"At Home Marriage Preparation Course"

Save \$32.50 on your marriage license and invest in your marital happiness.



Sometimes it is a great joy just to listen to someone we love talking to." Vincent McNabb

http://www.abeautifulceremony.net

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

How did you learn to ride a bike? You didn't do it through listening to a lecture on "how to ride a bike."

Someone did give you some basic instruction & a little support, then you started trying - practicing until you learned how.

It took effort, and you got a few scrapes along the way, but you wouldn't describe it as "work" – learning this way was fun.

You were highly motivated from within to succeed – so excited about the benefits of success that you kept on until you could do it.

And it was so much fun, you just kept on using your newly learned skill every day.

The same principles can hold for marriage preparation.

For a long time, I said to couples, "You've got to work at your marriage!" Their faces said it all: "I work all week on my job, and now you tell me I have to come home and *work* on my marriage?"

It's true that a relationship requires attention. That's what you're doing by taking this course.

It's true too that conflicts arise and have to be resolved. This course can help you with that too.

Persistence & overcoming challenges are part of making a marriage great. (Please note: any couple who *does not* believe this should spend a lot of extra time talking about their expectations of marriage).

However, I've become convinced of some other things as well.

One, marriage is supposed to be fun.

Two, if couples don't lose sight of that, and continue to have fun, many of the problems that might have come about simply won't.

This is one place where "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is very true.

Three, a lot of people aren't going to continue to grow in a relationship if it is all work and no play.

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That's why this course is bent toward having fun. Actually, it is designed on current learning theory (how people best learn).

- ? People learn when learning is *self-directed and self-motivated*.
- ? People learn when they are *actively involved* in the learning process.
- ? People learn when they are *having fun*.

This course incorporates all three elements.

<u>"You can tell people what they need to know very fast.</u> <u>But, they will forget what you tell them even faster.</u> <u>People are more likely to understand what they figure out for themselves</u> <u>than what you figure out for them."</u>

(From intro to <u>101 Ways to Make Training Active</u>, by Mel Silberman)

COURSE CONTENT

The bulk of this course is composed of *5 sections*, with an exercise or exercises in each section.

FIRST SECTION

FUN Learning Activities provide a series of "fun" things you can "do" to learn about yourselves and marriage. You may choose 2 or 3, or as many as you wish that look like fun and would be helpful to you.

SECOND SECTION

What Do We Need to Talk About Now is very important. Here you'll find 12 key relationship components.

Follow the instructions to discover areas you especially need to discuss right now.

Many couples have told me that while they consider themselves very good communicators, the process of going through these 12 areas has brought out some items they had overlooked.

THIRD SECTION

Asking & Listening gives you both an opportunity to ask for what you want and to practice listening. Both of these skills are essential for a strong marriage.

FOURTH SECTION

I Feel Love By You When You... is a very positive activity you'll enjoy.

FIFTH SECTION

Two more optional exercises you may choose to do.

After the last section, there is a page listing some additional resources for **stepfamilies**. Stepfamilies have some special challenges. All the more reason to make sure there is fun in your marriage and family.

I strongly encourage you to make use of some of the resources listed.

The last page is <u>for Florida residents who wish to save \$32.50</u> on their marriage license.

-Complete the verification and mail to me, or email your responses.

-I then can mail you the official government completion certificate.

-You take this certificate when you get your license to receive the discount.

Though it wouldn't hurt, you don't have to do everything in this course.

Choose the activities that look like are the most helpful to you.

The next page contains some general principles for good communication and conflict resolution. It would be a good idea to review these before moving onto the exercises.

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people" Victor Borge

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Before Starting Your Couple Exercises Review the Following Principles on Communication and Conflict Resolution

- 1. **Communication takes time.** Commit to take the time now & throughout your marriage to communicate. It is the lifeblood of your relationship.
- 2. **Truly listen to each other, without judgment.** Test your understanding by repeating back in your own words what you hear your partner say.
- 3. Honestly express your thoughts & feelings to your partner. On the other side, be ready to accept what your partner says.
- 4. **Remember that every relationship has conflicts.** To start with *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus!* When you have a conflict:

<u>Peal with it</u>. Often resolving differences is a process over a period of time. But unresolved issues do not go away. Resentments can build over the years.

