

Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley



**FIVE WAYS TO
INVEST IN A COUPLE**

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY,
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FIVE WAYS TO INVEST IN A MARRIED COUPLE
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Five Ways to Invest in Another Couple

Every day in the U.S., almost 2,000 marriages will end in divorce.

That's a lot of pain. A lot of brokenness. Maybe you know one of those couples. Maybe you wish you could help.

Over the years — thanks to other couples who invested in us — my wife Erin and I have developed a simple, yet powerful practice that can help another couple back away from the brink and reinvest in their relationship.

I know this works. Why? Because Erin and I were almost a statistic. But someone invested in our marriage. It made all the difference.

We want to show you how to become a Marriage Champion and help a couple in crisis. We believe you can help us reduce the number of divorces and strengthen marriages.

Are you ready to make a difference? Then let's get started!



After overcoming struggles early in their own marriage, Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley knew they wanted to be hands-on in helping other couples.

Today, Erin is a Marriage Counsellor and Greg is vice-president of Marriage at Focus on the Family. Together, they lead marriage seminars around the world and encourage couples to honour and strengthen their relationships.

CHAPTER I

The Phone Call

Erin was at the mall. I was relaxing at home when the phone rang. I answered and a cheery voice on the other end of the line greeted me. I recognised it immediately. Our friend Carrie Oliver asked to speak to my wife Erin.

"Sorry," I replied, "she's not here."

"When do you expect her back?" Carrie asked me.

"I really have no idea," I answered.

"Oh," Carrie's voice now sounded concerned. "Is everything OK?"

"Erin's gone," I joked, "She left me." I stood there holding the phone and smiling at my clever joke.

Carrie, however, didn't think it was funny. "Greg," she said, "I'm so sorry. Gary and I have been worried this might happen."

I suddenly felt confused. Weren't we bantering back and forth? "You know I'm joking, right?"

I told Carrie.

After an awkward pause, Carrie spoke again. "I thought you might have been serious. If I'm being honest, Gary and I have been worried about you and Erin for some time. I think we need to have a serious talk. Can you and Erin come over tonight?"



I'm so thankful Carrie called that day. God used my sarcasm to uncover the very real problem Erin and I were facing.

We were not OK. We were struggling. I doubt Erin would have left me, but our marriage was not in a good place. So, that evening, Erin and I had dinner with Gary and Carrie Oliver, and we talked.

We opened up about our marriage problems. We cried a lot while telling our story, but we left their home with hope.

Over the years, Gary and Carrie invested in our marriage and interceded on our behalf. And we've learned how to honour our marriage because of the Oliver's investment and God's great faithfulness.

Why Honouring Marriage Matters

Because of our experience, I am convinced that strong, healthy marriages must be a top priority. If our nation, our churches, and our families are to thrive, we must see marriage as a cornerstone of God's plan and design for the world. I believe the words from scripture in Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage should be honoured by all" (NIV).

I want to see marriage restored to its rightful place of honour.



**Marriage should
be honored by all.**

Hebrews 13:4, NIV

How do you "honour" marriage?

First, it means keeping your own marriage strong. The world needs to know that marriage is worth it. They need to see an example of a strong, vibrant marriage that makes them want the same. We need to show that Christ makes a difference in our marriage relationship.

Second, God wants to use our marriage to bless others. Encourage other couples by having a great marriage that proves what is possible with Christ. Develop a shared vision as a couple. I like Francis Chan's words, "Picture marriage as a vehicle for mission, an opportunity for Christians to carry out our mission to make disciples of all nations."

Let others be blessed by your marriage, even while you're still an imperfect person on an imperfect journey.

Couples desperately need encouragement, support, advice, and perspective as they journey together. They need cheerleaders who can inspire them to reach their goals and coaches who can direct them. The world needs seasoned, godly couples who will champion marriage and come alongside husbands and wives who need guidance.

You and your spouse can meet this need. The qualifications? A seasoned marriage, a commitment to Christ, and a heart to help other couples. That's it. And it takes as little as sixty seconds a day. Let me show you how to start.

Five Ways to Invest in a Couple

- Pray for another couple.
- Babysit for a couple.
- Invite a couple to dinner.
- Share your marriage story.
- Share the journey.



“
Couples need encouragement, support, advice and perspective as they journey together.”

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PRAYING FOR A COUPLE

"We prayed for you this morning," my good friend Gary Oliver said.

I wasn't sure how I felt about that. Did Erin talk to the Olivers about our marriage? Did she share our struggles? The thought made me feel ... betrayed. I was certain Erin had talked to the Olivers and now they were discussing my shortcomings. How else would they know we were fighting?

As it turned out, Gary and Carrie had been praying for our marriage for some time. Erin didn't have to tell them anything. They had seen us struggling. When the Olivers invited us to dinner that night, they listened to our challenges and shared the struggles they faced as a young couple. As they shared, my defences dropped. No one had betrayed me.

