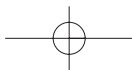




Growing together



*For Pippa,
who has taught me so much
over thirty-five years together*

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Growing together

a guide for couples getting married

Andrew Body

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How to use this book

Don't read it from cover to cover

The King's advice to Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is the usual way to read books:

Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end; then stop.

However, this book is different. It would be good to begin at the beginning, with the introductory chapter 'Affection, lust and love', and it would be good to end with the final chapter, called 'Ingredients of the wedding cake', which is different because it is a practical guide to ways in which you can plan your wedding service. But what you do in the middle is entirely up to you. The chapters are arranged alphabetically, and not in any order of importance. You can read them in any order you prefer.

Read it one chapter at a time

This book takes a dozen topics and approaches them in three ways:

- what attitudes and prejudices we may have inherited from our upbringing and past;
- what our present experience has to tell us;
- what hopes and fears we have as we look into the future.

Questions are provided to get you thinking and talking. Some of them will be irrelevant to you – others may occupy you for a long time.

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Read it separately and then together

Like some dishes in restaurants, this is 'for two people'. To get the most out of it, each of you needs to read a chapter, and then share the things it has raised for you. Compare notes on your individual answers to the questions and see how much you think the same way. Even deciding in which order to take the chapters could provoke some interesting discussions! If you have talked long and hard about the particular subject, you can feel good that you have done so. If another part of what is written here opens up ideas you have not had the opportunity to share, then that must be a good thing as well.

Read it slowly

The purpose of the book is to help you think – so give yourselves plenty of time. Read the text of the chapter before tackling the questions and don't miss out questions just because they are difficult! They might just be the most important for you to think about.

Use it as part of your formal marriage preparation

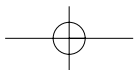
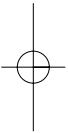
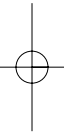
Ideally, if you are getting married in church, you will be offered some kind of marriage preparation. It may be that you have been given this book by whoever is undertaking that with you, whether as an individual couple or as part of a group of couples undertaking the *Growing Together* course now available. In that case, you may have the chance to share some of the issues that the book has raised with someone else, and you can discuss how best that can be done. But it is most unlikely that you will have twelve sessions to share it all in detail. Much of what you talk about as a result of reading this will remain between just the two of you.

How to use this book

If your marriage preparation follows some other pattern, then what you get from this book will provide useful material to add to the discussion, whether it is just as a couple with the minister or other person, or whether you are part of a group.

Come back to the book from time to time

You will be sharing your hopes and fears for the future. Maybe not every year, but from time to time, as your anniversary approaches, revisit particularly the questions about 'Where are you going?' – and see how far you have got on your journey together.



Affection, lust and love – an introductory chapter

***We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.***

(T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding')¹

You are reading this, presumably, because you are in love and are thinking about getting married. I have been asking couples for over 30 years what they mean when they say that they are 'in love' and, with my hand on my heart, I can say that I have never had the same answer twice. That is because we are trying to put into words a set of the most intense feelings that any of us ever experience. Even with the help of poets and song-writers, we find that hard to do. We use the word to refer to our favourite drink, to our favourite colour as well as to the deepest relationships we ever have – with our parents, our children, with God, and of course with our life-partner. With such a complicated idea, it is not surprising that the Bible uses at least three different words to express it – translated roughly in the three words in the title of this chapter. They are all important and positive ingredients of what 'love' means.

Some people enjoy analysing things, and others find that deadening. Putting your love under the microscope may sound a dreadful thing to do, and I am not suggesting you do

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that. But what I am certain about is that, if you explore what you mean by being in love, you have the potential to enrich it even more. As people come to their wedding day, they can't imagine that they could ever love each other more than they do at that moment. But the reality is that, if their love is what they say it is, it will go on growing and they will be even more in love as the years go by. This book is an invitation to exploration of the unique journey on which you have embarked.

Marriage is an exciting and adventurous enterprise that is different for everyone. 'No one in their right mind can tell anyone else how to be married.' I have often said those words to couples getting married and I stand by them. So what is this book about? This is not a compendium of the right answers to all the issues that might arise – it is a guide to asking some of the right questions.



'Marriage is an exciting and adventurous enterprise that is different for everyone.'

Affection, lust and love

People getting married today are asking many more questions than their parents and grandparents did. Surrounded by people whose relationships have not lasted, they are anxious not to join their number. Usually approaching marriage from a time of living together, they are much more closely in touch with the things that can make and mar permanent relationships.

Happily, more and more couples are being offered opportunities to reflect on what they are doing. The old expression 'marriage preparation' is beginning to be replaced by 'marriage exploration'. That is an improvement, because it rightly implies that marriage is an ongoing process of becoming, rather than a state we enter suddenly one Saturday afternoon. A young man once said to me 'I shall never stop getting married.' Asked to explain, he pointed to words in the wedding service that say 'All that I am I give to you'. 'But I don't know all that I am yet', he said, 'and when I discover more, I'll have to marry that bit as well.' That was a wonderful insight and something that applies to people of any age. We never stop getting married – or rather, we *shouldn't* ever stop getting married.

So maybe these chapters and questions will also be useful to people who have been married for some time, to help them reflect on their love for each other. But their main purpose is to help those about to 'commit matrimony', whether they are living together already or not. Although marriage is 'a gift of God in creation', as the Church of England's marriage service says, each generation has to work out what it means in its time and culture. Comparing the way marriage was for people even 50 years ago shows how true that is.

This book is written by someone who does believe marriage is God's gift. All faith communities have things to offer in understanding marriage but none of them 'owns' marriage.

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And, although this book is written by a Christian, it is for people with little or no faith as well as those who are committed believers. It is not trying to push a particular line or doctrine but, amongst other things, offers some perspectives of faith for you to make of what you will. Jesus never cornered people, but he did challenge them. I hope you will find that this book does something of that for you.

The people mentioned in this book all exist. Their identities have been thoroughly disguised, but the vicar mentioned is me. They are some of the hundreds of couples with whom I have had the privilege to share the months before their wedding. I want to thank them for all they have taught me, and hope that their stories may now teach something to others. I also want to thank Sue Burrige from the Archbishops' Council, and especially a group from the Mothers' Union in the Guildford Diocese (Corinne Cooper, Ann Fraser, Prue Young and Canon Dr Michael Hereward-Rothwell) for their support, encouragement and help.

**Something to talk
about and share**

- **What do you mean
by 'being in love'?**
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