



UNITY IN MARRIAGE

Building a Marriage that Experiences
and Expresses the Love of God!



LifeSpring
NETWORK

S E M I N A R W O R K B O O K



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Jason earned a B.A. in Business Economics and in Organizational Behavior and Management from Brown University, where he was captain, pre-season All-American, and all-Ivy team member of the football team. He is also a national and Olympic trials qualifier and former school record holder in the discus. He also earned a Master of Divinity degree from Southern Theological Seminary, is a graduate of the Arrow Leadership Program and has completed the course work for his Doctorate in Christian Leadership at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is currently engaged in further theological studies through Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO.

Jason is the author of the Omega Course, Delta Course, Creating a Connection Culture Seminar, Body Life Basics Seminar, Unity in Marriage Seminar, Renew Refresh Refocus Retreat, C.O.R.E. Small Group L.E.A.D.E.R. Seminar, Omega Mentor Training Seminar, Empowered Servanthood Seminar, Making Cent\$ Seminar, Leading the Omega Experience Conference and *Beyond Self-Help: The True Path to Harnessing God's Wisdom, Realizing Life's Potential and Living the Abundant Life (Xulon)*.

Jason is a co-founder and partner of E Pluribus Partners, a Greenwich, CT based think tank and consulting firm focused on helping organizations create connection cultures. He serves as a consultant and life coach to many corporate executives and pastors, helping them to create engaging organizations. Jason is a contributing author to *What Managers Say What Employees Hear*. He is also a co-author of the best-selling books, *Fired Up or Burned Out* (Thomas Nelson) and *Connection Culture* (ATD Press).

Jason's wife, Jen, is also a graduate of Brown University with a B.A. in Psychology, as well as Boston University with a Masters of Social Work. She is active in several ministries, especially those relating to youth and families. Jason and Jen have four children.

U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage Workbook for the
U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage Seminar: Building a Marriage
that Experiences and Expresses the Love of God!

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Welcome and Table of Contents

Welcome!

Welcome to the U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage Seminar Workbook. We're glad that you have decided to invest in the growth and development of your marriage. This workbook is designed to help you learn, process and apply the content of this seminar.

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The background of the slide is an abstract composition. On the right side, there is a stylized tree with a thick, textured trunk and several branches. The trunk and branches are rendered in shades of brown, tan, and yellow, with some darker outlines. The foliage is represented by soft, blended strokes of yellow and light green. The left side of the slide is a solid, dark green color. The title text is centered over the dark green area.

Session 1: Getting Acquainted

Getting Acquainted

U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage

Topics to be covered within the U.N.I.T.Y. Paradigm:

Christian Marriage is about U.N.I.T.Y. –

Unconditional love,

being a Nest for you and for raising the next generation,

Intimacy to the extreme,

a Tool for honing your character,

and a Yoke which binds you to a common mission.

Ground Rules for our journey together:

1. What's shared here stays here.
2. We have come together to share our experiences in marriage in order to build one another up and learn from one another. The assumption here is that nobody drifts towards greatness in any area of his/her life, so we have come together for intentional growth and training.
3. Everyone is free to ask any question they want and to challenge each other in any assumptions about what makes a marriage truly great.
4. I will play the role of teacher, facilitator and mediator if things get too intense or out of line.
5. We are going to use Scripture and a Christian view of marriage as the assumed basis of authority which will guide our discussion.

Who we are as your trainers:

Individual History

Marriage History

Ministry History

Our Family Now

Every Christian Marriage is a Ministry Marriage

We believe that we are called together in Marriage as believer priests to advance the Kingdom of God. God designed the journey of life to be done in community and the most intimate aspect of that communal experience is found within the covenant of marriage. It is for that reason that our relationships to our spouses are second only to our relationship with God.

When you take this approach to marriage and ministry, there are predictable challenges along the way that only God can guide and empower us through if we are seeking to live out our married lives His way.

Matthew 11:12

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.”

What does it mean to advance the Kingdom of God in your marriage?

How are you intentionally and forcefully advancing the Kingdom of God in your marriage?

The current state of discipleship as captured in a recent discipleship survey (2005) conducted by the Barna Group:
“When Christian adults were asked to identify their most important goal for their lives,

-
- This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Top Ten Threats to Ministry Marriages ¹

1. Inability to balance family life and ministry
2. Leaders more concerned about ministry calling than marriage covenant
3. Failing to facilitate partner's dreams - not helping one another grow
4. Failing to have fun
5. Alternative confidant found outside marriage
6. Money problems
7. Ministry makes the spouse live like a single parent/widow/widower
8. Unfulfilled expectations
9. Admiration sought from someone other than partner
10. Isolation

Marriage Rules from a Male Perspective ²

1. Learn to work the toilet seat. You're a big girl. If it's up, put it down. We need it up, you need it down. You don't hear us complaining about you leaving it down.
2. Saturday = sports. It's like the full moon or the changing of the tides. Let it be!
3. Shopping is NOT a sport. And no, we are never going to think of it that way.
4. Crying is blackmail.
5. Ask for what you want. Let us be clear on this one:
Subtle hints do not work!
Strong hints do not work!
Obvious hints do not work!
JUST SAY IT!
6. 'Yes' and 'No' are perfectly acceptable answers to almost every question.
7. Come to us with a problem only if you want help solving it. That's what we do. Sympathy is what your girlfriends are for.
8. A headache that lasts for 17 months is a problem. See a doctor!
9. Anything we said six months ago is inadmissible in an argument. In fact, all comments become null and void after seven days.
10. If you think you're fat, you probably are. Don't ask us!

Getting Acquainted

11. If something we said can be interpreted two ways, and one of the ways makes you sad or angry, we meant the other one.
12. You can either ask us to do something or tell us how you want it done: not both. If you already know best how to do it, just do it yourself.
13. Whenever possible, please say whatever you have to say during commercials.
14. Christopher Columbus did not need directions and neither do we.
15. ALL men see in only 16 colors, like Windows default settings.
Peach, for example, is a fruit, not a color.
Pumpkin is also a fruit.
We have no idea what mauve is.
16. If it itches, it will be scratched. We do that.
17. If we ask what is wrong and you say “nothing,” we will act like nothing’s wrong. We know you are lying, but it is just not worth the hassle.
18. If you ask a question you don’t want an answer to, expect an answer you don’t want to hear.
19. When we have to go somewhere, absolutely anything you wear is fine. Really.
20. Don’t ask us what we’re thinking about unless you are prepared to discuss such topics as: Sex, Sports, or Work.
21. You have enough clothes.
22. You have too many shoes.
23. I am in shape. Round is a shape.
24. Yes, I know, I have to sleep on the couch tonight, but did you know men really don’t mind that. It’s like camping.

