

PREPARE

TO LAST

Creating A Great Marriage | WORKBOOK

By JEFF & DEBBY MCELROY | DR. PETER LARSON | DR. DAVID OLSON

COUPLES

PREPARE To Last Couples Workbook
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*This project is dedicated to
Don M. "Bubba" and Cindy Cathy
and
Bob and Bev Maday.*

*Their joy for living life is contagious.
Their passion for lasting love is inspiring.*

Their vision for strengthening marriages has given birth to this resource.

*For that, we and future families around the world
will forever be grateful.*



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We would also like to thank Allyson Geyer for hours of proofreading and editing. (All of those highlights helped our words say what we meant!) We are also grateful to Dr. Gary Oliver for his contributions to the Scriptural Reference appendix.

To our partners in the project: PREPARE-ENRICH... Wow. We still can't believe that we got to work with the premier, most knowledgeable research organization in the field. David Olson and Peter Larson, you are the most unassuming, unselfish, gentle people with whom we've ever worked. It's an honor to have you as our partners, a blessing to have you as our friends! Jimmy and Karen Evans with MarriageToday... To work with a production company of such excellence and dedication is a dream come true. Your contribution of so many man-hours, creativity, administration, and marketing skills has been a gift — both to us and the thousands of couples who will be blessed by your work.

Dr. David Olson and Dr. Peter Larson (Life Innovations - PREPARE-ENRICH) are excited about this outreach to premarital and newlywed couples. Symbolically we have called this the “dolphin project” because it has been a team approach with creative contributions from many wonderful people. It was a joy to collaborate with Jeff and Debby, as well as the entire MarriageToday team.

A special thanks to our families and friends, who provide a constant source of love and support.

Jimmy and Karen Evans and the entire MarriageToday team are truly blessed to have been a part of this distinctive project and work with exceptional people like Dr. David Olson, Dr. Peter Larson, Dr. Matt Turvey, Jeff and Debby McElroy, Dr. Scott Sticksel, Bryon Gossett, Steve Trafton and all of their respective organizational teams. Our sincere gratitude also goes out to everyone at WinShape Marriage for all they did to make this resource a possibility.

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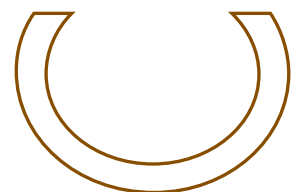
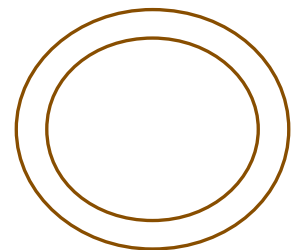
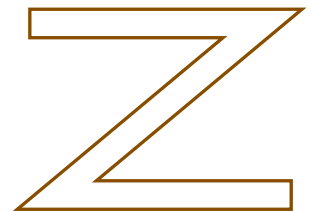
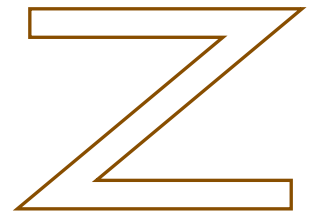
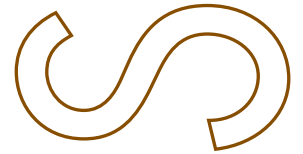
And finally, the partners are extremely grateful to Bubba and Cindy Cathy, Bob and Bev Maday and Shawn and Christina Stoeber of WinShape Marriage, and Dr. Jeff Fray of the Marriage Co-Mission. Your dream of seeing distinct organizations come together in a unified spirit around the cause of marriage has been realized in this project. We have been blessed to share in your vision.



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Welcome to PREPARE to Last!

It's exciting that you want to create a great marriage.

This resource is designed to...

provide an objective viewpoint of the strength and growth areas of your relationship,
give you some insights from noted authorities in the field of marriage,
help you apply these insights both individually and as a couple.

