

LEADER'S GUIDE

together

investing
in your marriage

9 session small group resource for couples

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1. Used with permission. Further Resources (on our website www.togetherinmarriage.org) shows the current range of HomeBuilder® resources available and how to order copies.

Introduction

Thank you for considering taking on the role of leading a Together group. Feedback received during the development of this material tells us that groups get a lot from the Together experience. Relationships grow between partners and friendships grow between couples.

Feedback has also confirmed that leading a group is not particularly difficult. You'll have fun, laugh a lot and learn a lot. It has been interesting to note that it is particularly the leaders who have benefited as they steer their groups through the sessions.

The notes will explain what Together is all about and help you start a group, prepare for and lead meetings.

What is Together?

Together is a nine-session study on marriage for small groups of couples. This is not a typical 'marriage enrichment' course nor just a Bible study on the topic of marriage. Rather, it helps couples draw closer to God and each other by laying a lasting spiritual foundation and by introducing elements of discipleship and accountability. It unpacks God's plan for marriage and addresses some common 'real life' marriage issues such as improving communication, resolving conflict and expressing love. There is a focus on couples taking specific action 'steps', but with the intention of anchoring everything in biblical principles.

Together does require significant commitment, but from feedback we know that it's extremely worthwhile. You will grow closer together as a couple and grow closer to God. Over the course of the whole study you'll also develop deep friendships with couples in your group and ... laugh a lot!

Summary of *Together* sessions

Session	Summary	Comment
Intro – Making the most of marriage	Couples consider questions about marriage and what it takes to make one that is flourishing. Couples are challenged to seek a new or renewed 'vision' for their marriage – God's purpose and plan.	This session is a 'taster' and gives an opportunity for couples to consider doing the 'course'. Also gently set an expectation to go on and lead their own group after completing the course themselves.
1 – Growing even closer through our communication	We grow closer through open and trusting communication. The gospel sets us 'free' to be the person God intended. Freedom from fear enables new patterns of open and transparent communication with God and each other.	This session lays a solid foundation for the rest of the study. It also allows couples to settle down and relax in one another's company.
2 – Finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage	We find unity through a shared vision and fulfilling God's purpose and plan for our marriage.	The rest of <i>Together</i> builds on this key session.
3 – Expressing love through emotional intimacy	We grow closer as we build intimacy in our relationship emotionally (and also physically and spiritually – Session 7). Emotional intimacy = feeling loved, special, cared for = meeting relational needs.	A practical session which helps us express our love by understanding and meeting each other's emotional needs.
4 – Facing life's relationship challenges with God	Relationship challenges and selfishness can threaten our marriage and lead to isolation. We grow closer as we face them together with God's help.	We cannot live the Christian life – or a Christian marriage – without the Holy Spirit (God's presence in our relationship).
5 – Handling our feelings constructively	The way we handle negative feelings can drive us apart. We grow closer as we deal with our own emotions constructively and learn to understand and accept the feelings of our partner.	A practical session about understanding and managing negative emotions well. The Holy Spirit helps us to handle our feelings with self-control and also to reveal the truth to us of what lies behind our feelings. God gives us a model for handling anger – to sacrifice retaliation.
6 – Living positively with our differences	Our differences add to the richness of our relationship. Our differences can also divide us through disagreements and conflict. But, we grow closer when we handle them in a godly way. We can also grow as people.	A practical session about appreciating our differences and also handling any conflict (large or small) in a way which strengthens our marriage.
7 – Deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy	Intimacy part two: we grow closer as we deepen our physical and spiritual intimacy.	Physical intimacy is not discussed in great detail in the group setting. Couples are encouraged to use <i>Together Notes: Differences in Sexuality Between Men and Women</i> (visit www.togetherinmarriage.com) as the basis for further discussion in the Couple Time. The session explores tangible ways of building spiritual intimacy.
8 – Fitting together as husbands and wives	We grow closer when we live together in a way that complements one another. We fulfil one of God's purposes when we model Christ's relationship with the Church in our marriage, through unity, love, God's order and submission.	Part of this session splits into two groups of men/women only.
9 – Leaving a legacy that will last forever	God intends for us to have a lasting spiritual impact as a couple. Those around us will see the reality of God and be drawn to Him by the things we say and do.	At the end of this session couples are encouraged to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuing to meet as a group for further study • taking new initiatives in evangelism and discipleship • starting new groups.

What books do we need for a group?

It is suggested that you read the section 'General Guidance for leading groups' (page 9) to help you decide how you propose to lead the group.

How do you propose to lead the group?	Leader's Guides required	Comment	Participants' workbooks required
Same lead couple to lead all the sessions	Two – ideally	The Leader's Guides are set out like participants' workbooks with added Leader's prompts and supporting information. If you each have a copy then you can put personal notes in your own copy.	One workbook for each participant in your group.
	One – minimum	You will need to share the Guide as a couple to prepare for and lead sessions. You will also need a second set of notes for Session 8 (where you split into separate men's/women's groups). You can download these free from the website.	One workbook for each participant. Two workbooks for the leader couple (one each) to make personal notes.
Rotating leadership This is where couples in the group take it in turns to lead or where you start leading and then encourage other couples to lead later sessions.	Two – ideally	One for each Leader to help them prepare. The Leader's Guides will be shared around the group and so you won't want to put personal notes in the Guides.	One for every person in the group. Every person will put personal notes in their own workbooks.
	One – minimum	You will need to share the Guide to prepare for and lead sessions. You will also need a second set of notes for Session 8 where you split into separate men's/women's groups. You can download these free from the website.	

Guidance for Leaders

Starting a group

What is a group?

The ideal group is four or five couples, with one of these couples leading (that's you). The sessions are designed to stimulate study and discussion of a topic with relevant Scripture. Couples learn principles and are encouraged to take specific actions to apply them to their lives. Individuals are asked not to talk about anything in the group that might embarrass their partner (there is a Couple Time between sessions for the personal things).

Couples may have been married for one year or many, or they may be remarried following the death of or divorce from a partner. Being at a similar stage of relationship/ages can be helpful for sharing (eg young marrieds/30s and 40s, older couples and the retired). However, those married only a short while will also benefit from the experience of others, so be flexible in the mix of the group. Together is designed for married couples but is suitable for engaged couples too. For more information about leading a group of engaged couples (including appropriate alternative questions) go to www.togetherinmarriage.org. Together doesn't assume in-depth understanding of the Bible. It is suitable for Christians (whatever their spiritual maturity) and non-Christians (providing they are open to the Bible). Note that someone who has been a Christian for many years and who is familiar with the Bible may not be living a life that is consistently in line with the Bible.

What a group isn't

- Couples' counselling
- Group counselling
- Teaching from the 'front'
- Telling people how to live their lives
- Only food, fun and casual chat

Tips on inviting couples

Talk to couples face to face – people like to be invited personally. You can give them an invitation for information so they can think and pray about it. Remember to write your contact details in the invite and DO follow up couples by phoning them

to find out their decision. Invitations which you can print off and complete can be downloaded from www.togetherinmarriage.org. Invite couples to an Introductory Session (which includes a nice supper) after which they can decide if they want to continue. It is worthwhile mentioning that Together is designed to help couples who want to invest in their relationships and make a good marriage better.

It's often better to talk to the women first because they are usually quite keen. Men can be very hesitant. **It's important to put to rest any fears they might have.** If appropriate, make it clear what the group is not. Reassure them that they will **not** be required to talk about their own relationship in the group. The group will involve learning together ... and it will be fun! Ask the husbands if they would consider coming as a 'gift' to their wives.

When and where to meet

When to meet?

It's up to you and the group to decide. Invite everyone along for the introductory meeting and ask couples to bring along diaries to fix the dates of all the sessions if they decide to continue. **It is recommended you meet every two weeks.** Remember people will need adequate space between group meetings to have their Couple Time (more on that later).

Where to meet?

The best place is in someone's home where everyone can sit together, because it's more informal and friendly. Rotating homes works well (but be sensitive if some in your group have very little space – it may be better to stay in one venue but rotate the 'hospitality'). A church venue or other meeting place is OK as long as there is privacy.

Hospitality

It's a good idea to share a meal together, especially at the first introductory meeting. This helps to break the ice and get to know each other. At the first introductory meeting you might want the evening to be a bit special with candles on the table. You might also start Sessions 1-9 with a meal or at least some refreshments, as this is an important part of relationship building. It can be a simple supper or coffee and biscuits/pudding. (Don't be too elaborate.) We recommend that the lead couple provide refreshments at first and then involve others. The danger of offering hospitality is that it can often use up your study time. Your meal should finish at least 1 hr 40 mins before people are expecting to leave.

Tips for hospitality

Hospitality is good because it provides a time for people to relax and build relationships. However, this part of the meeting needs to be managed carefully. Here are some tips to help you keep on time:

- Keep it simple. Avoid elaborate dishes. Only have one course. Some people are fantastic cooks and delight in sharing their talent with others. Try to keep them under control!
- Have the food cooked and ready beforehand to allow you to start eating on time.
- Start on time, even if people are late (you can keep food warm for them).
- If you serve wine, keep it under control! Consider putting the wine away at the end of the meal.
- Have coffees etc prepared to drink during the discussion.
- Make sure you start the Group Discussion on time.

Childcare

Groups may handle this differently depending on their needs. You could let everyone be responsible for their own arrangements. Alternatively, as a group, hire a 'sitter' to watch over the children in one location (ideally, not too close to where the group is meeting).

General guidance for leading groups

Facilitating or teaching?

As the lead couple you are responsible for organising and encouraging your group and facilitating the discussion. Facilitating means that you will be asking the questions in the study and ensuring everyone starts and finishes on time. **It doesn't mean you have to have answers for everything and you are not expected to teach**, because the teaching is in the study. Facilitating also means encouraging everyone to participate – not forcing them to answer questions but giving everyone the opportunity to take part.

Who should lead?

You do not need to be an experienced group leader or have in-depth Bible knowledge to lead a group. It is not necessary to be married for any particular length of time or have a faultless marriage. However, **as a lead couple your marriage should be stable**

and without any major unresolved issues between you. Good leaders are people who are willing to share their struggles as well as successes in building their marriage.

There are a number of common denominators for a well-led group:

- Everyone feels included.
- Minimum talk from the Leader, maximum discussion amongst the group.
- Nobody is embarrassed.
- Start and finish on time.

The leader couple might share responsibility for leading the discussion and time-keeping. Whilst one is doing the talking and facilitating, the other keeps an eye on time and helps the leader to ensure that everybody is included in the discussion.

Each session is divided into parts so the leading of a session is easily shared. Alternatively one person may do all the leading with the other being the 'eyes and ears'. Note that Session 8 splits into two separate groups of men/women only, so **you will need two Leaders and two Guides** or copies of the appropriate pages (go to the website for free downloads).

What makes a good Leader?

- A commitment to your own marriage and a desire to invest in it. This will be an example for others.
- A desire to love and encourage people and to have fun as a group.
- A willingness to practise hospitality or find somebody who can!
- A desire to work together as a couple and being faithful to your own Couple Time discussion.
- A desire to let God live in and through you – by His Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

Shared leadership

You may decide to give other couples in your group a chance to lead sessions – rotating leadership. This can be very positive, giving people a sense of shared responsibility. **Shared leadership will help give people the confidence and experience of leading which will help prepare them to start and lead another group later on.** If other couples aren't ready to share the leadership from the start then consider encouraging them to lead a session later on, once the group has settled down. The Leader's Guide is designed so it can be used as a personal workbook, ie you can use it to fill in Couple Time preparation boxes and complete Couple Time action points. However, if you intend to rotate the leadership of the group then you may prefer to have your own copy of a *Together* workbook for your personal stuff and pass around the Leader's Guide(s). (Look at 'What books do we need for a group?' on page 7.)

Working with your local church

We encourage you to talk to your church leadership and ask for their support, letting them know what you want to do and whom you want to invite. There may be pastoral issues that you are not aware of. Be aware of any pastoral support the church may be able to give you or members of the group if needed.

Ground rules for groups

The ground rules (at the beginning of each session) are very important so that everyone feels comfortable, to ensure confidentiality and build trust within the group. Explain these at the first meeting and remind everyone briefly at other times. In addition, as the leader you should ensure that:

- the group starts and finishes on time (starting on time is more challenging if you share a meal beforehand!).
- each couple is encouraged to complete the Couple Time homework (you can hold people accountable to this by asking each couple to share one insight from their Couple Time at the start of the next Group Session).

What about prayer?

Prayer is often an important part of a small group. However, as the leader, you need to be sensitive to the level of comfort the people in your group have towards praying in front of others, especially given the nature of the group. Here are some guidelines:

- As a lead couple we recommend you pray together for your meetings and the couples before and after meetings.
- The leader's notes for each session will indicate an appropriate place for prayer during the meeting, but only if you think this is right for your group.
- If you pray during the meeting, make it a short closing prayer. You could ask another couple to close in prayer (but check with them privately beforehand).
- It is appropriate to encourage each couple to pray with one another following Session 7, where the subject of prayer is covered.

Dealing with marriage problems

When you open up your home and lives to other couples, God can use you in amazing ways. Be prepared for this. From experience, few groups will have problems. The group will enable many couples to make a good marriage better. Some couples

will find in a group the encouragement, love and guidance that they need to enrich a marriage that is going through tough times and they will flourish. Others may need wise friends and listening ears, as the topics and discussions raise challenging issues that have not been fully addressed in their marriage.

A few couples may have severe problems and you will need to consider prayerfully how best to support them. Some couples with problems may need professional counselling.

Remember:

- You should stop individuals talking (in a group) if they are embarrassing their partner.
- Should the need arise you can meet with specific couples outside of the group environment to talk and pray.
- In many cases, the best step is to refer couples to a pastor or a professional counsellor (especially in the case of infidelity, alcoholism, substance abuse, physical abuse).
- If a couple is struggling then you may seek to meet as two couples. Pray first, listen carefully to each other and trust the Holy Spirit to guide you.

We caution you:

- not to be alone when you meet a member of your group who is of the opposite sex.
- to keep an eye out for inappropriate friendliness or flirting between individuals in the group ... that's the last thing you want!

Be aware of where to go for counselling support back up in your local community. You may find the following website useful: www.acc-uk.org and www.relate.org.uk

Overview for leading a *Together* session

General

It is vital that you spend some time as a couple to prepare beforehand and decide who will do what. There are detailed notes for individual sessions to help you prepare and lead. Expect to take between 30 and 60 minutes.

How do sessions work?

1. **Session topics.** An overview of the different sessions is given in the **Introduction** (page 6).

2. **Hospitality.** You will begin each evening with your time of hospitality (eg 7.00–8.00pm) and then there is the study time which needs to be at least 100 minutes (eg 8.00–9.40pm).
3. **Structure of a typical Group Session.** Sessions are designed to stimulate discussion on a topic and Scripture and to last 100 minutes.
 - **Feedback (10 minutes).** At the beginning of a session (apart from the Introductory Session) couples briefly 'report back' about their Couple Time (there is an opportunity in their Couple Time to agree something that they are willing to share in the group). The participants' session notes will contain a prompting question. The **feedback** time is an opportunity to develop accountability within the group about Couple Time.
At this time there is also a chance for your group to ask any **questions or make any comments from the Introductory Reading**, but try not to get stuck into deep discussion here.
We encourage you to do the feedback during the hospitality time and use it as a transition into starting the study.
 - **Sections A to C (85 minutes).** The main part of the Group Session. It includes case studies, exercises, discussion questions and Bible study. Suggested timings are given and each section concludes with a Foundation Principle to read out. To lead – just ask the questions!
From time to time there is a chance for everyone to **prepare for Couple Time**. Give people a few minutes to think and write in the boxes to prepare for their own Couple Time. Generally this writing is done alone, sometimes as a couple.
 - **... and finally (5 minutes).** An opportunity to re-read the Foundation Principles for the session, to make a short closing prayer (if appropriate) and wrap up the session. Before everyone leaves, **encourage couples to put a date in their diaries for the Couple Time and to complete the Introductory Reading (5–10 minutes) before the next meeting**. Make sure you are a good example by doing both things yourselves.
4. **Couple Time (60 minutes).** Couple Time provides the opportunity to apply what people have learnt during the Group Sessions to their own relationship. This is the private part and everyone is asked to spend one hour in dialogue as a couple between the group meetings.

Everyone should have the opportunity to complete Couple Time preparation boxes during the group sessions. These form the basis for the Couple Time. At the end of each Couple Time couples will be asked to agree and note down something they are prepared to share with the rest of the group at the beginning of the next meeting. This is important because it helps to make couples accountable, ensuring they complete their Couple Time. Some groups will have couples where one or both partners have been married before. In some cases, additional (optional) questions are added to the Couple

Time for those who are re-married.

From time to time there are additional (optional) questions for couples with children.

5. **Introductory Reading (5–10 minutes).** Before each of the Group Sessions, couples are asked to complete a short reading assignment which will help to set up the topic to be discussed in the next group meeting. The Introductory Reading is at the beginning of each session and people will get much more out of the meeting if they do it. It will not take more than 10 minutes (except for Session 8 which takes a little longer to cover the topic).

Time management

This could be your greatest challenge! Here are some pointers:

- **Watch out that the informal hospitality time doesn't eat into the discussion time!** (See 'Tips for hospitality' on page 8.)
- **Know what time you have to start so you can finish on time.** Give your group five minutes' warning that you're going to start to allow for natural breaks etc.
- **Identify the key questions** and those you can spend less time on in case you get short of time. Try to keep to the suggested timings given.
- **To keep the discussion moving, just ask the next question.** Think of some helpful phrases to 'move on'.
- **Always finish on time**, even if you haven't completed all the questions. This shows respect for all and allows those who have 'sitters' to be home on time. If you run out of time don't worry, you can always run a session over two meetings if the group agrees.
- On some occasions there may be a really useful discussion which will threaten time management if you allow it to continue, and so you may decide to split a session (see below).

Splitting sessions

There is an option to split some of the sessions into two parts if your group wants to take time discussing some of the issues in more depth or you have less time available for each meeting. However, **before you consider splitting sessions it is worth remembering that most people will benefit greatly from the study even if some topics are not covered in great detail**. Not every couple will wish to continue meeting regularly over a large number of sessions, so you will need to think and pray about what is right for your group. It **may** be better for you to encourage those couples who want to spend a long time on sessions to consider leading a group themselves so that they can deepen their understanding of the topics through their preparation.

Tips for handling difficulties in the group

- **Not everyone is participating.** A good way to give everyone a chance to participate is to break into small groups to discuss a particular question. Some people may be afraid that a weakness in their marriage will be revealed, especially during the first session. There could be other reasons. Ensure the ground rules are clear at the beginning. Pray for all the individuals in the group before you meet. Have a good time and you will probably find that people begin to relax and open up in later sessions.
- **There is an overly talkative person.** Sit next to them. It may keep them quieter as you don't make eye contact upon reading a question and looking up. If someone tends to steer the topic away from the discussion, the first step is to put the discussion back on track. Try repeating the question, or ask the next question to move things along. People will soon realise when you want to get things back on track and will support you in doing this.
- **You feel pressed for time.** Avoid comments about time pressure or your group will feel rushed. Try saying, 'We could probably talk about this all evening, but we need to consider some other important issues' and then ask the next question.

The Introductory Session

The preliminary gathering of interested couples is intended to be a 'taster' – giving people some ideas of what Together is all about. It is less structured and may not require the suggested timing. There is no Bible discussion or Introductory Reading assignment. Couples need to feel comfortable about the whole idea of discussing marriage and they need to understand the format of future meetings. This evening helps them 'dip their toe in the water'. Meeting other couples from the potential group can help them decide if spending nine more evenings with the same people seems an appealing idea. Some couples may be willing to commit to participating in Together before this Introductory Session and, if this is the case, you can order books for them. Other couples may not want to commit to buying the Together participants' notebooks or participating for the duration of Together until they have attended the Introductory Session. In this case the session material for participants is downloadable from the web from www.togetherinmarriage.org. Leaders should download and print this material ready to hand out at the introductory meeting.

Feel free to start later than the recommended time for the other nine sessions – perhaps with more time for the meal. Explain the format for future sessions and review some of the subjects being covered.

If couples are ready to commit at the end of the evening, that's great. You will be able to hand out participants' workbooks if you have them, or take orders. We recommend that you also put dates in the diary for future meetings. There are

some helpful forms for collecting meeting dates and contact details which you can download from our website.

If people are NOT ready to commit, we suggest you put a preliminary date in the diary for the first session to show that you are committed. Ask the couples to discuss what they want to do privately and tell them that you will ring them in a few days to find out what they have decided. **Follow up with a phone call within a week.** You can arrange to hand out books individually before or at the first meeting (you can download the Introductory Reading for Session 1 from the website if you need it).

Preparation for Group Sessions

General

Consider how you plan to lead sessions. Think about taking turns facilitating the sessions (with only one leader per session) or leading sessions together (with one leader to facilitate discussion of a particular set of questions which you have agreed during your preparation time). Preparation for leading a session will take you between 30 and 60 minutes. Note that for Session 8 you will split into groups of men and women, so you will each need to lead a discussion. We recommend the leader couple should ideally have a Leader's Guide each. However, it is possible to share a Leader's Guide and pass it between you. (Look at 'What books do we need for a group?' on page 7.) The partner not leading the session should serve as time-keeper, helping the leader follow the suggested timings. If you have only one Leader's Guide then the partner helping with time management should write what time you plan to start/finish exercises in the margin of their workbook.

To prepare:

- **Read through the Leader's Notes** for each session a few days before your group meets and make a note of any particular things to bring to the session or to prepare beforehand.
- **Clarify the objectives** in your own mind and pray for the evening together.
- **Identify the key questions.** Think about those questions which call for the sharing of personal experiences, and check with each other before sharing your own marriage stories with your group.
- If you find any of the additional information in the **Supplementary Information** helpful, copy key ideas into your session notes.
- **Make copies** of relevant Together Notes for each member of your group. You can photocopy some of them from the back of the Leader's Guide or print off copies from the website free. The website has all the Together Notes.
- **Bring spare pens** to group meetings.

Structure of Leader's Notes

For each session the Leader's Notes are divided into three parts:

1. **Leader's Information.** Helps you to prepare ahead of time. Each session is positioned (tells you how it fits into the whole of Together), the objectives are set out and the 'flow' of the session is outlined with timings. There are also things you need to do a few days before your group meeting and some general notes to help you.
2. **Session Notes.** This is in effect a copy of what the group participants have in their books with time guidelines and comments for leaders superimposed. The Session Notes are designed to be used by the leader couple as they lead the group discussion. We suggest that you make any notes you require to help you lead in this part of your Leader's Guide.
3. **Supplementary Information.** Important details to help you to prepare and address issues, and you may wish to use it as the basis for any notes you decide to make in the Session Notes. In some cases we provide pre-prepared answers or statements which leaders can read out to help with time management. Supplementary Information for each session is at the back of the Leader's Guide.

Contact details

If you have any questions, feedback or require further information please go to the website at **www.togetherinmarriage.org** where there is lots of extra information and support available free.

(Please note: the original website address www.togetherinmarriage.com as printed in some of the workbooks will also bring you to the new website www.togetherinmarriage.org)

Key for abbreviations and symbols in Session Notes

SI

Supplementary Information is available for this question.

SQ

Supplementary Questions (optional) to help conversation to flow or dig deeper.

SQ

Question to go here.

Instructions for the leader.
Not to be read aloud.

20 MINS

Shows you how much time we suggest you spend on this question or part of the session.

Time check

Insert target time above
(start time plus 75 mins)

Fill in this box during your preparation time. The time-check box will be an indicator of where you should be at a certain time (time measured from start time). In this case you should be at this point in the study 75 minutes after you started.

Leader's Notes for Sessions

Introductory Session

Positioning the Session

The Introductory Session is designed to give couples a feel for what Together is all about. At the end of the session, you will ask couples to commit to the remaining nine sessions (if they haven't already done so) and, if appropriate, you will order a participant's workbook for each group member.

If you haven't purchased participants' books then you will need a participants' Introductory Session for every person, which you can download and print off from the website at **www.togetherinmarriage.org**. If couples have already committed to the full nine sessions, then order and give out participants' workbooks before or at the Introductory Session.

Objectives of this Session

- To give couples a chance to relax, have fun and get to know one another.
- To consider what it takes to build a strong and flourishing marriage.
- To decide as a group whether to do the next nine sessions (unless they have already committed).

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Introductions	Time to get to know each other.	20
Group questions	Some questions which will get the group thinking about marriage.	55
Prepare for Couple Time	Time to note down one's thoughts at this point.	10
Moving on	Couples schedule their Couple Time. Agree the future of the group. Schedule further meetings. Close.	15

Preparation (during the days before the group meeting)

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the Notes (both the Group Session and Couple Time). Make your own notes as you wish throughout. Ensure you have the materials you'll need.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Ask everybody to bring their diaries.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	The session involves sharing information about you. You might want to agree with your partner what stories you share!	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	If you are planning to share hospitality or a meal as a group before the group discussion, then we suggest that you talk about timings with the host/hostess beforehand to ensure that the group will be ready to start the group discussion on time.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Have some spare pens/pencils handy for the preparation for Couple Time.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Think through how to handle the process of deciding on the future of the group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Download a 'contact details' sheet and a 'meeting schedule' (free) from the website, to be filled in at the end of the session by all those continuing to meet.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- This is an introductory meeting so try to ensure it is **relaxed and fun**.
- There is no Supplementary Information for this session.
- **Try to start and finish on time.** Manage your time carefully and try not to get 'stuck' on any particular question. You might say, 'Let's move on to the next question', and then read it out. Suggested timings are given to help you keep on track. You could ask your partner to help you to keep to time.
- Whether you choose to have a short opening or closing prayer is up to you and will depend on the kind of people in your group. If there are non-Christians in the group, it might be better to leave out open prayer at this stage. The goal is to **introduce prayer in such a way that it grows more significant through these nine sessions**, so that meaningful prayer aloud as a group is appropriate toward the end of the 'course', if not before.
- If people don't know each other you might want to consider name badges/labels with individuals' first names. If they do know one another well you may wish to cut down on the introductions part of the evening.
- **Make sure you are familiar with how this session works so you can briefly explain to the group what to expect.**
- **Ensure you have a clear understanding of how future sessions fit together so that you help couples understand what to expect (see page 6).**



READ out the first paragraph.

ASK someone to read out the 'ground rules'.

What will you say to the group? Agree it with your partner beforehand.

Introductory Session: Making the most of marriage?

Introductory Reading

This session introduces the *Together* study and considers what it takes to build a strong and flourishing marriage. The session will give you a 'taster' for this group study and at the end of the evening you can decide whether you wish to continue.

Ground rules

There are three simple ground rules to ensure the session is an enjoyable time of learning together:

1. Respect each other – Don't share anything that would embarrass your partner or others in the group.
2. Maintain personal boundaries – You can pass on any question you don't want to answer.
3. Be confidential – Whatever is said in the group stays in the group.

Introductions

All parts are optional.

A. Go around and introduce yourselves. Include:

- Number of years married
- Number/ages of any children
- Hobby/sport/special interest or, a little known fact about yourself

introductory session

9

20 MINS

There are no right or wrong answers. These questions are designed to get discussion going and people thinking about marriage. There should be plenty of time for these questions.

ASK someone to read these paragraphs out loud and someone else to read the Foundation Principle.

B. Go around again with each couple briefly telling either a funny story or something with fond memories about one of the following:¹

- When and where you met.
- A particular date when you first knew each other.
- A honeymoon experience or something from the early years of your marriage.

Discussion questions

Pick three or four to discuss as a group.

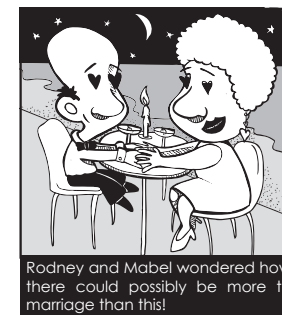
1. What attracted you to your partner when you first met?
2. Name a couple who model a good marriage to you (could be relatives, friends, or you could describe a media couple or TV characters). What is it about the relationship that you like?
3. How do (or how did) your parents influence your view of marriage?
4. What is marriage?
5. What are some of the things that make marriage difficult in today's society?
6. What makes a strong and flourishing marriage?

A vision for marriage

Everyone seems to have their own idea about marriage today. So why marriage? What's it all about anyway?

It is clear from the Bible that marriage is designed by God and He has a 'vision' for it. His vision gives marriage a purpose and an exciting, practical plan to make it work. When we appreciate how special this relationship is, we will defend it and invest in it. *Together* is a series of nine studies for small groups of couples in all stages of life and circumstances. It unpacks God's plan for marriage and addresses some common 'real life' marriage issues.

Any marriage – whether good or bad – has an impact on the wider community. **We've all noticed the ripple effects of a marriage that's been torn apart. What about the ripple effects of one that is truly alive and kicking?**



Rodney and Mabel wondered how there could possibly be more to marriage than this!

10

making the most of marriage?

EXPLAIN to your group that throughout the study there are Foundation Principles which are key learning points for each session.

As soon as the reading is done, move straight into preparing for Couple Time. You may need pens/pencils handy!

EXPLAIN that throughout the study there are opportunities to prepare for Couple Time – the time couples spend alone between group meetings discussing and applying what they have learned to their own marriages. Explain how Couple Time preparation works:

Ask everyone to spend 5 mins filling in the box without conferring with their partner.

- If there are any remarried couples, sensitively draw their attention to the optional additional questions at the end of some of the Couple Times.
- Tell parents that there are also optional additional questions for parents at the end of a few of the Couple Times (but not this one).

When everyone has filled in their boxes, explain that couples should come to the next group meeting prepared to share one brief insight or encouragement from their Couple Time discussion. Suggest they agree something they are willing to share with the rest of the group.

Opportunity to prepare for Couple Time

A good marriage is the closest thing on earth to the realization of a practical, enduring, and loving coexistence between people. It is a sign, a spiritual and social and political example, of depths of love and patience and forgiveness that are unknown in other spheres of life.

Mike Mason,
The Mystery of Marriage

No 'group therapy' or embarrassing revelations. Just the opportunity to get together, perhaps over a relaxing meal and **discover more for your relationship and find a renewed vision for your marriage ... together!**

Foundation Principle:

A flourishing marriage is one in which both partners have a shared vision and are committed to spending time learning and growing together.

My thoughts at this point ...

Take a moment by yourself to think about how the things you have discussed relate to your marriage, so you can talk about it in your Couple Time (after this group meeting).

- One thing that particularly attracts me to my partner right now is ...
- What was my vision or mental picture of marriage when we first got married? (Tick any ideas below or write your own.)
 - ☐ I want it to be 'happily ever after'
 - ☐ This will work as long as ...
 - ☐ Two children and a dog
 - ☐ When we're married I can change him/her
 - ☐ We'll stick it, whatever happens 'till death do us part'
 - ☐ I want our marriage to be better than my parents' marriage
 - ☐ Other ...
- What are a few words which would describe how I feel about my marriage now?
- In what way do I want to see this Together group and our 'Couple Times' benefit our relationship?

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and what you can do to make the most of your Together experience.

introductory session

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READ out the notes and explain how Together will work.

- You may want to discuss how timings could work for your group.
- Give people a chance to ask questions.

What is *Together* and what do we do?

This is not a typical marriage enrichment course nor just a Bible study on the topic of marriage. Rather, it attempts to help couples lay a lasting spiritual foundation and includes elements of discipleship.² Many practical marriage issues are covered as well with a focus on couples taking specific action 'steps'. Each topic is anchored in biblical principles.

Together is structured as follows:

- You will begin each evening with an **informal time of hospitality** (eg 7–8 pm)
- Following on is the **Group Session** of 100 minutes (eg 8.00–9.40 pm) which is designed to stimulate discussion on the topic and Scripture.
- A **Couple Time** of 60 minutes is completed privately at a time between the group meetings to discuss and apply what is relevant to your marriage.
- There is no written preparation for group meetings but you are asked to complete the **Introductory Reading** (5–10 minutes) to prepare for the topic before you come.
- We recommend that you **meet every two weeks**, with flexibility for holiday periods.

Session	Title
1	Growing even closer through our communication
2	Finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage
3	Expressing love through emotional intimacy
4	Facing life's relationship challenges with God
5	Handling our feelings constructively
6	Living positively with our differences
7	Deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy
8	Fitting together as husbands and wives
9	Leaving a legacy that will last forever

12

making the most of marriage?

ADDRESS the 'Shall we continue meeting?' question. If appropriate, put meeting dates in diaries and/or fill in a 'meeting schedule' (from the website).

If fewer than four couples (including you) want to continue, be prepared to contact others about Together, explaining the concept, showing an example of a session etc in order to secure one or two more couples for the group.

Encourage couples to put a date in their diaries NOW for their Couple Time.

ENCOURAGE couples to do the Introductory Reading before the next session (takes only 5-10 mins). Show them where it is in a workbook to avoid misunderstandings of what they should read. The group will get much more out of the discussion if everyone does this reading.

ASK couples who are continuing to meet to fill in their phone numbers and email addresses on the 'group contact details' sheet (from the website).

If you haven't already got them, ORDER the participants' workbooks required for your group. Give them out at the next meeting, or before if you can.

Congratulations – you've just finished leading your first

... And finally

Shall we continue meeting? Some things to discuss:

- One venue or rotate?
- Include a meal or not? (bring & share; rotating hosts ...?)
- Childcare needs?
- Putting all nine sessions in the diary ...
- Confirming start and finish times.

Arrange a Couple Time. Make time for each other after this session for your Couple Time, to talk through and apply what is relevant to your lives.

Why not agree a date now and note it here:

Marriage is the alliance of two people, one of whom never remembers birthdays and the other who never forgets them.

Ogden Nash

Time check

Write target finish time here:

introductory session

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Couple Time

As you talk to each other remember the dos and don'ts of listening:

Don't	Do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interrupt.• Be distracted.• Criticise or blame – instead say how you feel.• Give unwanted advice.• Change the subject.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen actively – give your full attention.• Be sensitive to one another as you share your thoughts and feelings ... this is important.• Speak the truth in love.• Try to understand – from time to time check your understanding by 'feeding back' to your partner what you think he/she has said.• Be ready to apologise for any attitudes or behaviour that has caused your partner to feel marginalised or misunderstood.

If you didn't have time to complete the Couple Time preparation box during your group meeting then take a few minutes to fill it in now before you talk to your partner. As you talk, consider elaborating upon what you wrote or ticked in the box. Also talk about any insights you gained from the group discussion. There are optional additional questions at the end for couples who are remarried (turn to page 16).

My thoughts at this point ...

Take turns explaining your answers for **i, ii, iii** and **iv**

Following on from your answers to question **iv** identify some personal goals or areas you want to grow in your marriage. Try to be specific, eg communicate more openly, understand my partner better and how I can show him/her love, talk more openly about my feelings, manage my temper better, liven up our sex life! (NB you won't be asked to share these goals with anyone in the group.) Write down at least three goals.

Personal goals

At the next group meeting you will be asked to share one insight or encouragement that has resulted from the Introductory Session or your Couple Time discussion. Agree with your partner the insight/encouragement to be shared with the group.

My insight:

Before you come to the next group meeting please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 1: **Growing even closer through our communication** (pages 19–20). It will set you up well for the group meeting and only takes approximately five minutes to read. Most of us would like to be better at communicating. How do we communicate in ways that lead to greater understanding and grow a closer relationship?

For remarried couples

(optional additional questions)

For couples where either one or both partners have previously been married or in a long-term relationship.³

- i. In what ways has your previous relationship, or the previous relationship of your partner, affected your expectations of this marriage?
- ii. Is there anything that you fear might affect this marriage, which may (or may not) have happened in your previous marriage, or that of your partner?
- iii. Agree on one thing you could do **to support your partner** as you face any challenges together.

Identify a personal action point for you as an individual (a specific way to follow through with an action from any insights you gained from the discussion with your partner).

Personal action point:

NOTES

1. Adapted from 'Getting to Know You' Session 1, *Building Your Marriage*, Group Publishing Copyright © 2000 Dennis Rainey. Used with permission.
2. A Christian disciple is someone who follows Jesus, literally a lifelong learner of His ways.
3. Questions adapted from 'Expectations in Remarriage' Session 1, *Making Your Remarriage Last*, Group Publishing Copyright © 2001 Jim Keller. Used with permission.

introductory session

17

Session 1

Positioning Session 1

Together begins with the subject of communication which provides a solid foundation for the rest of the study and is essential for a marriage to flourish.

Like all the sessions this one consists of:

- Introductory Reading to be done beforehand.
- Group Session when you meet as a group.
- Couple Time (which is done as a couple at a separate time from the Group Session).

