

Introduction

Things change. Because of that simple fact, we've updated our work in order to bring you what we consider to be an even more practical and potent version of *Fighting for Your Marriage*. What you hold in your hand is a major revision of the book we published in 1994. We wrote the original version to help couples build and nurture happy and strong marriages. This book is based on PREP[®], which stands for the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program. PREP is based on over twenty years of research at the University of Denver as well as on research from universities around the world.

PREP is a program we developed to help couples beat the odds. PREP workshops use specific steps and exercises to teach couples the skills and attitudes associated with good relationships. Because of its roots in solid research and its straightforward approach, PREP has received a great deal of attention from couples across the country, professionals in the field of marital counseling, and the media.

PREP is one of the most extensively researched programs for couples ever developed. The strategies in PREP are based on our study of the key risks couples face as well as the most promising avenues for helping couples lower the risks. Marriage in our culture is risky business, and the costs of marital failure are staggering. The good news is that there are proven strategies that can help you preserve a lasting love. Whether or not you ever take a PREP workshop, this book presents the core of our thinking and strategies for couples.

WHAT'S NEW?

The first edition of the book was very well received among couples and professionals alike. We were pleased to have watched it become a best-seller in the marriage field. Given that, you may ask, “Why change what’s working?” Well, a lot has happened in the years since we wrote that first edition—and we’re not talking simply about the Internet, Palm Pilots, cell phones, cheaper air travel, and 140 channels on satellite television. We were motivated to make this revision by ongoing changes in three major areas:

1. Societal trends and cultural shifts
2. New discoveries in research on marriage and relationships
3. Improvements in our strategies for success in marriage

Almost as important as the changes we made are the changes we didn’t make. If you know our work, you’ll recognize that key themes for helping couples have remained rock solid. We wanted this revision to retain the feel the original had: that of a guidebook for a great marriage. We continue to base our work on empirical research. Furthermore, we have retained and even refined the hands-on, action-oriented nature of what we suggest. We are known for taking solid research findings and translating them into usable, specific, and powerful strategies to help couples preserve a lasting love. If you are in a relationship, our goal is to help you with practical, no-nonsense advice. If you are someone who works with couples (such as a counselor or clergy member), our goal is to give you clear and consistent strategies for having a powerful impact with couples.

We will review some of the history of our work and the foundations in our thought and how our thinking has changed in the last eight years. For those of you who are less interested in this background, please just skip ahead to the section in this chapter titled “Improvements in Our Strategies for Success in Marriage,” because we’d like you to see what we’ve changed in this edition. It isn’t cru-



cial for you to read this Introduction to understand the rest of what we have to say. You could even go straight to Chapter One and dig in. If that is your plan, we would recommend that you read the two sections here called “How to Get the Most Out of This Book” and “Moving Ahead with Confidence” before moving to Chapter One. But if you are curious, and don’t mind the more technical tone we take in this Introduction, reading it will give you a solid overview of the thinking that underlies this revision. In the rest of this book, we’ll adopt a far more casual tone.

Societal Trends and Cultural Shifts

Over the past decades, at least six major trends have affected marriage as an institution, couples in their relationships, and the level of concern many have about where all the changes are headed. These trends and changes have continued, if not accelerated, in the last ten years.

Negotiation-Based Marriage

In the six decades since World War II, our society has seen marriages change from relationships in which virtually nothing was negotiable to ones in which virtually everything is negotiable. This

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trend has been particularly noticeable during the last decade as marriage rates have declined and expectations for love-based, happy marriages have increased. The massive changes in people's expectations for marriage have led to a very different kind of marriage for most couples. Today, marriages require more skill in negotiation between partners than ever before, because there is less that is automatically accepted and more that needs to be decided. This is true for any long-term romantic relationship, whether the partners are married or living together.

What this shift in marriage has meant is that couples are now more greatly affected by their ability to handle conflicts and differences than perhaps ever before. For couples who have wonderful skills in conflict management and problem solving, that's not a big deal. For the vast number of couples who don't know how to work through issues and problems, this shift away from common expectations means more conflict, more unhappiness, and more risk for divorce. So we have expanded our thinking and refined our strategies for helping couples manage the dark and difficult side of their relationships with more skill and confidence.

