

Overcome

Joined Together

Fusion Marriage Series

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MEMORY VERSE

... for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 1 John 5:4

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

OVERCOME

The Lord has called us to be overcomers through being submitted and connected to Him through the Holy Spirit. He has also called us to love, cherish and honor our spouses. When we fail at this, sin has entered our marriage and we need to acknowledge the sin and overcome it together as a team – you, your spouse and the Lord. If you apply these OVERCOME teachings from the word of God you have the opportunity to take the following steps:

- Communicate your emotional needs to your spouse
- Identify the root of your anger and practice de-escalation
- Learn how to handle disagreements in an honoring way
- Practice forgiveness in your marriage

Sign below to make a commitment to follow the above guidelines as you participate in this unit.

Name

Date

Acknowledge Your Issues and Trust God for Help

Many couples have bickered and quarreled so long that they lose hope that things will ever improve. They resign themselves to go on quarreling and hating the rest of their lives, or they end the marriage by divorce. Couples need to believe that, by God's power, they CAN resolve their marriage problems if both parties will really work at it.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). If we trust in ourselves we may fail. But we must believe that Jesus will provide the strength we need to please God. Careful thought will convince us that serious marriage conflict is not God's will for us. God created marriage for the good of man and woman. He never intended for marriage to be a source of hatred and bitter grudges.

Hatred, bitter quarreling, and alienation in our homes mean that someone is disobeying God. Either the problem began because someone disobeyed God, or else the original problem led someone to commit other sinful acts.

In either case, serious marriage problems almost always involve sin. If so, we can overcome the problems by the same methods the Bible describes for overcoming other sins! Recognizing that sin is the root of the problem gives hope because a Christian knows that God has the solution to sin.

However, marriage involves two people. A problem between two people can only be completely removed if both parties are willing to work at it. If only one person obeys God, the other person can keep the problem alive.

If my partner will not work to improve the marriage, this does not remove my responsibility to do what I can. To please God, I must follow His will regardless of what my partner does. I must believe that I can please God regardless of how others act.

1 John 5:4 states, "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (ESV). This includes overcoming improper family relations, but we must believe that it can be done by the power of God.



And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

1. OVERCOMING ISOLATION

"We must never be naïve enough to think of marriage as a safe harbor from the Fall... The deepest struggles of life will occur in the most primary relationship affected by the Fall - marriage."

-Dan Allender, renowned Christian therapist and author

"To be able to look forward to a lifelong, thriving marriage; you must have a clear understanding of the gospel. Without it, you cannot see God, yourself, or your marriage for what they truly are. The gospel is the foundation of a thriving marriage!"

- Dave Harvey, author of *When Sinners Say 'I Do'*

Five Truths about Oneness in Marriage

- Couples naturally drift toward isolation.
- Our differences and weaknesses can push us apart.
- Sin has affected every marriage.
- The gospel brings healing and reconciliation.
- Couples must learn to walk by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ has made me secure and significant. Whether I feel it or not, it is true. I am instructed by God to believe that my needs are already met, and therefore I am to live selflessly, concerned only with the needs of others. The more I choose to live according to the truth of what Christ has done for me, the more I will come to sense the reality of my security and significance in him.

Sin has made an utter wreck of things. God's original design was that man and woman should live in fellowship with him and in a selfless relationship of mutual giving to each other. In such a relationship, my love would so thrill my wife that I would feel deep significance as I realized the joy that my love creates in her; I would exult in the security that her love provides me. She too would find significance in touching my deepest needs and would enjoy the security of my love for her.

But something has gone wrong in our marriage. I no longer believe that my needs are already met. I seem to think that I need my spouse to give me security and significance before I can respond as I should. I now wait for her to fill me first, then I give of myself to her. If she fails to come through in a way that satisfies me, I back away or perhaps attack her. To the degree that I trust her to accept me fully, I will be open and loving with her. But now my love for her depends on her love for me. And she approaches our relationship in exactly the same way. If I love her in a way that brings her security, then she gives herself in loving subjection to me. Otherwise she establishes enough distance to numb the pain of rejection.

A terrible situation results. Because I have asked my spouse to meet my needs, she now has the power to withhold what I need – and thereby to destroy me. Fear has entered our relationship. We have become afraid of each other. Neither of us can find what we desperately need in our relationship because of fear.

So selfishness becomes one of the root causes of isolation. Husbands can never quite obey Ephesians 5 and love their wives as much as themselves. And wives then return in kind. To avoid this natural drift apart, couples need to make their marriage the priority it ought to be.

