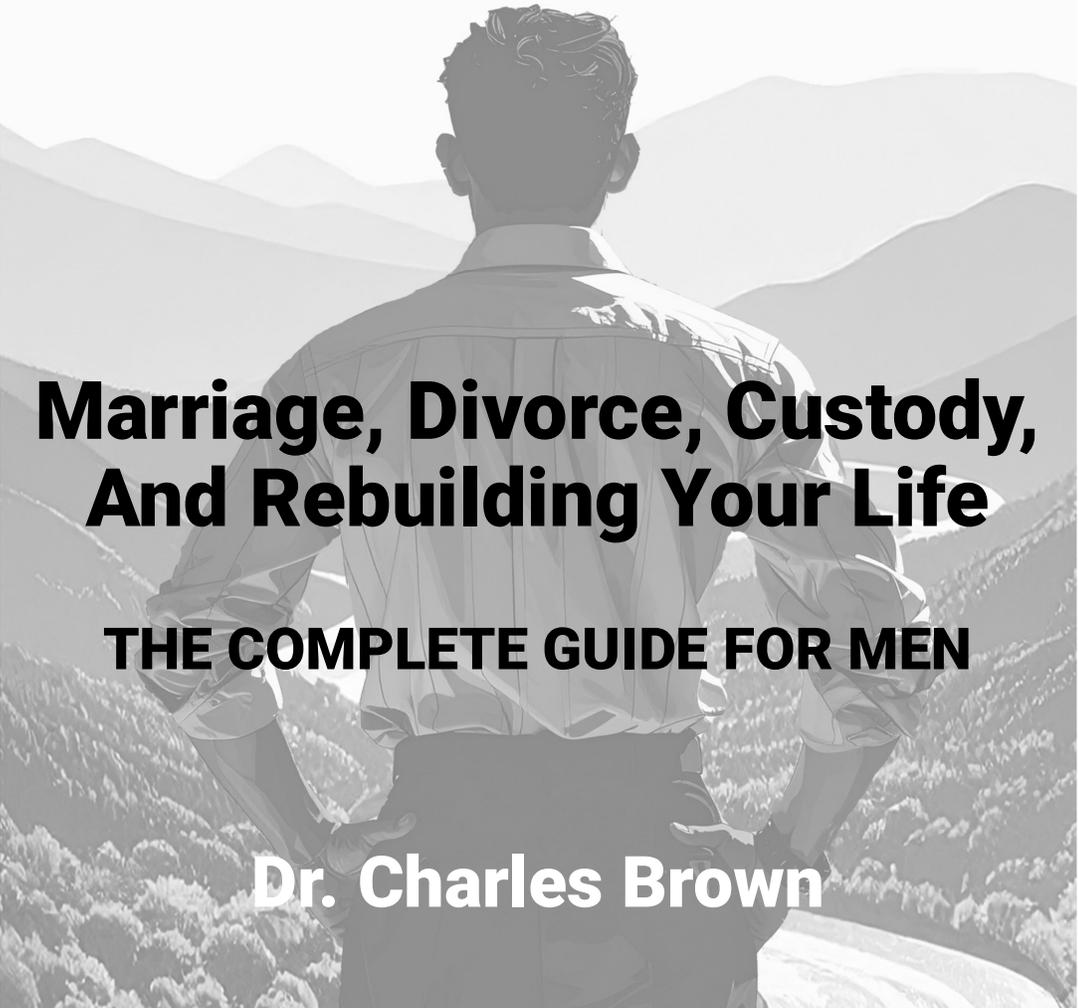


BEFORE *I Do*

and

AFTER I DON'T



**Marriage, Divorce, Custody,
And Rebuilding Your Life**

THE COMPLETE GUIDE FOR MEN

Dr. Charles Brown

Disclaimer

This book, *Before I Do and After I Don't*, is intended solely for general informational and educational purposes. The author is not providing legal, medical, psychological, financial, therapeutic, or other professional advice. The content of this book reflects the author's research, experience, and perspectives, but it is not a substitute for advice from qualified professionals who are familiar with your individual circumstances.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my teachers in life.

First and foremost, to **Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior**—my primary teacher—whose truth, grace, and correction have shaped every season of my life.

To **Mrs. Diane Brown**, my mother, whose sacrifices, strength, and quiet perseverance taught me lessons no classroom ever could.

To **Dr. Elise Neuner**, my tenth-grade geometry mentor, who showed me that discipline and clarity of thought open doors far beyond mathematics.

To **Mrs. Eileen Rosberg**, my tenth-grade English teacher, who taught me the power of words, structure, and honest expression.

To **Ms. Willie Ray Carter**, my eleventh-grade trigonometry teacher, who reinforced perseverance when the path forward was anything but simple.

To **Hanshi Tommy May**, my Isshinryu karate teacher; **Hanshi Arthur Drago**, my Matsubayashi Shorin-ryu karate teacher; and **Hanshi Daryl King**, my Sanuces Ryu Jujitsu teacher—each of whom taught discipline, humility, restraint, and the quiet strength that comes from mastery earned the hard way.

