

Together

BUILDING A GODLY MARRIAGE

LEADER GUIDE

SESSIONS 7 – 9



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NOT SEEING EYE TO EYE

OVERVIEW

In this section, you will reassure couples that they will disagree at times – this is perfectly normal. How you manage conflict is what matters. Your goal is to help couples find healthier methods to manage their conflicts. You will explore some of the negative patterns of managing conflict (such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling) helping to raise awareness. Then, healthy techniques such as compromise, negotiation and finding common ground will be explained.

"Conflict is inevitable. Combat is optional." - Max Lucado

LEADER LETTER

Dear Leader,

In this session, one of your primary goals is to debunk the myth that healthy couples don't fight. All couples disagree, but it's how they disagree that matters. Learning how to manage conflict in ways that honor our spouse and strengthen our marriage is something each couple can do with prayer and practice.

Men and women physically respond to conflict differently and understanding this helps men and women be more realistic about how each can handle disagreements when they arise in their marriages. Our upbringing also affects how we handle conflict and sometimes we have to learn how to agree to disagree, so disagreements do not derail our marriages.

Just as we discussed last week, most of us want to be heard when we feel strongly about an issue we are discussing with our spouse. Reinforce the importance of listening to one another and validating the emotions of your spouse. Compromise is an essential tool for managing conflicts.

Before leading this session, go to Gottman.com and print [the-four-horsemen.pdf](#). This will be used when discussing the negative patterns of communication we often use that lead us to conflict. It also goes over the positive ways to approach issues with our spouses.

Pray this week that the Holy Spirit is guiding the hearts, minds, and emotions of each person in your group. Pray for healing for some of the wounds that have been caused in the past when conflict has arisen and for God to give each person strength to find a new way to manage conflict.

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

HOW DO WE WORK THROUGH OUR DIFFERENCES?

"Our natural, arrogant selves are eager to speak, to be heard, and to be understood. We can't wait to express our opinion, state our outrage, or make clear our intentions, yet the Bible warns, 'When words are many, sin is not absent' (Proverbs 10:19). You know what this tells me in a practical sense? The pause button on my tongue's remote should get much more use than the play button." - Gary Thomas

SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO FIGHT FAIRLY

- To focus on how we handle conflict by reinforcing the necessity of not only listening but hearing our spouse's concerns, ideas, and issues as they arise.
- To clearly define some unhealthy behaviors that occur during conflict and then to learn healthier ways to manage disagreements in our marriages.

KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **Ephesians 4:31-32** – Reminds us that anger usually does not help us manage disagreements; instead focusing on kindness and compassion while offering forgiveness is the key.
- **Colossians 3:13** – Our focus must be on loving our spouse in the midst of conflicts.
- **Philippians 2:4** – Prioritizing the interests of our spouse before our own interests is a key to a healthy relationship.
- **Proverbs 15:1** – How we respond to our spouse during a disagreement makes a huge difference in whether the conflict is managed or escalated.

STARTER QUESTIONS - REVIEW OF PREP WORK



Opener: Break into smaller groups. Ask each group to spend a couple of minutes discussing what they think the number one cause for conflict is in most marriages. Ask them to choose their top choice. Go around and ask each group for their top choice.

Write these on a whiteboard: (Money, Communication, Household Responsibilities, Sex, Trust)

Compromise is essential for a healthy marriage.



Prep Work #1 was a quiz to see how well you and your spouse compromise. Please get together with your husband or wife, go over your quiz, and talk about any of the questions where you put a different answer from one another.



“Compromise is not about just one person changing. It’s about negotiating and finding ways to accommodate each other.” - Dr. John Gottman

Gottman goes on to say that, “You will not be able to compromise successfully if you don’t accept your partner’s flaws and quirks. Instead, you will be on a relentless campaign to alter your spouse.”

Would you tell your child to marry a person they have some concerns about because you can change a person’s behavior after you marry them?

NO! We all know that you cannot go into a relationship expecting someone to change who they are. Why do you think it’s difficult for us to compromise with one another? Right! We want our own way...we think we are right.



Read Philippians 2:4.

This passage does not mean God wants us to be like a doormat with our spouse. We should work hard to put our spouse’s interests before our own.

If both people are doing this, then each person's needs are being met much of the time.



