

# Together

BUILDING A GODLY MARRIAGE

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## LEADER GUIDE

SESSIONS 1 – 3



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“SO THEY ARE  
NO LONGER TWO, BUT ONE FLESH.  
THEREFORE, WHAT GOD HAS JOINED  
**TOGETHER,**  
LET NO ONE SEPARATE.”

-MATTHEW 19:6

# GETTING STARTED

## FACILITATING AN EXPERIENCE

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*“Facilitation is the art of stimulating deeper understanding, fresh thinking, and behavior transformation.” – Anonymous*

Thank you for leading! In facilitating this *Together* “experience,” may you be challenged to allow Almighty God to work powerfully in the lives of each couple as the Holy Spirit mysteriously brings about oneness. In the days ahead, both leaders and couples attending will need to be empowered by something greater than themselves. Allow God to be Teacher, Instructor, Guide, Counselor, and Coach as you help couples discover Biblical principles that govern the way life can be lived to the fullest.

**Remember: A good instructor teaches people, not simply material.**

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**A good instructor teaches people, not simply material.**

Our ultimate goal is for the couple to interact, discuss, and possibly debate the subject matter. We believe it is better for them to discuss their thoughts, ideals, fears, and questions rather than simply read the latest resource regarding that issue. We encourage you leaders to creatively adapt each session to meet your needs and your couples' needs as you journey through the workbook. Remember the keys are **interaction** and **communication** as you help couples **seek God's principles** for a fulfilling marriage.

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

The Leader Guide will assist in developing a plan to facilitate a small group experience. However, it was NOT written as a “Quick Lesson Approach” to leading a marriage class. Please be innovative and creative. Remember to make it personal.

## PRACTICAL AND SIMPLE

Not many people enjoy reading long complicated technical manuals. Thus, our attempt to challenge thinking is simplistic and practical. The curriculum is not intended to be a comprehensive, in-depth, "all-answer" resource. Instead, we hope to equip couples with some basic tools that are as old as time. Oftentimes the simplistic principles are easy to understand but complicated to live out. Hopefully, as you, the leader, work through each session, the ultimate Teacher, the Holy Spirit, will help in practical ways to implement the Biblical principles presented. As you build a foundation, it is important to begin with the basics and then build on what you know. The focus of *Together* is life change...practical and simple life change.

## DESIGN OF EACH SESSION

Each session of the participant workbook has been designed for couples to do "Prep Work" and interact as a couple before coming to your small group. The focus is not on the activities or teacher but on the learning process that God is bringing to their lives. These sections will help guide the couple through each session:

### OVERVIEW AND INTRO

A quick read to set the stage and get them thinking.

### PRAYER

A brief written prayer to meditate on as they begin the session.

### DRIVING QUESTIONS

These are the questions behind the session question. Please do not take the time to answer each one. Instead allow these to drive the thinking and conversation.

### PREP WORK

Each week the couples will be given four learning activities concerning that week's topic. They may be encouraged to meditate on a scripture passage, do a Biblical word study, go to a romantic place, or do some

other activity that creatively challenges your thinking. The activities are designed to be done prior to group weekly teaching/small group gathering. These assignments are not a major time commitment but are vital as couples work through issues.

## SYNOPSIS

At the conclusion of each of your small group sessions, please have couples take the time to go back and read the session synopsis. This will help bring together the content of each session.

## MY EPIPHANY

An epiphany is a moment of remarkable revelation that usually changes you in some way. An “aha” moment! This concept comes from the Christian festival, EPIPHANY, remembering the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles in the persons of the Magi twelve days after Jesus was born. Where Christ meets the commoner. The light comes on—insight happens. Thus, in a simple phrase or statement, have couples complete this phrase: ***From what I’ve learned in this session, this week I will...***

## HELPFUL TIPS

- Make this study yours. Invest time in preparing. Keep refining your teaching plan each time you lead a group.
- The first time you lead a couple or group will be the most labor intensive.
- You are creating an experience, not just passing information along.
- The focus is not on the workbook or leader/teacher but on the learning process that God is bringing to their lives.
- Remember you teach couples...you DO NOT teach curriculum. Personal relationships are the key.