Objectives of this Session

- To recognise that there are different levels of communication.
- To begin to identify our own communication patterns.
- To recognise that the gospel sets us free so we can take steps towards learning new ways of communicating and becoming more open with each other.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.
The heart of the session is in parts B and C.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and comment on the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	A case study to get conversation going and then a look at how we are communicating.	25
Part B 40	Explores how we communicate at deeper levels and the root of communication problems.	
Part C and close	Explores how we grow in trust and openness through our relationship with God.	25

Preparation (during the days before the group meeting)

	Activity	Tick box
1	Carefully review the Introductory Reading, the Group Session and Couple Time including the suggested Supplementary Questions (SQs) and the Supplementary Information for Leaders (SI page 182). Make notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Make sure that you have a clear understanding of the diagram in part B question 2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Read Together Notes: 'Poor Listening/Good Listening' before the group meeting (page 200). Make photocopies for every member or print off copies from the website.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	The session involves a case study. If you want a couple to role play the characters in the case study, then it might be helpful to warn them beforehand! You will also need a narrator.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	If you are planning to share hospitality or a meal as a group before the group discussion, then we suggest that you talk with the hosts beforehand to ensure that the group will be ready to start the group discussion on time.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- **Make sure that you have done your Couple Time following the previous meeting!**
- This is the first full session, so try to **ensure you have enough time for hospitality** before the Group Session starts. This will help participants to continue getting to know one another and feel relaxed in each other's company.
- To help time management, we **suggest you do the feedback from Couple Time and Introductory Reading (on page 21) during the meal** or the social period before you start the main session.
- **Think about what you are going to say if a couple have not done their Couple Time** following your previous meeting. Clearly you will want to encourage them. Couples get much more out of Together when they complete their Couple Time.
- It's a good idea to ask for volunteers to read aloud until everyone gets used to it.
- Please don't allow your group to get tied up with the characters reflected in the case studies. They are there to encourage discussion and should not be interpreted literally. **We have tried not to present a 'cliché couple' in this first case study to open up the discussion.**
- **Try to start and finish on time.** Manage your time carefully and try not to get 'stuck' on any particular question. Try saying 'Let's move on to the next question' and then read it out. Suggested timings are given to help you keep on track. You might ask your partner to help you to keep to time during the discussion.
- **We do not recommend that you split this session.** You should be able to cover the material in the suggested time.
- **Whether you choose to have an opening or closing prayer is up to you.** The goal is to introduce prayer in such a way that meaningful prayer aloud as a group becomes appropriate toward the end of the series. Any extended time of prayer would be in addition to the 100 mins needed for the Group Session.



1

Growing even closer through our communication

Introductory Reading

What are the things that make communication difficult for me and my partner?

Today we can communicate faster, with more people, and in many more ways than ever before – mobile telephones, email and text messages, to name a few. Yet in spite of all our technology, we know **communication is more than just transmitting a message between one person and another – it's about understanding and building a close connection.** Good communication in marriage is essential. So what gets in the way – what makes us feel disconnected?

Feeling disconnected?

There are many reasons for feeling disconnected from our partner, including:

- I. **Lack of time and energy.** Busyness and stress so fill most people's lives today that many couples complain they simply haven't got enough time for each other. Living in the fast lane also drains our emotional batteries. It's no wonder our relationships suffer.
- II. **Our differences.** Family backgrounds, experiences during childhood, personalities, value systems and religious beliefs all affect how we think and respond to situations. Our gender differences may also cause misunderstandings. Generally speaking, women like to express their feelings and men prefer to share information.
- III. **Styles of expression.** Some prefer to talk about facts and concrete realities, whereas others focus on concepts, ideas and possibilities. An introverted personality often prefers small groups and time alone, whereas extroverts get their energy from interaction with more people. Some like analysing situations before making decisions; others let their hearts rule.

God's design for couples

In the creation account we read that God makes humans 'in his image', as male and female.¹ We also read about His design for marriage: that two should leave their families, unite, and become one. A new unit is formed as we join our hearts, minds and bodies in marriage. God now sees us as 'one'. We are still individuals but somehow, together, we have become something new – a unique expression of the image of God.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.
Genesis 2:24–25

Communication helps us to get close to our partner – to build emotional intimacy and to experience and develop our 'oneness'. Busyness, stress and our differences can make communication difficult, even though that's not what we intend. **But the root of communication problems lies in the distortion of God's design.** We have an inner bent towards putting our own thoughts, feelings, desires and our lives at the centre of everything and before others. The Bible calls this sin. We also tend to hide our true selves from each other. This makes it difficult to get close to our partner.

How do I overcome my self-centredness and connect deeply with the thoughts, feelings and desires of my partner?

Good communication

We can build understanding and get closer to our partner by improving our communication skills. We can learn to be better listeners, to express ourselves more clearly, understand body language and the like, but at the end of the day these are only tools.

The heart of deep communication is about being transparent, which requires complete openness and trust.² There should be nothing to hide and no secrets to undermine the bond of trust. Transparent communication is free from shame, blame and fear. This level of sharing is a great challenge, but together – with God's help – we can work to see our communication become something that brings joy, closeness and new energy to our marriage.

This session looks at how we can develop a closer relationship through the way we communicate.



20

growing even closer through our communication

ASK someone to read out the three ground rules.

READ OUT the first Feedback question. Encourage several people to share a word of feedback from their Couple Time. If people are reluctant to talk begin by sharing something yourself (or have the non-leading partner share).

Highlight the importance of Couple Time and recognise those that have done it.

READ OUT the second Feedback question. Try not to get stuck here, but do address any important issues. If appropriate tell your group that Session 2 has more about God's design for marriage.

This case study is designed to get people thinking and talking.

- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Let conversation flow but stick to the suggested timing.

ASK a couple to read out the parts of Chris and Carol and ask someone to narrate.

Ground rules

Remember the three simple ground rules to ensure the session is an enjoyable time of learning together:

1. Respect each other – Don't share anything that would embarrass your partner or others in the group.
2. Maintain personal boundaries – You can pass on any question you don't want to answer.
3. Be confidential – Whatever is said in the group stays in the group.

Group session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about communication that prompted you to think about the subject in a new way? Explain.

A How are we communicating?

We all have different ways of communicating depending on our personalities and experiences. **As couples we tend to develop patterns of communication which can become habits, for good or bad.** Also, our modern way of life can squeeze out time for each other. If we want to grow a close relationship we need to be able to communicate well. This will mean dealing with those things that might prevent it happening.

Chris and Carol

Chris and Carol have had a long, hard day. At last the children are in bed and Carol settles down to watch the television

Chris: *(cheerfully)* I noticed that new people moved in across the road. Maybe we should invite them over for a drink tomorrow evening?

Carol: Mmm ... if you like.

Chris: Or we could invite them for dinner or a BBQ at the weekend? We could invite Brenda and Harry next door too – we haven't seen them for ages. It would be good to do something fun ... you know what they say about all work and no play ...

Carol: *(not really listening)* OK.

Chris: Sales are down again this month ... that's two bad months. People are getting nervous ... there's talk of redundancies. *(Pauses for a moment)* Carol, I don't think you're listening to me.

session 1

21

10 MINS

20 MINS

SQ

- Is Carol listening? Why/why not?
- How do you think Chris feels when interrupted?
- How do you think tiredness is affecting communication?
- What do you think the insistence to watch TV has 'cost' their relationship?

We suggest you spend most of your time on Q2.

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

SQ

SI

Carol: What?! *(reasonably gently)* Look, Chris, I'm trying to watch this. Can we talk about work later?

Chris: When does it finish? I've been wanting to talk to you all week ... I was hoping to get an early night tonight ... after all, this is Friday night!

He looks at her intently hoping she'll get the hint.

Carol: *(Glued to the TV and not even looking up)* OK – I'll see you later love.

Chris: Carol, that's not what I'm saying, I ...

Carol: *(Interrupting)* I'm sorry Chris. I just want a bit of time to wind down. Is that a problem? I've had people, meetings and decisions all day long and it's just nice to come home and switch off from everything. Would you mind making me a coffee while you're up, please? We can talk later, OK?

Chris doesn't reply but leaves quietly for the kitchen to make drinks. He returns and hands Carol a coffee. For a moment he hesitates as if to say something, but doesn't and then moves towards the door.

Chris: Don't wake me when you come up.

He leaves, closing the door behind him.

Carol: *(To herself.)* At last, some peace ...

She pushes away thoughts about the look of disappointment and hurt on Chris's face as he left, and tries to enjoy her TV programme.

1. What do you notice about Chris and Carol's communication – good and bad?

2. If this were a typical pattern of interaction, how would it affect their relationship? What could they do differently to improve communication?

Foundation Principle:

Good communication means making our marriage partner a priority.

22

growing even closer through our communication

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 30 mins)

ASK everyone to spend a few minutes filling in the Couple Time preparation box.

- Have pens ready.
- If appropriate, remind people how the Couple Time works.

Q1 is designed to get people thinking. Try not to get bogged down.

ASK someone to read out this paragraph.

Having reviewed the model, point out (if not observed by others) that lack of level 4/5 communication may well be contributing to Chris and Carol's situation.

Opportunity to prepare for Couple Time

A How are we communicating?

Take a moment by yourself to prepare for your Couple Time by thinking about how you communicate in your marriage.

Note three things that you want to talk to your partner about:

- an area where our communication is working well.
- an area where some change might be helpful.
- a practical idea to help me make regular time and energy for good communication.

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and what you can do to help each other communicate better.

SI

B Communicating at deeper levels

- What do you think might make communication within a Christian marriage distinctive?

Creation design

The heart that breaks open can contain the whole universe.

Joanna Macy

SI

In the creation account in Genesis we read that God makes marriage part of His design for human relationships. **His plan for marriage is a level of intimacy between husband and wife in which the two are so close that they are 'one'**.³ This requires open communication at deeper levels. The apostle Paul affirms the general principle in the New Testament to **open wide your hearts**.⁴

- The following diagram⁵ (page 24) shows different levels of communication. Each level requires different degrees of openness (transparency) and of trust. Think of some examples of potential communication between Chris and Carol for each of the five levels.

5 MINS

5 MINS

10 MINS

As soon as people understand this model then you can move on to Q3.

SQ

Look at the 'dos' of listening on workbook page 27. Which of these do you think is the most important?

(Leave this part out if you are pressed for time.)

There are no right or wrong answers here. The question allows people to think through what aspects are important for good listening.

ASK someone to read out this paragraph.

SQ

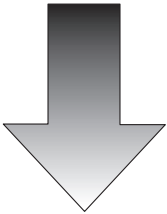
What do we fear?

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

Communication level

1. Cliché
2. Fact
3. Opinion
4. Emotion
5. Transparency

Degree of openness and trust increases moving through levels 1 to 5



Meaning

- Non-sharing
- Sharing what you KNOW
- Sharing what you THINK
- Sharing what you FEEL
- Sharing WHO YOU ARE

SI

3. Many marriages can 'tick over' from day to day with communication rarely going below level 3, like 'marriage business partners' getting on with all that needs to be done. This can lead to a shallow or unsatisfying relationship.

SQ

- What is the role of listening in reaching deeper levels of communication?

Don't knock the weather; nine-tenths of people couldn't start a conversation if it didn't change once in a while.

Kin Hubbard

The root of communication problems

Adam and Eve, the first couple, are described as being 'naked and without shame'.⁶ Then, in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve doubt God's loving provision for them. They disobey His instructions, giving in to temptation and eating the forbidden fruit. In this symbolic act God's authority is challenged and the whole created order is corrupted with far-reaching consequences. Enter: shame, blame and fear. They hide from God. They also hide from each other – **the openness that once existed between Adam and Eve turns to hiding behind coverings made of fig leaves.**

SI

4. God intends couples to be 'naked and without shame'.

SQ

- What do you think this means for the way we communicate as a couple?
- Why do we tend to hide our true selves from each other?

Foundation Principle:

Good communication means growing in deeper understanding, which requires openness and trust.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 70 mins)

24

growing even closer through our communication

10 MINS

10 MINS

ASK everyone to spend a few minutes filling in the Couple Time preparation box B.

ASK volunteer(s) to read out these paragraphs.

B

Communicating at deeper levels

i.

Think about the following statements and how they express your thoughts and feelings. Put your initials somewhere on the line to reflect how you see the issue.

almost never

sometimes

often

I think we share goals & dreams freely with each other.

I am able to express my feelings openly.

I find misunderstandings tend to grow between us.

I think we tend to avoid uncomfortable issues.

I think I am able to express my needs to you.

ii.

Now put your partner's initials somewhere to describe how you think your partner currently sees the issue.

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk to your partner and explain why you placed your initials where you did.

C

Growing in trust and openness

Since the 'Fall' in Genesis 3, relationships have been corrupted by fear. We fear punishment from God because of our sin, so we hide from Him. Other kinds of fears affect our relationships with people – fear of rejection, fear of being hurt – and so we may hide from them.

God reveals who He is – with total transparency – through Jesus. We do not need to fear punishment from God because He showed us His unconditional love by sending Jesus to die for us. His sacrifice dealt with sin and restored our damaged relationship with Himself. **The good news of the gospel is that it can set us free to live the way God intended as husband and wife.**

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

session 1

25

5 MINS

15 MINS

35

SQ

How does knowing:

- God's unconditional forgiveness and acceptance
- there is no punishment or rejection from God or
- we are loved unconditionally by God, affect the way we communicate as a couple?

SI

SQ

ASK people to fill in the Couple Time preparation box C.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. Good communication means making your marriage partner a priority.
2. Good communication means growing in deeper understanding, which requires openness and trust.
3. As we become more secure in God's unconditional love for us, we will be able to communicate more openly as a couple.

We know that couples get most out of *Together* when they complete the Couple Time. We also know that many fail to do it so please encourage them.

Suggestions:

- Make sure that each couple agrees a date for their Couple Time and it goes into their diaries.
- Everybody agrees to be accountable to each other to ensure that the Couple Time does happen before the next meeting. Explain that, at the beginning of future group meetings, each couple will be asked to report back briefly on their Couple Time.
- If appropriate, point out the optional additional questions for remarried couples at the end of the Couple Time.

ASK if it would be acceptable if you, as the leader couple, send around an email three days before the next group meeting to serve as a reminder.

Encourage couples to focus on encouraging and building each other up during their Couple Time.

Congratulations! You've just finished your first Together

Once we are sure that God will not punish or reject us, we can respond by coming out of hiding. As we begin to trust Him more we will be able to increasingly open ourselves up to Him. This new pattern of communication with God can have a knock-on effect on our communication with our partner.

1. In what ways can a relationship of growing trust and openness with God affect the communication in our marriages?

Foundation Principle:

As we become more secure in God's unconditional love for us, we will be able to communicate more openly as a couple.

C Growing in trust and openness

- i. What could I say to my partner to affirm him/her? How much do I trust him/her? Write down something positive below.
- ii. How free do I feel to open myself up to God – how much do I trust Him?

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and what you can do to help each other to grow in openness and trust in your communication, with God and with each other.

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date for your diaries for your Couple Time. Make an hour for each other between group meetings to talk through and apply what is relevant to your lives.

Couple Time date:

26

growing even closer through our communication

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

5 MINS

5 MINS

*Good communication is
as stimulating as black
coffee and just as hard to
sleep after.*

Anne Morrow Lindberg

Couple Time – 60 minutes

As you talk to each other remember the dos and don'ts of listening:

Don't

- Interrupt.
- Be distracted.
- Criticise or blame – instead say how you feel.
- Give unwanted advice.
- Change the subject or tell your own story.

Do

- Listen actively – give your full attention.
- Be sensitive to one another as you share your thoughts and feelings ... this is important.
- Speak the truth in love.
- Try to understand – from time to time check your understanding by 'feeding back' to your partner what you think he/she has said.
- Be ready to apologise for any attitudes or behaviour that has caused your partner to feel marginalised or misunderstood.

If you didn't have time to complete the Couple Time preparation boxes during your group meeting then take a few minutes to fill them in now before you talk to your partner.

A How are we communicating?

Take turns reading out and expanding on your written answers to all three questions on page 23.

Identify a personal action point for you as an individual (a specific way to follow through with an action from any insights you gained from the discussion in the group and/or with your partner). These are intended to be helpful prompts for change if needed.

Personal action point:

Note: Be gentle with each other as you talk about deeper levels of communication. Make a point of affirming your love and acceptance for your partner at whatever level they try to express themselves. Encourage them with your gratitude when moving to a deeper level than you would normally communicate.

B Communicating at deeper levels

Each explain why you placed the initials where you did on page 25, and remember to highlight the things you are doing well.

Identify a personal action point to enable you to communicate at a deeper level, if appropriate.

Personal action point:

Look at Together Notes: Poor Listening/Good Listening (www.togetherinmarriage.com) for more on communication.

C Growing in our trust and openness

Talk about how you can grow in trust and openness in your relationship. Both share your answers to the first question on page 26 before moving on to the second question. Identify an action point if needed.

Personal action point:

Note: If you struggle with past experiences and how these affect your ability to trust your partner, you may consider talking to a trusted friend or counsellor.

At the next group meeting you will be asked to describe one way you are starting to communicate differently with your partner as a result of the session. Agree on one thing you would be prepared to share with the group from your Couple Time and write it down:

Before the next group meeting please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 2: **Finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage** (pages 31–33). God designed marriage and He has an exciting purpose and plan for it. Understanding God's plan for our marriages will enable us to find a commitment to a shared vision.

For further reading:
A Child No More, Mary Pytches (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991)

Dying to Change, Mary Pytches (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996)

28

growing even closer through our communication

For remarried couples

(optional additional questions)

For couples where either one – or both partners – have previously been married or in a long-term relationship.⁷

- i. Do you face any special challenges in establishing trust and openness with each other in the light of the previous relationship of either one – or both – partners? How do they affect you?
- ii. Agree on one thing you could do to support your partner as you face any challenges together.

Identify a personal action point, if needed.

Personal action point:

NOTES

1. Genesis 1:26–27.
2. Adapted from *Understanding: Communication I*, FamilyLife USA 'Weekend To Remember' conference manual, revised 1/04. Used with permission.
3. Genesis 2:24.
4. 2 Corinthians 6:11–13.
5. Based on table 'Why am I afraid to tell you who I am' by John Powell, FamilyLife USA 'Weekend to Remember' conference manual, revised 1/04. Used with permission.
6. Genesis 2:25.
7. Adapted from Question 3, Session 3, 'Making Your Remarriage Last', Group Publishing, Copyright © 2001 Jim Keller. Used with permission.

Session 2

Positioning Session 2

Having looked at communication, now we start to unpack what marriage is all about. The more we understand God's purpose and plan for marriage, the more we are able to find unity through a shared vision. This session is very important and the rest of Together builds on it.

Objectives of this Session

- To discover that we find unity through aligning our marriage with God's purpose and plan: we are made male and female, both in God's image, two individuals designed to be united as 'one'. God intends us to fulfil His purposes for marriage as a united team.
- To see our partner as 'a gift from God'. We receive them as a gift by faith, based on the trustworthiness of God's character, not on our partner's qualities.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Considers the meaning of unity.	15
Part B	Explores God's purpose and plan for marriage.	35
Part C and close	Identifies three building blocks for a strong marriage.	40

Preparation

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information for Leaders (page 183). Make notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- **Make sure that you have done your Couple Time following the previous meeting!**
- **Think about what you are going to say if a couple have not done their Couple Time. Clearly you will want to encourage them.** Couples get much more out of Together when they complete Couple Time. Let the benefits to those who have done the Couple Time sell it!
- This session lays an important theological foundation. You may feel it appropriate to tell couples that there will be more practical sessions later on. The session also gives another opportunity for couples to 'settle down' in each other's company.
- **We do not recommend that you split this session.** To help time management, we suggest you do the feedback from the Couple Time and Introductory Reading during the meal or the social period before you start the rest of the session.
- There are some pre-prepared answers to some questions in the Supplementary Information which you can read out if you get short of time and want to skip a question. You could also read out an answer to move your group along to the next question. However, try to avoid making it sound like 'teacher has all the answers' and use pre-prepared answers only if absolutely necessary!



2

Finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage

Introductory Reading

Is our relationship made up of two disconnected individuals or one unified couple?

You only have to look at the divorce statistics to see that marriage just isn't working for many today. Everyone seems to have their own ideas about how marriage should work, yet it is clear from the Bible that marriage is designed by God. **When we appreciate how special this relationship is, we will defend it and invest in it; and the more we invest, the more valuable it will become.** When we understand God's purpose for marriage, we are in a better position to build the foundations needed to weather the inevitable storms that will come our way. We will also find greater unity as we live together with a shared purpose.

In the beginning

The pinnacle of God's creation was humankind, because God chose to make human beings 'in His image'.¹ He put the man into His world to work it and take care of it.² But God did not intend man to be alone or fulfil his responsibilities on his own.³ He needed a companion and a 'helper'⁴... woman.

As Adam named the animals,⁵ it became clear that no creature could be such a 'helper' for him. Perhaps it was while the animals were pairing off that he recognised what God had known all along.⁶ **Adam didn't need a clone of himself; but someone to whom he could relate.** He needed someone who would fill his solitude as well as work alongside him; someone who was both like him and yet different. God presented him with a woman and he received her with delight and excitement! Here was someone who was made of the same 'stuff'. 'Not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.'⁷

Adam and Eve were the first married couple and God blessed them.

God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

Genesis 1:28

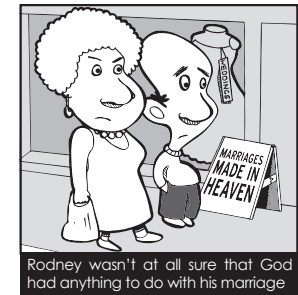
God's plan for marriage

God has a plan for marriage, for two individuals to be united as one.⁸ He intends for the oneness to be expressed in a unique pair-bond, which is physical, emotional and spiritual. It means being completely open with each other, totally trusting and unashamed before one another in the way we communicate (covered in Session 1) and live together. It also means being clear **why** we are together and **in which direction we are heading so that we are living as a united team**.

God's purpose for marriage

When we enter into marriage we enter into something God has already designed for a purpose. He intends marriage to be:

- I. **the first building block for community life.** We are not meant to be alone. Marriage means two people committing themselves to each other, making a binding covenant with the intention to stay together permanently. It is a commitment to be faithful to one another and to give 100% of ourselves.
- II. **a signpost to point people to God.** God made humans to 'mirror His image' on earth – to reflect His character and influence in the way we live and in the nature of our relationship. We point people to God (or not!) through our lifestyles at home, at work and in the community. We also show people what God is like through the nature of our relationship. God made two distinctly different creatures – male and female. It is when these two different humans come together in marriage that a unique aspect of God's character is displayed. Our relationship can actually illustrate for the world the nature of God's love.
- III. **a way to multiply a godly legacy.** God gave us a responsibility to 'fill' the earth. His desire is for us to have children, and for the family to be a training ground for life. But filling the earth is more than just increasing the number of humans. It is about helping others, including our children, to know God and make Him known. A couple will leave a lasting spiritual legacy as they model God's love and as they tell people about Him – as His ambassadors.



What do people see in the way we – as a couple – carry out our responsibilities to steward our time, money and creation?

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finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage

God knows that when the first flush of romantic glow of being in love begins to fade, we will need something outside of ourselves, beyond a cosy relationship, to fire up passion for marriage. God gives us a purpose and plan which draws us together in the way we're meant to be – living life to the full as a couple.

... good marriages are the foundation of society. They are seeds, or cell groups, pointing the way to man's great dream of utopia, which is fundamentally his urgent longing for the kingdom of God.

Mike Mason,
The Mystery of Marriage

This session looks at how we can develop unity through understanding God's purpose and plan for marriage.

If appropriate, remind people of the three simple ground rules to ensure confidentiality and trust.

AFFIRM all those couples who completed their Couple Time.

Try not to get stuck discussing the Introductory Reading. If appropriate, tell your group that: Session 3 has more on expressing love, Session 8 looks at how husbands and wives 'fit together' and Session 9 looks at our legacy.

SQ

- How would you define unity in marriage?
- What kind of **behaviour** works against unity/builds unity?
- Give examples of **attitudes** that may work against unity/build unity?
- How is unity in marriage achieved?

ASK everyone to spend five minutes individually filling in the Couple Time preparation box A.

Group Session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time following the Communication session?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about God's plan that prompted you to think about the subject in a new way? Explain.

A Finding unity in marriage

We are two different people who need to learn to live together as a united team. Even if we've been married many years there may still be things that get in the way of being a cohesive husband and wife team.

1. What does unity in a marriage actually mean? Consider:
- What kinds of things work against unity in a marriage?
 - What kinds of things build unity?

A Finding unity in marriage

- i. Note down a few words I could say to my partner to affirm how close I feel to him/her.
- ii. Am I struggling with anything **within myself** (not with my partner!) at the moment that could be causing disunity in our marriage? What might need to change so there is greater unity in the marriage?

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and how you can support each other in building unity in your marriage.

My most brilliant achievement was my ability to persuade my wife to marry me.

Winston Churchill

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finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage

10 MINS

10 MINS

5 MINS

ASK someone to read the paragraphs and Foundation Principle.

ASK if anyone has any comments about the paragraphs you've just read.

ASK someone else to read the Bible passage (leaving out the footnotes).

B God's purpose and plan for marriage

People have many different ideas about how marriage should work. But the Bible tells us that marriage was designed by God. **God gives us an exciting vision – purposes and a plan – for marriage.** Put simply, His purposes for marriage are:

- to be the first building block for community life,
- to be a signpost to point people to God, and
- to provide a way to multiply a godly legacy.

God's purposes for marriage give it meaning and focus beyond ourselves. **He also gives us a plan – a sort of 'how to' guide to make marriage work** (covered in the rest of this session).

Foundation Principle:

We find unity through the shared vision of fulfilling God's purpose and plan for marriage.

Bible study

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'

¹⁸The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³The man said,

'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman',
for she was taken out of man.'

session 2

35

20 MINS

Don't spend too long on Q1.

COMMENT: being a 'suitable helper' is not a derogatory term, but means an equal partner to live and work alongside her husband – to complement him. The Bible uses 'helper' as a term for the Holy Spirit and for God Himself (Psa. 54:4) and it is in no way inferior. There is more about our roles as men and women in a later session.

SQ

What do you think Adam felt when he saw Eve?

SQ

What had Eve done to earn Adam's favour?

SI

1. In the passage God says, '*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*' (v.18)

- What does this show us about God?

SI

2. God presents the woman to the man as if she were a gift (v.22).

- What was Adam's reaction? (v.23)

SQ

- What do you think attracted him when he saw her?

SQ

- Why do you think Adam accepted Eve? On what basis did he receive her?

²⁴For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

²⁵The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:15–25

NOTES ON PASSAGE

2:18 'Helper', Hebrew: *knedgedu*, meaning 'opposite against', an equal who supports one who needs help. 'Suitable', means being like another, matching him and complementary.

2:21 Rib', Hebrew: *sela*, meaning 'side'.

2:23 The Hebrew for 'this is now' is an ecstatic expression meaning 'wow'!

'Man', Hebrew: *Ish*

'Woman', Hebrew: *Ishah*, the feminine form of man's own name.

2:24 'One flesh' is a bonding of 'personhood', established through a sexual, emotional and spiritual union.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 45 mins)

36

finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage

SQ

- How would it affect our feelings towards our partner if we saw them as a gift from God?
- How would it affect our attitude towards them?
- How would it affect our behaviour?
- What responsibilities do we have as we think about being God's perfect gift to our partner?

SQ

How would it affect the way we approach tough times or any 'weaknesses' in our partner?

Be sensitive to those who have been married before. If appropriate, COMMENT: Divorce is a difficult and sensitive subject for some people. This study does not look at the theology of divorce, but tries to help couples to address any issues they face together in order to build a lifelong marriage with their new partner.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to fill in Couple Time preparation box B.

SI

SQ

Note:

Ever since the Fall in Genesis 3, God's perfect creation has been distorted by sin which affects all our relationships. Jesus dealt with sin and helps us to live according to God's plan for marriage.

SQ

3. We build a foundation for unity in our marriage when we accept our partner as a 'gift'.

- What does it mean in practice for one marriage partner to receive the other as a gift from God?
- What are the implications for our marriage relationship if we trust that God knew what He was doing when He brought us together?

Foundation Principle:

We can fully accept our partner as God's perfect gift, based on God's character and trustworthiness.

B God's purpose and plan for marriage

- How does it make me think and feel towards my partner as I reflect on the idea that he/she is a gift from God? (tick any that apply and/or write your own ideas)
 - ☐ Gives me a whole new perspective.
 - ☐ Produces joy/gratitude towards God.
 - ☐ Causes me to question God.
 - ☐ Makes me reconsider some of my actions/attitudes towards my partner.
 - ☐ Helps me to accept him/her as he/she is.
 - ☐ Gives me a deeper appreciation for my partner.
 - ☐ Not sure.
 - ☐ Other ...

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and how this concept makes you feel towards your partner and towards God.

Adam and Eve had an ideal marriage. He didn't have to hear about all the men she could have married, and she didn't have to hear about the way his mother cooked.

Kimberley Broyles

session 2

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 60 mins)

10 MINS

5 MINS

SQ

In what ways is the 'leaving' process life-long? Give some examples.

- Think of examples in terms of attitudes and behaviour.

SI

SQ

SI

SI

SQ

SQ

Try to list some examples of oneness in terms of :

- heart
- mind
- body
- spirit

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

C Three building blocks for a strong marriage

God's plan for marriage is a **lifelong process**. He gives us some practical instructions: '*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*' (v.24). These building blocks are not just for newlyweds!

Leaving

1. What do you think it means to leave our father and mother? Are there other ties we might need to leave?
2. Why is it important to leave ties?

Being united

3. The phrase '*be united to his wife*' is sometimes translated as '*cleave to his wife*'. What the words of these phrases are trying to convey is a sense of irrevocable commitment; a promise of unbroken covenant faithfulness.
 - What does this kind of permanent bonding between two people look like practically?
 - What are some of the benefits of this kind of commitment? What are the challenges?

Becoming one flesh

4. The Hebrew word for 'one flesh' refers to the bonding of the **whole** of a human being to another, rather than **just** the sexual aspect of human nature.
 - What are some ways a couple can experience greater oneness in a marriage?

Marriage is a wonderful invention: then again, so is a bicycle repair kit.

Billy Connolly

Foundation Principle:

We build a strong marriage as we follow God's plan to leave, be united and grow in oneness.

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finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage

10 MINS

10 MINS

10 MINS

ASK everyone to fill in the Couple Time preparation box C.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. We find unity through the shared vision of fulfilling God's purpose and plan for marriage.
2. We can fully accept our partner as God's perfect gift, based on God's character and trustworthiness.
3. We build a strong marriage as we follow God's plan to leave, be united and grow in 'oneness'.

- If appropriate, point out the optional additional questions for remarried couples and for those with children.
- Ask each couple to come to the next meeting prepared to share some insight from their Couple Time.

C Three building blocks for a strong marriage

What new insights into God's plan for marriage have I personally gained which could help me strengthen my marriage?

- i. Leaving:
- ii. Being united:
- iii. Becoming one flesh:

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your insight and a way you can follow through with an action to grow together in your marriage.

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date in your diaries for your Couple Time:

session 2

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

5 MINS

5 MINS

Couple Time – 60 minutes

As you talk to each other **remember the dos and don'ts of listening.**

Marriages are made in heaven. But, again, so are thunder, lightning, tornados and hail.

Anon

A Finding unity in marriage

Talk about building greater unity in your marriage. Share your answers to the first point on page 34. Then share your answers to the second question, if you completed it. (Note: this is not a question about finding faults in your partner!)

Identify a personal action point. (Remember: action points are intended to be helpful prompts for change **if** needed.)

Personal action point:

B God's purpose and plan for marriage

Talk about how it makes you think and feel towards your partner as you reflect on the idea that he/she is a gift from God. In what ways do you (or can you) demonstrate to your partner that you accept him/her unconditionally?

Identify a personal action point.

Personal action point:

40

finding unity through God's purpose and plan for marriage

For further reading:

Don't They Make a Lovely Couple, John and Ann Benton (Christian Focus, 2005).

The Mystery of Marriage, Mike Mason (Multnomah Publishers, 1985). Beautifully written and filled with life-transforming insights.

Marriage. Sex in the Service of God, Christopher Ash (InterVarsity Press, 2003). Deep theology and a helpful book for those who want to understand what the Bible has to say in greater depth. The author explores some of the complex and controversial issues, taking a thoughtful approach.

C Three building blocks for a strong marriage

Share the insights you gained into God's plan for marriage. What are you doing well? How could you follow through with an action to build a stronger marriage?

Personal action point:

There are optional questions for couples who are remarried (page 42) and for those with children (page 43).

At the next group meeting you will be asked to share one new insight you have gained about God's plan for marriage and how this is helping you in your marriage. Agree upon what you would be prepared to share with the group from your Couple Time – maybe a different insight for each of you – and write it down:

Before the next group meeting please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 3: **Expressing love through emotional intimacy** (pages 45–47). We grow closer – and build 'oneness' – when we understand and meet the needs of our partner.

For remarried couples

(optional additional questions)

Take some time to reflect, then talk together. Be gentle. It's a good idea to pray first and ask God for wisdom and sensitivity.

- i. Many factors can cause stress and problems for couples where one – or both – partners have been in a previous relationship. These will make leaving old ties – or unravelling them – and being united in a new marriage, difficult unless handled positively. Mark any from the following list that affect you '**Y**' and/or your partner '**P**'.

	Y	P
Former spouses (you and/or your partner may have been divorced or bereaved)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children from a previous marriage who live with you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children from a previous marriage who do not live with you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial support for a previous wife and children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time – visiting children/holidays	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In-laws from previous marriages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- ii. Discuss with your partner the stress factors you struggle with most. How do they affect you and your marriage? Do any of them work against unity in your relationship?
- iii. What can you do to support your partner in dealing with any of the above? Identify a personal action point, if appropriate.

For couples with children

(optional additional questions)

- i. In what ways does having children build – or challenge – the unity in your marriage?
- ii. Does anything need to change? Identify a personal action point, if required.

NOTES

- 1. Genesis 1:26.
- 2. Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:15.
- 3. Genesis 2:18.
- 4. Hebrew: *knegedu*, a helper suitable for him, or matching him.
- 5. Genesis 2:19–20.
- 6. Genesis 2:21–23.
- 7. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Matthew Henry (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1961).
- 8. Genesis 2:24.

Session 3

Positioning Session 3

Having looked at God's purpose and plan, we now deal with the subject of emotional intimacy.

We are created to be in relationships and we all have relational needs. This session is very practical and helps us to understand how to communicate and meet these needs to express our love for each other.

Objectives of this Session

- To recognise that each partner has different emotional needs. In helping to meet these needs the partner is showing 'agape love' – the kind of love that builds deep intimacy.
- To recognise the barriers to emotional intimacy.

Note: During this session couples will explore relational needs. Some may find it difficult to identify their relational needs and/or those of their partner. This is not uncommon – do not let it trouble you but try to be sensitive to those who might be struggling. Encourage couples that just by thinking and talking about this subject they will be moving closer together.

The teaching on relational needs is used with permission from 'Great Commandment Network' and 'ILM Relational Ministry UK'. The Together Notes on page 198 give information about the organisations and the teaching on relational needs as they appear in *Keeping Marriages Healthy*, by Dr David and Teresa Ferguson.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Expressing love in our relationship.	13
Part B	Meeting relational needs and their different forms.	47
Part C and close	Barriers to emotional intimacy.	30

Preparation

This session deals with some intimate and personal issues. Prayer for everyone in the group is really important, given the sensitivity of the topic. Pray particularly that all couples complete their Couple Time **after** the session (some might prefer to avoid talking about such sensitive issues).

Ten intimacy needs: It is important that you and your partner talk through the ten intimacy needs carefully as you both prepare, so that you understand the subtle differences between some of the identified needs. We suggest that, for the group exercise (Part B, Q3), you and your partner handle 'Acceptance', and 'Approval' as these are easily confused (see workbook page 52). If your group finds it difficult to understand all the nuances of the needs or struggles to differentiate between them, reassure everyone that it's OK. Use this exercise as a tool to get people thinking and talking.

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information for Leaders (page 184).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Decide whether you want to split this session (perhaps ask your group first). Then prepare accordingly making notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>

3	As a lead couple prepare your answers ahead of time for Part B Q3. If you're splitting the session you can leave this preparation for the next group meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	There will be times when individuals are either working alone or talking as couples. It might be helpful to have gentle background music ready. We suggest that you use something without lyrics, eg classical or light jazz.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- **Make sure that you have done your Couple Time following the previous meeting!**
- **Think about what you are going to say if a couple have not done their Couple Time.**
- **Pray briefly at the beginning** of the meeting if you feel this is appropriate.
- Try to start and finish on time, whether you are splitting this session or not. Note that all timings given in the notes are for completing the session in one meeting (suggested timings for a split meeting are outlined in the table below).
- **If you wish to split the session we suggest the following:**

FIRST MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	From Couple Time and Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Q1. Couple Time A.	10 15
Part B	Q1. Suggest men/women consider the needs of David and Deborah and then feedback their ideas to the whole group. Q2.	20 15

	Ten relational needs. Suggest you read the relational needs on workbook pages 52–53 as a group. Then allocate two or three needs to each couple and ask them to do the exercise in Q3 as their Couple Time (starting it during the rest of the time available and feeding back their ideas at the beginning of the next group meeting).	25
Wrap up	Closing remarks. Explain how you will approach the next meeting.	5

SECOND MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	From Couple Time A (if any).	5
Part B	Q3b. Ask couples to report back their ideas from Q3a. Q4. FP and CT prep B.	30 12 3
Part C	Spend a few minutes discussing the factors affecting emotional intimacy, as a group. Steve and Susan and Q1. FP and CT prep C.	5 35 5
... and finally	Review Foundation Principles for the whole of Session 3. Closing remarks.	5

- If you are not splitting the session and find you are unable to finish questions within the time allocated, then reassure couples that they will be given the opportunity to explore the issues further during their Couple Time. The important thing about the session is to get couples thinking and talking about their needs with one another.
- There are **no** additional questions for remarried couples or couples with children in the Couple Time at the end of this session.



3

Expressing love through emotional intimacy

Introductory Reading

Is my love for my partner focused on getting what I need, or on giving them what they need? Do I accept them just the way they are, or does my love depend on how I am feeling or how they are behaving?

In the early stages of attraction between a man and a woman we say they are 'falling in love'. Experts now tell us that this intense emotional period is accompanied by chemical changes in the brain. Each person experiences an unusually high level of tolerance towards the other: their love is literally blind. The problem is that this kind of love is only temporary, typically lasting up to three years. **Couples need to develop a more lasting kind of love once the 'blind love' has run its course.**

Some realities about human love

The love we experience from day to day often depends on:

- I. **feelings.** These can be the heady emotions associated with being in love, but they will eventually dry up. Love tends to depend on our mood: *I'm having a good day ... so I feel like loving him/her.*
- II. **'my' priorities.** Our love tends to be self-centred because at the centre of human love is the human self – our natural tendency to put our own feelings, desires and thoughts first: *will he/she love me back, look after my needs, give me sex?*
- III. **performance.** We are concerned with whether our partner meets the standards we have set: *does he/she deserve my love?*

The problem with human love is that ultimately it is a **taking** kind of love. **Lasting intimate relationships need giving love which is actively other-centred, accepting and unconditional.** But where can we find this love that puts our partner's needs above our own?

There is a greater love, an unselfish love: the love that God shows us. The Bible tells us that God **is** love and that His love is focused on others and serves others.¹

Jesus showed us what God's love is like

God's love is:

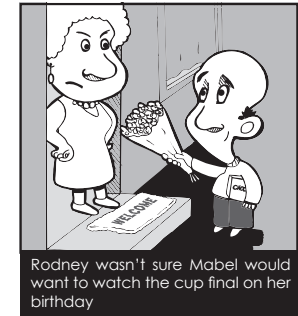
- **a decision** ... not a feeling.
- **unconditional** ... accepts a person as they are.
- **unselfish** ... puts the other person's needs first.
- **sacrificial** ... gives up rights.
- **active** ... takes the initiative to show loving behaviour towards others.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

The New Testament word for this **other-centred love is agape**.

Agape love might seem impossible to attain. **Yet God wants to give us love – agape love – to 'pour it into our hearts'**.² He is its source, and He has more than enough to spare! The more we open ourselves to God's love, in the context of a relationship with Him, the more His Spirit living within us will fill us with His love. This **agape** love will then begin to spill over into the lives of our spouse, our children (if we have them) and those around us. **We can only give this special kind of love when we have first received it from Him**.³ The impact of **agape** love extends far beyond our own marriage and points people to God, fulfilling one of His purposes for marriage.



Is it possible to love my partner in the way God does?

There is only one being who loves perfectly, and that is God, yet the New Testament distinctly states that we are to love as God does; so the first step is obvious. If ever we are going to have perfect love in our hearts we must have the very nature of God in us.

Oswald Chambers

... marriage inevitably becomes the flagship of all other relationships. One's home is the place where love must first be practiced before it can truly be practiced anywhere else.

Mike Mason,
The Mystery of Marriage

Designed to love

Everyone needs relationships. We are not meant to live as independent beings – **love can only be expressed in relation to others**. We all need the intimacy that comes from deeply knowing and being known by another person. **God created us to be in relationships – with Him but also with other people – to give and receive love**. In marriage, the most intimate of all human relationships, God intends each partner to complement and complete the other with **agape** love. **The one flesh bond between us strengthens as we freely interact in ever-deepening ways at all levels of our being: expressing our love by building intimacy.**

This session looks at how we express love to our partner and build intimacy by meeting their emotional needs.

No need to read out all the ground rules, but you may want to remind people not to share anything that might embarrass their partner.

AFFIRM all those couples who completed their Couple Time.

NOTE: Session 9 has more about how God's love draws others to seek Him. Session 7 is about deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy.

SI

ASK someone to read out the paragraph and Foundation Principle.

Group Session

Feedback

- Briefly share one insight each of you has gained as a result of the Couple Time following the session about God's purpose and plan for marriage. How has the topic helped you?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about love that prompted you to think about the subject in a new way? Explain.

A Expressing love in our relationship

- What do you think should be distinctive about the way love is expressed within a Christian marriage?

Feeling loved

It's important to understand that we all feel loved in different ways. **We need to understand what makes our partner feel loved, so we can express our love for them** in the way they need it. This requires **agape love** (other-centred and unconditional love) which comes from God's Spirit living and active within an individual.

Foundation Principle:

We build intimacy when we express love to our partner in the way they need it.

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expressing love through emotional intimacy

10 MINS

5 MINS

Leader to read out the instructions for Couple Time preparation box A.

Consider playing quiet background music as couples talk to each other.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 23 mins)

ASK someone to read out the paragraph. Ask a man to read out 'David' and a woman to read 'Deborah'.

There would be a lot more happy marriages if husbands tried to understand their wives and wives tried to understand football.

Anon

A Expressing love in our relationship

This is a different kind of Couple Time preparation.

First you will have two to three minutes to write down your answers to i. **Then** you will have five minutes to complete ii and tell each other what you wrote down for i.

- i. Jot down your answer to the following question: What does my partner do that makes me feel loved? Write down at least two things.
- ii. Then tell each other what you wrote. Make eye contact and say, 'I feel really loved by you when ...'

Note down those things that you do for your partner that they said made them feel loved.

In your Couple Time you will have more time to talk about ways in which you can express love in your marriage.

B Meeting relational needs

We all recognise that we have physical needs such as food and sleep. When these are met we feel satisfied; when not, we may feel irritable. Human beings also have 'relational' needs. Examples of some relational needs are: affection, attention, respect and encouragement. **When our relational needs are met we feel loved and cared for – we experience emotional intimacy.** When they are not met we can feel hurt and unloved. Partners who don't meet each other's emotional needs will likely experience a gradual emotional withdrawal from one another, over time.

David and Deborah

David works long hours to provide for his family. On Fridays he likes to go out with his mates to play pool and on Sundays he goes to watch his son play football. In any spare time David likes to do DIY around the house and garden. David is proud of what he has achieved. He

3 MINS

5 MINS

10 MINS

SPLIT into separate men's/women's groups but stay in the same room.

If you're short on time then leave out the feedback part. If you have time ask one person to summarise the group's feedback briefly.

Try not to get 'stuck' here. The main point is that humans have deep spiritual longings that only God can fill. God made us as physical and emotional beings with physical and emotional needs which are met through human relationships.

SI

loves his wife and son and wants them to have everything he didn't when he was growing up. Sometimes he feels guilty about the hours he works. He can't understand why Deborah is often moody and irritable but they don't talk much. Once or twice he has found her crying and he couldn't help feeling annoyed.

Deborah loves being a mum and dotes on her son. It took many years of trying before they had Sam (9) and she has given up hope of having another baby. She is busy in her job at the local school and she does voluntary work with the elderly. She also organises the crèche at church. Deborah has many friends but still feels lonely. She loves her husband but feels she doesn't get much of his time and attention. She also feels that she can't talk to David. Lately she has felt stressed and anxious, that everything is going wrong. She finds herself criticising David the minute he comes home.

1. Divide into separate groups of men and women to discuss your answers to the following questions. Then, feed back your thoughts to the whole group.

Men consider:

- a. What do you think Deborah is feeling?
- b. What does Deborah need from David?
- c. How can David make Deborah feel more loved and cared for?

Women consider:

- a. What do you think David is feeling?
- b. What does David need from Deborah?
- c. How can Deborah make David feel more loved and cared for?

It's not good to be alone

In the creation account in Genesis, we read that God calls His creation 'very good'. Yet after God creates Adam, suddenly we read that something is 'not good' – the fact that Adam is alone.⁴ There is no one suitable for him amongst the animals. God always intended to create a pair of humans but He created them one after the other in order to highlight their need for each other. So God creates Eve to live with and work alongside Adam.

God made us with a need for relationship. Marriage is one of the relationships which God has provided as a remedy for our aloneness. He also made us with a need for a relationship with Him. **We were made to need God and need people!**

2. In what ways do we need God? How is it different from needing our partner and other human relationships?

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expressing love through emotional intimacy

5 MINS

ASK someone to read these paragraphs.

Q3 is important. The purpose is to get everyone thinking about different kinds of relational needs. Reassure everyone that it's OK if people don't understand all aspects of the different needs. The main thing is to see them as a tool for discussion.

TELL couples to ignore the tick boxes for the moment. Give couples time to think of their answers to part a. When they report back ask each couple to read out the definition first and then tell the group their ideas.

As the lead couple, remember to take Acceptance and Approval for yourselves. Think about how they are similar and/or different. Notice also how they differ from Appreciation.

There are prepared answers in the SI to help you or if you are short of time.

If you get 'stuck' here you could suggest to your group that you split the session (if you weren't already intending to).

Ten relational needs

The following are ten identified relational needs which, when met, contribute to emotional intimacy (see pages 52–53).⁵ These are **specific ways in which agape love can become more tangible**. (Note: we sometimes think of 'intimacy' as the physical act alone. While intimacy may include sex it is much more than that. True intimacy is only possible when our relational needs are being met.)

We all have each of these needs to some degree. The intensity and type of our individual needs may vary from time to time. However, for the purpose of this exercise, we are focusing on the relational needs that we most want to have met **at this time** in our lives. Although we **shouldn't** expect our partner to be able to meet every single need we have, **God intends our marriage relationship to be the primary human relationship through which there is giving and receiving to meet these needs**. Giving and receiving is a big part of the process of becoming one in marriage.

SI

3. Do this exercise as a couple:

- a. **First**, each couple is allocated two or three (of the ten listed overleaf) relational needs. As a couple think of **a specific action** that illustrates how one partner could meet the need of the other. You may also find it helpful to say what **not** to do.
- b. **Then** report back your ideas to the group.

session 3

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 58 mins)

20 MINS

Ten relational needs

I need ...		Myself	My partner
Acceptance	Receive me unconditionally; look beyond my faults and irritations, respond positively to me. This means ... look beyond the faults and irritations, accepting me as the imperfect person I am, not based on performance. Don't criticise. <i>'Do you love me just the way I am?'</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approval	Commend me for who I am. Speak well of me to others. This means ... speak highly about aspects of my character, for who I am, to others. Recognise the special things about me. <i>'Show me that I am special.'</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affection	Communicate care and closeness through physical touch. Tell me you love me. This means ... express your affection by touching me and using loving words. <i>'I need a cuddle.'</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appreciation	Verbalise your personal gratefulness for me, notice my achievements. This means ... verbally communicate that you are grateful for what I do . <i>'Tell me that you notice me and what I do.'</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attention	Show interest in and support for my concerns; enter my world with me. This means ... listen to me. Spend time with me on my level – no distractions,	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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expressing love through emotional intimacy

I need ...		Myself	My partner
	but give me your undivided attention. 'Come into my world.'		
Comfort	Share in my pain by feeling the hurt with me, console me with tenderness. This means ... comfort me tenderly when I am hurting. Take my feelings seriously. 'Share in my pain/my struggle.'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouragement	Urge me forward positively; help me persevere towards my goal. This means ... help me to overcome something or work towards a goal, instilling confidence. 'Do you believe in me?'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect	Value my ideas, give regard to my opinions; show me my worth to you. This means ... honour me and don't put me down. 'Show me that I am of great worth to you.'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Security	Protect me from harm, pursue harmony, give me confidence when I am vulnerable. This means ... help me to trust and feel secure when I am vulnerable; create a feeling of freedom from fear or harm (emotional/physical/financial). 'I need to feel safe with you.'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support	Come alongside me to gently help me carry a load. This means ... help with a worry or problem. 'I need your help with this.'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tell your group not to be surprised if some find it difficult to identify their top relational needs. Our partners can often help us to identify them and you will have more time to discuss this in your Couple Time.

Leave the Couples Together parts out if you're short of time and just read out the COMMENTS below.

ASK who guessed three correctly, two correctly etc. Reassure anyone who appears not to understand any of their partner's needs (it's OK) – this is the point of this exercise.

COMMENT for c: Even if our needs seem to be similar (two or three the same) we may try to meet our partner's needs in a different way from how they want the needs to be met. For example, when both partners have a top need for Affection it could be that one partner wants to go walking and hold hands, and the other wants sex. That's why we need to discuss these.

COMMENT for d: It's unusual for people to know all of the relational needs of another person, unless they're a mind-reader!

GENERAL COMMENT: We often have a tendency to give our partner the things we would actually like to receive ourselves. Perhaps one partner has a top need for Affection and can't quite understand why the other isn't grateful for all the kisses and cuddles when in fact Respect would be more appreciated.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and the Couple Time preparation box B.

4. By yourself

- Identify your top three intimacy needs at this point in your life. (Tick three '**myself**' boxes but do not show your partner.)
- Now guess and note down what you think your partner's top three are at this point in his/her life. (Again don't confer with your partner. Tick three '**My partner**' boxes.)

Couples Together

- Are our needs the same?** Compare your top three (the '**Myself**' boxes) to see if any are the same as the '**Myself**' boxes ticked by your partner. For example, both identifying 'security'. Without revealing your specific needs, be ready to tell the group if you had: 3/2/1/0 the same (they don't have to be in the same order).
- Do we understand each other?** Compare what you guessed about your partner's top three needs ('**My partner**' boxes ticked) with what he/she actually selected (his/her '**Myself**' boxes ticked). Without revealing specific needs, be ready to tell the group if you guessed: 3/2/1/0 correctly

Foundation Principle:

Meeting the relational needs of our partner is an expression of **agape** love and draws us together.

B Meeting relational needs

In your Couple Time be prepared to describe why you selected the particular three relational needs you feel are most important to you at the moment. You will also be talking about how your partner can meet these needs.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 70 mins)

54

expressing love through emotional intimacy

6 MINS

6 MINS

ASK someone to read the paragraphs.

ASK someone to read out Steve and Susan.

C Factors affecting emotional intimacy

Emotional intimacy comes out of a growing awareness of each other's needs. Many people have difficulty recognising or expressing their own needs. If we don't understand or recognise needs – ours or our partner's – it hinders us from giving and receiving appropriately.⁶

Factors affecting the recognition of needs:

Unaware of them	Just don't understand what our own needs are.
Uncommunicative	Don't know how to talk about these things, or feel very uncomfortable doing so.
Self-reliance	Believe that all we need to survive and be happy is found within oneself. Those who've experienced a lot of childhood pain may learn to survive by stuffing their feelings inside, and find it difficult to show their true feelings to anyone else.
Low self-esteem	Believe we have little worth or reason to be loved. Feel unworthy, unlovable or guilty.

Steve and Susan

When Susan met Steve she was immediately attracted to his confident and fun-loving personality. They have been married eight years and to the outside world they seem the 'perfect couple'. To his friends Steve is always upbeat and cheerful, never showing any other kinds of feelings. Susan comes from a large family and tries to live up to the high standards set by her mother. Her parents went through a bitter divorce when she was in her teens. Susan doesn't know much about Steve's family except that his father was very strict, and when he died recently Steve hardly said a word about him. Susan feels unloved and frustrated that she can't get close to Steve. She is also worried because she has heard Steve raising his voice several times recently with their five-year-old son, saying things like 'big boys don't cry'. She doesn't know what to do and feels anxious and guilty.



1. Consider Steve and Susan and the factors affecting their emotional intimacy.
 - a. What might be the reasons that Steve finds it difficult to let Susan get close to him?

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

REASSURE your group that if anyone finds any of the questions in Couple Time preparation box C difficult to answer, that's OK. The questions are there to help prompt discussion of anything that may be holding people back from 'giving and receiving' love.

ENCOURAGE them to have their Couple Time within the next few days while the topic is still fresh in their minds.

- b. What might be the reasons that Susan finds it difficult to let Steve get close to her?
- c. How might these factors act as barriers to emotional intimacy for Steve and Susan?
- d. How does a person handle these factors so that they are better able to meet the needs of their partner?

Foundation Principle:

Together we can learn to handle any barriers to emotional intimacy.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 95 mins)

C Factors affecting emotional intimacy

- i. As I think about my own needs I relate to the following statement(s): (tick any that apply)
 - ☐ I am unaware of my needs.
 - ☐ I find it difficult or uncomfortable to communicate my needs.
 - ☐ I think it's important to look out for myself first (nobody else will).
 - ☐ I find fulfilment from within.
 - ☐ 'Big boys and girls' don't cry! All this stuff about needs is rubbish.
 - ☐ I feel guilty talking about my needs.
 - ☐ Other...
- ii. Look at the statements you have ticked above. How might they affect your ability to **receive** expressions of love from your partner? Do any of them act as barriers to building emotional intimacy? (Mark these with a B.)
- iii. Which insights from the group discussion could help you be better at **giving** to meet the relational needs of your partner? Note down one or two insights

In your Couple Time you will be able to talk about factors affecting emotional intimacy – your own needs and how you can meet the needs of your partner – so you will be able to give and receive more appropriately.

If appropriate, ask someone to read the special note out loud.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. We build intimacy when we express love to our partner in the way they need it.
2. Meeting the relational needs of our partner is an expression of agape love and draws us together.
3. Together we can learn to handle any barriers to emotional intimacy.

- ENCOURAGE couples to do this Couple Time.
- Some may find it difficult to identify their relational needs and/or those of their partner. This is not uncommon. Reassure your group that just by thinking and talking about their needs things will become clearer.
- If appropriate, mention that prayer will help individuals and couples recognise their relational needs so encourage them to ask for God's help in prayer before doing their Couple Time.
- Ask each couple to come to the next meeting prepared to share some insight from their Couple Time.
- If appropriate, point out that there are no additional questions for remarried couples or couples with children in this Couple Time.

A special note

As we try to communicate our feelings and needs, we might struggle to let loved ones get close to us or we may become angry in certain situations without knowing why. (We will tackle anger in Session 5.) It can be helpful to talk to a counsellor to unpack these struggles and give an insight into the causes of our behaviour. With this understanding we are much better equipped to change and grow as people. Counselling sometimes has an inappropriate stigma attached to it but there are situations when it is entirely appropriate, particularly if it will help to remove barriers to communication and intimacy. Useful counselling contacts are at: Association of Christian Counsellors 01189 662207 or visit www.acc-uk.org

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date for your diaries for your Couple Time:

5 MINS

session 3

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

Couple Time – 60 minutes

As you talk to each other **remember the dos and don'ts of listening.**

*Love conquers all things
– except poverty and
toothache.*

Mae West

A Expressing love in our relationship

If you didn't have time in your group meeting to complete part ii then do it now (page 49).

What one thing could you do for your partner this week that would make them feel loved?
Identify a personal action point.

Personal action point:

B Meeting relational needs

First, affirm your partner by telling them ways that they are already meeting some of your needs (mention at least two things).

Then, take turns to describe why you selected the three **relational needs** you feel are most important to you at the moment (pages 52–53). Think of ways your partner can meet these needs. Identify a personal action point(s) if appropriate.

Personal action point:

Together Notes: 10 Important Relational Needs (on www.togetherinmarriage.com) has more information about relational needs and contact details for 'The Great Commandment Network' and ILM Relational Ministry UK (including training and resources available).

C Factors affecting emotional intimacy

Take turns to tell each other which statements for part i you relate to the most as you think about your own relational needs (page 56).

Then talk about how they might act as barriers to building emotional intimacy with your partner (part ii).

What insights from the group discussion could help you be better at giving to meet the relational needs of your partner (part iii)? Does anything need to change in the way you or your partner give and receive love to build emotional intimacy in the future? Identify a personal action point, if necessary.

Personal action point:

At the next group meeting you will be asked to describe a key insight you've started to apply in expressing love and building emotional intimacy, as a result of the session. Agree on one thing you would be prepared to share with the group from your Couple Time and write it down:

Before the next group meeting ...

Please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 4: **Facing life's relationship challenges with God** (pages 61–63). Relationship challenges and self-centredness can threaten our marriage. We grow closer as we face them with God's help.

NOTES

1. 1 John 4:7–12; John 13:1–13, 34–35.
2. Romans 5:5.
3. 1 John 4:19.
4. Genesis 2:18.
5. Source of teaching on relational needs: Chapter 2, *Keeping Marriages Healthy*, by Dr David and Teresa Ferguson (Intimacy Press, 2000). Adapted and used with permission. For further information on the relational needs, including contact details for 'The Great Commandment Network' and 'ILM Relational Ministry UK' see Together Notes: 10 Important Relational Needs on our website.
6. Adapted from 'The result of unmet need?', Chapter 2, *Keeping Marriages Healthy*, by Dr David and Teresa Ferguson (Intimacy Press, 2000). Used with permission.

Session 4

Positioning Session 4

Having looked at emotional intimacy and our relational needs which help us grow closer in a marriage, we now focus on the relationship challenges which can pull us apart. We also explore how the Holy Spirit can help us.

This session is both practical and spiritual. It helps us to understand how vital the Holy Spirit is in living out distinctly Christian marriages in today's world.

Objectives of this Session

- To recognise the relationship challenges that every marriage can face.
- To understand the Holy Spirit and how to live out our marriages God's way.

Note: During this session couples will explore the nature and role of the Holy Spirit. People may be unused to the spiritual dimension or have varying views and experiences. By the end of this session couples will have a practical and biblical understanding on how to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. If appropriate, point people to Together Notes: Living the Christian Life (on the website). If you have non-Christians in your group you may want to read 'Knowing God' (page 154 in the workbook) as a group and talk about the gospel. You will need to allow extra time for this.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	A look at life's relationship challenges.	25
Part B	Facing relationship challenges with God.	20
Part C and close	Spirit-filled living.	45

Preparation

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information for Leaders (page 186). Make notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Read 'Knowing God (workbook page 154) and Together Notes: Living the Christian Life (on the website).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	If you have non-Christians in your group, think and pray about how you will handle this session. You may wish to split the session to give yourself time to talk about the gospel.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Decide whether you want to split this session (perhaps ask your group first). Then prepare accordingly, making notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	During this session you will be studying several passages of the Bible. Make sure that you're clear on the teaching points from these passages. The SI gives you the information that you need.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- **Make sure that you have done your Couple Time following the previous meeting!**
- **Think about what you are going to say if a couple have not done their Couple Time.**
- We suggest that unless there is a reason not to, you **say a brief prayer at the beginning of the meeting.**
- If you think it's necessary at this stage, remind everyone of the three simple ground rules.
- Try to start and finish on time, whether you are splitting this session or not. Note that all timings given in the notes are for completing the session in one meeting (suggested timings for a split meeting are outlined in the table below).
- **If you wish to split the session we suggest the following:**

FIRST MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Q1, 2 and 3. Couple Time A.	35 5
Part B	Talk about the gospel (if appropriate). Q1. Couples will have more time to explore the Bible passages and then feedback their ideas to the whole group. Read Foundation Principle and complete Couple Time B.	40 5
Wrap up	Closing remarks. Explain how you will approach the next meeting.	5

SECOND MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time A and B and recap from previous meeting.	15
Part C	Q1. A Spirit-filled life, Q2 and 3. Spiritual 'breathing', Q4. FP and Couple Time C.	20 30 20 5
... and finally	Review Foundation Principles for the whole of Session 4. Closing remarks.	10

- There are additional optional questions for remarried couples in the Couple Time at the end of this session.



4

Facing life's relationship challenges with God

Introductory Reading

Marriage is a special union between two individuals. It is also the closest most of us will ever be to another human and that brings challenges for our relationship.

In the early stages of a relationship we seem to be protected by a romantic glow. There is a high level of physical and emotional intimacy, but as the glow fades we begin to see each other in a different light. **We face a choice: either we ignore any problems or we tackle them together. Choosing the first option will lead us on a path to isolation; the other will draw us closer together.** If we don't want to confront any issues, we risk settling for a rather shallow relationship. In time we are likely to become resentful and bitter, and drift apart. We might still live under the same roof but emotionally we become distant. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can choose to work together, face life's relationship challenges and grow closer in the process.

Relationship challenges

We will look at five areas of challenge to any marriage:¹

- I. **Differences.** It seems obvious: our personalities, gender, family backgrounds, expectations and values are likely to be very different. It is often our differences which attract us to each other, but later on they can drive us up the wall! The situation gets worse when we start focusing on each other's weaknesses.
- II. **50:50 performance.** There is a great danger in basing our relationships on performance. In the 50:50 model we each do our bit: I'll meet your needs if you meet mine; if I do this for you then I expect something in return. I may expect my partner to maintain the high standard of performance I will obviously put in. But if I think you're only doing 40% then I'll criticise and cut back to 40% as well.

III. **Tough times.** Our relationship will have to take action to meet life's ups and downs in a constructive way. Naturally we celebrate the highs, but the way we respond to unexpected difficult circumstances can make or break a relationship.

IV. **'Affairs'.** We would define these as any activity where we seek inappropriate fulfilment outside of the marriage. The classic one is the love affair. But many people today have 'career affairs' in which most of their energy is channelled into their work. The 'activities affair' is similar – a hobby or sport can be an all-consuming passion. Love of material things such as shopping, food and so on is another way that we can seek gratification. Children can also take the first place over our relationship with our husband or wife.

V. **My priorities.** This is the big issue – we all have a natural tendency to put ourselves first. It's the way we are wired: our feelings, needs and happiness come first even if we are not trying to be deliberately selfish. That makes it difficult for the union of two to become a team of one.

Where do I spend my time and money? This is a good indicator of my priorities.

I never loved another person the way I loved myself.

Mae West

God has the answer

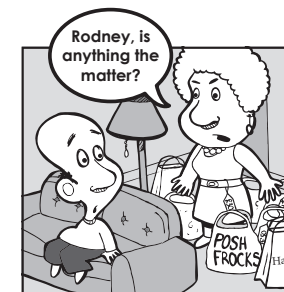
God can help us face these challenges to our marriage because He helps us to deal with the root of the problem: our self-centred nature.

The world became contaminated by sin when Adam and Eve, the first married couple, chose to go their own way and disobey God.² Sin distorts all that is good. **Sin makes people naturally self-centred,³ which has a catastrophic effect on our relationships with God and with each other.** God seeks an intimate relationship with every person but cannot tolerate sin because He is holy. So we find ourselves separated – disconnected – from Him.

The good news is that God took the initiative to restore a relationship with people – to reconnect. Jesus has dealt with mankind's sin on a cosmic scale through His sacrifice on the cross.⁴ **When we turn to Jesus as our Saviour (as one who rescues us) He gives us the Holy Spirit, God's personal presence and power to live in us. We may still live in a challenging world infected by sin, but the Holy Spirit helps us to live God's way, as opposed to our self-centred way.**

'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit ...

John 7:37–39



Who is the Holy Spirit and what does He do?

Jesus promised that God's Holy Spirit would satisfy our deepest longings. **The Holy Spirit is God – the third Person of the Trinity,⁵ not an 'it'. He is the intimate presence of God in our lives.⁶ Among the many things the Holy Spirit does are the following:**

- He gives us **new life**.⁷
- He assures us we are a **child of God**.⁸
- He enables us to experience the infinite **love of God**.⁹
- He teaches us **truth**.¹⁰
- He challenges us about our sin¹¹ and enables us to **change**¹² – to become other-centred rather than self-centred.
- He helps us **forgive each other**.¹³
- He gives us a **source of love from outside of our marriage** to love one another unconditionally, even when times are tough and we don't feel like it.¹⁴
- He enables us to **tell others about God**.¹⁵

If we try to live the Christian life in our own strength we will struggle, because it's impossible! We will experience failure, frustration and lack of fulfilment if we live by our self-centred desires, because they clash with living God's way.¹⁶ We need God's power and guidance to live as He intends and to face our relationship challenges. **For this we must live in step with the Holy Spirit.**

*What drives my choices?
Is it God's Spirit within me,
or my self-centredness?*

This session looks at how we can face life's challenges so they don't threaten our relationship, but bring us closer together.

AFFIRM all those couples who completed their Couple Time.

ASK the supplementary question to help conversation flow, if appropriate.

SQ

What are the consequences to a marriage relationship if challenges are not tackled in a positive way?

ASK someone to read the paragraph.

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

Group Session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time following Session 3 about expressing love?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about relationship challenges and how the Holy Spirit helps us that prompted you to think? Explain.

A Looking at life's relationship challenges

1. How might various kinds of relationship challenges affect a marriage? (Refer to the challenges covered in the Introductory Reading and think of your own ideas. Consider the positive impact as well as the negative.)

Going my own way

We **all** have a natural tendency to put our thoughts, feelings and desires first, before anyone else's interests. This inner bent towards self-centredness is easier to spot in others than in ourselves. Over time, selfishness in a relationship can lead to people drifting apart and eventually feeling isolated.¹⁷

2. How might it affect a marriage if one or both partners are feeling isolated?
3. Why do you think that some people are willing to tolerate isolation instead of working to build harmony and closeness?

To err is human ... to blame it on someone else is management potential.

Anon

Foundation Principle:

Life's relationship challenges may threaten a marriage and lead towards isolation, if we handle them in a self-centred way.

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facing life's relationship challenges with God

10 MINS

20 MINS

ASK everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box A (without talking to their partner).

A

Looking at life's relationship challenges

Think about the relationship challenges outlined in the Introductory Reading and those you have discussed as a group.

i. How has my relationship been affected by any, or all, of them? Rate how each has affected you, by putting a cross on the line.

Challenges	How does this affect our marriage?		
	Negative effect	Not affected	Positive effect
Our differences	<div></div>		
50:50 Performance	<div></div>		
Tough times	<div></div>		
'Affairs'	<div></div>		
Selfishness	<div></div>		
Other ...	<div></div>		

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and in what specific way you think your marriage is affected (positive or negative).

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 35 mins)

5 MINS

If there are non-Christians in the group, this would be a good moment to share the gospel. You could do this through personal testimony, eg facing a 'tough time' with God, and/or if appropriate, you could look briefly at some or all of 'Knowing God' (workbook page 154, Leader's Guide page 180) as a group. You will need to allocate extra time for this.

If it isn't appropriate to share the gospel in the group setting at this moment, you could meet with any non-Christians at a separate time.

- For the Bible study suggest you:
- Allocate one passage per couple. If time allows ask couples to look at another passage. If there are fewer couples than passages then you take on the extras and read out the principles from the notes.
 - Note that there won't be time for in-depth Bible study unless you are splitting this session (tell everyone this).
 - For part B ask couples to read the passage out loud first, then report back their ideas to summarise their principle and the application to marriage.

See table in Supplementary Information for Session 4 on page 186.



B Facing relationship challenges with God

Bible study

1. Selfishness is rooted in our sinful nature. Dealing with self-centred tendencies is a lifelong process.
 - a. **First**, each couple is allocated one of the following passages. Read it together and write down your answers to the following:
 - Identify a key principle for dealing with sin in our lives.
 - How can this principle help build a solid relationship between a husband and wife? Think of a specific example relating to marriage.
 - b. **Then** report back your ideas to the group. Note down important principles and their application to marriage in the table.

Key principle	Application to marriage

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

1 John 1:5–9 (NLT)

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:1–2

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
Philippians 2:1–4

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.
Matthew 7:24–27

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.
John 14:16–17

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment ...
John 16:7–8

Foundation Principle:

As we surrender every area of our lives to God, His Word and His Spirit, He will help us face life's relationship challenges and build a stronger marriage.

ASK everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box B.

This question is intended to get people thinking rather than finding answers. Try not to spend too long on it.

ASK people to read out the paragraph, aspects of the worldly Christian and the spiritual Christian.

B Facing relationship challenges with God

- i. Note any insights or encouragements from the Bible study feedback that you would like to share with your partner ...
- ii. In what way(s), if any, have I been going my own way and been self-centred in our marriage?

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about building a stronger marriage and dealing with any selfishness.

Time check
Write target time here:

(start time plus 60 mins)

C Spirit-filled living

- 1. Why might a husband and wife still have self-centred attitudes or behave in selfish ways, even though they are Christians?

A Spirit-filled life

Jesus came so we can have life to the full by experiencing intimacy with God.¹⁸ But many who express faith in God are not actually experiencing this intimacy because their lives are self-centred rather than God-centred. These Christians have the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Christ – living in them, but this is not being shown in their attitudes or actions. The Bible refers to them as 'worldly'.¹⁹ **To experience intimacy with God we need to stay close to Him – to be rooted in Christ – in every aspect of our lives, including our marriages, and be filled with His empowering Spirit.** The Bible tells us that God *pours His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit*.²⁰ The Bible refers to this kind of person as 'spiritual'.²¹

SQ

Which state best describes you?

You'll need more time on Q2 than Q3.

ASK for volunteers to read out different paragraphs up to Q4.

SQ

The worldly Christian



- self-centred
- in a relationship with God but following self instead of the promptings of the Holy Spirit
- living according to personal priorities rather than God's
- driven by own strength
- lack of spiritual growth
- feeling discord and frustration
- finds loving others in a Christlike way difficult

The spiritual Christian



- Christ-centred and Spirit-filled
- living in step with God's Holy Spirit
- motivated to please God resulting in growing harmony with God's purpose
- living in God's power
- experiences and demonstrates increasing: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control
- shows love for other people in a Christlike way

SI

2. How does an intimate relationship with God enable us to experience intimacy with one another?

SI

3. What gets in the way of our intimacy with God, and one another? What is the remedy?

Spiritual 'breathing'

We all make choices every day – being conscious of the big decisions but not giving a second thought to those smaller daily choices in our attitudes and actions. **It's often in the little things that we sin – choosing to go our own way rather than God's:** watching TV rather than talking to an anxious spouse, staying late at work rather than coming home to give support with demanding toddlers, and so on.

A simple analogy to help us understand how to live a Spirit-filled life is breathing. Breathing air is part of physical day-to-day living. **Spiritual breathing, to keep on being filled with the Spirit²² should be part of daily living as a Christian.** The apostle Paul puts it like this:

session 4

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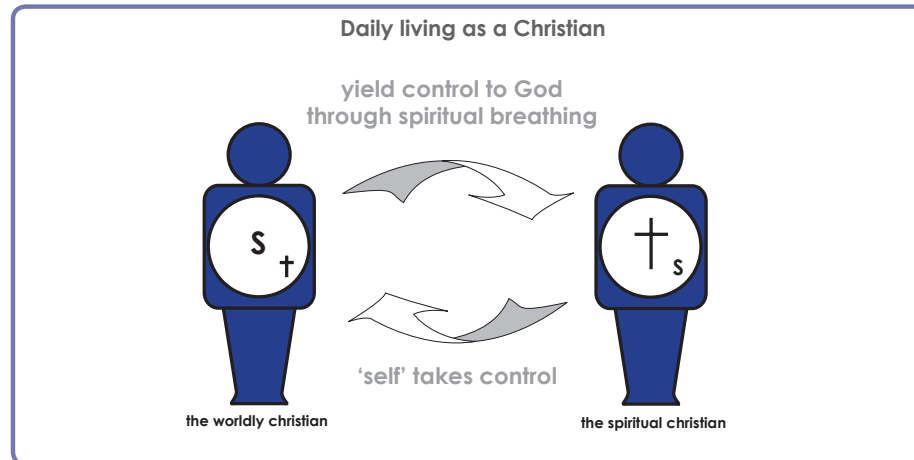
10 MINS

17 MINS

You may wish to explain the diagram. If so COMMENT:
The worldly Christian has taken control of his/her life from God - self is in the 'driving seat'. We move from being a worldly Christian to a spiritual Christian by yielding control of our lives back to God, through 'spiritual breathing' described opposite.

ASK for comments on the breathing analogy (if there is time).

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.
Ephesians 3:16–19



Breathe out We exhale the 'impure air'. When we go our own way rather than God's we need to deal with it as soon as we become aware of it (confession). **We need to admit our failures and turn away from our sin (repenting) and back to God.**
KEY VERSE: 1 John 1:9

Breathe in We inhale the 'good air'. We reclaim His forgiveness²³ and ask to be filled again with the Holy Spirit. In surrendering control of our lives again to Christ, we trust the Spirit to fill us again with His presence and power. The verb form 'be filled'²⁴ implies continuous action. We are to 'keep on being filled' because our dependence on Him needs to be moment by moment – like the 'oxygen of life'.²⁵
KEY VERSE: Ephesians 5:18

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facing life's relationship challenges with God

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box C.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. Life's relationship challenges may threaten a marriage and lead towards isolation if we handle them in a self-centred way.
2. As we surrender every area of our lives to God, His word and His Spirit, He will help us face life's relationship challenges and build a stronger marriage.
3. By living as Spirit-filled people we will increasingly experience intimacy with God and each other.

- Ask couples to focus on encouraging each other during their Couple Time - not to dwell on any perceived weaknesses.
- This focus on spirituality will be new for many. Don't let its importance be understated. Encourage couples to do their Couple Time and trust God for what He promises ... regardless of how they feel.
- Remind each couple to come to the next meeting prepared to share some insight from their Couple Time.
- If appropriate, point out that there are additional optional questions for remarried couples in this Couple Time.

SI

4. In what practical ways could God's Spirit filling a life make a difference in the marriage?

Foundation Principle:

By living as Spirit-filled people we will increasingly experience intimacy with God and each other.

C Spirit-filled living

- i. Is there an area of my marriage where I particularly need to yield to God's Spirit and depend on His power? (Look back at what you wrote down in the Couple Time preparation box **B ii** on page 68 and write down any specific details).

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about which area you especially want to yield to the Holy Spirit's control.

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date for your diaries for your Couple Time:

session 4

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

3 MINS

5 MINS

Couple Time – 60 minutes

Nothing takes the taste out of peanut butter quite like unrequited love.

Charlie Brown

Complete the following individual preparation before you spend time as a couple

Spend 5–10 minutes alone to reflect on the following questions before talking with your partner:

- Do I want the best for my partner and my marriage?
- Do I want to be a Spirit-filled marriage partner?
- Is there an attitude or behaviour I need to confess to God?
- Do I sincerely want to surrender control of my whole life to the Holy Spirit?

Then spend some time in personal prayer (use this suggested prayer if you wish).

Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for ... Thank You for Your forgiveness and cleansing. Help me to live in dependence upon Your Spirit. I want to surrender my selfish desires and allow You to make me the marriage partner You want me to be. Please fill me with Your Spirit. Amen.

