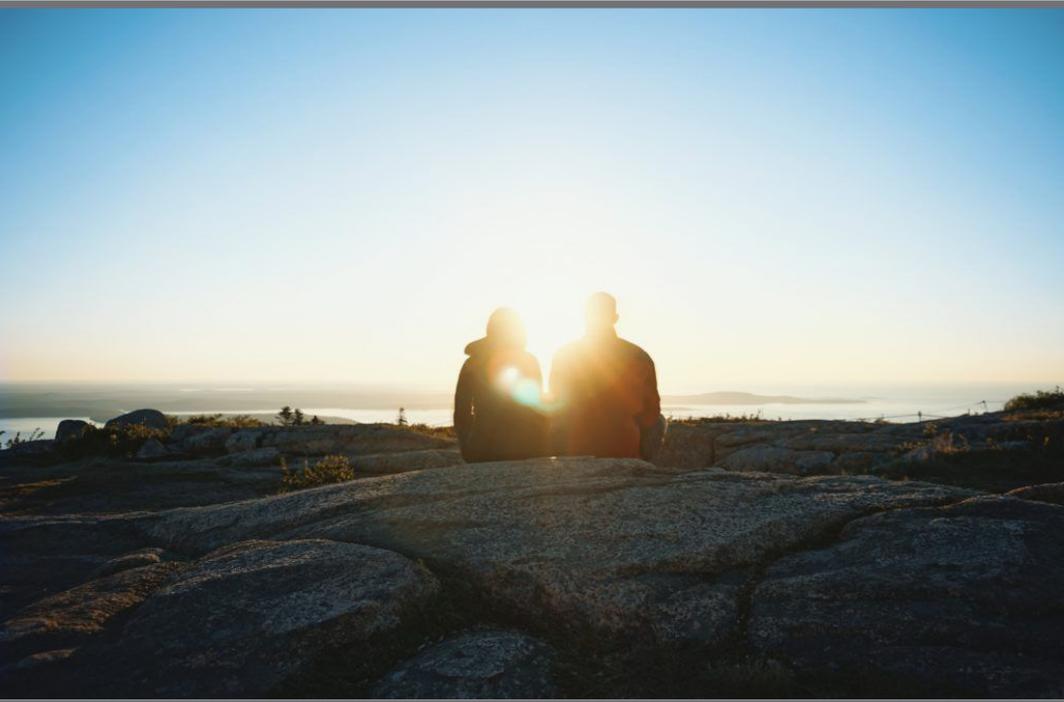


Marriage



Discussion Aids

Christ himself reveals to us the type of love we should have for one another in marriage. In life, there can be many distractions and bumps as we pursue Christ-like love toward our spouse. Open, honest, and respectful discussion about struggles in a marital relationship can strengthen our marriage and provide safety from the attacks of Satan. These discussion aids are intended to build conversation around common, core issues for couples. They are designed to be used in a small group setting as a way to seek truth, provide understanding and draw couples closer together. Sharing our joys and struggles with others can be challenging, yet beneficial and encouraging as we all strive for marital relationships which are God-honoring.

Ephesians 5:31-32 “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Each lesson has theme verses followed by a few questions to provoke conversation. The intent of these lessons is to cause each one to study God’s Word more fully in his/her own individual life and together as a couple. Following the first set of questions, there are a series of questions designed for a couple to go deeper into the topic. These questions should not be ignored and should be prayerfully considered as you move forward to build a stronger relationship.

We suggest beginning and ending with a prayer offered by one of the attendees. It is our hope each participant may feel the blessings of God as they study and that God might be glorified.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

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Communication

Proverbs 12:18 “There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.”

Proverbs 25:11 “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

Words can be used for good or evil—to tear down or build up. The use of the tongue is referenced extensively in scripture. In *James 3:3-8* we are reminded about the power of the tongue. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of controlling the tongue and applying sound communication principles within the context of the intimate relationship with our spouse.

1. State in your own words what *Proverbs 12:18* means to you.
2. Recall specific examples (outside the context of your marriage) where the use of words by others had a significant impact (both positive and negative) on your relationships.
3. Based on the communication concepts found in both *Proverbs 12:18* and *Proverbs 25:11*, identify and discuss one or more examples from scripture where either healthy or unhealthy communication was used in a marriage relationship (i.e. Isaac and Rebekah).

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse. Feel free to share your thoughts with others.

