THE BACKWARD TRUTH • FREE STARTER GUIDE

Start at the Finish Line

A 15-minute exercise for couples who want to plan the marriage, not just the wedding

Most couples plan their lives forward and hope love gets them somewhere peaceful. The Backward Truth flips that around: **picture the end of the road first, then work backward to today.**

> In a national poll, **41 percent** of Americans said couples focus too much on planning the wedding and not enough on preparing for the marriage.
>
> *Source: AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2018*

Step 1: Picture the porch

Imagine the two of you in your sixties, shortly after retirement, sitting on a porch on a quiet morning. Answer on your own first, then share.

Where are you living, and who comes to visit?

Is money a worry, or are you at peace?

How do you treat each other on an ordinary day?

What are you most proud of building together?

Step 2: Work backward

Three things we need to START doing now to get there:

One thing we need to STOP doing because it pulls us away from that picture:

> **TUFF TRUTH**
>
> True love is not just a feeling you have when you're young. It's the foundation you build today so you're still in love in your golden years.

Step 3: Quick Check

Rate each statement together. Be honest; a low score just shows you where to start.

Statement	Circle one
We have talked openly about our money: debts, savings, and spending habits.	0 1 2
We have clearly agreed who handles which responsibilities at home.	0 1 2
We can disagree without yelling, shutting down, or bringing up the past.	0 1 2
We agree on the big questions: children, faith, and where we want to live.	0 1 2
We have a regular time each week to check in with each other.	0 1 2
We know what we would do if one of us got seriously sick or lost a job.	0 1 2
We have shared the things we were afraid to tell each other.	0 1 2
We have a shared picture of the life we want at the finish line.	0 1 2

0 = not yet • 1 = somewhat • 2 = yes, and we live it

13–16: Strong start

You have a real foundation. The workbook shows you how to keep it strong in every stage.

8–12: On your way

Good intentions, a few gaps. The full workbook has the questions and plans to close them.

0–7: Room to grow

Not a failure. It is a map of exactly where to begin.

Which stage are you in?

Stage	Ages (about)	The big question
I: The Foundation Years	25–39	Are we the right team, and how do we start strong?
II: The Load Years	40–54	How do we stay close when life is at its busiest?
III: The Joyful Connection Years	55–69	How do we protect what we've built and enjoy it?
IV: The Fulfillment Years	70+	What kind of life do we want at the finish line?

In the full workbook

- Six areas of marriage in every stage
- 18 Questions Most Couples Never Ask
- The 10-question Honesty Conversation
- Scorecards and 30-day plans
- An "If Something Happens" checklist
- 50+ illustrations and expert research

This free guide is for education and reflection. It is not therapy, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you ever feel unsafe in your relationship, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788. © 2026 Marcela C. Sherwin, Live TUFF, LLC. Free to share in full; not for resale.

Ready for the whole picture? Get The Backward Truth Workbook.

The Complete Edition, or start with the stage you are living now.

LIVETUFF.ORG