Ask God to give us the spirit of forgiveness in dealing with conflicts with our spouses. Help us change unhealthy patterns of managing conflict in our marriages.

TEACHING PLAN

NOTE: Materials needed: White board, notecards (one per person)

STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

- To focus on how we handle conflict by reinforcing the necessity of not only listening but hearing our spouses' concerns, ideas and issues as they arise.
- To clearly define some unhealthy behaviors that occur during conflict and then to learn healthier ways to manage conflict in our marriages.

SEEKING 'OUR WAY' WHEN CONFLICT ARISES

Dr. John Gottman has studied thousands of married couples over the past 40 years at the Gottman Institute and he says that happily married couples aren't smarter, richer, or more psychologically aware than others. The key is that in their daily lives they focus more on their positive thoughts and feelings about one another rather than on their negative thoughts and feelings (which we all have). They embrace each other's needs and are intentional about not creating a climate of disagreement and resistance. When their partner requests something, they say, "yes, and..." rather than, "yes, but". This positive attitude increases their sense of romance, play, fun, adventure and learning together.



Why does responding to our spouse's request with "yes, and" lead to positive feelings, whereas, responding with "yes, but" leads to more negative feelings?



Does anyone remember who avoids conflict most from your reading this week – men or women? Why do they avoid it?

Research from Gottman shows men avoid conflict most because their cardiovascular systems are more reactive and take longer to recover from

stress. It's that fight or flight response. It can be overwhelming for men to handle marital conflict, so they tend to avoid it.



Have notecards (enough for each person to have one).

Ask your group to number 1-5 down their notecard (have shorter length be the TOP of the notecard). Have the following phrases on the screen or printed big enough for everyone to see on paper that you'll hang up around the room. Instruct your group that you are going to show them a phrase commonly used in marriages that can lead to conflict. Ask them to write the first word they feel when they hear the phrase. When you go through all the phrases, ask for some to share the words they wrote for each phrase.

1. We need to talk.
2. Why are you getting so upset?
3. I always do everything; you never help me out.
4. Whatever, you choose.
5. What's wrong with you?

Gary Chapman in his book, *Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married*, says that when most of us have conflicts, we feel the need to talk, but talking without listening leads to arguments.

THE REAL NEED IS TO LISTEN. We can't reach a compromise without listening. Compromise means to find a meeting place. It requires each of us to be willing to give something up in order for us to have harmony.

The phrases we discussed earlier often lead to arguments. **In marriage it is never "having my way" – it is rather "discovering our way."**

We can:

- "Meet in the Middle" – Find a place in the middle of your original ideas that you both find workable.

- "Meeting on Your Side" – You choose what your spouse desires and do it with a positive attitude.
- "Meeting Later" – Agree to disagree for the moment and we'll come back to it.

SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND

HOW EACH PERSON HANDLES CONFLICT

This week you were asked in Prep Work 3 & 4 to be honest with each other about how you handle disagreement in your marriage. Harsh words were used in some of the questions; words like disrespectful, disapproval, judgment, not listening, and complaining.



ASK: Was it tough to do this together? What did you find difficult?

One of our session goals was to clearly identify unhealthy patterns of behavior when we communicate with our spouse. In their research at the Gottman Institute, they found that relationships will succeed even when problems aren't solved if you can identify and counteract The Four Horsemen. [NOTE: Distribute handouts you copied. See Tools.]

- **Criticism:** A criticism is an attack on your partner at the core of their character; whereas offering a critique or voicing a complaint are about specific issues. When criticism becomes pervasive in your relationship it can lead to some of the more deadly horsemen. It can make your partner feel assaulted.



I'm going to read the following statements, tell me whether you think it's a criticism or a complaint and why.

"I was scared when you were running late and didn't call me. I thought we had agreed that we would do that for each other." (complaint)

“You never think about how your behavior affects other people. I don’t believe you are forgetful, you’re just selfish. You never think of me.”
(criticism)

ANTIDOTE – Gentle Start Up. Before you offer a criticism ask yourself:

- What do I feel?
- What do I need?

- **Contempt:** When we communicate with contempt, we are truly mean – we treat others with disrespect, mock them with sarcasm, call them names, and mimic or use body language such as eye-rolling. Our partner feels despised and worthless.