To **Rabbi Robert and Nancy Kachursky**, whose wisdom, hospitality, and example broadened my understanding of faith, tradition, and the enduring value of covenant and community.

(more)

To **Dr. Herman van Niekerk**, dean of my doctoral program, whose leadership and standards sharpened both my scholarship and my resolve.

To **Col. John Holland**, **CW5 Gerry Dedge**, and **CW4 Houston Crawford**, whose skills as Master Aviators taught me how to be a pilot, even after graduating IERW at Fort Rucker.

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Each of you taught me something enduring.

This work stands because of what you have all poured into me.

Foreword

This book was written in response to a quiet but persistent gap—one that many men do not recognize until they are already living with its consequences.

Most men are taught fragments of what it means to be a man: how to work hard, how to provide, how to endure, how to be strong. Far fewer are taught how to integrate those traits with emotional intelligence, relational wisdom, accountability, and foresight. The result is not failure of character, but incomplete preparation. Many men step into lifelong commitments having mastered responsibility, yet lacking a framework for navigating intimacy, conflict, boundaries, and long-term partnership.

At the same time, the world moves faster than ever. Relationships form quickly, decisions accelerate, and cultural narratives often emphasize romance and chemistry while minimizing compatibility, shared values, and spiritual alignment. Yet building a life with another person requires more than affection. It requires two people who are equally yoked—aligned not only in belief, but in expectations, discipline, vision, and responsibility. Without that alignment, even well-intentioned relationships can fracture under pressure.

This book also acknowledges a difficult reality: not all relationships endure. Despite effort, counsel, and commitment, some marriages fail. When they do, the impact extends far beyond the two adults involved. Children often find themselves caught in the crosshairs of unresolved conflict, miscommunication, and emotional fallout. They experience instability not because they are unloved, but because the

systems around them were not designed—or were not prepared—to withstand stress.

When divorce enters the picture, many men are unprepared for what follows. Legal processes, custody dynamics, financial restructuring, and personal identity shifts arrive simultaneously, often during periods of emotional depletion. Without guidance, men may react rather than respond, compounding loss with avoidable damage.

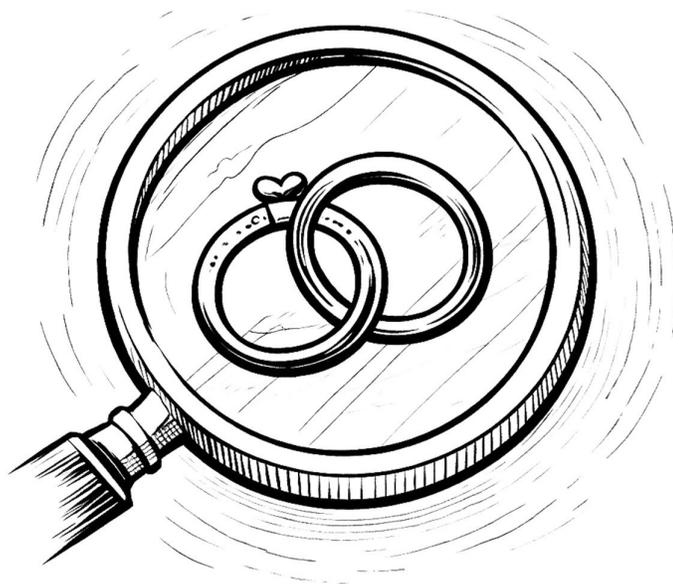
Before I Do and After I Don't exists to address these realities honestly and constructively. It is not a book about blame. It is a book about preparation, awareness, and responsibility—before commitment is made, during times of strain, and after relationships end.

This book provides insight into choosing wisely, navigating conflict with maturity, protecting children from unnecessary harm, and rebuilding life with clarity and purpose when plans unravel. It offers a framework for thinking ahead, acting deliberately, and learning from experience—whether one is preparing for marriage, enduring its challenges, or rebuilding after its conclusion.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is wisdom—earned, applied, and passed forward—so that fewer lives are shaped by avoidable regret, and more by intentional growth.



PART 1: BEFORE YOU SAY "I DO"



Introduction

If you're reading this section, you're either thinking about getting into a serious relationship, already in one, or trying to figure out what went wrong in your last one. Wherever you are, this might be the most important part of the book you'll read—because everything that happens later depends on the decisions you make right now.

Here's something most people don't want to hear: approximately 40–50% of first marriages in the United States end in divorce, with rates rising to 60% for second marriages and over 70% for third marriages.¹

These aren't abstract numbers. They represent millions of people who stood at an altar fully believing their marriage would last.

Most were not careless or irresponsible. They simply did not understand the risks they were taking—or how early those risks were locked in. The overwhelming majority of divorce outcomes are determined long before anyone files paperwork. They are determined by partner selection, relationship progression, and legal and financial structures established before marriage.²

Courts do not adjudicate feelings or intentions; they adjudicate contracts, assets, income streams, and documented behavior patterns. By the time a marriage reaches a courtroom, most outcomes are already mathematically predictable.