To achieve the best results for using this resource, follow the steps below:

- Go to the PrepareToLast.com website and complete your Couple Checkup. Your Welcome Card contains your individual couple voucher number that will allow you to access the assessment. This step is crucial because the results of your Couple Checkup will give you personalized feedback about your relationship and insight on what portions of this material will be the most important for you.
- Try to set aside an hour or two for eight weeks to work through this material. This will keep the process from feeling too overwhelming and will give you the time you need to thoroughly process what you'll learn.
- Each week you'll learn about a different subject. With your Couple Checkup results and workbooks in hand, you'll begin by watching a chapter on the DVD. The three DVD's will not only be your source for entertainment and insight, but will also serve as your guide through the workbook exercises.
- Later each week, you'll get to go out on a "guided date night," the details for which will be found in each chapter of the workbook. You'll begin that date by gathering your workbooks, getting in your car, and playing your "Date Night CD" for a short teaching segment and more information on what to do for that night.
- In addition to the core subjects taught on the DVD, you'll also find two special bonus features: "Step Families: Starting Strong" and "Wedding Tips and Special Touches".

- After spending the time working through this resource, you will feel more confident in your understanding of your relationship and of one another. You will have celebrated your relationships strengths and begun to work on the areas of needed growth. You'll be more aware of marital challenges and more equipped for marital success. Finally, you'll be a strong step closer to creating a great marriage.
- Upon completion of this program, you may be eligible for significant discounts on your marriage license fee. Check with your local marriage license office or county clerk to find out if you qualify.
- After exploring your relationship, you may uncover some problems or issues that cause you concern. If so, you'll want to get some help from a counselor or trained clergy. Under his/her guidance, you can have help as you work to resolve issues and improve your relationship. To find a **PREPARE** counselor or clergy trained in your area, visit the *Find a Counselor* section of the PrepareToLast.com website. As with any problem, the sooner you seek help, the easier it will be to resolve.
- Don't stop here! Use this program as the first step in creating a life-long habit of working on your relationship. Make a commitment of attending a conference or group study on marriage each year. Remember, a satisfying relationship can occur only when you give it sufficient time and energy.

How to use this workbook:

This workbook was created to be used in conjunction with the teaching on the **PREPARE To Last** DVD's and audio CD's. This material will give you the chance to have a fun, interactive way to work on your relationship.

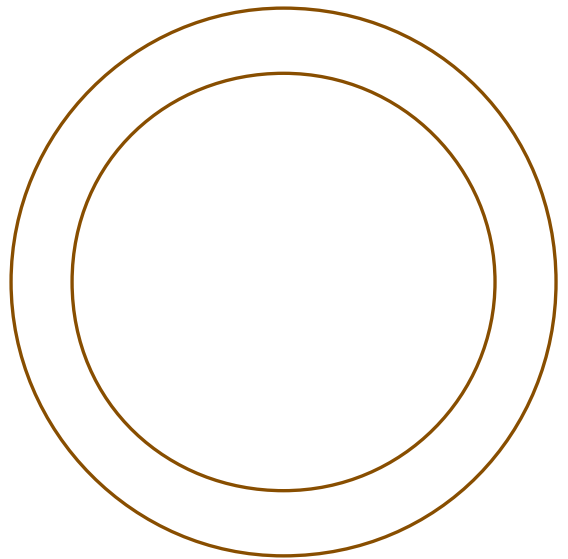
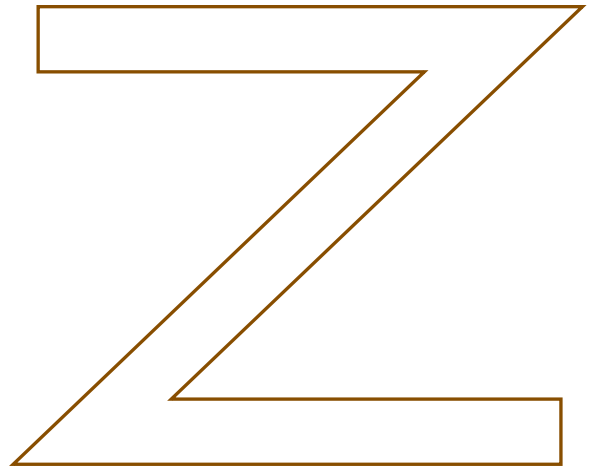
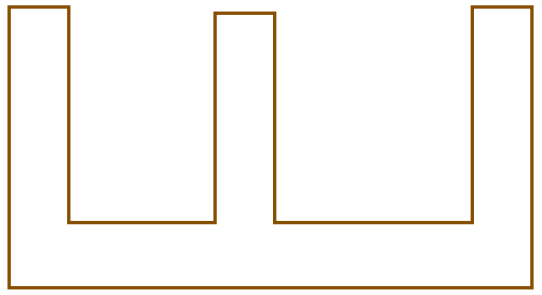
The first eight chapters correspond with the various subjects being taught. Each of these chapters consists of three distinct elements: **TALKING POINTS, SKILLS FOR SUCCESS** and **PREPARE FOR GREATNESS**.

