

Heal

Joined Together

Fusion Marriage Series

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MEMORY VERSE

I will bring health and healing ...; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. Jeremiah 33:6

INTRODUCTION: Joined Together

Fusion is the marriage ministry of New Life Community Church. The Fusion ministry exists to help connect couples to the Lord, to each other, and to the family of faith in the church. The goal is that marriages will be strengthened, lives will be changed, and families will experience God's power and blessing in every area.

The Fusion "Joined Together" curriculum is designed for use in small groups. "Joined Together" consists of 7 units with 4 sessions each. The titles of the 7 units are: UNITE, HEAL, COMMUNICATE, INFLUENCE, OVERCOME, INVEST, and DELIGHT. Each small group session is followed by homework that couples should complete on their own, outside of group.

In order to get the most out of these 4 sessions, make every effort to:

1. Attend the small group each week together as a couple.
2. Do the homework. Sometimes multiple homework options are offered. Complete the option that best meets your needs.
3. Don't give up!

We ask that couples abide by 4 Ground Rules:

1. What's said here, stays here (unless there is a threat of harm to self or others)
2. Check with your spouse before sharing a story that involves both of you
3. No put-downs
4. Confess your own sin rather than talking about your spouse's faults

HEAL

In this series on healing, we will explore the need for healing in four major areas of our lives: our emotions, our relationships, our behaviors and our spirit. We challenge you over the next four weeks to the following:

1. Break through your own defense network, your denial
2. Identify your wounds
3. Recognize the effect those wounds have in your life today
4. Begin the process to free yourself from those wounds in order to live a healthier, happier life with your spouse, family, friends and co-workers

Please sign below to commit to the above challenge.

Name _____

Date _____



Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing ...; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. Jeremiah 33:6

HEAL

Your woundedness is not something to be ashamed of or feared. We are all wounded in some way. Being emotionally wounded identifies you as being part of the human race. However, how you deal with your own wounds will be one of the major determining factors of your life. God wants to heal these wounds:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Matthew 4:23

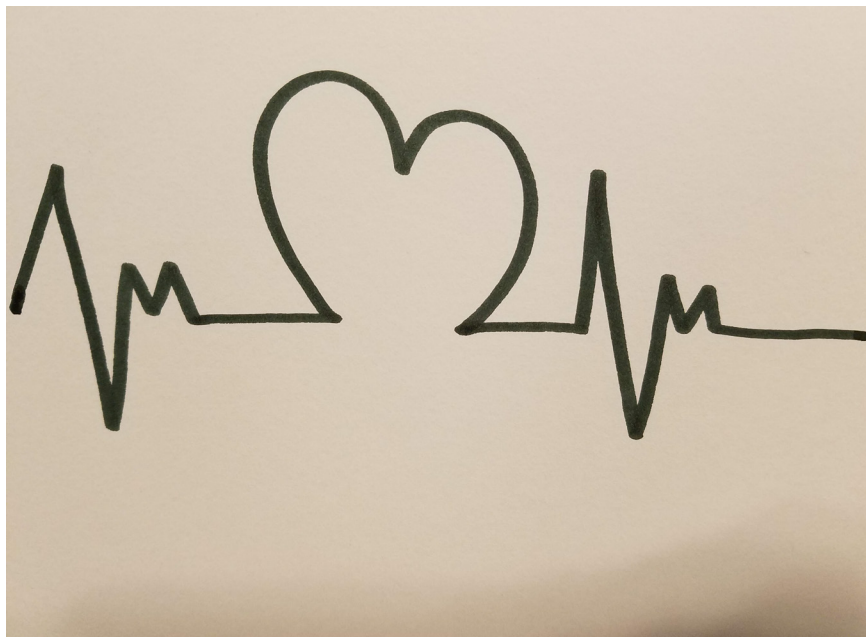
If you are physically, emotionally or spiritually sick, do not despair. In Mark 2:27 we read, "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the

righteous, but sinners.'" That means Jesus came for you! He desires to heal your sickness and deliver you from the source of your illness, your sin. This is the key principle to begin the healing process. Our overwhelming feelings of sadness, fear and anger; our damaged and broken relationships; our bad habits and behaviors; and our hopelessness and shame all have their roots in the traumas of our past, the false beliefs we have of ourselves and our own sin.

