

Tune-Up Time
Discussion Questions



Classic
Marriage

STAYING IN LOVE AS YOUR
ODOMETER CLIMBS

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with commentary by

PHIL RAYBURN

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Introduction

We encourage you to make a habit of setting aside time each week to talk before the check engine light comes on. Each set of Tune-Up Time questions and discussion points coordinates with a chapter from the book *Classic Marriage: Staying in Love as Your Odometer Climbs*.

www.classicmarriagebook.com

If you can go out on a date, these questions can be used to start meaningful conversation over a meal or on a walk after dinner. Or if you choose to stay in, prepare a meal together and then have a heart-to-heart over dessert. The questions will help you laugh, reminisce, restore, and take steps toward building a sense of unity and closeness. Some might spark conflict and provide an opportunity to practice handling it in a healthy way. We pray that God uses your discussion times to draw you closer to one another and to strengthen your classic marriage.

Michelle and Phil

About the Authors

Michelle Rayburn is the author of five books, including *The Repurposed and Upcycled Life: When God Turns Trash to Treasure*. She has a Master of Arts in ministry leadership with an emphasis on pastoral counseling. She has published Bible studies, articles, and devotionals in places such as *Focus on the Family*, *Christian Communicator*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Vista*, *Today's Christian Living*, and more. She has also written for ChristianBibleStudies.com.

She hosts a weekly podcast called *Life, Repurposed* and loves to help people discover ways to find joy in the midst of the trashy stuff of life. Michelle enjoys transforming flea market finds into treasures for their home; this mostly involves dragging Phil into projects that require his muscle and skill.

Speaking of Phil Rayburn, he has been entertaining people with his dry sense of humor around dinner tables and in living rooms for over fifty years—but never from stage or in print. He is the director of maintenance at a Christian camp, and spends his days plowing snow, mowing lawns, chopping firewood, fixing tractors, and unclogging toilets. He enjoys an annual trip or two to the Minnesota

Boundary Waters Canoe Area, where he and the boys are off the grid for a week at a time to fish, canoe, and do guy stuff that grosses out Michelle. He also can be found regularly with his head under the hood of a classic Jeep or an old truck of any sort. His idea of a weekend project involves replacing an engine in a vehicle, and he almost always smells of motor oil, gasoline, or wood smoke from the heater in the shop.

Michelle and Phil have been married for thirty years and have two adult sons and two daughters-in-love. Together they enjoy hiking, road trips, and reality TV shows. They live in northern Wisconsin in a one-hundred-year-old former church.

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Tune-Up Time



Chapter 1: A Novel Romance

Put away your phones, or if you're using the digital version, turn off notifications and mute your phone, then take a few minutes to talk about this chapter. Maybe you're out on a date. Maybe you're sitting by a campfire or at the kitchen table sharing a cup of coffee—well, your own *cups* of coffee more likely.

- Tell the story of your first date by sharing your memories. Take turns filling in the details. (Phil wants you to know this has to be your first date with *each other*—not your first date ever.)
- Share a humorous memory related to your first date.
- Take turns listing three things that you think are romantic. Do any overlap between the two of you? If not, take good mental notes about each other!
- Dare to go there. Discuss what you think was one of the biggest conflicts in your

marriage.

- * How did it end? Talk about it.
- * Do you still have issues to resolve? Discuss those.
- * What would you do differently if you were in that same conflict again?
- What is one sweet thing you can do for your spouse this week? Get out your phone and put a reminder in your notes or on your calendar. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 2: Fixer Upper Marriage

Make time to discuss your relationship. If you're reading this book before you are married, this is the perfect time to put together a maintenance plan for the future. Married couples, if you aren't sure where to begin with the renovations you need, making time in your calendar to sit without distraction and discuss these questions is a perfect place to start.

- Describe the craziest renovation project you have ever tackled together.
- What role does faith play in your relationship right now? If you could make a change, what would you do differently?
- If you are not yet married but preparing for marriage, list at least three ways you could establish a foundation of faith before you get married.
- If you have been divorced and are remarried, you can't change the past; letting regret consume you isn't helpful

either. You're accountable for what you do from this point forward. How could a foundation of faith make a difference in your present marriage?