- **TALKING POINTS** is the first section of each chapter. These discussion questions and exercises will guide you in processing the teaching you will hear on the DVD.
- **SKILLS FOR SUCCESS** is the next section for each chapter. It provides the instructions and exercises for your date nights, during which you will have the chance to develop key relationship skills.
- **PREPARE FOR GREATNESS** is the last section of each chapter. These bonus exercises and discussions are for those couples who want to be even more equipped for creating a great marriage.

Four bonus chapters round out the workbook, providing additional insights on relevant subjects. Want to know what to expect on your honeymoon? Getting remarried and need to know how to merge two families with children? It's included. There's also help with providing special touches for your wedding. If you're thinking marriage may not be the right step for your relationship, there's thoughtful, tender advice on what to do next.

While all of these chapters are filled with exercises and valuable discussions, be sure to enjoy the time together and have fun along the way. Don't let yourselves see this as "work," but as an investment in growing the understanding and knowledge you'll need for the life-long process of creating a great marriage. May the work you do here be a fruitful time together as you **PREPARE To Last!**





Chapter One: MARRIAGE EXPECTATIONS

“Your expectations get you to the altar. Once there, you must alter your expectations.”

Expectations about love and marriage can have a powerful impact on relationships. “To a large degree, you will be disappointed or happy in life based on how well what is happening matches up with what you think *should* be happening.” (Markman, Blumberg & Stanley, 1990).

Three Common Pitfalls Regarding Expectations

❶ Couples are often unaware of their own expectations.

Not until they already feel the frustration or disappointment of unmet expectations do couples realize they had made some dangerous assumptions about how things “should” go. Unfortunately, we often make the assumption that our relationships will just naturally fall into the rhythm and flow we expect. “My father always did the dishes for my mother after dinner; I guess I just assumed my partner would, too.”

❷ Expectations are unrealistic.

Hollywood, love songs, and pop culture have a way of promoting and romanticizing unrealistic expectations. Sadly, this sets many couples up for real disappointment. There is nothing wrong with wanting a great relationship, but expecting perfection is a slippery slope. Phrases like “one true soul-mate” and “you complete me” paint unrealistic pictures of relationships. Sometimes expectations need to be held in check. The following humorous announcement about expectations was reportedly heard on an airline: “Thank you for flying with us today. I hope our airline has met your expectations. If not, you should definitely lower your expectations before flying with us again.”

❸ Couples fail to discuss their expectations with one another.

There is sometimes a risk in expressing expectations. It opens one up to disagreement or rejection and is therefore a vulnerable thing to do. The risk of not expressing expectations, however, is to set your relationship up for disappointment, hurt, and anger.

The teaching on the DVD’s and the exercises that follow are designed to help you avoid these pitfalls so you’ll begin your future with a better understanding of each other and a more realistic understanding of marriage.

TALKING POINTS: DVD Discussions

Follow the teaching on Marriage Expectations (Chapter One) of the PREPARE To Last DVD for instructions on answering the following questions.

MANAGING THE MESS

When dealing with household chores, there are two preliminary discussions you will need to have before you get to assigning specific tasks. First, what does “clean” mean to you? Second, in order to achieve that level of cleanliness, how will the two of you manage the mess?

In each category, mark which best describes your expectations.

When it comes to cleanliness...

- I like a clean house with everything in its place before bed each night.
- I'm comfortable with clutter.
- Let the chaos reign!

As far as division of labor, I expect...

- We will divide and conquer the chores.
- We will do all the chores together.
- The male will do the outdoor chores and the female will do the inside chores.
- That's what maids are for!

At a later time, you may want to discuss more on this subject.

You can look through a list of specific chores and discuss how you want to “divide and conquer” household duties in the Marriage Expectations portion of the PREPARE FOR GREATNESS section of this chapter.

• • • RETURN TO DVD TEACHING • • •

FAMILY DREAMS

Whether you realize it or not, you're bringing strong emotional expectations into your marriage concerning your dreams of future family life. Although you can't know exactly what life will bring, it is important to begin an ongoing discussion of these desires.

Answer the following questions separately, then share and discuss your answers:

Do I want to have kids?

If so...

How many would I like to have?

How long do I want to wait before we start trying?