These deep-seated wounds begin to wreak emotional havoc in our teenage years and seriously affect our adult relationships. Many Christian couples struggle in their marriages because these emotional wounds from their past get triggered. For example, a husband comes home from a hard day at work with a frown on his face. When she was a two-year-old girl, his wife witnessed her father repeatedly scream and hit her mother. That child was terrified! She thought that she and her mother would die. Thirty years later, although those memories are totally suppressed, when this woman sees her husband frown, her childhood terror is triggered. She does not consciously remember her dad screaming, but the unconscious memory powerfully triggers a survival response of either saving her life by reacting in anger or retreating within herself in fear. Neither reaction is a healthy or logical response to her husband having a hard day at work. This is an example of how our emotional wounds cause relational wounds and continue the downward cycle of worry and pain in our lives.

The healing process begins by exploring the defense network that keeps us from properly acknowledging the source and extent of our wounds and sin. There are many reasons why we don't seek healing or even acknowledge our own wounds. Fear is probably the greatest. We have stuffed down our pain and fear for so long that the thought of reopening our wounds can be overwhelming. But until that happens, our lives will be consumed by regretting our past or fearing our future. As we have healing from our past, we can live each day more fully; loving God, loving family and loving those around us without fear of rejection.

The wounds in our hearts are but openings by which the healing love of God can enter in....



Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
Luke 5:30-32

1. FEELINGS

From Trauma to Wholeness

Where does our anger come from? We are not born angry. Everyone has a God-given inner need to be loved. When we experience rejection or emotional pain of any kind, anger can become a protective wall that keeps people and pain away.

The relationship closest to that of a husband and wife is the parent child relationship. That is the last time we opened our heart up so much to another person. For this reason, in marriage counseling, it is important to understand the couple's family history. Let's consider how a parents' divorce impacts their four-year-old daughter, Mary. As a child, Mary believes that somehow it is her fault that her daddy

has left. She did something wrong! She is unlovable! Young children are so ego-centric--they are the center of their world and everything happens because of their thoughts or actions. Years later in her marriage, Mary is very fearful of abandonment and sensitive to any kind of rejection. In many marriages, a husband or wife is paying for the sins of a neglectful or abusive parent.

The deep struggles and conflict within marriages often are directly related to emotional scars and wounds from our past. Because of your upbringing, you may have unmet needs for:

- Acceptance
- Affection
- Safety
- Security

Quite often neither partner is even aware of the deep-seated fear and emotional pain from their past. So why would we even want to go back to any of those negative feelings from our past? It is because those childhood feelings of guilt, shame, inferiority, fear and emotional pain continue to create chaos in our present-day lives. The strategy of that four-year old child to stuff down fear and pain may have helped her to survive a difficult childhood, but the ultimate result is that it simply extends and increases the pain into adulthood. The more we run away from our fear and pain, the more these negative emotions grow and impact our lives, lying hidden like land mines. This creates emotional triggers in our marriage that explode when these suppressed feelings of fear, shame, or pain are detonated by seemingly random events in our present circumstances.

Ultimately, emotional healing begins when we stop running away from our past negative feelings and face into them. Through prayer and forgiveness, we invite the Lord Jesus Christ into the darkness of our past. Then His love, truth and presence provide us the healing we so desperately need. Praise be to God! We can experience freedom from our past.

As couples, we can transform the dynamic of our marriage as we learn to help each other heal from our emotional wounds. When couples develop a cycle of shame and anger in their marriage, it is necessary to stop the bleeding as soon as possible. To do this, the couple needs to avoid any further explosive encounters. This is accomplished by taking responsibility for our own anger and using tools that deescalate the conflict.

The best way to deescalate conflict, especially when either partner is very angry, is to separate and calm down--both physically and emotionally. Then ask yourself, "What triggered my anger?" Often the trigger is simply a word, a phrase, a facial expression, or a specific detail, such as a spouse forgetting an important date. Once you identify your trigger, invite the Lord to help you recognize the deeper feelings at work such as guilt, inferiority, fear or emotional pain. After completing this process, you can return to your spouse and share with him/her what caused you to get angry. But now you are not blaming your spouse for getting you angry. You are inviting them into that subjective world where that frightened, lonely, wounded and confused little boy/girl abides. This permits your spouse to better understand, encourage, and pray for that wounded child so true healing can happen.

Read Jeremiah 32:17-18a

¹⁷ "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. ¹⁸ You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the parents' sins into the laps of their children after them.

Read Psalm 27:10

Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.

Read Jeremiah 33:6

'Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing...; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.'

Read John 7:37-39

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Discussion Questions

1. Turn and talk to another couple. Look at the four parenting styles in the table to answers questions 1A & 1B.

1A. Briefly describe the parenting style with which you were raised. Would you say your parents were authoritarian, balanced, neglecting or permissive during your upbringing?

1B. Share how that parenting style affected you growing up, and can you identify any unmet needs that still affect you today, especially in your relationships?