This part of the book exists to help you make better decisions before the cost of being wrong becomes catastrophic. These are not cynical choices—they are informed ones.

What This Section Covers

Part 1 is designed to front-load wisdom—to force clarity and intentionality before emotional attachment, social pressure, and legal entanglement narrow your options. Each chapter represents a decision point at which men commonly default rather than decide.

Chapter 1 — Know Yourself First

Partner selection often fails because men do not understand their own patterns, blind spots, and deal-breakers. Research shows that higher self-awareness is associated with better relationship satisfaction and partner compatibility.³ This chapter establishes the internal clarity required to evaluate others accurately.

Chapter 2 — Reading the Field

Early dating should be treated as data collection, not emotional commitment. Empirical studies show that behaviors observable in early dating—conflict style, accountability, narrative framing of past relationships—strongly predict long-term relational outcomes.⁴ This chapter teaches you how to distinguish attraction from suitability.

Chapter 3 — Her World, Your World

Family systems, peer groups, and pre-existing financial behaviors tend to persist into marriage.⁵ Once social worlds overlap, you have access to predictive information that most men ignore. This chapter teaches you how to interpret what you're already seeing.

Chapter 4 — Moving In Together

Approximately 70% of couples cohabit before marriage in the United States.⁶ What few understand is that cohabitation can trigger legal ex-

posure comparable to marriage—without its protections.⁷ This chapter explains how to cohabit deliberately and defensively.

Chapter 5 — The Ring and the Question

Engagement is not merely symbolic. In many jurisdictions, engagement rings are legally classified as conditional gifts, recoverable if marriage does not occur.⁸

Engagement is the last low-cost exit point before marriage. This chapter reframes the proposal as a strategic decision, not a milestone to rush.

Chapter 6 — Prenups and Asset Protection

Prenuptial agreements are enforceable in all 50 states, yet only an estimated 5–10% of couples execute one.⁹ Without a prenup, state default divorce laws control asset division, debt allocation, and support obligations. This chapter explains how to protect assets before they become marital property.

Roadmap

The Problem with How We Choose Partners

Modern relationship culture prioritizes feelings over forecasting. Popular narratives insist that love is sufficient, that commitment should precede clarity, and that discussing finances or legal protections signals distrust.

Research consistently contradicts this belief system.

Initial attraction and perceived “chemistry” are poor predictors of marital longevity.¹⁰ Factors that predict success include financial compatibility, conflict-resolution strategies, shared values regarding children and family, and aligned expectations regarding marriage.¹¹

During early romantic attachment, the brain is flooded with dopamine and oxytocin—neurochemicals associated with reward-seeking and addiction.¹²

This biochemical state impairs risk assessment and increases tolerance for red flags.

Longitudinal research suggests that this phase typically lasts 12–24 months, after which perception becomes more realistic.¹³ Many couples commit legally during the least reliable decision-making window of the relationship.

This book does not argue against love.

It argues against making irreversible decisions while cognitively compromised.

The Stakes Are Higher Than You Think

Financially, the average cost of a divorce ranges from \$15,000 to \$30,000, often exceeding \$100,000 in contested cases involving assets or custody.² Divorce frequently reduces long-term wealth through asset division and support obligations, with men experiencing measurable post-divorce income decline.¹⁴

Legally, marriage transfers decision-making authority over income, property, retirement accounts, and children into a statutory framework enforced by courts. Once invoked, this framework is difficult and expensive to exit.

Emotionally and socially, divorce recovery commonly takes 2–5 years, with children experiencing elevated risks for academic and psychological challenges—particularly in high-conflict dissolutions.^{15,16}

These realities are not presented to discourage marriage, but to ensure that men enter it with full situational awareness.

A Different Approach

Marriage is best understood as a business partnership with romantic elements, not a romantic partnership with incidental legal consequences. Successful business partnerships require due diligence, transparency, documentation, and exit planning.

Research and practice both indicate that couples who enter marriage with explicit agreements and realistic expectations experience stron-

ger long-term stability. Legal clarity does not undermine trust—it reduces ambiguity.

How to Use This Section

Single or casually dating: Read sequentially. Build discernment before attachment.

In a serious relationship or engaged: Do not skip ahead. Early chapters diagnose issues that prenups cannot fix.

Already married: Use this section diagnostically to understand failure points and avoid repetition.

Each chapter concludes with tools—worksheets, scripts, and decision frameworks—available as downloadable templates on the companion website at *www.ginkgo-publishing.com*.

Reading alone will not change outcomes. Execution will.

A Final Word Before We Begin

This book was written after the author had been through four marriages. Some readers will dismiss its contents on that basis alone. They are not the intended audience.

This book is for men who understand that expensive lessons—learned through failure—still have value when they prevent repetition. The chapters that follow integrate lived experience with research from psychology, sociology, family law, and financial planning.

Where claims are made, citations are provided. Where advice is experiential, it is labeled as such. You deserve to know the difference.

The decisions you make before marriage determine everything that comes after.

Make them deliberately.