## LIVING BY DESIGN NOT DEFAULT

### OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session is to clarify God's expectations for marriage and discuss how this view often differs from a secular worldview. Living by design isn't reacting as life happens, but being intentional to model the same kind of love displayed between Christ and the church in your marriage. Thus, your marriage has the potential to give a correct opinion of God to your family, community, and the world.

*"People can endure almost any 'what' if they have a compelling 'why'." – Ben Stuart*

## LEADER LETTER

Dear Leader,

As you begin this journey with your couples, it's vital to create an experience that is welcoming, engaging, and interactive. Your couples will most likely be uneasy about starting a marriage study. The main purpose for this session is to build relationships, establish trust, and learn together about God's design for marriage. So have fun getting to know each other.

Each couple will receive a workbook when they arrive. Be sure and give a brief overview of how the workbook flows:

1. Emphasize the importance of completing the four learning activities each week since these are designed to create deep and meaningful conversations that can actually change the course of their marriage.
2. Highlight that the greatest impact on their marriage will happen in these couple conversations possibly as much or more than in their small group meeting.
3. Review the "Introduction and Getting Started" section, especially the "interactive" paragraph, so you can fully explain the workbook to each couple.

Unlike the other weeks, in this first meeting you will actually work through session one together (see teaching plan below) as well as set the tone for your next several weeks together. For the remaining sessions, the couples will do the Prep Work for each session on their own prior to coming to the small group time.

Our prayer is for you to get off to a great start.

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

## WHAT ARE GOD'S EXPECTATIONS FOR MARRIAGE?

*"The war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of self is the deeper war that is the reason for all those horizontal battles that take place between us. It is only when you gain ground at the deeper level that you can gain ground at the horizontal level."*  
– Paul Tripp

### SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO REMEMBER

To build relationships, establish trust, and learn together about God's design for marriage. Remember that each couple's marriage matters and help them live for a bigger story. Above all – have fun and set the tone!

### KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **Genesis 2:18-25** – Marriage is a sacred union because it is rooted in the divine plan of creation. His union of Adam and Eve illustrates His ideal for marriage. He created marriage to be the uniting of one man and one woman in a covenant commitment for a lifetime.
- **Matthew 19:2-9** – The husband is united to his wife, no longer two but one. What God has joined together do not let man separate.
- **Ephesians 5:31-32** – The design of marriage is a profound mystery, but it breaks the silence by displaying the covenant keeping love of Christ and the church.
- **Hebrews 13:4-6** – Keep marriage holy, honorable, and pure.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

**Welcome:** Welcome everyone. Have snacks and informal conversation for 10-15 minutes. Set the tone for a fun night.



**Opener:** Briefly introduce yourself and share how long you have been married? As a couple, tell something funny that happened at your wedding or on your honeymoon.

**Give a brief introduction of yourself:** Explain why you wanted to lead this study and give each couple their workbook. Thank each couple for taking the risk to attend. Especially, thank the individuals who were drug into this study.

Take a few minutes to give an overview of the workbook [see Getting Started p. 6].

Look at the Table of Contents of where we are headed.

Look at page 2; read these statements from the "Note to Married Couple."

"Our desire for this workbook is to remind you of basic information and ultimately for the two of you to interact, discuss, and possibly debate the content...together. Each section is designed to challenge your thinking with simplistic and practical tools that are as old as time."

"As we remind you of your calling to be husband and wife, may your marriage teach you much; but more importantly, **may God's Holy Spirit provide the guidance, instruction, and counsel you need.**"

To work on your marriage, you will need to be empowered by something greater than yourself. During the times you do not have enough power or ability to love your mate in your own capacity, God will enable you to love. We have a Savior who gives life, hope, and purpose.

Read page 3 and quote from page 6.

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined **together**, let no one separate.” – Matthew 19:6

So, **create time in your calendar to make family a priority. Allow the Holy Spirit to be Teacher, Instructor, Guide, Counselor, and Coach** as you discover Biblical principles that govern the way life can be lived to the fullest.