4. Apply *Proverbs 25:11* to your own marriage. Illustrate how consistent application of this scripture would impact you individually as well as the relationship with your spouse.

5. For the next week, conduct an experiment to intentionally utilize your tongue for the health (*Proverbs 12:18*) of your spouse. Follow-up with your spouse and talk about your reactions to this experiment. Did this experiment impact the way the two of you interacted? What was it like for the speaker? Receiver?

6. Generate a list of things (i.e. stressors, emotional states, timing) which personally make it difficult to speak or hear kind words. Discuss this list with your spouse.

Spiritual Union

Ephesians 5:31-32 “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

When husband and wife join together to become “one flesh” and establish a covenant between themselves and God, they are developing a spiritual union. God himself reveals in scripture the concept of oneness evident within the Trinity (*1 John 5:7*). Within marriage, we are given the opportunity to live out spiritual oneness for the glory of God and the encouragement of our spouse. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of being intentional about strengthening the spiritual union and connectedness with our spouse.

1. In a spiritual sense, explain what it means to be “one flesh”.
2. List the spiritual principles or disciplines Christ displayed throughout the Gospels in order to maintain His oneness with the Father.
3. Compose a list of barriers or challenges which make it difficult to engage consistently in the spiritual principles above.

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse. Feel free to share your thoughts with others.

4. How satisfied are each of you with the level of spiritual focus and worship in your lives? What areas do you see the need for additional emphasis?

5. On a scale of 1–10, with 10 being active acceptance and engagement of spiritual leadership and 1 being complete neglect and disregard of spiritual leadership responsibilities, how well does the husband accept responsibility for providing spiritual leadership by reading the Word together, leading in prayer, making decisions within the home, and promoting relationships that are scripturally based? Explain your answer.

6. On a scale of 1–10, with 10 being consistent encouragement in love and 1 being no encouragement or a critical spirit, how well does the wife do at supporting and encouraging her husband in the above standard? Explain your answer.

Love and Love Languages

Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 John 4:16 “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

Throughout scripture, we are given clear examples of the love God has for us. We are reminded in *1 John 4:16* that God himself is love. In other words, outside of God, no man can truly know love. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of understanding and applying this concept within the context of the intimate relationship with our spouse.

1. According to *Ephesians 5:22-33*, both husband and wife are called to reflect the relationship/love between Christ and his church. How would you describe this relationship?
2. Contrast the concepts of love evident in the scriptures above with the messages we hear from American culture.
3. Identify and discuss one or more examples of individuals in scripture that exemplified the kind of love Christ had for his church (examples don't necessarily have to be in the context of a marriage relationship).

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse. Feel free to share your thoughts with others.

4. Write down three ways your spouse has shown you Christ-like love in the past. Next, illustrate three ways you can convey Christ-like love to your spouse in the future.

5. Explain what “symptoms” you may begin to notice in yourself and your marriage when love begins to be based on the ebb and flow of feeling rather than on a decision to engage Christ-like love.

6. Devise a strategy you and your spouse might use to prevent our culture from eroding the foundations of love in your marriage. How might you place your responsibility to maintain a Christ-like love toward your spouse above your own preferences and fulfillment within marriage?

Sexuality

Proverbs 5:18-19 “Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.”

Song of Solomon 1:15-16 “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes. Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green.”

Sexuality and gender were part of God’s original design (*Genesis 1:27, 2:24*). Furthermore, the physical union of a married couple symbolizes a spiritual truth: Christ’s oneness and intense love for the church. Within marriage, we are given the opportunity to live out this close physical connectedness through the expression of sexual intimacy. This act of oneness helps maintain intimacy with our spouse and glorifies God. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of being intentional about strengthening physical intimacy and connectedness with our spouse.

1. Briefly discuss why you think the physical union of a marriage is important.
2. In the verse from *Song of Solomon* above, the bed is referred to as “green.” The Greek word for “green” in this verse is *ra`anan*, which means “luxuriant, fresh, or to flourish.” Based on this understanding and in the context of physical union in marriage, describe in your own words this illustration.
3. Identify specific principles evident within the Trinity as well as Christ’s love for the church that could be applied to the physical union of a married couple in order to keep it “green.”

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse.

4. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being completely comfortable and 1 being completely uncomfortable, how comfortable are you to engage in conversation with one another about your sexual relationship? If this area of your relationship is extremely uncomfortable to discuss, what things may help you be more open with one another about your physical intimacy?