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Love-Based Marriage

Have you seen a good movie lately? Romantic comedy, action-adventure, or a children's fantasy—whatever the genre, you can't help being affected by all the messages about what people think are most important in having a good relationship: romance, passion, and love. You also can't help but be affected by what is absent from most of those movies: a message that *marriage* is a good place in which to express all that love. (We have nothing at all against romance and passion. In fact, one of the changes in this version of our book is to

bring greater emphasis to ways couples can keep those powerful dynamics alive. Further, Howard [coauthor] just edited a volume of essays with Janice Levine on the subject of love and passion. It's called *Why Do Fools Fall in Love?* [2001], also from Jossey-Bass.)

But the movies' perspective on the ultimate importance of romance seems misleading to us. It reflects a shift in many cultures, especially in industrialized nations, toward an expectation of marriage as something that should, above all, bring romance to your life. Further, the implication is that if your marriage does not, you should move on. It's not a marriage worth having. Passionate romance is a lot to expect in a week when the kids are sick, the car is acting up, and you are uncertain about having a job in the months ahead. People marry for love, but when they don't "feel" the love (read: passion), too often they divorce.

Consider a paradox in the statistical trends in marriage and divorce in the United States. Not only has the divorce rate skyrocketed (though it has stabilized at a high rate), but, according to David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead of the National Marriage Project, the number of couples who remain married and who are very happy has been declining. That's a puzzle. You'd think that with more people leaving their unhappy marriages, the bulk of those who stay would be really happy. The best way to explain this is to realize that people are expecting more from their partners and marriages than ever before. If you expect more love and romance but find them hard to achieve, you are going to be less happy. We all measure disappointment in life against what we expect, not against what is necessarily reasonable to get.

Blaine Fowers of the University of Miami has been calling attention to just this dynamic. In his book *Beyond the Myth of Marital Happiness* (2000), he forcefully argues that our focus on marriage as a relationship primarily about happiness has diminished marriage and that we need to reenvision marriage as an opportunity to practice the virtues of friendship, loyalty, and generosity. To simply try to be happier or to be more in love is not the path we suggest you

follow. Ironically, that may be the path on which you are least likely to find happiness. Although we want to teach you how to preserve happiness, our focus is on teaching you how to walk the deeper paths of commitment, forgiveness, and friendship. When you walk *these* paths together, you will find happiness and love throughout your journey, because these are the characteristics research tells us predict lifelong happiness and love.

Lower Constraints to Dissolving Marriages

Historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead wrote the original “Dan Quayle Was Right” piece in the *Atlantic Monthly* and, more recently, the book *The Divorce Culture* (1997). She notes that the great increase in divorce in industrialized nations results from greater affluence, which gives people more options if they want to leave a relationship. Furthermore, she notes that as societies become more consumer oriented, there is an increased emphasis on being satisfied with what we get. “What’s in it for me?” becomes a more acceptable way to think. These forces in combination lead people to expect more and to have an easier time leaving if their expectations are not met.

Economic development is wonderful in many ways, but it also means that people have fewer constraints for staying married than in days gone by. That’s not all bad. On the positive side, that means people can put more emphasis on their personal choices in the role of building *and keeping* a great marriage. For some, it can make leaving abusive relationships easier. That’s surely a good thing. On the negative side, with fewer economic, legal, and moral barriers to divorce, more people choose this option—even when faced with difficulties that many couples could overcome with the right kind of effort. That doesn’t mean a couple just survives their problems, but rather that they are learning how to thrive in the relationship.

As with the other changes we’ve mentioned, these cultural and societal shifts create more pressure on the “right here and right now” than ever before. With people having to work harder to negotiate

differences, expecting more in terms of love and passion, and finding it generally easier to leave when unhappy, marriages are less stable than any time in modern history.

Unstable Unions and Fragile Families

Most people desire a happy marriage that lasts a lifetime, but we know that many couples do not achieve one. Although the divorce rate has come down a bit in the United States since its all-time high in 1981, what we see now is a leveling off at what remains a high rate. The current projection is that among young couples marrying for the first time today, about 40 to 50 percent of them will eventually divorce. The trends we just discussed are in large measure responsible for these high divorce rates. Aside from those who divorce, many other couples wind up staying together through many years of unhappiness.