–Dr. Larry Crabb, *The Marriage Builder*, 1982, pp. 29–30

Read John 7:37-39

³⁷On 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. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive....

Read Jeremiah 2:13

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Read James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Read Philippians 4:19

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Meeting deep needs is a challenge because we are so different, but it also presents a great opportunity for us to minister to our spouses. We can choose to allow differences to isolate us or to build intimacy through selflessness.

1A. Identify the ways you are different from your spouse in any of the following areas:

- Family background
- Personality
- Education
- Interests
- Ways you use your free time
- Entertainment choices
- Spending habits

1B. How can you be intentional about meeting your spouses needs in the places where you are different from one another?

2. Turn and talk to another person of the same gender. Some of the deep needs or 'thirsts' that all people have are the needs to love, to be loved, to have security, and to have significance. Describe a recent situation in your marriage in which you became aware of a deep need. How did you try to satisfy that need? What part did you hope your spouse would play in satisfying your need?

3. Assign each couple one question from 3A-3D. 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.

3A. Read John 7:37-39. What does Jesus say about how we can satisfy our emotional and spiritual thirsts?

3B. Read Jeremiah 2:13. What have people done instead of pursuing God to quench the thirsts in their lives?

3C. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. What does this say? How can we comfort one another in a marriage? How can it work with children and other family members?

3D. Read James 1:17 and Philippians 4:19. What do these verses say about provision for our needs?

4. How have you experienced the Lord meeting deep needs for love, security and significance in your life?

5. Turn and talk to another couple. Give an example of how your spouse helped meet your deep needs. What did they say or do that helped you feel loved, secure or significant?

6. Take a moment to answer privately. How important has God been in your life and marriage?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

NOT IMPORTANT

VERY IMPORTANT

7. Turn and talk to your spouse. How could you allow God to play a greater role in meeting your personal needs? What about meeting needs in your marriage? Discuss a plan to include God more in your family life (worship and devotional times together, Bible reading, or reading other Christian books together, time with certain people, ministry, etc.).

Close in Prayer

Ask the Lord to quench your thirst and meet your deep needs.

Homework

You have two options for your homework. Complete the option that best meets your needs as a couple.

Option 1: Creating a Wish List

In this exercise, you each individually make a Wish List of things you would like more of or less of in your marriage. Next, take turns sharing your Wish List with each other. In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be practicing the communication skills of Assertive Speaking and Active Listening.

Assertive Speaking is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in your relationship. **Active Listening** is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating the message.

Speaker's Job: Speak for yourself ("I" statements ie. "I wish....")
Describe how you would feel if your wish came true.

Listener's Job: Repeat/summarize what you have heard.
Describe the wish and how your partner would feel if the wish comes true.

Make a Wish List of three things you would like more of in your marriage.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Make a Wish List of three things you would like less of in your marriage.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Option 2: Expectations List

Take 15 minutes for this activity. Often our marital expectations remain unspoken. When they are not met, they result in wounds because they are usually connected to a deep need. Sometimes our expectations are misplaced as demands on our spouse when they should be met by the Lord. Our expectations must remain desires rather than becoming demands for our spouse to fulfill. We place our hope and expectation on the Lord to satisfy and fulfill our deep needs.

List five expectations you have for your spouse and try to identify the corresponding need. Share your list with your spouse. Release each other from the burden of meeting these expectations as demands. Rather, express your list as desires. Bring your needs together to the Lord, and ask that he would quench your emotional thirsts and also motivate you to lovingly meet each other's desires.

<u>Expectation</u>	<u>Need (security, love, significance)</u>
<i>Ex: I expect my spouse to come home on time.</i>	<i>Security</i>

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



*But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.
Colossians 3:8*

2. OVERCOMING ANGER

Take Responsibility for Your Anger

Anger is a deceptive emotion. When we are angry we feel more powerful, but the angriest person in a relationship is actually the weakest. Anger is also a secondary emotion. If you grew up in a dysfunctional family, your parents may not have provided you with the love, attention, affection or affirmation you needed. Worse yet, you may have been abused, rejected or abandoned. You became a victim to that family dysfunction, growing up with hurt, fear and shame. In these circumstances, many children start acting out in anger. As they do, they experience a greater sense of control in their lives and may unconsciously decide that it is much better being in control and feeling anger than being a victim and feeling sadness and fear. Their anger may help them emotionally survive their teenage years, but they discover that their anger is very destructive in adult relationships.