The background of the page is a composite of several elements. On the right side, there is a vertical strip featuring an abstract painting of a tree. The tree's trunk is a warm, textured brown, and its roots are depicted in dark green and black, spreading across the bottom. The foliage is rendered in shades of yellow, green, and white with visible brushstrokes. To the left of this painting, the page is divided into three horizontal rectangular blocks of a solid, muted green color. The text is centered over the middle green block.

Session 2: Unconditional Love

Unconditional Love

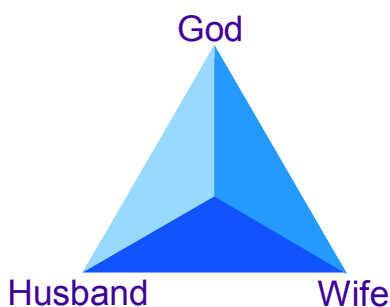
U - Unconditional Love

Christian Marriage: Is a very sacred covenant between one man and one woman for life with Christ at the center. It is to be taken very seriously, honored and respected for its power and importance in God's plan for our lives here on earth. Couples enter into marriage as individuals who are responsible for their individual lives before God. In marriage God gives us the opportunity to have a partner who will walk side by side with us as we journey through life following Christ.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being poor and 10 being good) how would you rate your unity?

In marriage you will each remain accountable to God for seeking out His will diligently. You are not to become dependent on one another but rather interdependently submitted to serving God and one another.

Therefore the picture of a God-honoring marriage would look like two people side by side (very close to each other) with Jesus in-between them and ahead of them guiding their way.



Ephesians 5:21-33

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”

Ephesians 5:21-33 teaches us the importance of admiration for one another in marriage. Communicate respect, interest and attraction.

Avoid these four things³ and replace them with the antidote:

- Criticism - Complaint
- Contempt - Grace
- Defensiveness - Accept Responsibility
- Stonewalling - Self-soothe

Which of these four relational traps are you prone to engaging in?

Unconditional Love

Does the antidote suggested make sense to you? If so, how do you plan to make sure you use it?

Jesus' view on Marriage

In Matthew 19:4-6 we see Jesus' view on Marriage and the importance of this covenant commitment: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Have you truly left your father and mother and taken up the commission to forge a dynamic union between you, your spouse and God?

What are some patterns from your past or connections to your parenting that continue to hold back greatness in your marriage?

In serving one another we become free!

As we read in **Ephesians 5:21** “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” We are all created and designed to experience unconditional love. This is the grace-filled love that we experience from God. In marriage God gives us a powerful platform to express His kind of love to each other. Strive to model God’s love for you, as you love each other!

Do you strive to serve your spouse in your marriage? How?

What stops you from serving your spouse?

Psalm 103:8-14

“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”

Vows - In the name of God, I take you to be my wife/husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live. This is my solemn vow.

Unconditional Love

Exchange of Rings

With this ring I marry you and commit to share my life with you.
This ring is a token and symbol of my covenant to love and serve you with my life till death parts us.

The Seven Deadly Sins vs. the Seven Godly Virtues

Throughout this seminar we will examine the seven deadly sins and seven opposing Godly virtues in order to see how the evil one attacks our U.N.I.T.Y. and how to apply God's solution.

Knowing your sin tendencies

The Biblical term for sin means to miss the mark. The bull's eye is God's abundant life. When we choose to desire, feel, think and act in ways that are contrary to God's will for our lives, we miss the mark.

John Wesley's mother's definition of sin

Whatever weakens your sense of reasoning (Mind), impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God (Soul), or takes away your relish for spiritual things (Heart). In short, if anything increases the authority of the flesh over the Spirit (Strength), that to you becomes sin, however good it is in or of itself.

Romans 7:15-20

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."

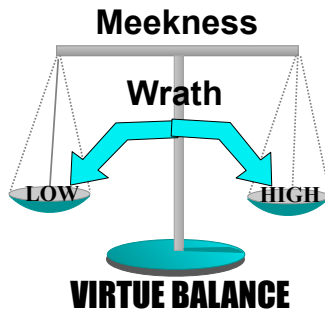
Do you relate to the understanding that we are all born with a sinful nature, and because of this nature we don't naturally do what is good for our lives? How is this clearly evident in your life?

What makes it hard for you to believe this?

Wrath - Anger is first an emotion. However, it becomes a deadly sin when it becomes inordinate, that is, against reason, and is connected with the desire for revenge, damage or destruction against the perceived cause of our hurt.

The Opposite Virtue: Meekness

Meekness is related to patience. It has to do with an inner strength or grace which allows one to embrace and endure an injury without self pity or having to retaliate in kind. It is part of the ability to maintain perspective in the stressful heat of injury.





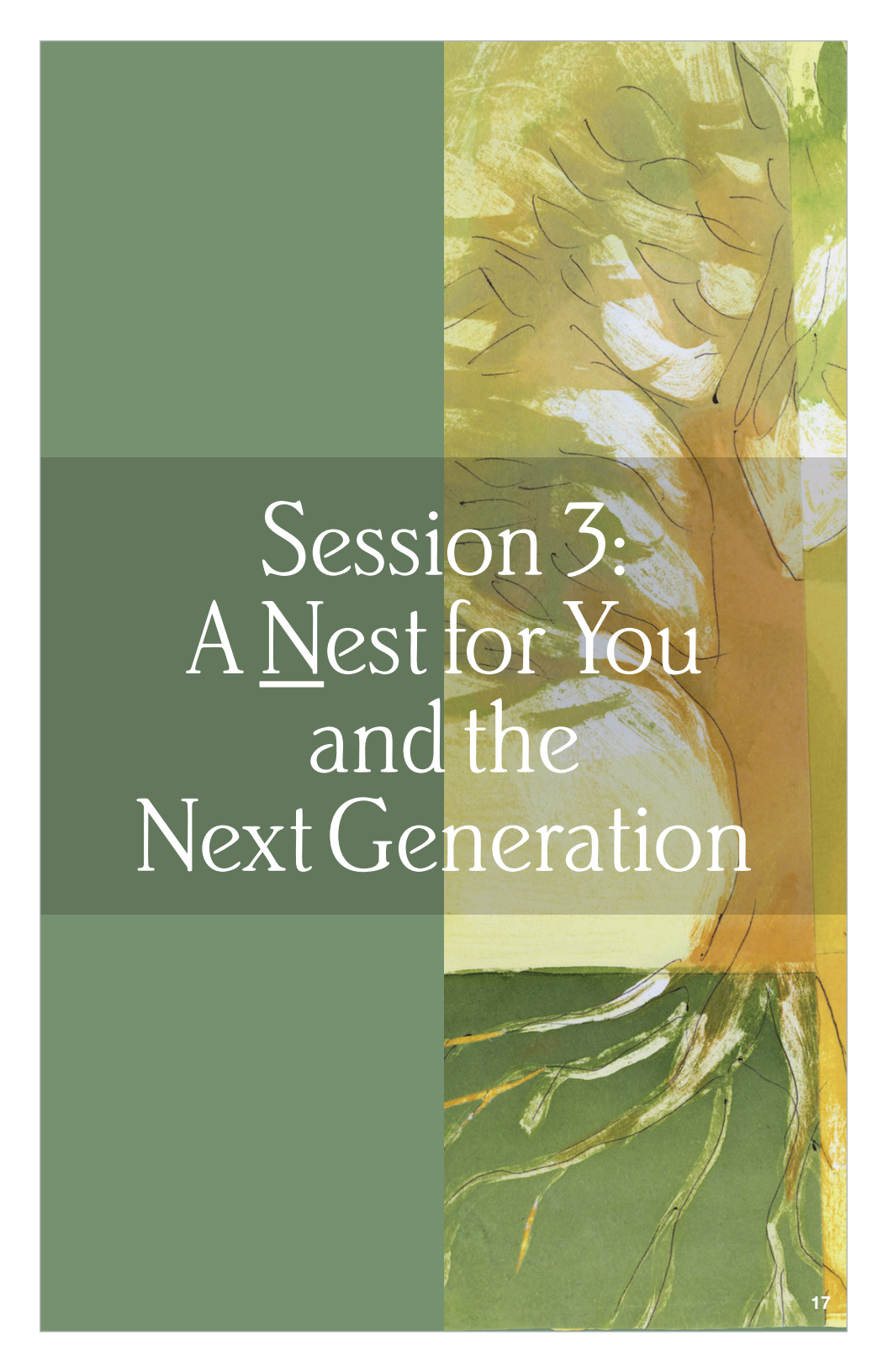
Unconditional Love

Discussion Questions:

What is the state of grace in your marriage today?

What are some unforgiven sins between you and your spouse that you need to forgive so that you can build a strategy towards reconciliation and repair the trust that was lost in your relationship?

How can you cultivate a culture of confession and forgiveness in your marriage?

The background of the slide is composed of large, solid-colored blocks in shades of green and yellow. Overlaid on the right side is a stylized, abstract illustration of a tree. The tree's trunk and branches are rendered in dark, thin lines, while the foliage is depicted with broad, textured strokes in various shades of green and yellow, giving it a painterly or collage-like appearance.

Session 3: A Nest for You and the Next Generation

A Nest for You and the Next Generation

The covenant relationship of marriage provides the ideal nest in which to come together and feel secure and loved.

It also provides the loving environment in which to raise children (if applicable) and grow God-honoring families. These children could be your biological children, adopted or even foster children.

Either way, when both of you are engaged in loving God and each other you will have the strength to love and provide for others.

Is your marriage a safe nurturing relationship? If so, what do you intentionally do to create this safety?

What can you do to deepen that sense of safety and support for each other?

Leisure and Play in Marriage²

1. Play is not going to happen automatically
2. Plan mini-breaks
3. Think of leisure as unorganized
4. Split some of your holidays into small segments
5. Plan what to do with your time together
6. Develop a healthy theology/philosophy of play
7. Plan inexpensive leisure activities
8. Don't let leisure become work
9. Don't put off leisure
10. Give playful gifts

A Nest for You and the Next Generation

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In your marriage, do you feel like you play enough? Why or why not?

What can you do to infuse your marriage with more play?

Know your partner's inner world!

Whether it is hard-wired or learned behavior, it is important to understand how we prefer to experience and express love in our lives.

Keep a Love Map recording your partner's likes and dislikes. What are five things that your spouse really likes?

What are five things that your spouse truly dislikes?

Know their Love Language - We will examine a paradigm created by Gary Chapman from his book the Five Love Languages.⁴

Knowing your love language and being able to discern the love languages of others in your life will be invaluable to you as you strive to experience and express love!

For more resources, thoughts, and discussion about this session, please visit www.lifespringnetwork.org

A Nest for You and the Next Generation

The Five Love Languages: ⁴

1. Words of Affirmation
2. Quality Time
3. Receiving Gifts
4. Acts of Service
5. Physical Touch

Three Ways to Discover Your Love Language

1. What does your spouse/close friends do or fail to do that hurts you most deeply? The opposite of what hurts you most is probably your love language.
2. What have you most often requested of your spouse/close friends? The thing you have most often requested is likely the thing that would make you feel most loved.
3. In what way do you regularly express love to your spouse/close friends? Your method of expressing love may be an indication that would also make you feel loved.

A Quick Summary of the five Love Languages:

Words of Affirmation

Verbal appreciation speaks powerfully to people whose primary love language is “Words of Affirmation.” Simple statements such as, “You look great in that suit,” or “You must be the best baker in the world! I love your oatmeal cookies,” are sometimes all a person needs to hear to feel loved. Aside from verbal compliments, another way to communicate through “Words of Affirmation” is to offer encouragement. Here are some examples: reinforcing a difficult decision; calling attention to progress made on a current project; acknowledging a person’s unique perspective on an important topic. If a loved one listens for “Words of Affirmation,” offering encouragement will help him or her to overcome insecurities and develop greater confidence.

Quality Time

Quality time is more than mere proximity. It's about focusing all your energy on your mate/close friends. A husband watching sports while talking to his wife is NOT quality time. Unless all of your attention is focused on your mate, even an intimate dinner for two can come and go without a minute of quality time being shared. Quality conversation is very important in a healthy relationship. It involves sharing experiences, thoughts, feelings and desires in a friendly, uninterrupted context. This involves "active listening" to assure that the other person knows you are truly listening. Many people don't expect you to solve their problems. They need a sympathetic listener. An important aspect of quality conversation is self-revelation. In order for you to really communicate with another person, you must be in tune with your emotions. It is only when you understand your emotions and feelings that you are able to share quality conversation and quality time with another person.

Quality activities are a very important part of quality time. Many people feel most loved when they spend physical time together, doing activities that they love to do. Spending time together will bring you closer, and help you build a memory bank that you can draw from in the future.

Receiving Gifts

Some people respond well to visual symbols of love. If you speak this love language, you are more likely to treasure a gift as an expression of love and devotion. People who speak this love language often feel that a lack of gifts represents a lack of love from their mate. Luckily, this love language is one of the easiest to learn.

If you want to become an effective gift-giver, you might have to learn to change your attitude about money. If you are naturally a spender, you will have no trouble buying gifts for that person. However, people who are used to investing and saving their money may have a tough time adjusting to the concept of spending money as an expression of love. These people must understand that you are investing the money not in gifts but in deepening your relationship with your mate.



A Nest for You and the Next Generation

The gift of self is an important symbol of love. Sometimes all a person desires is for you to be there for him or her, going through the same trials and experiencing the same things. Your body can become a very powerful physical symbol of love.

These gifts need to come every week or even every day, but they don't have to cost a lot of money. Free, frequent, expensive, or rare, if that person relates to the language of receiving gifts, any visible sign of your love will leave him or her feeling happy and secure in your relationship.

Acts of Service

Acts of service can bring about a great sense of feeling loved for those for whom it is a love language. In a marriage relationship or within a family, sometimes simple chores around the house can be an undeniable expression of love. Even simple things like doing the laundry and taking out the trash require some form of planning, time, effort, and energy. Just as Jesus demonstrated when He washed the feet of His disciples, doing humble chores can be a very powerful expression of love and devotion to your loved one.

It is very important to understand what acts of service another person most appreciates. Even though couples are helping each other around the house, they might still fight because they are unknowingly communicating with each other in two different dialects.

Also of importance is to engage in these acts of service out of love and not obligation. Someone who does chores and helps out around the house out of guilt or fear will inevitably be speaking a language of resentment rather than a language of love. It's important to perform these acts out of the kindness of your heart.

Sometimes demonstrating acts of service can mean stepping out of the stereotypes. Acts of service require both people to humble themselves into doing some chores and services that aren't usually expected from their gender. However, these little sacrifices will mean the world to the other person and invite a happier relationship.

Physical Touch

Many people feel the most loved when they receive physical contact. For someone who speaks this love language loudly, physical touch can make or break the relationship.

Sexual intercourse makes many mates feel secure and loved in a marriage. However, it is only one dialect of physical touch. It is important to discover how your partner not only physically responds but also psychologically responds to these touches. Sometimes little acts such as touches on the cheek, on the hand, or the shoulder can really make a difference.

All marriages will experience crises. In these cases, physical touch is very important. In a crisis situation, a hug can communicate an immense amount of love for that person. A person whose primary love language is physical touch would much rather have you hold them and be silent than offer any advice. It is important to remember that this love language is different for everyone. The type of touch that makes you feel secure is not necessarily what will make your partner happy. It is important to learn each other's dialects.

Which of the five love languages do you prefer to experience and express love through?

What are your partner's preferred languages?

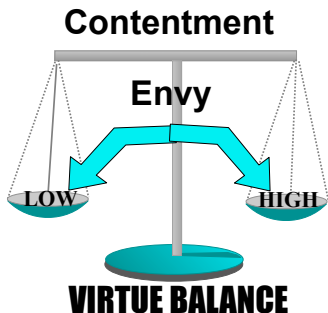
A Nest for You and the Next Generation

The Seven Deadly Sins vs. the Seven Godly Virtues

Envy - The dictionary defines envy as the painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, joined with a desire to possess the same advantage. In 1 Corinthians 13:4, the Apostle Paul describes envy as the opposite of love. Galatians 5:21 lists envy as the fruit of the flesh. The letter of James (3:14-16) associates jealousy and selfish ambition with evil and chaos.

The Opposite Virtue: Contentment

Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us that envy is contrary to love, the source of the soul's spiritual life. Love rejoices in a neighbor's good, but envy grieves over it. Contentment, it has been said, is wanting what you have, not having what you want.



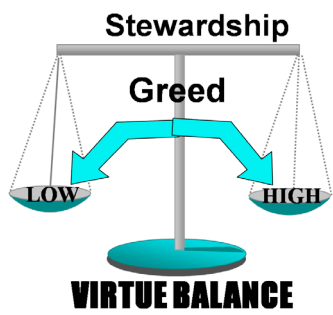
Do you feel like you are content with your lot in life? How does envy attack your marriage?

How is your discontentment, or that of your spouse, driving a wedge between the two of you and robbing you from appreciating and enjoying the life you have?

Greed - Greed is an inordinate love of money or material acquisitions and the dedication to - if not the obsession with - their pursuit. The implicit belief behind greed is that more is always better. Acquisition is the way to happiness. Financial savvy and success confer status and create the appearance of making a nobody into a somebody. The economy is driven by these needs and beliefs.

The Opposite Virtue: Good Stewardship

We all must come to terms with our radical poverty as creatures before God. The virtue of poverty also calls us to a greater sensitivity to the poor, God's special people.





A Nest for You and the Next Generation

Discussion Questions:

Do you and your spouse see eye to eye concerning finances?
For example, do you live on an agreed-upon budget and stick to it?
How could you do this better?

What are the biggest disagreements that you have concerning the handling of your resources?

An abstract artwork featuring a large, stylized tree-like structure. The tree's trunk and branches are rendered in shades of green and yellow, with dark, thin lines defining its form. The background is a solid, muted green. The overall composition is vertical and minimalist.

Session 4: Intimacy to the Extreme

Intimacy to the Extreme

God Desires that you Strive Towards Oneness in your Marriage.

Genesis 2:24

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

Oneness meaning true community:

1. Knowing and being known
2. Loving and being loved
3. Serving and being served
4. Forgiving and being forgiven
5. Celebrating and being celebrated

- In marriage God commands you to strive towards this.
- Your marriage will become a model relationship for others to follow. Your relating patterns will impact everyone you meet.
- You have the opportunity to experience and express intimacy to the extreme as soulmates!

How are you doing as soulmates?

Which of the five aspects of community could your relationship grow in the most? How?

10 Communication Approaches which Destroy Intimacy in Marriage: ²

1. Avoid sharing feelings
2. Assume you know what your partner wants and thinks
3. Shallow talk, e.g., the weather and daily events
4. Manipulative behavior, e.g., using the silent treatment
5. Assume any issue will disappear over time
6. Blame your partner for any problems
7. Lack of encouraging, positive words
8. Share all of your negative feelings
9. During an argument, bring up past issues
10. Avoid in-depth conversation about your relationship

Which of these ten communication approaches do you struggle with? Why?

Sex - God gave us the gift of sex to consummate this intimacy.
The Apostle Paul's words speak to this:

Hebrews 13:4

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure,
for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

Intimacy to the Extreme

The Seven Deadly Sins vs. the Seven Godly Virtues

Lust - Lust might be considered sexual gluttony. It is the inordinate need to experience sexual or genital gratification with little concern about the persons or relationships involved. We are seduced and we seduce one another in many ways. We are seduced by beauty, virility, power and control. Without any moral sensitivity, seduction can become a way of life at the expense of true love and intimacy.

The Opposite Virtue: Chastity

Chastity orders human sexual desire toward a union of persons. Chastity correlates with the beatitude, “Blessed are the pure of heart.” It sees human sexuality and intimacy as an integral dimension of God’s call to love; we cannot love God or others outside our bodies.

How is your marriage being challenged by the sin of lust?

Since sex is intended to be the culmination and celebration of our intimacy with one another, what are three things that your spouse could do in your marriage to better cultivate intimacy?

Gluttony - St. Thomas Aquinas defines the deadly sin of gluttony as an inordinate or immoderate appetite in eating and drinking. Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are very common in our time, causing cycles of starving or bingeing, and swinging between food-related anxiety, depression and guilt and the pursuit of sensory pleasure in food addiction. Professionals in this area have concluded that beneath this symptomatic behavior is an inner sense of alienation from the depths of oneself.

The Opposite Virtue: Temperance

Temperance is moderation in the enjoyment of food and drink. Sobriety is moderation in the use of intoxicating drink.

What are the eating and drinking habits like in your marriage?

What do you feel prompted to change?

What is the default sin tendency that you use to comfort yourself (e.g., too much or too little food or drink)? What does your spouse do? How can you help one another live more temperately?

Intimacy to the Extreme

What are you doing to grow your intimacy?

Are you:

1. Spending time honestly knowing and being known by your spouse?
2. Devotedly loving and being loved by your spouse?
3. Joyfully celebrating and being celebrated by your spouse?
4. Intentionally serving and being served by your spouse?
5. Compassionately forgiving and being forgiven by your spouse?

Discussion Questions:

Which of the five ideas listed for growing your intimacy are you neglecting in your marriage? How do you plan to change?

What are the stumbling-blocks to intimacy in your marriage?

What can you do to begin addressing them?

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Session 5: A Tool for Honing Our Character

A Tool for Honing Our Character

Growing Godly Character

God will use your marriage, and the safety of this covenant, as a tool to grow your character. I can attest that in my life God has used my spouse very powerfully to help grow and heal me in places that I didn't even understand. You can expect this to happen in your marriage as well, as you abide in God and allow yourself to be influenced by each other.

Proverbs 27:5-6

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.”

Proverbs 27:17

“As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another.”

Do you feel like you have a relationship where you can speak the truth to one another? What is difficult to talk about in your relationship?

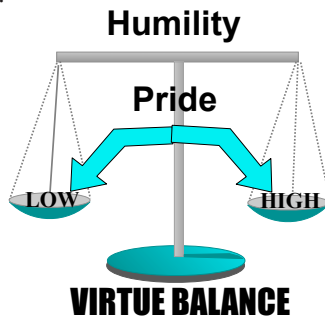
If there were three things that you would like your spouse to change, that they seem to be unaware of or regularly deny, what would they be?

The Seven Deadly Sins vs. the Seven Godly Virtues

Pride - The Oxford Dictionary defines pride as a high and overweening opinion of one's qualities, attainments or estate. Pride has traditionally been considered the root of all sin. As such, it is a disordered or exaggerated self-centeredness. It results in isolation from God and fractures the bonds that link us to each other and the community.

The Opposite Virtue: Humility

The counter-virtue to the sin of pride is humility. It has to do with an accurate sense of self and others with a deep reliance on God throughout the seasons of life.



How do you struggle with the sin of pride in your relationship?

How is it difficult for you to let your partner influence you?

A Tool for Honing Our Character

What could your partner do differently to help you submit to his/her influence in your life?

Growth Through Conflict - When we allow our partners to be used by God as a tool for honing our character, sparks will fly. This is part of the sharpening process, but it must be done wisely or we can destroy one another.

Biblical Wisdom for Fighting ²

- F - Face each other (Matthew 18:15-20)
- I - Ignore distractions (Philippians 3:12)
- G - Guard your tongue (James 3:3-12)
- H - Halt the history (Philippians 3:13)
- T - Touch (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)
- S - Stay in there (Philippians 3:14)

Matthew 18:15-20

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ¹⁸ “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

James 3:3-12

“When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Philippians 3:12-14

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

A Tool for Honing Our Character

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

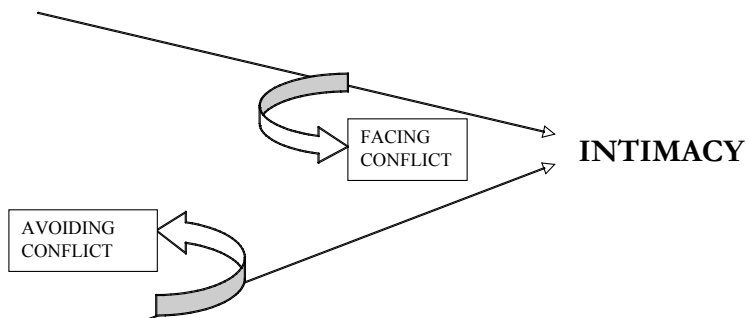
“The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

Using the F.I.G.H.T.S. paradigm, what are you doing right?
What are your strengths as a couple?

Using the F.I.G.H.T.S. paradigm, what is the most challenging area for you?

Which Scriptures stood out to you the most? Why?

When we learn to value conflict, God can use it to train us in righteousness and move us to deeper levels of intimacy.



Solve your solvable problems

In order to make conflict productive it is vital that we control what we can control:

- Soften start-up
- Accept influence
- Effective repair
- Soothe yourself & spouse
- Compromise
- Tolerate faults

Perpetual Problems:

Gottman³ says that 69% of marital problems are perpetual ones.

- Stress
- Relations with in-laws
- Money
- Sex
- Housework
- Becoming parents

Discussion Questions:

Which of the perpetual problem areas have occurred more than twice in your relationship?

What plans and strategies can you employ in your relationship to deal with them?

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Session 6: A Yoke which Binds us to a Common Mission in Life

A Yoke which Binds us to a Common Mission in Life

Yoking Together

In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul, commands Christians, if we are led to marry, to marry or become yoked together with other Christians.

- He does this because he knows that God has a special plan for marriage.
- God uses the yoke of marriage to give you a mission to live out together.
- You need to continue faithfully in the same direction with God as your guide in order to find and experience the abundant life and plan that He has in store for you.

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God’s Mission for Our Lives

Connecting in real loving relationship with God through Jesus **Christ** in the power of the Holy Spirit, with others in contagious Christian **Community**, and with our **Calling** of servanthood in the world.

How well do you feel like you understand God’s corporate mission for your marriage? If you feel on mission with God, explain what you intentionally do to live in obedience to this mission?

What do you do to listen for His regular guidance and apply it to your lives?

God tends to lead us differently given the season that we find ourselves in as a couple. What three things do you think God is highlighting for your marriage and family during this season of your life together?

Create Shared Meaning to Reinforce Your Yoke-bearing and Corporate Mission!

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

People with high marriage expectations usually have high-quality marriages if they follow God’s plan for nurturing their unity through:

- Rituals
- Roles
- Goals
- Symbols

In what ways are you learning how to follow God as you work together as God’s yokefellows with your mate?

A Yoke which Binds us to a Common Mission in Life

What rituals, roles, goals and symbols do you employ in your marriage to help you in your corporate yoke-bearing?

Do you find, as you press into God's plan for you, that His yoke is easy and His burden is light? How so?

The Power of a Partner - It is important to understand the power of a partner and how God wants to use you in each other's lives to be a source of strength and encouragement as you live out God's corporate mission for your marriage.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

¹⁰ If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! ¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? ¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

A Yoke which Binds us to a Common Mission in Life

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How do you encourage and help each other as fellow yoke-bearers?

What could you do better?

Complementary Partnership - It is important to understand how God has called and gifted each individual in a partnership to understand how best to steward your corporate life together and achieve maximum impact.

List three things about your mate that you feel make them gifted in an extraordinary complementary way. This means abilities, spiritual gifts, passions, etc., that God would like for you to steward well in order to realize your corporate potential.

The Seven Deadly Sins vs. the Seven Godly Virtues

Sloth - Sloth is popularly known today as laziness. The ancient Greek word was acedia: lack of caring, apathy, aimless indifference, lack of desire for anything. The deadly sin of sloth is an apathy of the spirit in the face of the effort required to attain a goal and sustain it. In addition to acedia, another aspect of sloth is tristitia, sadness or sorrow. Theologian Bernard Haring describes sloth as a lack of zeal for spiritual things.

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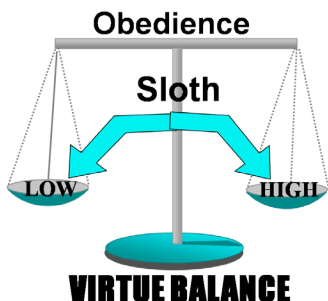
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A Yoke which Binds us to a Common Mission in Life

The Opposite Virtue: Obedience

(Pro-actively on mission with God)

This is stewarding your life from God's perspective. It requires us to reflect on our life mission and the various roles we play in life, and to allocate our time wisely in each role in order to be growing toward Christlikeness. The joy of being on mission with God comes through obedience!



How do you struggle with the sin of sloth in your marriage?

How are you feeling prompted to change your ways?

Seven Indicators of a Healthy Marriage ²

1. Prayer
2. Forgiveness
3. Communication
4. Romance
5. Acceptance
6. Contentment
7. Faith

The Seven Values of Abundant Living ⁵ and their Belief Statements:

(See the resources section for more information)

1. Guidance is necessary in order to carry out God's will.
 2. Grace is God's bridge to us and our bridge to others.
 3. Growth is a process towards full maturity in Christ.
 4. Glorification of God is the goal of our lives and the Church.
 5. Groups provide the optimal environment for life change.
 6. Gifts of divine empowerment are given to all believers to grow God's Church.
 7. Good Stewardship is the reasonable response to our gracious God.
-
-
-

Seven Indicators of a Healthy Marriage and the Seven Values of Abundant Living

1. Prayer - Guidance
 2. Forgiveness - Grace
 3. Communication - Growth
 4. Romance - Glorification
 5. Acceptance - Group
 6. Contentment - Gifts
 7. Faith - Good Stewardship
-
-
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So let's live up to the U.N.I.T.Y. that God designed marriage to be!

Unconditional love,

being a Nest for you and for raising the next generation,

Intimacy to the extreme,

a Tool for honing our character,

and a Yoke which binds you to a common mission.

A Yoke which Binds us to a Common Mission in Life

The Declaration of Marriage - And now, having declared your intentions for one another, having heard God's Holy word concerning marriage and love, having spoken your solemn vows to one another and sealed these vows with the giving and receiving of rings, it is my honor to pronounce that you are husband and wife according to the ordinances of God and the laws of the state.

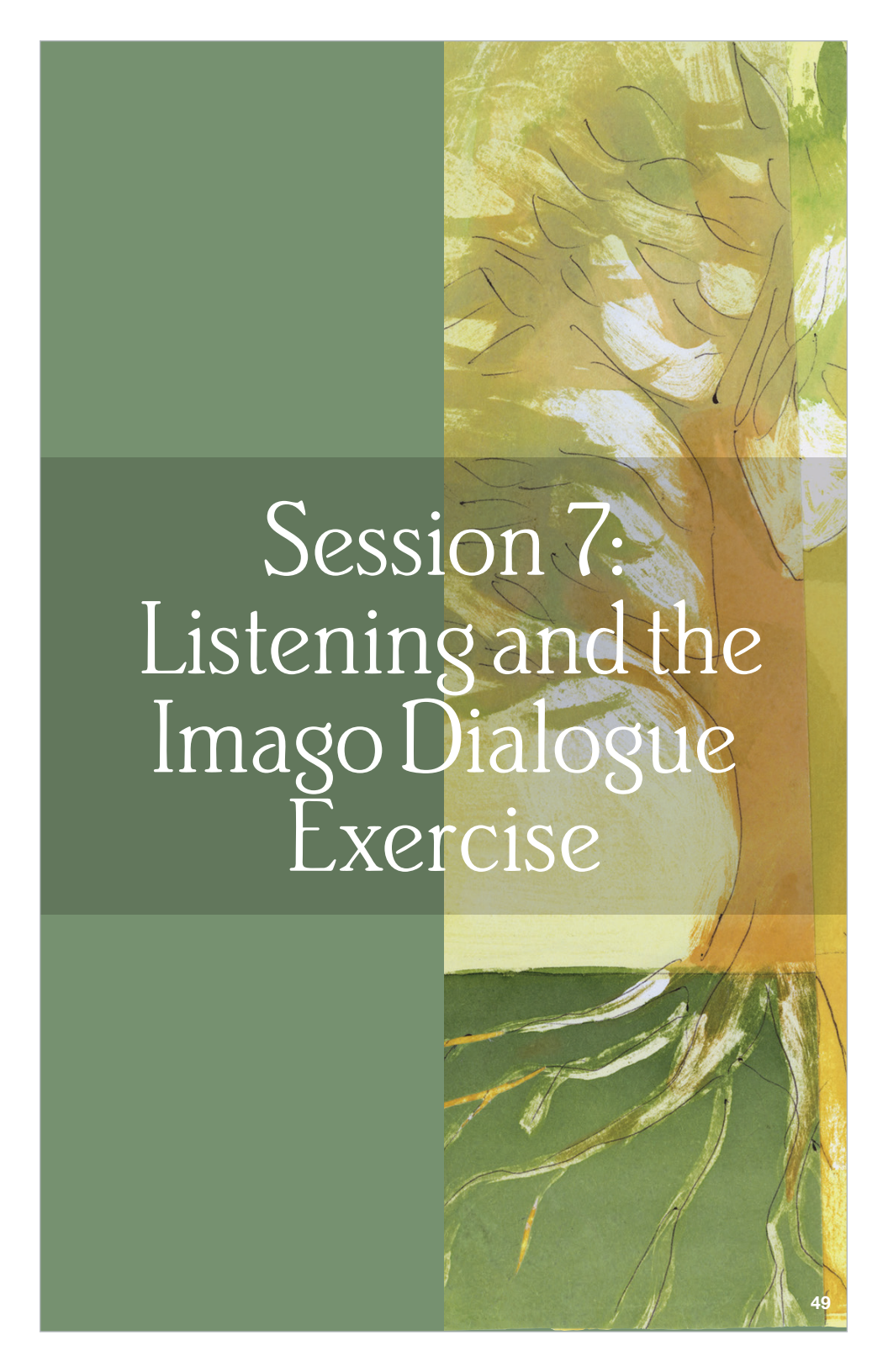
Those whom God has joined together, let no one separate.

Discussion Questions:

Which of the seven indicators of a healthy marriage do you think you need to invest in more? What are you going to do about it?

Do the Seven Values of Abundant Living help you to think about how you are going to do what you do? Which of these do you think you need to apply to your marriage? How?

Out of all that we have discussed in this seminar, what are you going to in the next 48 hours to build lifelong habits that will bless your marriage?



Session 7: Listening and the Imago Dialogue Exercise

50

- To God
- To Others
- To Self

First, listening **to God** and what He is saying to us individually.

Third, we listen to **ourselves**. Pay attention to how we innately seem to be responding to what someone is saying. Are we comfortable? Uncomfortable? Is this something to address or perhaps note for later?

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Henri Nouwen on Listening

“Let us not underestimate how hard it is to listen and to be compassionate. Compassion is hard because it requires the inner disposition to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely and broken. But...our spontaneous response...is to do away with suffering by fleeing from it or finding a quick cure for it. As busy, active, relevant people we want to [make] a real contribution. This means first and foremost doing something to show that our presence makes a difference. And so we ignore our greatest gift, which is our ability to be there, to listen and to enter into solidarity with those who suffer.”

Here, Nouwen points out our tendency: We really do want to help people in meaningful and tangible ways. The key is to do this in tandem with the work of God’s Spirit. It can be uncomfortable for us to just “be” with someone who is hurting, and we risk prematurely ending the conversation or the experience in our own power if we are not keenly aware of God’s timing and movement in the situation. Sometimes people just need us to be with them for a while.

Persuasive Listening ⁶

Studies tell us:

- 85% of what we know is learned by listening.
- We spend 45% of our day listening.
- 75% of that time we are preoccupied, distracted, or forgetful.
- Only 2% of people have had any formal training in effective listening.
- We hear approximately 125-250 words per minute.
- We can think at 1000-3000 words per minute.

Imago Dialogue Listening Exercise

Proverbs 18:13

“He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.”

James 1:19

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

Proverbs 18:2

“A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.”

Reflective Listening Techniques

Give back to the speaker your perception of what their problem is with an attitude that this is your perception, which is open to correction using:

- Repeating
 - Rephrasing
 - Reflecting
-
-
-

Basic Reflective Listening Formula: ⁶

Tentative Opening + Feeling + About/Because/When + Thought

It sounds like... you feel mad... about... paying higher taxes.

I hear you saying... you feel sad... because of... what she said to you.

If I hear you correctly... you feel glad... when... your sister succeeds.

You seem to be saying... you feel afraid... about... your father's ill health.

I think I hear you saying... you feel confused... because of... all the different options.

I'm not sure I'm following... you feel ashamed... about... wanting to leave home?

Am I hearing you say... you feel lonely... when... you remember your wife?

Imago Dialogue Listening Exercise

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Imago Dialogue⁷

A technique to enable two people to communicate their ideas and feelings effectively:

1. What can I do to help you FEEL more loved by me?
2. If I understand you correctly, to help you FEEL more loved by me I could... Is that correct? (The answer is simple – yes or no. You may ask them to repeat, it is important you say exactly what they say. This is a listening skill.)
3. Is there more?
4. Repeat #3 until finished! (It's good to limit this to two or three things, otherwise it can be overwhelming.)
5. Summarize items in #2, #3, and #4.
6. If someone did or said... I would feel... (Get in touch with gut feelings – e.g. abandoned, unloved, betrayed, forsaken, sad, etc.)
7. I desire to make you feel more loved by... (verbalize these items and make specific commitments to do something about those you can. Do not overstate).

Notes:

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References and Resources

The Seven Values of Abundant Living

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Below are a few important Scriptures where the Seven Values of Abundant Living are mentioned. First in Matthew 6:9-13 where Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray and then in Acts 2:42-47 where we see a snapshot of the early church and the values they lived by. Pray these values into your marriage and build a community that reflects these values to the world!

7 G's	The Lord's Prayer	Acts 2
Glorification	"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name,	46 "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God..."
Group	Your kingdom come,	42b "...and to the fellowship..."
Growth	Your will be done	42a "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..."
Gifts	on earth as it is in heaven.	43 "Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."
Good Stewardship	Give us today our daily bread.	44 "All believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need."
Grace	Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.	42c "... to the breaking of bread..." 47b "... and enjoying the favor of all of the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."
Guidance	And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."	42d ... and to prayer."

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The Seven Values of Abundant Living

Guidance is necessary in order to carry out God's will.

We depend upon God's leadership (or guidance) in our lives which is available through the Holy Spirit. We all need regular devotional and prayer times to connect with God in solitude. We seek the will of God through prayer, Bible study, circumstances, and the Church. We acknowledge the reality of spiritual warfare, where the battle is raging in the heavenly realms, and commit ourselves to praying so that God might use us to battle against the forces of darkness (Ephesians 6:12). Pray for yourself, your family, your community, people in authority over you, the sick, the poor, the crippled, the needy, etc. We show our need for God and our desire to grow our relationship with Him and others when we pray. It is through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that God uses our lives to influence others. We respect the spiritual authority and guidance of those God has placed in positions of authority and servanthood in our lives to help lead, guide and shepherd us along our journey of faith, and commit to seeking out their guidance as well. This includes the principle of maximum connection to God.

Grace is God's bridge to us and our bridge to others.

We are saved by Grace through Faith in Jesus Christ - and this not from our own works – so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8). Christ's followers understand and have individually received Christ's saving, sustaining, and enabling grace. Our focus is on the resurrected Christ and His Spirit, who saves us, is at work changing us, and empowers us to do God's will. Therefore, we are gracious and patient with people in our relational worlds who, like us, are on a journey of faith. As God's ambassadors, we reach out and share His grace with people He brings into our relational worlds and help them grow in faith. We believe in relational evangelism and believe that the Gospel is best shared person-to-person through the power of community. This includes the principle of authenticity and being real.

Growth is a process toward full maturity in Christ.

We recognize faith as a process and are committed to challenging ourselves and others to grow to maturity. Maturity means taking hold of all that is Christ (Philippians 3:12) and through His enabling Spirit, doing works of service which move us toward the goal of life. This goal is being the fullness of Christ in us (Ephesians 4:12), pleasing Him in every respect (1 Thessalonians 4:1). We need to surround ourselves with mentors and partners who will love, challenge, and provide guidance to us as we grow in faith. We desire to be diligent students of Scripture, and allow God's truth to be impressed on the very fabric of our lives. We look at our lives holistically and allow the mental, emotional, physical, spiritual and social dimensions of our lives to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. As we mature in our faith and God entrusts people to our care, we will strive to be good mentors to the people in our lives who look to us for guidance and discipleship. Leaders will strive to be submitted to those they lead and also will have regular discipleship and accountability times with their mentors. This includes the principle of discipleship chains.

Glorification of God is the goal of our lives and our church.

We lead lives of worship and bring glory to God in all we do when we humbly follow the guidance He provides. Excellence brings glory to God, so we submit ourselves to God's guidance so that He can work through us. We will strive to increasingly submit our lives to God and live lives of humble submission to His will. We will participate in regular times of worship where we can submit ourselves to God and refocus our lives on His Lordship. God calls us to be a royal priesthood of believers who go to Him for guidance and empowerment, and we will be held accountable for the way we live our lives both personally and corporately (1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 4:13; Romans 14:12). As God's saints, we will strive to live lives of submission to God and identify our lives with Him. This includes the principle of being before doing.

The Seven Values of Abundant Living

Groups of Biblically functioning community provide the optimal environment for life change.

We are committed to living our lives together in groups where both the vertical (you and God) and horizontal (you and the world) components of the Christian life will be lived out and growth is optimized. Christ calls us together as a people belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9), a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), established in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24), who in community are to show forth His praises (1 Peter 2:9). God desires that we learn from one another's diversity; therefore our groups should be willing to be diverse in every way: ethnic, racial, cultural, sociological, economic, etc. Differences and diversities easily divide, but we are called to follow the Master in our microcosm of God's kingdom. We are commanded to live lives of humility, patience, love, and forbearance (Ephesians 4:2) as Spirit-people through whom His fruit will be seen in community. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be seen apart from community (Galatians 5:22). We all need to become a member of a small group and a local fellowship (local expression of the family of God, local church). By entering into covenant relationship with others, we are placing ourselves in the optimal environment to experience life change. We will strive to live out the "one anothers" of Scripture together as God's family. This includes the principle of unity in diversity.

Gifts of divine empowerment are given to all believers to grow God's Church.

We are committed to discovering our spiritual gifts and passions and using them to serve and build up the Kingdom of God. Like our Master, we don't come to be served but to serve, and to give our lives for one another (Mark 10:45) in love (John 15:12) and unity. We do this so that the watching world will believe that such a One as Jesus in reality did come (John 17:23). God calls us to use the gifts, talents and resources that He has given us to help build up His Church. We are all called to serve in general and in specific ways. Our general calling of servanthood includes getting involved in service projects with our community and striving to model Jesus Christ's life of servanthood. Our specific calling of servanthood is where God has uniquely gifted us to build up His Church. We are all created for a purpose, and God has given every believer at least one spiritual gift so that we all might contribute to the building of His Church.

Good Stewardship is the reasonable response to our gracious God.

We understand our relationship to God and this world as that of stewards or managers and strive to be good stewards of our whole lives as God leads us. Christ-followers realize that they have been bought with the price of Christ's blood, and that everything they are and have belongs to Him. In light of this, we live as managers or stewards of all that God entrusts to us. We view our time, talents, and treasures as precious resources which need to be faithfully managed according to God's will, principles and priorities. In response to Christ's abundant giving, we increasingly submit our resources to His Lordship and display a spirit of generosity and cheerfulness. We are willing to share the resources God has entrusted to us as He leads (Luke 16). This includes following God's priorities for living and managing our lives in balanced and God-honoring ways. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also (Matthew 6:21). As God leads, we will accept and strive to serve faithfully in ordained leadership positions within the body of Christ. People are God's most precious resource and the pinnacle of His creation, and therefore, we will take the overseeing responsibilities in our lives seriously. We will strive to lead and guide others with gentleness and respect.

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Recommended Resources

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Acknowledgements

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Rev. Jason K. Pankau

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For more resources, thoughts, and discussion about this session, please visit www.lifespringnetwork.org

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Seminar Feedback and Endorsement

1. Please use the space below to write a brief testimony about your experience with the U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage Seminar and why you would recommend it to others!
2. What one thing did God reveal to you most clearly as a result of the U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage Seminar, and what do you plan to do with it?
3. If you had to sum up the U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage Seminar in one word, what would it be?

Further Involvement

The ministry of the Life Spring Network exists because of the prayer, service and financial generosity of people who believe in the need for reproductive disciple-making locally and abroad and have helped bring this experience to you! Would you be willing to support the spread of our ministry in the following ways?

Check those you feel God leading you to do:

- ☐ Prayer: Being an active part of our intercessory prayer team!
- ☐ Volunteer: Helping us administrate our ministry, put on seminars and spread the word to others!
- ☐ Financially: Pay forward your ministry experience and help us to bring U.N.I.T.Y. in Marriage and this ministry to more people!
- ☐ Please contact me about engaging in one-on-one Mentoring/Life Coaching.

Selecting one of the above automatically registers you to receive our e-newsletter which keeps you abreast of what is happening in our ministry and keeps you updated on other courses and seminars! We will contact you to follow up with your desire to get involved. We understand that by submitting your endorsement, we may use all or portions of it for research, donor and promotional purposes.