

DISCUSSION GUIDE

CHAPTER 1

Connect

Have everyone share with the group how they met their spouse.

Dig Deep

Can you (with your spouse's permission) share a time when the rose-colored glasses came off and you thought to yourself, *This isn't what I thought marriage would look like*?

What do you find to be the best part of marriage?

What do you find to be the hardest part of marriage?

Of the slow fades mentioned on pages 20–21, which one—just by looking at the title—resonates with your experience?

Have someone in the group read Ephesians 4:27 and John 10:10. Can you identify any ways you have allowed the devil to get a foothold in your relationship?

Apply

Talk to God this week about your marriage. Remember, He sees. He knows. He cares. He is bigger than any tough place you're experiencing right now.

Text intentionally with your spouse this week. If you're able to, text

each other several times during the workday. In marriage, the little things are usually the big things. Texting may seem cumbersome or silly or hard to remember, but it's a great way to stay on each other's mind throughout the day

Take the “How We Love” Quiz (www.howwelove.com) mentioned in the next chapter in order to be ready for next week's discussion!

Pray

Lord, thank You for the gift of marriage. Thank You for this study. Open our hearts up to what You want us to learn and where You want us to grow. Help us to identify the masks we wear and to see that they really are thinly veiled attempts to cover up our imperfections. Show us how to accept “imperfect” in ourselves and in our spouse, and to embrace the process of both of us being perfected by You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Connect

Share with the group where you went on your honeymoon and one memory you have from that time. (If you didn't go on a honeymoon, share about why you made that decision and one memory from the early months of your marriage.)

Dig Deep

Describe your growing-up years and the blueprint you brought into marriage.

What did your home internship (blueprint) teach you positively about marriage?

What did your home internship teach you negatively about marriage?
Is there anything you need to do a new internship in?

What did you learn about yourself when you took the "How We Love" Quiz? Was this surprising? Did your spouse take the quiz? What did he/she learn?

What was your biggest takeaway from this chapter?

Apply

Just for today, take one step toward your new internship. Pick up a book from the library on the issue. Look up Scripture on the topic (e.g.,

Google “Scripture about anger” or “Bible verses about criticism” or “what the Bible says about insecurity”). If needed, set up a counseling appointment to begin to dig through it.

Ask God to show you moments in your blueprint when lies were planted that might be affecting how to see God, how you see yourself, and how you see your spouse.

Take those moments and begin to replace the lies with God’s truth from the Bible. (Again, Google can come in handy. Let’s say you have identified that somewhere the lie was planted that God can’t be trusted. You can search “Bible verses about trusting God,” and you’ll find God’s promises for you!)

Get a date night on the calendar for the two of you.

Pray

Father, we know You will waste nothing in our lives. Every experience—both good and bad—can be used by You. Help us to honestly examine the presumptions, lies, and expectations we carried into marriage that aren’t serving us well. Help us to identify where we need to do new home internships in issues that make a difference in our relationships. More than anything, help us to find our hope and our help in You. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Connect

What is one of your favorite attributes—or strengths—of your spouse? Or what do you most appreciate about him or her?

Dig Deep

Of the eight God-tools introduced in this chapter, which two do you feel you need to use more often? Why?

Brainstorm together one practical step each person can take to start using one of the tools they need to use more often.

A full apology consists of owning what you did wrong, apologizing specifically, and asking for forgiveness. Are you characterized by offering half-apologies or full apologies? If half, which of those three steps is the hardest one for you to do? Why?

What was your biggest takeaway from this chapter?

Apply

When you find yourself frustrated this week, ask these two questions:

- a. Does this hurt me or just irritate me?
- b. Does this need to be correct or simply accepted?

Who needs some unhumanable love in your life? Your spouse? Your mother-in-law? One of your kids? A neighbor or coworker? Review

Romans 12:9–21. Which instruction in those verses do you need to put into practice today?

Each God-tool has an accompanying Scripture with it. Write out the Scripture of the two God-tools you need to start using more often on index cards. Put those index cards somewhere where you'll see them on a regular basis. (NOTE: If you're leading the group, you might want to bring index cards to distribute so everyone can write out their Scriptures before they head home.)

Pray

Lord, You have given us a toolbox full of tools that we don't use nearly as often as we should. Motivate us to make changes. When we blow it, help us to back up and start our response over again, using the right tool the second time around. Help us to look at ourselves rather than following the temptation to blame our spouse. More than anything, help us to find our identity in You so we can build our lives and our marriages on the firm foundation of truth. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Connect

What's the most surprising thing you've learned about marriage?

Dig Deep

What expectations did you come into marriage with that you now realize were unrealistic?

As you read, did you identify any unknown expectations that you can share?

Were there any unspoken expectations you were able to recognize?