As Christians, we need to acknowledge that much of our anger is sin, and as Paul says in Colossians 3:8, "Now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice..." To do this, we must first take responsibility for our anger. Our anger is a choice we make. Often it is a strategy we decided upon as children. We must take responsibility for our anger and not continue to justify our anger by blaming our spouse or others for it. Christ did not get angry at his persecutors on the cross. Instead, he prayed, asking his Father to "forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34). Taking responsibility for our anger means that we release the "pay back" for the hurt we feel from others (especially our spouse). We are motivated to forgive those who have offended or hurt us because "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Practice De-Escalation with the GIFT Tool and Time-outs

Self-awareness is a powerful tool for self-control. Better understanding of what is pushing our inner anger button allows us to exercise more control over our negative feelings. If you are angry, you should be able to trace it to one of four underlying emotions:

- **Guilt**
- **Inferiority**
- **Fear**
- **Trauma**

We have developed the acronym "GIFT" for these underlying emotions so that you can easily trace them to their root cause. We chose the word GIFT because it would be a GIFT to you and your spouse to identify the root of your wrath. By tracing the root of your anger, you may be able to share it more effectively with your mate. We challenge you to think about conflict and communicate it, not in terms of anger, but in terms of the four basic emotions that are lurking underneath.

The second communication technique is taking "Time outs." This tool allows you to a) identify triggers in your current relationship, b) understand the feelings these triggers evoke, and c) connect those feelings to early childhood wounds. This helps you separate past issues from current relational patterns in your marriage. The technique gives you a clear way of seeing how you can confuse childhood traumas with marital issues which cause a great deal of reactivity.

Read James 4:1-3

¹ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you

ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Read Ephesians 4:26-27

²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

Read Psalm 4:4

Tremble and [In your anger] do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

Read Psalm 37:7-9

⁷ Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. ⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. ⁹ For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.

Ephesians 6:12

For 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.

Discussion Questions

1. Let's have 1-2 couples share how the homework went, or what interfered with completing the homework.

2. Turn and talk to another person of the same gender. Share a time recently when you got angry at your spouse. What emotion do you think was underlying the anger: guilt, inferiority, fear or trauma?

3. Assign each couple one question from 3A-3D. 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.

3A. Read James 4:1-3. How are fights and quarrels connected to our desires?

3B. Read Ephesians 4:26–27. What does it say about anger? What is the danger of 'letting the sun go down on your anger'?

3C. Read Psalm 4:4. What advice is given about dealing with anger? What makes this a challenge?

3D. Read Psalm 37:7–9. What does the passage say about handling our anger? What can bring us peace when we are wronged?

4. Take turns reading items from the list of tips for handling anger. Which ones put God's instructions about anger into practice? Circle one or two that you want to use this week in your marriage and family. What stands out to you from this list?

Tips to cooling off a heated conflict:

- Take a deep breath to stay relaxed. (Psalm 37:7)
- Look the other person in the eye, with both of you sitting or standing.
- Speak softly and slowly. A soft answer turns away wrath. (Prov. 15:1)
- Keep your legs and arms uncrossed. Do not clench your fists or purse your lips. (Psalm 37:7)
- Keep reminding yourself: "We can find a win-win resolution to this," and remind the other person of this too.
- Watch your language. (Col. 3:8)
- Words that escalate a conflict are: never, always, unless, can't, won't, don't, should, and shouldn't. (Eph. 4:28)
- Words that de-escalate a conflict are: maybe, perhaps, sometimes, what if, it seems like, I feel, I think, and I wonder.
- Affirm and acknowledge the other person's position. (Prov. 18:13)
- Ask questions that encourage the other person to look for a solution.
- Ask open-ended questions rather than ones that will evoke a yes or no response.

5. Why is it such a struggle to follow good advice about handling anger when we are actually in the moment? What does Ephesians 6:12 suggest about the source of struggles with anger? How can we overcome this struggle?

6. Think about the anger-provoking marital situation you shared with another person in question 2. Recall the underlying feeling you identified. What did you really need when you were angry? Our anger is frequently a warning that our needs are not being met.

7. Take a few minutes to privately write down the answers to 7A-7D. Go over the answers as a couple as part of your homework during the week. In this exercise, you will be exploring the source of your anger and identifying the unmet need triggering it. Remember, this is about you and not about your spouse. Note: Anger is not always bad or sinful. Jesus got angry. The Lord is angry about many things. Anger is the right response to many things. However, much of our anger is selfish anger. We need to deal with this anger quickly and in the right way.