- What do you think you could try that would improve your communication and your closeness to one another?
- In what ways do you think your ideals might be unrealistic?
- What is the number one thing you and your spouse argue about?
 - * What step do you need to take in order to move toward resolution for this problem?
- Name three day-to-day issues or responsibilities that you think have worn on your relationship as years pass by. After each one, list a way you might be able to renovate your thinking about it in order to have a long-lasting and committed relationship. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 3: Just Married

- Take turns listing some of the thoughtful things you did for one another when you were dating.
- Which of these do you still do now?
- What about your early relationship do you find silly now?
- If you have some of your old love letters to one another, read a few for a grin.
- For fun: what movie (old or new) do you think represents your relationship?
- If someone were to make a movie about your relationship, what would you call it?
- On a scale of 1-10, with ten being the most willing, how willing would each of you be to seek help from a counselor for your marriage? Take turns sharing your number.

- If your answers were vastly different on the previous question, without interrupting, allow for each of you to state your reasons for your answer.
- What will be your next step to work on your marriage? Will you attend a retreat together, seek a counselor, read a book, take a class? Write down your next step and sign your names to it.
- List several non-physical qualities that you each love about the other.
- List several physical qualities that you each love about the other. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 4: The Marry-Go-Round

- Discuss what makes your relationship sometimes feel like a marry-go-round.
 - * Which of these challenges do you both have in common?
 - * If you could make a change, what would be a first step to slow down “the ride?”
- What has been the hardest challenge you have had to face as a couple?
- If you have had a traumatic event that damaged your relationship, how do you feel about it now? Do you think you have worked through it and found resolution?
 - * If you still have work to do, discuss what you think your next step should be.
- Do you think you're too busy? On a scale of 1-10 with ten being the most busy and one being the least, how busy do you feel your life is right now?

- * What, if anything, would you change right now?
- Brainstorm a list of date activities that both of you would enjoy. If funds are limited, come up with free or low-cost ideas. Include some that require little effort or planning for the crazy weeks. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 5: Men Behaving Dadly

- Describe what a perfect day would look like in your marriage.
- Discuss how your marriage has changed since you had children. What was the most surprising change?
- If you could change anything about the current state of your relationship, what would you change?
- If you don't yet have children, what do you think your life will be like when you do? What do you think will change?
- Take turns listing several things that you appreciate about each other as parents. Intentionally give out compliments.
- What do you value most about your relationship with each other right now?
- Tell your spouse one thing that you really need from them right now that would help you feel more secure in your relationship as a couple and as co-parents. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 6: Your DNA Is Showing

As you discuss these statements and take next steps, it might be painful at first and produce some temporary conflict. But if you commit to the process of opening communication, your marriage can be better than ever before.

For each of the following statements, say whether you agree or disagree. Then discuss why you chose your answers. Rather than defending your own answers, listen to one another and try to rephrase what you hear your spouse saying. Agree or disagree:

- I am sometimes uncomfortable with the behavior of my spouse.
- It is hard to express my true feelings to my spouse.
- Sometimes my spouse really hurts my feelings.
- I feel as though my spouse honors and respects my family of origin.

- Our families have very different cultural (social/economic/ethnic) values.
- My spouse is too dependent on his or her family.
- I am comfortable when around my spouse's family.
- I think my spouse's family (my in-laws) value me for who I am. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 7: No Chicks in the Nest

- Describe something you've always dreamed of doing personally.
- Describe something you've always dreamed of doing as a couple.
- What are the barriers preventing you from achieving these dreams?
- What has been most difficult for you in your current season? (No kids yet, grieving over loss, no kids by choice, empty nesters, etc.)
- If you're hoping to have children but don't yet, what is something you'd like to do before you have a baby?
- What fears do you have related to parenting and your current season? (Having children, foster parenting, adoption, raising stepchildren, launching kids into the world.)
- If your nest is empty or nearly empty,

discuss the plans you have in place for the next season of your relationship. If you haven't made plans, start a dream list.

- If you could do one thing from this chapter that would help you grow closer together, which one would you do?
 - * Focus on being a team.
 - * Volunteer together.
 - * Communicate more.
 - * Grieve together.
 - * Rediscover your friendship.
 - * Nurture one another's dreams.
 - * Balance time together and with friends.
 - * Get counseling.
 - * Try a hobby together.
 - * Start a small group with other couples.
- What have you observed in your parents that you'd like to emulate when it comes to parenting or becoming empty nesters?
- What would you like to do in a different way than your parents did?
- Tell your spouse one thing you appreciate about their support during this season of your marriage. 🌀

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 8: It's All Relative

For each of the following, say whether you agree or disagree, and then discuss why you agree or disagree with the statement. Listen to one another and try to understand your spouse's point of view.