5. How committed are you to meeting the other's needs? How is this demonstrated in your life?

6. Are you effectively dealing with any differences in your sex drives? Explain your answer.

Gender Differences

Genesis 1:27 “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Galatians 3:26-28 “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Gender differences were part of God’s original design. Within marriage, we are given the opportunity to discover similarities and differences with someone of the opposite gender. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of understanding some of the ways men and women differ and respect/appreciate those differences. In this manner, such differences allow husbands and wives to compliment and support one another.

1. State in your own words what *Genesis 1:27* means. In other words, what does it mean to be “created in His image” (i.e. both male and female), yet have two distinct genders?
2. God’s personality and traits are revealed throughout scripture. Identify some examples in scripture where God conveys a more masculine trait, and other times a more feminine trait.
3. Describe how your spouse reveals Christ to you or others in a way that you do not. Consider genders traits rather than personality differences.

Conflict Resolution

Proverbs 14:29 “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.”

Colossians 3:19 “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.”

James 1:19-20 “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

Occasional conflict in marriage is both normal and inevitable. How you handle conflict determines whether it harms your relationship or helps you to grow. A strong, healthy marriage is in part the result of communicating in an honest, truthful, and loving manner even in times when differences arise. In addition, conflict within marriage is dealt with effectively when we seek to be “*swift to hear and slow to speak*.”

1. State in your own words what *Proverbs 14:29* means to you.
2. Recall specific examples in scripture and your personal life where individuals were “*hasty of spirit*” (i.e. breath or speech). In these examples, what was the outcome?
3. Neglecting to share feelings of anger/frustration can lead to bitterness (*Colossians 3:19*). Describe ways you and your spouse effectively, with biblical principles (i.e. *James 1:19-20*), share feelings of anger/frustration with one another.

Financial Stewardship

Proverbs 3:9-10 “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”

Proverbs 13:11 “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.”

Matthew 6:19-21 “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

God calls us to be content with the things we have, for life is more important than possessions and marital love and peace is far better than material wealth. Nevertheless, money matters in marriage can be a real source of contention if couples don't understand and apply God's timeless truths to their financial situation. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of “submitting yourselves one to another” (Ephesians 5:21) and to His Word on financial matters.

1. State in your own words what *Proverbs 3:9-10* means to you.

2. Recall specific examples in scripture where individuals honored the Lord with their “*firstfruits*.” Contrast biblical examples where individuals did not honor the Lord with their “*firstfruits*.” What were the outcomes in each example?

3. In *Matthew 6:19-21*, Jesus calls us to consider wise stewardship. Jesus interestingly points out how the heart follows the behavior or action (“*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*”). Discuss how this principle can be practically applied to the way you manage your finances.

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse. Feel free to share your thoughts with others.

4. How did your families differ regarding money when you were growing up? How well do you respect each other in your spending habits?
5. What are some discoveries and compromises you have made regarding your differences over money?
6. Are you careful about debt? Are you comfortable with your level of debt? Are there things you need to do to reduce or eliminate debt?

Forgiveness

Isaiah 43:25 “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

Mark 11:25 “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Colossians 3:12-14 “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

God’s desire for and value of forgiveness is evident in the gospel message. Forgiveness is a vital part of all human relationships--particularly in an intimate relationship like marriage. Hurts, both major and minor, are bound to happen as couples draw closer together. Forgiveness provides couples with hope to overcome the damage from sin and imperfection. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of modeling the forgiveness God made available to us through Christ’s death on the cross; this forgiveness provides a way wherein we can move through hurt (which can separate us) and begin healing (which brings us together).

1. State in your own words what *Isaiah 43:25* means to you. What does it personally mean to know God’s forgiveness is available?

2. Reflect on both *Mark 11:25* and *Colossians 3:12-14* together. Contrast & evaluate the two motivations for forgiveness as referenced in these scriptures.

3. Based on the discussions from the above questions, illustrate how these biblical principles could be modeled in your own marriage. Identify when forgiveness is easier or more difficult for you.

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse. Feel free to share your thoughts with others.

4. Did you ever see examples of forgiveness in your home while you were growing up? When was the first time you remember someone offending you? How did you handle this?
5. Do you see a pattern in how you respond when people offend you? Do those responses help or hurt you? Why?
6. Talk together about a specific incident or incidents you are having trouble forgiving. How can you help one another move toward forgiveness?

Personality and Spiritual Gifts

Romans 12:6-8 “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

1 Peter 4:10-11, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Our Creator is not surprised by our differences and we should not be either. If you can view differences in your personalities as a gift rather than a threat, you will be greatly blessed in your marriage. Similarly, God has given spiritual gifts to all believers in a manner and degree as He has seen fit to do. Spiritual gifts vary between individuals and are intended to work together for the edification of the Body of Christ. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of helping each other grow and develop in a unique way based on how God has designed you. If helpful, please feel free to download and take a free survey on discovering your spiritual gifts from our website (www.accounseling.org/spiritualgifts).

1. State in your own words what *Romans 12:6-8* means to you. In particular, describe how we are to use our gifts?

2. Reflect on *1 Peter 4:10-11* together. Regardless of our “gift”, what does Peter ultimately say we are stewards of?

3. Based on the discussions from the above questions, illustrate how knowing and understanding your spouse's spiritual gifts can strengthen your marriage and live out lives in a way which glorifies God.

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse. Feel free to share your thoughts with others.

4. What do you see as strengths of your personality style? What are your weaknesses in this area? How can you help each other to use your strengths while learning to overcome your weaknesses?
5. What are the spiritual gifts God has given you? What are the spiritual gifts God has given your spouse?
6. Talk together about how you can support one another in ministering to others with the spiritual gifts you have been given. Develop a plan of action to actively engage your gifts in service to others.

Leaving and Cleaving

Genesis 2:24 “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

Matthew 19:4-6 “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

From the beginning God designed the marriage union to be a process of ‘leaving’ and ‘cleaving.’ He knew such a process is necessary to create a strong and lasting bond between a man and woman. It is good to consider ways this process can be encouraged and not hindered. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of both spouses considering the other to be the primary responsibility and devotion.

1. State in your own words what *Genesis 2:24* means to you. In particular, define what it means to ‘leave’ father and mother.
2. Identify things that encourage a healthy leaving process (consider both from parent and spouse perspective).
3. A strong marital bond not only includes leaving, but also cleaving as expressed in *Genesis 2:24* and *Matthew 19:4-6*. Illustrate how an adequate process of ‘leaving’ can assist in the second part of ‘cleaving.’ Additionally, compose a list of ways to cleave or create closeness to one’s spouse.

Growing Closer Through Life Transitions

Isaiah 26:3 “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”

Galatians 6:2 “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Colossians 3:12-14 “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

Both positive and undesirable transitions in life cause stress. Understanding transitional stress can greatly reduce conflict that promotes on-going distress in a relationship. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of seeking to be in tune with one another during life transitions. This requires increasing empathy and being good stewards of self in order to lower negative reactivity toward each other.

1. State in your own words what *Isaiah 26:3* means to you. In particular, discuss how and why we are kept in perfect peace.
2. Identify ways spouses can help one another keep their mind “stayed” on Christ during transitions.

3. *Colossians 3:12-14* reminds us of several things to “*put on*” as followers of Christ. Explain how these attributes create an environment whereby couples can be drawn closer together even in the midst of transitions. Consider what type of bond is possible if we “*put on*” these things.

The last three questions are designed to apply the lessons from above to your own marriage. Please discuss the questions below between you and your spouse. Feel free to share your thoughts with others.

4. Reflect together on some of the major transitions you have had together as a couple. What have you learned about yourself and your spouse during those transitions?
5. Compare how you and your spouse manage stress similarly / differently.
6. Consider possible transitions that may be coming up for you and your spouse. Identify three ways your spouse can support, encourage, and comfort you as you go through these transitions.

Making Marriage a Priority

John 13:14-15 “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

Galatians 6:9 “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

1 Peter 4:8 “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.”

Investing in a great marriage leads to blessings for you and your spouse as well as future generations. By choosing intentionality in your marriage, you’ll continue to invest in a healthy relationship and avoid settling into patterns of drifting apart or never addressing issues. A strong healthy marriage is in part the result of reflecting often on ways to continue to strengthen your marriage in a world that seeks to pull us apart.

1. State in your own words what *John 13:14-15* means to you. Spend some time considering the context of this verse and what it means for you to take on the mind of Christ in your marriage.
2. *Galatians 6:9* identifies a biblical principle of sowing and reaping. Illustrate how this principle can be applied to your marriage.
3. As a group, compose a list of practical ways couples can ‘sow seeds’ in their marriage.

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