7A. What does your spouse do that triggers your anger?
(Remember that nothing your spouse says can *make* you angry. You are *choosing* to become angry.)

When you _____

I feel this _____

7B. Identify the root of this anger using The GIFT Exercise. Circle one or two of the emotions that you identify as the main cause of your anger:

Guilt - Inferiority - Fear - Trauma or Pain

7C. Reflect on the underlying emotion. When have you ever felt this feeling before? (Look for a past occurrence, preferably in childhood.)

7D. What do you do when you feel this feeling? What is your behavior?

Close in Prayer

Pray as a group that God will empower you with self-control to handle your anger in a godly way.

Homework: Reducing Escalation with Time Outs

Most relationships start off well – you talk nicely to each other, you treat each other well, and then slowly negative patterns start to build up over time that gradually destroy a) your love, b) your good feelings,

and c) your understanding for each other. Negative, nasty patterns of talking and arguing destroy many relationships and marriages, as people who were once in love with each other grow more and more frustrated and apart.

This week, we will focus on one pattern that destroys love: Escalation. During the week, use the guidelines below to reduce conflict escalation with your spouse through time-outs. When you are getting into a heated conflict, practice taking a time out to handle your anger in a godly way.

There are two major ways that Escalation damages a relationship:

1. It makes you feel less emotionally safe.

- Most people want the safest person in the world – the one you can relax around and feel most supported by.
- When routine conversations explode into anger and frustration, partners won't feel relaxed around each other.

2. When most of us get really upset, we sometimes say very hurtful things.

- Usually, people are trying to defend themselves by attacking the other and they regret the things they said when angry.
- Unfortunately, the other person is likely to remember the stinging remarks someone said during a fight, making it unsafe to be open and trusting.

When you get really upset with each other, there is not a lot you can say or do right then to help. There is usually a lot you could do that would make things worse.

Stopping is often the best thing you can do at those moments. Take a **Time out**.

What to do during a **Time out**:

- Say, "I need a time out".
- Agree upon a time to return to talk about issue.
- SEPARATE
- Calm down your body and then your thoughts.
- Determine what event triggered your anger.
- What was the underlying emotion that triggered your anger?
- Return to respectfully share with your spouse.
- Invite him/her into your emotional world. Be vulnerable.

Reflect: What happened when you practiced time outs this week?



*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.
Ephesians 4:15*

3. OVERCOMING DISAGREEMENTS

Psychologists can determine with 90% accuracy if a marriage is going to succeed or fail by one factor: how the couple resolves disagreements. So, a broken marriage doesn't necessarily mean that the husband is a bad guy or the wife is a bad person but that the dynamic in the marriage is bad. The partners never learned the communication tools to resolve their disagreements. What happens in the relationship is that when a disagreement comes up, the couple begins to blame the other, shame the other and put up defensive walls. This creates an alienation where they don't talk much with each other for a few days. They finally kiss and make up, but because they never resolved the disagreement, when the issue comes up again, they go right back to blaming and shaming each other. This is called the shame and anger cycle in marriage and most couples fall into this cycle at some point in their marriage.

When you recognize this destructive cycle in your marriage, it is critical that you to make the time and commitment to change this unhealthy communication. To begin, we need to retrain ourselves to be present in the moment with our spouse. Set aside a time when you can give your undivided attention to each other. Choose an ongoing disagreement to resolve. Commit to mutual respect of one another, which means no put-downs or yelling.

Your purpose is not to get your own way. Win/Lose outcomes are actually Lose/Lose/Lose outcomes. You lose, your spouse loses and your children lose. Your ultimate purpose in the conversation is to understand your partner's thoughts and feelings. Your partner's purpose is to understand your thoughts and feelings. Once you have taken the time to better understand your partner, especially his or her feelings, you can both come to the point of agreement. You agree to work together as a team to resolve the problem or disagreement. Now, instead of struggling alone with a difficult financial issue or a difficult issue with your children, you are working together in unity to solve the problem. Bearing the burden together lightens the load for each of you. As you apply problem-solving tools to actually resolve the problem, you create a foundation of trust in your marriage. You grow in confidence that no matter what comes your way, you have the ability to deal with the issues and keep your marriage strong.