If we have fertility issues, I would like for us to...

_____ Use every scientific method available

_____ Use only those methods our budget will allow

_____ Adopt

_____ Interpret it as "children aren't God's plan for us"

If not...

What do we plan to do about birth control?

Do I want to invest in the lives of other children? How?

What other interests do I want us to pursue as a couple?

Whether we plan to have kids or not, how might we deal with an unexpected pregnancy?

Remember – The purpose of this exercise is to serve not as a binding contract but as a springboard for discussion. You can't know exactly what choices you'll make in this area until you're in the midst of the situation. Just keep in mind that this needs to continue as a flexible, open-ended discussion to keep the two of you unified.

• • • RETURN TO DVD TEACHING • • •

MARRIAGE MYTHS

After looking at your Couple Checkup results on Marriage Expectations and hearing the teaching on the DVD concerning the “Five Faulty Myths of Marriage,” which myth(s) have you fallen for the most?

Myth No.1: Marriage will help improve our relationship or will motivate my fiancé(e) to change.

Myth No.2: Marriage will make me feel complete.

Myth No.3: Perfect marriages happen for perfect people.

Myth No.4: Happily married couples never have serious problems.

Myth No.5: Happy marriages are filled with romantic love and unwavering trust.

• • • RETURN TO DVD TEACHING • • •

Date Night **SKILLS FOR SUCCESS**

Follow the teaching on Relationship Roles (Date One) of the PREPARE To Last Date Night CD for instructions on developing the following skills.

For your date night this week, choose a place to go out to eat where you'll feel relaxed and comfortable. On the way, listen to the CD. Once you get there, order your meal and then open your workbooks. Begin talking through the discussion questions that follow. When you finish the discussions, celebrate your accomplishment by splurging on dessert!

Items you'll need: Date Night CD, Workbooks, Couple Checkup

Date Night **EXERCISES**

Before completing the exercises below, refer to your Couple Checkup to review your results in this area.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Look at the following list and mark those statements that best describe your beliefs concerning leadership and roles in a home:

- _____ The male rules the roost.
- _____ The female rules the roost.
- _____ Whoever is more dominant rules the roost.
- _____ Equal partnership
- _____ Equal partnership with the husband as the head
- _____ The male brings home the money and the female stays home to take care of the house and children.
- _____ Both work full time; if there are children, they are in daycare.
- _____ The woman brings home money and the man is the stay-at-home dad.

Roles relate to how couples handle leadership responsibilities and divide household tasks. Research shows that the majority of couples fall into roles without actually discussing their preferences and wishes. It's as if they picked up scripts written for them and just began playing the parts, without any involvement in the creative process. These scripts are written into your expectations of marital roles based on messages you receive from a variety of sources. Where did you get your expectations concerning the roles of husbands and wives?

- *Your mom and dad's relationship?*
- *Your religious beliefs?*
- *Your culture?*
- *What you experienced in past relationships?*
- *What you heard and saw in the media?*

Discuss these questions with each other.

WRITING YOUR OWN SCRIPT

To keep from just being a rerun of the script of your parents' marriages, it's important to look at some of the lines they've written. Some you'll want to keep, others you may want to rewrite. Take a look at the list of questions below. Spend some time reminiscing with each other over your childhood as you consider the roles your parents played in these areas.

In the areas of decision-making, parenting, and spirituality:

- *What was your father's role?*
- *What was your mother's role?*
- *What did you like about what you saw in your family?*
- *What did you **not** like in your family?*
- *Are there any of those areas where you think things might have gone better if they had played it another way?*

If your parents were divorced...

- *Did that change their roles in any way?*
- *If they remarried, did you see any new roles portrayed by your parent and step-parent?*

Based on what you've shared, how do you want to create your own script in these areas? Talk about how your roles will be the same or different.

In our marriage, in the areas of decision-making, parenting, and spirituality:

- *My role will be...*
- *My spouse's role will be ...*

"The better your relationship is, the less you talk about who the boss is".

—Jimmy Evans

*Congratulations! Because of the great work you've done, you are now more prepared than most premarital couples in the area of Expectations. For those couples who want to be even more equipped for creating a great marriage, check out the **PREPARE FOR GREATNESS** section on the following pages for bonus exercises and discussions on Marriage Expectations.*

PREPARE FOR GREATNESS:

Taking the Next Step 

MARRIAGE EXPECTATIONS

CHORES: HIS, HERS, OURS, OR THE MAID'S

Below is a list of common household chores. Take some time to look over the list and talk about which of you will be willing to do each chore. Fill in each blank with one of the following choices: "His," "Hers," "Ours," or "The Maid's."