Norval Glenn, a sociologist at the University of Texas, has done a detailed projection wherein he concludes that about 24 percent of couples who marry will remain very happily married until death. Everyone who marries wants to be in that 24 percent who remain together and very happy, but the simple math suggests that most people are not going to walk that path. The odds are not in most couples' favor for having the kind of marriage they long to have. We often say that marriage is the riskiest activity most people ever engage in. Most of this book is about helping you and your partner be in that 24 percent. If enough couples learn the skills and approach we describe in this book, perhaps that percentage can even increase!

In addition to the rising divorce rates, there has also been a vast increase in the number of children born to people who are not married in the first place. This has been one of the greatest changes in family structure in industrialized societies over the past four decades. In the United States, for example, the percentage of children born to mothers out of wedlock has increased from 6 percent in 1960 to 32 percent in 2000.

This is a sweeping, unprecedented change over a relatively short period of time in human history. We can't emphasize strongly enough that there are many single parents doing a wonderful job of raising their children. Nevertheless, the increases in out-of-wedlock births as well as the high divorce rates have led to more children living in fragile families than ever before. That means there are increasing numbers of children at increased risk for economic disadvantage, a lack of father involvement, or both.

*Growing Awareness of the Effects of Marital Problems
on Adults and Children*

The damaging effects of destructive marital conflict and divorce on spouses and children are incalculable. These effects include economic, medical, and mental health problems. Let's focus on children for a moment. There are many studies that now show just how destructive poorly handled marital conflict is for the children living in the homes of fighting parents. When parents regularly argue, especially if in hostile ways, the evidence for the damage done to children is as conclusive as anything gets in our field of research. That children can be harmed by how their parents handle disagreements has led many to conclude that these children would be better off if their parents split up. However, many of these children are hurt by *how* their parents fight, whether or not they stay together. What we mean by that is that these children don't really do that much better if their parents divorce, because their parents still continue to fight—often through the children.

There is also a growing number of studies showing that divorce, in and of itself, has lasting and negative impacts on many children. Judith Wallerstein, who wrote *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* (2000), is one researcher who has received a great deal of attention for documenting the long-term effects of divorce on children. She reports that children of divorce are more likely to have a difficult time forming close relationships and to have more difficulty handling conflict, even into adulthood.

Even Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University who had once been more skeptical about the long-term impacts of divorce, has now concluded that for children of divorce there are long-term, measurable increases in risk of such problems as dropping out of high school, becoming pregnant as a teenager, and having mental health problems. Children of divorce are also at greater risk of living in poverty, because marriage provides families a stronger financial base in life than anything else we know. Cherlin would note that these children are not doomed by any means. In fact, although they are at greater risk, many children of divorce will not fall prey to the problems we've mentioned, for a variety of reasons. Yet there has been a clear trend among researchers and public policy commentators to express greater levels of alarm about the impact of divorce on children.

The most exciting current research relates to the questions of *how* parental conflict and divorce affect children's well-being over time. We are proud to say that several of our former students (and even students of students), now colleagues, are among the major contributors to this area. For example, Mari Clements at Penn State and Jean-Philippe Laurenceau at the University of Miami have been studying how marital conflict and parenting styles affect children's interactions with peers, as well as studying risk factors that predict marital distress and failure. Kristin Lindahl and Neena Malik at the University of Miami have been investigating how marital conflict and parenting styles affect children in both Anglo and Latino families. These researchers are having a great impact on our field.

Although researchers still debate the degree to which destructive parental conflict and divorce are damaging to children, there is wide agreement on the following four points:

1. As highlighted in a seminal report from the National Institute of Mental Health on prevention of emotional problems, marital distress and destructive marital conflict are major generic risk factors for many forms of mental distress and psychopathology.

2. Both destructive parental conflict and parental divorce raise the risk that children will have difficulties later in life; the risks caused by chronic exposure to parental conflict are particularly strong.

3. As noted by Paul Amato at Penn State, couples who have relatively low conflict marriages but who are “no longer in love” actually make up the greatest percentage of divorces. Researchers are increasingly willing to conclude that children of these marriages may well be better off if their parents can work things out.

4. Children do best when they are being raised in stable homes by two parents who love each other, handle conflict well, and provide a base of commitment that brings stability to the lives of those children.

It's this last point that is easiest for us to focus on here, because we want to help couples prevent marital distress and divorce in the first place. Before we go on, we want to emphasize that there are many single parents and divorced parents doing a wonderful job of raising their children. Nothing we have said here should be seen as diminishing that fact. But when you look at the long-term impact of these familial changes on a society, the trends are cause for quite a bit of concern because, on average, fewer and fewer children are being raised in the kind of situation in which they do best.

The negative impacts of marital problems and divorce do not solely occur in the lives of children. Adults suffer greatly as well. For example, marital problems are the number one cause of depression, and depression is the most common mental health problem in our society. Steven Beach at the University of Georgia and a number of colleagues in the field have found that marital dynamics such as emotional connection, support in helping one another cope with the stresses of life, and dependability of the spouse all reduce an individual's likelihood of being depressed. Criticism, blame, and threats of leaving the marriage all put individuals at much greater risk for depression.

Marital distress and divorce cause workers to be distracted and poorly motivated, which leads to great losses in productivity in our

society. More recently, research has also documented the powerful effects of marital distress on physical health. As Janice Kiecolt-Glaser of the Ohio State College of Medicine has found in a number of exciting studies, marital distress and conflict not only make you sick at heart but also can literally make you sick in the body.

Little Respect for the Institution of Marriage

There is at least one constant in our ever-changing world: regardless of gender, culture, socioeconomic status, skin color, and language, nearly everyone wants a lifelong, secure, happy, and committed relationship. Despite the near universality of this desire, it appears that in response to the high divorce rate and other bad news, more people are thinking that the pain of divorce can be prevented by avoiding what leads to divorce: marriage. Although it may not seem like a huge change to you, current projections are that about 85 percent of Americans will eventually marry, down from 95 percent in the past. These numbers have moved far more rapidly in the same direction in most European countries. In general, the trend in industrialized nations is for more divorce, less marital happiness, and less marriage in general.

You can avoid marriage, perhaps, but you cannot avoid that ache in your heart for a deeper, lasting relationship. And if the ache is there, the potential for pain and disappointment is there as well. If it aches, it can break. Obviously, some people have been harmed greatly in their marriages and would have been better off if they had never wedded. But simply put, it's not marriage that's the problem.

The greater problem lies inside our relationships, in how we treat one another. Whatever the trends in your country or culture, how *your* relationship fares over time depends more than anything else on how the two of you treat each other. This brings us to a discussion of the kind of research and the approach on which this book is based. In our research, and in our study of the research of others, we focus on learning as much as we can about the secrets of staying happily married and of how unhappy couples unravel. That means



we focus on learning what you, the couple, can do to make a difference in how your marriage does over time.

New Discoveries in Research on Marriage and Relationships

The techniques and strategies in this book are based on solid, up-to-date research in the field of marriage—not on “pop-psych” speculation. Our work is both *empirically informed* and *empirically tested*. By empirically informed, we mean that we take great advantage of a wide range of research findings from many respected scientists in developing our suggestions and in explaining them to you. This will be clear to you as you read on. By empirically tested, we mean that we (and colleagues) have conducted a number of studies looking at the effectiveness of this approach—especially with premarital couples who are starting out happy and wanting to stay that way.

There are exciting advances in our field of marital research, particularly in a new area: that of studying the bigger, deeper meanings to be found in relationships. Historically, the field of marital research

has seen two other major themes, or waves. The first area of focus was on marital satisfaction, the second on communication. Let's look briefly at these three waves.

Satisfaction

Thirty or more years ago, if you'd talked to researchers like us, you would've found that what we spent more of our time looking at was happiness—simply put, who's happy in marriage, who's not happy, and who's bouncing around between those extremes. This was important because how happy couples are is closely related to how marriages go over time. If you think about it, however, knowing more about happiness does not lead to very specific strategies for staying happy. If it did, we could stop writing this book now and just conclude with this advice: "Don't worry, be happy." That would not really tell you very much about *how* to make that happiness happen or last (but it would be a really easy read).

Communication

The next big wave in marital research was in the study of communication. This kind of research exploded on the scene in the mid-1970s with the advent of relatively affordable videotape recorders. (At least they were affordable to government-supported research projects.) This technology allowed researchers to do something they hadn't been able to do before: record couples as they talked. That was important because if you can record something, you can watch it over and over. And if you can watch it over and over, you can start to detect key patterns in how couples talk and how couples fight.

