

How to Use This Book

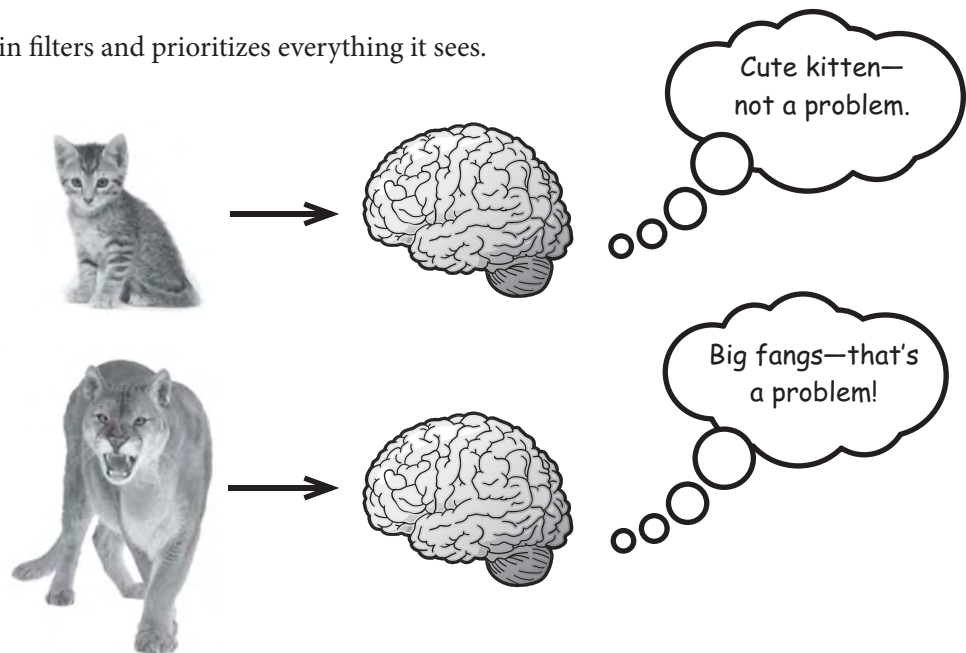
You've probably noticed that this book is different from most other books at the bookstore. You may even be wondering exactly what to think about it.

We'll grant you that it's not your ordinary book on relationships. Yes, it has a lot of content that summarizes what the Bible says about marriage, but it's presented in a completely different way.

Why?

There's been a lot of research done in the last few years on how people learn. There's also been a lot of work done on what actually leads to changes in behavior.

You see, your brain filters and prioritizes everything it sees.



Your brain automatically helps you by keeping low-priority items from cluttering your thinking. Unfortunately, studies show that the text of traditional books is usually treated as low-priority by your mind. It's really difficult to overcome the fact that your brain says boring, old text just must not be that important. That means you have to work extra hard to learn and apply information presented in the traditional way.

So we decided to do something different. We've used this research to design this book for maximum impact. We wanted you to not only understand the ideas in the book, but also put them into action. We learned what kicks your brain into gear and designed the book based on these ideas.

What are the key design features we use and why are they important?

We integrate images to communicate ideas.

Studies have shown that images lead to up to 89 percent improvement in recall and transfer. We want the ideas in this book to be *understandable* and *memorable*. You'll also see that the graphics we've included are not just added to the book. **They're as much a part of the "text" as the text.**



We help you to think—really think.

We try to *motivate*, *encourage*, *chide*, *cajole*—and several other verbs—to get you to really consider how these ideas apply to your life. That's the whole purpose, right? But we keep it fun. You'll find discussion questions, puzzles, fill-in-the-blank, rating scales, and other activities all designed **to take your reading beyond the surface.**

We write in a conversational style.


If you're an English professor, watch out. Some of our sentences in this book aren't complete. Like this. That's because studies show up to **40 percent better retention** from a *conversational tone* than formal writing. So we tell *stories* instead of *lecture*. And while we take the subject of marriage very seriously, we try not to take ourselves too seriously.

We use true stories.

People learn best from seeing how real people deal with real problems. We had some great couples open their lives to us so we could tell you their stories. We know some of these will echo your experience in ways that are rich and real.

We've made the applications believable and achievable.

You'll notice a bunch of tiny, bite-sized “next steps” in this book (like the sample “connection point” below). That's because we know that *if we can get you moving* in the right direction, chances are *you will keep moving*. And if you need to turn around from where you are headed now, **it's a lot easier to do that with a small step than with a giant leap.**

 **Connection Point**

How much honesty is there in your communication today compared to five years ago?

Him: Much Less Honesty Less Honesty Honesty More Honesty Much More Honesty

Her: Much Less Honesty Less Honesty Honesty More Honesty Much More Honesty

We write so you can discuss this book with other couples

You'll find many places in the book where we ask you to share your thoughts with your spouse, and then with a group. If possible, find some friends and work through this book together. Life's too short to go it alone. If you're a group leader, be sure to check out our Leader's Guide at the back of the book.

We speak to your heart.

We know that you'll **remember and act on things that you care about**. So we speak to your emotions—with *humor*, elements of *surprise*, appeals to your *curiosity*, and *stories* of real people.

We know change isn't easy.

There are no formulas for a perfect marriage. The Marriage Prayer isn't a mantra you can repeat to make everything turn out okay. We offer this book as a part of the process of change that God wants to work in your heart.

We include Scripture.

The best writing and insights in the world have no inherent power to change a human heart. God promises His word will transform lives. So most of the time when we reference a verse we include the entire text as well. If you skip some stuff in this book, don't skip the Scripture.

In addition, this material has been taught on numerous occasions to groups of men and women, and we also had groups field-test the presentation. They helped us refine the content and the layout so that it will be more effective for you. We are grateful to our publishers for being willing to experiment with something new and different.

By the way, you and your spouse can share this book. We'll ask you to grab some scratch paper a few times, but other than that it won't be a problem. We hope you enjoy the new format, but more than that, we pray God will use it to help grow your marriage.

Finally, we also owe a debt of gratitude to Kathy Sierra and Bert Bates, the creators of the Head First series of books. The lessons learned from these leaders informed much of the learning theory we have implemented in this book.

We've had a blast working on this book. It's been great to talk to so many couples and hear all that God has done in their lives. We consider it a privilege that you are investing your time and energy to have a better marriage! It's a joy to be on the journey with you. Thanks for reading, and may God bless your marriage.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Bert Bates' and the signature on the right is 'David Delk'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.