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STRIVING FOR A CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE
I was so inspired sitting on the couch with Chip and Theresa Ingram. Chip is a great teaching pastor and does a phenomenal job in this series teaching about what it takes to have a marriage built to last. But I was even more impressed when we interviewed Chip and Theresa about their triumphs and trials in marriage. Their story is a remarkable example of how God honors the hard work couples pour into their relationship.

Tomorrow my wife, Julie, and I have a meeting with the District Attorney and Child Protective Services. We had a similar meeting a few months ago. As foster parents, we love the children that come into our home, but we’re not quite used to the loss of privacy and extra meetings that have invaded our life.

A meeting like this gets you thinking about the seasons in life that led up to this point.

Our Heritage

Julie and I were married on January 1, 2000. We didn’t think specifically of the words “built to last,” but if you had asked us on our wedding day, both of us would have said our marriage will stand the test of time. It’s all we knew.

Both sets of our parents have been married for over 35 years. They made it through the ups and downs in the economy, through surgeries and health crises, through five kids (that’s diapers to empty nest and everything in between). Julie and I are products of marriages that were built to last.

In fact, our four sets of grandparents modeled this too. Julie’s grandparents all passed away having lived a lifetime committed to their spouses. Both sets of my grandparents have celebrated over 50 years of marriage and are still setting the example for the rest of us.

As I look back, it’s obvious that our parents were products of our grandparents’ marriages. And the cycle continues through Julie and I. Now, I’m not saying there’s a magic formula or equation: grandparents married for life + parents married for life = Julie and I married for life.
Opening Our Eyes

In 2000, Julie and I traveled to India to do some filming for a documentary at an orphanage. For the first time, we felt the hurt and pain children feel when they don’t have a mom or dad to hold them, love them, and share Christ with them. It was eye-opening.

In 2001, our small group at church watched a Bluefish TV DVD resource where one of the stories highlighted a young couple faithfully serving others. We were so inspired watching that story. We began searching for ways we could serve together based on our skills and passions.

In 2002, we had another overseas experience in Romania to serve children in need. Julie spent the week with babies who barely got enough physical and emotional attention to function as healthy humans. I witnessed the long-term results of neglect with teenagers who acted like 8 year olds. They would rock back and forth as a natural habit because they didn’t receive enough hugs and kisses as babies. It was heartbreaking as our eyes were opened even wider.

It would be nice if a formula did exist because then I wouldn’t have to worry about my kids or even work that hard at my marriage. The cycle would just naturally continue without any effort.

Just like the formula above isn’t a sure thing, the opposite formula isn’t true either: divorced grandparents and/or divorced parents = you will get divorced.

But as I think about the phrase “built to last,” I’m realizing more than ever that the only way for marriages to endure is with a lot of intentionality. It’s what I have seen in our grandparents and what I see in our parents. They worked at it together.
Later that year, Julie became good friends with a girl in her office named Lori. In natural conversation, Lori told Julie about a friend of hers who was a foster parent. Julie was intrigued by the stories Lori would tell, and Julie shared those stories with me.

At the same time, I was involved with creating a conference called LeadNow for pastors and volunteer leaders across the country. The goal of the conference is to teach and inspire leaders to mobilize their people to action… to find ways to serve God and others.

Julie and I realized it was time for us to take the LeadNow message and make it personal to us— with less talking and more obeying. So we started pursuing the steps to become foster parents. It was clear that God had given us experiences in the past that opened our eyes and hearts to children in need. It was also something we could do together.

We knew that in becoming foster parents, we wanted to be the hands and feet of Jesus to whatever little child came into our home. We knew that we might have a child for two weeks or 12 months before the court would send them back to their family. But no matter how long they would be in our home, we wanted to model a marriage and a family that honors Christ.

**Our Mission**

Over the past two years, I learned that I’ve taken my parents and grandparents for granted. I didn’t realize what a blessing it is to have a stable home with parents who are committed to each other. Julie and I have seen a glimpse into a world where there is no good, working model for these children—they don’t have a heritage that reflects marriages built to last.

It hasn’t always been easy for Julie and me. Our marriage has seen its share of disagreements (like whose family to spend Thanksgiving with); its share of loss (like our miscarriage); and its share of trials (like fretting over job decisions). I think this mission of becoming foster parents has superseded the other hurdles that could have slowed us down. We’re on mission together and it gives purpose and meaning to our marriage.

And so, tomorrow we meet with the DA and representatives from Child Protective Services. We are in a position to possibly adopt the precious little “angel” who has been in our home the last ten months. We’re nervous and eager and hopeful and stressed all at the same time. It could be that in a few months we’ll officially become Dad and Mom to this little girl. Or it could be that the courts decide something different.
Either way, we are in this together. We have prayed together with more fervor. We have lifted each other up when the other was down. We have communicated more deeply and openly. We have a greater appreciation for one another.

Working on this *Marriage: Built to Last* DVD series has heightened my passion for the message of marriage. I love that our Bluefish TV team partnered with Chip Ingram to help put marriage at the front and center of small groups across the country. Strong marriages are the foundation to healthy families. These families come together to form the church. It’s the church, Scripture tells us, that is the bride of Christ. But when marriages unravel, it neutralizes the church’s influence to a broken world.

**Built to Last**

So if the goal is a marriage built to last, then maybe there are patterns from the past that we have to break. We have to go against the hijacked version of marriage that culture throws in our face every day. Maybe we need to have the guts to say that what we’re currently doing isn’t working.

This will take effort to establish new patterns.

This will take intentionality to abandon culture’s me-centered message and live as one flesh.

This will take couples committing, to each other and to God, to pursue Biblical marriage.

Julie and I don’t have it all figured out. We have learned to be thankful for our heritage, to be observers of other marriages ahead of us in the journey, and to be intentional about our purpose as a couple.

We are hoping and praying that tomorrow’s meeting will be a step closer towards adopting this little angel into a family tree with deep roots. If God answers this prayer, then we’ll start praying that growing up in our home will provide a foundation for her future marriage (built to last).

Brian Mosley is the Sr. Producer for Bluefish TV and Director of The RightNow Campaign
Let’s face it. As new or seasoned leaders, our faults and insecurities cast shadows of doubt on our confidence to lead well. We think to ourselves: Who am I to lead a small group? Here are five common questions when it comes to leading and growing a small group:

1. **WHAT IF I DON’T FEEL CONFIDENT?**

Leading a small group isn’t about your ability. It’s about what God will do through you as the group’s facilitator. When you realize it’s a team effort, your overall view of leading will change. You’ll start to feel confident because you’re in community and participating with others. Above all, when you trust in Christ to help you lead and guide the discussion, those feelings of inadequacy will slowly fade away.

*Alan Danielson*, Independent Small Group consultant, shares more. Check out his 2-minute free online training video clip on SmallGroupExchange.com under the video: Alan Danielson :: I don’t feel confident in my leadership.

2. **HOW DO I HELP MY GROUP REALLY CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER?**

Getting your group to connect and gel on an authentic level has a lot to do with how you choose to open up. If you lead with a heart of authenticity, your group will feel the freedom to do the same. If you pretend like you don’t have struggles or sin issues, your group will never be vulnerable and spiritual growth will remain stagnant.

Early on, share your story and give your group snapshots into your life and who you are. Be honest about your struggles or sin issues. Ask icebreaker questions to the whole group. Love on them well and carve out social time together. And before you know it, you’ll be amazed at how naturally your group gels as a whole.

*Mike Hurt*, Senior Pastor of Parkway Church, shares more. Check out his 2-minute free online training video clip on SmallGroupExchange.com under the video: Mike Hurt :: How do I help my group gel?

3. **HOW DO I DEAL WITH AWKWARD SILENCES AFTER I ASK A QUESTION?**

Silence can sometimes indicate that you need to restate the question better. Launch questions that get people talking about themselves. If your group still isn’t opening up, set aside Bible study and discussion time for a few weeks and provide ways for your group to get to know each other in different settings.
Silence could also mean you need to practice more patience. Wait for about 20 seconds after you ask a question for your group to reflect and think. If your group still doesn’t answer, make eye contact with someone directly. i.e.: “John, what do you think about…?” You can also prompt the discussion by being the first to answer your own question.

**Dave Treat**, Director of Innovation for Group Life at Willow Creek Community Church, shares more. Check out his 2-minute free online training video clip on SmallGroupExchange.com under the video: Dave Treat :: What do I do if my group won’t talk?

**4. WHAT IF I DON’T KNOW AN ANSWER TO A QUESTION?**

Consider bouncing that question right back for your group to answer. Let them know you don’t know the answer but are interested in their feedback. Tell them you’d be glad to research that one later and get back to them. Being open allows for your group to see that you’re all on the journey together. Tough questions, even though intimidating, can carry your group into new depths spiritually and relationally.

**Mark Batterson**, Pastor of National Community Church, shares more. Check out his 2-minute free online training video clip on SmallGroupExchange.com under the video: Mark Batterson :: What do I do when someone asks a tough question?

**5. WHAT DO I DO WHEN THERE’S CONFLICT?**

Even though it’s really tempting, don’t run away from the inevitable conflict. Bring it to the surface by going to that person alone. Find out what’s driving the conflict (Prov. 20:5). Is something triggering a selfish attitude, a constant need to talk, or a critical tone of voice? God speaks about what to do with conflict all throughout Scripture (Matt. 18). Aim for healthy conflict that will build community and not tear it down.

**John Burke**, Lead Pastor of Gateway Community Church, shares more. Check out his 2-minute free online training video clip on SmallGroupExchange.com under the video: John Burke :: What if there’s conflict in my group?

Hopefully these suggestions along with other free online video training from SmallGroupExchange.com will encourage you all the more to lead and grow your group to its fullest potential.

_Samantha Krieger is the content editor and a writer for SmallGroupExchange.com_
ARE YOU A TRADER?

What do you want to be remembered for?
What is your passion?
What gifts has God given you?
How can you use them?
Does your life matter?

When these questions go unexplored, our senses become dull and we find ourselves going through the motions of life and pursuing the American Dream.

The RightNow Campaign is shaping a movement within this generation of people who are willing to trade in the pursuit of the American Dream for a world that desperately needs Christ.

Being a trader means being intentional with your time, your money and your passions.

A trader is a new kind of missionary - not defined by geography - but marked by a willingness to apply the parable of the Good Samaritan and “go and do likewise.”

If you are looking for opportunities where you or your group can put your faith into action, search our ministry website rightnow.org. We have posted thousands of local and international service opportunities and we have a team of coaches who are available to provide further help.

It’s time right now for the people of the church to step up and find tangible ways to use their God-given passions and skills to bring hope and change to the world.
Just a few things to check out at RightNow.org

FATHERING THE FATHERLESS
Looking for 1,000 churches to raise up mentors for fatherless boys in your community

WATER FOR ALL OF LIBERIA, AFRICA
Looking for people to give money and raise awareness to solve the water crisis for an entire country

EVANGELISM FROM YOUR LIVING ROOM
Respond to phone calls and email from those already looking to learn more about Jesus

JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS
Build caregiver medical kits that will go to the frontline battle against AIDS
This Leader's Guide is a tool to help you combine the video and Bible Study into a dynamic growth experience. Go online to: http://www.bluefishtv.com/Handouts to download logos, posters or flyers to help promote this series to your group. Be sure to order enough Workbooks for each member of your group in advance and pass them out in the first session. You can use the Leader's Guide as your own workbook.

With that in mind, let's preview the Leader's Guide. The main body of the Guide is written as a conversation you would have with the class. **When there’s a specific question to ask,** it appears in bold type. (If you’re looking for a quick answer, the suggested answer sometimes appears in parentheses after the question.) But most of the questions are open for discussion, so they have no (suggested) answers. Take some time in advance to consider the Bible Study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion. **Leader:** When we want to whisper directions about logistics or breaking into groups, we’ll use italics.

Each lesson has particular sections:
GETTING ACQUAINTED

This section can be adjusted to the character of your group, but don’t skip it for several reasons. (1) Every group needs transition time into deeper issues. (2) Your group can better get to know each other. (3) The introductory questions draw out practical connections between the topic and their lives. If your group knows one another well, you obviously don’t need to spend much time on it.

VIDEO

Because every group session includes a video portion, think about the logistics in advance. Will everyone be able to see clearly? Set the audio at a comfortable level before the session. Make sure everyone has their own workbook and encourage them to take notes during the video.

TALKING IT OVER

Discussing and reflecting on what your group has just watched helps them remember and think deeper on the real-life stories and key teaching points from the video.