Note: The Holy Spirit enters our life when we entrust it to Jesus. While we only need invite Jesus to come into our life once, we will need to ask the Holy Spirit to fill us many times, as we become aware that again we have taken over the control of our life.

Read Knowing God (page 154) if you're not sure about your relationship with God. For more on living in the Spirit read **Together Notes: Living the Christian Life** (visit www.togetherinmarriage.com).

Complete together

As you talk to each other **remember the dos and don'ts of listening**.

A Looking at life's relationship challenges

Take turns describing how you feel the various challenges have affected your marriage (page 65). Is there anything you could do to protect your marriage against anything that threatens (or might threaten) your relationship?

Identify a personal action point, if required.

Personal action point:

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facing life's relationship challenges with God

B Facing relationship challenges with God

Share your insights or encouragements from the discussion in answer to i (page 68). Then share your answers to ii. **Note:** this question is not intended to prompt accusations of selfishness in your partner. Instead focus on ways **you** might have been self-centred.

In what ways can you deal with any self-centredness to build a stronger marriage? (If you wish, go on to **C. Spirit-filled living** to help you.) Identify a personal action point, if required.

Personal action point:

C Spirit-filled living

Take turns telling each other in which areas of your marriage, if any, you feel you need to yield to God's Spirit and depend on His power (page 71). Identify a personal action point, if necessary.

Why not practise 'spiritual breathing' together by praying, either silently or out loud.

Personal action point:

For further reading:

Sorted by David Wilson (Agapé, 2000), gives lots of helpful information about getting in step with the Holy Spirit in your Christian life.

There are optional additional questions for remarried couples overleaf.

At the next group time you will be asked to talk about a new insight you have gained about the Holy Spirit and how He is helping you in your marriage. Agree on one thing you would be prepared to share with the group from your Couple Time and write it down:

Before the next group meeting ...

Please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 5: **Handling our feelings constructively** (pages 77–79). The way we handle feelings can drive us apart or we can grow closer as we learn to understand and accept the feelings of our partner.

For remarried couples

(optional additional questions)

- i. Do you need to ask the Holy Spirit to heal you or your partner of hurts from the past which have not fully healed, or, if healed, wounds that are easily reopened due to being in a new marriage?
- ii. Agree on one thing you could do to support your partner as you face these challenges together.

NOTES

1. Adapted from 'Five Threats to Oneness', *FamilyLife USA Weekend to Remember* conference manual (Revised January 2004). Used with permission.
2. Genesis 3.
3. Romans 3:23.
4. John 3:16.
5. The 'Trinity' is a word for God mysteriously revealing Himself as the three Persons of the Godhead (Father-Son-Spirit) unified as one. The Bible does not use the word 'Trinity', but Father-Son-Spirit are used together in the context of being equally God, eg Matthew 28:19; John 14:6-31.
6. Ephesians 2:18; John 14:16-17.
7. John 3:3-8.
8. Romans 8:15-16.
9. Romans 5:5; Ephesians 3:18-19.
10. John 14:17; John 15:26; John 16:13-15.
11. John 16:5-8.
12. Romans 8:1-17; Colossians 3.
13. Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13.
14. Galatians 5:22-25; Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:7-8.
15. John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8.
16. Galatians 3:3; 5:17.
17. Adapted from *Going Your Own Way* and questions 5 and 6 of *Building Your Marriage* (Group Publishing, copyright © Dennis Rainey, 2000). Used with permission.
18. John 10:9-11.
19. 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3.
20. Romans 5:5.
21. 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3.
22. Ephesians 5:18.
23. 1 John 1:9.
24. Ephesians 5:18.
25. David Wilson, 'Provision for life', *Sorted* (Agapé, 2000).

Session 5

Positioning Session 5

Having looked at challenges to marriage and at the role of the Holy Spirit, we now continue to develop tools to enable us to communicate and build intimacy. In this session we will look at how to handle emotions constructively: in particular, anger. If anger is managed badly it can drive us apart. On the other hand, if we handle it well then we can confidently deal with our conflicts and become stronger as a couple. Together notes: Managing anger (available from www.togetherinmarriage.org accompanies this session).

Objectives of this Session

- To understand that anger (including its milder forms; irritation and frustration) is a signal that something is wrong and needs to be acted upon.
- To recognise the importance of understanding our primary emotions.
- To understand how God can help us manage our anger.
- To understand 'active listening' and the role it plays in resolving angry situations constructively.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Understanding anger.	27
Part B	God's help for anger management.	30
Part C and close	Handling anger constructively.	33

Preparation

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information for Leaders (page 187). Make notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Read Together Notes: Managing Anger (on the website). If you think it would be helpful for your group print off one copy per couple to give out at your meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	The preparation for Couple Times is quite long so you might want to have some background music available.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- **Make sure that you have done your Couple Time following the previous meeting and are able to encourage anyone who hasn't done theirs!**
- Given the sensitivity of the subject, it is a good idea to **remind everyone of the ground rules.**
- Some couples may think that anger is not an issue for them. We all get irritated and frustrated. Irritation and frustration are often just milder forms of anger and need to be treated in the same way.
- Although there are quite a few pages to cover, you should be able to get through the material in one meeting. It is possible to move through section C quite quickly. If people are not familiar with I/you messages and active listening they will catch on quickly. If they are familiar with these techniques it is still worth covering them briefly as we can always do with more practice!
- There are **pre-prepared answers in the SI** for some of the questions to help you.
- We suggest you do the feedback part (on workbook page 80, Leader's Guide page 98) during the meal or the social period before you start the main session.
- There are additional **optional questions for remarried couples** in the Couple Time at the end of this session.



5

Handling our feelings constructively

Introductory Reading

Human beings are wired to feel and express a huge range of emotions, both positive and negative. Positive feelings, like love and joy, obviously help to grow a strong marriage. But negative and painful feelings can completely overwhelm us and make us behave in ways that can damage us as well as our relationships, unless we learn to handle them constructively. This session looks at handling anger and the emotions that lie underneath it.

Learning to recognise 'negative' emotions

Some emotions are easy to spot, whereas others are not so easy to recognise. Intense angry feelings are obvious like the 'tip of the iceberg'. Less obvious are milder forms of anger such as annoyance, irritation or frustration. Anger, in whatever form, is triggered by other more painful feelings that lie 'below the waterline', and it's these emotions that are usually more difficult to recognise. **Experts refer to feelings like anger as the secondary emotions and the deeper feelings as primary emotions.**

Primary emotions are strong feelings like insecurity, disappointment, worry, guilt, jealousy, rejection and fear. For example, Kevin and Katherine are arguing about cancelling their holiday. Katherine is angry and Kevin is irritable. But neither is expressing the primary emotion underneath. For Katherine the primary emotion is fear: she's exhausted and fearful of what will happen if she doesn't get a break, so doesn't want to cancel it. For Kevin it is worry: he might miss out on a promotion if he doesn't cancel the holiday.

What lies underneath my anger; irritation or frustration?

Unless a person admits their anger and identifies the primary underlying emotion(s) they will be unable to deal with the root cause and really grow in the relationship. But **if a person is able to learn to recognise the feelings underlying their anger, then they will be better able to identify the root cause and come up with a constructive solution.**

How people express their emotions

People express their emotions in different ways, depending partly on temperament and partly on patterns picked up from the past. Most of us tend to fall into one of two groups:¹

- I. **'Exploders': express emotions openly.** They spew out what's inside, easily blowing up in irritation, frustration or aggression ('I'm sick and tired of your ...'). Some unleash their anger by shouting. A few may even express emotions by lashing out physically. If such aggression gets out of control it can lead to violence and abuse. **Unless exploders learn to manage their emotions they will not only hurt others but also themselves, because they often frighten away the very people to whom they want to get close.**
- II. **'Stuffers' don't express emotions openly.** They stuff or bottle up their feelings, internalising them. Some deny or try to ignore their feelings in order to avoid uncomfortable situations ('I don't want to talk about it!'). They may withdraw into their shell or even leave in order to protect themselves from being hurt. Some hide behind activities or children. They might display prickly behaviour, or make sarcastic or cutting remarks. Others express their emotions in subtle ways: Frank expressed his aggression subtly by overspending and Fiona expressed hers by making Frank cucumber sandwiches, which she knew he hated! **Stuffers hurt others because they are not open with their feelings, making it difficult to know and relate to the real person.** But they also hurt themselves because suppressed anger or other negative or painful feelings can lead to bitterness, resentment, ulcers, high blood pressure and even depression.

How do I express anger? How does it affect my partner?

Effects of strong emotions

Strong emotions affect the person feeling them AND the person on the receiving end, the partner. They tend to cloud judgment so we are not able to make wise decisions when affected by them. We also tend to see situations from our own point of view. This means **we can have very negative interpretations of our partner's actions.**² For example, Peter returns home from work and asks, 'What's for dinner?' He gets angry because he *thinks* Pam doesn't show him enough love and respect when she only heats up frozen pizza instead of preparing a more substantial meal. Pam works just as long hours as Peter and she *thinks* she is doing him a favour by preparing food at all. She gets defensive and angry too. Both see the issue of dinner through their own eyes, and feel unappreciated by the other.



Do we need to talk?

God doesn't say that we shouldn't feel angry (He gave us the emotion in the first place!). But, He doesn't want us to let negative emotions turn into bitterness, rage or bad behaviour.³

He does say we should handle it in the right way. Anger can be positive, as a signal that something is wrong and requires action. We should deal with anger quickly and get to the bottom of the issue so it doesn't smoulder. Otherwise the devil can fan it into a flame of hatred, pride, self-pity or self-righteousness.⁴ This requires good communication at a level of trust and openness. We should find ways of expressing our feelings constructively.⁵ And we need to listen to one another in a way that seeks to understand the root causes of the anger (the primary emotions) and accept them. This can be hard.

A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

Proverbs 29:11

God understands anger

God was angry when mankind rejected Him and His directions for life, but He chose not to pour out His anger on us. Out of His great love for us He sacrificed His Son, resulting in peace between us and Himself.⁶

While our anger is more often petty and selfish, unlike the holy and righteous anger of God, we can still learn from this example. If we ask Him, He will help us make the sacrifice of putting aside our desire to retaliate, and learn to deal with our own anger and that expressed by our partner.

This session looks at how we can handle our emotions to develop a closer relationship.

Group Session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time following the session on facing challenges with the Holy Spirit (page 73)?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about handling our feelings that prompted you to think about the subject in a new way? Explain.

A special note

It is not possible to cover all aspects of handling feelings in this session, so we will focus on anger and how to handle it in a way that will strengthen a marriage.

A Understanding Anger

When talking about anger we should realise that there are different forms of anger. At the 'tip of the iceberg' are intense angry feelings. But there are lesser forms of anger which are milder feelings, such as annoyance, irritation or frustration. When we use the word 'anger' in this study it includes all the milder feelings too.

To understand anger better there are two things we need to know: firstly, what makes us angry, and secondly, how our anger is expressed.

- I. **What makes us angry?** No one can make us angry – we are each responsible for our own feelings and how we handle them. **Anger is triggered by primary emotions, which are other more painful feelings that lie deeper.** These are not always recognised, so they are shown as 'below the waterline' in the diagram. The secondary emotions are shown as 'above the waterline' because they are easy to see.
- II. **How is our anger expressed?** Put simply, some people express anger openly ('exploders'), but others internalise or 'bottle up' their feelings ('stuffers').

80

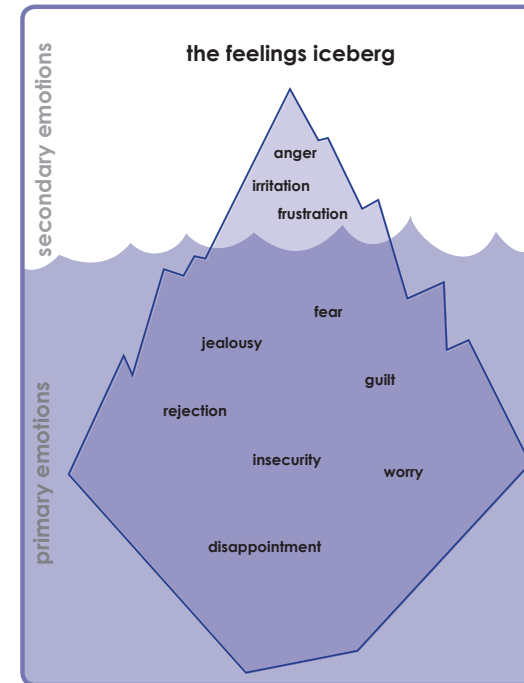
handling our feelings constructively

10 MINS

7 MINS

READ OUT the special note.

ASK someone to read out the paragraphs.



Unaddressed anger can damage relationships and drive us apart. On the positive side, anger can be a signal to take action which will help build a closer relationship. A healthy start is to admit to ourselves what we are really feeling (both the anger and the primary emotion underneath).

ASK someone else to read out Edward and Esther.

Edward and Esther

At a party, Esther sees Edward paying a lot of attention to a woman considerably younger and more attractive than she is. Later, when he returns to her, she asks sharply, 'What's the matter, Romeo? Did Juliet throw you off her balcony?'

SI

1. What primary emotion(s) prompted Esther's reaction? In what way(s) is she expressing her feelings? How could she handle her feelings better?

George and Gina

George returns home late from work, exhausted. The porch light isn't working and he struggles to get his key in the lock to open the front door. He finds Gina at the kitchen table, engrossed in paperwork. George notices the bank statements and his credit card bill lying amongst the scattered papers. From the look on Gina's face he suspects that he has exceeded his credit limit again. Gina looks up and says, 'I think we're going to have to forget ideas of going on that cruise. I don't think we can afford it.' George, now exploding, grabs the papers and shouts, 'I told you there was nothing to worry about ... I'm getting my credit limit increased.' Gina gets up, her face reddening, saying, 'I'm going to bed. Your dinner is in the oven.' Then she slams the door behind her.

SI

2. What primary emotion(s) might have prompted George's reaction? In what way(s) is he expressing his feelings? How could he handle his feelings better?

What primary emotion(s) might have prompted Gina's reaction? In what way(s) is she expressing her feelings? How could she handle her feelings better?

SI

3. Controlling anger can often be difficult. Why do you think this is? Why is bottling up anger not a healthy solution?

Foundation Principle:

Anger is a signal that something is not right and that the underlying feelings need to be addressed.

82

handling our feelings constructively

15 MINS

ASK someone to read out George and Gina.

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

ASK everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box A (without talking to their partner).

If we take matrimony at its lowest, we regard it as a sort of friendship recognised by the police.
Robert Louis Stevenson

A Understanding anger

Write down answers to the following four questions:

- i. In what situation(s) do I tend to get angry or irritated or frustrated with my partner? (Note down any typical scenarios, including those where there is no strong expression of angry feelings or anger is internalised.)
- ii. What are the likely primary emotions? (Tick what might be underneath my anger.)
 - ☐ Insecurity
 - ☐ Disappointment
 - ☐ Guilt
 - ☐ Jealousy
 - ☐ Fear
 - ☐ Rejection
 - ☐ Injustice ('It's not fair ...')
 - ☐ Other ...
- iii. How do I typically react when I'm angry with my partner? (Tick any in the table that apply.)
- iv. How do I typically react when my partner is angry with me? (Tick any that apply.)

Reactions	How do I react when I am angry/irritated/frustrated	How do I react when my partner is angry/irritated/frustrated
• Blow up in a rage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Get depressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Get physical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Cry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Run away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Suppress it with silence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Making cutting or sarcastic remarks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Humour or teasing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and what you can do to help each other to understand each other's anger in a constructive way.

session 5

Time check
Write target time here:

(start time plus 32 mins)

B God's help for anger management

*Genuine happiness is when
a wife sees a double chin on
her husband's old girl friend.*
Anon

Bible study

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold ...

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:25–27, 31–32

SI

1. What insights does the passage give about anger? You might want to consider:

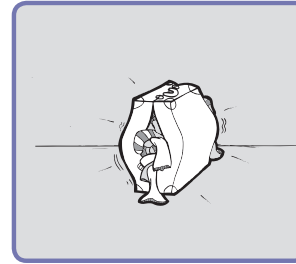
- Is anger always wrong? When does anger become sin?
- What do you think it means to not 'let the sun go down while you are still angry'?
- How does God want us to handle anger?

God's way of dealing with anger

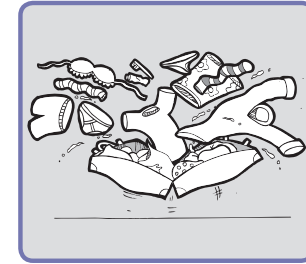
God was angry when mankind rejected Him and His holy ways.⁷ This anger was dealt with on a cosmic scale by His Son,⁸ who chose to take God's wrath upon Himself as an act of love when He submitted to being sacrificed on the cross. From this we can learn that **sacrifice and self-control are needed in handling anger.**

The three suitcases in the diagram opposite show different ways people can handle anger.

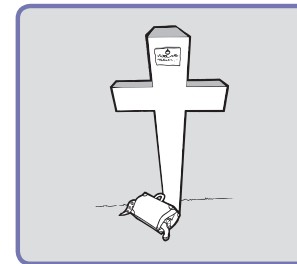
ASK for volunteers to read out the paragraphs.



CASE 1: keeping our anger locked inside



CASE 2: letting our anger explode



CASE 3: taking anger to God in prayer. We do this by:

- **giving God our feelings and asking Him to show us what lies beneath** – the primary emotions and the reasons why we are feeling the way we do.
- **asking Jesus to show us what to do.**
- **sacrificing the desire to retaliate and choosing to love instead**, leaving judgment to God.
- **'breathing spiritually'** – confessing any wrong attitudes and hurt we may have caused. Asking God to fill us afresh with His Spirit. Asking for peace and the power of self-control to express our feelings constructively.

If we are on the receiving end of anger expressed by our partner, we can do this by:

- **asking God to help us with our feelings** (as per bullets above).
- **asking God to give us the strength not to retaliate and to accept the feelings of our partner**, whether we are the cause or not, as an expression of our love.
- **asking God to help us forgive or be forgiven.**

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

SI

2. How might it help you handle **your own** anger if you took it to God? How might it help you if you typically:

- keep anger locked inside?
- let anger explode?

SI

3. How might it help you handle **your partner's** anger if you took it to God?

Foundation Principle:

God helps us to deal with the anger of others and to control our own.

*It's practically impossible
to look at a penguin and
feel angry.*

Joe Moore

ASK everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box B.

B

God's help with anger management

How do I want to see my relationship with God help me to:

i.

handle my own anger/irritation/frustration? (Tick any in the table that apply.)

ii.

handle the feelings of my partner? (Tick any in the table that apply.)

God's help	How do I want God to help me handle my feelings?	How do I want God to help me handle my partner's feelings
• Look at guidelines from His Word in the Bible on how to handle anger.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Enable me to understand how I express my anger at the moment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Show me the underlying primary emotion so I can deal with the root cause.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Give me the strength and self-control to handle my own feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Give me the courage to accept the feelings of my partner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Help me accept anger because of the sacrifice made by Jesus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Help me sacrifice my desire to retaliate when my partner has hurt me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Fill me with His peace.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Convict me of inappropriate ways I deal with anger.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about how God can help you handle anger personally and as a couple.

5 MINS

session 5

Time check
Write target time here:

(start time plus 62 mins)

ASK someone to read the paragraphs.

ASK couples to spend five minutes rewriting a-d as 'I' messages. Then ask for volunteers to give answers to each question.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and the paragraph.

C Handling anger constructively

God wants us to handle anger with self-control. We start by treating the anger as a signal to take action and take our feelings to God. **The next step is to tell our partner what we are feeling – not by attacking him or her with angry words but by expressing our feelings constructively, by 'speaking the truth in love'.**⁹ This takes deeper levels of communication (Session 1). We discuss what lies underneath the anger to identify the root cause and take action to address it. By doing this we expand our understanding of each other and grow closer together.

Expressing negative feelings constructively

It is possible to speak honestly yet avoid accusing your partner, by using 'I' messages instead of 'you' messages.

X 'you' messages	✓ 'I' messages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attack the partner's faults• Are directed towards your partner• Express judgment of the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflect personal emotions• Are directed towards oneself• Express individual feelings

1. Look at the example of an 'I'/'you' message and then rewrite the following 'you' messages into constructive 'I' messages:

Example

'You' message– 'Your driving is going to get us all killed!'

'I' message – 'I feel very frightened and worried by your driving.'

- a. 'It's typical of you to roll over and go to sleep like nothing has happened.'
- b. 'You don't think of anyone but yourself. At these events you're always going off and talking to everyone except me.'
- c. 'That's just like you to spend so much money on something we don't really need.'
- d. 'Why don't you ever listen to me?'

Foundation Principle:

Handle anger by expressing your feelings constructively.

88

handling our feelings constructively

Suggest you leave out Q2 if you are short of time and just make an appropriate comment (see SI page 188).

Have some fun with Q3. You could do it as individual couples or ask for volunteer couples to role play to the group.

COMMENT: Active listening can feel artificial but it is worth learning this tool as it can transform the way we talk about our feelings if we persevere with it. Even if we are familiar with the technique, it is still worth doing it - we can all improve our communication with more practice!

Listening actively to understand

The next step is taken by our partners. They should listen actively to understand the feelings being expressed. **Active listening means giving your full attention to the one speaking and is an expression of other-centred love.** It is helpful for the listener to repeat in their own words what is being said ('reflect back') to check that they have understood. The listener should also ask clarifying questions if they are unsure of what the speaker is trying to say.

The goal of the listening partner is to understand and accept the feelings being communicated.

SI

2. How do you feel when someone has really listened to you?

3. Look at the following example and then work out what you could say to reflect back what has been said below to show you have been actively listening.

Example of 'I' message and good reflecting back.

I feel a little rejected when you spend ages talking to your friends on the phone and then don't seem to want to sit and talk with me.

So you're saying that you feel a little rejected, like you don't matter to me, when I am on the phone so much ... ?

a.

I'm tired and frustrated that I seem to be the one doing more than my fair share of the housework.

b.

I'm hurt that you come home so late regularly. I feel insecure and worry that you're really out having a good time without me.

session 5

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5 MINS

10 MINS

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle and complete the Couple Time preparation box C.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. Anger is a signal that something is not right and that the underlying feelings need to be addressed.
 2. God helps us to deal with the anger of others and to control our own.
 3. Handle anger by expressing your feelings constructively.
 4. Understand your partner's hurt feelings by listening actively.
- Encourage couples to affirm their love and acceptance of each other during their Couple Time.
 - The Couple Time may prove a great opportunity to practise 'I' and 'you' messages!
 - If appropriate, hand out copies of Together Notes: Managing Anger, which has more questions for discussion in the Couple Time.
 - Remind each couple to come to the next meeting prepared to share some insight from their Couple Time.
 - Point out the questions for remarried couples, if appropriate.

Foundation Principle:

Understand your partner's feelings by listening actively.

C Handling anger constructively

Think about any recent 'anger situations'. Remember these may involve milder feelings of irritation or frustration, rather than overt anger.

- i. In what ways do I handle angry feelings (mine or my partner's) well?
- ii. In what ways can I be more constructive?

In your Couple Time be prepared to actively listen to each other and find ways of handling anger more constructively, if necessary.

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date for your diaries for your Couple Time:

90

handling our feelings constructively

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

5 MINS

5 MINS

- End the meeting with a brief closing prayer, if appropriate.

*When angry, count ten
before you speak; if very
angry, a hundred.*

Thomas Jefferson

Visit our website and take
a few minutes to look at
**Together Notes: Managing
Anger** together which has
much more on how to handle
anger positively.

Couple Time – 60 minutes

Note: Anger can be a very sensitive subject for many people, whether they experience intense angry feelings or only mild irritation or frustration. **Pick a good time to have your Couple Time** (preferably not when you are very tired). It can be helpful to pray before you start. Be gentle and sensitive towards each other as you talk about your feelings. We all grow up with different experiences of handling anger and sometimes those experiences run very deep. **Make a point of affirming your love and acceptance for your partner** whatever feelings they express, and try to understand them more fully through this discussion.

A Understanding anger

First, talk about your own anger. Take turns to describe the situation(s) that tend to make you feel angry (refer to your notes on page 81). Talk about how you react and why you react the way you do – what are the primary emotions you are feeling? What are you managing well? Does anything need to change?

Then, talk about how you react to angry feelings expressed by your partner. Identify a personal action point, if required.

Personal action point:

B God's help with anger management

Talk about how God helps or could help you handle your anger, or anger expressed by your partner (see page 87 and the notes on page 85). Identify a personal action point, if required.

Personal action point:

C Handling anger constructively

First, take turns to tell each other in what ways you handle feelings well (yours or your partner's) and how you could handle them more constructively (if necessary).

Then, take turns to describe a recent example of an 'anger situation' using an 'I' message whilst your partner listens actively. Does anything need to change in the way you or your partner handle situations in the future? Identify a personal action point, if appropriate.

Personal action point:

At the next group meeting you will be asked to describe a key insight you've started to apply in handling feelings constructively with your partner as a result of the session. Agree on one thing you would be prepared to share with the group from your Couple Time and write it down:

Before the next group meeting ...

Please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 6: **Living positively with our differences** (pages 95–97). Our differences can divide us through conflict. But, we grow closer when we handle them in a godly way. We can also grow as people.

For further reading:

The Other Side of Love by Gary Chapman (Moody Publishers, 1999) is filled with insights and techniques to help understand the source of anger and guide you towards a productive outcome.

For remarried couples

(optional additional questions)

Note: You or your partner – or both of you – may have experienced a bereavement or divorce. In both cases there are likely to be strong emotions associated with the past and it is vital for both partners to deal with these appropriately. This is not about restoring a relationship with a divorced partner, but about handling resulting emotions so you are free to move on and build a strong and healthy new marriage. For bereaved partners there may still be issues from the past, which are hurting your current marriage.¹⁰

Take some time to reflect and then talk together. Be gentle. It is a good idea to pray first and ask God for wisdom and sensitivity.

- i. What do you feel when you think about **your** relationship with your former partner? Or, what do you feel when you think about **your partner's** relationship with his/her former partner?

Are you struggling with anything?

- ii. Agree on one thing you could do to support your partner as you face any challenges together.

NOTES

1. Adapted from 'Resolving Conflict: Communication III – understanding the anatomy of anger', *FamilyLife USA Weekend to Remember* conference manual, revised 1.04. Used with permission.
2. Matthew 7:1–5.
3. Ephesians 4:31.
4. Ephesians 4:25–27.
5. Ephesians 4:29.
6. It is worth remembering two important points concerning God's wrath and the death of Jesus: God did not take out His anger on people (although they deserved it). Instead, He took His wrath upon Himself in the Person of Jesus. Secondly, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself: Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42.
7. Psalm 78.
8. 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10.
9. Ephesians 4:15.
10. Adapted from 'Session 4: HomeBuilders Project' Question 3, *Making Your Remarriage Last* (Group Publishing, copyright © Jim Keller 2001). Used with permission.

Session 6

Positioning Session 6

Having looked at how we handle our feelings constructively, we now move on to how to live with our differences. Differences are normal; through dealing with any resulting conflict we become the people we are meant to be. We unpack forgiveness and look at how to reconcile in order to restore closeness. The art of forgiveness and reconciliation is key to a flourishing marriage.

Together Notes: Three Steps for Resolving Conflict (available from www.togetherinmarriage.org) accompanies this session.

Objectives of this Session

- To understand that our differences add richness to our relationship.
- To appreciate that any conflict as a result of our differences can be constructive.
- To understand the three steps for resolving conflict:
 1. understand and accept our differences
 2. forgive one another
 3. agree actions that bring reconciliation and restore closeness.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	From Couple Time and the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Understanding and handling our differences.	15
Part B	Handling conflict.	50
Part C, summary and close	Finding full reconciliation and building closeness.	25

Preparation

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information for Leaders (page 188) and Together Notes: Resolving Conflict (on the website).	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Read through Together Notes: Three Steps for Resolving Conflict , and print off one copy per couple (available from the website) to hand out at the end of the group meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Decide whether you want to split this session (perhaps ask your group first). Then prepare accordingly making notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- Note that all timings given in the notes are for completing the session in one meeting (suggested timings for a split meeting are outlined in the table below).
- **Supplementary questions are optional and intended to help get conversation flowing or explore the issues further, if required and if time allows.**
- **If you wish to split the session we suggest the following:**

FIRST MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Q1. Couple Time A.	20 5
Part B	John and Jenni and Q1 and 2. Bible study and Q3. Q4.	20 25 15
Wrap up	Closing remarks. Explain how you will approach the next meeting.	5

SECOND MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time A.	10
Part B	Forgiveness in marriage and Q5. FP and CT prep B.	35 5
Part C	Finding full reconciliation and building closeness and Q1. Q2. FP and CT prep C.	20 20 5
... and finally	Review Foundation Principles for the whole of Session 6. Closing remarks.	5

- There are **optional additional questions for remarried couples and those who have children** in the Couple Time at the end of this session.



6

Living positively with our differences

Introductory Reading

Opposites attract ... but that 'perfect match' may end up being a dual rather than a duet. **As a married couple, we need to learn to live with the differences we each bring into the relationship** – backgrounds, personalities and needs, as well as thoughts, feelings and ways of seeing the world. Then we have to navigate our way through work schedules, household responsibilities, and differing opinions on money, sex, friends, in-laws and, possibly, children. The very things that first attracted us to each other and brought spice to our relationship can often end up causing frustration and arguments.

Marriage is the world's most expensive way of discovering your own faults.

Anon

Making our differences work

We don't just have to 'grin and bear it' – we can learn to make our differences work for the good.

Our differences add richness to our relationship and can strengthen a marriage. When we appreciate our differences and work together – to complement one another – we will be stronger together than when apart. Also, God can use our differences as tools for personal growth, knocking off some sharp edges. **In marriage we will have our weaknesses exposed. We can learn to embrace the strengths of our partner into our own lives. As we compromise, we change and grow as people.** We will have the opportunity to try new ideas, new activities, make new friends, learn to take a few more risks or learn to take more care. This growing process can be uncomfortable, even painful, but as we step out of our own comfort zone we will develop greater personal 'wholeness' and grow a closer relationship ... if we handle the inevitable conflicts well.

*In what ways are we different?
Do those differences annoy
me or challenge me to develop
personally?*

The conflict zone

Handling conflicts well means understanding the different stages which can lead to a spiral of ongoing conflict.¹

- I. **Conflict starts when there is a clash of our differences** – an initial offence that causes hurt. This offence could be quite trivial (forgetting to put the top on the toothpaste, cutting it fine to get to the station, a look or tone of voice) or more serious (money, sex, children). It may have been done unknowingly, or it may be deliberate. Of course, **underlying any conflict is our native selfishness – our tendency to want things to go our own way.**
- II. **The initial offence causes hurt, and that hurt may produce irritation, frustration or anger.** Some people choose to fight ('exploders') and others to withdraw ('stuffers'). At this point, the person who has felt the hurt has a choice: to decide to bring up the issue so that both can work together to resolve it; or to ignore the hurt, leaving a seemingly small issue unresolved. Meanwhile the other partner may not even be aware that he/she has caused hurt.
- III. **One unresolved hurt is often followed by another** (small things can accumulate) and may result in overreacting to something else. This can lead to retaliation by the other person and the spiral goes round again, with a build up of hurt, anger and further 'offences'.
- IV. **We stop the conflict spiral when we decide to stop ignoring the issue or trying to get our own way (or get even), and make a conscious decision to resolve the matter.**

Am I out to change the way my partner is or to resolve the issue and grow our relationship? Am I prepared to recognise that my behaviour may be part of the problem?

Resources for resolving conflict

The first requirement is an unselfish attitude. Good communication is also important, as is the way we handle anger. God tells us to 'speak the truth in love'.² We might be able to speak out, but forget to be loving ('exploders'). Some of us are loving, but unable to face our partner and speak truthfully, if the truth is painful ('stuffers'). **Perhaps the most loving thing we can do when we have a difficult conversation is to listen.**

Listening and talking through issues will often provide an acceptable solution. **But if we want to restore our relationship and feel connected again, we need to forgive. Forgiveness means 'letting go' of the offence, whether it's serious or trivial.** It is not a feeling, but a decision. When the person who has been hurt chooses to forgive, they let go of resentment. When the partner who has caused the hurt receives forgiveness, they are free to love again. Our ability to forgive the one who has hurt us, and to ask for forgiveness if we have caused the hurt, are both linked to our relationship to God.³



To forgive is to set the prisoner free ... only to discover the prisoner was you.

Anon

How do I feel about God's forgiveness of me?

God forgives us and helps us to forgive others

God has shown us grace: even though we didn't deserve it, He has extended His unconditional love and pardon to us through Jesus.⁴ We can respond by receiving His forgiveness as a gift and enjoy living as people who have been forgiven. God gives us the power to forgive one another through His Spirit (Session 4). When we experience this in a deep way, we will be able to more easily forgive others.

It's worth noting that when we forgive, we do not automatically forget. We need an ongoing process of healing and reconciliation to rebuild trust and closeness with our partners.

This session looks at how we can resolve our differences so they don't divide us through conflict, but bring us closer together.

Group Session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time following the session on handling our feelings constructively?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about living with our differences that prompted you to think about the subject in a new way? Explain.

A Understanding and handling our differences

Opposites often attract each other. But even if we're not complete opposites we all have different ways of looking at life, likes and dislikes. Our differences can often result in disagreement and ongoing conflict. **The Bible tells us that a clash of differences between people can be constructive.**

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.
Proverbs 27:17

1. In what ways can the principle of 'iron sharpening iron' benefit a marriage?

Foundation Principle:

Our differences can be tools that help us grow as people and grow stronger in our marriage.

ASK someone to read out the paragraph.

The purpose of Q1 is to help couples to realise that our differences are a positive part of our relationship, whether we experience a lot or very little conflict in the relationship.

SQ

Would anyone be willing to give an example from their own marriage where one partner has 'sharpened' the other? (As the lead couple, have an example ready from your own marriage.)

SI

SQ

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

10 MINS

10 MINS

ASK everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box A (without talking to their partner).

ASK someone to read the paragraph. If appropriate, you may like to make the following comment.

COMMENT: Some couples will say they have a largely conflict-free relationship. For the purpose of this session we define conflict as a state of irritation or disagreement within a relationship which may or may not be outwardly expressed. On this basis most couples experience conflict to one degree or another.

ASK two people to read out John and Jenni and someone else to narrate.

... A psychiatrist asks a lot of expensive questions your wife asks for nothing.
Joey Adams

A Understanding and handling differences

- i. Note down one or two insights from the group discussion that you would like to share with your partner.
- ii. Identify one important difference between you and your partner, eg
 - money: spend it/save it
 - sport: budding athlete/couch potato
 - holidays: seek adventure/rest
 - temperament: 'glass half full'/'half empty'
 - lifestyle: spontaneous/make plans and stick to them
 - people: spend time with others/prefer to spend time alone
 - focus: relationships/task more important
 - approach to tasks big picture/detail
 - other...

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about how you could use this difference as a catalyst for personal change and growth in your marriage.

B Handling conflict

In marriage we are forced to live with our differences and some of them will lead to conflict, whether we like it or not. Whatever the reasons for our conflicts, if we leave them unresolved we will be likely to find ourselves drifting apart. But if we learn to resolve them well, we will experience even greater closeness with each other.

John and Jenni – conflicting priorities

John is a spontaneous people person and is very focused in his work. Jenni is sensitive, emotional and likes to plan carefully. It's late and Jenni is in bed, reading. John comes home and joins her in the bedroom.

Jenni: (with frustration) You're late, what happened?

session 6

Time check
Write target time here:

(start time plus 35 mins)

5 MINS

10 MINS

SQ

John and Jenni have had these conversations before - many times. Why do you think that they are not resolving their conflict?

John: *(in an upbeat tone)* Hello, darling! I did say on the phone this afternoon that I would be home late.

Jenni: *(extremely irritated)* It's nearly eleven o'clock! I got the impression from your call that you'd be home for dinner. I waited until 8.30pm. I even tried to call you on your mobile, but it was switched off!

John: *(soothingly)* Sorry, Jen. Mr Lewis arrived unannounced and invited the whole team out for drinks. I couldn't say no. And I couldn't get a signal on my mobile.

Jenni: *(incredulous, in a loud voice)* You couldn't say no!?!

John: Jenni, you know how important this contract is.

Jenni: *(trying hard to be calm)* I feel really hurt. I made a nice meal so we could spend some time together. I feel let down. You said you'd be home.

John: I'm sorry, darling, what can I say? Look, it's late and I'm tired ...

Jenni: You always say that. You work late nearly every night and when you don't, you're out with people from the office! You're always putting your work first – I think you love your work more than me!

John: *(a little defensively)* Please don't start with all that again. I am trying hard to keep everyone happy. I'm under a lot of pressure right now. We have to pay the bills ... you know how tight the money situation is! Look, Jen, I need to do this and I need you to bear with me. It's my big chance. It will be better next month.

John hugs Jenni and leaves the room quickly.

SI

Jenni: *(in an exasperated tone)* You said that last month ... *(even more quietly)* ... and the month before.

SQ

1. In what ways are John and Jenni handling their conflict well? Not so well?

Note: This question is not about judging who is right or wrong.

SI

2. What else could John do? Jenni do?

Foundation Principle:

Loving confrontation is the first step towards resolving conflict.

Marriage is an alliance entered into by a man who can't sleep with the window shut, and a woman who can't sleep with the window open.

George Bernard Shaw

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

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living positively with our differences

ASK someone to read out the paragraph and someone else to read the Bible passage.