Contempt assumes a position of moral superiority over them. **It is the single greatest predictor of divorce – it must be eliminated.**

ANTIDOTE – Build a Culture of Appreciation and Respect. Do small things often like regularly expressing appreciation, gratitude, affection and respect. The more positive you feel the less likely you’ll express contempt.

- **Defensiveness:** Is typically a response to criticism. When we feel unjustly accused, we make excuses or act like a victim. This strategy rarely works and communicates to our partner that we don’t take his or her concerns seriously and that we won’t take responsibility for our mistakes.

EXAMPLE:

Wife: “Did you call Brian and Sally and tell them we’re not coming tonight like you promised to do this morning?”

Husband: “I was too busy today. As a matter of fact, you know how busy my schedule was. Why didn’t you just do it?”

ANTIDOTE – Take Responsibility. Defensiveness is really a way of saying that the problem isn't me – it's you. Accept responsibility, even if only for part of the conflict. How could the response be said differently since you are taking responsibility?

- **Stonewalling:** This is usually a response to contempt and occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, and simply stops responding to their partner.

ANTIDOTE – Physiological Self-Soothing. Stop the conflict discussion and call a timeout. It should last for at least twenty minutes because it takes that long for your body physiologically to calm down. Don't focus on why you're frustrated; instead, do something soothing or distracting.

SEEKING TO GROW PERSONALLY AND GROW STRONGER MARRIAGES



READ Ephesians 4:31-32 (the Message)

“Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.”

The golden rule in managing conflict in your marriage is

NO ONE IS RIGHT.

Because our goal is to love and forgive like Jesus. When it's about winning, someone loses, and the reality is that we both lose.

Another truth is that negative emotions are important. We must listen when our partner's anger, sadness, disappointment, or fear is shared because it holds important information on how we can love one another more fully. It matters HOW we share our negative emotions, but not sharing them leads to toxic feelings, attitudes, and actions.



Does anyone remember from last week what it means to validate our spouse? It's when we recognize or affirm the worth of our partner's emotion.

ACCEPTANCE IS CRUCIAL

This leads to our last truth to help us strengthen our marriages and it is that acceptance is crucial! Our spouse must believe that we love, understand, respect and accept them for who they are. Jesus offers us this kind of acceptance and we offer it to the person we love the most. This doesn't mean we always agree with one another, but we accept one another as being a beloved child of God.

CONCLUDE

Managing conflict is one of the toughest things we do in our marriages. It's crucial that you make space to have fun together. Be reminded why you got married in the first place. There's so much wisdom in knowing that the growth in marriage comes from the small things like appreciation, gratitude, respect, and humor.



Let's read together Colossians 3:12-14 as found in the Message as our commitment to one another:



"So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive. Forgive as quickly and completely as Jesus forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it."



Closing prayer.

TOOLS

One page (PDF) printout of John Gottman's

["THE FOUR HORSEMEN AND HOW TO STOP THEM WITH THEIR ANTIDOTES"](#)

[\[click to open\]](#)

CONNECTING ON A DEEPER LEVEL

OVERVIEW

Each of us is created with a God-given desire for intimacy. As time progresses, it seems many obstacles creep into our marriages to keep us from experiencing the safe haven God desires our marriages to be. Our hope for this session is to explore ways to help deepen emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy in our marriages. It's never too late to deepen the connection we have with our spouse.

"Vulnerability is the essence of romance. It's the art of being uncalculated, the willingness to look foolish, the courage to say 'This is me, and I'm interested in you enough to show you my flaws with the hope that you may embrace me for all that I am but, more important, all that I am not.'" - Ashton Kutcher

LEADER LETTER

DEAR LEADER,

This session could be one that creates good discussion between the group. Be sure to think through some of the Driving Questions and create your own thought-provoking questions to discuss in your group. You know your group and the dynamics better than anyone, so craft questions that would be beneficial to your couples.

One of the main purposes in this session is to look at how our spiritual intimacy with God gives us the ability to connect emotionally and physically with our spouse.

Most couples, who have been married for some time, know the reality of missing each other. Busyness, life circumstances, hurt, external pressures, etc. rob us from connecting on a deeper level.