<u>Control your anger</u>. Anger & other defensive tactics shut off communication. You may need to take a walk & delay discussing something. But do come back to it.

<u>Clearly define the problem</u>. Specify how each of you may contribute to the problem, or difficulty in resolving the issue.

<u>Prainstorm possible solutions</u>. Decide, and if necessary, *negotiate* a mutually agreeable solution. Then put it to the test.

<u>Stay committed</u>. In most cases, people can resolve their differences. When you do, it will give you confidence that problems don't have to defeat you. Your relationship will be stronger & you will feel more secure in it.

5. Seek outside help if needed. If you hit a snag, sometimes having a third party to give feedback and direction can be helpful. Contact a minister or other trained helper for guidance.

Section One TWO FUN LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Just go over the list below and pick out 2 or 3, or as many you want.

ROLE MODELS

Each of you describes a person or persons whom you consider to be a great father, or mother, or husband or wife. Of course, explain your choices...what makes them great in your estimation.

GIVE ME A HAND

One of you holds out your hand. The other person describes the hand from their vantage point. Now, you describe the same hand. Note how your descriptions are the same & how they are different. Which one of you is right? Of course, you're both right, your just looking at it from different perspectives. Is there a subject you've been discussing where there is no right or wrong? How does remembering this principle of "perspective" help in a marriage? What are some areas in which men and women have different perspectives?

RESEARCH 101

Does this sound too much like going to school? No need to go to the library for this research though. Each of you think of someone you know who has a successful marriage...not just long, but what you consider a good marriage. Each of you go separately & talk to the husband or wife and ask them about their marriage (your asking will be compliment to them). Come back together and compare notes. What did you learn about marriage from your research?

STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES

Can each of you think of a stupid argument you've heard (maybe you were in it). What made it stupid? Why do you think it became an argument? How could it have been avoided? Can't think of one? A husband was sitting in front of his TV eating from a bag of LAYS potato chips when he pulled from the bag the biggest potato chip you've ever seen in your life. He starts holding it in the air, waving it around and bragging as if he had made the chip himself. All is fine until his wife reaches over and crunches his potato chip! He got mad and an argument followed. Can you top this one? Email me your stupid argument (names always withheld to protect the guilty).

"If you don't learn to laugh at troubles, you won't have anything to laugh at when you grow old" Edward W. Howe

WATCH A MOVIE

Can you believe you can do marriage preparation watching a movie? Overhearing (and over-watching) others can be a great learning tool. Rent the movie *The Story of Us* starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Bruce Willis. Here's a relationship that gets into a lot of trouble. After the movie, discuss what went wrong and how they could have prevented things going so bad. (This movie is Rated R)

BE AN ARTIST

Some people like to draw. Whether you are good at it or not, this can be an interesting exercise. Each of you, separately, draw a picture of what you believe a family to be. Compare pictures and explain what you've drawn. If you're not an artist your explanation may be essential!

TAKE A FIELDTRIP

Remember taking fieldtrips in school? Now that was a fun way to learn. Go to the mall or a restaurant (she says, "that sounds like fun!") and observe couples. How do couples treat each other? Are they in love? Can you really tell by looking? This is not meant to judge people that we don't really know, but is a way of exploring your own notions of marriage. Your observations and answers will say a lot about your expectations for marriage (for instance, should couples show affection in public?)

TRY ON A PAIR OF NEW SHOES

Put yourself in the other person's shoes. (Ladies, if he literally wants to wear your clothes, you may want to get him help). Be the other person and describe what your day is like.

YOU ARE THE COUNSELOR

Imagine that you've been married for ten years. You're a little older, a littler wiser. What would you say to:

- 1. A young couple engaged to be married
- 2. A couple at the end of their first year of marriage
- 3. A couple in conflict and considering a divorce

"A friend is one who knows you and loves you just the same" Elbert Hubbard

MY WONDERFUL UNCLE LEFT ME A MILLION DOLLARS

It's fun to dream, and dreams say a lot about us & what's important to us. Have fun imagining that someone left you a lot of money. What would you do?

<u>TOYS – R – US</u>

Like toys? Which of the following toys illustrates what marriage is like to you? Slinky - Silly Putty - Yo-yo – Puzzle - Other:

MY BEST VACATION

Each of you describe your very best vacation and tell what made it so great.

I KNOW ONE WHEN I SEE ONE

Describe a really bad marriage that you are aware of. What makes it bad? Where did it go wrong? How will yours be different?

2-WAY LEARNING

What is something each of you knows a lot about that the other knows little about. Take time to listen and learn from each other.

TALK TO ME LIKE THIS

Take a free, short personality test at <u>WWW.personalitytype.com/quiz.htm/</u> Once each of you has taken the test, you can click on a button that tells you the most effective way to communicate to your spouse, given their personality type. Talk about your discoveries.

Can you think of a fun learning activity you'd like to share with other couples? Email it to me and maybe hundreds of couples will benefit from your idea. <u>RevKev@abeautifulceremony.net</u>

> "The definition of a beautiful woman is one who loves me." Sloan Wilson

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Section Two WHAT WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT NOW

PURPOSE: There are a number of components that impact couple relationships. Twelve components include:

- (1) communication
- (2) resolving conflicts
- (3) expectations of marriage
- (4) money matters
- (5) recreational activities
- (6) children & parenting
- (7) family & friends
- (8) husband / wife roles
- (9) family backgrounds
- (10) religious views & practices
- (11) personality concerns
- (12) the sexual relationship.

While you may have discussed many of these areas in your courting, the following exercise provides an organized approach to help you focus on the most important things you need to talk about right now.

DO THIS: On the following pages:

(1) Read through the questions and statements in each of the 12 relationship areas. *Place a check mark beside each question or statement you believe you need to discuss together now.*

(2) Each of you should place the letter "N" beside three of the twelve relationship components you consider to be your greatest needs right now. Don't be discouraged to recognize that you have relationship needs. All couples do. You will also find it interesting to see if you both marked the same areas as needs, or if there are some differences in your perceptions. Discuss your reasons for marking a component as a need.

NOTICE! This is a fun & helpful exercise.

Should you hit some bumpy spots, remember to practice good communication principles like these:

◆Let your partner to be honest with you. You don't have to like or agree with what you hear, but negative reactions cause your partner to shut down. These reactions could include defensiveness, anger, put-downs, and threats.

◆ Listen. Give your partner the time they need to express their viewpoint & seek to truly understand. Ask questions, & put in your own words what you hear said.

◆ Speak to each other in a normal tone of voice.

♥ Remember the goal is to strengthen your relationship. This will enable you to work together toward solutions.

Go to the next page for the exercise \mathbb{R}

"What we need to talk about now" Exercise

Men $\mathbf{\ddot{o}}$ to the left & ladies to the right questions or statements you believe you need to discuss. Also place the letter "N" beside three of the twelve relationship areas you consider to be your greatest relationship needs right now.

Communication . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

The amount of time we have to talk Differences in our communication styles What I/you do when we have trouble communicating The topic hardest for me to discuss with you is: My/your ability openly & fully express ourselves My/your tendency to use put-downs My/your lack of being a good listener My/your honesty My/your tendency to become quiet My/your tendency to interrupt My/your tendency to dominate the conversation My/your lack of interest in what I say What we talk about most of the time Our acceptance (or lack) of what one of us says to the other Becoming negative in our communication Keeping secrets Our need to find someone to help us learn to communicate better

Resolving Conflicts . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

Our general ability to resolve conflicts
My/your tendency to give in too quickly
My/your need to be right & get our way
My/your tendency to say one thing, then do another
My/your getting upset over trivial things
My/your lack of taking issues seriously enough
My/your not saying enough
My/your talking too much & not listening
My/your avoiding dealing with conflict
My/your ability to share feelings/thoughts
My/your ability to accept other's feelings/thoughts
Our unresolved issue of:
An issue we have not discussed is:

Continue Resolving Conflicts Area \rightarrow

Continuation of **Resolving Conflicts** . . .