Some of the discussion questions also try to connect the video teaching to your group’s emotions or experience. *Is that true in your life? Do you have the same issue?* Solid discussions allow for a smooth transition into studying Scripture.

BY THE BOOK

This section focuses heavily on Scripture. Sometimes we ask questions like: What does this verse/word mean? Keep in mind there could be differing
.opinions. Meaning comes from what the author intended, not from what we read into it. A discussion that involves people bouncing views off one another in an attempt to reach the author’s meaning can be quite productive.

A CLOSER LOOK

It’s easy to just accept teaching from Scripture and move on, but no lasting change occurs until you put the truth into practice. This section will help your group think critically on what specific words mean, how they’re used, and how to apply them in everyday scenarios.

WORKING THINGS OUT

This is the time to apply what you’ve learned together by dividing your group into smaller groups or family couples. Your class will work on situations and personal issues brought up earlier in the video, Bible study and discussion. In these smaller groups, members will be able to talk and inspire each other’s thinking even further on issues addressed from the video and Scripture.

TOGETHER AT HOME

This section is a final word to send the couples home with a few questions to consider and discuss together. There may also be some structured questions in the workbook that a couple may complete in private to further apply what they’ve discovered in class.
Chip Ingram is the Founder and Teaching Pastor for Living on the Edge, an international ministry that provides guided pathways to authentic discipleship. His passion is to help everyday Christians actually “live like Christians” by raising the bar of discipleship.

Chip has been a pastor of growing churches in Texas and California for over 25 years. He spent five years as President of Walk Thru the Bible. Chip holds an M.S. degree from West Virginia University and a Th.M. degree from Dallas Theological Seminary.

Chip is author of 10 books, including Good to Great in God’s Eyes, Effective Parenting in a Defective World, God: As He Longs For You to See Him, Overcoming Emotions That Destroy, and Love, Sex and Lasting Relationships. His teaching can be heard on hundreds of radio stations world-wide, multiple television outlets, and on the internet. Chip and his wife, Theresa, have four adult children and six grandchildren.

LivingontheEdge.org

ALSO FROM CHIP INGRAM:

- Love, Sex & Lasting Relationships
- Experiencing God’s Dream for Your Marriage
- Effective Parenting in a Defective World
SESSION 1

ADJUSTING TO EXPECTATIONS
We see examples of married couples all the time on TV and in the movies—sitcoms and dramas, adventure flicks and romances. Think about a specific scene you’ve watched lately.

**What was it telling you about marriage?**
**According to that scene, is marriage fulfilling, annoying, easy, difficult, funny, sad . . . what?**

**Leader:** Be ready with an example of something you’ve seen yourself. Try to get beyond one-word answers with follow-up questions like “Why do you think that?” or “What could they have done differently?”

Throughout our lives we gather lots of ideas about what marriage is and what it’s supposed to be—from the media, yes, but also from our parents, our friends, our church, etc. As a result, we tend to enter marriage with a lot of expectations, and some of these don’t match up to reality. That’s what today’s session is focusing on.

**Leader:** Make sure everyone has a workbook, and invite them to take notes during the video if they’d like.

**VIDEO**

Play Session 1: *Adjusting to Expectations* (26 Minutes)
Let’s think back to the story of football player, Kurt Warner, and his wife, Brenda. They had that great first meeting while line dancing, but then—right up front—Brenda says, “Look, I’m divorced with two kids.” She tells him she’d completely understand if he never wanted to see her again.

**Do you think he expected that? How did he react?** (He says it added to the intrigue. He wanted to know her better.)

**How do you think she expected him to react?** (Obviously she was expecting him to be scared away by her situation.)

Brenda said they dated for “a very long time” before they got married. As Kurt explained it, “You know, you get into that mode where . . . I don’t want to take that next step until I’m financially set or until I know what my future is going to be or until I know where I’m going to be.”

**Do you think this is pretty common? Do people wait to accomplish things in their own lives before committing to a marriage? Is this a good idea? Why should that personal uncertainty keep a person from moving into marriage?**

There could be some great discussion on this, and it comes back to some basic questions of *expectations*. People have plans and dreams for their individual lives, but these goals regularly get revised when they commit to marriage. Suddenly your plans and dreams are mutual matters.

**In the video Kurt said,** “As I grew to know [God] more personally . . . I was able to step out and ask Brenda to marry me.” **How would his spiritual growth lead him to make this commitment? Is marriage a spiritual issue?**

God cares about every aspect of our lives, and he leads some couples together into marriage. Some couples probably *shouldn’t* get married. But it seems that Kurt was in the process of weighing his personal goals against the commitment of marriage. As he grew spiritually, he might have become less self-focused and more open to love—a mature, committed love.
Brenda talked about how it was early in Kurt’s football career. Her expectation was that he would get a solid 9-to-5 job and support the family, but he had this dream of playing in the NFL. It’s easy for us to look back on that, knowing that Kurt became a football star, but at that time it was just a pipe dream.

**How do you think Brenda got through those times when Kurt was obscure and underpaid, just chasing a dream? How would you deal with that? Does anyone have a similar example?**

As any football fans will know, Kurt Warner became a champion NFL quarterback. Did you hear what he said about this sudden success? “When everything took off from a football standpoint, it forced Brenda and I to become closer. So many new things came flying at us that we didn’t understand, that we didn’t know how to deal with. This kind of blew us both out of the water.”

**What do you think is more taxing on a marriage, the struggle to succeed or the attainment of success?**

A lot of couples look back at the years when they were “poor but happy” as a great time of togetherness. With success come distractions and higher expectations. Others find that the struggle to succeed puts additional burdens on a marriage.

Kurt and Brenda mentioned a number of issues that we’ll be discussing in this series—expectations, anger, and communication—but it was especially interesting that they talked about trust.

**Brenda said, “He’s better than anybody that I’ve ever met but I don’t trust him 100%.” Did you find it surprising that she would say that?**

**How can a couple develop trust in each other?**

In a way this is the flip side of expectations. Brenda was cheated on before, so she expects it might happen again. We often develop our expectations—good and bad—from past experience. The rebuilding of trust is a difficult thing, especially if someone’s wound runs deep. It requires understanding, communication, and consistently acting in a trustworthy manner.
In the video, Chip Ingram mentioned the “Hollywood model” that gives us a lot of our expectations about marriage. (We talked a bit about this earlier.) Here’s how Chip defined it:

“You’re going to find the right person. Then you’re going to fall in love and you set your hopes and dreams on them. You get married and there’s the pretty dress and it’s wonderful. Then you’re going to move in together and it’s going to be awesome.”

What’s wrong with that picture? Isn’t that the way it really happens?

No need to be overly somber about this, because there are many wonderful moments like that in courtship and marriage. People do fall in love and have storybook weddings. But as you all know, real life has its struggles. As you continue on in your marriage, things are not always “awesome.”

What happens, then, with our expectations? If we go into marriage expecting the “Hollywood model” of awesomeness, what happens?

We get disappointed. Sometimes we blame it on ourselves, sometimes on the other person. We feel we should be doing better than we’re doing. Some people panic, thinking they must have married the wrong person. Some marriages fall apart because they don’t match up to those unrealistic expectations.

Here’s what Julie said in the video: “What keeps me from being truly happy in my marriage is just having set in my mind this is how it should be. And when it goes wrong, I’m completely insecure, unstable, unhappy.”

The premise of this lesson is that our expectations of marriage are warped. We’re letting the movies tell us what marriage should be, when we should be listening to God. What is God’s definition of marriage? What are his expectations for us? To find the answers, let’s go back to the beginning.

BY THE BOOK

Turn to Genesis 1. Here we have the familiar creation account, but there’s a very important explanation at the end of the chapter, after God has made the earth and all the plants and animals. Would someone read verses 26-28?
We see a phrase repeated several times. Man was made “in God’s image”? What do you think that means?

There have been many theories about this. The basic meaning is that humans are like God in some way. Verse 26, itself, gives us authority over the earth, and so that might be the idea here—just as God rules everything, he puts us in charge of the earth. Some have suggested that God’s image is about creativity—all we know about God at this point in Genesis is that he is a creator, and we are also creative.

But there’s another theory that picks up the strange wording at the beginning of the verse—“Let us make man in our image.” Christians see a hint of the Trinity in this verse. In any case, it appears that God is in relationship with himself, and so he has created humans to be in relationship. Perhaps the love between a husband and wife is an image—a reflection—of God’s love. (That would explain the emphasis on “male and female” in verse 27.)

In verse 28, what are the first commands God gives to humans? (“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule . . .”)

What does this tell us about God’s vision for humanity?

He obviously didn’t want them to stay in Eden! They were to “fill the earth.” He intended that they would have children, who would grow up and have more children.

By the way, some folks have the notion that the “original sin” of Adam and Eve was sex. That’s far from the biblical truth. In fact, we might say that sex was the original command of God. Within that image-of-God, male-female relationship, he wanted them to “be fruitful.”

Leader: Someone might ask (or want to ask) where that leaves single people. Are singles out of God’s plan because they’re not in a marriage and being fruitful? No. It’s clear from 1 Corinthians 7 that singleness can be a special calling of its own.

Flip ahead to Genesis 2:18. You might notice that chapter 1 and chapter 2 seem like different stories. Chapter 1 seems to be an overview, but beginning in 2:4, we seem to zoom in to the story in more detail. In chapter 1 we learned that God created “male and female,” but early in chapter 2 we have only one human.
Would someone read verses 18-20?

**What does God decide to do?** (Make a helper suitable for the man.)

The Hebrew word for helper doesn’t necessarily mean an underling or servant. It refers to anyone who helps us, whether God or a ruler or a friend or an assistant. So the idea is merely that the man needed someone to join him in his task. Someone “suitable,” which essentially means “comparable to.” It seems as if God and Adam hunted through the animal kingdom for a suitable helper and couldn’t find one.

Would someone read verses 21-23?

**What did God do to resolve the problem?** (He made a woman from Adam’s rib.)

**According to this text, why is it important that the woman was made from a part of Adam’s body?**

She is “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” the man exclaims. There is a unity here. They belong together. Actually the Hebrew word for rib here can also mean “side” or “part,” so it’s not just some insignificant bone that gets turned into a helper. God grabbed a hunk of the man’s body and turned it into a suitable teammate. The emphasis here is on unity and connectedness.

Somebody read verses 24-25.

**What three things happen here?** (The man leaves his parents, unites with his wife, and they become one. Note that the Hebrew word which the NIV translates “unites with” is a strong term for adhering or clinging. We’ll follow the NASB and use the word “cleave.”)

Did Adam do these three things?

Trick question. Adam had no parents, nor did Eve, so this is obviously not written about them. It’s written about the rest of us. The writer of Genesis is going back to the beginning to explain how things should be in his time and going forward to our time. That’s important to consider, because this is obviously not merely a historical observation. It is presented to us as a continuing principle. We should leave, cleave, and become one.
Let’s look a bit more closely at these three things we’re supposed to do.

**In what ways does a married person need to “leave” his or her parents? What does that mean?**

We might consider *behavioral independence*. Your parents can no longer tell you what to do.

There’s a certain adjustment of *emotional priorities*. You need to care more about your spouse than your parents.

We should also consider *financial independence*. You need to be making your own living within your own household and not be dependant on parental support.

**Does this mean that we cut all ties with our parents?**

Not at all. We are still called to “honor” them, but our first allegiance is to our marriage. We might still ask our parents for advice, but we’re not bound to follow it. We can certainly continue to love our parents, but our spouse should come first.

**Why is this important to a marriage? Does too much connection to parents hurt a marriage? How?**

**Have you seen (or lived through) situations where this occurred?**

Leader: You’ll probably have some stories from the group, but be ready with one of your own—either from your life or from your observation of others.

**What does it mean to “cleave to” your spouse? In practical terms, how can we do that?**
We’re talking about allegiance and loyalty. Your spouse is the most important person in your world. You care what your partner thinks and feels—more than you care about other things. Your husband or wife matters more to you than your job. Other relationships take a back seat. In public, you stand up for your spouse, you look out for their best interests.

This cleaving also means a change in decision-making. Before you were married, you made your own decisions and did what you wanted, but now there’s a new entity involved. Me is replaced by us. Your individual desires take second place to what is best for the two of you.

There’s also a recognition of need. With your marriage, you have entered a situation where you are part of a whole. Your side has been scooped out of you and now you need your spouse in order to be whole. It doesn’t mean you’re any less smart or talented or interesting than you were before, it’s just that you’re connected to someone else.