Parenting Style	Description
Authoritarian	Highly demanding and directive, but not warm or responsive. High in control and maturity demands, but low in nurturing and communication.
Permissive	More accepting than demanding. Avoid confrontation with the child. High in nurturing but low in maturity demands, control and communication.
Neglecting	Low in responsiveness and maturity demands. Low in warmth and nurturing as well as control, structure and communication.
Balanced	Both demanding and responsive. High in nurturing and warmth, maturity demands. Clear and consistent rules and communication.

2. What promises does the Lord give us in Psalm 27:10 and John 7:37-39, and what do these promises mean to you personally?

3. In Jeremiah 32:17-18a it states that children often experience consequences of their parents’ sins. How has that happened to you? How have those parental sins affected your closest relationships?

4. In Jeremiah 33:6, the Lord promises that He will heal His people and have us enjoy abundant peace. Where do you need healing and peace? Write it down, and if you feel comfortable, share with your group. If you’re not sure, ask God to reveal to you where you need healing or what barriers impede you from enjoying more peace.

5. Colossians 3:8 says, "But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." What does the Lord tell us that we must get rid of in our lives, our families? How are you doing in this area? (You can take an honest look at yourself by working on "The Gift Exercise" in the Appendix with your spouse.)

6. Share two things your spouse could do to make you feel more loved, appreciated or cared for when you are emotionally triggered.

7. Close your eyes and ask the Lord to give you a vision of your marriage filled with the fruits of His spirit: love, joy, peace and self-control, being fully patient, kind, good, gentle and faithful to one another. Share that vision with your group.

Close in Prayer

Pray as a group that God will heal your deepest emotional wounds.

Homework

You have 2 options for your homework. Complete the option that best meets your needs.

Option 1: Healing of Parental Wounds

The Celebrate Recovery Inventory on the next page is divided into five sections. It will help you recall events that you may have repressed and reveal to you how wounds from your past may still affecting your life and those around you today. Like Lamentations 3:40 says, "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord."

Answer the questions in the table. Use your mother or father for "The Person" (if at all applicable).

The Person	The Cause	The Effect	The Damage	My Part
Who is the object of my resentment or fear?	What specific action did that person take that hurt me?	What effect did that action have on my life?	What damage did that action do to my basic social, security and/or sexual instincts?	What part of resentment am I responsible for?
				Who are the people I have hurt?
				How have I hurt them?

Table adapted from: Baker, J. (2018). *Taking an honest and spiritual inventory: Participant's guide 2*. Nashville, TN: Zondervan.

Option 2: Meeting your Spouse's Emotional Needs

We can help our partners heal emotionally as we become more effective in meeting their emotional needs. To accomplish this, we first need to know what their needs are. What makes this challenging is that men's needs tend to be very different from women's needs.

The following tend to be the highest needs for men and women:

Men's top 5 Needs

- a. Sexual fulfillment
- b. Recreational companionship
- c. Physical attractiveness
- d. Domestic support
- e. Admiration

Women's top 5 Needs

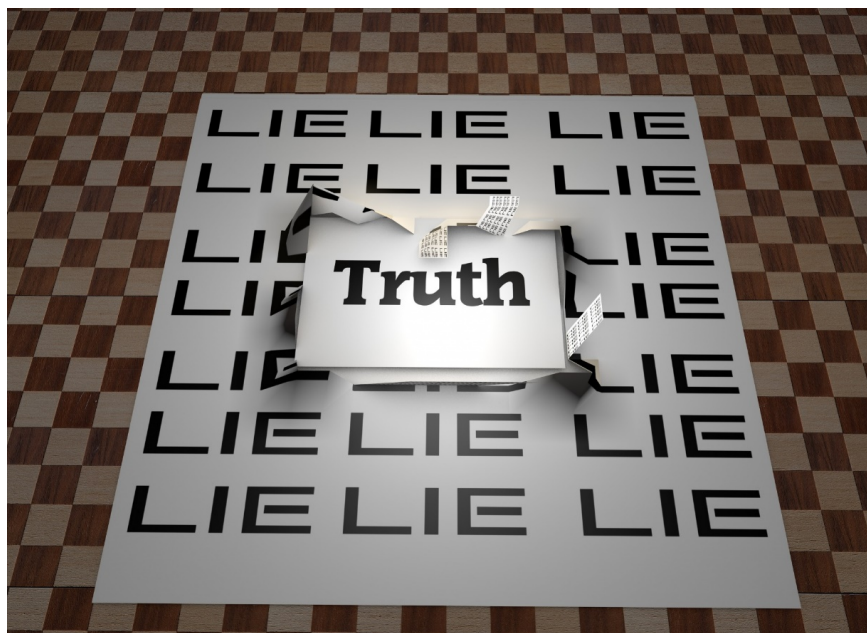
- a. Affection
- b. Conversation
- c. Honesty and openness
- d. Financial support
- e. Family commitment

Note: A man's top need may be in the women's column or visa-versa.