My/your getting angry too much My/your saying hurtful things Our need to find someone to help us learn to resolve conflicts Who has to have the last word Will we ever discuss our conflicts with friends/family members Will we ever discuss our differences in public or in front of our children Our ability to compromise

Expectations in Marriage . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

Your expectations of our marriage My expectations of our marriage Do you expect me to meet all your needs What happens if unexpected problems come our way What do we believe about commitment in marriage Are you going to try to change me How we view romantic love in a marriage

Money Matters Questions . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

Our expenses & can we pay the bills Who will "keep the books." When & for what will we borrow money Are we going to keep a budget Will we have credit cards & for what use Current debts one or both of us have Will both us work now, or later Would we move if one of us received an offer of better pay Will we have separate checking and/or savings accounts Each others spending habits When do we need to consult with each other before spending money How much of our income will we save What we will save for Would we ever lend money to a friend/family member Would we ever borrow money from a friend/family member Will we shop for discounts How much will we spend on fun stuff How important should money be in our thinking & lives

Next area \rightarrow

Recreational Activities . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

Children & Parenting . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

Birth control When we will have children How many children we will have & spacing How we will nurture our children How we will discipline our children Who will discipline our children Private, public, or home schools for our children The role of the father The role of the father If we discover we can't have children, what then Value we'll place on spending time with our children Value we'll place on showing affection to our children Value we'll place on family mealtimes Will one parent always be home with the children How parenting will affect our marriage

Friends & Family . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

How supportive our friends/family are of our marriage How your family feels about me How my family feels about you The time you spend with your family/friends Family members that nose into our business

Continue Family & Friends Area \rightarrow

Continuation of Friends & Family . . .

A family member/friend of yours that concerns me is: ______ A family member/friend of yours that I really like is: ______ How close/far away we'll live from our parents Will we accept/ask for financial help from our parents How we will decide where to go for Christmas How you speak to/treat my family What happens if one of our parents needs special care

Roles . . . I believe we need to talk about . . .

Will we both work outside the home Our division of labor at home How we will make major decisions My/your role as father My/your role as mother Who will keep up with the money Who will keep up with the money Who will do the yard work Who will keep the house clean Who will help children with homework Who will discipline the children

Family Background Similarities/Differences . . . I believe we need to talk about...

How our families expressed love to each other How much time our families spent together/apart How decisions were made How children were disciplined Who disciplined the children How conflicts were handled Who did what (roles) The stability of our parent's marriages How holidays & birthdays were celebrated What we did for vacations What we did on weeknights The time our parents spent together alone The way children were taught about money

Continue Family Background Area \rightarrow

Continuation of Family Background Similarities & Differences . . .

How crises were handled The place of religious faith in my/your family The person I like most in my/your family is: ______ The person I like least in my/your family is: ______ Family secrets What we can learn from our families, good or bad

Religious Values / Practices . . . I believe we need to talk about. . . .

Our views on the importance of spiritual life The role of our spiritual practices in our relationship How our faith will help us deal with problems How active we will be in a church What I/you believe about ______A non-negotiable belief/practice for me is ______A non-negotiable belief/practice for me is _______A non-negotiable belief/practice f

Personality Concerns . . . I believe we need to talk about. . .

My/your stubbornness My/your temper My/your honesty My/your jealousy My/your moodiness My/your bad habits My/your domineering behavior My/your negativity My/your _____

Next Area \rightarrow

Sexual Relationship . . . I believe we need to talk about. . .

Your expectations of me sexually What I need from you sexually Sexual acts I am not comfortable with Amount of affection in our relationship Our method of birth control Previous sexual experiences and/or abuse My comfort level in talking to you about sex How often we will make love Concerns or fears I have about sex What sex means to our relationship Male / female viewpoints in regards to sex How I feel about my body/sexual attractiveness Using sex as a punishment or reward Should the man always initiate sex Can we be affectionate without sex

"These are some other things I'd like for us to discuss that were not listed anywhere above"

His:

Hers:

Section Three ASKING AND LISTENING

PURPOSE: Husbands & wives need to both ask for what they want and listen to their mate ask for what they want.

We all have needs and there is nothing wrong with wanting those needs met.