The words "we prayed for you" were spoken as a reminder that Erin and I were not alone.

Their care and commitment led to a deeper relationship. They "bore our burdens" as Ephesians 4:2 states.

Over time, we adopted their prayer habit as our own. We pray for other couples who are struggling, and then we find ways to encourage them.

You can do this too. It's easy. I recommend a formula I call 1 + 1 + 1. Here's how it works: Choose one couple. Say a one-minute prayer for them. Do it once daily. That's it. Watch what God does when you pray consistently for that one couple.

THE PRAYER HABIT

1 + 1 + 1

The 1 + 1 + 1 Prayer

What should you and your spouse pray about? Here are some of the top issues couples face:

- Fading Commitment
- Unresolved Conflict
- Financial Problems
- Communication
- Sexual Struggles
- Parenting Issues
- In-law Issues
- Addiction
- Infidelity

When you pray, pray with courage. Use Scripture as a guide. Praying the Scriptures aligns your prayers with God's truth.



Here are Scriptures Erin and I use as we pray for other married couples:

Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her.

Genesis 2:24 - Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Mark 10:9 - What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

Hebrews 13:4 - Marriage should be honoured by all.

Hebrews 3:13 - But encourage one another every day.

Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Prayer makes a difference. It's what helped Erin and me as we struggled through the first few years of our marriage. We had praying friends - Gary and Carrie Oliver - who prayed for us and our marriage. I'm so thankful.

BABYSIT FOR A COUPLE

When I was working on my doctorate, Erin and I were dirt poor and extremely busy. We were working full-time and trying to care for our one-year-old daughter, Taylor. We were physically exhausted and emotionally disconnected. We couldn't seem to find the money or time to go out on a date.

That all changed one evening when someone knocked on our front door.

I opened the door to see Ron and Carol, a couple from our church. Ron looked at me and offered me \$20. "Hand over Taylor and then leave," he said.

I was confused. I knew we needed the money ... but did Erin offer to sell our baby daughter for twenty bucks?

Ron was a retired firefighter. His matter-of-fact communication was developed in crisis situations. There is no time to mince words. Thankfully, his wife Carol had a softer side. She explained they had seen how tired we looked at church. They decided to step up and babysit our daughter so that Erin and I could reconnect as a couple. And for the next four years, Ron and Carol faithfully showed up each week to babysit Taylor and give us money for a date. I'm convinced our marriage stayed strong because of their investment of time and money.

You and your spouse may know a young couple from your church or small group. Try Ron and Carol's approach. You and your spouse may just grow even closer together as you serve another couple.

DOUBLE DATING AND DINNER

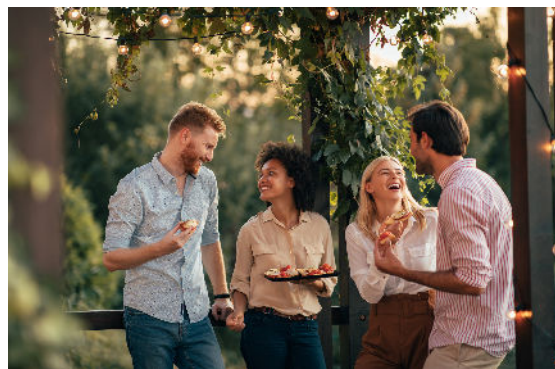
When you read the Bible carefully, you'll see that God emphasises community. He designed people to depend on one another and lift one another up when they need it. Marriage is a great example: two people helping each other, in good times and bad. But God's design goes beyond just that community of two. Along with a couple's relationship with God, it takes a supportive community of friends and family to keep a marriage strong.

Even the healthiest relationships go through difficult times. And in these dark, painful seasons, Satan does everything he can to isolate you and keep you suffering alone. Why? Because he knows we're weaker when we're isolated. We were never meant to tackle the challenges of life and marriage alone. Ecclesiastes 4:12 tells us "a threefold cord is not easily broken."

How do we add "cords" to our most critical relationship? We connect and surround ourselves with other like-minded couples. These relational cords keep our marriage strong and safe.

An easy way to add that relational cord is to invite couples over for dinner or share a double date.

Whether you're spending time with lifelong acquaintances or a couple you've just met, you can enjoy a quiet meal together or try a new adventure like a service project, shared hobbies, cooking, or hiking.



Double Date Ideas

The “what” doesn’t matter. What matters most is that you and your spouse are spending time in community with other couples. As you and your spouse connect with others, you’ll find yourselves growing closer together.