Read Ephesians 4:15

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Read Ephesians 4:22-25

²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Read James 1:19-20

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Discussion Questions

1. Let's have 1-2 couples share how the homework went, or what interfered with completing the homework.

2. Turn and talk to another couple. We all have a conflict "operating system" that was downloaded onto our mental and emotional hard drive by our family of origin. It was downloaded without our consent or request. How were disagreements handled in your home when you were growing up? Look at the list below for ideas.

- Discussed openly
- Attacked
- Didn't see conflict discussed in our home
- Given the cold shoulder
- Talked about it quietly after everyone had calmed down
- Withdrew
- Pretended nothing happened
- Used snide comments and sarcasm
- Nagged about it till the other person was finally willing to talk

3. When we get married, our conflict "operating systems" often clash. How are disagreements handled in your home now? Refer to the list in question 2 for ideas.

4. As followers of Christ, we have the opportunity to install a new "operating system" for conflict. With God's help, how would you like to improve the way you handle disagreements?

5. Assign each couple one question from 5A-5D. 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.

5A. Read Ephesians 4:15. What does the verse encourage us to do? How does speaking the truth develop maturity?

5B. Read Ephesians 4:15. What is the problem with speaking truth without love or love without truth?

5C. Read Ephesians 4:22-25. What does it say to do, and how does this apply to disagreements in marriage?

5D. Read James 1:19–20. What does it say to do?

6. How can we be quicker to listen, slower to speak and slower to get angry in our conversations with our spouse? Try to be specific and practical. Look at the "24 Guidelines for Resolving Conflicts in Marriage" in the Appendix if you need ideas.

7. What tools or tips do you have to lovingly speak the truth to your spouse during a disagreement?

8. Take turns reading items from the list below about Problem-Solving Meetings. What ideas do you like best from this list? Circle them.

How to Run a Couple's Problem-Solving Meeting

- Set a date to meet weekly from 45 minutes to a maximum of 1 hour.
- Make sure there are as few distractions as possible.
- Maintain good eye contact, focus solely on each other.
- Each person says one thing that is going right.
- Identify any problems.
- Pick one problem to solve.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Mutually respect each other, no put-downs of each other.
- Each will listen to understand their partner's thoughts and especially feelings.
- Keep the focus on what you want, and ideas about how to get it – not on complaints.

Use the following problem-solving techniques to resolve the issue.

- Take time to understand the real problem
- Find solutions together
- Write down ideas for possible solutions – brainstorm.
- Evaluate the ideas carefully.
- Plan for success.
- Write down action plan with assigned responsibilities
- Meet to reevaluate.
- Plan a fun activity together for later in the week.

Note: A Problem-Solving Meeting is not the time to nag, complain, lecture, whine, withdraw, get defensive or criticize.

9. Turn and talk to your spouse. When can you get together as a couple over the next 7 days to deal with a problem in a Problem-Solving Meeting? Write down a time and date.

Close in Prayer

Sit and pray with your spouse. Ask God for help to obey his word and improve the way you handle disagreements.

Homework

You have 2 options for your homework. Complete one or more options that best meet your needs as a couple.

Option 1: Couple's Problem-Solving Meeting

Answer questions 1-4 alone, then share them with your spouse and do question 5 together.

1. Are you able to share your feelings and wants with your spouse when you disagree? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If not, write your feelings and wants about a marital issue now.

2. Write down an issue where you need to let go of trying to have it your way.

3. How can you be more understanding and supportive of your spouse?

4. How would your understanding and support help resolve your disagreements?

5. Do a Couple's Problem-Solving Meeting this week using the problem-solving rules listed in the lesson. Take time to listen your spouse's thoughts and feelings of why he/she wants something else in a disagreement than you do.

When and where will you meet?

What problem do you want to cover?

Option 2: Assess and Compare Personality Types

Take about 30 minutes for this activity. Personality types can be a source of conflict in marriage because they affect the way we view the world and and communicate about it. We must understand, appreciate and accept one another's different personalities to reduce conflict that could be caused by them.

Go to the website and take the Jung Typology Test to discover your personality profile. Record your results below. After taking the test, click on "Read a full description" under your personality type. From the full description, you can also click on a link to read the "communications skills" of your personality type. After reading the descriptions and communications skills for both of your personalities, answer the questions.

Website: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

My personality type (circle the letters): I-E S-N T-F J-P

My spouse's personality type (circle): I-E S-N T-F J-P

1. What characteristics (letters) do your personalities have in common?
2. What are one or two preferences of each of your personalities?
3. What helps each of your personalities be successful in communication?
4. What hinderances need to be avoided for each of your personalities when communicating?
5. What is one way you will use this information to communicate effectively with your spouse in your next conflict?



Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

4. OVERCOMING UNFORGIVENESS

The problem of unforgiveness is that your sins stay unforgiven and it creates denied anger within you, which breeds resentments and bitterness. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is about giving yourself, your children and your partner the kind of future they deserve--unhampered by hurt and anger. It is about choosing to live a life wherein others don't have power over you and you're not dominated by unresolved bitterness and resentment.

What is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness involves the decision not to hurt someone in return for what they've done to you. It is the decision not to seek payback. Many wives do not forgive their husbands because they fear that if they do, it will encourage their husbands to continue disappointing or hurting them. This indicates a misunderstanding of true forgiveness. Forgiveness is between two people, me and God, and it is about my healing. If my

spouse receives any benefits of my forgiveness, this is extra. God wants to heal me! All healing of past emotional wounds begins and ends with forgiveness. It is so important, Jesus calls us to pray each day, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). This is a conditional sentence which means that if you do not forgive the person that hurt you, you cannot receive God's full forgiveness, acceptance and love of Christ. Also, you can only forgive the pain you get in touch with. So, forgiveness is acknowledging your pain, fears and disappointments and taking them to the feet of Christ, trusting and obeying Him. As you do this difficult task, the presence and the love of Christ heals you. As you experience the Lord's healing, you can release the anger that you have accumulated against your spouse. This is also part of the healing process because when we hold on to anger, for whatever reason, it is like an emotional cancer inside us that will affect many areas of our lives and relationships.

Forgiveness is Different than Reconciliation

Forgiveness opens us up to reconciliation. Reconciliation is different from forgiveness in that it deals with three people: you, God and the person that has hurt you. It also deals with how to improve the current relationship. The limitation with reconciliation is that if the other person is not willing to change their hurtful behaviors, you cannot reconcile with them. However, after experiencing healing through forgiveness, you can establish healthy boundaries even though you have an unhealthy spouse. You don't have to return to anger. You can continue to give the message that you love your spouse, but you now focus on their hurtful behaviors. For example, it is not acceptable to continually be shamed by your spouse. Express to your spouse how their behaviors make you feel and the changes you want to see in them so the two of you can achieve a healthy and happy marriage. If your spouse is unwilling to change, you may need to implement stronger boundaries through godly counsel to protect yourself and your children until there is true repentance. These boundaries are made not with anger, but with the power of God, love of Christ and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Reconciliation Opens the Door to Rebuilding Trust

When there is reconciliation and mutual commitment to change, the final stage of healing is to rebuild a broken trust. Forgiveness is given, but trust always needs to be earned over time. It is during this stage that the steps of healing are engaged in over and over. It is crucial that you resist anything that takes your heart away from your partner during this stage. When you continue to work through forgiveness/reconciliation/trust, over and over, resisting the temptation to quit, you will find that your trust grows, your bonds increase and the amount of time you feel distant from each other keeps decreasing.

Steps Toward Building Trust

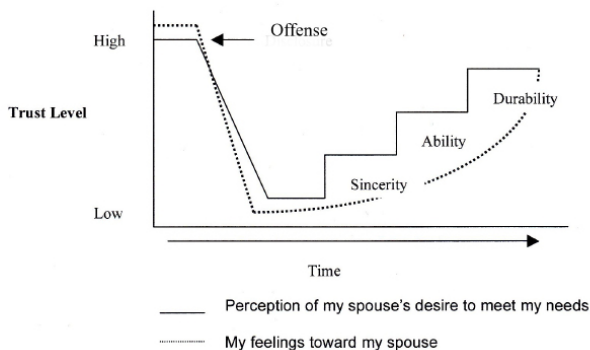


Image adapted from: Roberts, D. (2009). *Betrayal and Beyond: Healing for broken trust-workbook 1*. Gresham, OR: Pure Desires Ministries International.

Read Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

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 18:34-35

³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-5

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Discussion Questions

1. Turn and talk with another couple. Share about your homework from Session 3, or share what interfered with completing it.

2. Why is it hard to forgive people? What holds us back from forgiving?

3. Assign each couple one question from 3A-3D. 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.

3A. Read Ephesians 4:32. How are we meant to forgive, and what is the motivation? What does this kind of forgiveness look like?

3B. Read Matthew 6:14-15. What does this say about forgiveness? Why do you think the Lord says we won't be forgiven unless we forgive?

3C. