

Marriage Conversations

from co-existing to cherished

CATHY PRIMER KRAFVE



ST JOSEPH, MISSOURI USA

MARRIAGE CONVERSATIONS: FROM CO-EXISTING TO CHERISED

Copyright © 2021 Cathy Primer Krafve

ISBN: 978-1-936501-56-4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. Published by CrossRiver Media Group, 4810 Gene Field Rd. #2, St. Joseph, MO 64506. www.crossrivermedia.com

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV from the King James Version, public domain.

Any webpage addresses or phone numbers used throughout this book are offered as a resource to the reader. These websites are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement on the part of CrossRiver Media Group or this book's compilers, nor do we vouch for their content or accuracy for the life of this book.

Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

For more information on Cathy Primer Krafve, please visit — cathykrafve.com

Editor: Debra L. Butterfield

Cover Designer: Carrie Dennis Design

Author is represented by the literary agency of Credo Communications, LLC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, www.credocommunications.net

Printed in the United States of America.

I dedicate this book to the people who inspire me most: my family.

In memory of my parents, Ann and Charlie Primer,
for sharing their stories and loving us
so generously while they were here.

And most of all to David, for stepping into
the adventure of loving each other for a lifetime.

Contents

Introduction	9
1. Code 44.....	15
2. Catching Mom.....	23
3. Mom's Parents Were Sparky.....	35
4. Chosen	45
5. Super-duper Sex	55
6. Disney and Fairy Dust	67
7. Best Christmas Ever	81
8. Initiating Love	91
9. Continental Divide	107
10. Queen of the Dirty Laundry	117
11. A Safe Place	131
12. Keeping What We Give Away	141
13. Dad Makes Amends	153
14. Negotiate Like an Oil Tycoon	165
15. Power Questions	177
16. Horses at the Barn.....	187

CATHY PRIMER KRAFVE

17. The Compassion Story 197

18. Don't Be an Island 211

19. The Muscular Orderly 219

20. Best Moment in History to be Married 229

 More Adventures to Come 239

 I am Grateful 243

 About the Author 247

Introduction

Why This Book?

*Because it's so dang practical, real,
and, yes, funny. Plus, it will help.*

Imagine evenings in front of a crackling fire after a fun day in the sun. Feel the anticipation of secrets whispered with your best friend and lover. A perfect setting for happily ever after.

As women, many of us go into marriage with stars in our eyes, only to discover marriage is a lot harder than we thought. Bookstore shelves are full of marriage books. Marriage is much more than finding Mr. Right. Some Christian speakers and authors tell us to focus on becoming the right person, as if a human can actually achieve the ideal standard.

Instead, I would propose marriage is the lifelong pursuit of a special kind of intimacy called fellowship. A deeply satisfying marriage requires unity of purpose cultivated over time. Learning to cherish your life-long companion requires a commitment that's sure to be tested. Such oneness may seem out of reach, but it's not impossible to achieve. Intimacy in marriage is an art, not a science.

“Through hell and high water,” the old folks used to say, referring to the way their families stuck together during their childhood, enduring the Depression and World War II. When the fifties arrived, my generation's parents pursued educations, found each other, and built their first dream home together. Through the sixties and seventies, they raised families, launching their children into adulthood in the eighties.

CATHY PRIMER KRAFVE

Many couples from that amazing generation built marriages that stood the test of decades. How did they do it?

For those who succeeded, their marriages successfully maneuvered through both joys and sorrows for entire lifetimes. Some of us felt defeated almost as soon as we got started. Can we develop the skills to create the marriage conversations we all crave? Yes, we sure can!

I wrote this book for my children, a collection of essays on the essentials of marriage. I have this fear of dropping dead of a heart attack in a parking lot, any parking lot. Okay, I'll admit my parking lot fear is quirky. I'm quirky. I first wrote these ideas to be sure my kids understood the basics. You know, in case of parking lots.

I gave the rough draft to my family for Christmas and held my breath. In my opinion, there's plenty of embarrassing stuff in here. You know, the nitty-gritty stuff you shouldn't mention in public. To complete strangers, for heaven's sake. So why share it at all?

With families in our culture struggling, I wanted my kids to get a head start. We wanted their friends to succeed together and to enjoy authentic conversations. David and I wanted to hold ourselves and our family to a high standard of openness and community.

Marriages are hurting. Our decisions today influence our families for generations after us. Hundreds of years from now, great-grandchildren we will never meet will be carrying around the blessing of the good decisions we make today.