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| _____ Cooking | _____ Washing dishes | _____ Grocery shopping |
| _____ Washing the car | _____ Yard work | _____ Washing clothes |
| _____ Folding clothes | _____ Ironing | _____ Sweeping/mopping |
| _____ Dusting | _____ Vacuuming | _____ Bathroom: sinks and tub/shower |
| _____ Bathroom: toilet | _____ Car maintenance | _____ Make the bed |

A TIME FOR US

Another specific expectation many couples don't discuss is how they are going to spend their time. Just like money, time is a commodity that needs to be managed. There are no right or wrong answers, but it is important to discuss your desires openly. Mark the choice that best applies to your expectations of how you'll spend your time:

My schedule needs...

- _____ Personal time and lots of it
- _____ 24/7 with you
- _____ Time together, but time alone as well

When it comes to spending time together, I would rather spend it...

- _____ Watching TV
- _____ Outdoors
- _____ With friends

I think Saturdays are...

- _____ For getting things taken care of around the house
- _____ For relaxation and recreation
- _____ A combination of both of the above: start with R&R, then work around the house
- _____ A combination of both of the above: start with the chores, then get R&R

One time-intensive activity that might take me away from you, but I'd like to keep doing is...
(i.e. video games, sports, shopping, hunting/fishing, golfing, reading, overtime, working out)

One of the hardest struggles in making the transition from single life to married life is being willing to change the way you spend your time. It is crucial to remember that you're no longer able to always do what you want to do, when you want to do it. You now have someone else to consider. Your schedule not only impacts your spouse's schedule, but your marriage as well. The reality is, your relationship can't survive on your leftovers. Therefore, it's important to continue to make intentional time for the marriage and each other.

We can be intentional about our time together by...

- _____ Going out on a date once a week
- _____ Keeping strong boundaries to limit work hours
- _____ Keeping strong boundaries with family and friends to protect our "alone time"
- _____ Looking for hobbies or recreation activities we would enjoy doing together
- _____ Being willing to limit our individual time away from each other

YEAH, RIGHT!

15 Unrealistic Expectations about Love and Marriage

In addition to the Five Faulty Myths of Marriage, there are other unrealistic expectations we bring into a marriage that rob us of the joy of our reality. Review the list below and identify the statements you are most tempted to believe. Follow up by discussing why and how these statements are unrealistic. This will help you increase the chances that your expectations and your experiences have plenty in common.

- ❶ We'll live happily ever after with no major problems.
- ❷ Just spending more time together will improve our relationship.
- ❸ We'll do things just like my family did.
- ❹ We'll do things nothing like my family did it.
- ❺ Our blended family will be just like any other family.
- ❻ We will/must agree on everything.
- ❼ Our relationship will be better when we have a baby.
- ❽ My partner will meet all my needs; he/she will be totally loving and attentive.
- ❾ If it's true love, he/she will know what I want without me having to ask.
- ❿ Our relationship will remain the same.
- ⓫ My partner will stay the same.
- ⓬ My partner's interest in sex will be the same as mine.
- ⓭ We will have a great sexual relationship; it will be easy and just happen naturally.

- 14 Our wedding night and honeymoon will be the most amazing sexual experience, EVER!
- 15 I believe that I know everything there is to know about my partner.

RELATIONSHIP ROLES

Sharing Roles: Making It Fair

“Coming together is easy; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

—Henry Ford

Look again at the Relationship Roles page of your Couple Checkup. What expectations do you have in terms of your approach to leadership and responsibilities? Know that getting there requires a very intentional process and takes more than just stating your desires.

For example, most young couples, especially women, prefer the idea of a more equalitarian relationship. This is harder to achieve than you might think. It takes solid relationship skills to develop and maintain this type of relationship because there are more responsibilities to negotiate. Especially after children arrive, the woman often becomes more involved in child care and housework than the man, and the couple relationship becomes even less equalitarian. When changes like this happen in a family, it is important to keep communication open and maintain flexibility in this area.