We are hopeful this session will slow couples down, allow them to breathe deep, and provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to re-focus their attention. Many couples find themselves trapped in the dailiness of their routines and forget to share their lives with one another.

The bottom line is we hope that your time will provide the much-needed intentionality for couples to connect on a deeper level.

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

HOW DO WE REALLY KNOW ONE ANOTHER?

“Deep emotional intimacy is when we feel wholly accepted, respected, and admired in the eyes of our mate even when they know our innermost struggles and failures.”
— Jill Savage

SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO INTIMACY

- To identify ways that couples may have grown distant from each other because of selfishness and laziness and to challenge them to spend intentional time connecting emotionally, seeking God together spiritually, and making physical intimacy a priority.

KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **Philippians 2:3-5** - Unselfishness; consider others as more important than self.
- **Genesis 1:28, 2:24-25; Matthew 19:5-6** - Sex within the covenant of marriage is holy, good, and encouraged.
- **Matthew 6:33** - Seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness.

STARTER QUESTIONS - REVIEW OF PREP WORK



Opener: Why are some seasons in marriage harder to connect than others?
(Prep Work #2 - question 1)

What are some common reasons couples lose connection and intimacy in marriage?

Refer to a paragraph in the Synopsis – page 108 in *Together* workbook:

“The undercurrent of self-centeredness easily tugs us toward isolation unless we graciously move forward in a unified means. This requires each of us to own our part and change our behavior. It starts with me!”

What are some ways you become selfish in your relationship and what prompts it? (Prep Work #2 - question 3)

We all stood at the altar and made a vow to “love, honor, and cherish one another”.



Share about a time in your marriage when you felt cherished and honored.
(Prep Work #2 -question 4)



Does anyone want to share some takeaways from Prep Work #4 of your “one-hour rendezvous”?



Pray for your time together

TEACHING PLAN

STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

- To identify ways that couples may have grown distant from each other because of selfishness and laziness and to challenge them to spend intentional time connecting emotionally, seeking God together spiritually, and making physical intimacy a priority.
- In this session, we want you to “lean on” and “lean in!”

LEAN ON GOD

Refer back to this quote from Session 1 – page 14

"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



Oswald Chambers: "No love of the natural heart is safe unless the human heart has been satisfied by God first."



How have you seen this to be true in your marriage?

Why do you think that Spiritual oneness is the foundation of a healthy marriage/home?



Matthew 6:33- "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you."

There is a HUGE difference between a marriage with 2 Christians and a Christ-Centered Marriage. There are a lot of Christians who get married but there aren't a lot of CHRIST-centered marriages!



Show this on a screen or through a handout created by Gary and Carrie Oliver.

MARRIAGE WITH TWO CHRISTIANS	CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE
Jesus is Valued	Jesus is Lord
Problem-focused	Growth-focused
You Are Here for Me (Self-Focused)	I Am Here for You (Other-Focused)
Conditional Love (Contract Marriage)	Unconditional Love (Covenant Marriage)
I Focus on Me & You	I Focus on Us
I Hear You	I Listen to You
I Want to be Understood	I Choose to Understand
I Want to be Served	I Seek Opportunities to Serve
I Assume the Worst	I Assume the Best
I Pray Periodically	I Pray Without Ceasing
Individual Spirituality	Shared Spirituality
Lord, Change My Spouse	Lord, Change Me

“God’s case for marriage is not about a prescription for thrills and feel-good. It is not a game plan designed to produce soul mates whose overarching achievement is personal emotional fulfillment. God’s case for marriage is based on his goal of the transformation of his people into faithful image bearers. But what Christians discover (often to their surprise) is that once they buy into God’s program, personal fulfillment at an undreamed-of-level comes as an unlooked-for-by-product of old-fashioned obedience and willingness to fit into God’s plan.” (Matthews and Hubbard, *Marriage Made in Eden*, 2010)

Leaning on God causes us to be able to lean in towards one another

LEAN IN TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER

We all love the thought of being real and being accepted for who we are – not having to be something we are not.

God’s call for marriage in Genesis 2 is just that. The Bible says, “the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.” Vulnerable. Yet, confident and secure to be who we were created to be. Are you willing to allow your spouse to see into the inner caverns of your being?



Why is it tough for us to be vulnerable when we long to be real?