1. Identify your top two emotional needs that you would like your partner to give you more of.

Now share those two needs with your spouse.

2. After sharing the two emotional needs you want your spouse to provide, discuss together a plan of how you both can better meet those needs. Write down this plan so you will successfully implement it.



To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32

2. IDENTITY

From Deceit to Truth

We are spiritually wounded and separated from God by our sins and past shame-based lies that have kept us in darkness. But "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come..." (2 Cor. 5:17). Christ frees us by speaking truth to the shame-based lies of the sins that have kept us bound and separated from God. The truth of God is that He loves us and sent His son to die on the cross to set us free from sin. Our new freedom allows us to fully know Jesus, know the joy of salvation, live in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and have the power to obey God and follow His perfect will for us. Spiritual healing is experiencing the freedom to abide in Christ.

The Good News is that our identity can be completely changed in Jesus. Our brains can be healed. You are no longer a liar, an addict, a loser, an adulterer, a bad person. Rather, you "...have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10). You are a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). You have been "called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Just like you, your spouse desperately needs to know their true identity in Christ. One of the worst consequences of marital fights is that you both are reinforcing the 'worldly sinner' identities of your spouse and yourself.

As Paul states in Ephesians 6:12, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Once you start fighting with your 'flesh and blood' spouse, you have already lost the battle and have invited dark powers into your marriage. So, put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18). Remember that the enemy is within, not each other. As a married person with a new identity in Christ, an important purpose to which you are called is to minister love to your spouse (1 John 5:17). When you are angry or frustrated with your spouse, don't operate in your old identity. Rather, operate in your new spiritual identity. Bite your tongue and don't allow your hurtful words to come out. Go to your room, get on your knees and pray for God to deliver you from the temptation to sin. Within minutes, you can be praising God that you did not wound your family and can return to enjoy a wonderful night with your loved ones because the Lord heard your prayers and delivered you from the temptation to react in your old identity.

When we walk in our new identity in Christ, we put on brand new virtues like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness. "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Col. 3:14). Now this is the key to a spiritually healthy marriage!

Read 1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ...

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Read 1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Read John 15:15-16

¹⁵ *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* ¹⁶ *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.*

Read Romans 6:18

¹⁸ *You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

Read 1 Corinthians 2:16

¹⁶ *for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹ *Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* ¹¹ *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Read 1 Peter 3:9

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Read Colossians 3:12-13

¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Read John 14:16-17

¹⁶ *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—* ¹⁷ *the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you*

know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Read 2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

Discussion Questions

1. Assign each couple a Bible passage from the table about identity in Christ on the next page. Each couple will read the Bible passage and identify what the passage says about our identity in Christ. Once everyone is ready, take turns sharing what you discovered.

Scripture	Who Am I in Christ?
1 John 3:1	
2 Corinthians 5:17	
1 Peter 2:9	
John 15:15-16	
Romans 6:18	
1 Corinthians 2:16	
1 Corinthians 6:11	

2. Turn and talk to another man or woman to answer 2A–2C.

2A. Do you feel like these identity statements are true in your life?

2B. What makes it hard to believe that this is who you are in Christ?

2C. If you truly believed these statements about who you are, how would your relationships be different?

3. What do 1 Peter 3:9 and Col. 3:12–13 command us to do?

4. One way of obeying these commands is affirming our spouse's identity as a son or daughter of Christ Jesus. List three ways you can do this.

5. Look at 2 Peter 1:3 and John 14:16–17. How do we have the power to carry out God's commands and affirm our spouse's new identity?

6. Read Col. 3:12-13 again. Which of the following virtues from your new identity will you commit to practice every day with your spouse over the next week? (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness). Be specific of how you will do this.

7. Turn and talk with your spouse. Think of situations in your marriage where you may lack understanding or are a little too critical with your spouse. Share how you will affirm your spouse's Godly identity by being more supportive and encouraging.

Relationship Issue	Ineffective Response	New, Jesus-Inspired Response

Close in Prayer

Pray as a group that God would help you to walk in your new identity in Christ.

Homework: Practicing Spiritual Intimacy

You have 3 options for your homework. Complete the option that best meets your needs.