This is difficult to buy into, and many people never do, but that need for connection requires a death-blow to self. The independent entity you used to be has to vanish. You are now connected to one another.

Leaving and cleaving brings us to a point of “becoming one flesh.” This is God’s dream for your marriage. It is a level of intimacy that encompasses your whole life, for the rest of your life. In future sessions we’ll be exploring more of what that intimacy is all about.

WORKING THINGS OUT

Let’s rewind a little bit and think about our expectations of marriage and how they compare to God’s expectations. We have a lot to talk about.

We’re going to divide into groups, but before we do, let’s review the ground rules. First, if you have a perfect marriage, get out now. You don’t belong here. We’re going to assume that everybody has issues and they’re here to work on those issues. With that in mind, we need to show support and discretion as we talk together. It would be a terrible thing if someone took something that was shared in this room and began gossiping about it.
Leader: Divide into small groups no larger than 5 or 6. Each group should be all men or all women. Direct them to the following material on page 15 of their workbooks.

Here’s a list of phrases that people said in the video. Look through these statements slowly and consider each one, whether it might apply to your marriage as well. Have you ever felt this way? After about three minutes, share your thoughts with your small group.

• After we got married the romance was done.

• Sometimes my husband doesn’t validate me because he puts other priorities first. I feel like he doesn’t think about my feelings.

• I feel like I argue with my wife over and over again about the exact same things.

• We fought a lot. We were really angry a lot. We both had unforgiveness issues.

• We both don’t fight fair, and so in our house it has been a dig-in-until-you-win kind of thing for both of us.

• If others could see inside our house, I would be so humiliated, because we aren’t acting like Christians.

• We knew . . . we weren’t going to divorce, but at the same time we would still kind of throw around the word.

• I definitely sacrificed to be married.

• I actually decided to get married out of guilt.

• I had been in charge of my life for so long that it was really hard to bring another person in and to know you’re not in charge.
Continuing the discussion, consider the following three categories. As you talk together and spur each other’s thinking, see if you personally can come up with at least two things to put in each category.

A. Things I expected about marriage that turned out to be true

B. Things I expected about marriage that turned out to be false

C. Things I didn’t expect about marriage that turned out to be true
In the video Julie said, “I think being a woman you want this fairytale marriage. You want it to be perfect and when it doesn’t go perfect, you just feel like you’re not being validated.”

She talks about being a woman and wanting a “fairytale marriage.” Do you think men want the same thing, or different?

How do you think your expectations of marriage have differed from those of your spouse?

We’ve taken a good look at our own expectations for marriage, but we’ve also looked into Scripture for God’s expectations. Genesis 2:24 gives us the principle of leaving, cleaving, and becoming one.

Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts to these questions:

Have I done a good job of “leaving” my parents behaviorally? (They no longer control my actions.)

Have I done a good job of “leaving” my parents emotionally? (My spouse is more important to me.)

Have I done a good job of “leaving” my parents financially? (We are economically independent from them.)
Is there some other entity—a job, possession, hobby, or person—I ought to “leave” in some way, so that my spouse has top priority?

How can I do this?

Do I “cleave” to my spouse by showing loyalty in public situations?

Do I “cleave” by making my spouse the most important person in my life?

Do I “cleave” by making decisions with my spouse and for our mutual benefit?

Do I “cleave” by emotionally needing my spouse?
What one thing have I done in the past week to “cleave” to my spouse?

Is there one cutting-edge issue, in which I need to “leave” or “cleave” more effectively? What is it?

**TOGETHER AT HOME**

Leader: *Draw the groups back together for a final word.*

It might be a good idea for you husbands and wives to talk together about the things you wrote down and discussed in the groups. It *might.* Are you really ready to work on these things? Then by all means open up about your expectations and surprises and disappointments. Roll up your sleeves and figure out how you can both “leave” and “cleave” and find a greater intimacy.

But I ask you to respect each other’s processes. Maybe one of you needs to think through this a little more. Maybe you’re not ready to roll up your sleeves just yet. That’s fine. But maybe there’s a time later in the week where you can take your workbooks and work through these issues—and pray through them—some more.
SESSION 2

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY
GETTING ACQUAINTED

Let’s start out with a bit of play-acting. We need a couple to play the parts of . . . a couple. The situation is this: You’re at home, talking about things that happened that day. You can make up anything you want—except each thing you say needs to start with the next letter of the alphabet. For example:

He: **A**ll day I was wondering what you were doing.

She: **B**ut I told you last night I had a meeting.

He: **C**ome on, now. Tell me how it was.

She: **D**ull.

You get the idea. Say anything you want, but start with the next letter. See if you can get through the whole alphabet.

**Leader:** *This can be a lot more challenging than it seems. It can also be a lot of fun. Choose “actors” who are comfortable being up front, but if they get into trouble, you could solicit alphabetical ideas from the rest of the class. If this goes well, try part two, described below. (And you might want to choose a different couple as “actors.”) If not, move on to the video.*

Now let’s try something a bit different. This couple is making plans for the weekend. The first line can start with any letter, but then every line must start with the last letter of the previous line. For instance:

She: What should we do on Saturday?

He: **Y**ou decide.

She: **E**asy. Let’s watch **T**V.

He: **V**ery good.

She: **D**on’t you want to?

**Leader:** *Give it a try. This is a little more difficult.*

One interesting thing about this exercise is that it forces you to do two important things that a lot of couples don’t do: (1) Really listen to each other; and (2) Wait for the other person to finish.
As you might have guessed, communication is our subject today. Let’s watch.

Leader: Make sure everyone has a workbook. Once again, invite them to take notes during the video if they’d like.

VIDEO

Play Session 2: Learning to Communicate Clearly (32 Minutes)

TALKING IT OVER

Let’s look back at the first couple we met, Brooke and Adam. You might remember the dominoes story, or when she got back from a business trip and he was playing a practical joke. Somehow it just seemed like they were on different wavelengths.

Have you ever experienced that, where one of you is trying to be funny, but the other gets hurt by it? Or a good, fun time suddenly turns bad? How can that happen?

Chip mentioned that sometimes it’s like marriage partners are speaking different languages. “You can love each other with all your heart,” he said, but you’ll have trouble if “one kind of emotionally speaks French and the other German.”

Do you think the differences are really that drastic? Is it really like speaking a different language? What have you experienced?

In the video we saw different styles of dealing with problems. Brooke said she gets angry, raising her voice and escalating the situation, while her husband Adam says, “I want to get away and think about it, and I want to process things and try to figure it out.” But with Ed and Tiffany it’s the wife who wants to pull away and process things, while the husband says, “I want to deal with it now!”
Do you and your spouse handle disagreements in different ways like Ed and Tiffany? Is one way better than the other?

Obviously your answer to that question will indicate your own style. There are clearly advantages and disadvantages to both. The spouse that prefers to settle things immediately won’t let a problem fester, but it might result in snap judgments and angry words. The spouse that prefers to pull away to process can stretch out a problem for days, weeks, or months, but it often yields a well-reasoned solution. Neither one is the “right” approach, but if two partners are using different approaches, they can create resentment and frustration.

How can a couple work through problems if they have such different approaches to those problems?

Here’s something Chip said in the video, and it’s worth memorizing: “The key of communication is the meeting of meanings. We need to learn to understand. We learn to become students of one another. We need to have other-centered, grace-filled, pulling-down-the-walls, risk-taking events called communication—and that doesn’t happen unless you recognize: (1) I’m going to tend to be selfish; (2) our personalities are really different; (3) I’m a man, she’s a woman (or vice versa); and (4) . . . we all have baggage.”

The “meeting of meanings.” What does that mean?

It’s not enough to say what you mean. You need to make sure your meaning gets “met.” Is the other person getting what you mean, and not just the words but also the feelings, the attitude? And when you listen to your spouse, you have to get more than just words. You need to understand the meaning. Study your partner, so you know what he or she means.

If you were going to live in a foreign country, you would study the language and the culture. You would be aware that they do things differently there, and you would want to avoid misunderstandings that could potentially cause difficulty. Well, you’ve chosen to live with another human being—and that can be similar to living in a foreign country. You might think you know their language, but maybe you don’t. If you understand how different your spouse is—in personality, in gender, and in the experiences that he or she brings into the marriage—you can begin your studies. That’s hard work, and the selfish part of you won’t want to do it. It’s easier
just to speak your own language, but that would cause misunderstandings. The labor involved in this cross-cultural communication is well worth it.

**We saw some people in the video who got into bad shape financially, and this put a serious strain on their relationship. Why do money issues have such power to pull couples apart?**

**What can we do about that? How can we deal effectively with money-based conflict?**

Money is a very practical part of our lives. We deal with it just about every day, so it’s an issue that keeps coming up. We can’t get away from it.

Many people develop money habits early in life, before they get married, so they bring some values and expectations into the marriage. As in Erica’s case, some bring substantial debts into a marriage. And since “the two become one” in a marriage, most couples merge their finances, so every decision one of them makes also affects the other. There is no “my money” and “your money” anymore, unless the couple specifically arranges that. There is only “our money,” but if the two partners have learned to deal with money differently, they could have problems.

We also tend to associate money with security, happiness, and personal value, whether we should or not. If money is tight, we worry. If I don’t make enough money, I might feel inadequate. If you make bad financial decisions that keep me from buying something I want, I might get angry with you. These aren’t good feelings to have, but we all have them.

For all these reasons, money is a major pitfall for many couples. That’s why communication is essential, not only for everyday spending decisions, but also regarding priorities and future plans.

**In the video, Chip said: “Communication is the highway on which love travels. It’s a lot of hard work, but we can learn to share hearts instead of just exchange words.” How is communication a “highway”? What did he mean by that?**

You might feel all sorts of love for your spouse, but it doesn’t go anywhere unless you can communicate effectively. Poor communication serves as a roadblock for many relationships.
What does it mean to “share hearts instead of words”?  

This is the “meeting of meanings.” Good communication goes far beyond words. If we can listen for the thoughts, desires, and values of the other person—their heart—we can respond at that level.

BY THE BOOK

Turn to Ephesians 4. We find some great principles of communication here, which work not only within marriage but in any relationship.

Would someone read verses 1-2?

**What sort of life are we supposed to live?** (A life “worthy of the calling we have received,” one of humility, gentleness, and patience.)

**What “calling” have we received?** (The apostle is talking about our calling as Christians, to serve Christ by loving others.)

**What sort of people do we need to be patient with? What sort of behavior do we need to “bear with”?** (We bear with behavior we don’t like. Obviously, he’s assuming that people will do things that try our patience. Even among Christians, there will be conflict. We might say that even in a Christian marriage, there will be conflict.)

Look ahead at verses 12-16. Paul is talking about the growth of Christians. We are moving toward “maturity” (v. 13), when we will “no longer be infants” (v. 14). Obviously there were some false teachings going around, and some “infantile” believers were being deceived. But instead of being deceived, our proper response is right there in verse 15—“speaking the truth in love.”

**What does “speaking the truth in love” mean to you?**

**Why is it difficult to do . . . especially in a marriage?**

Often the truth hurts. Generally love heals. When we love someone, we’re tempted to avoid speaking any truth that
might make them feel bad, and so we speak love but not truth. When conflict arises, we might speak the truth someone needs to hear, but not in a loving way, thus speaking truth without love. Putting both together can be a challenge.

*Does this outfit make me look fat? Did I make a fool of myself at the party?* Questions like this tax our ability to speak the truth in love, but it’s important to “share hearts and not just exchange words.” If you’re truly sharing a loving heart with your partner, then love is a key component of any communication.

Would someone read verses 22-24?

This is like the changing room at a clothing store. What are we supposed to take off, and what are we supposed to put on? (Take off the “old self” with its “deceitful desires.” Put on the “new self” in righteousness and holiness.)

In the last session we talked a bit about the expectations we bring into marriage. We compared God’s idea of marriage to the Hollywood model. We see a similar comparison here. As Christians, we come to marriage with renewed minds. What will this look like? The following verses spell it out in more detail.

Somebody read verses 25-29.

In these verses, what are we told to do or not do? (Don’t lie, but speak truthfully. Don’t sin when angry, and don’t let anger last, which would give the devil a foothold. Don’t steal, but use your hands to do something generous. Don’t talk in an “unwholesome” way, but use your words to build others up.)