“A great marriage is not when the ‘perfect couple’ comes together. It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences.” – Dave Meurer

Give brief instruction of how to maximize the *Together* experience. [See page 10-11.]

[NOTE TO THE LEADER: Become familiar with page 10-11 so you can coach your couples through the process.]

Each session has been designed for you to work through and interact as a couple and then to meet with a small group of other couples to gain encouragement, share insight, and debate opinions. **The focus is not on the workbook or teacher but on the learning process that God is bringing to your lives.**

Tell the couples to **ONLY** read the Driving Questions and allow these to “drive” the conversations, but do **NOT** take the time to answer each in their Prep Work.

Each person will do the four “Prep Work” learning activities each week prior to your small group meeting. These can be done quickly or a couple could spend hours processing. Our intent is for these to be a springboard to get each couple interacting positively.

## TEACHING PLAN

### STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

The goal of this session is to build relationships, establish trust, and learn together about God's design for marriage. Remember your marriage matters so let's help one another live for a bigger story.

This session extends a call to remember three foundational things.

### REMEMBER THAT MARRIAGE IS GOD'S INVENTION

As long as there has been more than one human on the earth there has been marriage. It was God's idea; he designed it from the beginning (Genesis 2).



Read Genesis 2:18-25

- **Genesis 2:18-25** – Marriage is a sacred union because it is rooted in the divine plan of creation. His union of Adam and Eve illustrates His ideal for marriage. He created marriage to be the uniting of one man and one woman in a covenant commitment for a lifetime.

Jesus says in the New Testament,



Read Matthew 19:2-9.

- **Matthew 19:2-9** – The husband is united to his wife, no longer two but one. What God has joined together do not let man separate.

We know from Scripture that marriage was created before government, business, and even the first church. It didn't evolve from human ingenuity, so we don't get to set the rules.



Basketball thrives when the participants play according to the way James Naismith designed it. If each person creates their own rules, the game ends

in chaos and frustration. Perhaps you have seen the chaos when small children, who are in their first basketball season, are learning to play. When players don't follow the intended design of the creator's purpose, it doesn't work well. To live by design in our marriages requires God's power and our humility.

As you saw in the brief intro, a brilliant social science researcher, Shaunti Feldhahn, in her book, *The Good News About Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce*, estimates the divorce rate to be in the 31-35% range, depending on the study.

This is great news, and it is surprising for us all. Half of all marriages are NOT ending in divorce. We need to scream this from the mountain top!

Feldhahn goes on to say the divorce rate drops significantly for faithful Christ followers. Even below 20%. Jesus makes a difference!

That is why it is important for us to reflect on why God instituted marriage. Marriage has value. Our Creator invented it to have purpose.



**Couple Experience:** Have each person experience Session 1 by reading the brief intro on pages 13-15. Give a few moments for them to read. Don't worry...it's less than 350 words.



**Pray** the prayer on page 16 of the workbook, and then have them look at the Driving Questions on page 17.



Then have each person **work through Prep Work #1**. Give them plenty of time to complete each question.

Next, have each couple work through **Prep Work #3** together. Remind them to keep it positive, safe, and fun. No fighting or defensiveness allowed. They should also share with one another their answers to Prep Work #1.



Is anyone willing to share their answers in Prep Work #3?

The day we got engaged I was...

As we celebrated our wedding day, I would've said marriage is...



Then ASK...

Why do you want to do this study?

What questions about your marriage do you hope to have answered over the next several weeks?

#### REMEMBER THE WHY OF MARRIAGE

So why did God institute one man and one woman living in oneness? Why not just live together? Why not live together until we get tired of one another?

Let's be honest, our default is a self-centered focus. We think we know best and this often keeps our marriages from thriving.

As Gary Thomas says, "Every great marriage begins with a funeral." Therefore, we must die to our selfish ways in order to make a marriage work.

In Ephesians 5:32, Paul describes the design of marriage as a profound mystery. Like any mystery, the ending is not easily understood.



Read Ephesians 5:31-32

The design of marriage is a profound mystery, but it breaks the silence by displaying the covenant keeping love of Christ and the church.