Option 1: Go to the Tender Place

It is a continual battle to walk out our identity in Christ, and we all need encouragement in this process. Many of us have made the mistake of hurting our spouse when we operate in our old identities, apart from Christ. Your homework is to practice going to a tender place where you are soft hearted and vulnerable to seek forgiveness for what you have done. Sit down facing each other and hold each other's hands.

Husbands, you begin by repeating the following words:

- (wife's name), I realize that I have most hurt you in our marriage by _____. (Do not explain yourself. Focus only on validating your spouse's pain).
- I am sorry, I never wanted to hurt you.
- I am committed to changing.
- Will you forgive me?

Now wives, you repeat the process with your husband. While you are still in that tender place, pray for the Lord be with you both. Enter into Jesus' loving presence. Listen to the truth He wants to impart to you and experience His loving kindness about your relationship and your identities.

Option 2: Practicing Spiritual Connection

When we talk about our spirit, we are focusing on our inner-most being. For spiritual healing in our marriage, we need to connect at a much deeper level. Don't be cowards about experiencing a deeper intimacy with your spouse!

For this exercise:

- Face each other and stare into your spouse's eyes.
- Remain silent for seven minutes.
- As you look into your spouse's eyes, remember loving times you have experienced as a couple.
- Think about how your spouse has grown in his/her identity in Christ.
- Share with one another the love you have for each other and encourage each other's new identities in Christ.

Option 3: Daily Devotion for the Week

Take a few minutes to privately reflect. Close your eyes and take a few minutes to remember a time when you deeply felt the presence and love of Jesus in your life. Begin to express appreciation to the Lord for being His son/daughter. Enter a dialogue with Jesus on what barriers in your marriage He can help you overcome.



⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

1 John 1:8-10

3. BEHAVIORS

From Denial to Responsibility

A healthy marriage consists of continually confessing our bad habits and sins to God and our spouse and actually making the changes we need to make. Bad behavior is simply a nice name for sin. We need to stop with the bad behavior. Especially with our spouse! No excuses! Instead of this, many focus entirely upon their spouse's shortcomings and ignore their own sins. This is called denial. The major form of denial in marriage is projection. I project my bad behavior and sins upon my spouse so I do not have to deal with my own. Probably the most common example of projection is anger. The angry husband tells his wife, "I do not have an anger problem. You're the problem! If you didn't

nag me all the time, I wouldn't get angry." So if the anger is not the husband's problem but the wife's, the husband never needs to take responsibility for the problem. The sin behind the anger continues to control the husband.

God commands us in John 15:17 to love each other: "This is my command: love each other." If instead of loving your spouse, you are angry at your spouse, jealous, resentful, critical, or have any other negative feelings, you are not loving. Rather, you are disobeying God and sinning. With a sinner's heart it is impossible to obey this command or, for that matter, follow Jesus in any honest, abiding way.

The real problem is that sin is much more powerful, pervasive and persistent than any of us want to acknowledge. There are three ways we can deal with the sin that surrounds us.

1. We can deceive ourselves by capitulating with sin and tell ourselves we are not sinning. This doesn't lead to love.
2. We agree with God and recognize the sin, but then we practice the sin in secret, deceiving ourselves. We believe that God cannot see our sin. This also doesn't lead to love.
3. We confess our sins to God with a broken heart and contrite spirit. We tell God, "not my will be done but Yours." This leads to God, the source of all love.

There is an important relationship between responsibility and freedom. In any area of our lives, if we take responsibility for our thoughts and actions, we can experience freedom. A great example of this is the alcoholic. When an alcoholic finally admits that he is an alcoholic, all his family and friends tell him, "Well, it's about time! We've been telling you for five years now that you're an alcoholic." Although this is probably a true statement, it is the first small step the alcoholic makes to take responsibility for his alcoholism. He continues to take responsible actions by going to AA meetings, getting a sponsor, and publicly stating he has totally quit drinking alcohol. After three years of continued recovery, he can be free from something that was destroying his family and killing himself (alcoholics live 20 years less than the average life-span). Taking responsibility for our actions will lead us to experience freedom in our marriages!

Many Christians fall captive to self-deceit. They claim to have fellowship with God and yet they lie and do not live out the truth. Are you walking in any darkness? Are you walking in anger, jealousy, drunkenness, lies, sexual deviations, selfishness, cheating, laziness, gluttony, drugs, adultery, pride, etc.? There is so much darkness around us! How desperately we need God's light in our lives! But 1 John 1:7 also says we need fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus to

purify us from all sin! So, as you live in the light, fellowship and blood of Jesus, your marriage will prosper.