But it must go ways for a healthy relationship. Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition, rather both give 100%.

The following exercise will give you both practice in assertively asking for what you want and in listening to what your partner wants & needs.

DO THIS: Separately, each of you look over the list on the next page.

Guys, to the left, **rate from 1 to 3** how important each item is to you ("1" is of lesser importance & "3" is of greater importance). Ladies, do your rating to the right. Whoever goes first, the next one should cover the responses of their partner . . . don't get ahead of yourselves.

There is a blank at the end for "other" if there is something else you think of that's important to you.

When both are finished, discuss your 3's & then others as you wish.

NOTICE! As you share your responses:

◆ Listen carefully to your partner as they express their needs and why these are so important to them.

◆This is not meant as an opportunity to make selfish demands.

◆Be realistic in your expectations and be willing to compromise in some areas.

"The real test of friendship is: can you literally do nothing with the other person? Can you enjoy those moments of life that are utterly simple?" Eugene Kennedy

Go to the next page for the exercise \rightarrow

Your "Asking & Listening" Exercise

See instructions on previous page

 Spend most of your free time with me	
 Let me make my own decisions	
 Change a personal habit if it bothers me	
 Always tell me what you are thinking	
 Discuss with me before spending money	
 Join in with me in things I like to do	
 Go shopping with me	
 Have sex with me whenever I want	
 Kiss me every day	
 Show / don't show affection to me in public	
 You take care of birth control	
 Have no contact with former girl/boyfriends	
 I'd like to spend regular time with my parents	
 Both of us be involved in religious activities	
 Speak about me & to me with respect in public	
 Remember special days with presents	
 Call if you are running late	
 Clean up your own messes	
 Throw away old love letters	
 5	
 Have good personal hygiene	
 Talk to me face to face daily	
 Always tell me what's bothering you	
 Compliment me often	
 Keep the house clean	
 Keep yourself attractive	
 Be home in the evenings	
 Help with dinner	
 Make me feel better when I'm do	
 Take care of me when I'm sick	
 Support me in my dreams	
 Plan fun dates for us	
 Be nice to my family	
 Other:	

Section Four I FEEL LOVED BY YOU WHEN YOU . . .

PURPOSE: It's important to keep your relationship positive & loving.

This exercise further helps you to express to your partner how you are made to feel cared for.

This keeps your partner from having to guess (and maybe guessing wrong) about what you appreciate most.

DO THIS: Each of you complete the statement "I feel loved by you when you..." on the next page.

Again, whoever goes first the next one covers the other's responses.

Write down **between 3-5** caring things your partner can do.

Once you've both written down your responses, share your list with your partner.

Discuss and explain if necessary, but most importantly do the things your partner has listed . . . and enjoy! **NOTICE!** As you write down your responses apply these principles:

♦ Keep it positive. Don't write, "I feel loved when you don't nag me."

Instead, "I feel loved when you remember to call me during the day" or "I feel loved when you tell me you love me."

♦ Make the cost of the behavior free or inexpensive.

Not "I feel loved when you buy me jewelry" but, "I feel loved when you rub my back" or "I feel loved when you bring me a romantic card"

◆ Choose something that can happen every day or with some regular frequency.

"I feel loved when you kiss me hello and/or good-bye" or *"I feel loved when you compliment me on my appearance."*

Go to the next page for the exercise $\ensuremath{\mathbb{R}}$

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"I feel loved by you when you . . . " Exercise

"His"

I feel loved by you when you . . .

1	 	
3. <u>-</u>	 	
4	 	
5. <u>-</u>	 	

"Hers"

I feel loved by you when you . . .

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

A diplomat is a man who always remembers a woman's birthday but never her age"

"Women like silent men. They think they are listening."