Agree or disagree:

- I feel respected by the bonus family in our life (children, in-laws, exes, siblings).
- I think our families cause friction between us.
- We have clear boundaries when it comes to making our relationship the top priority.
- I have told my family members how proud I am of my spouse.
- I think we are growing in our unity with one another.
- For parents of married children—We do well with showing love and support for the spouses of our children as they

incorporate into our family.

- For “symphony” families—We have created a loving and peaceful home where all of our children feel appreciated and accepted.

As you continue your discussion, review the rule in this chapter: your marriage comes above all other relationships.

- On a scale of 1-10, with ten being the highest, how do you rate your commitment to doing this? (You might not have the same number. Talk about how one of you might feel much more positive about this than the other does.)
- Discuss at least one of the following steps you can take to establish a principle that will help to prioritize your marriage:
 - * Establish boundaries.
 - * Keep your emotions in check.
 - * Say positive things about your spouse in front of other relatives.
 - * Commit to not complain to other relatives about each other.
 - * Don't put each other in a position to choose sides.
 - * Agree to stand up for each other.

- Establish a time in about month or so where you can talk about this step and evaluate how you're doing.
- Take a few minutes to pray together to thank God for the bonus family he has given you and ask him to teach you how to have gracious conversations and healthy interaction with family. 🙏

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 9: Trading Hobbies

- Which of your spouse's hobbies have you not tried but would be willing to try?
- Talk about which of your spouse's hobbies you have resented or made fun of.
- Think back in your experiences together and name some activities one of you did just to make the other person happy. What did you learn about each other in that experience?
- Come up with a list of ideas you could try as a couple's activity, even if only one of you is passionate about it.
- What is your most treasured memory of something you did together?
- Without help from your partner, name what you think his or her favorite hobby is.

- Let's practice appreciating things through our spouse's eyes. Explain what you think your partner loves about their favorite hobby.
 - * What emotions does it produce in them?
 - * How does it validate their interests?
 - * What special skills do they use in this hobby?
 - * What awards or accomplishments have they received in this activity? 🍷🍷

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 10: Passionate Sheet Music

This could be an interesting conversation to have in a restaurant. This would also be a perfect date night to have in a private place, on a getaway, or for a stay-home date too. Privacy allows you the comfort to talk openly without inhibition. Discuss whether or not you agree with the following statements and why:

- I am satisfied with our current frequency of lovemaking.
- I feel as if my sexual needs are fulfilled.
- I feel comfortable with my body.
- We are more emotionally intimate than ever before.

More questions for discussion:

- Describe the first time you kissed each other.
- On a scale of 0-10 with ten being the highest, how important is non-sexual touch and affection to you in your relationship? (Holding hands, hugging, sitting close, etc.)

- When you engage in non-sexual touch or affection with each other, what does that communicate to you?
- What are some of your biggest obstacles when it comes to sex?
- What kills the mood for you like nothing else?
- What turns you on more than anything else? 🌀

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 11: Sole Mates for Life

- Describe which of these you struggle with the most: apathy, boredom, comfort.
- Discuss how you would define "soul mates."
- Make a list of ten to twenty date ideas that you could realistically do (that fit with your time and budget).
 - * Write these on slips of paper and put them in a jar that you can draw from when you need an idea.
 - * For fun, decide that you will do whichever one you draw.
- Fill in the blank. When I get angry, I tend to _____.
- Describe an alternate way to react when you're angry that could improve the health of your marriage.

- Agree or disagree: I'll do anything to avoid potential conflicts with my spouse. Discuss how you think your reaction affects your relationship for good or bad.
- Agree or disagree: I sometimes feel apathetic about our relationship, and I don't feel like trying to fix it. Discuss your responses.
- Agree or disagree: I am bored in our relationship. Discuss a strategy to move past boredom.
- Agree or disagree: Our relationship is in a comfort zone, and I long for some variety. Discuss what this means for you as a couple.
- Agree or disagree: I love spending time together.
 - * My favorite thing to do with my spouse is_____.
 - * If we could do one new thing together, it would be_____.