Or, the curse of bad decisions.

Somehow, my family read their rough drafts and skipped over those embarrassing personal parts. They saw beyond to you.

God surrounds us with a legion of amazing women. Yet, as women, we all have moments when we feel alone and isolated. Often comfort and strength can be found in a confession, in a good book, or in a good laugh. Laughter follows the people I love. We all want to share the comfort and strength we've found—and, yes, the laughter as well.

Each chapter examines a specific topic and includes one of our family stories. Or maybe several to let you know we all share in life's joys and sorrows together. Even the quirky parts. At the end of each chapter, I

MARRIAGE CONVERSATIONS

give two personal gifts I hope will help you in your journey. The first gift is a set of personal application questions. The second gift is a prayer I've prayed for myself and my marriage along the way. I hope you'll pray them for yourself and your loved ones. As you pray, allow yourself time to sit quietly before the Lord to hear His answers to your questions.

With these pages, may you discover something new for today. May you know the joy of being cherished in all your relationships, especially your family. My family sends their love and prayers for your ongoing success.

Together, we intend to enjoy a good laugh, too.

Part One
The Whys of Marriage

Code 44

Why Bother to Marry at All?

Because marriage is still our best hope for physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy.

The light switched on, jarring me out of my fitful sleep on the cot next to my dad's bed. The pungent smell of antiseptics jolted my mind into harsh reality.

"Is he breathing? There's no signal on the monitor," demanded the nurse. I cowered in the corner, watching with trepidation as nurses crowded into his room, surrounded his bed, and decided instantly how to proceed.

"Code 44 in Room 5823! Code 44 in Room 5823!"

The automated warning blared throughout the empty hallways of the hospital. A protocol I didn't understand unfolded systematically in front of me. Ignoring me, they focused on his care. They snatched the only chair out of the way to make room for the boxy red defibrillator.

Gently, a nurse ushered me into the hall where the lone chair waited for me, as if I could sit down. Instead, I stood where I could see into the room. From my vantage point I glimpsed Dad's lower left leg and foot. I watched the color leave his skin. Grief squeezed my heart. My lungs froze. I craved Dad's humor in this crisis moment, his natural ability to create fun at the drop of a hat. Memories of campsites, tree forts, fishing, and hammocks dazzled my brain in flashes of heavenly light.

They moved his body to a gurney. Bewildered and frantic, my mind tried to process the scene. What was happening?

CATHY PRIMER KRAFVE

“We are moving him to ICU,” whispered a nurse coming from his room to stand beside me.

“You mean he’s still with us?” I asked, “He’s alive?”

My emotions trembled between hope and unreality. Like creeping through fog on a country road in early winter, we were surrounded by light but unable to see the journey ahead of us.

In the days that followed, my dad surprised us all, especially his doctors. While in a medically induced coma, he seemed to respond to Mom’s voice with raised eyebrows each time she spoke. Was he working hard to let us know he could hear her?

The doctors constantly reminded us not to get our hopes up. They told us to prepare to end life support. For two weeks, we wondered if it was just our imagination or if he laughed at our jokes. Was he having random spasms or were his shoulders shaking with humor at just the right moment?

Finally, the day came when they took him off his ventilator tube and reduced the sedation. Would he function purposefully? I was the first to arrive when they opened ICU that morning.

“Where’s Ann?” he asked when he saw me. The first words out of his mouth were about our sweet mother, who walked in moments behind me with other family members.

The gift of true love. A love that defies reason. A love that defies doctor’s orders and human imagination. My dad’s love for Mom defied physical boundaries and the laws of nature, especially human nature. My dad came back for my mom in my favorite love story. In all, they celebrated fifty-eight years of marriage together before Dad left for heaven. They were two of the sweetest lovebirds I know.

I hesitated to share this story of Dad’s devotion to our mom because it sounds so storybook perfect. We all want the storybook romance. However, I know the rest of the story. They worked hard to get to the place of true oneness, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

My dad was known for fun, while my mom got the job done. They came close to throwing in the towel. I saw how their marriage looked in moments of intense distress. Yep, I had a front-row seat. My beauti-

MARRIAGE CONVERSATIONS

ful mom and dad gave me permission to make a spot for you on the front row. They shared intimate parts of their story here, hoping to encourage others to hang in there.

Doomed or Delighted?

Let's face it, our culture seems pretty hopeless for good marriages. It can feel like the only people with good marriages are the genetic superheroes of the relationship universe. Is a good marriage only for super-gifted people, like only super-smart people make it through medical school or only super-athletes make it to the NBA? If our marriages fall apart, are our kids' marriages doomed? What if we didn't grow up with happily married parents?

