These days we have a solid fix on what it takes to be healthy. Almost everyone knows that a good diet, regular exercise, adequate rest, reducing stress, and avoiding certain risk behaviors such as smoking are the ticket to general good health. We have an enormous industry dedicated to helping people be physically healthy. We require education in our schools and colleges about maintaining good health. The magazines, airwaves, and fiber-optic cables are full of sound advice on achieving and maintaining good health. The quest for good health for most people is within our grasp. The question now is not what people know about health, but rather what they decide to do about it.

I predict in five to ten years the same will be true about what it takes to have a healthy, happy marriage. With research that has been going on for the past 20 years we have a pretty good idea of what it takes to keep marriages strong and, conversely, what rips them apart or causes them to fade like sun-bathed curtains. In addition, an increasing interest in marriage these days is likely to cause a marriage-research boom over the next decade. We will add to a good body of research and learn more about selecting a partner who is a good fit for us and what the danger signs are for a partner who will not be a good spouse. We will learn more about what we do before marriage that establishes a firm foundation for a strong relationship and what harms the chances of a long, happy union. We will unlock the mysteries to solving out marital conflicts. We will learn better how to anticipate and navigate the expected, periodic problems that arise with the stress of work, the birth of children, the empty nest, etc.

We already know a lot about many of these kinds of questions, and we will learn much more. So, again, the issue is: What will we do about it? Within ten years, I predict it will be as curious for someone to say about a failed marriage, “We just weren’t a good match” or “We just didn’t have what it takes” or “We just stopped loving each other” as it is now for a smoker to say, “I don’t know why I don’t feel more energetic” or for someone who doesn’t exercise to say, “I don’t know why I can’t lose those 20 pounds.” Yes, there are more deep-seated biological causes of these kinds of physical health problems that require specialized medical attention. Similarly, within ten years, I predict our well-trained marriage therapists will have the knowledge and tools to help almost any couple heal their relationship, even those with serious problems-if they want to heal. And I predict that most will want to heal their marriages because we will know so much about stable, happy marriages. This will be true especially for men, who come to marriage with less developed relationship skills than women, but who pride themselves in the knowledge to fix broken things.

With such good knowledge about building and maintaining happy, strong marriages on the temporal horizon, it will not be our abilities but rather our personal values, our motivations, our diligence,
as well as the broader cultural values and supports for the marriage that will be the focus of our questions about marriage.

One last prediction. In ten years, we will also have a fix on why a good marriage is such a big asset to physical health, the equivalent of kicking a two-packs-of-cigarettes-a-day habit.

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