Sin abounds in the darkness. Sin also places a heavy burden on marriages. Only you can repent of your sins. Your spouse may try but he/she cannot change you. Draw close to the Lord today and ask Him to examine your heart. Do not try to hide your sin from God as Adam did in the Garden. Confess your sins to God and trust in His promise that He will forgive you your sins and purify you from all unrighteousness.

Read 1 John 1:5-10

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Read James 5:16

¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Read Proverbs 28:13

Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Discussion Questions

1. Assign each couple a question from 1A-1C. Each couple will read the Bible passage, then prepare an answer to the question. Once everyone has their answers ready, take turns sharing the answers to your questions.

1A. In 1 John 1:5-7 the passage talks about walking in light and darkness. What does it mean by this, and why is it important?

1B. According to 1 John 1:8-10 and Proverbs 28:13, what are the effects of confession or lack of confession of our sins? What makes it so hard to admit our sins?

1C. What does James 5:16 say about confessing our sins to others, and why is this important?

2. Both Proverbs 28:13 and James 5:16 state that there are benefits to confessing our sins. How have you personally experienced benefits like these when you confessed?

3. James 5:16 talks about confessing our sins to another person. Sometimes this might be our spouse and other times a prayer partner. Who have you confessed to in the past, and how has it helped bring healing? If you have a prayer partner to confess to, how has it helped your marriage? If you don't have a regular prayer partner, how do you think it could help your marriage?

4. What strategies can you share with the group that have empowered and helped you overcome sin patterns in your life?

5. Take a few minutes to reflect privately for questions 5A-5C. Afterward, you may volunteer to share your answers with the group if you feel comfortable.

5A. Regarding your marriage, where are you claiming you are without sin (as 1 John 1:8 suggests), and need to admit and confess it? Write down an area where you have been denying your sin.

5B. What will it take for you to get rid of this bad behavior?

5C. What help and support do you need to accomplish this?

Close in Prayer

Sit with another man or woman and pray for God’s help to overcome sinful behaviors that damage your marriage.

Homework

You have 2 parts to your homework. In Part A, your spouse will help you identify annoying behavior. In Part B, you will work with the Lord to overcome your sinful behavior.

Option 1: Identifying Behaviors that Need to Change

In this exercise you will be receiving your spouse’s information on what behaviors are annoying to him/her. Remember, you both want to be working as a team to enhance your marriage by removing the love busters that are at the source of conflict. Habits and activities are annoying behavior if they cause you to feel unhappy. They can be as innocent as snoring or as destructive as infidelity or alcohol addiction. Remember to thank your spouse for this feedback.

Answer following questions.(Questions taken from Harley Jr., W. F. (1996). Give & take: The secret to marital compatibility. Ada, MI: Fleming H Revell Co.)

- 1. Which annoying behavior causes the greatest unhappiness?
- 2. What does your spouse do when engaging in annoying behavior?
- 3. How unhappy are you when your spouse engages in annoying behavior? Circle below:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
No unhappiness		Some unhappiness		Extreme unhappiness		

4.. How often does spouse engage in annoying behavior?
_____ times each (circle one): day week month year

5. When did your spouse first engage in annoying behavior?

6. Has behavior increased or decreased in intensity and/or frequency since it first began?

7. How does recent annoying behavior compare with past?

Option 2: Overcoming Sin

Practice overcoming sin in your marriage with this exercise. Keep a daily inventory of your behaviors in the Appendix for a week. At the end of each day, do the following:

1. Name your sin, honestly confessing it to God. Before God and in your own conscience, call your sin exactly what it is. Stop all explanations and excuses. Get on your knees and confess that this thing is opposed to God's character and hurting your spouse and children.

2. Repent against your sin. Do a 180 with your life. Choose with your God-given power to reject the sin and deliberately change your mind and direction. Set a new course for your life and marriage.

3. Receive a steady inflow of God's love as your source of power over sin. God's love becomes the muscle behind the entire experiential process of victory over sin. To better understand and experience that love, enter into daily prayer, meditation, bible study, devotional worship and fellowship with His body.



*Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.
Matthew 19:6*

4. RELATIONSHIPS

From Isolation to Connection

How can we be reconciled to Christ if we are not reconciled to our spouse? 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 urges us to be reconciled to God, and states that we have been given a ministry of reconciliation. Yet many of us have deep brokenness in our marriages and differences that we have not reconciled. This interferes with us experiencing close relationship with God.