We’ve already talked about truth-telling, but here we add the issue of anger. Is it wrong to be angry? (This verse would imply that anger happens whether we like it or not, but we can control what we do with it and how long it lasts. Anger itself is not wrong, as long as it doesn’t lead us into sin, and as long as we deal with the issue immediately—“before the sun goes down.”)

A thief who comes to Christ should stop stealing, but what should he do? (This isn’t just a list of no-no’s. The thief must do more than just stop stealing. He must start doing the opposite of stealing. Instead of taking the fruits of other people’s labors, he must work for what he gets. Instead of taking from others to benefit himself, he must give to others to benefit them.)
What is “unwholesome talk”? (You might think this refers to obscene language, and it might, but the Greek word literally means “rotten, putrid.” And if Paul is putting together opposites, then the opposite of “unwholesome” talk is language that builds people up. So maybe the rotten talk is something that makes a relationship decay, words that make a friendship go bad—not just dirty words, but destructive words.)

It’s interesting to trace the pattern through these verses: put off, put on. Stop the bad behavior, yes, but replace it with positive behavior. In Christian relationships, and in marriage, it’s not enough to avoid doing anything wrong—we must be actively engaged in doing positive things for others. This pattern continues in verses 31-32. We’re told to “get rid of” six different negative attitudes and actions. Instead, we should cultivate kindness, compassion and forgiveness.

Through Christ, God forgave us for our sins. Paul makes that clear. How should that affect the way we treat others? (Forgiven people forgive others. That point is made often in the New Testament. Jesus told a whole parable about a forgiven servant who refused to forgive another servant. It’s right there in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us . . . as we forgive.” When we understand that we have fallen short of God’s ideal, and that we desperately need his mercy, we simply cannot refuse mercy to others when they fall short of our expectations.)

A CLOSER LOOK

Let’s look a bit more closely at this passage, pulling out five principles that will transform communication in your home.

1. Be Honest – speak the truth in love
(Ephesians 4:15, 25)

We have talked a lot about this already. It’s relatively easy to do one or the other, but when your communication is characterized by both truth and love, that’s when you begin to share hearts and not just words.

2. Be Angry – deal with anger appropriately
(Ephesians 4:26-27)

Anger is the most destructive emotion in any marriage. Where does it come from? We might say it’s “the distance between your expectations and your experience.” If you think
you deserve this (up here) and you only get this (down here), you’ll be angry about it.

Remember what the Bible says. It assumes you will feel anger sometimes. There will be times when you expect one thing and get another—that’s a given. But “do not sin.” Don’t let those feelings explode into destructive words or actions. Even if we don’t resort to physical violence, we know how to hurt each other with words. Accusing, blaming, name-calling—this is all destructive talk, and it usually stirs up more of the same.

The second thing we’re told is to deal with it today. Some couples adapt this into a “Don’t go to bed angry” rule. They have a time each evening when they can sort through those feelings. That’s a good idea.

How do you deal with it? A good place to start is the I-statement. Here’s how I feel when you do such-and-such. It’s not an attack or a demand. It allows for the possibility that maybe I shouldn’t feel this way, but it expresses the emotional reality of the situation. In response, the other person can either promise to change behavior or try to change the way I feel about it.

3. Be Diligent – work hard on your relationship (Ephesians 4:28)

Remember that verse 28 talks about the thief who needs to stop stealing. Stealing is a shortcut. The thief tries to get something for nothing, letting others do all the work. Some people treat marriage the same way, applying the minimum effort. And just as the thief is told to do the opposite of stealing by working hard and even giving, so you need to commit yourself to do the hard work of marriage. Sign up for the rest of your life to make your marriage a priority.

4. Be Positive – don’t wound with your words (Ephesians 4:29-31)

The text warns us against “putrid” language that rots out a relationship. Many couples get into bad habits with verbal digs and name-calling. The Bible tells us not to let these words out of our mouths. Instead, look for the language that builds up your spouse and strengthens your marriage.

5. Be Forgiving – be the first to say, “I’m sorry” (Ephesians 4:32)

Some couples hold grudges for years. They’re in a deadlock that they both refuse to break. Deadlock is an appropriate
word there, because the marriage itself is locked in a kind of death because neither partner will give in. If you both insist on winning, you will both lose. Stop worrying about who’s right and who’s wrong and set things right between you.

The biblical teaching on forgiveness starts with the fact that each one of us needs forgiveness—and gets it—from God. As a forgiven sinner, then, I have no right to withhold forgiveness from anyone else, and I have no need to claim that I’m perfectly righteous either. So I can wipe the slate clean, releasing grudges and offering apologies.

The Bible does not say, “Be perfect and demand that others be perfect, so you can all live in perfect harmony.” It says, “You will mess up, and others will mess up, so you need to bear with one another in patience and forgiveness.” In the real world, the way to good relationships is not perfection, but forgiveness.

**WORKING THINGS OUT**

**Leader:** Direct the group to page 22 of the workbook. Allow about five minutes for each person to fill out this section individually. Then put people together in groups of 4-6 to talk about what they’ve written. In these groups, couples should be together. So a group could consist of two or three couples, or you could mix some singles into a group.

1. How would you describe the communication pattern you observed in your family growing up?

2. How does this affect the way you communicate in your home now?
3. Experts say that only 7% of our communication comes through our words, 38% through our tone of voice, and 55% through our body language and facial expressions.

That’s a general average. What do you think the percentages would be for you personally in your unique style of communication? What would it be for your spouse?
4. Other experts have identified five levels of communication.

Level 1. Clichés
Level 2. Facts
Level 3. Ideas/Judgments (my thoughts about the facts)
Level 4. Feelings
Level 5. Open Communication (honesty, vulnerability)

In all of your interactions throughout the week—not only at home but at work, in the neighborhood, etc.—what percentage of your communication would be in each level? Obviously this is just a broad estimate, but jot down a number for each level (and those numbers should add up to 100%).

All Interactions

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<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clichés</td>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Open</td>
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5. Now, in your communication with your spouse, what would the percentages be? (NOTE: Do not share these numbers with the group, but do share them later with your spouse.)

With Your Spouse

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TOGETHER AT HOME

Leader: Draw the groups back together for a final word.

It’s apparent that communication is an important element in all of life, but especially in our closest relationship, marriage. Many couples struggle with the basic elements of speaking and listening, especially when you throw in those other factors like tone of voice and body language. It helps for us to go back to the basics, to think about how we communicate, how we have learned to communicate while growing up, and the levels of communication where we feel most comfortable. As husbands and wives understand their communication processes better, they can often improve things.
Where will you go from here?

Chip Ingram recommends several specific tools to improve marital communication. I’ll leave these with you as a “homework assignment.” The guidelines are in your workbook, on page 23. Sometime this week, could you set aside time to do this? You might have your own way of working on communication issues, but let me suggest that you follow these guidelines. You might discover something new and helpful.

**THE CONFERENCE**

Sit comfortably, face to face.

Husband, ask your wife the first question, and listen carefully to the answer without interrupting.

1. **What are you concerned about?**

   Wife, ask your husband the same question, and listen without comment.

   Do the same with questions 2 and 3, husband asks wife, then wife asks husband.

2. **What do you wish?**

3. **What are you willing to do?**

**THE WORD PICTURE**

Take a moment to think of some issue, perhaps some frustration that you haven’t been able to adequately put into words. (It’s probably best to start with something small, a minor irritation.)

Think visually about it. If you were to take a photo or paint a picture of this situation, what would it be like?

Describe that picture to your spouse.
THE I LOVE YOU LIST

Each of you takes pen and paper. List seven simple actions your spouse could do for you that would make you feel loved. *(I feel loved when you ...)* Make sure these actions are do-able, not too expensive and not problematic.

Trade lists. Each partner should choose two of the items to do this week.
SESSION 3

BREAKING DOWN WALLS
GETTING ACQUAINTED

When was the last time your car broke down? How did it inconvenience you? What turned out to be the problem? How did you fix it?

**Leader:** This is your basic icebreaker question, but there’s a reason for it. Lots of people have stories about car trouble, if you can get around to issues of regular maintenance, all the better.

Fixing a car is easier than fixing a marriage. In today’s video, Chip Ingram compares car maintenance to marriage maintenance. Lots of things can interfere with the oneness you want to have with your spouse, if you don’t keep your marriage fueled and tuned up. Let’s watch.

VIDEO

Play Session 3: *Breaking Down Walls* (28 Minutes)

TALKING IT OVER

The first couple we met, Gary and Elizabeth, had some difficulty as the stepfather when he tried to discipline her kids. How did this cause a problem in their marriage?

She describes her parenting style as “easygoing.” He wanted to have a “positive impact.” And felt unappreciated. We can see how her loyalties were divided between her kids and her husband. “I wasn’t able to put my husband first,” said Elizabeth.

**Why would it be important for a remarried mom to “put her husband first”? In any family situation, do you think the husband-wife relationship should be more important than the parent-child relationship?**

**Leader:** Tread carefully here. Your group might see this couple’s troubles as verification of the fact that they were wrong to get married in the first place. You don’t need to debate that point, but we must acknowledge that there
are many Christians who have remarried after divorce and now struggle with blended-family situations. You also might find strong support for the idea that children always come first. This could create a great discussion—just remember our theme: breaking down the barriers in marriage. Loyalty to children is certainly not a bad thing, but even in first marriages when a husband and wife disagree on parenting, it can put up a wall between them.

Even in first marriages, when there are children that belong to both of you, how can they create barriers between a husband and wife?

The second couple, Kevin and Amanda, had issues with his parents. And so did the third couple, Shane and Alissa. Why is it so hard for us to get along with our in-laws?

Marriage is a transfer—especially when a couple is young. Parents transfer a certain amount of responsibility for their (adult) child to the new spouse. Even when in-laws want to be supportive, there is always the potential for competition and judgment.

Why would this put up a wall between a husband and wife? What barrier does this create?

Once again it’s a question of loyalty. Of course you love your parents, as you love your kids, but your spouse needs to know that he or she has priority in your life.

Chip warned against “triangulation” in a relationship with your parents and spouse. What did he mean by that? How can you avoid it?

He’s talking about a situation where you’re caught in the middle, between your parents and your spouse. Chip said you should invite them to talk it out directly. They need to have a direct relationship in which the boundaries are clearly set. With that in place, then they can treat each other with mutual respect.
The last couple we met in the video had the saddest situation, don’t you think? Chris and Christie kind of drifted apart. They felt lonely and neglected, and both of them succumbed to the temptation to have an affair.

**If you could have talked to them before they split up, what would you have said? What would you say to them now?**

Chip talked about four car-related tips that can keep our marriages running. Do you remember what they are?

1. The fuel of commitment.
2. The oil of communication.
3. The tune-up of caring.
4. The navigational system of commission.

**How does commitment fuel a marriage?**

Some would say that love is the fuel of marriage, and they’re right. But we know that love isn’t a feeling of infatuation; it’s a commitment that “I’ll be there for you no matter what.”

**Of course communication is important in a marriage. Why would it be the “oil”?**

You might say that good communication, like oil, keeps everything else running the way it should. It enables you to love and serve each other more effectively. Part of the tragedy of Chris and Christie’s story is that they seemingly didn’t communicate until it was too late. Each was suffering secretly and building up resentment. They never gave the machinery of marriage a chance to work.

**How is caring like a tune-up?**

As Chip asked, “Where and how can you build the fun, the joy, and the friendship back into your relationship?” Keep paying attention to the things that make your spouse happy, and do those things.
What does Chip mean by “commission”? How is that like a car’s navigational system?

We know God has given gifts and talents to each of you, but as you put those abilities together, what can the two of you do? What is God calling you to accomplish? When you work together in God’s purpose, you bond closer together.

BY THE BOOK

Turn to Genesis 3. As we talk about walls in a marriage, it might help to go back to the beginning and see where things went wrong, back to the Garden of Eden.

Would someone read verses 1-6?

Let’s focus in on verse 6. What made Eve eat the forbidden fruit? (The fruit looked good. She was hungry for it. And the serpent made a good case for its ability to give them the sort of wisdom God had.)

Is it wrong to want wisdom? Maybe not, but there’s more to this situation. God had been giving them whatever they needed. At this point Adam and Eve stopped receiving what God gave them and started taking what they wanted.

Where was Adam at the time? (With her.)

Volumes have been written about the roles of the man and the woman in the first sin, but they often miss the point that Adam was “with her,” according to verse 6. They both sinned.

Somebody read verses 7-10.

What was the immediate result of their sin? (They realized they were naked and they tried to cover themselves.)