Look back on page 69 at the exercise “Chores: His, Hers, Ours, or the Maid’s” and answer the following questions:

- *Are your chores mainly divided by interests and skills or by more traditional male/female roles?*
- *How similar or dissimilar is your list compared to what you witnessed in your parents’ handling of chores?*

Husband and wife roles encompass much more than just chores. Are there other areas in which you’ve adopted a “his, hers and ours” approach? For example:

- *Who drives the car when you are going somewhere together?*
- *If you’ve set a wedding date, how have you divided the wedding planning?*
- *Will one person’s career or education take priority over the other’s?*
- *Does one person take the lead on planning and coordinating your social life and activities?*

NOTES

ABOUT THE PREPARE TO LAST PARTNERS...

FOREVER FAMILIES, INC.

Hosts/Teachers • DVD/CD content creators

Co-authors of the Group Leaders and Couples Workbooks • Retreat design and delivery

Jeff and Debby McElroy

The McElroys are founders of the international nonprofit organization Forever Families, Inc. Since 1989, they have become one of the most sought-after couples in the arena of marriage enrichment and have spoken to millions around the world in their quest to strengthen marriages and families. Their ability to weave humor, drama, teaching, and music throughout their delivery commands their audience's attention, while their transparent, honest style inspires their audience's trust. Their *Marriage Tune Up* DVD series and *Covenant Praise* CD have sold thousands and have helped marriages across the country, in Russia, and in eastern Africa. Through Forever Families, Jeff and Debby have worked alongside churches, organizations, and businesses to help them develop programs to protect and strengthen their families.

PREPARE/ENRICH (Life Innovations, Inc.)

Creators of the PREPARE to Last Couple Checkup • DVD content advisors/contributors

Co-authors of the Group Leaders and Couples Workbooks

Dr. David & Karen Olson

David is President and Karen is Vice President of Life Innovations, where they work as a team with David creating products and Karen managing the company and its outreach nationally and internationally. The main product is the PREPARE/ENRICH Program which is the foundation for the PREPARE To Last Couple Checkup and couple exercises. PREPARE/ENRICH is used by over 65,000 clergy and counselors around the country and in 15 other countries. Dr. Olson is Professor Emeritus, Family Social Science, University of Minnesota and is a Fellow in the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Association of Marital and Family Therapy (AAMFT). He is past President of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) and he has received several national awards for his contributions from ACME (Mace Medal), APA, AAMFT, AFTA, ACA & Smart Marriages. He has written 20 books and more than 100 articles in the field of marriage and family. His most recent books include: *Empowering Couples* (2000), *Marriage and Family* (2006—5th ed.), *Building Relationships* (1999), and *Families: What Makes Them Work*. He has appeared on a variety of talk shows, including "Today" on NBC, "The Early Show" on CBS, and "Good Morning America" and "Oprah" on ABC.

Peter and Heather Larson

Peter is the Vice President of Life Innovations, Inc., and the co-designer of the Couple Checkup online assessment tool. He is a licensed psychologist in the state of Minnesota. Heather has her Masters degree in clinical psychology. Together, they offer counseling, teaching, and speaking to premarital and married couples. Peter received his doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, and has specialized in marriage and premarital therapy for many years. He has published several articles in professional journals and has co-authored the PREPARE/ENRICH Marriage Mentor Program (2004) and the Building Strong Families Program (2005).

MARRIAGETODAY

Production • Packaging • Project administration and marketing

Jimmy and Karen Evans

Jimmy Evans is one of America's leading authorities on family and marriage relationships. He is a popular church and conference speaker as well as author of the best-selling books *Our Secret Paradise* and *Marriage on the Rock*. Jimmy has served as Senior Pastor of Trinity Fellowship Church, Amarillo, Texas for over twenty years and serves as President and Co-founder with his wife Karen of MarriageToday, an international marriage ministry and nationally broadcast television program. With their call to excellence Jimmy, Karen, and the award-winning production staff strive to passionately share with its viewers and strategic alliances such as the PREPARE To Last Partners the practical, biblical truths of building a strong and satisfying marriage for life.

WINSHAPE MARRIAGE

Project initiation and funding • Project / Retreat advisors • Retreat design

WinShape Marriage is a part of the WinShape Foundation, a nonprofit organization started in 1983 by Chick-fil-A founders Truett and Jeannette Cathy. Bubba and Cindy Cathy direct WinShape Marriage with a two-fold purpose: (1) to strengthen marriages and (2) to foster collaboration between organizations and ministries with a passion for healthy relationships. Both of these purposes are accomplished in the PREPARE To Last project.