



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

SESSION 1: Communication 101	5
SESSION 2: Understanding and Expressing Love	15
SESSION 3: Initiating Positive Change	25
SESSION 4: Making Sex a Mutual Joy	35
SESSION 5: How to Share the Things That Bug You	45

## DAY 1

# Keeping Intimacy Alive

## READ PSALM 89:1–2

The words of Psalm 89:2 praise God for His love and faithfulness in keeping His covenant with us. They also serve as an ideal that married couples can aspire to. The love and faithfulness described in this verse is instrumental for “living happily ever after.” Without it, spouses tend to go their separate ways—and that affects everyone in the family, especially the youngest ones.

When spouses neglect their own love relationship, either intentionally or unintentionally, they do so to the detriment of their children. Research clearly shows that the effect of divorce on a child is devastating. Divorces normally do not occur on the spur of the moment. They are preceded by months and sometimes years of neglecting the marital relationship. Therefore, for the conscientious parent, there is nothing more important than rekindling or keeping alive an intimate relationship with his or her spouse. The antidote to divorce is to stop the process of drifting apart. Choose to paddle your canoes toward each other rather than away from each other. Commit yourselves to your relationship and your family. Make your marriage a priority. You will please yourselves, your children, and God.

## PRAY

Take some time to pray individually or as a couple. As you pray . . .

- *thank God for the relationship with your spouse that He has blessed you with;*
- *ask God to help you identify the times you have failed to paddle toward each other;*
- *ask Him to help you and your spouse learn to move toward each other in all circumstances.*

## IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME . . .

Discuss together or reflect on these questions:

- *Describe the effects of divorce on a child, whether from your own experience or from stories you've heard from friends or loved ones.*
- *What would your spouse say about the priority you place on your marriage?*
- *How might you and your spouse “paddle your canoes toward each other”?*

Consider these passages for further study on Intimacy: *Psalm 63:1–11; 1 Corinthians 10:31; James 4:8*

## DAY 2

## Defensiveness

## READ 1 CHRONICLES 19:1–5

**D**efensiveness is a common reaction when someone's self-esteem is threatened. Defensiveness reveals a self-esteem hot spot. Unfortunately, you won't know your spouse's self-esteem hot spots until you touch one of them.

The key to lessening your spouse's defensive reactions is learning to communicate your concerns in a way that will not strike at his or her self-esteem. For example, let's say Bill tends to get defensive any time his wife, Megan, asks him to mow the lawn. Megan can assume the issue is tied to his self-esteem. Therefore, in an open conversation with him on an evening when they are not in conflict, she may say, "Bill, I've noticed that when I mention mowing the lawn to you, your natural response is to be defensive. I'm assuming that something in your past related to mowing the grass is causing this defensiveness. I hope you know that my intention is not to anger you, so I would like to find a better way to handle this." Chances are, Bill will be responsive to what she is saying, and together they can find a way for her to express her concern without stimulating defensiveness in him.

## PRAY

Take some time to pray individually or as a couple. Ask the Lord to . . .

- *help you recognize defensiveness in yourself;*
- *give you insight into your spouse's defensive hot spots;*
- *guide the two of you in finding less defensive—and more productive—ways to communicate.*

## IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME . . .

Discuss together or reflect on these questions:

- *In the heat of an argument, why is it sometimes tempting to say something you know hits your spouse's self-esteem hot spot?*
- *How can you tell when you have hit a hot spot in your spouse's self-esteem?*
- *How can you make amends for past confrontations in which you were less than loving with your spouse?*

Consider these passages for further study on Communication: *Proverbs 15:2; Ecclesiastes 5:2; James 1:26*

## DAY 3

## Speaking of Faith

## READ JOSHUA 14:6-15

Caleb was a bold warrior who “wholeheartedly followed the LORD” (Joshua 14:8, 9, 14). Even at age eighty-five, he was still vibrant, fearless, sure of God’s presence, and ready for battle. His outspoken faith is a model for us. Just as Caleb spoke openly about his faith, so should we—especially in the context of our marriages.

The notion that religion is “personal” and something about which one does not talk is the same misconception that emotions are personal and not something to be discussed. When we categorically refuse, for whatever reason, to discuss our spiritual perceptions, we are eliminating an entire aspect of our humanity, and thus we limit marital intimacy. Spiritual intimacy does not require agreement of belief on every detail. The purpose is not agreement but understanding.