The text says “But I speak of” – it is the **Greek word “lego” which means to lay forth or to break the silence.**

Thus, our marital relationship breaks the silence of the mysteries of God by displaying the covenant keeping love of Christ and the church. It’s not as much about our marriage as it is God’s redemptive story.

This is our why. He is not going to leave us nor forsake us. The institution of marriage is about transformation and is built by design to give a correct opinion of God’s redemptive story.

What a privilege!

## CONCLUDE

### REMEMBER THAT YOUR MARRIAGE MATTERS

It’s so easy to forget the WHY of marriage and let our decisions and motivations be dictated by the world around us. May God grant us incentive to trust His design above our own default as we live for a bigger story. Remember that your marriage matters!



Read **Hebrews 13:4-6** to conclude. Keep marriage holy, honorable, and pure.



#### **Closing prayer.**

Ask the Holy Spirit to be Teacher. Specifically, pray that over the next several sessions God would powerfully use this study to transform each person.

## INTENTIONAL LOVE

### OVERVIEW

In this section, you will encourage couples to notice the differences between the world's view of love and God's view of love. You will discover together through biblical study that our call is to love one another selflessly and sacrificially and this is often not natural to us. You will talk about the different ways we can authentically share love with our spouses. One of the tools you'll explore to help couples love one another more fully is information shared by Gary Chapman in his book *The Five Love Languages*.

*"Your emotional love language and the language of your spouse may be as different as Chinese from English. No matter how hard you try to express love in English, if your spouse understands only Chinese, you will never understand how to love each other."*

– Gary Chapman

## LEADER LETTER

DEAR LEADER,

We hope your first session went well. Each couple was asked to take the 5 *Love Languages* test online before the session. You'll be able to help couples discuss practical ways they can use the knowledge of their spouse's love language to create a loving relationship.

Text your group to remind them to do Prep Work for Session 2 and take the online test.

As you prepare to lead the group this week, your primary goal is to help couples truly grasp the concept that each person is loved unconditionally, selflessly and sacrificially by the Creator of the universe. God relentlessly loves each of us, period. It's out of the abundance of God's love for us that we are able to love our spouses wholly and completely.

Encourage couples to really dig into this concept that our goal in marriage is to try and love our spouse selflessly as God loves us. Of course, we will fall short, but this is the goal for our marital relationship.

Enjoy facilitating conversation around the Prep Work for this session. Create a safe environment that encourages honest and reflective conversation.

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

## HOW DO I LOVE LIKE JESUS?

*"Love says: I've seen the ugly parts of you, and I'm staying." Matt Chandler*

### SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO SELFLESSNESS

To explore the selfless and sacrificial nature of God's love and to share this love with our spouse. One tool is to understand how our spouse best receives love and to practice loving this way daily.

### KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** – Characteristics of Biblical love.
- **1 John 4:7-12** – Love comes from God—foundational for showing God's deep and sacrificial love for every person.
- **Colossians 3:12-14** – Reminds us of the importance of love being the foundation of our marriage which helps us to forgive one another.
- **Ephesians 3:16-19** – Encourages us that we can love one another as God loves us if we have faith and are willing to ask for God's help and guidance.

## STARTER QUESTIONS - REVIEW OF PREP WORK

**Opener:** In the Prep Work, you were asked to spend 10 minutes each day (DST – Daily Sharing Time) to simply share three things that happened to you that day and how you felt about them.



How did you find creating this space in your daily lives? Was it easy? Was it difficult? Did you learn anything eye-opening about your spouse or about your marriage?



[Have **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** on the screen.] You were asked to look at this passage and reflect on which of these characteristics of love were a struggle for you and which ones you think are strengths you might have.



Get in groups of 3 couples. Ask each other to discuss the following:



Did you learn anything about yourself and how you love your spouse that you might not have realized before studying this scripture? Does your spouse agree with your assessments?

If there is time, have a few couples share with the entire group their strengths and struggles with loving like Jesus.

You were asked to list 5 positive characteristics of your spouse.

Would anyone be willing to share a positive characteristic of your spouse?

How many of you were familiar with Gary Chapman's book, *The Five Love Languages*? Is anyone willing to share a positive way that this information impacted your marriage?

## TEACHING PLAN

When we struggle in our marriages, we often look for ways to fix the problem. None of us got married hoping it would be difficult or frustrating to be married yet that's often what we experience. Before we can fix the issues in our marriages, we first have to look at our personal relationship with Jesus. We must ask ourselves, **“Do we believe in the very fiber of our being that we are loved by God?”** For most of us, we do believe, but sometimes life hits hard and causes us to doubt God's love. If you are here and unsure about your personal relationship with Jesus, please reach out to someone in the group and talk to them about what it means to believe in Jesus.

### STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

The goal of this session is to **explore the selfless and sacrificial nature of God's love and to share this love with our spouse.** One tool is to understand how our spouse best receives love and to practice loving this way daily.

### FOCUS ON LOVING LIKE JESUS

We cannot love our spouses the way God intends unless we first believe that God loves us without conditions. To experience Godly love in our marriages, we must learn to love more like Jesus, sacrificially and selflessly.



#### **Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.**

When we love our spouse, these characteristics need to be present. We are not perfect, but by grace, through faith, God can enable our love for our spouse to mirror Jesus's love for us.

Have everyone turn to page 34 of the workbook and read over the characteristics of love found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. These are the ways we try to love our spouse because it's how God loves us.

The Bible teaches us that love:

- Is patient and kind,
- Does not envy or boast,
- Is not rude and does not insist on its own way,
- Is not irritable or resentful,
- Is willing to share our burdens and endure hardships with us,
- Always protects, trusts us,
- Is hopeful and perseveres.



Why are some of these characteristics of love so difficult for us to express in our marriages?



**Read 1 John 4:7-12**

Gives us the foundation for God's deep and sacrificial love for every person.

**Read Colossians 3:12-14**

Reminds us of the importance of love being the foundation of our marriage which helps us to forgive one another.



Put the following quote from Gary Chapman on the screen: **"The desire for romantic love is deeply rooted in our psychological makeup."**



Can you share why you agree or disagree with Chapman's assertion that we are created to desire to be intimate romantically with another person?

Sharing emotional love gets complicated because our individual backgrounds, personalities and experiences impact the way in which we give

our love to others. This is the premise underlying the concepts shared in Gary Chapman's book, *The Five Love Languages*. He claims that there are basically five emotional love languages – five ways that people speak and understand emotional love.

## FOCUS ON LOVING IN THE LANGUAGE OUR SPOUSE UNDERSTANDS

It is rare for two people to speak the same love language. It's well worth the time and effort to learn one another's love language and then begin the process of learning to speak the love language of our spouse.

To learn a new language takes time, energy and effort. Yet the payoff when you can communicate fluently in a new language is freeing!



**Learning a new language.** It's like traveling to Paris and being able to speak French. No crazy miming to get your point across. No having to stop every few seconds to look up a word. No throwing up your hands in frustration because you ordered a chocolate croissant and received a ham bagel instead.



Put the 5 love languages on the screen and review them:

- **Words of Affirmation:** You feel most loved when you are receiving words that build you up and encourage you. These verbal compliments or words of appreciation are powerful communicators of love to you.
- **Quality Time:** You experience love when you feel like you have your partner's undivided attention and that you can share experiences together.
- **Receiving Gifts:** Gifts are visible symbols of love for you. To you a gift is a symbol that someone was thinking of you.

- **Acts of Service:** When someone does things for you that they know you would like them to do. You are pleased by your partner doing things for you because it shows you that you are loved by them.
- **Physical Touch:** Love is communicated best to you through physical touch such as hugs, kisses, holding hands. Being touched expresses to you how much you are loved by your partner.



**COUPLE EXERCISE:** Have each couple share their love language with their spouse and then give each participant a half sheet of paper and have them list ideas for ways they could share love with their spouse using their spouse's love language. Then have the couples share their ideas with one another.



Do any of you have the same love language as your spouse?

This is actually pretty uncommon. Most of us have to practice speaking the love language of our spouse and it's kind of awkward at times.



Go through each love language and have people share ideas for how to show love in that language. You could write these ideas on a whiteboard.

Why, for some of us, does it feel awkward to give love in the language of our spouse?

What do you think will be most challenging for you as you try to speak your spouse's love language?

CONCLUDE

Because there is less frustration, miscommunication, and apathy, your efforts to speak a new love language will fill up your spouse's love tank.

You begin to experience the love God always desired you to experience in your marriage. Your marriage is filled with opportunities to love selflessly and sacrificially. Like Jesus first loved us!



**Read Ephesians 3:16-19.**

This text encourages us to love one another as God loves us. We can do this if we have faith and are willing to ask for God's help and guidance.



Closing prayer.

## WHAT I BRING TO THE TABLE

### OVERVIEW

The intent of this session is to better understand our identity, influences, and impact on other people so we can interact more effectively with one another. The Bible refers to a married couple as being united into oneness and this marital oneness has the potential to enrich our lives. We will talk about what each person brings into the relationship and acknowledge our spouse's individuality. Understanding each person's unique characteristics has the potential to make our marriages stronger and more fulfilling.

*"The more you know yourself, the more patience you have for what you see in others."  
– Erik Erikson*

## LEADER LETTER

Dear Leader,

This should be a fun session. Mainly, because people like to talk about themselves.

The focus should be on two concepts of the identity equation:

1. understanding our ego,
2. **and the most important** is grasping the doctrine of humanity—  
“Imago Dei.”

Select a FREE online personality test (i.e. Enneagram, DISC, Myers-Briggs, Lion-Beaver-Otter-Golden Retriever, Colors, etc.) for your group so that everyone is taking the same test and discussing the same thing.

Five or six days before your small group meets, send a text or email with a link and specific instructions for taking the online test for Prep Work #3.

Personality tests can provide a common language to better understand ourselves and, maybe just as important, others—especially our spouse.

We recommend a very simple, easy to use and understand, and fun tool—Lion-Beaver-Otter-Golden Retriever—created by John Trent. It can be done quickly. Enneagram is great, but time consuming to understand if you have not already become familiar with it. All are great tools.

But don't lose sight of helping each person realize and remember that he/she is God's prized work of all of creation – made in the image of God.

This week pray that each person would find freedom and security in who they are in Christ.

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

## WHO AM I AND WHY AM I HERE?

*"Know thyself." – Ancient Greek expression*

### SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO IDENTITY

To analyze who we are and how God shaped us for meaning and purpose as we love others—especially our spouse. Our identity and what influences us have incredible potential to impact the two of us becoming one in marriage.

### KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **Genesis 1:27; Psalms 8:3-6** – Imago Dei – created in the image of God. Humanity is God's crowning work and given the responsibility to rule over all creation.
- **Jeremiah 17:5** – When we trust in ourselves or humanity, we miss God's intent.
- **Colossians 3:7-11** – Christ died for every person of every race, and we are being renewed in our Creator's image.
- **1 John 4:19** – Experiencing love from God fills us and allows us to love others.

## STARTER QUESTIONS - REVIEW OF PREP WORK



**Opener:** What would you tell your 13-year-old self struggling to find their identity?

Why do 13-year-olds struggle so much? As adults, are we much different?

On a great podcast, *Good, True, & Beautiful*, Ashton Gustafson begins almost every episode by asking his guest, “When you do introduce yourself and your work in the world, where do you begin?”



Get in groups of 3 people (other than your spouse) and answer this question:

When you *do* introduce yourself and your work in the world, where do you begin?

Show of hands, how many introduced yourself by describing something you did?

By connecting yourself with others—family, hometown, school, etc.?

How many mentioned something regarding “Imago Dei”—in the image of God?

Knowing that we are God’s crowning work of creation, and specifically prepared in His own image—“Imago Dei”—is not something we confidently proclaim. But we should. Especially as Christ-followers.

The phrase has its origins in Genesis 1:27, wherein "God created man in his own image..." This biblical text does not imply that God is in human form, but that humans are in the image of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual core. Thus, **humans reflect God's divine nature.**



In the Prep Work, you were asked to practice Lectio Divina.

Has anyone used this Spiritual discipline before? If so, how has it shaped you?

At one time, this common practice was used by all Christians to connect with our Holy God.



If this was your first time to practice Lectio Divina, what did you learn about those two Biblical passages on page 43 as it relates to our identity?

Consider a picture a tree. Notice the branches that grow fruit. The fruit is not for the tree's consumption, but for others. So, let's not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Our connection to The Vine is not a self-absorbed consumer mentality, but a means to live out the greatest command to "love each other" as John 15 states. And we get the opportunity to practice this daily with our spouse.



Ask the Holy Spirit to be Teacher. Specifically, pray that each person would have confidence in who they are and how they are hard wired.

## TEACHING PLAN

Many Christians suffer from an identity crisis. We are insecure in our search of knowing ourselves, and we don't like what we see.



Find a clown mask or a cardboard cut-out of a famous person. Hold it over your face.

We all wear masks, trying to portray something we are not – masks of...

intelligence, spirituality, appearances of money and status, trucks/cars, tough, rugged or pretty. We try to impress even those we don't know.

We try to appear as a person we aren't with "the best we have to offer" in order to gain others' approval. We flirt with danger when we begin building our identity on something false, yet, marriage has a way of exposing who we really are. The masks come off. Often it makes us more insecure. We hide.

Just like in the garden (Genesis 3), Adam and Eve, due to their sin and insecurity, hid from God. They tried to become something they weren't created to be.

### STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

The goal of this session is to analyze who we are and how God shaped us for meaning and purpose as we love others—especially our spouse. Our identity and what influences us have incredible potential to impact the two of us becoming one in marriage.

## IDENTITY – WHO AM I?



Enneagram Illustration – George Gurdjieff was an early adopter of the enneagram symbol in the early 1900s but did not teach a system of “types” like we see today. He used it to help people know the basic characteristic that defines them, or as he called it, their “chief feature.”

He believed the chief feature was the lynchpin of a person's ego structure.

Why do I react that way? Why am I like this? Can I change?

Understanding our ego is one part of the equation.



Put the six contrasting characteristics from Prep Work #1 on page 42 on the screen.

Any personality test you take will include these 6 personality features.



Were any of you on the same side of all six continuums?

Any opposite on all six?



DISCUSSION: Have couples share their similarities and differences.

What was one of the personality features that attracted you to your spouse, and NOW IT DRIVES YOU CRAZY?

The second part of the “identity equation” and the most important is grasping the doctrine of humanity. “Imago Dei” as it is simply stated in Genesis 1:26-27.



Have a different person in the group read one of the following: Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:3-6; Psalm 139:13-14; James 2:26; Romans 5:12; and Romans 5:8.

People were created in God's image (Imago Dei)—Genesis 1:26-27

Created male and female—Genesis 1:26-27

People are the crowning work of all creation—Psalm 8:3-6

Every human possesses dignity and has value—Psalm 139:13-14

People exist in body and spirit—James 2:26

Man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race—Romans 5:12

This separated humanity from God. Therefore, a need for redemption exists—Romans 5:8



David Benner, a psychologist and author of the book, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, defines identity as, "who we experience ourselves to be – the 'I' each of us carries within."

It's imperative that we find out how we are hard-wired. We must be willing to examine ourselves in order to know and accept our personality and passions. When we know ourselves, it makes it easier to share ourselves with our spouse in an honest and sincere way.

We must evaluate what influences our life. What voices speak the loudest and shape us and our worldview?

## INFLUENCES – WHO AND WHAT INFLUENCES ME?



A sign in a public library read: "DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK."  
Put this sign on the screen.

Consider these voices of influence:

**Upward voice** – The Holy Spirit guides our behavior. We create space in our lives through prayer, reading God’s word, seeking the counsel of other Christ-followers and we listen for God’s voice. The upward voice shapes our ethics and morals.

**Outward voices** – Our family, friends, positive influencers from all around the world, media, culture, socio-economic status, cultural background, and some not-so-helpful voices all speak into who we become.

**Inward voices** – Our conscience or “gut,” influences our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The Bible says there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me (Romans 7:23). Jesus came to set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). Scripture tells us that letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death, but letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. (Romans 8:6).