There are a couple of areas that allow us – even push us – to “get naked” in our marriages. To become totally exposed, to get real. To fully give of ourselves to the other. To say, you are important, and no matter what, I will never leave you nor turn my back on you.

The first “get naked” seems obvious.

Sexually – But great sex in marriage is a by-product of your spiritual and emotional connections. Sex isn’t just about the sex.



What advice about sex would you give to a young couple about to be married?

How does our culture define sex for a married couple? What purpose does it serve? How is it evaluated?



How do you see the Christian culture being lured into the insanity of sex?

Why is sex such a powerful tool in marriage?

168 hours in a week -There are 168 hours in a week and the average couple spends one to two hours in sexual activity each week. Those one to two

hours are completely dependent on the other 166. Things like rest, nutrition, stress, work schedules, money, communication, spiritual attitudes, dirty clothes, dishwashing, and giving one another undivided attention all factor into the equation.



Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, and discuss what 'holy and honorable' Christian sexuality might look like? You may wish to consult 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.

The second area to "get naked" is...

Emotionally – Share what is important to you. Connect with words, feelings, insights, concerns, frustrations, etc. Bond! Make the little things important. Marriage experts call it "**turning toward each other**" in little ways on a daily basis.

All of us can do this through hugs, kisses, playful fun, flirting, humor, kind remarks, encouragement, saying "I love you," speaking well of each other publicly, expressing appreciation, saying "thank you," etc.



Brag on your spouse. How has your spouse "turned toward you" in a little but memorable way since we started this study?

By making a unilateral decision to lean in no matter how you feel or how your spouse is treating you honors God and deepens your marital intimacy.

How does this honor God?



Have couples turn to each other and express one takeaway from this session of how they have been challenged to **lean on** God and **lean in** toward their spouse?

CONCLUDE



Close your time by praying Psalm 63.

You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.
I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.
Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

SO WHAT... NOW WHAT

Overview

Each couple has put in the hard work of building their marriages together these past eight weeks. You have been vulnerable, honest, and dedicated. We are hopeful that you are seeing the results of your efforts. The intention of this session is to take time to purposefully reflect, analyze and evaluate what you have experienced. We will help you make an action plan to continue strengthening your marriage.

"A sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on." — C.S. Lewis

LEADER LETTER

Dear Leader,

Congratulations! You have made it to the end. Thank you for the investment into these married couples. We hope the journey has been rewarding for you as well as your small group.

Make your last meeting one of celebration! But also make it meaningful and challenging. Be sure to hold them accountable in completing their Action Plan.

As you are keenly aware, a 9 session study isn't enough to "magically" change a marriage. Couples must learn from it and put those truths into practice.

Healthy rhythms need to be established.

Intentionality should drive their focus.

And the Holy Spirit faithfully has been unleashed.

That's when transformation takes place.

Our vision for this last session is for you to guide your couples into an honest conversation of what they have learned, process that together as a group to encourage one another, and then challenge each couple to develop healthy patterns.

Thanks again for giving your life away for the sake of the Gospel. Don't forget to pray daily for the couples in your group.

"What God has joined together, don't let humanity destroy." Matthew 19:5-6. Let God use this remarkable tool of husband and wife to help change our crazy world!

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

HOW DO WE ESTABLISH HEALTHY RHYTHMS?

"A year ago, everything was different. And now that I look back, I realize that a year can do a lot to a person." – Anonymous

SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO REFLECT

- To celebrate completing the last eight sessions by sharing an honest conversation of what couples have learned, processing that together as a group, and then challenging each couple to develop an action plan of healthy patterns.

KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **Psalm 139:23-24** – Investigate our lives in order to get a clear perspective so that we can be led down the right path.
- **Romans 12:1-3** – Renew our minds – approve God's will.
- **1 Corinthians 7:17** – Sage advice from Paul helping the church of Corinth gain perspective about being married or single or struggling in marriage. NOTE: Read from *The Message*.
- **Hebrews 11:1** – Defining faith helps guide hope, and hope helps define our faith.

Starter Questions - Review of Prep Work

Create a fun atmosphere – have special snacks or drinks to celebrate the end of the course.



Opener: Play a fun and brief game.