I have great news: We all can have hope. Most marriages can improve immediately with a few new skills. Besides, who cares about anyone else's marriage; we just want to be cherished in our own marriage, right? If the big question is why bother to marry at all, the answer is simple. Because marriage remains our best hope for physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy.

Marriage provides the best path to oneness, that tenderness and intimacy that mark lifelong mutual commitment. Marriage is the place where words like community, intimacy, friendship, oneness, unity can come together if we decide to be intentional in our love for each other.

I watched my parents build tenderness and intimacy into their marriage. Our family suspects Dad's spirit refused to leave Mom. His life on Earth extended beyond all odds, we believe, because the physical, emotional, and spiritual ties between them were so strong. My dad would never have claimed to deserve a dignified death. In fact, he would have scoffed at such a notion.

He spent the last thirty years of his life learning to live as a recovering alcoholic. His humility became a hallmark of his life, but he didn't start out that way. He started out wounded. We all start our marriages with wounds. Can we recover and build redemptive relationships? Yes, the key to a miraculous marriage is fellowship. Fellowship is the gentle

CATHY PRIMER KRAFVE

art of companionship. However, tenderness is often the missing piece in modern culture.

From Co-existing to Cherished

Nobody wants to merely co-exist in our marriage. We want to feel loved and cherished. Since cherishing each other is an art, let's look at the way artists master their craft.

Even for artists who have a natural aptitude for creating art, mastery requires developing skills. The artist must devote herself to sketching, for instance. She must collect tools, such as pencils, charcoal, paint, and easels. Noting the lighting, she must study the perspective lines of a scene, the interplay of color, and the emotional mood of a subject. Finally, with care and devotion, a process develops, eventually resulting in mastery.

Exactly like artists practice to eventually create art masterpieces, we begin by studying and practicing skills to create great conversations in marriage, as in all our relationships. We can learn a lot from Jesus, the master communicator. One thing about Jesus—He understands our needs. He cares about the things you and I care about. He doesn't bore us with long dissertations when it comes to defining marriage. He gets right to the point: oneness. Leave it to Jesus to share a profound truth that changes everything! As we study Him, we equip ourselves to be masters in gentle judicious lifestyles leading to cherished relationships.

With gratitude, I share a small part of my parents' grand story to say there is hope for the rest of us. Imperfect people create healthy marriages all the time. If Ann and Charlie can do it, so can we. While marriage can be challenging, even heartbreaking at times, creating intimacy is extravagantly joyful.

Dad lived for a year and a half after that Code 44 moment. We all said our goodbyes to him in a clean, quiet room at hospice. In that bonus time, we got a final glimpse of the truly loving, wise, thoughtful, funny, creative person God designed Dad to be all along. In his weakest moments physically, his brightest attributes glowed. The poignant tenderness between my parents was palpable, each moment a mea-

MARRIAGE CONVERSATIONS

sured treasure. The weather was chilly and peaceful on a fall evening when Mom held Dad as she said her tender good-bye. He comforted her, then a few hours later he slipped away to heaven.

We're pretty sure we know exactly who Dad hangs out with up there. He always sought out our favorite fun people. We think Dad is teaching the young people to jitterbug while he watches for his all-time favorite partner to join him.

We All Crave Companionship

God designed us each one for an emotionally intimate, loving relationship with Him. No wonder we all crave companionship. We all want to be loved. Everyone does. We're designed by God to seek a relationship with Him. However, throughout our modern culture, people looking for love often fail to find it.

When it comes to relationships, there's great news, though. God loves second chances. He can forgive any sin and heal any past or present wounds. Astonishingly, God loves second chances so much He sent His Son to pay for them. Jesus' death on the cross paid for you and for any hurt you carry. Like my dad chose my mom and came back for her, Jesus chose you and rose from the dead to prove His ability to love you faithfully.

May I suggest you make a decision today that can change all your relationships forever? God sent His Son, Jesus, to seek you out. Jesus is the One who is lovingly referred to as the Bridegroom.¹ He demonstrated that miracles, joy, life, sacrifice, and resurrection are simply who He is. I invite you, if you don't know Him, to begin an intimate, loving relationship with Him today. As you begin to trust Him, you will marvel at how He will help you build fellowship in all your relationships. Have no fear, Jesus loves you with unfailing, tender love.