Try these ideas to see what might work for you and another couple:

- Baseball Game - A warm summer evening at a baseball game might be the perfect double date activity. There's enough going on down on the field that you don't have to fill the entire evening with conversation.
- Miniature Golf - Play couple against couple or guys against girls. Or make it a four-way competition. This competition also works in other low-impact sports.
- Cooking - If plans with your babysitter don't work, stay at home and invite a different couple over to create a wonderful culinary masterpiece.
- Tour Groups - Tour local attractions with another couple and build friendships while experiencing the world around you.
- Service Project - Look for service opportunities in your community, and then turn one of them into a double date. This is a great way for couples to give each other a window into the things they are passionate about.
- Shared Hobbies - Do you and your spouse enjoy museums? Hiking? Invite another couple to enjoy that activity with you and then return the favour when they make a suggestion.
- Camping - It's more of a time commitment, but camping with friends can be a great way to deepen your friendship without the time constraints of a two-hour date.

SHARING YOUR MARRIAGE STORY

I'm not proud of this but it's part of our marriage story.

During our second year of marriage, Erin and I got into an argument while I was pulling together our laundry. The ugly disagreement made her late for work, so before she slammed the door on her way out, she looked at me and delivered one final, sarcastic comment.



We lived on the third floor of an apartment complex, right above the first-floor laundry room. My normal way to get the laundry downstairs was to lean over the railing and drop the heavy bag. But this morning, as I stepped out the front door to drop the bag, I noticed Erin near the bottom of the stairs. What if I dropped it near her? I didn't want to hit her. I just wanted to startle her. That would show her I meant business. And I would get the last word.

If only my plan had worked.

Unfortunately, my “dumb bomb” clipped Erin. It didn't hurt her, but it did knock her to the ground. And as she lay on the turf, she looked up and saw me staring over our balcony. That's when I realised how much trouble I was in.

As I said, I'm not proud of this, but this is part of our story. We share it often at the marriage conferences we teach. After one event, a woman came up to me and said, "That's a terrible story – I can't believe Erin stayed married to you!" And that's what's so wonderful about the story. Erin stayed with me. We're still in love (and I'm more careful with the laundry).

The laundry story represents the good, the bad, and the ugly in our marriage. We actually love telling this story because it represents God's grace and faithfulness, my craziness, and Erin's forgiveness.



The laundry story shows the good, bad and ugly. In spite of it all, we're still in love.

Author Jerry Jenkins writes about marriage stories in his book, Hedges: "Tell your [marital] story. Tell it to your kids, your friends, your brothers, and sisters, but especially to each other. Make your story so familiar that it becomes part of the fabric of your being. It should become a legend that is shared through generations as you grow a family tree that defies all odds and boasts marriage after marriage of stability, strength, and longevity.

I want our story to inspire our children. I want to create a marriage worth repeating! We need to constantly remind ourselves – and others – that God has brought us very far in our relationship.

SHARING THE JOURNEY

There are only two places in the Bible we are told to do something daily. The first is Luke 9:23: "Take up your cross daily." The second is Hebrews 3:13: "Encourage one another daily."

A wonderful way to encourage others' marriages is to share the incredible journey with them.

One of our culture's greatest lies is that marriage is only about two people. The truth is that marriage is a team sport: It can't be done alone.

I like how my friend, Ted Cunningham, explains it: "Marriage is a duet in need of background singers." We need the encouragement of family and friends – not just when marriage begins, but to keep it from ending.

So, how can we become "background singers" and help other marriages "carry the tune"?

A marriage champion – an encourager – isn't a professional relationship expert. It's someone passionate about marriage, who prioritises listening over giving advice, is willing to be real about their own marriage, and is committed to walking out the journey with a hurting friend. It's about "encouraging one another daily."



Marriage is a duet in need of background singers.

Become a Marriage Champion

- **Be available.** Love is spelled T-I-M-E. Your married friends need someone willing to join them on the journey.
- **Listen.** What's the old saying, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." You don't always have to fix the problem. Sometimes, listening is the greatest cure.
- **Advise.** Be careful of giving too much advice ... but know there is a proper time and place to speak. If it helps, think of yourself as a consultant. Listen first and then invite conversation.
- **Create trust.** Don't share your friends' struggles with others. As you and your spouse create trust with a struggling couple, God will open doors to provide help and healing.
- **Give hope.** Remind your friends that the God of the universe fights for their marriage. Share your struggles and share what God has done for you.
- **Pray and intercede.** Ask God to intervene in your friends' marriage. Ask God for wisdom to know how to help. Your friends need people fighting for their marriage.

- **Guard your own marriage.** Maintain a rock-solid commitment. Prioritise time with your spouse. Build a community around your own marriage. These safeguards can keep you from landing on the "other side" of the conversation.



Encourage one another daily.

Hebrews 3:13

IN CLOSING

Congratulations!

You are a Marriage Champion!

It really is that simple. You and your spouse become Marriage Champions by keeping your marriage strong and then investing in another couple.

If you would like additional books, studies, and resources to share with a couple, your church or your small group, visit the Focus on the Family website to access our Marriage Toolkit.

Our video platform FamilyCast.com.au also has resources for the whole family including our RealLife:Real Love Marriage and Marriage and Money Conferences.



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You and your spouse can make a difference.