Learning about forgiveness

A simple sincere apology is an important part of resolving conflict. Admitting and acknowledging our part in the disagreement means we are taking responsibility for any hurt we have caused. But saying sorry is usually not enough. We need to take another step to admit we were wrong and ask our partner's forgiveness. And the offended partner needs to let go of the hurt by forgiving the person who has caused it. Forgiveness is vital in order to let go of the BIG HURTS, but it's also really important when dealing with those daily trivial things that upset us.

Bible study

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?'

²²Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'

²³'Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents^a was brought to him. ²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶'The servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." ²⁷The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

²⁸'But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred denarii.^b He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

²⁹'His fellow-servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back."

³⁰'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you?" ³⁴In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.'

Matthew 18:21–35

NOTES FROM PASSAGE

- a. A talent was equivalent to fifteen years of income.
- b. A denarius was a coin worth the equivalent of a day's wages.

Q4 covers a very important aspect of forgiveness, namely where we get the power to forgive. There is a pre-prepared answer in the SI on page 189. If you prefer you could answer the question through personal testimony.

ASK someone to read out the paragraph on forgiveness in marriage.

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

SI

3. What do we learn from the passage about forgiveness? You might want to consider:

- What effect should the king's forgiveness of the debt have had on the servant?
- What were the consequences of refusing to forgive?

SI

4. How does experiencing God's forgiveness in our own lives help us to forgive others?

Forgiveness in marriage

Conflict is rarely about one person being right and the other wrong. It's usually about two different people with different expectations and needs. **To resolve an issue each person should take responsibility for their own part in the situation.**

- The one who has been hurt should acknowledge their feelings.
- The one who has caused the hurt needs to ask for forgiveness.
- The one who has been hurt should offer forgiveness.
- Forgiveness needs to be accepted.
- If both sides have caused hurt (as is often the case), then they both need to forgive one another and forgiveness will flow both ways to restore the relationship.

Forgiving does not mean pretending that nothing has happened, or forgetting there is a wound. **Forgiving does not condone a wrong action. Forgiving is a conscious act and requires strength.** It is the first stage in an ongoing process of healing and is an essential step in resolving conflict. **Forgiving sets free the person who caused the hurt as well as the one who offers forgiveness.**

SI

5. Why is it sometimes difficult to forgive? What are the consequences of refusing to forgive in marriage? (Note: consider the 'little' things as well as the big ones.)

Foundation Principle:

Forgiving one another is the second step towards resolving conflict.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 55 mins)

*... not forgiving is like
drinking rat poison and
waiting for the rat to die.*

Anne Lamott

ASK everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box B.

Time check
Write target time here:

(start time plus 75 mins)

B **Handling conflict**

i. What are the ways I tend to react and handle conflict in my marriage? (Tick any that apply. REALITY CHECK: would my partner agree with my assessment?)

☐ talk calmly and try to work things out

☐ withdraw from conflict

☐ get defensive and argue

☐ get very heated verbally

☐ get physical

☐ freeze up, with no reaction

☐ deny or struggle to fully acknowledge being hurt

☐ find it difficult to explain how I feel

☐ find it difficult to listen and understand

☐ find it difficult to genuinely apologise

☐ find it hard to accept *my partner's* view

☐ find it hard to accept that *my* behaviour may be part of the problem

☐ other ...

ii. Think about the following statements and how they express your thoughts and feelings. Where do I generally see myself regarding this issue? (Put your initials somewhere on the line to indicate.)

iii. Where do I think my partner generally is regarding these issues? (Put your partner's initials on the line, as appropriate.)

	almost never	sometimes	often
I am able to say when I have been hurt by my partner.	<div></div>		
I am able to admit what I have done to hurt my partner.	<div></div>		
I am able to apologise.	<div></div>		
I rely on God to help me with forgiveness.	<div></div>		
I am able to forgive my partner even when I feel hurt.	<div></div>		
When I have forgiven I don't hold any grudges.	<div></div>		
In forgiving, I am able to show my partner love.	<div></div>		

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk to your partner about how you perceive you handle conflict – what goes well and not so well. Also, explain why you placed the initials where you did for part ii.

5 MINS

There are suggestions in the SI page 189 to help you if you are short of time.

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box C.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principle:
Our differences can be tools that help us to grow as people and grow stronger in our marriage.

Use the Together Notes: Three Steps for Resolving Conflict to summarise. If you are short of time then just read out the three headline steps (which are the Foundation Principles for the session). If you have more time you can look at the bulleted notes for each step.

- Remind couples to focus on encouraging each other during their Couple Time.
- If you haven't had time to look at the Together Notes in detail, encourage couples to look at it during their Couple Time.
- Mention that the Couple Time may be a great opportunity to practise 'I' and 'you' messages from Session 5!
- Remind each couple to come to the next meeting prepared to share some insight from their Couple Time.
- Point out the questions for remarried couples and couples with children, if appropriate.
- You may want to reassure people that in the next session about physical and spiritual intimacy they won't be expected to reveal anything about their sex lives!

SI

SI

C Finding full reconciliation and building closeness

When we experience conflict, saying sorry and expressing forgiveness to one another are not enough. We need to be reconciled – to grow together again, and rebuild trust.

1. In the process of conflict resolution, how do we:
 - Restore closeness?
 - Rebuild trust?
2. How can we live with a less than ideal situation? (A neat and tidy resolution is not always possible.)

Foundation Principle:

The third step to resolving conflict is to agree on actions that bring reconciliation and restore closeness.

C Finding full reconciliation and building closeness

- i. Note down one or two insights from the group discussion about finding full reconciliation that you would like to share with your partner ...

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk as a couple about reconciliation and building closeness after a conflict.

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date in your diaries for your Couple Time:

104

living positively with our differences

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

15 MINS

5 MINS

5 MINS

*A good marriage is the
union of two good forgivers.*

Ruth Bell Graham

Couple Time – 60 minutes

Note: Talking about conflict when you're **not** having a disagreement is very important. It allows you to think and talk calmly about how you handle your differences. Make sure you pick a good situation to have your Couple Time. We all grow up with different experiences of handling conflict. Make a point of seeking to understand each other and to **be positive** as you talk.

A Understanding and handling differences

First, share your insights from the group discussion about how differences between marriage partners can be positive.

Then tell each other what difference you selected for part ii (page 99). How can you use this as a growth point for personal change? How can it be a growth point in your marriage? Identify an action point, if appropriate.

Personal action point:

**Look at Together Notes:
Three Steps for Resolving
Conflict on our website** for
more on the steps for resolving
conflict well.

B Handling conflict

Talk about how you tend to react in conflict situations (refer to your notes for i on page 103). Why is this the case? Does anything need to change? Identify a personal action point, if necessary.

Then, explain why you placed the initials for yourself and your partner where you did for part ii. In what areas are you doing well? Are there areas that need to change? Identify a personal action point to enable you to manage the process of forgiveness better, if necessary.

Personal action point:

C Finding full reconciliation and building closeness

Talk about your insights from the group discussion to help you move towards greater reconciliation and closeness after a conflict (refer to your notes on page 104). Do you need to agree on a specific step to help you in the process of reconciliation? Agree an action point, if appropriate.

Personal action point:

For further reading:

Fighting for Your Marriage, Markman, Stanley & Blumberg (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). Includes exercises to help you make changes in the way you handle conflict.

At the next group meeting you will be asked to describe one aspect of resolving conflicts that you've agreed to do differently in the future with your partner as a result of the session. Agree on one thing you would be prepared to share with the group from your Couple Time and write it down:

Before the next group meeting ...

Please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 7: **Deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy** (pages 109–111). Physical and spiritual intimacies are part of God's plan for two becoming 'one flesh'. As we deepen these aspects of our intimacy we will grow closer together.

For remarried couples

(optional additional questions)

These questions are not about restoring a relationship with a divorced partner, but about issues of forgiveness so you are free to move on and build a strong and healthy new marriage.

Take some time to reflect and then talk together. Be gentle. It is a good idea to pray first and ask God for wisdom and sensitivity.

- i. Do you need to forgive your former partner for anything, or, if applicable, your partner's ex-wife or ex-husband? Is there anything you need to forgive yourself for? Does there need to be a loving confrontation with anyone on any issue?
- ii. Agree on one thing you could do to support your partner as you face these challenges together.

For couples with children

(optional additional questions)

- i. Think about how you handle your emotions and any conflict in front of your children. What do you think they see – what are you modelling to them?
- ii. Does anything need to change to help your children learn to handle conflict and emotions well? Identify an action point, if appropriate.

NOTES

1. Excerpt taken from Dr Gary and Barbara Rosberg's book *Healing the Hurt in Your Marriage*, a Focus on the Family book. Copyright © 2004, Gary and Barbara Rosberg. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Used by permission.
2. Ephesians 4:15.
3. Ephesians 4:32.
4. John 3:16–17; Romans 8:1–2; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13; Hebrews 10:14.

Session 7

Positioning Session 7

Having already addressed emotional intimacy in Session 3, we now turn to the physical and spiritual aspects of intimacy.

Participants will find this a helpful, practical and illuminating session. First, we will look at the perhaps surprising things the Bible has to say about physical intimacy. Next, we will turn our attention to the spiritual dimension of intimacy.

Tog1ether Notes: Differences in Sexuality Between Men and Women (available from www.togetherinmarriage.org) accompanies this session.

Objectives of this Session

- To explore how to deepen physical intimacy.
- To understand that God is pro sex in marriage.
- To explore how to express spiritual intimacy in tangible ways.
- To explore praying together as a means of building and deepening spiritual intimacy.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into four parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Deepening physical intimacy.	35
Part B	Developing spiritual intimacy.	25
Part C, summary and close	Deepening our spiritual intimacy.	30

Preparation

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information for Leaders (page 190). Make notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	The SI for this session is comprehensive. You will want to take a little more preparation time to think through how to lead the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Read Together Notes: Differences in Sexuality Between Men and Women so you are familiar with its contents (page 201). Print a copy for every person in your group and hand them out at the meeting at the end of Section A. 1	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- **We do not recommend that you split this session.** You should be able to cover the material in the suggested time.
- Many couples find praying together challenging. You too may find this difficult. In your position as the lead couple, try to put aside your personal experiences and views and **encourage your group to consider this subject with an open mind.**
- The Couple Time following this session will give the opportunity for couples to pray together. From our experience there will be lots of reasons/opportunities for them not to do this. Think of ways in which couples can help and encourage each other to pray together.
- There are **no optional additional questions for remarried couples or those who have children** in the Couple Time at the end of this session.



7

Deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy

Introductory Reading

As human beings we crave love, in the form of a deep and intimate relationship. Marriage is one of God's answers to our need. We develop love and intimacy in a marriage as we feel free to share all of ourselves: emotionally, physically and spiritually. We have already looked at how to build emotional intimacy through open and trusting communication (Session 1) and meeting each other's relational needs (Session 3). This session covers two other forms of intimacy.

How free do I feel to share all of myself with my partner?

Physical intimacy

Western culture is dominated by sex, but often cheapens it. The Church has frequently presented unhelpful views on sex, but the Bible is clear that we are physical beings, 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.¹ God designed male and female bodies to fit together perfectly, as 'one flesh'. There is nothing shameful in this. **God invented sex and meant it to be good: for bonding,² pleasure³ and reproduction.⁴**

We express our deep commitment and love for one another through a faithful and loving sexual relationship. It is interesting that humans are the only creatures whose physical union is face-to-face.⁵ The Bible advises that we should only abstain from sex by agreement for a specific period for the purpose of prayer and fasting. Then we should come together again so that neither partner is tempted to stray outside of the marriage.⁶ **The Bible says that the marriage bed is for mutual satisfaction and that we should give ourselves to our partner to meet their needs.⁷**

A healthy relationship

Many couples enjoy healthy sex lives, but for others it can be an aspect of their marriage with which they struggle. Some may even feel that they are failing in some way. Lots of couples would like to have a more satisfying physical relationship but don't know how to make it better. **A satisfying sex life is like the icing on the cake ... but we have to bake the cake first!**⁸ There is no single formula to develop a fulfilling sex life because every couple is different, but there are some key issues we could consider:

For a woman, sexual intercourse is the culmination of her responses to tenderness, sacrificial love and even spiritual leadership from her husband.

Roger and Donna Vann,
*Secrets of a Growing
Marriage*

What do I like about
our sex life?

1. **Men and women tend to have very different needs.** Generally speaking, for a woman intercourse is linked to the quality of the relationship. She wants to feel valued and cared for. Deep and fulfilling physical intimacy grows out of meeting each other's emotional, relational needs (Session 3). Women also need time to be wooed.

Most men can isolate sex from the other parts of the marriage and are quickly aroused and ready for action. Men may also subconsciously use sex as a way to release built-up fears, joys, tensions and excitement⁹ and are hoping that their wives will be as sexually interested as they are.¹⁰

A husband doesn't want a body to perform on, he wants a person who will respond to him in the physical terms that are so meaningful to him ... Without it, a husband loses a sense of his masculine self-esteem ...

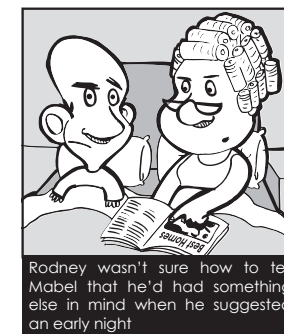
Lewis and Hendricks,
Rocking the Roles

II. **We need to communicate our needs, likes and dislikes in the sexual area.** We might find this uncomfortable, but unless we talk about these things we will never know what our partner really wants or likes. God intends us to be 'naked and without shame'.¹¹ When we talk we should be honest, but also kind; respecting each other's feelings and insecurities.

III. **Resolve to work on things that get in the way:** tiredness and stress, a lack of privacy, communication problems, unresolved anger, a problem that needs forgiving, loss of trust, anxiety, too much TV ... to name a few!

IV. **Avoid dangerous traps!** There are a few things we should avoid if we want to enjoy a healthy sex life. We shouldn't spend regular periods of time alone with members of the opposite sex. This may be a slippery slope to an affair. We should also be cautious about which films and other media we consume because they can give us unrealistic expectations about sex and make our partner feel inadequate. Some people believe that pornography can spice up a flagging sex life, but this is untrue. Pornographic images have a way of entering our imaginations, bringing another 'person' into our marriage bed. Also porn is like a drug in that we end up looking for stronger stuff to get aroused. Someone usually ends up getting hurt.

There is a deep emotional and spiritual connection when we make love, so it is important to nurture our physical relationship through all the seasons of life.



*The problem is we are in
different places spiritually ...*

*I feel uncomfortable sharing
my spiritual side with my
partner ...*

*The secret of life is finding
relationship with God.
The richer your relationship
with God, the richer your
relationship with
your partner.*

Selwyn Hughes,
Marriage God's Way

Spiritual intimacy

A marriage connects us at a spiritual level, whether we are aware of it or not, because we are spiritual beings. Spiritual intimacy is more than reading the Bible, praying or doing 'churchy' things together, although those things contribute to it. **Spiritual intimacy means connecting at a deep level, drawing close to God together as our heartfelt desire and submitting to His will for our lives.**¹² Then we can draw on His love and leadership and harness His power in our marriages.

Why is spiritual intimacy important?

- I. **God gives us a solid foundation.** We can't really know ourselves until we know God. As our Creator, He gives us a firm foundation for our lives: identity as His children;¹³ security in His promises and significance and purpose for living.¹⁴ If we try to build the foundations of our lives on other things, such as work, money, status, power, education, material things, or even on the love of our partner, then we will be let down. **God is eternal, powerful and loving. If we build the foundations of our lives on a shared relationship with Him, we will build a much stronger marriage.**
- II. **God is love and He is its source.**¹⁵ He promises to pour Himself into our hearts through His Spirit so we can love each other with His agape love:¹⁶ other-centred, unconditional, seeking the greatest good. **Only the love of Christ can truly bind a marriage together and bless it.** Other kinds of love are self-centred and will tend to pull us apart rather than draw us together.
- III. **God makes our marriage stronger.**¹⁷ He blesses relationships in which either or both partners are trusting in Him.¹⁸ He will shape us as individuals and marriage partners as we seek His will and power for growth and change.

**This session looks at how we can grow closer as we deepen
our physical and spiritual intimacy.**

Given the topic it may be a good idea to remind people not to share anything that might embarrass their partner.

This question is designed to open up the topic. There are no 'right' answers. Have fun!

Suggest you:

- Allocate one passage per couple. If time allows, ask couples to look at another passage. If there are fewer couples than passages then you take on the extras and read out the principles from the notes in the SI.
- Ask each couple to look at the passage and discuss the first part of Q2 between themselves for a few minutes.
- Then ask each couple to read their passage out loud and feed back their principle to the rest of the group.
- Discuss the second part of Q2 as a group. Spend as much time as possible discussing the second part of Q2.

SI

Group Session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time following the session on living positively with our differences?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about our physical and spiritual intimacy that prompted you to think about the subject in a new way? Explain.

A Deepening physical intimacy

Physical intimacy and sex are expressions of our 'one flesh' relationship and enhance our sense of emotional intimacy (Session 3). **Deep and fulfilling physical intimacy grows out of meeting each other's emotional, relational needs first.** While this session is not intended to be a good sex guide, we will look briefly at what God thinks of sex.

1. What is society's view of physical intimacy?

It must be admitted that we English have sex on the brain, which is a very unfortunate place to have it.
Malcolm Muggeridge

Bible study

2. Read the following passages from the Bible.

- Summarise what you think is the general principle from each as it relates to sex in marriage.
- How should these principles shape our attitude to our own sex life as partners?

If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.

Deuteronomy 24:5

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

Proverbs 5:18–19

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deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy

10 MINS

5 MINS

25 MINS

See important note in SI, page 190.

ASK someone to read out the Foundation Principle.

²But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 7:2–5

⁹You've captured my heart, dear friend. You looked at me, and I fell in love. One look my way and I was hopelessly in love! ¹⁰How beautiful your love, dear, dear friend – far more pleasing than a fine, rare wine, your fragrance more exotic than select spices. ¹¹The kisses of your lips are honey, my love, every syllable you speak a delicacy to savor. Your clothes smell like the wild outdoors, the ozone scent of high mountains.

Song of Songs 4:9–11 (The Message)

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:13b–20

Foundation Principle:
God is pro sex in marriage.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 40 mins)

session 7

113

ASK everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box A (without talking to their partner).

HAND OUT a copy of Together Notes: Differences in Sexuality Between Men and Women to each person for their Couple Time.

ASK someone to read the paragraph.

A Deepening physical intimacy

- i. One thing I like about our sex life now is ...

- ii. What elements of our sex life would I like to discuss with my partner to build greater physical intimacy?
 - ☐ Positive anticipation
 - ☐ Romantic atmosphere
 - ☐ Seduction
 - ☐ Tender words
 - ☐ Non-sexual touching
 - ☐ More time for lovemaking
 - ☐ Initiating lovemaking
 - ☐ Greater variety
 - ☐ Deeper responsiveness
 - ☐ Clearing the air about a concern
 - ☐ Other ...

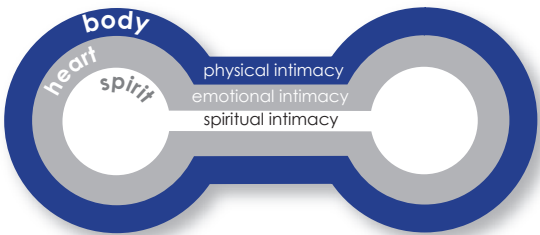
In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your sex life and how you might meet each other's needs. You are encouraged to look together at Together Notes: Differences in Sexuality Between Men and Women, which contains information about the differences in sexuality between men and women, as well as questions to help you talk about sex.

Despite the claims of some sex manuals, a couple cannot separate sex from the rest of the marriage, perfecting it and then isolating it, as it were, in an airtight compartment to be used when desired. Everything that happens in a marriage has its effect on the lovemaking experience.

Ed Wheat, M.D.
and Gaye Wheat,
Intended for Pleasure

B Developing spiritual intimacy

Intimacy is the freedom to share all of yourself with your partner. Two persons are 'becoming one' in three distinct dimensions:



114

deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy

5 MINS

10 MINS

Be sensitive to any non-Christians in the group. Try not to make critical comments. Instead highlight the benefits of being spiritually aligned.

Praying together will be discussed in part C. Steer your group to think of ways of developing spiritual intimacy other than praying together.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete the Couple Time preparation box B.

SI

Our bodies become intimate through physical expressions of love: touching, hugging, kissing and sex. We share our hearts through open and trusting communication (Session 1) and meeting each other's emotional needs (Session 3). At the deepest level there is a spiritual connection between marriage partners.

SI

1. What are the effects on a marriage if
 - both partners share a living faith and relationship with Jesus?
 - one partner has a living faith and relationship with Jesus, and the other does not?
 - neither of the partners has a living faith in Jesus?
2. Spiritual intimacy comes as we seek the will of God for our lives together. What are some ways that a couple can develop spiritual intimacy in a marriage?

Foundation Principle:

Spiritual unity needs to be expressed in tangible ways.

B Developing spiritual intimacy

- i. How can I support my partner in his/her own spiritual development?
- ii. What part could any of the following play in developing your spiritual intimacy? (Tick any you want to discuss or write down your own idea.)
 - ☐ Developing my individual relationship with Jesus
 - ☐ Reading and discussing the Bible together
 - ☐ Praying aloud together
 - ☐ Attending church together
 - ☐ Working together to help others in need
 - ☐ Deciding together to give financially
 - ☐ My idea ...

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about developing the spiritual intimacy in your marriage.

session 7

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 70 mins)

10 MINS

5 MINS

ASK someone to read the paragraph.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box C.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. God is pro sex in marriage.
2. Spiritual unity needs to be expressed in tangible ways.
3. Praying together deepens spiritual intimacy.

This Couple Time is important. In our experience couples may be unusually tempted not to do this particular Couple Time! Consider the following:

- Ask each couple to pray for another couple in your group – to pray that they will make time to do this Couple Time.
- Ask couples to tell one another the dates on which they plan to do their Couple Time so that others can pray for them and maybe help in practical ways (babysitting?).
- Point couples to the When2pray website to help them to pray together.
- Ask each couple to come to the next meeting prepared to share some insight from their Couple Time (but not the details of a possibly newly invigorated sex life!).
- If appropriate, point out that there are no additional questions for remarried couples or those with children.
- Point out that the Introductory Reading for the next session on the roles of men and women is longer than normal to try to cover what is often a controversial subject.

SI

SI

C Deepening our spiritual intimacy

We all have different experiences of prayer. Many people only know 'prayers before bed' and 'grace' at meal times. Some people take part in formal set prayers in church and others pray openly in all kinds of settings. Many people feel comfortable praying in private and find the idea of praying out loud difficult and uncomfortable. Whatever our experiences and feelings about prayer, it is an essential part of drawing close to God.

1. Many married Christians tend to only pray alone and/or in church groups. Few pray as couples. Why do you think this is? Is praying aloud together a personal option or an essential part of growing together in a Christian marriage?
2. What advice or guidelines might help a couple move forward in praying aloud together?

Foundation Principle:

Praying together deepens spiritual intimacy.

C Deepening our spiritual intimacy

i. How do I feel about praying aloud together? (Tick any that apply.)

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excited | <input type="checkbox"/> Quite comfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> Terrified! | <input type="checkbox"/> Open to trying it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other ... | | |

ii. Write down any insights from the group discussion, or ideas of your own, which could help you move forward in your prayer life as a couple.

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about praying together as a couple.

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date in your diaries for your Couple Time:

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deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy

Note:

The Introductory Reading for Session 8 is longer to enable us to explore this complex issue of how God intends us to fit together based on biblical principles.

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

10 MINS

10 MINS

5 MINS

5 MINS

*The only people who make
love all the time are liars.*
Louis Jordan

Visit our website and look at
**Together Notes: Differences
in Sexuality Between Men
and Women** for questions to
help you talk about sex.

For further reading:

Rob Bell, *Sex God* (Zondervan,
2007). Fantastic insight into
our sexual and spiritual
connections.

Barrie and Eileen Jones,
When2Pray (RoperPenberthy
Publishing, 2003). Full of
practical and helpful insights
to help you pray together as
a couple.

www.cwr.org.uk

There are a variety of
devotionals available to help
you study the Bible regularly.

Couple Time – 60 minutes

Note: Many couples find it very difficult to talk about sex. Be gentle and patient with one another. Affirm one another. Don't criticise. Remember that deep and fulfilling physical intimacy grows out of meeting each other's emotional, relational needs **first**.

A Deepening physical intimacy

Firstly tell each other what you like about your sex life at the moment.

Talk about the elements of your sex life you ticked during the group session (page 114) and why you selected them.

Identify one thing **you** could do **for your partner** to build greater physical intimacy, if appropriate.

Personal action point:

B Developing spiritual intimacy

Take turns in sharing your answers to part i (page 115). Then tell your partner what you ticked for part ii (if anything) and elaborate on why you ticked it. If developing your spiritual intimacy together is important in your marriage right now, agree what you could do together. Identify an action point, if appropriate.

Personal action point:

C Deepening our spiritual intimacy

Talk about what you wrote concerning your feelings about praying aloud together and how you could move forward in this area of prayer (page 116). Identify a personal action point, if appropriate.

Why not pray together now ... If you are not used to praying together, here are some tips:

- You might begin simply by each praying one sentence about a particular topic, before moving on to the next topic.
- Try to avoid having one person pray a long prayer, which then leaves the other feeling that there is nothing to say!
- Take turns and think of it as including God in your conversation.
- Periods of silence are OK.

Personal action point:

At the next group meeting you will be asked to describe one way you are starting to express love differently towards your partner as a result of the session. Agree on one thing each of you would be prepared to share briefly with the group from your Couple Time and write it down:

Before the next group meeting ...

Please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 8: **Fitting together as husbands and wives** (pages 121–125). This session looks at how we can grow closer when we live together, in a way that complements one another. Remember to give yourself a few more minutes to read as it's slightly longer than other sessions. It will set up your group meeting – and maybe blow away some preconceived ideas!

Note:

Praying together builds spiritual unity. We can express our gratitude to God together. We can pray for our general concerns and specific problems. We can pray for, and thereby support, each other in our work, home life, marriage, wider family issues and children. As we express our thoughts and feelings together before God, we let His power and love into our lives. Our thoughts, attitudes and love for one another will change and grow, and so will our intimacy.

Why not sign up to receive weekly e-prayers from [when2pray](http://when2pray.net) to help you pray together as well as pray for others. Investigate www.when2pray.net

NOTES

1. Psalm 139:14.
2. Genesis 2:24.
3. Deuteronomy 24:5; Proverbs 5:18–19; Song of Songs; 1 Corinthians 7:2–5.
4. Genesis 1:28.
5. Source: Ed Wheat M.D. and Gaye Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2002) chapter 1.
6. 1 Corinthians 7:5–6.
7. 1 Corinthians 7:2–5. This passage is often misused to justify sexual 'rights'. The context of this passage is actually about mutual satisfaction and pleasure. The Christian wife is not the property of her husband. Sex is not his right and her obligation. Paul is saying that the husband and wife belong to each other and the marriage bed is a place for meeting each other's sexual needs. The passage is not about 'demanding' or 'taking'. The emphasis is about 'giving' of oneself and of mutual responsibility. Source: Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987).
8. Roger and Donna Vann, *Secrets of a Growing Marriage* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986).
9. Ibid.
10. Willard Harley, *His Needs, Her Needs* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 1986).
11. Genesis 2:25.
12. Source: 'Developing Spiritual Intimacy in Marriage', an article by Norman Wright. www.familylife.com
13. John 1:12; Ephesians 1:5.
14. Romans 8.
15. 1 John 4:7–8.
16. Romans 5:5.
17. Ecclesiastes 4:9–12.
18. 1 Corinthians 7:14–16.

Session 8

Positioning the Session

We are coming towards the end of Together. So far we've looked at God's purpose and plan for marriage, how to build intimacy, practical issues and how God helps us to face relationship challenges.

The next topic is one which every married couple has to address. How do we fit together as husband and wife? Who does what? How do we make the decisions?

This is a huge topic. The intention is to explore some core issues about our roles in a broad way. Set your group's expectations at the beginning in case some people feel frustrated at the 'bird's eye view' we've taken.

Time management will be challenging. This is a session you may want to split into two meetings if your group are up for it and we've given suggested timings in the notes for the session.

Objectives of this Session

- To understand what the Bible says about how husbands and wives fit together and the part that each plays in achieving this.
- To understand how to achieve oneness by complementing each other (not competing for power).

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into five parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
feedback	From Couple Time and the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	How do we fit together as husbands and wives?	15
Part B	A marriage with God at the heart of it.	25
Part C	How does a husband/wife fulfil his/her God-given role? (Husbands and wives in separate groups.)	45
Summary and close	Men and women come together again briefly.	5

Preparation

We suggest that the husband of the leader couple leads the men's group and the wife leads the ladies' group. You should have two copies of this Leader's Guide. If you haven't, then a copy of the Leader's Guide for Session 8 is available at www.togetherinmarriage.org as a download.

	Activity	Tick box
1	Ensure that you have another room and a leader for the second group and that he/she has Leaders' Notes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information (SI) for Leaders (page 192).	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Decide whether you want to split this session (perhaps ask your group first). Then prepare accordingly making notes as you wish throughout the session. There are time management ideas in the notes below if you want to complete the session in one meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>

4	Have some background music to play during Couple Time A.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Look briefly at Session 9. You may want to plan ahead and decide whether to make this the final get-together, or to do Session 9 and then meet again for a nice meal to celebrate the end of the study, share feedback and consider whether you want to do something else together as a group (see pages 164–65 and 174–175).	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- **Think ahead and arrange a second room for the men's/women's group.** Ideally the two groups will be separated by a wall to avoid distraction.
- If appropriate, **encourage someone from your group to pray briefly at the beginning and end of the session.**
- Note that all timings given in the notes are for completing the session in one meeting (suggested timings for a split meeting are outlined in the table below).
- **If you wish to split the session we suggest the following:**

FIRST MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and Introductory Reading	10
Part A	Q1 Couple Time A (take 5 mins to fill in parts i and ii. Then take 10 mins to begin talking as a couple about part i).	15 15
Part B	Q1. Q2. Couple Time prep B.	25 25 5
Wrap up	Closing remarks. Explain how you will approach the next meeting.	5

SECOND MEETING	Section	Suggested timings (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time A and B.	10
Part C	MEN Q1. Bible study and Q2. Q3. Q4 case studies. FP and CT prep B.	10 30 15 20 5
Part C	WOMEN Q1. Bible study and Q2. Q3. Q4 case studies. FP and CT prep B.	10 25 20 20 5
... and finally MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER	Review Foundation Principles for the whole of Session 8. Closing remarks.	10

- If you are not splitting the session and find you are unable to finish questions within the time allocated, then reassure couples that they will be given the opportunity to explore the issues further during their Couple Time. The important thing about the session is to get couples thinking and talking about how they work together.

Some suggestions to help time management:

- Plan to finish the meal 15 mins earlier than normal to create a time 'buffer'.
- Decide which one of the case studies is most appropriate for your group, then if you are running out of time do that one and leave out the second one.
- Make good use of the time check boxes.
- Round off your group discussion of particular questions quickly by reading out the suggested answers in the SI and then moving your group onto the next question.
- For further time management ideas see page 11.



8

Fitting together as husbands and wives

Introductory Reading

When we marry we change from being two independent people to being a new unit as a couple. But how should this new unit operate? Our culture has enormous influence over our view of how men and women should function within marriage, and the result is often different from what God intended.

What are the greatest influences on my view of the roles of a husband and a wife: parents, my culture, TV...? What are they telling me?

Sometimes I wonder if men and women really suit each other. Perhaps they should live next door and just visit now and then.

Katherine Hepburn

Many of us harbour unconscious deep-seated expectations about the roles men and women play in a marriage based on what our parents did. Then, we may either try to be like them or else determine to be as different as possible. We may also have strong views based on certain stereotypes of dominant and subservient roles or we may reject the whole idea of roles altogether. Sadly the Church too has presented roles for men and women which cannot always be biblically supported.

The trouble is, if we don't find a positive way of 'fitting together' we can end up undermining, manipulating or competing against one another. This will prevent us living effectively together as a united team. This session looks at what the Bible says about how God has designed us to fit together.

God's design: we're made for each other

God did not make humans as isolated units or self-sufficient creatures. **He made us to be in relationship:** two creatures made from the same stuff, yet different, bonded together as one flesh. **In this 'profound mystery'¹ of marriage there is no loss of identity, rather a relationship where the two together are greater than when apart.**

When God created men and women He made them of **equal value – both in the image of God – but clearly not the same.**²

God made man from the 'dust'. The man's first task was to name the animals. Perhaps it was while he was naming the animal pairs that he recognised what God had known all along, a need to have his own mate.

God set about making woman from the man's side – to be at his side as a 'suitable helper'³ because man alone could not fulfil God's purposes. The woman wasn't (and isn't) just there to have babies and make life more pleasant, nor as some kind of inferior sidekick, but as someone to **complement the man through an intimate relationship.**

*A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.
Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.
Proverbs 31:10–12*

God intends for a husband and wife to live together in marriage as a united team.⁴ God blessed the man and the woman and **together** they are told to 'fill' the earth and 'rule' over it on His behalf. We have a joint responsibility to care for the world – accountable to God as His representatives or managers.⁵

Marriage: designed to be a harmonious partnership

The God of the Bible is the God of order, not of chaos. God extends the ordering of human life and relationships into marriage, families and the wider community.⁶ He has put a divine harmony into His design for marriage and provided practical instructions to fit together so that each partner gives something of themselves for the good of the other. God gives us each a role in the marriage and with it comes responsibilities.

*In my house I'm the boss,
my wife is just the decision-
maker.*

Woody Allen⁸

I. In His divine design for marriage, God gives the husband a role as 'head'.

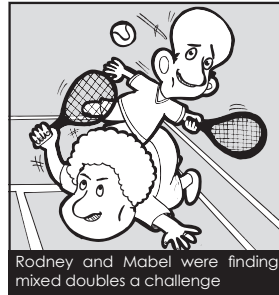
Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

1 Corinthians 11:3

But it is vital to God's order that Christ is the head of man and God the Father is the head of Christ. Christ is a husband's role model for headship. At the same time, He is the One to whom a husband is accountable. Headship has nothing to do with worth. The word 'head'⁷ has a range of meanings: literally as the head which governs a body; a metaphorical meaning for head is as 'source' for life. Head also means a person with final authority, responsibility and accountability.

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fitting together as husbands and wives



Being the **head does NOT mean one who lords it over another. Instead the husband is to be the head – like Christ.** Christ is the head of the Church body but also its humble servant,⁹ the One who showed us what sacrificial love is like.¹⁰ **A husband as Christlike man is one who serves and loves his wife sacrificially.** He also cherishes and takes care of his wife enabling her to maximise and fulfil her God-given potential.¹¹

II. **God gives the wife the role of 'helper' – an equal partner to live and work alongside her husband.**

The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'
Genesis 2:18

The Bible also uses the term 'helper' to describe the help which comes from God.¹² There is **no sense of inferiority at all**, rather it describes one who enables and defends the other. The wife is to be a companion who fits or matches her husband in a way that supports and respects him as his equal.¹³

God's creation design became distorted by sin in Genesis 3. This was the birth of the battle between the sexes, which continues in a world infected by sin. When husbands or wives seek to go their own way, rather than God's, the marriage can end up on a slippery slope where one or both are either seeking to dominate or fight for control, or they are abdicating their responsibilities altogether. But there is hope because Jesus has brought forgiveness and restored our relationship with God and each other.¹⁴ God will help us bring about a harmonious partnership if we are willing to make important choices.

Marriage in real life: important choices

The most important choice we can make to fit together is to allow God to have control of our marriages. This means we each surrender ourselves – submit our individual hearts and wills to God's will.¹⁵ **This isn't a one-off event, but a way of life** that involves daily choices to live God's way – filled with His Spirit – and not according to selfish desires. Yielding control to God doesn't mean that we will instantly become the perfect couple or never argue. It will mean that **God will influence our decisions and behaviour towards one another in a way that will over time strengthen our marriage.** The Bible gives a picture of this kind of marriage as a rope of three cords that is not easily broken, where two of the strands are represented by the husband and wife and the third is God.¹⁶

Perhaps it was the recognition of the daily struggles in marriage amongst the Ephesians that prompted Paul the apostle to stress some important messages for husbands and wives which are just as relevant today, because they are rooted in God's creation design. The first is for husbands and wives to '**submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**'.¹⁷ When we come into marriage, inevitably we will have to give up some of our own independent desires for the sake of our unity. So **marriage becomes a series of daily small decisions and sacrifices for the sake of the other person**: don't leave clothes on the floor; remember to squeeze the toothpaste from the bottom; take out the rubbish when asked and so on.

Paul was also trying to communicate a 'profound mystery', namely that the out-working of the relationship between a husband and wife is meant to illustrate for the world the relationship of Christ to His Church. For the husband, Paul emphasised the need to love his wife as Christ loves the Church – giving himself up for her.¹⁸ For the wife it was to submit to her husband as the Church submits to Christ.¹⁹ **The instructions for husbands and wives are in essence very similar: doing what is best for the other person and the marriage. Putting them first, after God, but before work, children, hobbies ...**

The big problem is that in this fallen world, marriage forces us to face up to the sin of wanting our own way.