“Looking For...” Game

You are looking for the first married couple that best matches the description. Use the following categories or come up with some of your own:

I am looking for the couple who . . .

- married on or closest to an official holiday.
- married on or closest to one of their birthdays.
- had the shortest honeymoon.
- birthed the most children between their wedding day and 5th anniversary.
- lived the furthest apart when they went out on their first date.
- on my “go,” can hold the longest sustained kiss without looking around.
- both husband and wife completed EVERY Prep Work learning activity in the *Together* workbook???
- The couple who NEVER fought while working through the Prep Work in the workbook. [Give them a prize!]

As we stated at the beginning, our hope was that the Holy Spirit would be an instructor throughout this process...even if you fought a little or didn't complete all of the Prep Work. We are hopeful that God still met you.

Let's attempt to bring together all of our thoughts, analyze and evaluate them, and then set the table to create a way forward – an action plan.

So in our time, we want to reflect on the

What?

So what?

Now what? of our time together.

TEACHING PLAN

STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

- To celebrate completing the last eight sessions by sharing an honest conversation of what couples have learned, processing that together as a group, and then challenging each couple to develop an action plan of healthy patterns.

TIMES OF REFLECTION INCREASES OUR FAITH



So here is what we are going to do, and we would love to hear from each person in the room. Let's start by answering these questions from Prep Work #1:

What?

Describe two or three "teachable moments" that have taken place for you.

So what?

List 3 things you have learned about yourself, your relationship with your spouse, attitudes, actions, thoughts, understanding and any improvements.

Now what?

Identify 3 action steps you personally want to do to improve and develop your marriage.

Ralph Waldo Emerson beautifully penned, **“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.”**

This process you just completed is the essence of faith. Hebrews 11:1 reminds that, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” This is what the ancients were commended for as verse 2 proclaims. Our marriages need faith in action. We are in need of hope!

WE DON'T KEEP VOWS – THE VOWS KEEP US

As you know, there can be dark days, and this study has been a reminder that “God will never leave us nor forsake us.” We have discovered that we are NOT the only ones who have struggles. We need each other!

Mike Mason has it right when he confidently states,

“We don't keep vows – the vows keep us.”

Hope keeps moving us forward and toward one another – together, forever. Gaining a new vision creates love. Learning to love requires something bigger than ourselves – a SUPERnatural God. Above our natural order.

Ultimately, we long to see our Creator. He is the author and perfecter of our faith. God is our hope and our strength in times of trouble. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, the Holy Spirit graciously grants us new vision to see the world differently, to see our marriages differently and to experience life differently. Ultimately, we learn to love like Jesus.



Couple Activity: Work together as a couple to get your Action Plan started by thinking back to your letters from Prep Work #4 and each session's “My Epiphany.”

Take 5-10 minutes to identify 3 Growth Areas. **Complete page 127.**

As a couple, what growth areas do you need to improve?

Clearly define what you want to do or behavior you want the Holy Spirit to change.

NOTE: This helps each couple start their Action Plan. Briefly explain why it is important to have future intentions moving forward. Remind them to take some time in the next few days to complete their 5 Future Intentions – What do you want to accomplish? Remember to identify the skills or behaviors you need to work on and any resources to help you.

PILING UP STONES

It's good for us, like Jacob in Genesis 28, to pile up stones to remember all that God has done in our lives.

Think creatively to give each person in your group a tangible object that can remind them of doing the hard work of this course. [Examples: stones with "Matthew 19:5-6" written on them, print, and frame one of the meaningful quotes from Together, use your "Pinterest" brain.]



As you hand each couple their "remembrance," say a brief word of encouragement to them about their marriage. Everyone needs encouragement.

In order to make changes in our marriages, we need the Holy Spirit to help maintain the focal point.

LEADER NOTE: This would be a great time to remind those who are struggling or stuck that we have all been there. Offer local and church resources such as counseling, mentoring, Re-Engage, marriage intensives, marriage conferences, etc.

CONCLUDE



Read Romans 12:1-3 (MSG) to conclude.

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

...The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.” (Romans 12:1-3, MSG)



Be sure and save ample time to pray for one another.

End the time by the group praying specifically over each couple. We are all in this together!

GRANT US A VISION, LORD,
TO GIVE HEED TO YOUR CONSTANT CALL.