No matter what else people say about Jesus, everyone seems to agree Jesus was an amazing teacher when He walked the earth. I love the way He took the hardest questions and boiled down truth so we can all

1 See Matthew 9:14–15; Mark 2:18–20; Luke 5:33–35; John 3:29.

CATHY PRIMER KRAFVE

benefit. He shared many amazing truths about marriage. Keep reading as we examine them together.

In Case You Were Wondering...

We all have questions. Jesus was not afraid of questions. They don't have to be scary for us either. I pulled some of my favorites from our Camp Krafve, CathyKrafve.com, website for this book.

If my marriage is terrible, am I doomed? Absolutely not. You are not doomed, but you may need courage and some new skills.

Clearly, humans are natural romantics who somehow, against all odds, keep believing in the ideal of true love. Two marriages and two divorces later, we still show up at our friends' third try. Naively perhaps, we want to believe this time the marriage will be happy and will last. Human nature must carry a common, effervescent hope making us want to be married, even when we know it can hurt.

Instinctively, we seem to know there must be a way to create fulfilling marriages. We may even notice people who seem to have done it. Effective communication skills for marriage can be taught and learned. I watched my parents negotiate the heck out of marriage. It took work and courage, but you already know the end of their story. Their work paid off in huge dividends.

Since we're designed for a loving relationship with God, it follows that humans naturally crave those kinds of relationships with other people. In fact, we love because God loved us first.

"We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Deep satisfaction flows out of the thought that God loved us first. The idea of His initiating love affirms our value. We can free ourselves to love from whole hearts, as we ponder God's love for us.

Small decisions become the daily mini-miracles we anticipate with joyful expectancy. We must ponder the kind of relationships we want if we want whole hearts, not broken ones.

You can formulate strategies so fabulous and personal you won't even need anyone else's participation to get started. We don't have to be

MARRIAGE CONVERSATIONS

sneaky, victimized, or wounded. Like my beautiful mom, we can simply live a miraculous life, firmly and patiently loving all those around us.

As you read, may I recommend you record your personal revelations in a private place like a journal? Later, you will recognize your growth and be encouraged. I hope you laugh. You may cry. You will discover some new strategies to improve the group dynamics in your home, at work, at church, and, well, just about anywhere. Best of all, you will know you are not alone in your struggles or your triumphs. Oh, what joy!

Pause, Ponder, Pray, Then Proceed

1. Understanding your needs: To what lengths are you willing to go to create new dynamics in your relationships, especially your marriage? This is an important question to answer for yourself.

What prayer requests about marriage are so crucial and specific that you will write them down so you know when they are answered?

2. Identifying your worth: As women, we often fail to appreciate our own worth. It's a common problem. Create an ad as a mail-order bride and sell your strengths to a pretend potential husband. What did you write about your own value? Give yourself freedom to be totally silly and braggadocious. Laugh, but know what is true. You are valuable in innumerable ways.

3. Envisioning your future: If God offered you anything, what would you ask Him to do for you, His beloved daughter, the apple of His eye? Please turn to Him in prayer and ask for that very thing now.

Write a personal definition of a good marriage. What would a marriage look like that you deem worthy of your heart-felt commitment? Now share that description with a trustworthy friend. When we share our most personal dreams and fears with trustworthy friends, we unlock the door to wholeheartedness in all our relationships.

My prayer for you, with my love

Dear God, You are a companion to us in ways we cannot compre-

CATHY PRIMER KRAFVE

hend. We easily feel abandoned, unwanted, and alone. Please bless my sister with a new and deeper knowledge of who You truly are. Help her shed any wounded thoughts keeping her from knowing You. You love her beyond her comprehension. Bless her with a vivid awareness of Your tenderness for her. Help her heart be whole, not broken. Allow Your love for her to energize her and inspire her with hope and joy.

From Psalm 3, we offer You this praise: “But You, O LORD, *are* a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head” (Psalm 3:3).

To pray for yourself

Beloved good Father, You are the Designer of marriage. Thank You for Your Son who expressed Your love for me in sacrifice because He values me as worthy. Help me shake off any feelings of unworthiness and rejection as I sit in Your presence. Let me get to know You in new ways today.

What do You want to teach me so I can bring home fellowship in all my relationships? Help me trust You as together we develop a beautiful future for me. Give me courage to be vulnerable and reveal this beautiful heart You gave me. Bless me now because that’s Your heart’s desire. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

*“I’m convinced that there’s a song, a dance, and a path to laughter for every human emotion.” — Brene Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection**