

Chapter 1

Redefining the Honeymoon

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

“So, how are your wedding plans coming along?”

If you're a prospective bride, it's likely that you will hear this phrase countless times before your wedding. Everyone wants to hear about your gown, your veil, the reception, the cake, the flowers, the invitations and all the numerous details of preparation that go into the planning of your wedding. And you are delighted to talk about these things.

Did you know that there is another event other than your wedding ceremony and reception that critically needs your attention and planning? Few engaged couples, however, know how to proceed with plans for this life-altering event called the honeymoon. What follows is the story of a young couple who sadly experienced this reality.

Karen's Story

Karen was one of those perfect brides. She was model beautiful, smart and wealthy and had a very handsome fiancé. Karen and Tom were a gorgeous couple. Karen had the perfect dress, the most expensive reception, the most exclusive guests and 10 bridesmaids and groomsmen to flank her wedding party. Every detail was scheduled and prepared for down to the smallest nuance—and it was a fabulous wedding and reception. From the outside, it appeared to be an event to remember for a lifetime.

Karen and Tom's hundreds of guests saw them off after the reception. How happy everyone was for them! And the tired but happy couple was excited to spend their first night together as husband and wife and depart on their honeymoon. They were scheduled to leave on a plane early the next morning for a fantastic, dreamy European honeymoon. What a fairy tale come true! Or so they thought.

They returned from their honeymoon a week later with their fairy-tale bubble shattered. It had been a nightmare of a honeymoon.

Karen sobbed as she confided to her girlfriends the events of the previous week, starting with the wedding night. Karen and Tom had not left the reception until close to midnight, and she had eaten little food all day. Most of her time at the reception had been spent socializing with many of the more than 500 guests. The newlyweds arrived at their hotel that night exhausted and hungry.

Karen had given in to Tom's pressure to have sex during their engagement, and she still harbored some bitterness about the fact that she had given away her virginity on a night that was not her wedding night. She didn't really care if *it* didn't happen this night; there was always tomorrow to consummate their marriage. They both crashed sound asleep in each others' arms.

The next day, their travel alarm did not go off. They jumped out of bed with no time for romance and hurriedly showered, packed up, ran to the airport, were delayed by the security lines and just about missed their international flight.

After several flight connections (including another one they very nearly missed) and a *long* day of travel, they finally arrived at their destination jet-lagged and even more exhausted than the night before. All Karen could think about was getting to their nice, plush hotel room, their comfy, plush bed, and crashing. But all Tom could think of was having sex with his new bride, again and again, in their sumptuous and swanky hotel room.

However, neither the room nor the bed was lush or lavish. Those of you with travel experience will understand what happened. What is considered a four-star hotel in the United States does not necessarily translate to the same standard overseas.

The accommodations were clean but small and cramped, with painted pipes overhead. And they had an awfully uncomfortable—even lumpy—mattress. The bride, the princess, the perfectionist was beyond unhappy. But at least they had each other, right? And sex!

Well, that actually was great, despite the lumpy bed—although Karen was surprised at how she found herself resenting even more the fact that Tom could not have waited for sex until the honeymoon.

Then, to make things worse, Karen came down with a bad bladder infection, what we doctors call a rip-roaring case of honeymoon cystitis, the very next day—fever, pain and a honey-you-can-forget-about-any-more-fun-down-there-for-a-while kind of cystitis.

Ever try finding medical care in a foreign country? It took Karen and Tom most of the next day and a big chunk of their extra honeymoon money to get her the medical treatment she needed.

To make a rapidly souring situation even worse, several lingering relational issues came up, leading to several loud and long arguments—the last one resulting in Karen dissolving in tears and Tom storming out of the hotel. Karen wished they had taken a friend’s advice to get some premarital counseling. She was stunned at the completely unexpected depression, loneliness and homesickness that invaded her soul. When she called her mom and talked for more than 30 minutes, Tom blew a gasket and again left her alone, which only worsened her misery.

By then, they had both had it. All they could think of was getting home. Which they did—two days earlier than scheduled—and for a significant add-on cost for changing airline tickets.

Karen and Tom can’t forget about their honeymoon. It’s a nightmare that continues to haunt them both. It still affects Tom’s feelings for Karen. He actually thought about suggesting they go to counseling, but he has decided to bury the whole thing emotionally—except he can’t do that.

Unfortunately, this couple did not see that their terrible honeymoon experience had the potential to eventually lead to a wrecked marriage.

Poor Karen—she had the perfect wedding and the perfect husband. Why did she have a honeymoon that went all wrong? Was this any way to start a marriage? What could have been done to prevent this nightmare from happening?

Wrong Ideas About Honeymoons!