Of course there’s a lesson here for us. One of the results of our sinfulness is that we hide. We hide from God, and
we hide from our mates. Instead of being open and honest, transparent and vulnerable, we cover ourselves. We’re afraid to be who we really are. Spiritually we play games with God, and relationally we hide behind various barriers that block our intimacy.

Somebody read verses 11-13.

**How did the man excuse his behavior?** (He blamed the woman.)

**How did the woman excuse her behavior?** (She blamed the serpent that deceived her.)

Some married couples play the blame game constantly.

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**A CLOSER LOOK**

Genesis 3 has identified for us a number of spiritual barriers that continue to stand in the way of oneness in marriage.

Giving has turned to taking. Building has turned to blaming. Sharing has turned to blaming. Openness has turned to hiding. And even the differences between male and female, intended to create a complementary unity, have turned to elements of conflict. We get a hint of that in the curse that God issues at the end of Genesis 3.

So the walls that stand between you and your spouse might be of your own making, the result of sin, selfishness, shame, or blame. But there are other types of barriers as well.

Some couples have “psychological walls” based on **personality differences**. If one partner is an introvert and the other loves being around lots of people, they'll probably have some disagreements. These differences don’t **have** to create obstacles to oneness, but they should be considered and understood.

**Gender differences** can also put up walls between a husband and wife. If the man is a doer and the woman is a talker, they may frustrate each other. She wants to talk through a conflict and he just wants to bring her some
flowers and be done with it. These are not insurmountable problems—we want men and women to be different—but those differences must be handled with grace.

The most challenging type of barrier in a marriage is **historical**, the baggage you bring from your past:

- You learned who you were, and how to conduct relationships from the family you grew up in. Your spouse has a different set of expectations and habits from a different family.

- Traumatic events from your past may have jolted the way you look at life or the way you feel about certain people, places, things, or activities.

- You bring a unique spiritual history into the relationship. Were you brought up in the church or not? What kind of church? How did you envision God? Maybe your spouse has come to the marriage from a different path.

- Past relationships have also conditioned you in a particular way for your marriage. Did you have a painful breakup? Were you cheated on? You might find yourself re-fighting old battles with a new person.

**WORKING THINGS OUT**

We have now discussed many different “walls” that can crop up in a marriage, keeping you from the oneness you desire. Now you’ll get a chance to talk about some possible barriers in your marriage. While the different types of barriers include spiritual issues and historical “baggage,” these might prove too intense to deal with in a public session like this. I urge you not to ignore those areas, but right now we’ll focus only on personality differences and gender differences.

**Leader:** Direct the group to page 29 of the workbook. Allow about five minutes for each person to fill out this section individually. Then direct couples to talk together about their answers for about five minutes. (If you have people without partners present, you could put them in groups of 2-3 to compare notes.)
**PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES**

Below you’ll see a continuum for each of four different sets of characteristics. On each one, put an initial or symbol at the point that would mark *your* personality and another initial or symbol to mark your spouse’s personality. Then consider the questions for each.

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Would you consider this difference between your personalities minor, moderate, or major?

Has this difference (if there is one) ever caused a problem in your marriage? If so, when?

What could be done to make this difference *complementary* rather than *conflicting*?

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Would you consider this difference between your personalities minor, moderate, or major?

Has this difference (if there is one) ever caused a problem in your marriage? If so, when?

What could be done to make this difference *complementary* rather than *conflicting*?
Would you consider this difference between your personalities minor, moderate, or major?

Has this difference (if there is one) ever caused a problem in your marriage? If so, when?

What could be done to make this difference complementary rather than conflicting?

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Some researchers have suggested basic differences in the way men and women think. While there are many exceptions, these are suggested as general tendencies. On the following charts, for each set of characteristics, place yourself and your spouse, as before.
Men tend to . . .

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<tr>
<td>Strive for achievement</td>
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Women tend to . . .

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<tr>
<td>Nurture relationships</td>
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Understand two important things: (1) one side of this chart is not better than the other; (2) many people veer from the gender norm on some factors—that doesn’t make you less manly or womanly.

With that in mind, are there any of these characteristics that have caused problems in your marriage? If so, when? How?

What could be done to make this difference complementary rather than conflicting?

As you finish filling out the charts individually, begin comparing notes with your spouse. Are you pretty close in your appraisal of the characteristics? Do you agree on any problem areas you have identified?
Leader: Draw the groups back together for a final word.

Were there any surprises for you? Were you and your spouse far off on any of the findings?

You’re under no pressure to share anything that’s too personal, but are there any examples you can share about how these characteristics have conflicted in your marriage?

I’m interested in that question: What can be done about it? Did you come up with any ideas? What strategy could we follow?

Chip Ingram uses a quote: “A problem clearly defined is 50% solved.” So we’ve already taken a first step in our strategy. We’ve identified a few areas of conflict.

Another crucial aspect of this is the attitude we bring to it. It’s human nature to assume that everyone should be like us. When you see it charted out like this, you begin to understand that the other side of the chart isn’t wrong, it’s just different. Your spouse has as much right to be over there as you have to be over here. In fact, your marriage might be healthier because you have those two different qualities between you. You might still get annoyed or inconvenienced, but you can begin to see your partner’s differences as a gift rather than a weapon.

Once we begin to value the different sides of this chart, we can let the relationship flow back and forth. Let the extrovert draw you out and let the introvert draw you in. Let the words and actions work together. If you’re a man of action, great, but you’ll have to break out of your comfort zone ever so often to have a heart-to-heart talk with your wife. And now she knows how far you’ve had to stretch to have that talk, and she appreciates it.

As I mentioned earlier, we decided to skip over two major types of barriers—spiritual and historical. But there are some exercises in the workbook that you could do as a homework assignment.
As we talk about spiritual barriers, we’re obviously talking about our relationship with God. There are actually three walls to tear down—not only the one separating husband and wife, but the ones separating each of them from God.

**Is there sin I need to confess to God in order to restore my relationship with him?**

**Am I having trouble accepting God’s forgiveness?**

We’re not perfect, but we can be forgiven. God invites us into a free, joyous, grace-filled relationship with him. As we turn back to the marriage relationship, we need to start with the understanding that, before God, we are both forgiven sinners.

Examining the marital relationship, let’s use the symptoms we saw in Eden. *(Take a good long time to answer these questions. They may provide an important diagnostic for the spiritual health of your marriage.)*

**In our marriage, has giving turned to taking? Where do we see this?**

**In our marriage, has building turned to blaming? Where do we see this?**
In our marriage, has sharing turned to shame? Where do we see this?

In our marriage, has openness turned to hiding? Where do we see this?

The purpose of this exercise is not to create more shame or blame, but to come out of hiding, in essence to “get naked” in a spiritual sense.

Is there something I need to ask forgiveness for?

Is there something I need to grant forgiveness for?

How will we celebrate the miracle of grace?

HISTORICAL BARRIERS

List three (or more) habits, expectations, or values you learned from the family you grew up in—things that might be different from what your spouse learned. Consider issues of housekeeping, money management, personal hygiene, boundaries with friends/family, politics, education, etc. Then discuss these differences.

Finish these sentences:

My upbringing taught me that I am...

My upbringing taught me that people are...

My upbringing taught me that God is ...
See how your spouse responded. Discuss any differences. Make sure you’re ready for the next section.

**What’s the worst thing that happened to you between the ages of 0 and 18?**

**What’s the best thing?**

**How have any of these things affected your life since then?**

See how your spouse responded. Hug, pray, weep. Make sure you’re ready for the next section.

**When was the first time you were in love? What did you learn about romantic love from that experience?**

**What was the greatest pain you felt in a romantic relationship (or breakup or unrequited love), not including this marriage? What did you learn about romantic love from that experience?**

**Is there a past relationship that continues to haunt this one? How?**

After sharing your answers and shaking off any jealousy or vengeance that may have arisen, try this: Brainstorm creative ways to mark the passing of any previous relationship or relational wound that still afflicts you to totally embrace this present relationship.

Working on marital issues can be hazardous because you might dig up some stuff you don’t know how to deal with. If you do, get help. Contact your pastor or another professional counselor to help steer you through.
GETTING ACQUAINTED

What’s your favorite movie of all time? How would you summarize it in a few sentences?

**Leader:** Feel free to ask follow-up questions, especially to clarify the conflict involved. Be ready with examples of your own.

What would happen to those films if you took out all the conflict? How would you summarize the movie then?

Conflict is unavoidable. The favorite stories of our lives don’t exist if there is no conflict. And we’ll have conflict in real life too, especially in marriage.

VIDEO

Play Session 4: *Resolving Conflict* (25 Minutes)

TALKING IT OVER

**In the video Bill said,** “I didn’t think she really respected the level I had achieved or the work it took to get to that level. Everybody else thought I was great, but when I was at home I didn’t feel like she thought I was great.” **Do you think Bill’s complaint was valid? Why do you think this would happen?**

**Stacy said,** “I blamed myself. What can I do to make him happy? Can I lose weight? Can I clean the house? Can I cook a better meal?” **Why was Stacy thinking this way? How important is it in your marriage to respect and compliment each other?**
According to these statements, neither one was getting enough affirmation, so they felt taken for granted and lost their confidence. This is something that’s easily overlooked in the daily grind of life. In a previous session we read Ephesians 4:29, which talks about avoiding “unwholesome” talk and replacing it with conversation that “builds up” someone else. This is extremely important for the general health of a marriage.

Bill said, “There was just a lot of coldness and a lack of connection between the two of us. I already decided I didn’t want to be in this marriage anymore.” Why was he bailing out on the marriage?

We should pause here to acknowledge that the people interviewed in these videos have given us a great gift by letting us look into their lives, which helps us examine our own marriages. We can become critical of decisions they’ve made, but let’s not be too hard on them. Sadly, it often happens that one partner makes a decision to divorce long before he or she ever brings it up. It is very hard to reverse direction, once you set your mind and heart toward divorce. If there’s anyone here who has already opted out, I urge you to slam on the brakes and turn around. Give your marriage an honest shot.

Doug said, “Conflict was completely new to me. Miranda grew up in an environment where conflict was the norm. It completely surprised me because, you know, never having that conflict, I responded with being frustrated, I responded with being angry.” Did you learn how to fight from the family you grew up in? Do you find yourself acting like your parents when you argue with your spouse? How?

It’s very common for people to adopt the methods of their parents as they deal with conflict in their own marriage. What can you do about that? How can you deal with different ways of fighting?
It’s one of the great ironies of marriage that the healthiest couples have good fights. That is, they know how to get their concerns out in the open where both partners can understand them. This requires communication and observation. You need to learn the method of confrontation (or lack of confrontation) that your partner has learned, and find your own ways to engage in meaningful conflict.

**In the video Kelly said,** “We still weren’t talking about the hard stuff. . . . It wasn’t, ‘How do you really feel about this? Are you sad? Are you scared?’ We never had those conversations.”

**Greg said,** “I didn’t really think that what I was doing in not communicating with Kelly was wrong. All I wanted to do was escape.”

**Kelly said,** “I felt abandoned. I would start needling him, kind of just trying to dig, to get him mad at me, just because I felt hurt.”

**Greg and Kelly had an autistic child. How did they handle their stress and grief differently? How did this affect their marriage?**

The challenge of autism affected both of these parents deeply, but they processed it in very different ways. Kelly desperately wanted to share these feelings of worry, sorrow, or anger. But Greg wasn’t sure how to process these emotions, and so he shut himself off. Picking a fight was Kelly’s way of luring him out into the open, but we get the feeling it just made him annoyed with her.

**Do you think men, more than women, have trouble processing and verbalizing their deepest emotions? If so, what can be done about that?**

This is a generalization, but not always true. Even in their pain, both partners need to recognize that they have a responsibility to help the *other* partner deal with that pain. So they both need to figure out how the *other* one processes emotion and then help them do that. This would probably result in a combination of sharing time and personal “cave time.”

**Leader:** If you have any parents of special-needs children in your group, or others who have faced family trauma, if they’re ready to talk about it, you might ask them to talk about the challenges this brought to their marriage.
In Chip’s comments, he talked about “sharks” and “turtles.” Do you think it’s better to be a shark or a turtle?

In the extreme, both are equally devastating to a marriage. Sharks are in it to win it. They jump into a conflict and use all sorts of manipulation, humiliation, and blaming to get their way. Turtles withdraw from direct conflict, but often they use subtle tactics to “punish” the other person. Sometimes they’ll avoid the other person entirely. The turtle style might seem more polite, but it’s just sneakier.