How is it that a husband and wife who deeply loved each other, raised three children together, and shared twenty years of their life together can end up hating each other and seeking to destroy each other's lives? One conclusion is that expressly because they opened their hearts so deeply to one another, when problems started happening in their marriage, these problems triggered fears of their relationship failing along with the accompanying fears of rejection

and abandonment. If the couple cannot resolve these problems, they end up in a divorce that breaks each other's hearts and their children's hearts. So, each partner begins to respond more defensively to protect themselves. Whether it is yelling or withdrawal, the wounds go deeper and the defenses, backed by anger, get higher until the couple convinces themselves that there is no hope for their marriage.

Because of our wounds, marriage can feel like we are in a castle tower behind high defensive walls. Every now and then, we shoot our cannon at our partner's castle. But in your castle tower, filled with anger and frustration, you are not able to resolve any issue in your marriage.

At this point a couple has three choices for their marriage. They can continue in chaos, they can get a divorce, or they can seek reconciliation. Please seek reconciliation! As Christians, in choosing reconciliation, you can also hope for God's redemption of your marriage! Redemption in marriage means that as you both are broken together and as you both surrender to the Lord's will in your relationship, He can make your marriage better than if all the fighting, tears, separation or affairs never happened. To heal, you need to learn to come down from your castle tower, lower the drawbridge, leave your defensive position and go to that tender place where instead of sharing your frustration and anger with one another, you share the sadness from the hurt and the loneliness you have both experienced.

How does God even begin to do that miracle? After He leads you through surrender He directs you both to forgive one another of all past sins and offenses. Everything! Remember Matthew 6:15, "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." So, if you refuse to forgive your spouse's sins, you will not experience the full forgiveness, acceptance and love of the Lord. But as you take all your hurt and bitterness to the cross, you can experience Jesus' presence and love which is the source of all emotional healing. As your heart heals, you can release your anger.

As you forgive your spouse, it opens you up to reconciliation with your spouse. Through forgiveness you can have healthy boundaries with him/her. Not backed by anger as before, but now backed by the power of God, the love of Christ and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. The one limitation of forgiveness is that if the other person is not willing to change their hurtful attitudes and behavior, you cannot reconcile with them. But even if this is the case, you are no longer a victim trapped by your partner's intransigence. You can pray for your spouse, assertively share your feelings and wants with your spouse, and find healthy people to help you heal and grow. Through this strategy, as your

spouse witnesses the positive changes in you, he/she can be also be challenged to want to change.

You are effectively putting yourself in a position where God can actively intervene in your marriage. You have much more power in your marriage than you realize. "You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you" (Phil. 4:13).

Now as you begin reconciliation as a couple, it is important to incorporate the following changes in your relationship.

1. Make working on your marriage your first priority.
2. Accept each other as you are. Stop trying to change your spouse.
3. Learn communication and problem-solving skills.
4. Share your feelings and wants with one another.
5. Schedule weekly times to share more deeply about the dynamics of your relationship.
6. Make time for date nights – have fun together.
7. Take time to be affectionate and nurture one another.
8. Learn from your mistakes, learn to forgive.
9. Pay attention to what you admire about each other.

Over time, as you work through your reconciliation, the final outcome should be a greatly deepened trust of one another. Trust is the foundation for experiencing true love and intimacy in your marriage.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Read Matthew 6:14-15

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Read Matthew 5:23-24

²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Read Hebrews 12:14-15

¹⁴ *Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.* ¹⁵ *See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

Discussion Questions

1. Both 2 Cor. 5:17-19 and Hebrews 12:14-15 imply that we are to be peacemakers in our homes. How can you be a peacemaker in your home?

2. What truth does Matthew 6:14-15 express about forgiveness and its effect on our spiritual life?

3. What makes it difficult for us to reconcile with our spouses? Like Heb. 12:16 states, how do “bitter roots” cause trouble?

4. Take a few moments to reflect privately on 4A-4C. Matthew 5:23-24 commands us to prioritize reconciliation with one another. We all need to reconcile some area of our marriage relationship.
 - 4A. Start where you feel comfortable and write down something you want to reconcile with your spouse.

 - 4B. Why is this issue important for you?

 - 4C. What responsibility do you need to take for this issue?

5. How do you find the time to share deep relational issues with your spouse? When was the last time you did this?

6. How can you make it safer for your spouse to connect with you and be more vulnerable?

7. Write down something you would want your spouse to forgive you for.

Close in Prayer

Sit and pray with your spouse that God will help you to reconcile when and where you need to.

Homework: Learning to Discover and Deal with the “Raw Spots”

Before beginning this exercise, if you are having trouble sharing your deeper feelings with your spouse, take time to dialogue with Jesus about these barriers. Ask Him for guidance and wisdom to share and reconcile your differences with your spouse. Then trust and obey what Jesus tells you to do.