From the descriptions on pages 82–83, what do you think your mind style is? What about your spouse? How do you think knowing and understanding this might help your marriage?

Of the healthy expectations on pages 94–95, which one do you most need to focus on? Why?

Apply

Have someone read Philippians 4:8. How does this apply to marriage? What you fertilize will grow. Take some time this week to do a “thought audit” where you honestly ask yourself what kinds of thoughts you're fertilizing. Negative thoughts? Fault-finding thoughts? Blaming thoughts? Or what about loving thoughts? Positive thoughts? Kind

thoughts? Based on Philippians 4:8, what do you need to do with your thoughts?

Start paying attention to your thoughts about your spouse and your marriage. Evaluate if any of them are fueled by unknown, unspoken, unrealistic, or unmet expectations. Pull out your God-tool of courage and share honestly with your spouse about what you are discovering.

If your spouse shares anything with you this week, be safe. Don't over-react. Invite continuing conversation with a response like, "Tell me more."

Pray

Lord, we know that all too often our expectations get in the way. Help us to see everyday challenges through different eyes. Show us how to expect the right things. Help us to stay away from idealism and unrealistic expectations that will only result in our own disappointment and disillusionment. We want to learn how to push our thoughts in the right direction, honor You, and stop the fades in our marriages. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Connect

Does your marriage have traditional roles (e.g., she does the laundry, he does the yard work), or have you bucked some of those traditional roles for something that works better for both of you? If so, how?

Dig Deep

Can you share a time outside of marriage where you've felt minimized? Can you share a time where you did the minimizing?

Of the two kinds of minimizers identified in this chapter—internal and external—which one do you tend to be? Why do you think you default to that kind of minimizing?

Do you tend to be a fixer or a feeler? What were your initial thoughts as you read about the importance of validating?

How's your pace of life? Is it a pace that allows for giving grace and finding the space needed for nurturing your marriage?

Of the six ways to increase margin and decrease minimizing introduced on pages 108 and 109, which one do you need to get started on tomorrow? What is one practical way to take a step in the right direction?

Apply

Evaluate your own personal pace. What is one step you can personally take today to increase your margin for your marriage?

Start paying attention to the minimizing that goes on inside your head. When you recognize it, work to replace minimizing with validating. It won't be easy, but it is possible! Remember, you're creating a new normal for your relationship!

Write out Ephesians 4:32 on an index card and post it somewhere you'll see it on a regular basis. (NOTE: If you're leading the group, you might want to bring index cards to distribute so everyone can write out their Scriptures before they head home.)

Pray

Lord, sometimes we underestimate the way we respond to one another. Show us how to be sensitive to one another. Help us to step into each other's world and resist labeling different as wrong. Show us the God-tools we need to use each and every day. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Connect

How have your role models influenced your expectations of marriage?

Dig Deep

What were the results of your POS (Personal Operating System) quiz (see summary table on page 135)? If your spouse took the quiz, what did you find out about each other? (NOTE: Discussing what each person/couple learned and how those discoveries will change the way they interact in their marriage will take up the majority of the discussion time this week.)

What was your biggest takeaway while reading this chapter?

Apply

Start paying attention to what you've learned about yourself and/or your spouse. Embrace who you are. Embrace who your spouse is. Thank God each time you see his/her personal operating system in action.

Identify ways your spouse's operating system balances you out. Tell him or her what you appreciate about their operating system and why it balances you out.

Pray

Lord, help us to remember that differences aren't deficiencies. Remind us that You knit us together with unique personalities and temperaments, and oneness happens when we learn to appreciate those in each other. Help us to be more accepting of one another. Convict our hearts when pride creeps in and wants us to believe our way is the right way. Remind us to speak kindly, filled with grace and love as we interact with one another. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Connect

What favorite activities do you enjoy doing together as a couple?

Dig Deep

Of the questions suggested to get to the heart of disagreement on pages 142–143, which one do you need to ask yourself more often?

Discuss the six disarming phrases on pages 144–146. Which phrases have you tried, if any? What kind of response did you experience? Do you have any additional words or phrases you can share with the group to help decrease disagreement and increase communication?

Of the proactive strategies listed in this chapter, which strategy have you incorporated? Which do you want to start soon?

What was your biggest takeaway from this chapter?

Apply

Which disagreement fade do you more likely default to?

Disagree → Control → Crush

Disagree → Argue → Control

Become Passive → Withdraw → Deceive

One of your own? _____ → _____ →

Ask God to help you become more aware when you slip into this fade.

Discussion Guide

Choose one of the Scriptures about the weight of our words on page 144 and write it on an index card. Place that card somewhere you can see it every day. (NOTE: If you're leading the group, you might want to bring index cards to distribute so everyone can write out their Scriptures before they head home.)

Pray very specifically for your spouse this week. If you find it helpful, you can write your prayers out in a notebook or journal.