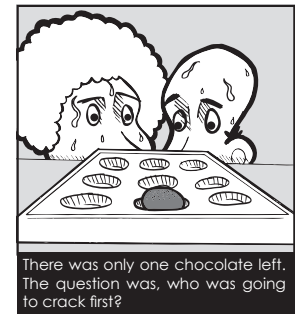
The first question is: do we wait until our partner 'deserves' our actions or do we take the initiative and behave in the way we know we should, the other-centred way, even though we don't feel like it? It's chicken and egg ... who goes first? **We can freely choose the other-centred way, bearing with the weaknesses and foibles of our partner. Or we can choose the way of our old sinful nature and do what we want or feel like.** Whichever way we choose, we will reap what we sow. One way leads to gradual isolation, the other to growing oneness.

The next question is: **Which kind of behaviour is more likely to lead to oneness in the marriage?** Manipulation, constant disrespectful behaviour, acts of domination or bullying may all lead to abdication of responsibility within our God-given roles, and withdrawal. However, an atmosphere of unconditional love and initiating other-centred behaviour will motivate your partner towards Christlike love and actions.

Husbands and wives make important choices every day about the way they live together. Those daily choices 'form a delicate and beautiful dynamic that cannot be pinned down with rules'.²⁰ **We can't change another person, but we can change ourselves. If we ask God to fill us with a spirit of humility, we will find we can do things according to His will, and not the way we would naturally tend.**

My wife is always making little digs or criticising me. Nothing ever pleases her so I've given up trying to do anything.

Maybe I would submit to my husband if his behaviour were a little more Christlike. The problem is it isn't! He can be so insensitive to my needs.



There was only one chocolate left. The question was, who was going to crack first?

How do we manage our time and money? How do we honour God as we fulfil our responsibilities together; in the home, at work, or in the community?

Adam was a man alone, a singleton. But in the company of Eve he became a race, a corporate body, and only then did he become capable of mirroring the true and full life of God, which is in the life of loving relationship.

*Mike Mason,
The Mystery of Marriage*

OK, so who cleans the floors and who brings home the bacon?

The Bible is silent on who should cook and clean. Different cultures have different expectations of who does what and how. **A woman's sole role is not necessarily only about having children and looking after the home**, although this is a wonderful, fulfilling and demanding job. The 'wife of noble character' from Proverbs 31 is more like 'wonder-woman': capable and hardworking as a successful business woman, wise and respected in the community, caring for the poor as well as running a home.

Similarly **a man is not expected to earn all the money**, although the Bible does say that he has a responsibility to provide for the needs of his family.²¹ A loving husband would want to do his fair share in the home and play an active role in bringing up any children. Again and again Proverbs reminds fathers of their responsibilities in raising children. It's worth remembering too that Jesus loved and valued children. Jesus also cooked fish for His disciples!

A husband and wife will need to agree on a division of tasks in and out of the home according to abilities and preferences. These may change from time to time through the seasons of life. The couple will also need to find a way of reaching decisions that honour God together.

An example of perfect relationship

Gods Himself is the example for us of fitting together in a perfectly ordered and harmonious relationship: Father–Son–Spirit. God is three Persons mysteriously unified as one: as Tri-unity, or the Trinity. Each Person is equally God and yet the Son seeks to do the will of the Father,²² and together, with the Father, sends out the Spirit.²³ So **God models to us a relationship of love and the way of other-centredness and submission.**

As husband and wife, God intends for us to be two equals unified as one. He puts Himself as the ultimate head in the divine ordering: God–husband–wife. **With God at the head and in the heart of our marriage we can reflect His image in a unique way that we can't as individuals, through the nature of our 'fitted together' relationship.**

This session looks at how we can grow closer when we live together in a way that complements one another.

There may be people within your group who take issue with the position presented concerning the roles of husbands and wives. Try not to get bogged down in deep discussions at this stage. Ask people to keep open minds and to explore the topic over the whole of this session. Then go on to read the special note.

ASK someone to read God's design principles and the Foundation Principle.

Group Session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time following the session on 'deepening our physical and spiritual intimacy'?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about husbands and wives that prompted you to think about the subject in a new way? Explain.

A special note

This session is intended to unpack some core issues to do with men and women in marriage. It is not possible to cover every aspect or all the complexities. The intention is to explore some key ideas from the Bible to help husbands and wives decide how they will 'fit together' in their marriage in a way that honours God.

A How do we fit together as husbands and wives?

We all come into a marriage as imperfect people with individual identities as well as our own attitudes and behaviour patterns. When we marry we begin a life-long process of learning to fit together.

SI

1. What does our culture tell men and women they need to be like in a marriage?²⁴ In what ways should or could a Christian marriage be different from society's view?

God's design principles

The first principle is that human beings were not meant to be alone.²⁵ In marriage we move from two independent beings to an interdependent relationship as one. **God intends for a husband and wife to live together as a united team, supporting one another with our individual skills, gifting and personality.**

The second principle is that together we are to reflect God's image in a unique way that we can't as individuals – through the nature of our relationship. **God illustrates the perfect**

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fitting together as husbands and wives

10 MINS

10 MINS

ASK people to comment on God's design principles (if you have time).



relationship and divine order for us in the interpersonal relationship of Father–Son–Spirit. He wants us to mirror the key aspects of this kind of relationship in our marriage. Put simply, they are:

- Equal value of each person²⁶
- A divine order²⁷
- Unity of purpose²⁸
- Mutual submission and sacrificial love²⁹

Some men are born with cold feet; some acquire cold feet; and some have cold feet thrust upon them.

Anon

Foundation Principle:

God intends for a husband and wife to live in a way that is complementary – NOT competing with each other.

God's design principles need to be applied in a practical way so that we fit together in our everyday lives.

- ASK people to complete part i of Couple Time A.
- Have some background music ready to play while couples talk.
- Encourage couples to carry on talking and finish part ii in their Couple Time after the session.

A How do we fit together as husbands and wives?

Complete part i of this Couple Time box now. Part ii can be completed later during your Couple Time.

- i. Take a minute to jot down your answer to the following:

Think of a significant contribution your partner is making to the marriage. In what way(s) does he/she complement you?

- Write down something your partner does and/or the way they do it.
- Also write down an aspect of their character, which complements yours.

Then tell him/her what you wrote down.

Complete the following later in your Couple Time

- ii. Consider how you and your partner complement one another as you carry out day-to-day responsibilities (*for some ideas see the table*). Issues can sometimes arise when both partners try to do the same thing or make assumptions about the role of the other. 'How do I feel about the way we fulfil our roles – do I work with you in a complementary way?' (*Tick the appropriate boxes in the table*)

Am I working in a complementary way with my partner?	Yes – and I'm happy with the way we fulfil our roles	Yes – but I'd like to talk about making some changes	No – let's find a better way of doing this together
In the way we are ...			
Managing money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making significant decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managing the home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managing social/leisure time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Raising children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring for elderly relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In your Couple Time be prepared to discuss the areas where you are working well together. Also talk about any areas where you feel you would like to clarify your responsibilities so that you work together in a more complementary way.

5 MINS

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fitting together as husbands and wives

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 25 mins)

ASK someone to read the paragraph.

If appropriate, ask someone to read the note about submission.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box B.

SI

A Note about submission:

Submission is not an easy subject in today's Western culture which prizes individual rights. It is vital to remember that submission is something we choose to do. As Christians we yield or submit ourselves **first** to God – to Jesus and His divine authority. God does not force us to submit to Him – it is something we do willingly because we recognise Jesus as Lord and respond to Him out of love. The Bible also tells us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This means we are subject to human authority as long as it does not involve disobedience to God. This is possible if we are filled with God's Spirit and experience the fruit of humility.

SI

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 50 mins)

B A marriage with God at the heart of it

God will help us to fit together in a marriage if we put Him at the heart of it. Often a husband and wife can be at different places on their spiritual journey, but wherever we are God can help us if we want Him to. **We do this by individually surrendering control to God – doing what God wants for our marriage instead of wanting our own way.** This yielding of our hearts and wills to Him is not a one-off event but a daily surrender or submission to the headship of Christ.

1. What would a marriage be like where both a husband and wife willingly submit to God – to the headship of Christ? Think of practical examples in terms of:
 - How a couple behave towards one another
 - How decisions are made
 - Managing time and money etc
2. Why is submission to God hard in a marriage? What part does the Holy Spirit play?

Foundation Principle:

God will help us to fit together as we submit our individual hearts and wills and our marriage to Him.

B A marriage with God at the heart of it

- i. Are there any areas in my life where I am struggling to be fully submitted to and trusting in God? Eg:
 - Time alone with God
 - Bible reading and prayer
 - Time with partner and family
 - Money – spending it/earning it?
 - Sex-life
 - Personal ambition
 - Other ...
- ii. How am I doing in living a Spirit-filled life? What, if anything, needs to change?

In your Couple Time be prepared to share your thoughts with your partner and pray for one another.

session 8

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10 MINS

10 MINS

5 MINS

ASK someone to read out the paragraphs and Bible study passage.

At this time men and women split into two separate groups.

Questions for MEN ONLY are on pages 130–132
and questions for WOMEN ONLY are on pages 133–136

MEN ONLY

C How does a husband fulfil his God-given role?

God intends marriage to be an equal partnership with complementary roles.

SI

1. The way marriage partners relate to each other is vital to a flourishing marriage. Discuss the possible consequences to a marriage if either one of the partners is very dominating or very passive in the relationship.

Important messages for husbands and wives

The BIG PROBLEM for all relationships is that ever since the Fall we have been living with the consequences of the distortion of creation. In the case of husbands and wives this often results in things like: oppression, exploitation and manipulation, none of which are part of God's plan. Neither does He intend the relationship to be skewed out of balance, with one partner overly dominant and the other completely passive. God wants us to 'pull together' in the same direction.

Paul, the apostle, must have seen his fair share of marriage-related issues; he had important messages for husbands and wives in his letter to the Ephesians.

Bible study

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and

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fitting together as husbands and wives

5 MINS

15 MINS

ASK the men to give practical examples as well as general answers from the Bible passage.

If appropriate, ask someone to read the note about submission.

- Ask someone to read the paragraph on principles for a Christlike husband.
- You could divide your time equally between the two case studies or only do one.
- Then introduce the case studies. Explain that they are designed to help people apply the principles of a Christlike husband given different personality mixes. Concentrate on the behaviour of the husband, not the wife.
- Ask someone to read a case study and then reflect on the questions.
- Please don't allow your group to get tied up with the characters reflected in the case studies. They are there to encourage discussion and should not be interpreted literally.

SI

SI

Note:

Submission in marriage is not a role. The submission of a wife to her husband reflects the divinely-created order of: God-husband-wife and so it must be seen in the context of the overall headship of Christ. Submission is a **free choice**. It **cannot be forced**. For a wife, submission is a willing act of support and grows out of an attitude of respect for the husband. It is easier for a wife to submit to her husband when she sees her husband behaving with Christlikeness in the home.

It takes a smart husband to have the last word and not use it.

Anon

blameless.²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – ³⁰for we are members of his body.³¹“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”³²This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.
Ephesians 5:21–33

2. God's plan for our marriages is to model the relationship between Christ and the Church.
 - a. What is the goal or purpose of a Christlike husband?
 - b. According to the passage, how is this achieved?
3. Why do you think some wives find it difficult to submit to their husbands? (Note: This question is not intended to probe the weaknesses of wives! Focus on the behaviour of husbands that may cause wives to struggle in giving respect and support.)

Principles for a Christlike husband

The purpose or goal of a Christlike husband is to enable his wife to fulfil her God-given potential to become BEAUTIFUL in character and behaviour. Growing in our role as a Christlike husband is a life-long process. In Ephesians 5 Paul gives the husband **three important aims – to be:**

- **Loving** – nourish and cherish his wife.
- **Sacrificial** – putting her needs first. Making her his first priority after God.
- **Proactive** – neither dominating nor passive, taking initiative; the emphasis is not on ruling, but on taking responsibility and offering care.

4. Look at the following case studies and questions.

Ben and Bella. Bella wanted many things for herself and her family. Ben needed to work long hours to fulfil them. The bigger house was essential so the kids didn't have to share a room (the mortgage was only met by overtime). Holidaying for two weeks in the sun was vital in summer. Money was tight and the only way to cut costs was to get Ben to do all the DIY – hence THE LIST. Every weekend his time was scheduled to do all the jobs, which meant he had no leisure time or quality time with Bella and the kids. He understood the logic but sometimes it would have been so nice to go out for a beer with his mates or even enjoy a football match on the

session 8

131

5 MINS

15 MINS

TV. The only space he did get was when Bella went out with her friends and after he had put the kids to bed. Ben was a quiet sort of person and Bella was lively and outgoing. Whenever he challenged the kids on their behaviour she would always take their side and accuse him of being too strict. After eighteen years of marriage Ben had settled in to 'going with the flow' instead of 'rocking the boat'.

- a. Apply the principles of a Christlike husband, given the personality mixes. How could Ben relate better to Bella in ways that honour God?

Jake and Jane married after a whirlwind romance. Jane was swept off her feet, but now four years later she felt like she had slipped into the role of Jake's mum. She did all the cooking and cleaning, even ironing his socks (just like his mum did)! Jake liked to make all the decisions. He lived life his way, seeing Jane as a pretty accessory on his arm when out with mates. Her needs as he saw them were to have a roof over her head and to be happy in homemaking. They didn't talk much – she knew better than to cross him. She seemed a willing participant in the bedroom although he was the one who would always initiate their love-making. He assumed that she was happy. More recently though he had begun to think that she was 'letting herself go a bit'.

- b. Apply the principles of a Christlike husband given the personality mixes. How could Jake relate better to Jane in ways that honour God?

Foundation Principle:

A husband fulfils his God-given role when he provides Christlike headship.

C How does a husband fulfil his God-given role?

- i. One or two insights from the group discussion that I would like to share with my wife ...
- ii. In order to be a more Christlike husband I think I need to ...

In your Couple Time be prepared to share your thoughts with your wife.

Margaret Thatcher's husband, Dennis, was once asked who wore the pants in his family. 'I do,' he replied. 'And I also wash and iron them.'

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fitting together as husbands and wives

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 95 mins)

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box C.

CHECK to see if the other group is ready to rejoin the session.

5 MINS

ASK someone to read out the paragraphs and Bible study passage.

SI

The only thing worse than a man you can't control is a man you can.

Margo Kaufman

At this time men and women come together again. Please turn to page 136.

WOMEN ONLY

C How does a wife fulfil her God-given role?

God intends marriage to be an equal partnership with complementary roles.

1. The way marriage partners relate to each other is vital to a flourishing marriage. Discuss the possible consequences to a marriage if either one of the partners is very dominating or very passive in the relationship.

Important messages for husbands and wives

The BIG PROBLEM for all relationships is that ever since the Fall we have been living with the consequences of the distortion of creation. In the case of husbands and wives this often results in things like oppression, exploitation and manipulation, none of which are part of God's plan. Neither does He intend the relationship to be skewed out of balance, with one partner overly dominant and the other completely submissive. God wants us to 'pull together' in the same direction.

Paul, the apostle, must have seen his fair share of marriage issues; he had important messages for husbands and wives in his letter to the Ephesians.

Bible study

²¹Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²²Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – ³⁰for we are members of his body. ³¹“For

SQ

Do you think that respect needs to be earned? Why? Why not?

SQ

SI

this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³²This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:21–33

2. The passage says that the 'wife must respect her husband'.

- Why is respecting a husband so important?
- How does a wife show respect/disrespect?

Principles of a Christlike husband and a wife's response

The purpose or goal of a Christlike husband is to enable his wife to fulfil her God-given potential to become BEAUTIFUL in character and behaviour. This is a life-long process and Paul draws the attention of husbands to **three important aspects of a Christlike husband – to be:**

- **Loving** – nourishing and cherishing their wives.
- **Sacrificial** – putting her needs before his own. Making his wife his first priority after God.
- **Proactive** – neither dominating nor passive, taking initiative; the emphasis is not on ruling, but on responsibility and offering care.

The passage is **not** saying that a wife cannot take the initiative or a leading role in some areas of the marriage. It is **not** saying that a wife is a doormat or subservient. She is an equal partner in the marriage. It **is** telling wives to respond to their husbands in a way that respects and supports them, rather than undermining or criticising.

SI

3. Paul emphasises a need for wives to submit to their husbands.

- Does submission mean 'unthinking obedience'? What are the 'boundaries'?
- How is a marriage affected by a wife who willingly submits to her husband's Christlike love and headship? How is it affected by a wife who doesn't willingly submit to her husband's loving headship?
- Why do you think that some wives find it difficult to submit to their husbands? (Note: This question is not intended to probe the weaknesses of husbands! Focus on the things that some wives may be struggling with within themselves.)

Note: **Submission in marriage is not a role.** The submission of a wife to her husband reflects the divinely created order of: God–husband–wife. Submission is a **free choice** we make. It **cannot be forced**. For a wife, submission is a willing act of support and grows out of an attitude of respect for the husband. It is easier for a wife to submit to her husband when she sees her husband behaving with Christlikeness in the home.

If appropriate, ask someone to read the note about submission.

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fitting together as husbands and wives

10 MINS

- ASK someone to read the paragraph on principles for a wife.
- You could divide your time equally between the two case studies or only do one.
- Then introduce the case studies. Explain that they are designed to help people apply the principles of a respecting and supporting wife given different personality mixes. Concentrate on the behaviour of the wife, not the husband.
- Ask someone to read a case study and then reflect on the questions.
- Please don't allow your group to get tied up with the characters reflected in the case studies. They are there to encourage discussion and should not be interpreted literally.

Principles to live by as a wife

Showing respect for her husband – honour, esteem and defer to him. Making him her first priority, after God.

Supporting her husband – working by his side using her unique talents and gifts so that together they fulfil God's purposes. An aspect of support is to willingly acknowledge his headship.

Love undergirds everything. Giving respect and support to a husband are not just the dry duty of a wife, but the out-workings of her love for her husband.

4. Look at the following case studies and questions.

Jake and Jane married after a whirlwind romance. Jane was swept off her feet, but now four years later she felt like she had slipped into the role of Jake's mum. She did all the cooking and cleaning, even ironing his socks (just like his mum did)! Jake liked to make all the decisions. He lived life his way, seeing Jane as a pretty accessory on his arm when out with mates. Her needs as he saw them were to have a roof over her head and to be happy in homemaking. They didn't talk much – she knew better than to cross him. She seemed a willing participant in the bedroom although he was the one who would always initiate their love-making. He assumed that she was happy. More recently though he had begun to think that she was 'letting herself go a bit'.

- Apply the principles to live by as a wife given the personality mixes. How could Jane relate better to Jake in ways that honour God?

Ben and Bella. Bella wanted many things for herself and her family. Ben needed to work long hours to fulfil them. The bigger house was essential so the kids didn't have to share a room (the mortgage was only met by overtime). Holidaying for two weeks in the sun was vital in summer. Money was tight and the only way to cut costs was to get Ben to do all the DIY – hence THE LIST. Every weekend his time was scheduled to do all the jobs, which meant he had no leisure time or quality time with Bella and the kids. He understood the logic but sometimes it would have been so nice to go out for a beer with his mates or even enjoy a football match on the TV. The only space he did get was when Bella went out with her friends and after he had put the kids to bed. Ben was a quiet sort of person and Bella was lively and outgoing. Whenever he challenged the kids on their behaviour she would always take their side and accuse him of being too strict. After eighteen years of marriage Ben had settled in to 'going with the flow' instead of 'rocking the boat'.

- Apply the principles to live by as a wife given the personality mixes. How could Bella relate better to Ben in ways that honour God?

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box C.

Check to see if the other group is ready to rejoin the session.

MEN AND WOMEN COME TOGETHER AGAIN

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. God intends for a husband and wife to live in a way that is complementary – NOT competing with each other.
 2. God will help us fit together as we submit our individual hearts and wills and our marriage to Him.
 3. A husband fulfils his God-given role when he provides Christlike headship.
 4. A wife fulfils her God-given role when she respects and supports her husband.
- Encourage couples to do their Couple Time. There are no optional additional questions.
 - Explain how you are going to approach the final session (make it the last meeting as a group or have another meeting with a celebration meal at a later time?).

Foundation Principle:

A wife fulfils her God-given role when she respects and supports her husband.

C How does a wife fulfil her God-given role?

- i. One or two insights from the group discussion that I would like to share with my husband ...
- ii. In order to be a more supportive and respectful wife I think I need to ...

In your Couple Time be prepared to share your thoughts with your husband.

Why does a woman work ten years to change a man's habits and then complain that he's not the man she married?

Barbra Streisand

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 95 mins)

At this time men and women come together again.

... And finally

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

If you have time share some of the highlights from your discussion.

Agree on a date in your diaries for your Couple Time:

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

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fitting together as husbands and wives

An archaeologist is the best husband a woman can have; the older she gets the more interested he is in her.
Agatha Christie

Note:

Be gentle with each other as you talk about this whole topic of fitting together. It is very easy for partners to feel unappreciated or criticised. Concentrate on affirming your partner. **If** there is change to be made then remember to **change yourself** and **don't try to change your partner!**

Couple Time – 60 minutes

A How do we fit together as husbands and wives?

If you did not have time to complete part **i** (page 128) then do it now. Talk about ways you complement one another.

Go on to complete part **ii**. Take a few minutes to individually tick the appropriate boxes. Then take turns telling each other where you placed ticks in the table for each area of responsibility. Affirm your partner for the things that they are doing well. Discuss any areas for possible change. (Note: Some of these responsibilities are big subjects in themselves. If either of you want to make significant changes you may wish to agree a separate time to revisit that particular area of responsibility – **don't try to fix everything now.**)

Identify a personal action point if needed.

Personal action point:

B A marriage with God at the heart at it

Share your answers to **i** (page 129) – any areas you are struggling to be fully submitted to God at the moment. Then share your answers to **ii** – how are you doing living the Spirit-filled life?

Identify a personal action point, if needed.

Personal action point:

C How does a husband/wife fulfil his/her God-given role?

Share your insights from the MEN only and WOMEN only discussions that were helpful to you (part i). Then, share your answers to part ii and remember to respond to your husband/wife with encouragement!

For husbands: this is what you feel you need to do to be a more Christlike husband.

For wives: this is what you feel you need to do to be a more supportive and respectful wife.

Identify a personal action point, if appropriate.

Personal action point:

For further reading:

Rocking the Roles, Robert Lewis and William Hendricks (Navpress, 1991) looks at biblical roles in marriage in a practical way.

Boundaries in Marriage, Dr Henry Cloud and Dr John Townsend (Zondervan, 1999) helps you understand and respect each other's needs, choices and freedom so you can give yourselves freely and lovingly to one another.

Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989). This excellent book guides you through the spiritual disciplines – those habits and practices that 'allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us'. This edition includes a study guide.

Praying together Pray for one another. (Note for husbands: if praying together is still unfamiliar for you as a couple, then why not take the initiative to pray for your wife and your marriage now, silently or aloud together.)

At the next group meeting you will be asked to share one new insight you have gained about God's plan for husbands and wives to fit together in marriage. Agree upon what you would be prepared to share with the group from your Couple Time – maybe a different insight for each of you. Write them down:

Before the next group meeting please complete the Introductory Reading for Session 9: **Leaving a legacy that will last forever** (pages 141–143). Our lives are shaped by the influence of others, especially our families. The final session looks at how God wants our marriage to have a spiritual influence on people around us and on future generations.

NOTES

1. Ephesians 5:32.
2. Genesis 1:27 Man, Hebrew: *Ish*. Woman, Hebrew: *Ishah*, the feminine form of man's own name, because she came out of man.
3. The Hebrew phrase includes two words *ezer knegdo*. *Ezer* is translated 'helper' implying someone who assists, encourages and provides support for what is lacking in the one who needs help. The

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fitting together as husbands and wives

help is then qualified by the word *knegdo*, so that it means a helper matching his eminence or perhaps his distinctiveness. It certainly points to one who is fit to stand before the man, opposite him as his counterpart, companion and complement. Literally the helper is 'like opposite him'. (*The Message of Genesis 1–11*, David Atkinson (IVP).)

4. Genesis 2:18–25.
5. Genesis 1:28.
6. *The Message of Ephesians*, John R.W. Stott (IVP, 1979).
7. The Greek for head is *Kephale*. The literal meaning is as a head governing a body. Like its Hebrew equivalent word, *rosh*, there is a metaphorical meaning as 'source' of a river or life. *Kephale* also refers to the concept of 'headship' which is the divine ordering of family, civic or ritual sphere of relationships. Headship carries authority – as delegated by God and therefore directly accountable to God. Jesus is head of the Church as its founder and sustainer. Christ wields authority as Lord and humbled Himself as servant. The New Testament references to the husband as head (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 10:3) clearly state that headship means to be like Christ as Saviour. (*Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, editor Stephen Renn (Hendrickson Publishers, ISBN 1 56563 938 3). *The Message of Ephesians*, John R.W. Stott (IVP).
8. www.comedy-zone.net
9. Mark 10:42–45; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:9–10; 2:19.
10. John 15:12–14.
11. Ephesians 5:23–29; 1 Timothy 5:8.
12. Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7,26; Psalm 20:2; 33:20; 115:9; 146:5.
13. Ephesians 5:22,33; 1 Peter 3:1–5.
14. Ephesians 2:13–18.
15. Ephesians 5:8–18; Romans 8:7.
16. Ecclesiastes 4:12.
17. Ephesians 5:21.
18. Ephesians 5:25.
19. Ephesians 5:24.
20. Christopher Ash, *Marriage. Sex in the Service of God* (IVP, 2003), Part 3:14.
21. 1 Timothy 5:8.
22. Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28–29; 12:49–50; 13:30; 15:10; Ephesians 5:22; 1 Corinthians 15:24–28.
23. John 14:26; 15:26.
24. Adapted from Question 1 Session 5 of *Building Your Marriage* Dennis Rainey (Group Publishing Copyright 2000 Dennis Rainey). Used with permission.
25. Genesis 2:18.
26. Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:26–27.
27. 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23.
28. Genesis 1:26–28; Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:6–9; John 17:20–23.
29. Ephesians 5:21–33; John 13:34–35.

Session 9

Positioning the Session

In this final session we will finish by dealing with the question of legacy. Sadly many couples live out their marriages without purpose, although this is not the way God means it to be. We will look at the legacy God wants us to leave and how we might go about achieving this.

At the end of the session you will have a chance to feed back as a group how you have benefited from the study and discuss what you all want to do next (if anything). We've made some suggestions in Further Resources for small groups (on our website) to help you with this discussion.

We'd also encourage you to ask your group members to consider starting and leading a new group. They will benefit from leading themselves and the new couples will benefit too. Starting new groups regularly is how the ministry multiplies and grow.

You will also need to refer to the Together Notes: Sharing our Faith – Anything to Declare? (www.togetherinmarriage.org).

Objectives of this Session

- To understand our different legacies and to see that the legacy we leave is more important than the one that we are given.
- To understand the legacy that God wants us to leave.
- To explore why and how we share our faith.

The Flow of the Group Session

The session is divided into five parts and takes 100 mins.

	Subject matter	Time (mins)
Feedback	from Couple Time and the Introductory Reading.	10
Part A	Understanding our different legacies.	15
Part B	Leaving a spiritual legacy.	35
Part C	Sharing our faith.	25
Feedback	Feed back to each other on Together, considering what next. (There is an option to complete this at a separate celebration supper.)	15

Preparation

	Activity	Tick box
1	Read through the session (both the Group Session and Couple Time), including the Supplementary Information for Leaders (page 196). Make notes as you wish throughout the session.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Think about what the group might do next. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you want to meet again for a celebration supper? • Discuss the 'Feedback' part at that time? • Do you want to encourage the group to continue meeting and perhaps look at other material? • How are you going to encourage couples to start their own Together groups? • How are you going to present the question 'What Next?' to the group? Pray about this. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Read Further Resources for small groups (on the website).	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Read Together Notes: Sharing our Faith (on the website) and if appropriate print a copy for every person .	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Pray privately for every individual in your group before the group meets.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes for the Group Session

- We address some big issues in this session, which are intended to broaden the 'vision' couples have for their marriage. There may be a temptation to go off at a tangent or to get bogged down. Be prepared to keep to time and to move your group along.
- The Couple Time includes **optional additional questions for couples who have children**.



9

Leaving a legacy that will last forever

Introductory Reading

When God created Adam and Eve He blessed them and instructed them to 'fill the earth'. Yet this was much more than a command to increase the human population by having children, which is good news for couples struggling to conceive. He was sending them on a life mission to reproduce His image through godly people. We can only do that as we get to know Him, and then help to make Him known to others.

Knowing God

It is part of our design as humans to know God and be known by Him.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men ... Ecclesiastes 3:11

We find meaning and purpose in life through a relationship with the eternal, living God. As we get to know God and the love He has for us, we are changed:

- I. **We are set free.** We become more ourselves because God's unconditional love and acceptance free us to be the people He intends us to be. He can then shape our unique qualities, talents and experiences for the good – benefiting us and those around us.
- II. **We are transformed.** We grow more into God's image, or likeness. Not that we become clones or robots, but our character and behaviour gradually become more like His, through the activity of His Spirit working in us.

III. **Our marriage is transformed.** When we open our marriage up to God He builds an ever-strengthening relationship of intimacy and trust, held together with sacrificial love and mutual submission. We become stronger together than the sum of our individual strengths.

Making God known

God wants all people to come to Him and love Him.¹ If we are in step with Him, He will use us to draw others, including our children if we have them, to seek God for themselves.

Others will see God in us when we live godly, loving lives and give Him the credit. He wants us to stand out as 'salt and light',² so that our lifestyles influence society. The apostle Peter encouraged Christian wives to 'win over' non-believing husbands through godly behaviour.³ Christian husbands may similarly affect a non-believing wife. **God's desire is to shape every aspect of our married lives to be distinct, reflecting His image through the nature of our love for one another.** By loving each other in God's way we point to the source, just as Jesus in loving sacrificially pointed the way to God.

'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'
John 13:34,35

Christ-centred living is important. Faith without action is empty,⁴ even hypocritical. But living out the Christian life is not enough. **We need to introduce people to Jesus by telling them His message of love and forgiveness, because otherwise they won't know.** It's also worth remembering that telling people about God's love is an expression of love for them.

Many Christians find they are enthusiastic about sharing their experiences of God. Others are cautious and some hold back in fear. **Our marriage affects our willingness to witness, and our effectiveness as well.** If our marriage is a struggle we may feel we have nothing about God to commend to others. But Jesus was quite clear that He wanted His followers to actively spread God's message of love. In the 'Great Commission'⁵ He charged His followers to tell people the good news about Himself.

*A Christian is a keyhole
through which other folk
see God.*

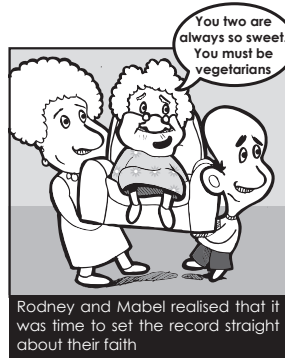
Robert E. Gibson

*How did I come to know God?
Was it through a parent,
friend, minister ...? What was
it about them that drew me to
seek God or know Him
more deeply?*

*This commission was
given to **every** follower of
Jesus, not to pastors and
missionaries alone. This is
your commission from Jesus,
and it's not optional. These
words of Jesus are not the
Great Suggestion.*

Rick Warren,
The Purpose Driven Life

What am I working for?
What do I want to be
remembered for?



He may not be asking us to become missionaries to far-flung places (although He does ask some to do this). **He is asking us to be Christ's ambassadors,⁶ to represent Him individually and as a married couple here and now to the people around us: family, friends, colleagues at work, neighbours ...** It's a tremendous privilege and responsibility. He wants us to go and make disciples⁷ – to help others to become committed followers of Jesus, literally learners of His ways. (If we have children then it's worth remembering that they are our first disciples.)

Married couples who unite together to love God, love others and tell them about His love, will leave a lasting spiritual legacy. It's an exciting way to live – experiencing abundant life together now and building something that lasts forever.⁸

This session looks at how we can have a spiritual influence on people around us and on future generations.

SQ

- In what ways have you been blessed by what your predecessors have left you?
- In what ways has the legacy you've been left been unhelpful?

ASK someone to read out the paragraph.

No right or wrong answers here. This is just for people to start to think about the legacy that has been left to them. Be sensitive to those with painful family backgrounds, but don't let the group get bogged down. Instead move them along to the hope given in the Foundation Principle.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box A.

SQ

Group Session

Feedback

- What insights or encouragements did you gain from your Couple Time following the session on fitting together as husbands and wives?
- Was there anything in the Introductory Reading for this session about our legacy that prompted you to think about marriage in a new way? Explain.

A Understanding our different legacies

Our lives are deeply influenced by the words and actions of other people. When we look back we are able to recognise the lasting impact on our lives of parents, friends, teachers, neighbours etc. We too influence those we come into contact with.⁹

1. What kind of legacy have you been left? (Think about the influence of parents, friends, teachers etc.) How do you feel about this legacy?

Foundation Principle:

The legacy you pass on is more important than the legacy you were given.

A Understanding our different legacies

- i. As I look back at the legacy I have been handed, is there anything I would like to thank my parents, other people or God for? Is there anyone I need to forgive or anyone of whom I need to ask forgiveness? (Make a note of it now.)
- ii. What aspect of that legacy do I want to pass on? What do I not want to pass on?

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers.

After a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations.

Oscar Wilde

144

leaving a legacy that will last forever

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 25 mins)

10 MINS

10 MINS

5 MINS

ASK someone to read the paragraph and someone else to read the Bible passage.

This is a huge question and you are only going to scratch the surface. Acknowledge this to your group and encourage them to share their ideas.

ASK someone to read the paragraph and someone else to read the Bible passage.

B Leaving a spiritual legacy

In the creation account God tells Adam and Eve to 'fill' the earth.¹⁰ His desire was for them to have children, but His instruction is about more than just increasing the numbers of humans on earth. **God wants to fill the earth with His image through the words, influence and actions of those who know Him personally.**

Bible study

³⁶'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' ³⁷Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

Matthew 22:36–40

SI

1. How can we put the Great Commandment into practice as a couple?

- How can we show love for God in and through our marriage?
- How can we show love for others as a married couple? Think of some practical ideas.

2. Is it enough simply to live out our faith through actions?

Living and telling

Actions do speak louder than words. Faith is empty without action. However, if we don't tell people about our faith they might commend us for being good people, but probably not make the connection that God is the source. **To connect people with the source of love and hope we need to point them to God.** Just as we have received God's unconditional love, He wants us to pass it on by sharing the gospel message with others. Helping others, including our children, to know God – ie making Him known – is the mission He has given each believer.

Bible study

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the

This is another broad question which is intended to widen the group's 'vision' for their marriages.

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle and then ask everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box B.

SI

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'
Matthew 28:18–20

3. This 'Great Commission' was among some of Jesus' last words to His disciples and a vital part of His legacy. Think of ideas for helping to fulfil the Great Commission as a couple.

Foundation Principle:

God intends us to have a lasting spiritual impact as a couple by passing on God's love to our children and other people, through the things we say and do.

Your life is like a coin – you can spend it any way you want, but you can only spend it once.

Juan Carlos Ortiz,
Argentinean Pastor

B Leaving a spiritual legacy

- i. What do I most want to be remembered for?
- ii. What would I like our spiritual legacy to be?

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and anything you could do together to build a spiritual legacy.

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 60 mins)

5 MINS

146

leaving a legacy that will last forever

ASK someone to read the paragraph and someone else to read the Bible passage.

ASK someone to read the paragraph.

COMMENT: Not all of us are gifted evangelists, but all of us should be willing and prepared to talk about God in our lives.

SQ

How can we address any blockages which keep us from sharing?

ASK someone to read the Foundation Principle.

SI

Visit www.togetherinmarriage.com. **Together Notes:** **Sharing Our Faith – Anything to Declare?** has more about how to share our faith journey with others.

SQ

If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name in a Swiss bank.

Woody Allen

C Sharing our faith

Showing that God is real and sharing our faith means more than asking people to come along to church. It's important to be able to speak about Jesus and God's love in a natural way.

Bible study

1. What principles for sharing our faith in Christ does the following Bible passage give?

²Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
Colossians 4:2-6

Stories from our lives

A simple and effective way of expressing our faith is through sharing parts of our spiritual journey:

- my attitude and approach to life before coming to faith
- why and how I came to trust in Jesus Christ
- how He has changed my life, including my marriage. You can talk about the difference God makes in your life even if you have always had a faith in Jesus.

People are interested in other people's lives. Also, others can identify with us and learn of the impact God has on our lives through Jesus Christ, if we are prepared to tell them about Him.

2. What keeps people from sharing about their spiritual journey? Think of some ideas which might help people to explain to non-Christians about the impact God has had on their lives.

Foundation Principle:

Those around us will see the reality of God when we live out and talk of the **difference** He has made in our lives.

10 MINS

10 MINS

ASK everyone to complete Couple Time preparation box C.

Leader to read out the Foundation Principles:

1. The legacy you pass on is more important than the legacy you were given.
2. God intends for us to have a lasting spiritual impact as a couple by passing on God's love to our children and other people, through the things we say and do.
3. Those around us will see the reality of God when we live out and talk of the difference He has made in our lives.

ENCOURAGE everyone to complete their Couple Time.

- If appropriate, tell everyone that there are optional additional questions for couples with children.
- If you are meeting again for a celebration meal you will be able to share insights at that time. If you are not meeting again then encourage your group not to let the Couple Time slip – this is possibly the most important one.
- If you are finishing the meeting here, we suggest you close with a short time of prayer.

FEEDBACK

- The point of the feedback time is to encourage one another.
- If you are meeting at a separate time to do this then you'll have plenty of time to hear all the feedback. If not, use this as a quick wrap-up exercise.
- You could ask couples to look back at their goals from the Couple Time following the Introductory Session (workbook page 15, Leader's Guide page 23).
- If appropriate, point out that the things people are able to share in their feedback can be stories to share with others about the difference God makes in our lives.