## IMPACT – HOW CAN I AFFECT THE WORLD?



Personality Types [**See Tools** in the Leader Guide for a summarized list of personality types.]

Put the compilation of personality types on the screen and review them. However, focus on the personality test you selected. If you selected a test other than Enneagram, DISC, or Animal, then you can add your type to the mix.

Go through each personality type and discuss the “**chief features.**”



Have one person from each personality type best describe themselves/their characteristics and have the spouse of that personality type jump in with their thoughts.

As you are discussing each one, ask how this personality can be used for the Kingdom of God. You could write these ideas on a whiteboard.



**Couple Exercise** – It’s time to brag on your spouse! What are one or two POSITIVE “chief features” you see in your spouse?

## CONCLUDE



Read Matthew 6:33-34 to conclude.

Is who you are determined by what you do or is what you do determined by who you are?

We do not win God’s approval by what we do. God is not impressed by anything we do nor depressed by what we don’t do. He loves us PERIOD!

Instead, because of God’s grace and unconditional love for us, we are motivated to serve and give our lives away. We love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19).



Closing prayer.

## TOOLS

### PERSONALITY INVENTORY

#### **Lion** (Dominance)

Enneagram | 3 – Achiever | 8 – Challenger

This personality likes to lead. The lion is good at making decisions and is very goal-oriented. They enjoy challenges, difficult assignments, and opportunity for advancement. Their leadership inspires a following. Because lions are thinking of the goal, they can step on people to reach it. Lions can be very aggressive and competitive. Lions must learn not to be too bossy or to take charge in others' affairs.

**Strengths:** Visionary, practical, productive, strong-willed, independent, decisive, leader

**Weaknesses:** Argumentative, dictatorial, sarcastic, deals with facts not emotions, domineering

**Limitations:** Doesn't understand that directness can hurt others, hard time expressing grace

**Greatest Needs:** Respect

#### **Otter** (Influence)

Enneagram | 2 – Helper | 7 – Enthusiast

Otters are very social creatures. Otter personalities love people. They enjoy being popular and influencing and motivating others. Otters can sometimes get hurt when people do not like them. Otter personalities usually have lots of friends, but not deep relationships. They love to goof off. They are notorious for having the messies. Otters

like to hurry and finish jobs. Jobs are not often done well, but they have fun doing it.

**Strengths:** Outgoing, responsive, warm, friendly, talkative, enthusiastic, compassionate

**Weaknesses:** Talks to much, can be undisciplined, too permissive

**Limitations:** Remembering past commitments, follow through with discipline

**Greatest Needs:** Attention/Acceptance

### **Golden Retriever** (Steadiness)

Enneagram | 6 – Loyalist | 9 – Peacemaker

Golden Retrievers are good at making friends. They are very loyal. Retriever personalities do not like big changes. They look for security and can be very sensitive. They are very caring, have deep relationships, but usually have only a couple of close friends. They want to be loved by everyone, look for appreciation, and work best in a limited situation with a steady work pattern.

**Strengths:** Calm, easy-going, dependable, quiet, objective, diplomatic, humorous

**Weaknesses:** Indecisive, indifferent, too soft on other people

**Limitations:** Seeing the need to be more assertive, holding others accountable

**Greatest Needs:** Appreciation/Security/Comfort (Empathy)

### **Beaver** (Compliance)

Enneagram | 1 – Reformer/Perfectionist | 5 – Investigator

Organized. Beavers think that there is a right way to do everything and they want to do it exactly that way. Beaver personalities are very creative. They desire to solve everything. They desire to take their time and do it right. Beavers do not like sudden changes. They need reassurance.

**Strengths:** Analytical, self-disciplined, industrious, organized, sacrificing

**Weaknesses:** Unrealistic expectations of self and others, critical, overly perfectionistic

**Limitations:** Seeing the optimistic side of things, expressing flexibility

**Greatest Needs:** Approval/Security

NOTE: **Enneagram | 4** is intentionally omitted from the above list because they are “individualist” and would never see themselves fitting into a list. However, be sure to include them because they have a fear of “no identity.” Yet, as any 4 will tell you they also want to express their uniqueness!