- Which one of you is the most spontaneous in your relationship? Make a plan for how you can swap roles within the next week:
 - * For the one who is more spontaneous, plan out a date your spouse would appreciate and schedule it waaaay ahead (which, for you, probably means two days ahead).
 - * For the one who is scheduled and buttoned up, surprise your spouse by agreeing to an unplanned activity. Drop everything and just have fun. 🥳

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 12: Laughter, the Language of Harmony

- Which type of humor do you think is your spouse's top language: physical, bodily, self-deprecating, wordplay, surreal, or dark?
- Describe something that makes your spouse laugh.
- What movie do you find funny, and you could watch it over and over again?
- Share a funny experience that you have never shared with your spouse before. (Maybe skip it if it's about an ex.)
- Describe a time when you were hurt by something your spouse thought was funny. Allow for open sharing without defending or giving a rebuttal. If your spouse was hurt, the pain was real.

- Try to remember a time when you both laughed so hard together you lost your composure. Describe as many details as you can remember. What made it funny?
- Describe a typical scenario in your relationship where one of you might use humor inappropriately to cope. Discuss a better way to respond that would lead to progress and growth.
- Describe a typical scenario in your relationship where humor could be helpful. Talk about ways that humor could ease tension and help you relax in the midst of conflict. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 13: Sprints and Spiritual Hurdles

- List all the ways you can think of where your spiritual journeys are similar. (Church denomination, theology, church attendance, etc.)
- List the differences in your spiritual journeys. (Baptism, church attendance, denomination, etc.)
- Use a stopwatch on your phone and give three minutes for each of you to describe a short summary of your journey of faith. Include how you came to know Christ.
- Take turns describing how you think God has changed your personal faith and spiritual maturity the most since you got married.

- Ask the question of each other: how can I support and encourage you in your spiritual race? Share two or three things.
- Tell your spouse what you are most inspired by in their spiritual growth process. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 14: We Didn't See That Coming

- List some of the qualities about each other that you think makes you a great team.
- Discuss what you think would make you even better prepared to be a team that is ready to face a crisis together.
- Discuss what you think the most difficult part of a season of "in sickness and in health" would be (or already is) for you.
- What would you do together if you knew that one of you only had a year to live?
- What part about growing older together scares you?
- What part of growing older together makes you happy?
- Share briefly about another couple who modeled "in sickness and in health" well for you and how it inspires you.
- What is the best part about being together for the long haul? 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 15: I Thought I Found True Love

- Finish these statements by saying them to each other:
 - * I feel genuinely loved when you _____.
 - * I feel appreciated when you _____.
- If you think you have drifted apart as a couple, discuss what you think was the starting point of the problem.
- Practice forgiveness. Take turns sharing one wrong from your spouse that you have found it hard to forgive and that keeps you from freely expressing your love. This is something that is not yet resolved, and not something you have already worked through and forgiven.
 - * As your partner shares, listen without giving excuses.
 - * After your partner shares, give a short statement that acknowledges

how your actions hurt them. Again, without excuses or making them feel to blame. Use a statement such as, "I did _____, and that caused you to feel _____."

- * Give an apology that doesn't contain any "if" statements such as, "if I hurt you," or "if you feel this way." Instead, take ownership for the hurt that is real and ask for forgiveness with sincerity. Example: "I apologize for not being truthful about where I was going, and I acknowledge that it violated our trust and caused pain to you, damaging our relationship. Will you forgive me for my wrong?"
- * Follow up your spouse's request for forgiveness with a statement that says something like, "I receive your apology and I forgive you. I release you from blame and won't hold this against you, and I choose to pursue restoration and love in our relationship."

- If you are working at building back trust in your relationship, identify which step from this chapter in the section titled "Building Trust and Love" would be an appropriate next step for you as a couple:
 - * Commit to break off the affair.
 - * Devote yourselves to repentance, forgiving, and rebuilding.
 - * Earn back trust.
 - * Be honest with each other.
 - * Sacrifice.
 - * Seek counseling. 🔄

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 16: One Plus One Equals One

- Watch your wedding video together or go through your photo album together. Describe how you thought about marriage then and what it means to you now.
- Discuss how you think a contract and a covenant are different.
 - * Which one do you think best represents how you would describe your marriage right now?
 - * How could you commit or recommit to your covenant with one another and with God?
- Read your wedding vows to one another or talk out the details for planning a small ceremony to renew your commitment.
- Take turns describing where you would like to see your relationship in five years, ten years, and twenty years from now.