It would be hard to overstate how important this wave of research became to the field. Such pioneers as John Gottman, Robert Weiss, Kurt Hahlweg, Howard Markman, and Clifford Notarius began to generate an astounding number of fascinating findings. As you probably realize, this kind of research has played a major role in the development of our approach to helping couples build strong and happy marriages. Many of our core techniques

come directly from studies that show how damaging some kinds of negative interaction can be and what is different in the communication of couples who do well over time.

Although the focus on communication is hardly new in the marital field, there are many new studies about how couples communicate that we incorporate in this revision. For example, Andrew Christensen at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) and Christopher Heavey at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas have refined our understanding of the dynamics of pursuit and withdrawal. In other words, there is new information we'd like you to know about to enhance your understanding of why some people tend to pursue discussing issues with their partners and why some people tend to avoid or withdraw from such discussions altogether.

As another example, researchers Frank Fincham at State University of New York at Buffalo and Thomas Bradbury at UCLA, among others, have refined our understanding of the ways in which people's thoughts about their partners affect how they communicate with their partners.

The Bigger Meanings

We are now in an exciting new era for researchers. There is a growing emphasis on the deeper meanings and themes of relationships. The relatively new emphasis on what it all means can be seen in advances in the study of such topics as commitment, acceptance, friendship in marriage, forgiveness, attachment history, and the process of spiritual intimacy in marriage.

As a result of this increasing focus on deeper themes, there are new findings and theories being developed all the time that we think can help couples in their relationships. Research is most meaningful when it is used to create strategies and techniques to help couples move forward in their relationships. We have always followed this path, and this new book is no exception. We'll bring in the newest concepts and show you how to apply them in your own relationship.

Improvements in Our Strategies for Success in Marriage

We have gotten older, and although it's been questioned by some of our equally older colleagues, we think we've gotten wiser as well. (Our mothers all attest to our growing wisdom.) Over the years, we have worked with thousands of couples, as well as with people who help couples in marriage and family relationships. As a result of this vast experience as well as the new research in the field, we have made three very specific kinds of changes in this revision:

1. We've refined what works well to make it work better.
2. We've added entirely new concepts and strategies that we believe give couples a powerful edge.
3. We've taken the emphasis off anything that seemed less useful or less relevant to couples.

As an example of refinement, we've developed new ways to describe many key themes so that it will be easier for you to remember and use the concepts. For example, we've updated every chapter in this book to reflect new research in the field. We've also added boxes throughout the book that contain special, more in-depth content. These boxes usually describe research that has particularly interesting implications for how you can strengthen your relationship. We've also added an overview of our approach in Chapter One that will give you a great start, up front, on understanding where we're headed and why we say the things we say.

As an example of new strategies, we've added a section in Chapter Eight on self-regulation. Our work has always played up the importance of couples' taking charge of their relationships. For example, we've emphasized, and still emphasize, the importance of mutually agreed-on time-out strategies. These allow you, as a couple, to manage conflicts rather than let conflicts manage you. What we've added to this focus on couple regulation is self-regulation. You

stand a better chance as a couple of handling conflicts well if you, as individuals, are learning to handle your own emotions constructively. This is not a book on self-control, but it is a book made better by the addition of thoughts on self-control and personal responsibility.

As an example of changing emphasis, we talked in the first edition about research suggesting that when it came to the experience of physical stress in marital conflict, men had, on average, a more difficult time than women. This now appears not to be the case, and it may even be the other way around. Whatever is going on there, it's a lot more complex than it was looking to researchers ten years ago, and our chapter on gender differences now reflects these complexities.

We'll not bother to detail things we've taken out of this revision of *Fighting for Your Marriage* because they are, well, not here anymore.

RESEARCH ON PREP AND ADVANCEMENTS IN GETTING THE WORD OUT

We have been busy continuing to conduct research on PREP as well as finding ways to get research-based strategies out of the lab and into the hands of couples and those who work helping couples.

What Research on PREP Reveals

Some of the most important research on the PREP approach has been conducted at the University of Denver. Over the years, our research has been supported by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation, and it has resulted in more than fifty scientific and professional publications. Here we will give you a brief example of findings from these studies and those of colleagues with whom we've been privileged to work over the years. Those col-

leagues include such fine researchers as Kurt Hahlweg at the Technische Universität Braunschweig; Kim Halford at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia; Don Baucom at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and a long list of talented colleagues at the University of Denver. These are highlights from studies on PREP or variations of it and very similar programs.