Although there is help and advice for the wedding and reception plans, much less frequently will anyone ask about your honeymoon preparation and plans—and if they do, the questions are usually superficial, such as, “Where are you going on your trip?” “How long will you be gone?” “Where will you be staying?” Hardly ever will you be asked questions about the details of your preparation for the first week of the rest of your life together as husband and wife.

Why is this? Is it because it’s too intimate? Too personal? Too much information?

Perhaps these are some of the reasons, but we suspect there are two far more important reasons: (1) Most men and women simply do not understand how critical

their honeymoon is to the health of their marriage; and (2) Most married couples simply do not plan the life-changing event upon which they will embark—their honeymoon.

Not only do we not ask about the honeymoon, but we also aren't taught about it. Parents typically are caught up in the wedding ceremony. Pastors, priests and rabbis usually concentrate on compatibility issues and conflict-resolution skills. Certainly, most of our friends don't feel equipped to teach us *anything* concerning matrimony. Who feels equipped to teach while either looking for their own future mate or trying to maintain their own marriage?

Simply put, our society in general, and the Church in particular, places more emphasis on planning the wedding than planning the honeymoon—an experience that occupies the first and most critical week of virtually all marriages.

Check it out for yourself. Look at the \$72 billion wedding industry. Peruse the hundreds of wedding magazines, guides and books. Look at the content of these publications: You will find scads of information and advice on all the trappings of a fairy-tale ceremony but pitifully little guidance concerning your honeymoon—the beginning of your married life together. Most women (or their mothers) heading toward a wedding have shelves filled with several resources of marketing information for the things and events that should surround the planning of the wedding ceremony—but almost nothing on preparing for the rest of their life.

And if there's *any* information to be found on the honeymoon, it typically only discusses where to go, how to get there and what you should expect or do sexually. Go to a book site on the Internet, like www.amazon.com or www.barnesandnoble.com, and search using the word "honeymoon." Besides the novels, travel guides, sex guides and journals, there's nothing to help *you* prepare for this foundational week of your marriage and life together with your soul mate.

Our culture, churches and communities—not to mention our families, friends and faith communities—have abandoned the traditional practices of our ancestors of passing down wisdom from grandmother, aunt or mother to the prospective bride—or from grandfather, uncle or father to the prospective groom. Unfortunately, it seems that this brand of wisdom has been buried with past generations.

As a result, what we have found in our medical practices, after more than 35 collective years of practicing medicine, is that there are now more and more engaged couples turning to us, as their physicians, for answers to their most intimate questions and concerns about the honeymoon.

Although this happened less commonly when we were new in our practices, it seems to us that increasingly couples intuitively understand that their honeymoon is not just another vacation. It's the beginning of a new life with their soul mate—and like a foot race, the start will dramatically determine the finish.

Not only do most men and women have medical and sexual concerns about their honeymoon, but even more important, they express real, heartfelt questions about preparing for the emotional, relational and spiritual changes that they hope will occur when two souls take the most holy, until-death-do-us-part vow of their lifetime—the sacred promises of matrimony.

These conversations require trust and openness. They are the kinds of conversations once reserved only for parents, close relatives and friends or the parish priest, the local pastor or rabbi. However, because most modern family members and pastoral professionals simply don't know where to start, we doctors are hearing these questions in our practices. Like most physicians, we treasure our relationships with our patients. The doctor-patient bond is one of deep sharing and trust. No one believes that more than we do. But we also believe that most of the advice and conversations about planning for a honeymoon should and must occur between the couple approaching marriage and their parents, families, pastor *and* a mentor couple.

Unfortunately, these personal and private conversations have been lost in our modern age, but they are as critical for today's brides and grooms as they were during the days of King Solomon.

This book is our attempt to dispense the best of ancient wisdom, sprinkled with the flavoring of a dash of modern medical and counseling advice and mixed with the experiences and stories of others who have gone before you, to allow you to plan and pray not just for your wedding but also for your honeymoon and your marriage.

We believe that if you invest the time and effort to prepare for a special, sacred and spiritual honeymoon, then the fruit of that investment will bless not just your marriage but also, as you share this wisdom with others, the marriages of many who will follow your path.

For Thought and Prayer

1. Based on what you've learned so far, have you or your fiancé had any "wrong ideas" about your honeymoon?

2. Have you found anyone you can talk with about preparing for the honeymoon of a lifetime?
3. For the groom-to-be: Are you willing to take the lead in planning the honeymoon of a lifetime? While your fiancée works overtime to plan *your* wedding, are you willing to invest in her, your marriage and your future by becoming the “lead dog” for this expedition and adventure?
4. How and when do you plan to implement each of these decisions?