Obviously if we hold the same core beliefs, then our level of intellectual agreement will be high, but even then our experiences, our emotions, and our interpretations of spiritual things will not always be identical. For example, one spouse may have spent a great deal of time this week reflecting on the love of God—while the other has been reading about the wrath of God. One is trying to understand and process one aspect of God’s nature while the other is meditating and reflecting on another aspect. If they are willing to open this part of their lives to each other, then they can both be richer, and spiritual intimacy is the result.

## PRAY

Take some time to pray individually or as a couple. Ask God . . .

- *to remind you that the purpose of spiritual conversations is not agreement but understanding;*
- *to help you listen openly to your spouse so that you can learn from and about him or her;*
- *to deepen your spiritual intimacy.*

## IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME . . .

Discuss together or reflect on these questions:

- *Why do some couples feel uncomfortable or hesitant to talk about their faith?*
- *How does open communication about spiritual matters grow marital intimacy?*
- *How openly do you as a couple discuss your faith? To spark a spiritual conversation with your spouse, share something you’ve been reflecting on, and ask your spouse what God has been teaching him or her.*

Consider these passages for further study on Communication: *Psalm 73:28; Acts 20:24; Hebrews 4:12*

## DAY 4

# The Work of the Holy Spirit

**READ 1 SAMUEL 26:23**

David's reply to King Saul in 1 Samuel 26:23 makes it clear that God rewards faithfulness and righteousness. One of the keys to faithfulness and righteousness is prayer. The more we pray, the closer we get to God. The closer we get to God, the more He reveals areas in our lives we need to address.

In a marriage, prayer is essential—for ourselves and our spouses—even when it is uncomfortable. Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, "And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment" (John 16:8). If you love your spouse, you will pray for the specific work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. Pray that He will effect a deep sense of guilt for sin, a genuine awareness of what it means to be right, and an understanding of the reality of judgment to come.

Such praying is in keeping with what we know to be the work of the Holy Spirit. You might also pray the same power for yourself. Often, if one spouse is willing to deal with his or her own failures, the other spouse will do the same. There can be no reconciliation without repentance.

**PRAY**

Take some time to pray individually or as a couple. Thank God that when we sincerely ask His forgiveness, He always gives it. Ask Him to convict you of areas in your life that need confession and forgiveness. Ask Him to make you an instrument of forgiveness in your spouse's life.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME . . .**

Discuss together or reflect on these questions:

- *Why is it important to be convicted of one's sin?*
- *What keeps people from experiencing guilt?*
- *What can you do to help your spouse address sin in his or her life?*

Consider these passages for further study on Prayer: *Job 42:10; Romans 8:26–27; Ephesians 6:18*

## DAY 5

## Conversational Prayer

## READ LUKE 11:1-13

Jesus emphasized prayer, yet many couples find it difficult to pray together. There may be many reasons why couples feel uncomfortable with prayer. For example, if marriage partners are not treating each other with love and respect, then they will not feel motivated to pray together. In other cases, marriage partners never learned to pray with someone else and therefore never established the practice of praying together.

Regardless of how much experience you have praying together, try this learning exercise. Prayer takes many forms, but this exercise develops conversational prayer. In conversational prayer, the husband and wife take turns talking to God about a specific matter. They may each speak one or more times about the same subject. When neither has further thoughts, one of them changes the subject, and they repeat the process, much as they would in a conversation with friends. Consider this brief example of a conversational prayer:

Husband: "Father, I want to thank You for protecting me on the way home from work today. I was so close to an accident when the truck ran the red light in front of me. I'm grateful for Your protection."

Wife: "Father, I too thank You for protecting Steve. Sometimes I take Your protection for granted. Along with protection, I want to thank You for our health, and I pray for my dad, that You would renew his health."

Husband: "Father, I too pray for my father-in-law. Please guide the doctors in this series of tests, and give Dad peace of mind during this time of uncertainty."

Wife: "I also ask that You would comfort my mother. Remind her that You are with her and Dad through this experience. . . ."

Couples may pray as long as they like. Some couples like to have a time of conversational prayer immediately after a meal. Others prefer the comfort of the couch. Still others prefer praying before going to bed or before starting the day. Find the time and place that you like best.

## PRAY

Take some time to practice conversational prayer together as a couple.

## IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME . . .

Discuss together or reflect on these questions:

- *When is an ideal time and where is an ideal place for you to pray together?*
- *How could praying together more regularly grow you as individuals and as a couple?*

Consider these passages for further study on Prayer: *Psalm 145:18; Matthew 18:19-20; Acts 1:14*

SESSION 2

# Understanding and Expressing Love

## A GREAT START

Ask any married couple why they got together, and you'll likely hear the word love tossed around liberally:

- “It was love at first sight.”
- “When she told me she was a Notre Dame fan, I realized I was in love.”
- “We started out as friends and then fell in love.”

When you eliminate the word love, however, the question becomes more challenging to answer. See for yourself. Without using the word love—or any synonym of the word—answer this question:

### *1. Why did you get married?*

That's probably an unfair challenge. After all, love and marriage go together like—well, you know how the song goes. The problem is, people mean different things when they use the word love.

### *2. How would you define love?*

Most people think of love as a feeling or an emotion. Yet you can't command someone to feel an emotion. And you can't teach a feeling to someone else. Therefore, love must be something more than a feeling or an emotion.

### 3. Read *Ephesians 5:25* and *Titus 2:3–4*. What do these verses tell us about love?

In *Ephesians 5:25*, the apostle Paul gives this instruction: “For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her.” In *Titus 2:3–4*, he gives this instruction: “Older women . . . should teach others what is good. These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children.”

**WATCH** Video Segment 2A: “Expressing Love”—Dr. Chapman

#### TALK ABOUT IT

Dr. Chapman emphasizes that we express love through our words—specifically, through compliments, kind words, humble words, non-defensive words, and present-tense words. We also express love through actions—specifically, through patient behavior, kind behavior, and unselfish behavior.

### 4. Which is more meaningful: words that express love or actions that express love?

### 5. Look again at the types of words and actions that express love. Which ones come most easily to you? Which ones are most difficult for you?

Everyone has a primary love language—a way of experiencing love that’s especially meaningful to him or her. Anyone who desires a healthy, vibrant marriage must learn to speak his or her spouse’s primary love language.

**THIS WEEK:** If you have not done so, discover your love language by visiting <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/>.

**WATCH** Video Segment 2B: “Loving the Unlovely”—Dr. Chapman

#### TALK ABOUT IT

Expressing love to a receptive spouse—one who is expressing love in return—is one thing. But what if you’re married to someone who is less than receptive to your expressions of love? What if you’re married to someone who refuses to show love in return?



*6. How do you explain the fact that so many difficult-to-love people are actually married?*

Ephesians 5:18 says, “Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.” The point is that being under the influence of the Holy Spirit is like being under the influence of alcohol—it causes us to do things we wouldn’t do otherwise.

*7. What can the influence of the Holy Spirit do for someone who’s trying to love an unlovely spouse?*

*8. Whether our spouse is easy or difficult to love, we have a biblical mandate to express love to him or her in a meaningful way. With that in mind, what will be the first thing you do for your spouse after this session?*

### TAKE IT HOME

Close the session by praying—aloud or silently—something like this:

**“Lord, we ask that You would bless our efforts to show meaningful love to each other. Please help us keep each other’s love tank filled. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.”**

Set aside a few minutes in the coming week to read the Session 2 assignment (“Five Love Languages”). Identify your primary love language and write down two or three specific things your spouse could do to “fill your love tank” using that love language. Then identify (or guess) your spouse’s primary love language and write down two or three specific things you can do to fill his or her love tank using that language. Compare your answers with your spouse’s answers.

## FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES

Dr. Chapman has identified five “love languages”—five ways through which people genuinely experience love. Identify which of the five is your primary love language—that is, the most meaningful way someone can express love to you. Under that heading, write down two or three specific ways your spouse could show you love using that language.

Then identify (or make your best guess as to) your spouse’s primary love language and write down two or three specific ways you could show him or her love using that language.

### 1. Words of Affirmation

Your love tank is filled by unsolicited compliments.

### 2. Quality Time

Your love tank is filled by undivided attention.

### 3. Gifts

Your love tank is filled by tangible evidence of thoughtfulness.

### 4. Acts of Service

Your love tank is filled by having a responsibility lifted or a chore completed for you.

### 5. Physical Touch

Your love tank is filled by contact—including hugs, kisses, pats on the back, and reassuring caresses.

## SESSION 2: UNDERSTANDING AND EXPRESSING LOVE

On the next few pages, you will find daily devotions reprinted from *The Love Languages Devotional Bible*. These readings will help you further reflect on the topics discussed today. If time allows, read these devotions together (or individually) during the next week.