As noted earlier, most of the formal research on PREP has been with couples in the transition to marriage. We believe the concepts and principles are just as applicable for happy or unhappy couples, for those who are going to marry or who have been married for fifty years. Our studies (and others) show that marital failure is predictable to a surprising degree, which means that for many couples, the seeds of divorce are present prior to marriage. It does not mean that we researchers are very good at predicting exactly which couples won't make it, but we have gotten pretty good at identifying the factors that greatly increase the odds of divorce.

The factors that predict marital failure range from relatively static dimensions, such as a history of parental divorce, differences in religion, and personality styles, to more dynamic dimensions, such as communication, conflict, and commitment. Because we know what predicts marital failure, there is hope for reducing the risks. To us, the more dynamic factors—how to communicate as a couple, how to handle differences without destructive patterns of conflict, and how to keep the marriage secure—make the most attractive targets for you to work on in your relationship. This is because these dynamic factors are not only highly predictive of divorce but also the most amenable to change. PREP is primarily focused on the dynamic dimensions identified in research as crucial to marital success. Chapter One tells you more about risk factors and why we focus on what we focus on.

Aside from the prediction research, various studies strongly suggest that couples can learn skills, complete exercises, and enhance ways of thinking that increase their odds of success. In our own research on premarital education, we can track the positive effects

of preventive interventions for at least five years after the training. Although there is more research to be done, a number of long-term studies have evaluated PREP compared to several different types of control groups, including couples who have received traditional premarital counseling (PMC) and those who have received nothing special for helping their relationship. The following are some of the findings:

- PREP couples have lower rates of premarital breakup and postmarital divorce. In a large-scale study in Denver, PREP couples were one-third as likely to break up as the couples in the control group, up through five years following the program (combining pre- and postmarital breakup). In a recent study in Germany, only 3 percent of the PREP couples had divorced at a five-year follow-up, whereas 16 percent of couples who received traditional PMC (or no PMC) had divorced.
- According to one major long-term study, PREP couples have shown a greater likelihood of maintaining relationship satisfaction for a few years following training.
- According to studies in the United States, Germany, and Australia, PREP couples have lower levels of negative communication and higher levels of positive communication immediately following the program, and they maintain these advantages up to five years later.
- In one study, PREP couples have reported lower levels of physical aggression in the years after taking the program.
- PREP couples enjoy taking the program because of the hands-on, skill-oriented nature of the material; PREP couples often report greater program satisfaction than couples taking other programs.
- Premarital couples taking PREP given by clergy or lay leaders in their religious organization (as well as by university staff) communicate more positively and less negatively following training, compared to couples taking more typical premarital training in their religious organizations.

It is important to note that some of the beneficial effects of a program like PREP appear to be clear as long as four or five years after the training. This does not mean that every couple benefits or that every couple can reduce their risk of divorce. In this field, we need to know far more about which couples get the greatest benefit from which kinds of materials. Also, no matter what the program or material, the beneficial effects probably weaken over time. Therefore, it is important for any couple who benefits from this material to review those things that seem to help their relationship most.

Our research continues in our current project, in which we are testing the effectiveness of PREP delivered within religious organizations. Lydia Prado and Michelle St. Peters at the University of Denver have played ongoing lead roles in this work.

If you would like to read more of the academic descriptions of our work to delve into the mysteries and complexities of such research, you can refer to the Selected Research and References. We know this isn't something most of you will want to do, but for those who would like to read more, the references are there just waiting for you.

Getting the Word Out

We are excited about the opportunities we've had in the past decade to disseminate our work—our concepts, strategies, and research findings—to couples and those who help couples worldwide. This work has been spearheaded by Natalie Jenkins. Natalie is the vice president of PREP, Inc., a company formed by Howard and Scott (coauthors) in 1991 to be the prime vehicle for the dissemination of work based on the PREP approach.

As the lead force in our efforts to get the word out, Natalie has overseen the growth of PREP in many areas, including the following:

- Holding PREP workshops in the United States and in many other countries. We have trained mental health professionals, clergy, health care workers, and lay persons from around the world

in this approach. Many of these people use our materials to conduct workshops for couples or in counseling individually with couples.