C Sharing our faith

- i. What insights from the discussion could help me share my faith with other people? Write down one or two insights.
- ii. What one thing could I tell a non-Christian about the difference God makes to my marriage?
- iii. Who are the people God wants me to influence for Him? Write down the names of five people (or couples) you can pray for regularly that they will come to know Jesus personally.

In your Couple Time be prepared to talk about your answers and anything you could do together to share your faith.

... And now

Take a minute to review the Foundation Principles for the session.

Agree on a date for your diaries for your Couple Time:

Feedback

As an individual, take a few minutes to write down your answers to the following questions:

- a. What new insight have I gained about God and marriage as a result of these sessions?
- b. What is one specific way God is making a difference in my marriage as a result of *Together* – something that I am doing differently?
- c. What has this group meant to me during the course of the study?

The single greatest gift you can give someone is an introduction to God.

Bill Hybels,

A Walk Across a Room

Time check

Write target time here:

(start time plus 85 mins)

Note:

You can complete this feedback section¹¹ and 'What next?' now or they could be done separately at another time, maybe at a celebration supper.

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leaving a legacy that will last forever

5 MINS

15 MINS

Leader to read out the options for What next? Ask your group for their thoughts and have information about further resources (available from the website) ready to look at.

We are suggesting that couples in the group consider taking others through Together. This does not mean that your group should disband. You could continue to meet to look at other material and support each other. In the past this has been a common, positive outcome.

Don't worry if the group decides to end. Let God be the one to guide this - it is not up to you to make it happen.

Thank you for leading a Together group.
May God bless you!

As a couple: Briefly talk about your answers to the questions and agree on the things you are prepared to share with the rest of the group. (Remember you can pass on any of the questions if you wish.)

Then, as a group: listen to each other's comments.

What next?

There are several options to consider as a group about what you could do next (and you can select more than one option):

- Continuing to meet as the same group to do another study (there are ideas in Further Resources: Additional resources for small groups on www.togetherinmarriage.com).
- Taking some new initiatives as a whole group (or as a couple) in evangelism and discipleship (see Further Resources on our website for resources to help you).
- If you have benefited from being part of this group, then why not share those benefits with other couples and consider starting another *Together* group?
- Finishing *Together* and not going on with the current group.

... And finally

Close with a time of prayer. You might want to consider the following as you pray together:

- giving thanks for the ways our relationship has benefited
- asking God to show us ways to touch the family lives of other people with God's love and share our faith with them

Time check

Write target finish time here:

(start time plus 100 mins)

session 9

149

Couple Time – 60 minutes

As you talk to each other **remember the dos and don'ts of listening.**

*Love does not consist in
gazing at each other, but in
looking outward together in
the same direction.*
Antoine de Saint-Exupery

A Understanding our different legacies

Tell each other about the legacies you were handed and how you feel about them, sharing your answers to **i** on page 144. Then share your answers to question **ii**.

Identify a personal action point, if necessary.

Personal action point:

B Leaving a spiritual legacy

Share your answers to question **i** (page 146). Then talk about what you would like your spiritual legacy to be.

Consider starting another *Together* group as part of your spiritual legacy as a couple. If you want to start another group then think about/pray for couples you could ask to join a new group.

Identify a personal action point, if applicable.

Personal action point:

150

leaving a legacy that will last forever

Take time together to visit www.togetherinmarriage.com and look at **Together Notes: Sharing Our Faith – Anything to Declare?** and think through how you would each describe your spiritual journey.

For further reading;

Why and How Should We Tell Others? Nicky Gumbel (Kingsway Communications Ltd, 2005). A helpful booklet with content taken from the book *Alpha – Questions of Life*.

Just Walk Across the Room, Bill Hybels (Zondervan, 2006). An excellent book on taking a natural relational approach in personal evangelism that follows Jesus' example.

Why not visit our website and look at **Further Resources** together for ideas of what to do next.

C Sharing our faith

What things encourage you to share your faith? What ideas can you help each other put into action?

Share the insights you gained from the discussion which could help you share your faith or share it more regularly or with more people. Could you tell a non-Christian about the difference God makes to your marriage? (Questions **i** and **ii** page 148). Identify an action point.

Personal action point:

There are optional additional questions overleaf for couples with children.

What next?

Share your thoughts with your partner and agree how you will respond to the following:

Do we wish to continue meeting with the current group?	Yes / No
Do we want to consider starting a <i>Together</i> group ourselves?	Yes / No

What would we like to do next? Write down ideas and preferences:

Praying together

- Give thanks to God together in prayer for parents and other people and the positive impact they have had on your lives.
- Pray for forgiveness and healing if there are wounds from the past that are still hurting.
- Thank God for one another and your marriage – for what He has done and what He will do!
- Ask God to show you who you could share your faith with. Pray for those five people or couples you noted in Couple Time prep **C iii** (p.148) and ask God to prepare their hearts to be receptive to His love and gospel message.

For couples with children

(optional additional questions)

- i. Look at the following Bible passages together. Note down any thoughts about what kind of legacy God wants you to leave your children and how you can do this¹²

¹Praise the LORD.

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,
who finds great delight in his commands.

²His children will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

Psalms 112:1–2

I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

2 Timothy 1:5

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9

- ii. Agree on one thing you could do as a family to help nurture the faith of your family unit.

NOTES

1. 2 Peter 3:8–15.
2. Matthew 5:13–16.
3. 1 Peter 3:1.
4. James 2:14–25.
5. Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8.
6. 2 Corinthians 5:20.
7. Matthew 28:19–20.
8. Romans 8:37–39; 1 Corinthians 3.
9. The heart of section A of this session of *Together*, including the first Foundation Principle, is based on Session 7 of *Building Your Marriage* by Dennis Rainey (Group Publishing Copyright © 2000). Used with permission.
10. Genesis 1:28.
11. This last feedback section of *Together* is adapted from 'wrap up' Session 7, *Building Your Marriage* op. cit. Used with permission.
12. Adapted from questions 5 and 6 of Session 7, *Building Your Marriage*, op. cit. Used with permission.

Knowing God

(page 154 in workbook)

Entering into a relationship with God is the beginning of a new life. Before we can begin this new spiritual life we have to deal with a big problem.¹

The BIG problem

Couples who want a strong and flourishing marriage work to resolve their problems in the areas of communication, money, sexuality and so on. However, there is one basic problem at the heart of every marriage, and it's a problem we can't fix. No matter how hard we try, this problem is too big to deal with on our own.

The big problem is we are cut off from God. **If we want to experience our marriage the way it was designed to be we need a vital relationship with God, who offers us the power to live a life of joy and purpose.** But we are disconnected from this power.

What separates us from God is sin. Many of us assume that the term sin refers to actions which most of us agree are wrong. We try to deal with the problem of our sin by working hard to become better people. But within our hearts we know our sin problem runs much deeper than a list of bad habits. **All of us have chosen to go our own way instead of God's; we may openly rebel against God, or simply ignore Him.** It is this self-centred attitude that the Bible calls sin.

We are all the same: 'for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23). God is perfect (**holy**), we are sinful, so there is a great spiritual gap between us. We may try to feel better through work, relationship, sport or religion. But all our attempts fail because we have ignored the real problem – turning our backs on God.

The amazing solution

God is holy, but He is also **loving**. So He took the initiative to restore a relationship with us by showing us 'grace' (undeserved forgiveness and acceptance).² As well as being holy and loving, God is also **just** and so there is a price that has to be paid for our sin.

God took on human form in the Person of Jesus Christ. He lived a holy life, in perfect obedience to God's will. Jesus, being without sin Himself, took the punishment we deserved by dying on the cross in our place. Jesus died willingly to satisfy God's justice and restore our relationship with God.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8

Paul, the apostle tells us that, '... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred ...'

1 Corinthians 15:3–6

God's answer to the problem of sin is a gift – we cannot earn it and we don't deserve it. Jesus Christ is unique³ (both human and God). He died in our place so that our relationship with God can be restored and we can have eternal life⁴. God proved His power and authority by raising Jesus to life again⁵. **Jesus gave His life so that we might be pardoned and have an eternal relationship with God** – giving us hope for life in this world and beyond the grave.

The critical decision

This gift is available to all who desire a personal relationship with God. Jesus gives us this picture: 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me' (Rev. 3:20).

God has promised that if we agree that we have turned our backs on Him, He will forgive us and resolve our sin problem.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast.

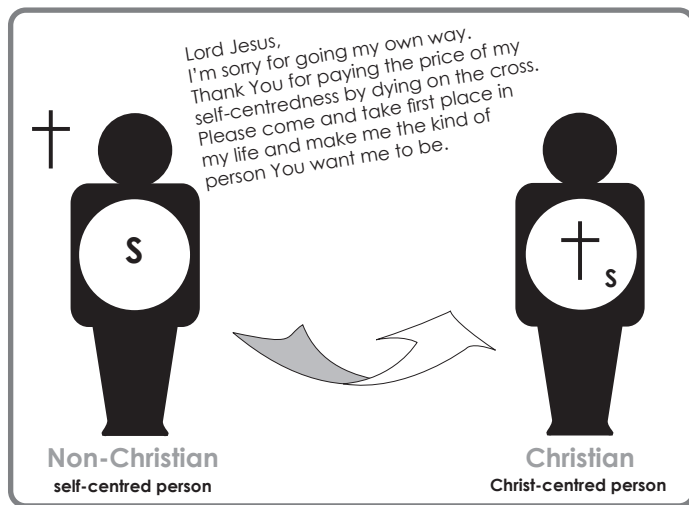
Ephesians 2:8–9

When the Bible talks about receiving Christ, it means agreeing with God that we are sinners and can't fix the problem ourselves. It means turning away from sin – our self-centred way of life. And it means trusting God to forgive our sins. It's not enough to just intellectually believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It is an inner turning of our heart and mind towards trusting Jesus as our Saviour (the One who rescues us because we cannot save ourselves).

To experience a personal relationship with God we need to:

- **accept responsibility for our own sin and agree that we are totally cut off from God**
- **inwardly turn to God and trust Him to forgive us completely, because Jesus has paid the price for our sin**
- **live our lives with Jesus Christ at the centre (rather than 'our'selves).**

We can do this by talking to God in prayer, remembering that He is not so concerned with our words as our attitude. In the box over the page there is a suggested prayer...



The new reality

We enter into a new relationship with God based on His grace⁶ and not our performance. Like a precious diamond, God's saving grace has many facets:

1. We are free from the condemnation of sin, guilt, shame, death and evil powers.
2. We have new life in all its fullness as God intended,⁷ and can experience His unconditional love, giving us joy, peace, wholeness, security and heaven.
3. We are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit (His intimate presence) to help, strengthen and guide us.⁸
4. We are assured that God will never leave us.⁹
5. We benefit from God's complete forgiveness.¹⁰
6. As we live in the light of God's grace He enables us to show grace to others. Our ability to forgive others is linked to our having experienced God's forgiveness.

How can we be really sure all this has happened?

If we have sincerely opened our heart to Jesus Christ, we can know that He is in our life because God has promised this and can be trusted.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:11–13

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all

creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:38–39

We can always rely on God and His promises in the Bible. But we cannot always rely on our feelings because they come and go. **The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word**, the Bible (God's promises).

Flying in an airplane can illustrate the relationship between faith and feelings. To be transported by an airplane we must place our faith in the trustworthiness of the aircraft and the pilot who flies it. Our feelings of confidence or fear do not affect the ability of the airplane to transport us, though they do affect how much we enjoy the trip.

In the same way, as Christians we know that our relationship with God does not depend on our feelings or emotions, but on our faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God Himself and the promises of His word in the Bible.

Suggestions for Christian GROWTH

Our faith in God grows as we trust God with every detail of our lives. We will find it helpful to:

- **Get to know God** by reading the Bible (2 Timothy 3:14–17)
- **Respond to God** in prayer (Philippians 4:6)
- **Obey God** moment by moment (Luke 6:46–49)
- **Walk in the power of the Holy Spirit** (Colossians 2:6; Ephesians 3:14–21; 5:18)
- **Tell others about Jesus Christ** by the life we lead and the words we say. (Matthew 28:18–20; 2 Corinthians 5:17–20; Ephesians 4:1)
- **Have contact with other Christians.** (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42–47)

NOTES

1. Adapted from the following sources:
'Our problem, God's answers', Building Your Marriage. Group Publishing Copyright c 2000 Dennis Rainey. Used with permission.
'Knowing God personally', Agape Ministries Ltd. Copyright 1976, 1985, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001.
2. Ephesians 2:8–9
3. John 14:6
4. John 3:16, John 17:3
5. 1 Corinthians 15
6. John 1:12, Romans 8:12–25, Ephesians 1:5
7. John 10:10
8. John 14:15–27
9. Romans 8:37–39
10. Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13

Supplementary Information

The following supplementary information is there to give you background knowledge and to help you answer questions raised by the group. It isn't intended to give leaders all the 'right' answers so they teach their group. However, in some sessions there are pre-prepared answers (shown in a distinctive font) which you can read out if you are short of time and want to move through that question quickly.

Supplementary Information for Session 1

Part A (page 31)

2. Things that you could mention if they don't come up in discussion:
 - Good communication requires our time, energy and focused attention. You could ask for some practical suggestions to help Chris and Carol manage their time and energy to help improve communication in their relationship.
 - Patterns of behaviour can become bad habits. To change requires willingness and an effort from **both** sides.
 - If we don't share who we really are, our relationship can be shallow and it may suffer. We can end up feeling lonely and isolated, and even drift apart.
 - Good listening shows that we value others. This is something that can be learned. **Refer to Together Notes: Poor Listening/Good Listening** on the website for more on listening – encourage couples to look at it as part of their Couple Time by giving them each a copy.

Part B (page 33)

1. Things you could mention if they don't come up in discussion:
 - Being '**other-centred**', putting the needs of our partner before our own, eg listening first, carrying each other's burdens or problems.
 - Demonstrating that we **value our partner**. Not interrupting or making light of something that is important to the other. Making time to talk, removing distractions like TV so that we can concentrate on each other.
 - **Dealing with disagreements**, rather than letting them fester.
 - **Complete openness and trust**. Not hiding things from each other – no lies or secrets. Each is transparent.
 - **Praying together**. Non-Christians may do some or all of the above, but they probably wouldn't pray together.
2. Hopefully the diagram is self-explanatory. If not, the notes below will help. Then discuss Chris and Carol.

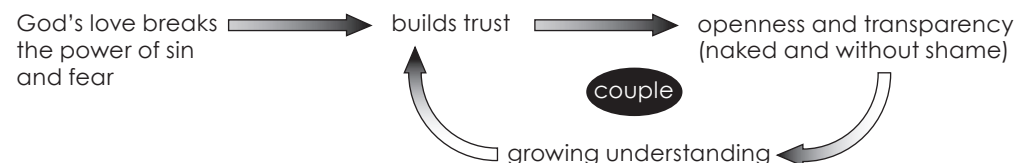
Level of communication	Notes and examples...
1. Cliché	Superficial, allowing a person to remain at a 'safe' distance eg greetings and comments that express no opinions or feelings, such as 'Hi, how are you?' or talking about the weather!
2. Fact	Exchange of facts, gossip or analysis of information can hold others at arm's length eg sports results or TV soaps.
3. Opinion	Involves sharing what a person thinks – ideas and opinions which reveal a little more of the real person, eg 'I'm concerned about all the rubbish on the TV these days and the effect it's having on young people's minds.'
4. Emotion	Involves conveying one's feelings – hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, dreams, failures, stresses, burdens, discouragements etc, eg 'I'm feeling more and more worried about my job.' Saying 'I am concerned about ...' is not showing emotion. It expresses an opinion. Expressing emotion means using a 'feelings' word.
5. Transparency	No-barriers communication. Means sharing one's heart and emotions as a way of life eg 'I'm feeling really stressed about work and when you ignore me and watch TV instead it makes me feel like you don't really care ...'

3. Consider:
 - **It shows we value the other person**. When we listen to others we are showing them we value them. ('I'm interested in you and I value you and your views.')
 - Listening assists the **deepening of relationships**.
4. Consider:
 - It means complete openness and trust in the way we communicate; we are not supposed to be hiding things from each other; we have nothing to be ashamed about.
 - We usually 'hide' because we fear making ourselves vulnerable, being ridiculed, getting hurt or being punished for something 'wrong' that we may have done – or because of some 'weakness' that might be revealed.

sin  shame, blame and fear  hiding

Part C (page 35)

1. As we grow in our relationship with God, we change, and the way we communicate changes too. This takes time! Consider the following:



Part C 1 ... continued

With God; the more we:	The more we are able to:	The less we:
know His <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acceptance • forgiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate without shame¹ • communicate without guilt² • be open and have no secrets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack self-worth (this can manifest itself in constantly seeking attention or in avoiding it) • hide things we've done which we feel guilty about • lie
know there is no punishment or rejection from God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicate without fear • be open and vulnerable • speak the truth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hide things through fear • lie • blame the other
know that we're loved unconditionally and are secure in His love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen unselfishly • encourage and build each other up • communicate without fear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interrupt or ignore each other • criticise the other • blame the other • fear making ourselves vulnerable
know God and are filled with the Holy Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build trust • be transparent with God and each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are selfish, ashamed of our differences, fearful of rejection and punishment, blame and criticise the other

1. Shame comes about when we are ashamed of who we are and we feel unaccepted as a person. Shame is dealt with by knowing unconditional acceptance.

2. Guilt is linked to a wrong action done. Guilt is dealt with by experiencing forgiveness.

Supplementary Information for Session 2

Part A (page 46)

1. Unity in marriage means becoming one in more ways than one! It doesn't just happen; we need to work at it. Attitude is key. When 'stuff' happens, will it drive us apart or will we use it to build unity?

Work against unity	Build unity
Putting 'me' first Ignoring/interrupting Ignoring the other's needs Being independent Doing tasks/things alone Keeping problems and feelings to ourselves	Putting the other first Listening Meeting the other's needs Being inter-dependent Doing tasks/things together Sharing problems and feelings

Thinking and dreaming alone Criticising the other Ignoring the other's strengths Breaking trust (eg lies & deception) Intolerance and unforgiveness Only personal pursuits Strongly held different religious beliefs may work against unity Letting an issue come between us	Sharing our thoughts and dreams Encouraging the other Leaning on the other's strengths Behaving in a trustworthy manner (eg sexual faithfulness) Accepting and forgiving the other's failings Having fun together Sharing a faith in Jesus Resolving conflict well
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Part B (page 47)

1. God created men and women to need, and be in, relationships. He cares for us and provides for our need for a companion.

Also, God knows how essential relationships are, as modelled in the Father–Son–Holy Spirit relationship of the Trinity.

2. God presents the woman to the man as if she is a gift.

- What was Adam's reaction?
v.23 is a poem of joy. It means 'Wow'!

- What do you think attracted him when he saw her?

He recognised her as being human, the same 'stuff' as him.

- Why do you think Adam accepted Eve? On what basis did he receive her?

Eve had done nothing to 'earn' his acceptance. He had nobody else to compare her to. So he must have been attracted to her as God's provision because he knew and trusted God. (Adam knew something of the character of God. God had already given Adam the garden, food and the task of naming the animals.)

Eve was offered unconditionally and she was received in the same way.

3. We build a foundation for unity in our marriage when we accept our partner as a 'gift'.

- What does it mean in practice for one marriage partner to receive the other as a gift from God?

We accept the whole person unconditionally, 'warts and all' – relying on the qualities of the giver rather than the gift.

- What are the implications for our marriage relationship if we trust that God knew what He was doing when He brought us together?

No matter what our history, circumstances, or what influenced our coming together as a couple, we can be confident that God can use these things and our differences as people for the good of our marriage as well as our individual growth.

Part C (page 50)

Leaving

1. Leaving involves physical, emotional and financial separation from parents. This can be very challenging, particularly if one or other of us has dominating parents or has become dependent on parents.
We may need to leave other ties like a former partner or emotional 'baggage' from the past. Some of our ties may need to change so that our spouse is our first loyalty, eg friendships.
2. We need to let go of some things so we are free to take hold of something new.

Being united

3. Consider the following:
 - An attitude of lifelong commitment (divorce is not an option!)
 - Sexual faithfulness
 - Making choices which are good for both partners eg jobs, where we live, etc
 - A high degree of trust
 - Investing in the marriage to make/keep it strong
 - Finding solutions to problems

Benefits	Challenges
Feeling of security Harmony and support Companionship Value and purpose Trust Research shows that married couples are happier, healthier, wealthier and live longer than their single counterparts! Clearly there are huge benefits to society as well.	Feeling stifled Ongoing conflict Different interests, values, faith Inappropriate self-image Fear and anxiety Challenges in the knowledge that God will help us, because He is for our marriages. More on this and the power of the Holy Spirit in Session 4 – Challenges and the Holy Spirit.

Becoming one flesh

4. We can think about oneness in terms of:
 - Heart – fulfilling each other's emotional needs (more in Session 3)
 - Mind – understanding each other more deeply through good communication
 - Body – expressing our intimacy through sex (more in Session 7)
 - Spirit – expressing our intimacy spiritually (more in Session 7)

Consider emphasising that selfless action, time and effort are necessary to experience greater oneness.

Supplementary Information for Session 3

Part A (page 62)

1. Agape love is what makes a Christian marriage distinctive. Agape love is: other-centred, a decision, unconditional, unselfish, sacrificial and active.

Part B (page 63)

1. Consider:

Let your group discuss these questions, the point being to learn to identify the needs of the other partner. Couples will recognise that David and Deborah both have unmet needs and are not meeting each other's needs. They have each turned inward and are feeling hurt. They also might be seeking fulfilment from outside of their relationship from work and other activities.

Two points to note:

We both need each other in a relationship. If only one person is having their needs met, then intimacy will be hampered.

Having relational needs is normal and admitting those needs is healthy.

2. Consider:

- We need God to anchor our identity – as His precious children. Our value does not come from our family, work, status, popularity, appearance etc
- We need God to give us purpose – as His stewards of the earth
- We need God to give us hope
- We need God's supernatural power against sin
- Our need for human relationships is for mainly physical and emotional intimacy

3. It is a good idea for the lead couple to illustrate Acceptance and Approval as these may be confused by some people. Some suggestions are given below, but try to think of some examples from your relationship which you are prepared to share with the group.

The need is for	Examples of how a partner can meet the need
Acceptance	This is about receiving our partner, just the way they are. Saying 'I love you just the way you are', especially those things about them which are different or when something has 'gone wrong'. Don't try to change the other person. For example, if they find it difficult to get up in the morning, bring them a cup of tea with a kiss instead of complaining.
Approval	This is about showing our partner (and other people) that they are special. Saying how special/kind/thoughtful they are ... or telling others in front of our partner. Telling others how great our partner is – not for what they do, but for who they are – their character.
Affection	This is about saying 'I love you' through sexual and non-sexual touching. Giving a kiss and a hug when we part and when we come home again. Holding hands. Making time in the bedroom!
Appreciation Attention	This is about demonstrating that we notice and appreciate what our partner DOES. Giving a compliment when they have made the effort to dress up. Saying thank you for little everyday things ... not taking things for granted.

Comfort	This is about showing interest in our partner and what's on their mind. Spending time listening to our partner to hear about their day. Not interrupting or trying to 'fix things'.
Encouragement	This is about sharing in our partner's pain and struggles. Asking them how they feel and listening actively to understand, consoling them if appropriate. Being there for our partner, showing sympathy. Comfort and support are different. Comfort is about sharing or knowing the problem, support is about helping address the problem.
Respect	This is about 'giving courage' to our partner to face a situation that is difficult for them. Helping our partner when they are struggling, with encouraging words, being there with and for them ... but not stepping in to take over or do things ourselves. Building confidence to finish the job and not giving up.
Security	This is about valuing our partner as an individual. Asking for our partner's opinion and taking their point of view seriously. For example, finding a colour of paint we both like if our partner doesn't like the one we've chosen. Not criticising, especially not in front of others. Not using humour to put our partner down.
Support	This is about offering our partner protection from something they find threatening. Pursuing harmony in the relationship. Giving confidence when our partner feels vulnerable. Being trustworthy with our time, money and bodies.
	This is about coming alongside our partner and helping them. Taking action: sharing a task, providing support through listening (only giving advice when asked). Noticing times of particular stress and offering to help when our partner is burdened or struggling.

Part C (page 69)

Question	Observation	Comment
a. What might be the reasons that Steve finds it difficult to let Susan get close to him?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steve appears upbeat and cheerful, doesn't show others his deeper feelings. Steve's father was strict, Steve said very little about him when he died. Steve is not letting Susan get 'close to him'. Steve is demonstrating anger and intolerance with his son. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He may be unaware of his relational needs He may not know how to talk about his feelings or may feel uncomfortable doing so. <p>In addition it may be that Steve had a poor relationship with his father and that, as a result, his self-esteem is low ... his outward upbeat manner may be a veneer that he hides behind. Many who are rejected or who feel unloved as children will keep their loved ones at a distance in case</p>

		<p>they get hurt again. Many who are constantly criticised as children will resort to self-reliance, and stuff their feelings inside.</p> <p>Unresolved issues from the past may influence Steve's behaviour and, in particular, be why he doesn't let Susan get close to him. Maybe he should see a counsellor.</p>
b. What might be the reasons that Susan finds it difficult to let Steve get close to her?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She tries to live up to her mother's high standards. Her parents went through a bitter divorce when she was in her teens. Susan feels unloved and is frustrated. Susan is worried. Susan is anxious and feels guilty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Susan clearly has needs that are not being met, but if she's feeling worried and guilty then there's a good chance that she's finding it hard to communicate her feelings. She may well be self-reliant, especially if her mother was like that too. Susan's self-esteem is almost certainly low, which is often the case if parents divorce.
c. How might these factors act as barriers to emotional intimacy for Steve and Susan?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If Steve's intolerance and anger go unaddressed and increase, he will become more self-reliant. He will end up isolating himself and pushing away those he loves through his poor behaviour. If Susan's confidence continues to ebb away, she will be less likely to express her need for Steve's love and attention. Unless the two of them tackle this wall that is growing between them, their relationship will become one of two individuals living together ... or possibly apart.
d. How can people handle these factors so that they are better able to meet the needs of their partner?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working together to help one another. Communication is key. As we discuss our needs with each other we are in a better position to be able to meet them. Susan would almost certainly be able to help Steve to identify his relational needs if he let her. If Susan is worried about Steve's behaviour with their son then she needs to say something. This might be a good opportunity to discuss Steve's relationship with his father. Sometimes we need to unpack our pasts if we are to identify these barriers and remove them. Finding help for emotional pain or if we find ourselves 'stuck' can be very positive. A good counsellor should be able to help us to recognise and understand unhelpful behaviour, so we can take action to change it. Being unselfish. Focusing on giving our partner what they need – not trying to get what we need. Putting ourselves in their shoes. Changing our own behaviour – even if we feel that our behaviour is only 10% of the 'problem'. (We can't change others anyway!)

Supplementary Information for Session 4

Part A (page 80)

1. We will all experience relationship challenges at various points in our marriages. They can have a positive or negative impact depending on **how** we handle them.
2. As humans, we are created to be in relationships. In a marriage, if partners feel isolated they will typically look elsewhere for their fulfilment – to fill their need. It is often feelings of isolation that lead to 'affairs' of one sort or another. If partners are feeling isolated then this can and should be addressed by taking action to rebuild intimacy.
3. Consider:
 - They are unaware of the cost of isolation.
 - They are unaware of what is happening because they are not communicating with each other and/or
 - They are aware, but as a result of fear, selfishness or ignorance they do not take action to address the issue.
 - Whether unconsciously or not, fear is often an issue. Isolation is defeated by intimacy and intimacy is built on vulnerability and trust. Many fear being vulnerable.
 - Selfishness is usually an issue too. People are not prepared to make the effort to build a strong relationship because it involves putting others first.
 - This study helps address the ignorance issue!

Part B (page 82)

Verse	Principle	Application to Marriage
1 John 1:5–9	If we continually live apart from God (live in darkness) it affects our fellowship with God and with each other.	The closer we are to God, the closer we are to each other.
	We all sin, even if we are Christians.	Don't judge each other. No one is perfect!
	If we confess our sins then God forgives us.	As long as we confess our sins and seek to turn away from them (repent), then we are forgiven. This forgiveness means we should not and need not be burdened by guilt.
Romans 12:1–2	Live life God's way, not the way of the world, instead ...	Be obedient. Live out God's purpose and plan in your marriage. Be different from those who live the way of the 'world'.

	... be transformed by the renewing of our thoughts. Then we will be able to discern God's will.	Then God will transform your attitudes and the way you think. As a result you'll be better able to recognise what God's will is for you and your behaviour in your marriage.
Philippians 2:1–4	Love each other, share the same attitude and purpose.	This is how all Christians are meant to be.
	In humility consider others better than ourselves. Look to the interests of others.	Put our partner first, in thought and action.
Matthew 7:24–27	If we live according to God's Word (as defined in the Bible) then our lives will be built on a firm foundation.	If we live according to God's Word then our marriages will be built on a firm foundation.
John 14:16–17	The Holy Spirit is like Jesus and He lives in us. (counsellor = 'helper')	Jesus lived the perfect life. The same Holy Spirit who was in Jesus is available to Christians to help us live better marriages.
	He is the Spirit of truth.	He will help us to recognise the truth in ourselves. This is very useful when trying to understand our fears and feelings.
John 16:7–8	It is good for us that Jesus went so that the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus – see Acts 16:7) could come to us.	The Holy Spirit is available to us, for the benefit of us and our marriages..
	He will convict the world of	Through our consciences the Holy Spirit will help us recognise the right way to behave in our marriages. <i>It is not our job to convict others!</i>

Part C (page 84)

2. Consider:
 - **God brings us together.** As we live in God's presence ('in the light') we live in closer 'fellowship' to each other (1 John 1:7).
 - **God enables us to agape love one another.** The Holy Spirit pours His love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5), which means that we can love each other God's way ... (as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7). So, even if we feel unable to love each other in our own strength, we can love each other with God's love. We can ask God to fill us with His love through prayer.

Part C 2 ... continued

- **God changes us.** As we are continually filled with the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit will become more evident in our lives ... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This will clearly lead to greater intimacy between husbands and wives.
3. Our unconfessed sin or selfishness is a major inhibitor to both our fellowship with God and with each other. The remedy is to confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness by faith. Forgiveness removes guilt and fear and enables us to be vulnerable again with God and each other, which will enable us to rebuild intimacy.
- 4.
- The Spirit will make us less selfish.
 - The Spirit will '**renew our minds**' changing our attitudes and actions. **We will become more like Jesus:** wise, discerning, faithful, forgiving, humble, compassionate and with servant hearts.
 - The fruit of the Spirit **is essential if we are to love each other with the intimacy that God intends.** God knew that we needed help in this area!
 - The Spirit of truth will help us to **recognise our partner's relational needs and our own.**

Supplementary Information for Session 5

Part A (page 100)

1. Esther's primary emotions

Just about all of the primary emotions are at play here but the main ones could be:

- Fear – of losing Edward.
- Jealousy – of the younger woman and her good looks.
- Rejection, insecurity, worry and disappointment.

Esther is expressing her feelings by making sarcastic remarks. She is definitely irritated, if not angry.

It would be better if she could communicate her primary emotions more openly, eg by saying 'I felt jealous, insecure ...' That way Edward would be in a position to understand and to respond.

2. What primary emotion prompted George's reaction?

The more likely ones are:

- Guilt – George feels guilty because his spending is out of control.
- Rejection – George feels rejected by Gina when she walks out.
- Injustice – George is feeling hard done by, he works as hard as he can ... and it is still not enough!
- Worry – George is worried too: Gina likes expensive holidays which they can't afford!

How is George expressing his feelings? How could he do it better?

- George is not expressing his feelings well. He's **exploding**.
- He could ask that the two of them talk about the issue when he is not tired and emotional. Setting a specific time to talk would help Gina understand he is not merely avoiding the subject. Then at that time he could express his feelings calmly.

Gina's likely primary emotions:

- Worry – that they are spending more than they can afford.
- Fear – she may be afraid of George's explosive anger.
- Disappointment – she really did want to go on that cruise.
- She may well be feeling insecure.

How is Gina expressing her feelings? How could she do it better?

- She is **stuffing** her feelings inside, instead of expressing them.
- She could say how she feels and ask that the two of them talk about this when they are not tired and emotional. Setting a specific time to talk would help George understand that this is important to her and it would show understanding that George is tired. At a later time she could express her feelings calmly.

3. We all have different temperaments and naturally tend to handle our feelings in different ways. Anger can be difficult to control because of the often painful feelings which lie underneath.

If appropriate, read this out to your group:

- For someone who 'explodes', controlling anger is a challenge. Uncontrolled anger is always wrong. Controlling anger is often difficult because we don't recognise the primary emotions underneath. If we can identify the primary emotions, it is much easier to manage our angry feelings positively.
- Bottling up anger is not healthy or helpful. If not dealt with, it can lead to stress and even clinical depression. If we hide or bottle up our feelings then our partner will not know how we feel. This removes the opportunity for our partner to help us understand or to deal with our feelings.

Part B (page 102)

1.

Is anger always wrong? When does anger become a sin?	Feeling angry is not wrong. God gives us feelings. But uncontrolled anger (rage) is always wrong. Unresolved anger (bitterness) is also wrong – in these circumstances anger leads to actions which are sinful.
What do you think it means to 'not let the sun go down while you are still angry'?	We should resolve our anger situation quickly. Or, as someone once put it: 'resolve the flack before you hit the sack'. Even if the problem can't be resolved quickly, at least we should 'let go' of anger before bedtime (ie let go of the desire to retaliate).
How does God want us to handle anger?	He wants us to control our anger so it doesn't turn into rage or bitterness. This will mean we have to express our thoughts and feelings (the primary emotions). We do that by 'speaking the truth in love'. We handle the anger of our partner with kindness and compassion by

2.

	Impact of taking your anger to God	
	More	Less
For a 'Stuffer'	Peace – to express feelings. Sacrificing the desire to retaliate.	Bitterness. Fear and withdrawing from partner. Getting back at your partner in indirect ways (passive aggressive).
For an 'Exploder'	Self-control. Sacrificing the desire to retaliate.	Rage. Retaliating when hurt.

3.

We wouldn't take our partner's anger so personally if we took it to God. We wouldn't feel so fearful or bitter. Instead we could accept their feelings, forgive them for any hurt caused and help them to identify the primary emotion and work through the issues concerned together. God can help us sacrifice the desire to retaliate if we ask to be filled with the spirit of self-control. This would be an act of love.

Part C (page 107)

2. When someone has really listened to us we tend to feel:
- Valued
 - Loved
 - Important

It is much easier to agree to disagree with someone when you feel that you have been properly listened to and your feelings are understood.

Supplementary Information for Session 6

Part A (page 118)

1.

- This proverb teaches us that as we 'rub' or 'knock' against each other we grow into what we are meant to be. We become 'sharpened' in our character and behaviour.
- The rubbing or sharpening function is beneficial for us – to 'knock off' unhelpful edges.
- We are clearly meant to be in relationships and it is through these relationships that we are 'honed' into the people that God wants us to be.
- The benefit to our marriages is that we can take a positive attitude to dealing with our differences – that it will be good for us to work through any resulting conflict.

Part B (page 120)

<p>1.</p> <p>How are they managing their conflict?</p> <p>Well</p> <p>Not so well</p>	<p>John</p> <p>Apologises. Doesn't lose his temper.</p> <p>Apologises but shows neither understanding nor acceptance of Jenni's situation and need. In fact he appears to ignore and even run from addressing it.</p>	<p>Jenni</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forgiving 'seventy times seven' means to go on and on forgiving people. Forgiveness involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cancelling the 'debt' (in this case the debt was so huge that it could never have been repaid), letting someone go without punishment or seeking revenge. Because we are forgiven we are required to forgive others. Resentment (the opposite of forgiveness) is sinful and destructive. Forgiveness comes from the heart.
<p>Comment</p>	<p>It seems that these issues have been going on for a while. Whilst John and Jenni are handling their feelings relatively well, the issues remain unresolved. There is growing resentment on both sides.</p>	
<p>2. Consider the following ways people typically deal with conflict!:</p>		

- **fight to win.** This 'I'm right – you're wrong' position reflects domination; the relationship is less important than victory.
- **withdraw.** The 'I'm uncomfortable – so I'll pull away' position is where the relationship is less important than avoiding the discomfort of conflict.
- **yield.** The 'rather than start another argument – whatever you want is fine with me' position. This is where a safe feeling (being 'nice') is more important than confronting the other person.
- **loving confrontation.** This position says 'I care enough about our relationship to deal with the issue as it really is'. The relationship is valued more than winning or losing, escaping or feeling comfortable. This approach offers the greatest possibility of satisfactory resolution.

John and Jenni need to make a good time to talk when they aren't so tired and emotional and then lovingly confront one another. They need to seek to understand each other's issues and feelings. There will need to be forgiveness on both sides.

NOTE:

1. Adapted from Session 4, Resolving Conflict in Your Marriage, Group Publishing © 2000 Bob and Jan Horner. Used with permission.

3.