How can you keep from becoming a shark or a turtle?

Most of us have natural tendencies in one direction or the other. We tend to engage or withdraw. This tendency isn’t necessarily a bad thing; it’s what you do with it. The shark has a commendable desire to get things out in the open, but needs to fight fairly and avoid manipulation. The turtle has a commendable desire to keep the peace, but needs the courage to stick his neck out and communicate.

BY THE BOOK

Turn to the book of Philippians 1. This has been called the “epistle of joy,” because there are so many references to joy and rejoicing—nearly twenty times in four short chapters. That might make us think that there was no conflict in Philippi. Not so.

Somebody read Philippians 1:15-18.

What was going on? What sort of preachers were there in Philippi?

How did Paul respond to this? (He looks past the personal attacks and rejoices in the fact that the Christian message is going forth, regardless of the motives involved.)

Turn to chapter 4. Would someone read Philippians 4:2-4?
Leader: You might want to read this yourself, to get the names right: Euodia (you-OH-dee-ah) and Syntyche (sin-TEEK-ee) and Clement (CLEM-ent).

What seems to be the problem here? What do you think was going on? (Scholars haven’t figured this out, so take a guess.)

Obviously there was some disagreement between these two. The fact that Paul calls them out in this public epistle suggests that this was an important conflict or that they were important figures in the church. Perhaps the yokefellow was a sort of coordinator of the different house-churches in the region, and Paul was asking him to negotiate a settlement. Or he was asking the whole church to keep the peace and avoid breaking into factions.

How would you describe Paul’s attitude toward conflict? (He wants these co-workers to find harmony. But the conflict doesn’t seem to dampen the rejoicing.) Paul seems to be inviting the whole team to help these two to go in the same direction. And the result of this common mission is rejoicing.

Let’s circle back to chapter 2. Would someone read Philippians 2:1-2?

Paul is asking the Philippians—and us—to do several things. How can we “make his joy complete”? (“By being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”)

There are really four different areas of unity mentioned here. We need to be one in mind, love, spirit, and purpose.

Does this mean we need to lose all our individuality and become “Christian clones”?

No. “Like-minded” has more to do with values guided by God. We don’t need to have identical thoughts, and we can certainly disagree, but we share a renewed, transformed way of looking at the world. (See Romans 12:2.) “Love” refers to our passion for God and for others. “Spirit” is really our openness to God and our continuing interaction with him.

Paul was writing to the whole church. Does this apply to marriages? How?
Would someone read Philippians 2:3-4?

**We know from chapter 1 that there was “selfish ambition” in Philippi. What’s the remedy for that?**  
(Considering others better than you, and considering their interests as well as your own. The idea is that we give others more honorable treatment than we demand for ourselves. We put others first. It is assumed that we will “look to our own interests,” but we need to add to our considerations those things that are in the best interest of others.)

How would Paul’s advice in these verses affect the relationship between you and your spouse?

Would someone read Philippians 2:5-11?

**What is one specific way, in your relationship with your spouse, that you could “have the mind of Christ in you”? How could you act like Christ in your marriage? Be specific.**

**Leader:** Don’t let them get away with a generic “love each other more.” Get specific: Drying the dishes, watching the other’s TV show, giving a backrub, etc. Remember that the example of Christ involves servanthood, giving up one’s own privileges to benefit the other.

Before we leave Philippians, there’s one more verse we need to look at. You might need to post it on the refrigerator, on the bedroom mirror, by the front door, etc.

Would someone read Philippians 2:14?

**Do you think this means that we should never bring up disagreements or problems?**

Paul himself had a complaint about Peter’s behavior once, and he confronted him about it (Galatians 2:11-16). If we try to bury our problems, our problems will bury us. It would seem that Paul is telling us that our lives should not be characterized by complaining and arguing. There are times when some marriages can get into these bad habits. Every word has an edge to it. But this is not who we are as followers of Christ. We are children of God, we’re told in the following verses, blameless and pure, offering our world the words that give life. We are not complainers and arguers. Like Christ, we are servants.
A CLOSER LOOK

As we look for ways to think about and work with the conflict in our marriages, there are several principles we can glean from Philippians and the rest of Scripture.

1. **Conflict is normal.** We saw several indications of conflict in the church at Philippi, but Paul was still rejoicing. Good Christians have disagreements with other good Christians. So you don’t need to panic if you have a fight with your spouse. It might mean that you’re both just talking about the things that matter to you.

Now there are times when conflict is caused by sin, but sometimes it’s just the diversity God built into us. Maybe there’s some sin you need to confess or forgive, but maybe not.

2. **Conflict is an opportunity for growth.** In Philippians 1 we see Paul applauding the fact that there are preachers who despise him, but they’re still preaching Christ. The church had to grow beyond Paul and Peter and the others. If it took some conflict to make that happen, so be it.

The question is not: *How can we avoid conflict?* (A “turtle” might ask that.)
The question is not: *How can I win?* (A “shark” might ask that.)
The question is: *How are we going to grow through this?*

3. **Conflict must be defused (and diffused) or it will destroy.** The apostle Paul knew that Euodia and Syntyche needed some help to set things right. Though he doesn’t seem to panic, he recognizes that an escalating fight among leaders could hurt the whole church. While conflict can bring about growth, it can also cause destruction. It’s important to communicate how you’re feeling, even if that’s contentious, but do not try to hurt your spouse—verbally, emotionally, or physically.

If your spouse does try to hurt you physically, please seek help immediately.

4. **Healthy conflict requires rules so that no one gets hurt.** A husband and wife must decide on rules of engagement. “No physical violence” is a must. “No name-calling” is another. What about “both parties should get equal time to speak”? Or “keep the kids out of it”? You decide what boundaries you need to ensure a fair fight.
WORKING THINGS OUT

In the video, Chip ran through the DIFFUSE system for dealing with marital conflict. At this point we’re not actually doing those seven steps. We’re just evaluating them. Is this an approach you might take? How would it work? Do you want to tweak any of the points to fit you better?

Leader: Direct the group to page 37 of the workbook. Divide into smaller groups, with couples together.

HOW TO DIFFUSE CONFLICT IN YOUR MARRIAGE

Define the problem on your own (Proverbs 15:14).
Learn to separate the problem from the person.
What’s bothering me?
When did this begin?
What is it that I am feeling?

For Group Discussion
Why do you think it’s important to start with your individual analysis of the problem?

What does it mean to “separate the problem from the person”? Why would that be important?

Are there any questions you’d like to add to that list?

Initiate a time to talk (Matthew 5:23-24).
What is generally the best time for you and your spouse to have a discussion like this, or will it vary?

For Group Discussion
Do you think it’s best to have this meeting as soon as possible after the problem, or should you allow a cooling-off time?
What happens if your spouse doesn’t want to talk about it?

**Focus on the perceived problem, not the person**  
(Proverbs 18:19).
Chip Ingram said, “Don’t use the words ought, should, always, never. ‘You ought to do this,’ ‘You should be doing this’—that doesn’t help. What’s the issue?”

*For Group Discussion*
Why would it be important not to use those words?

Would it help to use “I-statements”? *I feel (this way) when (this) happens.* Why or why not?

**Feel their pain as though it were your own**  
(Proverbs 17:17).
Chip Ingram said, “Until you begin to feel what’s going on, you’ll always be judgmental. In our fallen state, you’ll always be the person who’s ‘right’ and the other person needs to straighten up. That’s not how you resolve conflict.”

*For Group Discussion*
Isn’t it a little phony to say, “I feel your pain”? Can we ever really feel the other person’s pain?

How important are feelings in a husband-wife discussion like this? Don’t you want to stick to the facts?
Uncover the root problem (Proverbs 20:5).

When you fight over ... the root problem might be ...

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Root Issues</th>
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<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>values, priorities, power/control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>communication, unmet emotional needs, past history/baggage</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-laws</td>
<td>loyalty, expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children/work</td>
<td>roles/goals</td>
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For Group Discussion
Does every argument have a deeper “root problem”?

Once you’ve uncovered the root problem, how do you deal with that?

Set things right between you (James 5:16).
Chip Ingram said, “You need to look the person in the eye and say ‘I’m sorry, I want to own my part of this, I want to ask you to forgive me.”

For Group Discussion
It’s great to ask for forgiveness, but what if it wasn’t your fault?

What if your spouse won’t forgive you, at least not right away?
Establish a specific action plan that addresses the issue discussed (James 1:22-25). What specifically are you going to do as a result of this meeting with your spouse?

I commit to …by … (when)

*For Group Discussion*
Does conflict resolution always need an action plan?

What if you (or your spouse) don’t follow through on this commitment?

Is this a plan that you could use to diffuse conflict in your marriage?

Are there pieces of it you’d want to use?

**TOGETHER AT HOME**

*Leader: Draw the groups back together for a final word.*

It would be interesting, as a homework assignment, to go through this model with your spouse working through a specific issue. It might be a current conflict you’re facing, or you might “try out” the method by rehashing a conflict you’ve already worked through.

If you decide not to go through the DIFFUSE model, I’d suggest that you have another “Conference” with your spouse, as we learned in session 2. It’s all there in your workbook.
How to Diffuse Conflict in Your Marriage

Define the problem on your own (Proverbs 15:14).
Learn to separate the problem from the person.
What’s bothering me?
When did this begin?
What is it that I am feeling?

Initiate a time to talk (Matthew 5:23-24).
What is the best time for you and your spouse to have a discussion like this?

Focus on the perceived problem, not the person (Proverbs 18:19).

Feel their pain as though it were your own (Proverbs 17:17).
Uncover the root problem (Proverbs 20:5).

When you fight over ... the root problem might be ...

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Possible root problem</th>
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<td>communication, unmet emotional needs</td>
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<td>Children/work</td>
<td>roles/goals</td>
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Our issue: Possible root problem:

Set things right between you (James 5:16).

Establish a specific action plan that addresses the issue discussed (James 1:22-25).

What specifically are you going to do as a result of this meeting with your spouse?

I commit to... by (when)...

Alternate homework; consider having “The Conference” from page 42 in the Leader’s Guide.
SESSION 5

RESTORING
SEX & INTIMACY
Birthdays. Christmas. Anniversaries. We give each other gifts.

**What’s the best gift you’ve received from your spouse? What made it so special?**

**What’s the gift you felt best about giving to your spouse? Why?**

Our topic today is “sex and intimacy.” Sex is certainly one of God’s great gifts to us, but it’s also a gift that a husband and wife give to each other.

**VIDEO**

Play Session 5: *Restoring Sex and Intimacy* (27 Minutes)

**TALKING IT OVER**

Let’s do something a bit different today. In your workbook you have quotes from the video and some simple questions. We’ll take the next five minutes or so to look through those quotes individually. Jot down your answers or thoughts. Then we’ll talk more about it.

Darin and Becca were sidetracked by a full family schedule. Darin said, “You get to the end of the day and there are some times that there’s just no energy left to be intimate with each other.” *Have you ever felt like this?*

**What advice would you give Darin about this?**
Matt and Jennifer had gone through some miscarriages and were struggling to have a child. Matt said, “All the processes of the medicines that we had to take . . . kind of took the glamour out of it. The sex became less romantic and more procedural.” What advice would you give them?

How important is “glamour” in a couple’s sexual intimacy?

Ken and Lisa went through repeated layoffs and bankruptcy. Lisa said, “If you don’t respect your spouse or if you’re feeling any sort of contempt, then it’s going to be really hard to open up to them physically . . . I didn’t respect him at the time; why would I want to be with him?”

Ken said, “It’s amazing what stress can pull away from you. It robs you of your relationship with your family, with God, with everything, if you let it, and I did. I let it pull everything out.”

Do you think Lisa is right to feel that way?

What advice would you give her?

What advice would you give Ken?

Have financial challenges or job difficulties ever caused a problem for the intimacy in your marriage?

What can be done about this?
Chris and Kelly had a struggle with expectations and with pornography. 

Chris said, “We really had these expectations of our wedding night, fireworks going off and just complete oneness, this great intimate night. Unfortunately, it was anything but that.” 

Kelly said, “I just felt, just hyper-focused on my looks, like I wasn’t pretty enough, I wasn’t attractive enough.” Chris said, I really honestly thought that I was going to be able to handle it [his pornography addiction] on my own and control it and to stop viewing it. Unfortunately that was not the case.”

Do you think that people’s expectations of sex tend to be too high?