In reconciliation, the couple needs to learn how to go down that emotional elevator and discuss the deep emotions that trigger conflicts. In so doing you can learn how to become a team in healing each other and your relationship.

See if each of you can:

a. Identify a specific moment during a fight or disagreement when you suddenly feel more vulnerable or on guard.

b. Identify the most negative thoughts that go through your head at that point. What is the worst, most catastrophic thought about your partner, yourself and your relationship? For example: “He doesn’t care.” “We are going to fight and split up.”

c. Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up for you in these moments. Often this is a fear about yourself or about your spouse and how he/she thinks or feels about you.

In moments of disconnection, deep down I feel (circle the feelings you experience):

Lonely	Dismissed	Worried
Unimportant	Helpless	Unwanted
Scared	Hurt	Humiliated
Hopeless	Intimidated	Let down
Panicked	Rejected	Sad
Overwhelmed	Inadequate	Insignificant
Failing/Ashamed	Lost/Confused	Vulnerable
Isolated		

d. Do you show this feeling to your partner? _Yes _No

If not, what feeling do you usually show your partner? Often when unsafe, we show anger/frustration or no feeling at all. Try to share your answers to the questions above with your partner.

e. Taking turns, fill in the blanks:

When we get stuck in disconnection, I show you _____
_____, but underneath I feel _____.

It is _____ (hard, easy, scary, strange, comfortable) to tell you this.

If you wanted to help me with this feeling, then right now you could ____
_____.

Questions from taken from Johnson, S. (2008). *Hold me tight: Seven conversations for a lifetime of love*. New York: Little, Brown Spark.

In Conclusion

We thank you for attending these classes and for your commitment as a couple to invest in your marriage. We hope that the lessons have been beneficial to both of you and that you have gained insights and taken actions to enhance your relationship.

Of course, to have a great marriage, we need to continually learn and grow in our personal maturity and as a couple. Remember that one of the greatest risks to achieving a great marriage is settling for a so-so marriage. Don't settle! Christ has given us the hope and vision of achieving an amazing love and true intimacy with our spouse. He desires to bless your marriage with the fruits of His spirit. As God's children, may you experience in your marriage love, joy, peace, patience and self-control. May you be kind, gentle, good and faithful to one another. This may seem impossible for you to experience at this time, but it is possible when you invite the Lord Jesus Christ to be the third person intertwined in every area of your relationship.

May the Lord abundantly bless your marriage and your family.

APPENDIX A: Daily Inventory of Behaviors

This form will help you see on a daily basis how you are doing with your behavior. Mark the chart with an X for each day you are on the “self-will” side, or a check mark if you are on the “God’s Will” side.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-WILL	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7	CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD’S WILL
Selfish and self-seeking								Interest in others
Dishonesty								Honesty
Frightened								Courage
Inconsiderate								Considerate of others
Pride								Humility-seeking God’s will
Greedy								Giving or Sharing
Lustful								What can I do for others
Anger								Calm
Envy								Grateful
Laziness								Take Action
Gluttony								Moderation
Impatient								Patient
Intolerance								Tolerance
Resentment								Forgiveness
Hate								Love-Concern for others
Harmful acts								Good deeds
Self-pity								Self-forgetfulness
Self-justification								Humility-seeking God’s will
Self-importance								Modesty
Self-condemnation								Self-forgiveness
Suspicion								Trust
Doubt								Faith

APPENDIX B: Heal On-line Resources List

You can access these resources online at nlc.io/fusion.

Session 1: Feelings

- The Gift Exercise: <http://rodgerscc.com/soul-healing-love/toolsexercies/>
- Five Ways to Find Healing from Your Past: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/five-ways-to-find-healing-from-your-past.html>

Session 2: Identity

- 20 Encouraging Bible Verses about Our Identity in Christ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/bible-verses-about-our-identity-in-christ/>
- Four Ways Our Identity in Christ Changes Our Lives: <https://unlockingthebible.org/2015/04/four-ways-our-identity-in-christ-changes-our-lives/>
- Immanuel Approach: <http://www.immanuelapproach.com/>

Session 3: Behaviors

- Eight Recovery Principles: <https://www.celebraterecovery.com/resources/cr-tools/8principles>
- Five Bad Habits that Kill Love in a Marriage <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2017/06/02/5-bad-habits-that-kill-love-in-a-marriage/>

Session 4: Relationships

- 25 Best Christian Marriage Resources to Help Your Marriage Thrive <https://www.ibelieve.com/relationships/25-best-christian-marriage-resources-to-help-your-marriage-thrive.html>
- How Forgiveness Can Transform Your Marriage: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/forgiveness-can-transform-marriage/>