<p>What do we learn about forgiveness?</p>	<p>Ensure that all the following points are angry and feel hurt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is difficult to forgive when somebody has done something that we feel or know is not 'right' (because we have a sense of justice). It is difficult to forgive because forgiveness is unconditional: it involves giving something away without necessarily getting anything back. It is difficult to forgive when forgiveness is 'unfashionable' and others encourage you not to forgive. It is difficult to forgive when we see forgiveness as a concept rather than a choice to 'wipe the slate clean'. We forgive by choosing to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cancel any debts owed. forego or release the need for revenge.
<p>What effect should the king's forgiveness of the debt have had on the servant?</p>	<p>It should have changed his heart and his attitude so that he big offer to be able to forgive the debt and forego revenge. The consequences for smaller offences are just as real, because they have a way of building up most of us in ourselves, and the master at mercy and forgiveness related on the forgiveness presence, restoring a relationship. If we don't forgive then we will end up weakening the relationship or even pulling it apart. For small unresolved issues this can be a gradual drift apart.</p>
<p>What were the consequences of refusing to forgive?</p> <p>4.</p> <p>As we recognise and accept our own share in the sin that did on the cross, then we are able to expression of His mercy and unconditional acceptance of the Holy Spirit, our hearts and minds are debts and foregoing revenge.</p>	<p>He offer to be able to forgive the debt and forego revenge. The consequences for smaller offences are just as real, because they have a way of building up most of us in ourselves, and the master at mercy and forgiveness related on the forgiveness presence, restoring a relationship. If we don't forgive then we will end up weakening the relationship or even pulling it apart. For small unresolved issues this can be a gradual drift apart.</p> <p>Both partners will suffer a number of feelings: knowing that God's shame, disapproval, rejection, lack of acceptance, anger, bitterness, self-righteousness, the change and then forgiveness we may still suffer the feelings but the healing does start.</p>

Remember, forgiveness is still a choice that we are required to make as an act of obedience to God.

5.

Why is it sometimes difficult to forgive?

What are the consequences of refusing to forgive in marriage?

Part C (page 124)

1. This question assumes that you have completed Steps 1 and 2 of Resolving Conflict (there is more information about these (on www.togetherinmarriage.com), in Together Notes: Three Steps to Resolving Conflict. This question is about Step 3.
- To reconcile means to 'restore closeness'. The emphasis is on taking action to rebuild the relationship, because it doesn't just happen. The following will assist bringing reconciliation **and** rebuilding trust.
- a. Pray about the situation; ask for guidance; give thanks for your partner (even if you don't feel like doing this!).
 - b. Think about the situation. Each partner honestly asks him/herself questions like:
 - Why am I doing this, what purpose does it serve?
 - What could I do to help and support my partner more?

Part C 1 ... continued

- c. Take the initiative to reconcile. Agree actions together. Be prepared to compromise. Two types of action are helpful:
- Personal promises: Changes that you will make as an individual. Promise to cease activities that destroy trust. **Warning:** broken promises are not helpful for building trust.
 - Joint action: What you will do together to stop this sort of thing happening again.
- d. Agree that because these actions are important you will review them again in the future.

2. Consider:
- Sometimes you will do all of the above (see Q1) and still not get an outcome that one or both partners are happy with. It makes it much easier to live with this if you feel that you have been listened to and that your partner values you and has considered your views and feelings carefully. We are all a 'work in progress'.
 - Keep patiently working at it, show that your relationship and reconciliation is important to you and don't give up trying to find a positive way forward.
 - If you can't reconcile and the issue is important, then ask a third party to help you both get to an acceptable outcome (ideally someone you both know and trust and who will be impartial). This could be a counsellor.

Important note. This passage has often been used to justify sexual rights, usually by the husband. This is inappropriate. The context of this passage is about mutual responsibility. Paul is saying that the husband and wife belong to each other and that the marriage bed is a place for meeting each other's sexual needs. The passage is not about 'demanding' or 'taking'. It is about giving of oneself and mutual responsibility to protect the marriage.

Verse	Principles	Outworking in attitudes and actions
Deut. 24:5	'Bringing happiness' does not mean 'give her amusement by telling jokes'! It means 'providing exquisite physical pleasure'. It is important that a newly married husband 'brings happiness' to his wife, so this was given priority over defending the country.	Providing each other with sexual pleasure is important , it needs to be prioritised into our lives. Time is needed to get to know each other so that we learn how to give each other physical pleasure.
Prov. 5:18–19	God's plan for marriage is that we should enjoy each other sexually. This erotic love and physical satisfaction is to be cultivated throughout the years of marriage.	Don't be shy or embarrassed about sex; we're meant to enjoy it. Keep working at building a fulfilling and satisfying sex life so that you are captivated by each other.
1 Cor. 7:2–5	The body is not meant for immorality.	Keep your bodies for each other; ie be sexually faithful .

Sex within marriage is an instrument to stop immorality.

Pleasing our partner sexually is **important**.

Your body is not your own, it is to be shared with your marriage partner. • The Holy Spirit will be actively transforming both partners to become like Jesus. • The 'fruit of the Spirit' will become more evident in both partners because we are so weak-willed it is not good to deprive each other of sex, unless by mutual consent for an agreed time so that you can pray, as it leads to temptation. • As partners grow spiritually they will grow together, becoming one: emotionally, physically **and spiritually**.

Song of Songs 4:9–11

The lover is using passionate, vivid and descriptive language to describe his attraction for his bride. He speaks of:

His love
His friendship
Her beauty

In this situation, the most potent weapon a believing partner has is **faith demonstrated in grace-filled action, combined with prayer**.

1 Cor. 16:13b–20

We are to worship God with our bodies. If we are born again, then God lives in us – our bodies are His. It is 'obscene' to have sex outside of marriage. Our bodies are to be 'holy' (set apart for God).

The answer is **we don't know for certain**. Many marriages of unbelievers are very successful and are a great witness to the importance of loving commitment. Throughout history God has chosen to work through believers and non-believers. Research in the USA reflects that the marriages of believers who bring God into their marriages are more than just churchgoers have a higher rate of marital satisfaction and commitment, better communication and conflict resolution skills than others do. We are meant to be distinct in the way we use our bodies. **We can be sure that God is present in believers' marriages.**

Flee from sexual immorality.

We will be tempted by sexual immorality and when it happens we should flee.

Part B (page 137)

1.

Both partners share a living faith and relationship with Jesus.

- This is a basic foundation for any spiritual growth. As we experience personal transformation through our relationship with God, we learn to **love and trust God more** and more.
- We will become more **obedient** to God; this is a vital part of our growth.
- **The 'fruit of the Spirit' becomes more evident in our lives.** The fruit of the Spirit is very good for any relationship!
- When we see God at work in our partner we see how real God is and how much **He loves our partner**. This is good for our relationship with both God and our partner. **It also keeps us on our toes spiritually!**

One partner has a living faith and relationship with Jesus, and the other does not.

- Learning from God's Word together is a foundation for spiritual growth.
- By discussing God's Word together we **learn from each other's insights**. This is valuable as God often speaks to people through others.
- If one partner has greater Bible knowledge, then clearly the other partner can benefit from this.

Praying together grows deep spiritual ties. **However we suggest that you skim over this because you will be discussing it in more detail in Part C of this session.**

We have the pleasure of worshipping God together, **experiencing the presence of God amongst His people, as a couple.**

- We grow in knowledge of each other's gifts and attributes and learn how we **complement one another** as we serve God together.
- Together we reflect more of 'the image of God' than when apart. This in itself is a powerful **witness** to others.

Neither of the partners has a living faith in Jesus.

- Making decisions about giving to God's work and sharing with those in need is deeply spiritual. We grow in **understanding** of each other. In particular, our **hearts for helping and reaching others**.
- Decisions like this are **unifying**. This is good for our marriages as it draws us together, particularly with regard to how we master money. (It is extremely bad news for a marriage when money becomes the master!)
- Giving is something that is **blessed** (rewarded) by God and so we will have the opportunity to be blessed together.

2.

Developing our individual relationship with God.

Reading and discussing the Bible together.	<p>Busyness ... 'We don't have enough time in the day to make this happen.' This is an excuse. What we're really saying is this is not sufficiently important.</p> <p>Ignorance ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> of the importance of praying together. of how to pray aloud. <p>It's risky ... We are required to be open in front of our partner. There may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fear of embarrassment: 'I might make a fool of myself.' This is often accentuated if one partner is perceived to be 'more spiritual' than the other. fear of judgment: 'If I do this then my partner might judge me in an unhelpful way.' <p>Lack of trust in God ... 'He won't answer our prayers so why bother?'</p> <p>Discord ... If partners aren't getting on well together then it's very difficult to pray together. (NOTE: Praying together could help deal with the conflict!)</p>
Praying aloud together.	The Bible does not specifically instruct husbands and wives to pray together, but it does infer it (1 Pet. 3:7). Prayer is clearly very important. Christians are instructed to pray, and to pray together (Matt. 18:19–20).
Attending church together.	Prayer has an important role in unifying the body of Christ and this is also true within a marriage. If we do not pray together, then it does not mean that our marriage will fail. However, if we do pray together then we open our relationship up to God in a new way and we discover a different and exciting dimension to spiritual growth.
Ministering to others together.	

Deciding together to whom we will give financially.

Note: All of the above are 'spiritual disciplines'. We are encouraged to pursue these disciplines as a response to God's love and grace given to us. In doing this, we are making ourselves available for God to continue His transforming work in our lives. We also grow closer as a spiritually united couple.

Part C (page 138)

Do	Don't
<p>Give it a go.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why do you think few couples pray together? Agree a time that suits you both. Get away from distractions (phones etc switched off!). Get organised, treat this like an important meeting, give it the priority it deserves and put your prayer time in the diary. 	Keep on putting it off or let it get 'squeezed out' of an over-full diary.
Keep your prayers simple and agree on the duration of your prayers together.	Get preachy or 'super spiritual'. Don't try to pray for too long. If one person says 'everything' then there won't be much for the other person to pray.
Be bold. You are doing this in response to what God has done for you.	Get all embarrassed and worried about what your partner might think.
Encourage one another.	Judge or criticise one another.
Be persistent. If you struggle then try again. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and help you to make your prayer time together happen.	Give up.

Note: Barrie and Eileen Jones have written a short and helpful book on this subject called When2Pray. You can register for a weekly eprayer at the When2Pray website which helps couples to pray together (www.when2pray.net). In addition there is a considerable amount of information about prayer on the site. Listed here are some of the key benefits that the book and the website identify:

- As you listen to each other's prayers you get to **know and understand your partner** in a new way: **tolerance, respect and love grows and you learn from each other.**
- Praying together brings **peace and blessings** to the relationship. Remember the promise of Jesus: 'When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there' Matt. 18:19–20 (*The Message*).
- Couples who pray together increasingly allow **Jesus to guide, comfort and inspire** their lives.
- Praying together brings **harmony in the home**. It is difficult to pray together when you are not reconciled or remain unforgiving or unforgiven. Indeed Jesus warns: 'And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins' (Mark 11:25). In 1 Peter 3:7 Peter advises us that our prayers are hindered if we are not treating each other well.

2.

	Some key behaviours (and Bible passages):
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacrificial love – putting aside our desires (John 15:12–13) • Serving the other – (John 13:1–17) • Unity – being one in spirit and purpose (Phil. 2:2) • Humility – an attitude of considering the other partner more important and putting their needs first (Phil. 2:3–8) • No guilt or fear – freedom to be oneself • Accepting, forgiving, respecting, honouring and bearing with one another
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will not make decisions based on selfish motives • We will not bully or manipulate to get our own way • We will be increasingly obedient to God's Word • We will pray together to seek God's will
	Our decisions and actions become more aligned with God's priorities for stewarding our time, money and resources

Supplementary Information for Session 8

Part A (page 150)

1.

The purpose of these two questions is to get conversation going and for people to realise that a Christian marriage is required to be distinctly different. Whilst it would be easy to spend a long time on this, please don't (unless you are splitting the session).

What does our culture tell men and women they need to be like in a marriage?

Consider:

- In every culture (and even at the family level) we will find different views of how men and women should be in a marriage.
- In some cultures husbands are expected to be dominating whereas in others they are passive.
- In some cultures women who work (instead of looking after the family) are frowned upon. In others they do all the work!
- In almost every culture this question is clouded by issues of equality which is a totally different matter.

In what ways should a Christian marriage be different from society's view?

Every society (and individual?) has different views, so explanations as to how a Christian marriage will differ from society's view will vary considerably and may be impossible to define! **The key point here is that a Christian marriage is required to be different and distinct.** We are to pursue God's purpose and plan for marriage **not that of any society or culture.**

The manner in which our marriages are meant to be is defined by a set of principles: 'God's Design principles', in the paragraph that follows Q1.

Note: Christian scholars hold differing views about the roles of husbands and wives. Two widely-held views hinge around issues about the meaning of the word *kephale* (Greek word for head) and the understanding of submission. We have tried to summarise the issues below.

- i. There is a widely-held view that *kephale* as 'head' implies a role with authority and responsibility for the marriage. In this position the husband's role is modelled on Christ as 'servant leader' who humbled Himself and gave up His life for His people out of love for them. Husbands and wives are seen as having equal value but taking different roles. Others stress that *kephale* can also mean 'source' in the sense of the creation of woman from man. In this latter position the equality of men and women is emphasised and the belief is that there is no difference in roles in the marriage.
- ii. The second issue hinges on submission. There is a view that a wife should submit to her husband – to his divinely appointed role as husband – in the same way that the Church submits to Christ. The wife's submission is in the context of **both** the husband and wife being fully submitted first to God. Those holding the other position emphasise that all believers should 'submit to one another out of reverence to Christ' (Eph. 5:21) and that Paul (and Peter) write about the submission of wives to husbands to maintain the good Roman cultural order of the day – so that there would be no dishonour to the gospel. They believe that the specific instruction for wives to submit to their husbands is no longer relevant today.

As you read the Bible passages in your group, we suggest you encourage everyone to try to keep an open mind and ask God to speak to you as you read about and discuss the subject of roles, and to show you what He wants for your marriages.

Part B (page 153)

1. **Note:** It is vital that we remember that submission means we willingly surrender or give ourselves to God, just as Jesus was obedient to His Father and willingly gave up His life (John 10:18). **Submission is an act of love not a response to fear or power.**

What would a marriage be like where both husband and wife willingly submit to the headship of Christ?

In terms of behaviour towards one another ...

How decisions are made ...

Managing time, money etc ...

2. Why is submission to God hard in marriage?

Consider:

- Submission generally is hard because of our old sinful nature, which puts 'self' first. The sinful nature is 'at war' with the Spirit within us (Gal. 5:16–26).
- Submission is countercultural – the world encourages an attitude of looking after our own interests first NOT to surrender our will to someone else.
- Satan will not want us to submit to God wholeheartedly.
- Submission involves risk – we have to let go of our wants and desires.
- In some ways we can avoid or hide from wholeheartedly submitting to God as individuals. It is much harder in marriage where our partner knows us better than any other human being. If personal ambition, shopping, image, money etc are really first in our lives, our spouse sees us as we are, which makes hiding from God harder – no one *likes* to be accountable!

What part does the Holy Spirit play?

Submission to God goes against our sinful nature and requires God's Spirit to be actively involved to enable us to surrender ourselves to God. The Spirit of Christ is a Spirit of humility.

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

⁷but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself
and became obedient to death –
even death on a cross!

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:5–11

Part C

MEN ONLY (page 154)

1.
Put simply, God wants us to 'pull together' not 'pull in different directions'! If either partner is too dominant or too passive then you may expect to see some of the following happening:

- One person feels that they do all the decision-making and resents it. The other feels that they have no input and resents it.
- Neither half feels valued by the other. We need to be valued and if we aren't valued by our partner we will find our value elsewhere.
- Misunderstandings may happen because partners aren't talking things through.
- Gifts and strengths go unrecognised by all concerned; they don't grow as a result.
- There may be oppression, exploitation and manipulation.
- Children may develop an unhealthy view of married life.
- Both partners end up feeling isolated and may eventually lead individual lives.

2.
What is the goal or purpose of a Christlike husband?

To present his wife 'without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless'. In other words, to love her by 'nourishing and cherishing' her so that she can grow to become the person that God means her to be.

According to the passage, how is this achieved?

- **Submitting to our wife** (v.21) – putting her needs before ours.
- **Loving our wife like Christ loved the Church.** We give ourselves up for our wife as Christ did for the Church – unconditional and sacrificial action (v.26).
- **Loving our wife like we love our own body.** This means that we take care of her. This is expanded on in verse 29 where it says we are to feed and care for our wife ('nourish' and 'cherish' her); **this implies serve her: physically, emotionally and spiritually.**

A husband who is 'head' of his wife is a Christlike husband who submits to God and who puts the needs of his wife before his own and before his work. His love is unconditional and sacrificial and it involves nourishing and cherishing his wife. To do this he clearly needs to:

- Know his wife's needs
- Act proactively to serve her

~~All this will be impossible if we don't ask for God's filling with the Holy Spirit! (Spiritual Breathing).~~

3.
Important note: God has created men and women as equals and wants us to live together in marriage in a way that complements and supports one another. As a result of the Fall, a husband's loving headship was distorted by sin which may lead to his exercising power and domination to get his way (Gen. 3:16). Sin affects a wife's behaviour too. She may fight for power and control or she may resort to manipulation to get her own way. In day-to-day life we may be living harmoniously in mutual submission. But when sin chips away at that loving co-operation we must take action.

Like Jesus, a husband should take the initiative and surrender his will to God and do what is best for his wife in the same way as Christ yielded Himself to the cross. (This may mean sacrificing his own desires and doing what his wife wants!) The wife should surrender herself willingly to her husband's headship – to his divinely appointed role (just as the Church submits to the headship of Christ). The amazing truth – and mystery – is that 'earthly marriage provides us with a practical picture or working example, then, of what it means to submit to a personal God'.¹

It will make it harder and less attractive for a wife to choose to submit to a husband who behaves in a domineering or passive, conditional, selfish or unloving way. If the actions of a husband reflect that he clearly has the best interests of his wife at heart, then submitting becomes a lot easier! Even if he's not perfect his wife can see he is trying to change.

1. Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage (Multnomah Publishers Inc. 1985).

WOMEN ONLY (page 157)

1.
Put simply, God wants us to 'pull together', not 'pull in different directions'! If either partner is either too dominant or too passive then you may expect to see some of the following happening:

- One person feels that they do all the decision-making and resents it. The other feels that they have no input and resents it.
- Neither half feels valued by the other. We need to be valued and if we aren't valued by our partner we will find our value elsewhere.
- Misunderstandings may happen because partners aren't talking things through.
- Gifts and strengths go unrecognised by all concerned; they don't grow as a result.
- There may be oppression, exploitation and manipulation.
- Children may develop an unhealthy view of married life.
- Both partners end up feeling isolated and may eventually lead individual lives.

2.
Why is respecting a husband so important?

Note: the New Testament word for respect in Ephesians 5:33 has a literal meaning of 'fear',

but in the sense of 'reverence for a position' – in this case the divinely appointed headship of a husband. This means that a wife is expected to respect her husband simply because of his position as her husband. She should 'show respect' in the sense of honouring his role in the way she behaves towards him. In this way she is honouring God! It also means that a husband does not need to 'earn' a wife's respect, (just as a wife shouldn't need to earn her husband's love) but there would be something rather wrong with him if he does not!

The modern view is that we show someone respect if we have a high opinion of that person – for what they say and do. However, God wants wives to behave with respect towards their husbands even if we do not like or agree with everything they say or do.

- Through **obedience to God's will** together in what we say and do

When a husband is respected it encourages him and he grows into his role as husband and to be the husband the wife deserves. If a husband is not respected his wife ends up feeling a difficulty undermined and of little worth. This will hinder him taking responsibility as 'head', which is to love and serve his wife. A wife is more likely to get a husband worthy of respect if she shows him respect.

- Through **trusting God together**, particularly in times of difficulty
- Through **showing gratitude to God**
- Through **worship and praise**
- Through **loving and serving others**

How does a wife show respect/disrespect?

- Through spending time **reading God's Word and in prayer** together

By regarding her husband highly, deferring to him, treating him with consideration in what she says about him, and in what she does for him.

- By **actively getting to know others – building relationships**
- By **praying together for others to know God and for their needs to be met**
- By **speaking well of others** (not gossiping and bad mouthing)
- By being kind, **serving and helping** others in practical ways (meeting their needs) both in the community and in the workplace
- By **giving generously** (financial giving) to 'the poor' and to **find God's work**

One sometimes hears wives talking negatively of their husbands in public, being critical or putting them down. This is extremely disrespectful and damaging to a relationship.

3.

a. Does submission mean 'unkind obedience'? What are the 'boundaries'?

Wives are told to submit to their husbands in the context of both a husband and a wife being submitted to God. On this basis sensible boundaries for not submitting to her husband would be:

- If something is inconsistent with the Bible.
- If it is illegal.
- If it is harmful; to her or anyone else.

b. How is a marriage affected by a wife who willingly submits to her husband's Christlike love and headship? How is it affected by a wife who doesn't willingly submit to her husband's loving headship?

The more we understand God's love for us the more we will want to **share the 'Good News'** with others in ways such as:

- inviting others into the church community (seeker services, mother and toddler groups, holiday clubs etc)
- praying for opportunities to tell people about God ... and **then taking the opportunities as they arise**

Wife submits

Husband feels respected and supported by his wife.

Husband is encouraged to grow and take on more responsibility to help and support his wife.

Husband is inclined to open up to his wife re sensitive, important and/or personal issues.

Wife doesn't submit

Husband feels undervalued, undermined.

Husband retreats into himself. Growth is hindered.

Husband pulls back from wife, shares less.

Less 'competition' between husband and wife for power and control.	Husband either retreats totally or begins to assert himself. He may try to earn respect or he may demand it.
Greater harmony in the relationship.	Increased discord or indifference.
Growing affection.	Increased hostility or indifference.
Greater oneness.	Increased independence.
Better reflects God's image.	Marred reflection of God's image.

c. Why do you think that some wives find it difficult to submit to their husbands? (Note: This question is not intended to probe the weaknesses of some husbands! Focus on the things that some wives may be struggling with within themselves.)

Important note: God has created men and women as equals and wants us to live together in marriage in a way that complements and supports one another. As a result of the Fall, a husband's loving headship was distorted by sin which may lead to his exercising power and domination to get his way (Gen. 3:16). Sin affects a wife's behaviour too. She may fight for power and control or she may resort to manipulation to get her own way. In day-to-day life we may be living harmoniously in mutual submission. But when sin chips away at that loving co-operation we must take action.

Like Jesus, a husband should take the initiative and surrender his will to God and do what is best for his wife in the same way as Christ yielded Himself to the cross. (This may mean sacrificing his own desires and doing what his wife wants!) The wife should surrender herself willingly to her husband's headship – to his divinely appointed role (just as the Church submits to the headship of Christ). The amazing truth – and mystery – is that 'earthly marriage provides us with a practical picture or working example, then, of what it means to submit to a personal God'.¹

1. Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage (Multnomah Publishers Inc. 1985).

- Some things wives might be struggling with:
- Fear of being used or taken for granted.
 - Some wives see respecting their husband as 'giving in to him' and they see this as an act of weakness.
 - It is an act of humility – humility is not always easy ... especially if you think you're right!
 - It may not be culturally 'fashionable' for a wife to submit to her husband. The whole 'equality thing' clouds the issue. (In God's eyes husbands and wives **are** of equal value. Submission has nothing to do with equality.)
 - We often have extremely poor role models either in our families or in the media. This makes submission harder.
 - There is no question that it is much easier to submit to a husband who is increasingly putting his wife first and seeking to nourish and cherish her. However, submission is not conditional. It is an act of love.

Supplementary Information for Session 9

Part B (page 171)

1.

Question	For consideration
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How can we show love for God in and through our marriage?	
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How can we show love for others as a married couple? Think of some practical ideas.	
---	--

3.

Key phrases from this Bible passage:

- **go** – we are meant to take initiative and be actively involved in spreading the gospel.
- with the **authority** of Jesus – we serve in Christ's name.
- **make disciples** – come alongside people and help them to know Christ and make Him known – living the Christian life (be a role-model, winning new converts, teaching, training and encouraging disciples to do the same).
- **baptise them** (ie give them the opportunity to mark 'spiritual re-birth' through baptism in a local church).
- **teaching them** the way of Jesus.
- **I am with you** – helping people to trust God and that He is with us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Practical ideas for taking the initiative to share our faith as a couple:

- Pray for non-believers.
- Build relationships with our neighbours.
- Help and reach others. Run a marriage or a parenting course for people in the community (see Together Notes: Further Resources – www.togetherinmarriage.com). Serve your local church's outreach and local mission activities (eg mother and toddler groups, prison visits, serving the local homeless, visits to old people's homes).
- Give away Christian books.
- Invite others to local events such as those run by Care for the Family.
- Invite others to church or to an enquirer's course (see Together Notes: Further Resources – www.togetherinmarriage.com).
- Share our testimony individually and as a couple with friends, neighbours and work colleagues.
- Take opportunities to share the gospel.
- Run a regular Bible study group.
- Teach others to share the gospel.

Part C (page 173)

1.

Key phrases from this Bible passage:

- **Devote yourselves to prayer** for yourself and for other Christians (**devote** means give up oneself exclusively to a purpose or event) –
 - for **doors to be opened** to seize opportunities
 - so that we may clearly **proclaim Jesus** and the gospel message.
- **Be wise in the way you act with non-believers** – live a godly way of life that is a good witness for Jesus.
- **Make the most of every opportunity.**
- Let your conversation be:
 - **full of grace** (loving without being judgmental)
 - **seasoned with salt** (thoughtful and helpful, distinctly Christian, about Jesus and what He has done for us).
- **Answer everyone in a godly way.** Be prepared to tell people about Jesus. This doesn't mean we have to know the Bible inside and out. It does mean being prepared to speak up for Christ and, if appropriate, going away to find answers to an enquirer's question and then meeting again to tell them what we have discovered.

2. There are two parts to this question ...

What keeps people from sharing about their spiritual journey?

The main reason that people are kept from sharing about their spiritual journey is FEAR ...

- of embarrassing ourselves or offending others ... 'They will think poorly of me'.
- of not doing a good job ... 'I'm not good enough for this'.

Franklin Roosevelt (a US President) said: 'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.'

The Bible says:

'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.'

2 Timothy 1:7-8

The Holy Spirit makes us bold. It is essential that we are full of the Holy Spirit if we are to be effective in sharing our stories. (Session 4 and Together Notes: Living the Christian Life – www.togetherinmarriage.com – give guidance on how to be filled with the Holy Spirit.)

Think of some ideas which might help people to explain to non-Christians about the impact God has had on their lives.	Looking beyond faults, differences, irritations to see worth. An unconditional commitment to an imperfect person.
Telling our 'testimony' or story is a great way to help others understand the impact of God in our lives in a relevant way. A testimony is the account of a 'witness', the story of God in a believer's life. A good testimony:	Greeting with a kiss. Verbalising 'I care for you', 'I'm here for you', 'I love you'. Hugging and touching non-sexual and sexual.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoids religious words like 'sin', 'saved', 'born again' • is easy to understand • is complimentary. Not taking things for granted. Looking for the best rather than being ready to point out the flaws. • has been thought about, prepared and practised 	
There is more guidance for how to share your faith in Together Notes: Sharing our Faith – Anything to Declare? on the website. Please encourage your group to prepare and tell their testimonies, using this to help you. You might want to practise with each other at a separate meeting. Why not challenge your group to meet again to share testimonies?	Being together, doing things together. Taking time to listen, remembering to tell each other about the day. Interest without criticism.
You might like to read out the following Bible verse:	
'They defeated him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and the bold word of their witness. They weren't in love with themselves, they were willing to die for Christ.'	Sensitively showing concern at a partner's disappointment or hurt. Taking feelings seriously. Hurting with and for another's pain.
Revelation 12:11, The Message	Helping a partner to keep going when enthusiasm has gone. Not rushing in to take over a task from a struggling partner when encouragement would result in the task being completed.
	Honouring each other. Never putting each other down in front of others. Using humour sensitively; being willing to be serious when a joke would be hurtful and imply criticism.
	Knowing that security is found in strong, reliable relationships and making a priority of reminding a partner of your long-term commitment to them. Doing the 'little things' with consistency.
	Giving the message to a partner that you can be counted on when needed. Noticing times of particular stress and offering help. Sharing tasks.

	Relationship Needs	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acceptance – receive me unconditionally; look beyond my faults and irritations, respond positively to me (Romans 15:7)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Affection – communicate care and closeness through physical touch. Tell me you love me (Romans 16:16)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Appreciation – verbalise your personal gratefulness for me, notice my achievements (1 Corinthians 11:2)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approval – commend me for who I am. Speak well of me to others (Ephesians 4:29)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Attention – show interest in and support for my concerns; enter my world with me (1 Corinthians 12:25)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Comfort – share in my pain by feeling the hurt with me, console me with tenderness (Romans 12:15)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encouragement – urge me forward positively; help me persevere towards my goal (1 Thessalonians 5:11)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Respect – value my ideas, give regard to my opinions; show me my worth to you (Romans 12:10)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Security – protect me from harm, pursue harmony, give me confidence when I am vulnerable (Romans 12:16a)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support – come alongside me to gently help me carry a load (Galatians 6:2)	<input type="checkbox"/>



Notes: 10 Important Relational Needs

These notes give information about the 'Great Commandment Network', 'ILM relational Ministry UK' and details of the teaching on relational needs as it appears in Keeping Marriages Healthy, by Dr David & Teresa Ferguson.

10 Important Relational Needs

Acceptance

Affection

Appreciation

Approval

Attention

Comfort

Encouragement

Respect

Security

Support

We all need the above in some measure and especially at particular times. However, there will be certain of these relational needs that you will enjoy receiving over and above the others. You are invited to choose which are your top three needs and guess which three needs your marriage partner most enjoys receiving.

Myself

Partner

The result of unmet need?

There are three main dangers for us when needs are unmet.

Selfishness – we seek to take from others instead of giving. Within a marriage each partner can become preoccupied with their own needs, looking always to take what they consider to be their right to have, never focusing on giving first to the other. Taking for ourselves is never satisfying and such a relationship will crumble.

Self-reliance – believing that all that is needed to survive and be happy can be found within oneself. Families can encourage self-reliance and discourage showing true feelings to others. The ability to stuff feelings down inside is then regarded as a virtue. Those who have experienced a lot of hurt or pain in childhood may have wrongly learnt that to survive they mustn't let anyone see their hurt. 'Big boys or girls don't cry.' Sadly, it is also difficult to feel positive emotions, to feel loved by another, if self-sufficiency has been the priority.

Self-condemnation – believing that we are not really loveable, that we are unworthy, and responsible for everything, particularly the things that go wrong. Such a person feels guilty that they have needs and finds it very difficult to receive.

About the Great Commandment Network

The **Great Commandment Network** is a team of denominational partners, churches, para-church ministries and strategic ministry leaders who are committed to the development of on-going Great Commandment ministries worldwide. Great Commandment ministries help us love God and our neighbours through deepening our intimacy with God and with others in marriage, family, church and community relationships.

The **Great Commandment Network** is served by Intimate Life Ministries through the following:

- The Center for Relational Leadership** – Their mission is to teach, train and mentor both ministry and corporate leaders in Great Commandment principles, seeking to equip leaders with relational skills so they might lead as Jesus led. The CRL then challenges leaders to train their co-workers in these relevant, relational principles because great relational skills can, and will, impact customer/member satisfaction, morale, productivity and ultimately, the organisation's measurable success.
- The Center for Relational Ministry Training** – Through a team of experienced community trainers, the CRMT helps churches establish ongoing Great Commandment ministries. They offer an on-line support for pastors and lay leaders in guiding church members through relational ministry training. Training topics include: the priority of relational ministry, marriage, Parenting, Single Adult Relationships, Leadership, Emotional Fitness, Coaching and Spiritual Formation.
- The Galatians 6:6 Retreat Ministry** – This online conversation technique is designed for ministers and their spouses for personal and professional re-establishing and affirming ministry and family priorities. Co-sponsoring partners provide all meals and retreat accommodations as a gift to the participants.
- Great Commandment Radio** – This ministry, including co-sponsoring partners, publisher and affiliates build co-operative relationships in order to see Great Commandment ministries multiplied.
- Relationship Press** – This team collaborates, supports and joins together to develop and produce resources that facilitate ongoing Great Commandment ministry. Experiential, user-friendly curriculum materials allow individuals, churches and entire denominations to deepen Great Commandment ministry. Not taking Great Commandment Ministry Online provides tools for relationships and the work of the Holy Spirit. Helpful downloads such as family night tips, marriage staff meeting ideas, daily couple devotionals, and ways singles can reach out to other single adults are available. Tools for work, workplace include goal-setting, time-management, life-balance assessments.

The **Great Commandment Network** is also served by **The Center for Relational Care**

- The Center for Relational Care (CRC)** – Their mission is to equip churches to minister effectively to hurting people. The CRC provides therapy and support to relationships in crisis through an accelerated process of growth and healing, including Relational Care Intensives for couples, families, and singles. The CRC also offers training for counsellors and caregivers through More Than Counseling seminars.

The gift of being a good listener, a gift which requires constant practice, is perhaps the most healing gift anyone can possess, for it allows the other to be, enfolds them in a safe place, does not judge or advise them, accepts them as they are without desiring to change them, and communicates support at a deeper level than words.

Gerard Hughes

www.RelationalCare.org

For more information on how you, your church, ministry, denomination, or movement can become part of the Great Commandment Network and take advantage of the services and resources offered by Intimate Life Ministries, write or call:

Intimate Life Ministries
P.O. Box 201808
Austin, TX 78720-1808
800-881-8008

Or visit our website:
www.GreatCommandment.net

ILM Relational Ministry UK

Part of the International Great Commandment Network

Centre for Relational Ministry UK
The UK office send out a monthly community email which can be subscribed to from the website www.relationstraining.co.uk This provides news about training opportunities in the UK, also resources, articles and information for those wanting to develop a relational emphasis in their church/ ministry. Office tel. 01926 430889

Invitations to Galatians 66 retreats for ministry leaders in the UK

Workbooks and other resources can be purchased in the UK. For details visit the website.

Centre for Relational Training UK
Relational Ministry Training is a two-day opportunity to experience the Intimate Life message through teaching and small groups. These take place in Warwick and other venues in the UK. For details of the next training time visit our website www.relationstraining.co.uk

Relational Ministry one-day workshops for churches on a variety of topics from the range of resources and course workbooks produced by ILM Relationship Press. ILM UK accredited trainers lead the workshops and then offer encouragement and support to those leading the follow-up courses. Workshop details and opportunity to book a workshop can be found on the website

Centre for Relational Care
Providing one-on-one counselling and education in relational principles and offering participation in three-day Marriage Care Intensives
For more details phone 01926 430901

Centre for Relational Leadership
Teaching, training and mentoring for leadership teams, providing a relational perspective based on Great Commandment principles.

For more details phone 01926 421167

Together Notes: Poor Listening/Good Listening

We learn to communicate from the cradle and continue to learn from our families, peers at school, work colleagues and so on. There are some ways that we can show we don't really want to listen at all: avoiding and withdrawing are a kind of running away, pseudo-listening fakes interest and selective listening tunes in and out of conversations only for points of interest.

When we do listen we can say and do things which deflect attention away from the main point and the speaker. The table below sets out some bad habits. We will relate to some and not to others but it can be useful as a basis for discussion. It is worth trying to develop new habits of listening for the sake of our partner and others we communicate with on a daily basis. ¹		
Bad habit		
Interrupting		
Giving unasked-for advice		
Being critical		

Reassuring

Looking away

Telling my own story

Rationalising

A B C of good listening

Good listening is something that can be learned². It isn't easy and it takes practice. It may also feel unnecessary when we are discussing the football results or the latest storyline in our favourite 'soap', but it can make the world of difference if we are listening to our partner talk about a particularly difficult day at the office, or with the children, or sharing our feelings about in-laws, money worries or a problem.

A good listener is actively engaged with the speaker in order to understand the main point of what they are trying to communicate. They are not just passively waiting for the speaker to finish; they are showing the speaker that they want to hear what he/she has to say.

A Attention:

A good listener gives his/her full attention to the words, ie what is being said. He is listening to **how** things are said and what feelings and needs are beneath the surface. He is also paying attention to **what isn't** being said – to silence.

A good listener will also be picking up signals from body language. Just as we listen with more than our ears, we communicate with our whole body. Our body language reflects what is going on inside: so if we are feeling angry it shows as a rigid posture and clenched fists; if defensive, we may fold our arms across our chest; if content, our body posture will be relaxed and open; if we are expressing honest feelings, then our body language will reveal it. Similarly, if we are trying to cover up our feelings we should be aware that most people would intuitively sense something isn't quite right.

B Be connected:

A good listener uses all his/her senses: ears to hear, good eye contact, relaxed facial expression and body posture show we are attentive and have a heart that cares and a mind to understand.

C Check understanding:

Good listeners check their understanding of what is being said. So, from time to time, listeners may repeat back to the speaker what they have just heard. Experts call this 'reflecting back'. The listener may also ask one or two questions to clarify his understanding of a situation or of the other's feelings. Then if there are misunderstandings, the speaker can put their point across in another way. This doesn't mean interrupting the speaker with our views. It does mean asking an appropriate question at the right moment

Questions to help you develop your listening skills

1. How do you feel when someone is really listening to you?
2. Look at the table of bad habits together. It's easy to spot someone else's bad habits. Can you spot your own?
 - Agree an action point to help you 'break' your own habit.
3. Read 'A B C of good listening' together. Now practise it. Take turns to be the one speaking and the one listening.
 - When you are the speaker tell your partner about a recent experience and how you felt about it (eg a party, holiday or an accident).
 - When you are listening practise 'reflecting back' to check your understanding.

NOTES

1. Based on principles taught by the Acorn Christian Healing. Used with permission.
2. For more information contact the Acorn Christian Healing, Whitehill Chase, Bordon, Hampshire, GU35 0AP. Tel: 01420 478121. Web: www.acornchristian.org