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Our relationship is solid on the foundation of our shared faith in Jesus Christ.
 - * Explain why you agree or disagree.
 - * What would you like to change in your relationship if you disagree with the statement right now?
 - * Discuss and come to an agreement on what your next step will be regarding growing your foundation in Jesus Christ. ↻

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 17: More Give and Less Take

- Discuss the difference between each of you giving 50 percent and taking 50 percent versus each of you giving 100 percent in your relationship.
 - * What do you think it would change in your marriage if you both adopted the 100-percent mindset?
- Name one area in your relationship where you feel like you're a taker and could become more of a giver.
- Of the list of things to give up in this chapter, which one resonates most with you?
 - * Give up being right.
 - * Give up expecting perfection.
 - * Give up comparing to others.
 - * Give up complaining about your spouse.

- * Give up expecting the worst.
- * Give up feeling sorry for yourself.
- Discuss where you think your relationship is in regard to being in tune with each other. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current state of unity as a couple, where one is the least in tune and ten is the most in tune?
 - * What do you think causes the most disharmony between you?
 - * Discuss together what your next step will be to work on harmony with each other.
- Take a few minutes to each create a list of five ways you could be more giving to your spouse. Then read your lists to each other. (This exercise is about focusing completely on how you can be more giving *for* each other, versus asking for something *from* each other.)
- Finish your discussion by sharing two or three ways your spouse is generous with their giving to you and express appreciation for that. 🥰

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 18: For Better or for Hearse

- If you could write something funny for your own headstone, what would you want it to say about you?
- Now change it up and share what funny thing you would write about your spouse.
- Identify one of these five things that gets in your own way the most (it might be different for each of you): pride, stubbornness, busyness, complacency, and laziness.
- Discuss how you think your personal actions have affected your relationship for better or worse.
- Take turns listing two or three things you used to do for your spouse that you no longer do anymore. Take care in how you respond to one another's statements so there is no shaming or accusing. This is about recognizing our own responsibility in loving and serving our spouse.

- Reminisce about a time in your marriage when you feel your “for better or for worse” vow was tested the most.
 - * What made you stronger during that experience?
 - * What shook your marriage bond during that time?
- Write a living eulogy about your spouse. Grab paper and a pen for each of you and take five or ten minutes to write out what you would say in front of a crowd about your husband or wife. Then, read each of your eulogies aloud together.
 - * If you don't want to write it out, each record a video on your phone and then play them for each other. 🎥🎥

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 19: The Aroma of Hope

- Warm up with a little fun: What is a scent or odor most people can't stand that you actually like?
- Describe a memory of a season in your relationship where you weren't sure if you were going to make it as a couple (maybe you're in one now). What was it that gave you enough hope to keep trying?
- Practice getting to the truth. Grab a notecard, a scrap of paper, or a napkin for each of you. Take a minute to think about what you need to acknowledge in your relationship that you've tried to pretend isn't a problem. Write one short statement that describes what it is.
 - * Now take turns reading what you wrote.
 - * Discuss a next step for how you're going to work on that issue together.

- There is no computer that can interpret what your spouse is feeling when he or she is upset. Discuss ways you can each support one another without trying to fix each other. List specific actions or words that help each of you to feel understood and validated when you're upset.
- Discuss ways you could both rely on God's Word more individually and as a couple. Make a plan for how you are going to read and discuss the Bible on a more regular basis together. When will you do it? Where? How? ↻

Tune-Up Time



Chapter 20: Happily Ever After

- When you were single, what made you want to be married?
 - * How has being married fulfilled this desire?
 - * How has it not fulfilled this desire?
- What has marriage revealed about your own rough edges that needed some work? What was surprising about this for you?
- Name one weakness (your own) that has been exposed during the course of your marriage. Listen to each other without critique as you share your own weakness. What will you do in the next two weeks to begin work on this weakness? Declare it out loud to your spouse as your commitment.
- Discuss the idea of how marriage can make you more like God. How does this

contrast with the idea of expecting your marriage to make you happy?

- Talk about what you think of the idea of pursuing God more and letting happiness trail after that as a benefit rather than a goal.
- Take a few minutes to each write out a paragraph or two about where you see your marriage in the next five to ten years. Write it as if you already are that couple.
 - * Now share what you wrote with one another, and together identify three priorities you'll pursue as action steps as a result of reading this book. 🌀