How do you think a man’s pornography habit affects the way he views his wife?

How do you think it affects the way she views herself?

What advice would you give this couple?

Leader: After 5-8 minutes (see how engaged the group is in writing their answers), proceed with discussion.

We don’t need to review everything you just wrote down, but I’m especially interested in the advice you’d give to these various couples. Does anyone have a great piece of advice you really want to share?

Which of these couples do you think has the best chance of restoring sexual intimacy in their marriage? Why?
Let’s focus now on some of the things Chip had to say.

**Early on, he quoted a good saying: “Sex begins in the kitchen.” What does that mean?**

Popular speaker Kevin Leman originally used that as a book title, and he wasn’t referring to sexual activity in different parts of the home. The point was that every aspect of your marriage contributes to your sexual intimacy. When a husband does kitchen chores willingly and lovingly, he is winning his wife’s heart. When a wife goes to her husband’s softball game to cheer him on, she is winning her husband’s heart. (Of course, the details are different for every couple—you’ll have to figure them out for yourself.)

A TV sitcom caught this idea several years ago when the wife came home to find her husband vacuuming the floor. She said, “You have never been more sexy to me than you are right now.”

In the video, Chip Ingram said, “Ladies, when your husband loses his job, when your husband doesn’t like himself, when your husband doesn’t make a sale, when your husband feels down on himself, when your husband gains a little weight, when a man starts to feel like he’s less than a man, there are few things that you can ever do that make him feel more like a man, more respected, than when you initiate sexual relationships with him. . . . The real issue is not sex. It’s that down deep men are desperately insecure, just like women. . . . A man desperately wants to be wanted and cared for.”

**Men, does that sound about right?**

**Do you think this really stems from insecurity, or do men just like to feel that they’re God’s gift to women?**

Chip also said, “A lot of the sex for your wife isn’t about climaxes or orgasms. They enjoy that like all the rest of us, but what they really need to feel is cherished and loved... A lot of sexuality can happen without intercourse. A lot of hugging, a lot of affirmation, a lot of deep talks... It’s the connection of your bodies with one another, but it’s the heart, it’s saying, ‘I love you, I want to be close to you.’”
Women, do you think he got that right?

Or is that just a good excuse to not have sex when you don’t feel like it?

The point that Chip is consistently making is this: Physical sexual interaction is an important part of marriage, but let’s not isolate it from the rest of the relationship. That physical experience is connected to everything else you do together—emotionally, spiritually, practically. All those other things—vacuuming, cuddling, affirming—lead into the sexual experience, but they don’t replace it.

Chip said, “God says that the marriage bed is sacred (Hebrews 13:4). There is a bonding that occurs when you come together physically. That’s not like an optional thing if you get time. It is as important as the spiritual relationship. It’s as important as the emotional relationship. And I think we’ve gotten some sort of flaky ideas that if it’s not spontaneous and wild and passionate that, you know, it’s just sex. Well, it’s about communication of hearts and personhood.”

What’s he saying here? Should you feel compelled to have sex even if you don’t want to? Do you agree with that?

No, it’s not just about the physical act. There’s no great benefit in “going through the motions.” But the physical act should be part of your life together, connected with your spiritual and emotional relationship. Together, you need to make time for it, even when you’re busy or distracted.

According to Chip Ingram, how are sexual problems like the light on your car dashboard?

Sexual problems are an indication that something else in your marriage is off-kilter. “Your sexual relationship with your spouse is like a window into the soul of your relationship.” Chip said. So don’t just buy a sex manual and fix the sexual problem. That’s like smashing the dashboard light. Take a look at the whole relationship. Is there a problem with respect or affirmation? Are you holding grudges? Are you too distracted with other things?
How does a pornography habit change the nature of a marriage?

As we saw in the video, pornography can ruin the relationship between a husband and wife in many ways, but especially sexually. When the husband views pornography, he is redirecting his sexual desire. Rather than being a physical expression of a loving relationship, sex becomes a spectator sport, an escape, a detour. It’s interesting, in our video example, that even before Kelly knew of Chris’s pornography habit, she was already second-guessing herself. She was worried that she didn’t look good enough for her husband. She didn’t know that she was competing with the impossibly perfect images of pornography—but somehow she sensed it. Pornography makes sex an arena for competition, when it should be a haven of safety and acceptance.

Chip said, “God gave sex as a gift, and this [pornography] is an artificial poison from the pit of hell to seek to ruin your life and create a desire that can never be fulfilled.”

BY THE BOOK

Turn to 1 Corinthians 6:18. This letter deals with a number of practical issues, including sex and marriage.

Would someone read verses 18-20?

What does this passage say about your physical body? (It is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It ultimately does not belong to you. It should be used for God’s honor.)

How is sexual sin different from other sins, according to verse 18? (It is a sin against your own body.)

What does that mean? How is it a sin against your own body?

There might be various answers, but here’s one idea. Sexual immorality treats the body as a “desire machine.” It disconnects the body from the soul by attempting to fulfill only physical desires. Sex is meant to be enjoyed by our bodies, but only within the emotionally and spiritually intimate...
relationship of marriage. It is intended for complete pleasure, not just physical pleasure. When our physicality is cut off from the other aspects of our lives, we die a little.

Let’s move on into the next chapter.

Would someone read 1 Corinthians 7:1-2?

**Is Paul anti-marriage?**

Not entirely. We need to understand the nature of this epistle. It seems that the Corinthians had sent Paul a list of questions and he’s answering them, one by one. He might be quoting their question before going ahead to answer it. (We see a similar structure in 6:12 and elsewhere in this letter—their quote and his “yes, but” response.) So, is it good for a man to avoid marriage? Yes and no.

(By the way, the phrase is literally translated “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” with the idea that “touch” implied sexual relations. The NIV may be right in assuming that it’s a question about marriage, but it’s also a question about sex.)

As he explains later in this chapter, singleness can be a good option because it allows people to focus on the Lord’s work rather than on family responsibilities. But it does not mean it’s bad to get married.

**What reason does Paul give for getting married?** (“So much immorality.”)

Since it’s so hard to remain celibate as a single person, people should get married, so they can fulfill their sexual desire in a wholesome, God-honoring way. That may seem like a back-handed compliment to marriage, but it’s what Paul (who was probably single) gives us.

**Would someone read verses 3-5?**

**What are we being instructed to do?** (To fulfill our marital duty; to have sex.)
What does this tell us about God’s view of sex?

What do we learn here about the ownership of our bodies? (You don’t belong only to yourself, but also to your spouse.)

How do you feel about that? What are the implications of this joint ownership?

Under what circumstances could you abstain from sex? (By mutual consent, in order to devote yourselves to prayer, but only temporarily.)

This is remarkable on several counts. Christianity has often been accused of being anti-sex. Even married people sometimes think of sex as something dirty, a necessary duty. But this passage clearly says otherwise. Sex between a husband and wife is not only accepted, but urged. Each has a responsibility to meet the other’s sexual needs.

Another remarkable thing is that men and women are treated equally here. The Greeks would have had no problem if Paul said, “The wife’s body belongs to the husband,” and only that. But to add that the husband’s body belongs to the wife, that’s stunning for that time and place.

A CLOSER LOOK

Paul’s subject in this passage is sex, not “how to have a more intimate marriage,” and yet even here we get a basic biblical principle—that it’s never “just sex.” A husband and wife belong to each other physically. Their sex life is an expression of their oneness. It is part of their wholeness.

So we need to come back to that principle ourselves. To put it in tabloid terms, how can we have “better sex”? Well, not by focusing on some physical technique. The physical relationship draws its life from the rest of the relationship. You have better sex by having a better marriage.
So let’s revisit the essential components of a good marriage and consider how they might contribute to greater intimacy.

Would someone read Matthew 19:6?

**What does this tell us about marriage?** (Two become one. It’s a bond that God has put together, so we shouldn’t try to undo it.)

Jesus was talking about divorce. It was a hot topic in his day. *Under what circumstances is divorce permitted?* We’re not going to delve into that today, except to grab the basic idea Jesus gives us here—that marriage is meant to last. It’s an eternal commitment.

What do we mean by commitment? It’s there in your workbooks. “A lifelong choice of unconditional love to an imperfect person.”

News flash: Your spouse is imperfect. And yours. And yours. I know you’ll try to tell me, “No, my spouse has never done anything wrong!” But I assure you, they have. Still, that does not give you the excuse to stop loving them. God has welded you together with his kind of love.

So we need to take divorce off the table. It’s not a legitimate solution to your marriage problems.

Would someone read Ephesians 4:15-16?

This is talking about the church, but it applies very nicely to marriage too. Different parts fit together and grow together. The key is that first phrase: *speaking the truth in love.*

**We asked this a few sessions ago, but maybe you have some more insights now. What does it mean to “speak the truth in love”?**

Communication is our second key to an intimate marriage. Let’s define this as “A lifelong skill of learning to understand each other.”

There’s no hiding. No secrets. Truth and love lead us forward into a growing knowledge of one another. There are scientists who have devoted their careers to studying the atom, or the moon, or the three-toed sloth. Each day they strive to learn something new, and they rejoice when they do. Your subject is your spouse. Use truthful, loving communication to learn more and more of what makes them tick.
Would someone read Genesis 2:18?

**According to this verse, what was “not good”?**
(The man being alone.)

**Then what happened in this passage that is good?**
(The creation of woman to join him.)

We studied this whole passage before, so there’s not much to add, except the reminder of oneness. The man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife. They cling to each other. This is something we might call Caring, the third component of an intimate marriage. We define this as “an adventure of lifelong friendship, fun, and mutual fulfillment.”

Would someone read Romans 16:3-5?

**What do we learn here about this couple, Aquila and Priscilla?**
(They were Paul’s co-workers. They had risked their lives for him. A church met in their home.)

Other Scriptures tell us that they were tentmakers, and they worked with Paul. They were forced to move at least once. We know they were involved with the churches in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus. They were also pretty good Bible teachers. The point is that they didn’t just have a marriage, they had a mission. They felt they had a commission from God to spread the gospel and strengthen the church, and they did so.

That gives us our fourth key: Commission, defined as “a vision to impact the lives of others for Christ.”

**WORKING THINGS OUT**

**Leader:** Direct the group to page 46 of the workbook. Have each couple discuss the following questions.

**Building Intimacy into Your Marriage**

1. Ask your partner: What can I do to demonstrate my commitment to you?
Consider: spending more time at home, compliments, praying together, more involvement with the kids, etc.

Note: Sometimes the best way to show unconditional love is to do something you don’t prefer doing in order to please the other.

2. What time can we put in our schedule on a weekly basis for significant communication?

Consider reserving a regular weekly time for The Conference, or something like it.

What are the times in our daily schedule when we can connect more casually?

Breakfast? Call from work? After dinner? After kids in bed? Before bed?

Note: You don’t need to have major conferences each day, but it would help to identify those times of “checking in” that naturally happen during the day. Let those become precious to you.

3. List three activities you like to do with your spouse.

Jot down the three activities your spouse listed.

Can you schedule a weekly “activity time” to do some of these things, maintaining the fun and friendship in your marriage? When would that be?
This is not just frivolity; it’s marriage maintenance. If your schedule doesn’t allow a major activity every week, plan one for each month, but fill in with minor fun things.

Right now, talk specifically about one activity—what and when.

4. What ministries are you currently involved in, individually and as a couple?

Are there gifts and talents you have that aren’t being used in ministry? Like what?

Has God placed on your heart a passion for a particular group of people, geographical area, or type of ministry?

Get your spouse’s answer to these questions too.

As you put all these answers together, consider . . .

• could you get more involved in some ministry you’re currently doing?
• could you both get involved in some ministry one of you is doing?
• is there a unique type of ministry that could combine the skills of both of you?
• do your God-given passions merge in any way, leading you toward a particular ministry?

What’s the next step you could take to explore these options?

When (specifically) will you get together to pray about this?
Leader: *Draw the groups back together for a final word.*

Commitment. Communication. Caring. Commission. Your homework is to move forward on all these fronts. Keep talking about the things you started talking about here. And you might find that any sexual issues you’ve had start falling into place.
SESSION 6

STRIVING FOR A
CHRIST-CENTERED MARRIAGE
Do you like to dance? Why or why not?

There have been some TV shows lately that feature dancing. Do you watch any of them?

Why do you think dancing shows are so popular? What is it about couples dancing that people find so enjoyable?

Our topic today is “Striving for a Christ-centered Marriage,” but we might call it “Dancing in a Christ-centered Marriage,” because the whole idea is to make marriage a dance rather than a debate.