Pray

Lord, disagreement is part of two imperfect people living under the same roof. We know and understand that. However, the way we respond to disagreement can either bring us closer to each other or move us away from each other. Help us to choose responses that disarm conflict and increase understanding and communication. Help us to think about proactive strategies we can put in place to decrease disagreement and be wise about the way we interact with each other. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Connect

What is one thing that is on your individual bucket list?

Dig Deep

When you think about your home of origin (your first eighteen years), what experience did you have with anger or defensiveness? What about tone of voice? Have you carried any of those experiences into your marriage?

What is one word that would describe how you handle feedback from your spouse? Why did you choose that word?

What was your biggest takeaway from this chapter?

Apply

- 1) Get a date on the calendar, or determine when you'll have time to talk on a road trip, and ask each other some of the "reflective feedback" questions on pages 173–175. Think of it as an expedition in your marriage!
- 2) Identify which tool you need to use more often to stop the fade of defensiveness in your marriage.

Pray

Lord, we confess that we sure do kick into defensive mode very easily. We build walls instead of bridges in our marriage. Help us to receive feedback. Show us how to invite our spouse to keep talking. Give us courage to replace passive-aggressive communication with direct, kind, honest communication. More than anything, though, help us to give positive feedback and encouraging words more often. May we build one another up each and every day. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

Connect

What are the little acts of kindness or thoughtfulness or connectedness that mean the most to you in your marriage? (Another way to look at this is “I love it when we/he/she do/does _____.”)

Dig Deep

Before you read this chapter, which mindset did you identify with most: “setting boundaries is important to protect your marriage,” or “I’m in control and ‘rules’ about being with the opposite sex are unnecessary”? Did your mindset change in any way after reading the chapter?

What social media boundaries do you and your spouse have in place? What boundaries are you aware of that other couples have in place?

Of the twenty-one hedges mentioned in this chapter, which one do you need to take action on this week?

Apply

What soul mirages do you entertain in your mind? Confess those to God and ask Him to help you focus on truth rather than lies.

Where are you being naïve as it pertains to your responsibility to protect your marriage? What God-tool do you need to use more often to stop the fade of naïveté?

Pray

Lord, we confess that too often we're naïve about protecting our marriage. We also confess that we're affected by peer pressure more than we realize, because we don't want to be thought of as a prude. Help us to look only at You and what You want us to do. Give us the wisdom to steer clear of temptation. When we're faced with it, help us to run in the opposite direction. May we be intentional about stopping the fade of naïveté and getting serious about protecting our marriages. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

Connect

If you could take a one-week vacation to anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why?

Dig Deep

Was this chapter comfortable for you to read, or was it uncomfortable because you don't particularly like to think about sharing feelings?

Of the practical steps to build your vulnerability muscle listed on pages 209–211, which one are you already doing? Which one do you know you need to start doing? Why?

Talk about this statement: *If I resist getting naked emotionally, I will keep our relationship from being all that it can be.* Do you agree? Disagree? What feeling does that statement cause inside of you?

Apply

Ask God for the courage to share more of your history, thoughts, fears, and struggles with your spouse. Take one step toward doing that this week.

Take an inventory of how and where you've been causing a fade in your marriage by avoiding emotion. Just once this week, push through the fear and trust your spouse by sharing one feeling you're experiencing (about work, parenting, extended family, marriage, etc.) with your spouse.

Pray

Lord, it's scary to be emotionally naked. Yet You didn't design us to be physically naked in marriage without first being emotionally naked. Help us to know how to share our hearts with one another. Show us how to make it safe for our spouse to share their heart with us. May we be motivated to move from a 1.0 fearful-of-being-vulnerable version of ourselves to a 2.0 courageous-honest-and-open version of ourselves. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

Connect

What's challenging about finding time to talk as a couple? What is one thing you've found works for you for finding time to talk as a couple?

Dig Deep

Where do you struggle the most in marriage with “what you feel like doing” versus “what God wants you to do”?

Overall, what God-tool is the one you most need to use more often? What is one practical step you could take to make that happen more often?

What has been your biggest takeaway from this book?

Apply

Go back to chapter 3 and write out the Scripture that goes with the God-tool you need to use more often. Post that Scripture somewhere you can see it on a regular basis.

Ask God to continue to perfect you, making you more like Jesus Christ every day. Continue to learn to interact and respond to your spouse in new, kind, honest, vulnerable, Christlike ways.

Pray

Lord, this book has required us to dig deep. It's not easy to look at ourselves and to identify ways we need to grow. It's important, though. Keep showing us how to respond to each other in a more loving, godly way. Keep helping us to use our God-tools more often. More than anything though, help us to see how we each contribute to the fades in our marriage and how we each can do our part to stop them. In Jesus' Name. Amen.