- The training of hundreds of chaplains and social workers in all the branches of the armed forces of the United States, in order that they can make use of the straightforward strategies of PREP to help the marriages of the active-duty personnel of the services. This work has been particularly gratifying to us, as we've watched how the military services work on the front lines of efforts to help couples prevent marital distress and divorce. The nature of military work involves many stresses on families, and we are proud to help protect and strengthen the marriages of people who serve our country.

- The development and marketing of a wide variety of materials that couples can use to learn the concepts we teach. These include videos and audiotapes for couples and a host of materials for those who present PREP workshops for couples. In collaboration with various experts, we have also developed versions of *Fighting for Your Marriage* that are geared to specific groups of couples, such as those in the transition to parenthood, empty nest couples, Jewish couples, African American couples, and couples who prefer a model deeply integrated with the Christian faith. (A list of titles appears in Resources and Training.)

- The development with Chris Saiz of a self-directed course for couples who wish to learn the core communication and conflict management aspects of our work through the use of a coordinated video and workbook.

- The development of a top-notch staff that supports the efforts to market and distribute our materials based on PREP.

This is just a partial list of what we've been doing. Some of the most exciting things are yet to come, and come they will. Natalie Jenkins and William Bailey at the University of Arkansas, along with Scott and Howard, are working on an entire approach to helping couples deal with all of what money means in marriage. The book based on that work will be available from Jossey-Bass in spring 2002. It will rely on some core aspects of the PREP approach, but it will also move more deeply into the complexities of money in marriage.

We're not sitting still. We not only continue to do research on marital success and failure but also are constantly looking for new and better ways to reach more couples with tools that can make a difference.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

We believe that the recipe for a great relationship includes a cup of love, a cup of commitment, several tablespoons of compatibility of interests, a cup and a half of skill in handling conflicts, and a pinch of magic. We are convinced that you can learn how to build and protect a great relationship if you are motivated to do so. We'll introduce a number of very effective skills for handling conflict and disagreements. We'll also suggest strategies for building and maintaining friendship, commitment, and spiritual intimacy—all that really great stuff that bonds you together. With each skill or principle, we'll also tell you about the underlying theory and research so that you understand why it may work for you. You will find that these techniques are not really difficult to understand, but *they will take some investment to master*. We believe in making things simple, but simple is not always easy. You have to put in the effort to reap the rewards.

You can learn how to build and protect a great relationship if you are motivated to do so.

One way to invest in your relationship is to discuss the talking points and to complete the exercises at the end of each chapter. The exercises are particularly important since they are carefully designed to help you learn the key concepts and strategies.

MOVING AHEAD WITH CONFIDENCE

Our society has come to a point where most people are divorced, know many people who are divorced, or are surrounded by some pretty unhappy married couples. In fact, those who study the generation

following the Xers have found something quite interesting about these folks. They are the most conservative generation in a long time with regard to marriage and family. On average, they value marriage more than the Xers, and they think that being married for life is a worthy goal. Of course, they want to be *happily* married for life. What they lack, however, is confidence that a happy marriage is an achievable goal. In fact, it looks more like an impossible dream to many of them. It might be fine for Don Quixote to dream the impossible dream, but in reality, most people don't get all that excited about dreams that they believe just cannot happen.

On the positive side, you probably know couples who have done well over many years—meaning they have stayed together and stayed happy. They've found a way to preserve their special bond through all the ups and downs of life. Who have your role models been regarding marriage and family relationships? Depending on who you spend time with, you may have either concluded “Yes, it can be done” or “No way, hardly anyone makes this deal work out well.”

If you are an optimist about relationships—especially marriage—what we have to offer you in this book can give legs to your optimism. We find it's not enough simply to be optimistic; optimism needs to be paired with specific plans and action, or it's just a good feeling.

Likewise, if you are pessimistic about relationships and marriage, we think you've come to the right place. Our primary goal in writing this book is to teach you the most powerful strategies we know for helping you build confidence in your relationship. In our research, we have found that confidence in marriage is related to such factors as commitment to your partner, friendship with your partner, fewer nasty arguments with your partner, and having fun with your partner. If you take a moment to look at the Contents, you'll find those to be among the core themes of this book.

In short, we want to help the two of you build confidence based on increased competence. Although we make no guarantees, we believe that if you work through the ideas presented here and adapt those that seem to help you the most, you will significantly increase your chances of not only staying together but also experiencing the greater joys of a life together.