PLAY

Play Session 6: *Striving for a Christ-Centered Marriage* (26 Minutes)

TALKING IT OVER

In the video, Chip Ingram said, “God created marriage and he made it purposefully, after the fall, to frustrate you to some degree. To let you know, apart from His Son, you just can’t get close to someone. … You need Jesus Christ, not just in your life but in the center of your life in your relationship.”

How do you see that in your marriage?

In the video, Gordon and Tanya had a conflict that seemed to center around joining the church. Do you think Gordon has a legitimate beef, or is he just looking for a way out?
What do you think the root of their conflict was about? How is this affecting their marriage?

We could argue about the importance of particular roles in the home, but let’s consider what that meant for this couple. Tanya had a more active connection and desire for faith than Gordon, and she was using that connection for the good of the family.

What advice would you give them or any couple where their faith isn’t “in sync”?

At this point in the video, Chip made an important distinction. “We are talking about the importance of having a Christ-centered marriage. We didn’t say a going-to-church-centered marriage or a religious-centered marriage. We’re talking about when each person has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

What’s the difference?

Many people grow in their relationship with Christ by going to church and doing religious things, but we must not confuse these things. The relationship with Christ is the important thing. Without that, churchgoing and religious activity is pointless.

In the later interviews, there were a couple of exchanges that were just beautiful to watch. In these moments, we saw couples truly involved in a relationship “dance.”

Daryl said, “She’s kind of a balance with me. When I’m a little firm, I’m a little tough, she’s a little mercy, a little grace, so she kind of brings a balance to me.”

Denise said, “He’s my strength sometimes and I have to be his ease sometimes because he’s a little strong-willed and I’m a little bit more passive, so we kind of balance one another out.”

Chase said, “I get to see the love and the patience and the serving that she’s able to do for these kids, and I just get to do it with her and it’s a blast.”
Elizabeth said, “I’ve just been able to see him be the hands and feet of the Lord to me, as I’ve been drained at the end of the day and he comes home and is able to kind of relieve me and get the girls back excited, and just to see his tender heart.”

What do you see here? How do these husbands and wives complement each other?

Do you think that sort of balance happens immediately in a marriage, or does it develop over time?

If it “develops over time,” how does it develop?

They say that “opposites attract,” but maybe it’s not so much opposites but “balancers.” That is, we are drawn to people with qualities that balance out our qualities. So maybe some marriages are complementary from the start. But many marriages develop that balance as both partners become aware of their own traits and how they match up with the other’s traits. Each learns to entrust the other with certain specialties. In some cases, they find new balance as they focus on a particular mission. For Chase and Elizabeth, it was being foster parents. They brought new qualities to that task and they saw how those qualities fit together.

Chip talked about the “dance” of marriage. How is marriage like a dance?

Two partners, each with strengths and weaknesses, moving through life in rhythm and balance, using one’s strength to support the other’s weakness.

Chip Ingram said, “You say to God, ‘. . . You’re the choreographer I want you to tell me where to step and how to step,’ . . . and as you do that, you come together and it’s a thing of beauty. . . . You say to God, ‘Lord this is a beautiful life that you made. It’s a dance. You be the choreographer. You show me as a man, you show me as a woman, how we do this dance together.’”
By the Book

Turn to Ephesians 5:21. The apostle Paul gives some powerful insight into how this dance is designed to work.

Would someone read verses 21-24?

Who is verse 21 written to? (The whole church.)

Why should we submit to one another? (Because we revere Christ.)

What does it mean, then, to “submit”?

This would seem to match up with other New Testament commands given to the entire church, such as the teaching we found in Philippians 2. We should consider others “better” (or more worthy of honor) than ourselves. We should look to their interests more than our own. We should follow Jesus’ example, not clinging to our rights but becoming a humble servant. This is the way all Christians should behave, because our aim is to honor Christ and not to please ourselves.

It’s possible to see verse 21 as a title for this next section, extending to Ephesians 6:9. The Christian life is a dance of submission, and here’s how it plays out in specific life-situations.

What, then, are wives called to do? (To submit to their husbands “in everything,” “as to the Lord.”)

Is this any different from the mutual submission mentioned in verse 21?

What does it mean for the husband to be the “head” of the wife?

Scholars have debated the interpretation of this image, which also appears in 1 Corinthians 11. In the ancient world, to be the “head” of a group was to be its leader, but Paul seems to be painting a very specific picture here. Christ is the head and the church is the body, he says, in the same way that
a husband is the head and the wife is the body. Leadership is one issue here, but so is connectedness. Divide a head from its body, and both die. The church is connected to Christ through its submission and his sacrificial service. A husband and wife might be connected in the same way.

Would someone read verses 25-31?

**What are husbands called to do?** (To love their wives as Christ loved the church.)

**How did Christ love the church?** (He “gave himself up for her to make her holy.”)

**How is this “love” different from the “submission” we read about in verses 21-22?** (It’s certainly more specific. It involves Christ-like self-sacrifice.)

**Husbands are instructed to love their wives “as their own bodies.” How does this compare with other passages we have read?**

In our last session we learned that the wife’s body belongs to the husband, and the husband’s body belongs to the wife (1 Corinthians 7:4). So there is a physical unity that God has created. This also jibes with the verse that Paul quotes from Genesis 2:24 about the two becoming “one flesh.”

**How, then, should a husband care for his wife?** (With the same devotion he would give his own body.)

Would someone read verses 32-33?

**What is the “profound mystery” Paul is talking about?**

He says specifically that he is “talking about Christ and his church.” That’s the mystery. Now there are two ways to read this phrase: casual and cosmic. He has already been drawing the comparison between marriage and the Christ-church connection. Then he quotes the “one-flesh” verse from Genesis. At this point he might be saying, “How does the one-flesh idea apply to Christ and his church? It’s a mystery, but let’s not get into that right now.”

But Paul has used the word mystery before in a cosmic setting, even in this epistle (1:9). God has a “secret plan” he has now revealed in Christ. In a companion epistle he spells it out. “God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles
the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). So he might be saying, “This is the ultimate mystery, how you and Christ can be eternally connected, and we see a picture of that in the way a husband and wife become ‘one flesh.’”

If that’s the case, then your marriage is a PowerPoint presentation to the world of the greatest story ever told. Not to put any pressure on you or anything, but you are the bearers of the secret message that isn’t secret anymore. Your love and submission and connection mirror the relationship that can exist between human beings and God.

Take a look at the first nine verses of Ephesians 6. These are often grouped together with the passage we just studied in a section some scholars call “house rules.” These are guidelines for different groups of people in a well-structured home.

What groups of people are addressed? (Children, fathers, slaves, masters—and of course husbands and wives in chapter 5.)

There is one theme that recurs throughout this section—honoring the Lord. Children must obey their parents “in the Lord,” but fathers must provide the “instruction of the Lord.” Slaves must obey “as you would obey Christ,” and masters need to remember that they too have a master.

Does Ephesians 5:21 serve as a good title for this whole section? Why or why not?

This passage clearly gives different instructions to husbands and to wives. Does this indicate that men and women have different God-given roles in a marriage?

If so, how would you define these roles?
In the video, Chip spoke about marriage as “a great dance.” After reading Ephesians 5, we might say it’s “the great mystery dance of ultimate cosmic meaning.” Yes, that passage is the subject of heated debate. In our world, the subject of “roles” for men and women is often misunderstood and rejected. But can we get beyond the debate and enjoy the dance? Can we get two partners to work together as one to create a thing of beauty? That’s our goal.

Here are some thoughts on marriage as a dance:

**A great dance needs a choreographer.** Who is creating the steps? God, of course. We must not look to our culture to tell us how men and women should relate. We need to seek the full counsel of God on the matter.

**A great dance requires mutual submission to the choreographer’s steps.** Both partners must be willing to put aside their own prerogatives and follow the Lord’s leading.

**A great dance demands clarity of roles.** Who leads? Who follows? Who lifts? Who swirls? God has gifted us with certain abilities and given us certain tasks. We need to communicate with each other about how we each fit into God’s plan.

**A great dance results from practice, practice, and more practice.** Will you make some missteps? Absolutely. Will you fall? Maybe. But you pick yourself up and keep dancing.

**A great dance develops an incredible team.** You draw closer to each other as you learn to combine your strengths and passions for God’s glory.

**A great dance develops balance, timing, rhythm, and strength.** Dance partners tune in to each other, reading subtle signals and adjusting their own moves accordingly. The same is true of marriage partners. You learn to listen, read, and respond.

**A great dance develops personal joy and mutual fulfillment.** There is nothing quite like being where you’re supposed to be and doing what you’re supposed to do—especially when you’re coordinating all of that with a partner you love. Personal pleasure is not the goal of marriage (or of dance), but it’s a reward. Dance is thrilling. Marriage can be more so.
A great dance is a thing of beauty. If you watch dancers, you recognize that they are creating something that goes beyond themselves. It’s a work of art. In some way, it reflects the glory of the Creator, who made our bodies and invented the physical properties of the universe. In the same way, a great marriage points beyond itself to the love and beauty of our great God.

WORKING THINGS OUT

Leader: Direct the group to page 52 of the workbook. Divide into groups of 4-6, all-male or all-female.

Learning to Dance

1. What different roles did your parents assume in their marriage? What was their marriage-dance like?

2. How would you describe the role you currently have in your marriage? Can you come up with three words to describe it?

3. Do you feel pressure from the culture, the church, your parents, or your spouse to take on a different role in your marriage? How? What?

4. Do you feel that your spouse should take on a different role? What?

5. Have you and your spouse ever talked specifically about the different roles you take in your marriage?
6a. (Men) What does it mean to you to “love your wife as Christ loved the church”? What specific thing could you do to accomplish that?

6b. (Women) What does it mean to you to “submit to your husband as to the Lord”? What specific thing could you do to accomplish that?

**TOGETHER AT HOME**

**Leader:** Draw the groups back together for a final word.

Sometimes men find it easier to talk with other men and women find it easier to talk with other women, but this is definitely a subject you should talk about with your spouse. I urge you to go back through your notes for this session and discuss it together. Now that you’ve had a sort of “dancing lesson,” see how it comes together.

As we conclude this series, I want to refocus on where we started: two becoming one, the intimacy of oneness. That’s God’s desire for your marriage, and it’s probably yours too. I hope you come away from these sessions with some new ideas, with a greater understanding of each other, and with some good habits—like the regular Conference or scheduled activities together.

Of course I can’t let you go without a little assignment. This is a simple “intimacy survey” that asks a number of questions about three different areas of marital intimacy. I’d suggest you make some blank copies of this and stash them away to use again three, six, or nine months from now. And I pray that you continue to dance together in oneness.
Intimacy Survey

**Spiritual Intimacy**
1. We agree on issues concerning values and beliefs.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

2. We confess our faults and sins to each other.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

3. We offer forgiveness to each other when needed.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

4. We pray together.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

5. We read Scripture together.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

6. We are involved in serving others together.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

**Emotional Intimacy**
7. We feel comfortable sharing our positive feelings with each other.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

8. We feel comfortable sharing our negative feelings with each other.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

9. We ask how the other is feeling about things that happen in our lives.
   0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

10. We listen to each other with undivided attention.
    0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully

11. We talk regularly about our relationship.
    0 Not at all   1 A little   2 Moderately   3 A lot   4 Fully
Physical Intimacy

12. We set aside special times to be alone with each other.
0 Not at all    1 A little    2 Moderately    3 A lot    4 Fully

13. We go on dates together.
0 Not at all    1 A little    2 Moderately    3 A lot    4 Fully

14. We are comfortable communicating sexual desires and preferences with each other.
0 Not at all    1 A little    2 Moderately    3 A lot    4 Fully

15. We compliment each other regularly.
0 Not at all    1 A little    2 Moderately    3 A lot    4 Fully

16. We often touch, hug, and cuddle.
0 Not at all    1 A little    2 Moderately    3 A lot    4 Fully

17. We have a satisfying sex life.
0 Not at all    1 A little    2 Moderately    3 A lot    4 Fully
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with David Nasser  
What Culture Doesn’t Want You to Hear

**Free Market Jesus**  
with Donald Miller  
How Our View of Culture Shapes Our View of the Gospel

**The Sacred Echo**  
with Margaret Feinberg  
Why is Prayer so Mysterious?

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with Marcus Goodloe

Friends
with Sean McDowell

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with David Nasser
Filmed in Rome

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