Online at: <u>http://abeautifulceremony.net</u>

Section Five OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

A. Read these Bible passages & discuss together each one's meaning to your marriage:

- 1. Serving Each Other (Matthew 7:12; Philippians 2:1-8; I Corinthians 10:24)
- 2. Honesty (Ephesians 4:25 / Colossians 3:9)
- 3. Christ's love as the model for marital love (Ephesians 5:21-33)
- 4. Positive communications (Ephesians 4:29)
- 5. Dealing with unexpected problems (Romans 8:28 / Jeremiah 29:11)
- 6. God's design for marriage (Genesis 2:18-25)
- 7. Forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32 / Matthew 18:21-35)
- 8. The Bible's description of love (I Corinthians 13)
- 9. Sexual needs (I Corinthians 7;1-5)
- 10. Parenting (Ephesians 6:1-4)
- 11. Money & priorities (I Timothy 6:10; Philippians 4:11-12; Matthew 6:33-34)
- 12. Sources of conflicts (James 4:1; Proverbs 15:1)

B. Willard F. Harley, Jr. in his book *His Needs*, *Her Needs*, identifies what he believes are the top five needs of men and the top five needs of women. See if you would rate your needs the same, and discuss with each other what these needs mean to you.

HIS NEEDS:

HER NEEDS:

- 1. Sexual Fulfillment
- 2. Recreational Companionship
- 3. An Attractive Spouse
- 4. Peace and Quiet
- 5. Admiration From Her

- 1. Affection
- 2. Communication
- 3. Openness & Honesty
- 4. Financial Support
- 5. Family Commitment: A Good Father

RESOURCES FOR STEPFAMILIES

There can be special challenges for stepfamilies . . There are however a number of excellent resources available.

If you are becoming a stepfamily, I urge you to make use of some these materials. Listed below are a number of websites to get you started.

If you do not have Internet access, visit a bookstore and look for resources in the family section.

?The Blended Family Ministry - <u>http://www.blendedfamilyministry.com</u> / Resources from Edward & Sharon Douglas, authors of *The Blended Family:* Achieving Peace and Harmony in the Christian Home

? **Stepfamily Association of America** – <u>http://www.saafamilies.org</u> / A national, non-profit organization that sells a variety of books and materials for families and professionals.

?Family Medallion – <u>http://www.familymedallion.com</u> / These medallions and pendants are often used as gifts to the children in the marriage ceremony. **'A Beautiful Ceremony**' can purchase these gifts at a discount. We also have a wide varity of 'Blended Family Vows" for you to choose from.

?Your Stepfamily (Magazine) – <u>http://www.yourstepfamily.com</u> / Bi-monthly magazine for dads, moms, & kids to help them evolve as a stepfamily

?Stepdads.com - <u>http://www.stepdads.com</u> /

?Stepfamily information – <u>http://stepfamilyinfo.org</u> / Wealth of info including an 8-module remarriage preparation course

?The Family Law Advisor – <u>http://www.divorcenet.com</u> Provides advice & post-divorce resources by state

?Stepfamily Services – <u>http://stepfamilyservices.com</u>

?Successful Stepfamilies – <u>http://successfulstepfamilies.com</u> Offers Christian based book and video resources

Online at: <u>http://abeautifulceremony.net</u>

VERIFCATION OF COMPLETION OF THE AT-HOME MARRIAGE PREPARATION COURSE

? To receive your Certificate of Completion, complete this page & send to me by mail or email. Your responses below are part of your learning process, as well as confirming your course work.

1. Something I learned about *us* during this course:

He said:

She said:

2. Something I learned about *me* during this course:

He said:

She said:

3. This course was helpful to us in this way:

4. This course could be improved in this way:

? Please include the following information to receive your completion certificate by mail:

Groom's name/address:

Bride's name/address: _____

Where to mail the certificate:

Total time spent on the course: ______ (you must spend at least 4 hrs. in the course to receive a certificate of completion) Date completed:

(must be within one year of applying for your marriage license)

Send responses to me by email at **revkev@abeautifulceremony.net** Or by mail to: **Rev. Kevin Knox** 1369 Century Oak Dr. Ocoee, FI. 34761

A very special thanks to my friend and colleague Ralph Griggs who authored and designed most of this marriage preparation course. This study course came about as a result of his own Masters and Doctrinal studies.

I'm deeply indebted to him for allowing me to offer this course at an even lower fee than what he charges his participants in Tennessee.

It's my genuine hope that your marriage is enriched as a result of completing this course!



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