist the pressures that are destroying today's married couples.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: *How to Counsel a Couple in 6 Sessions or Less*

H. Norman Wright, 2002-08-30 *How to Counsel a Couple in 6 Sessions or Less* makes it easier to counsel couples over a brief period of time, but also addresses major marital issues of communication, family issues, decision making and more. This highly practical resource for pastors - or anyone in ministry - can be used with *The Marriage Checkup Questionnaire* or as a stand alone tool for quickly diagnosing problems and referring couples to a professional, as necessary.

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Dr. Tim Clinton, Timothy E. Clinton, Dr. Mark Laaser, Mark R. Laaser, 2010-04 This A-Z guide assists people-helpers--pastors, professional counselors, youth workers, and everyday believers--to easily access a full array of information to aid them in (formal and informal) counseling situations.

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marriage counseling guide for pastors: *Marriage Trust Builders* Ellen Dean, 2018-05-23

Almost everyone knows someone who has been impacted by broken trust in marriage. Perhaps it is you, a family member, a friend, or someone you are trying to help and guide. *Marriage Trust Builders* is about strengthening and restoring the trust in marriage. It is written to help the couples that are struggling because of weak trust in their marriages. It is also written to help marriages that have experienced broken trust. It provides guidance for the spouse who is hurting, the one who caused the pain, and also for those who are walking alongside to help.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: *Preparing Couples for Love and Marriage* Cameron

Lee, James L. Furrow, 2013-10-15 Good preparation enables couples to take a first step together in facing their future challenges. While no one can smooth away all the rough spots in the marital road ahead, couples can be coached to pay attention to warning signs, see the bumps before they hit them, and deal more skillfully with inevitable conflicts. This book provides pastors with a framework and tools for this ministry. The good news is that you don't need any formal background in counseling, because the kind of work we're talking about isn't counseling—it's coaching—a coach who can help couples to respond positively to the differences between them. It's not about having the answers; but is it about helping couples manage difficulties before they become serious threats to the marriage.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: *Catching Foxes* John Henderson, 2018 Why Are

Foxes on the Cover of this Premartial Guide? Because every marriage has foxes lurking inside it! We all have idols and selfish appetites-and, like the foxes in Solomon's vineyard, they can cause untold destruction and heartache. In fact, how seriously a couple takes their own foxes will influence whether their marriage blooms and glorifies God, or is a shallow and pale imitation of the real thing. In this workbook for both individuals and groups, biblical counselor John Henderson stimulates meaningful conversation and prayer between engaged couples. The book's interactive format provides couples with a foundation for understanding what marriage is really about, becoming a godly husband or wife, and understanding conflict and resolving it biblically. Sit down together, ask a married couple to come alongside you, and get ready to chase the foxes out of your relationship. Book jacket.

marriage counseling guide for pastors: *The Marriage Challenge* Art Rainer, 2018-06-01 God

has a plan for your marriage and your money. It starts with a challenge. Will you accept? For many

couples, the collision of marriage and money is the beginning of relational havoc. But does it have to be this way? What if the collision of marriage and money no longer tore couples apart but brought them together? What if money was no longer a topic to argue about but a topic around which couples rallied? What if the collision of marriage and money actually helped couples find contentment and purpose? In *The Marriage Challenge: A Finance Guide for Married Couples*, financial expert and author of *The Money Challenge* Art Rainer takes you on a journey to a financially healthy marriage. Get started on the right foot, or get back on the right track, by accepting the challenge and realizing God's design for money and marriage.

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member has their own unique place in a family. Ron Deal explores the myth of the blended family offering practical, realistic solutions for stepfamilies.

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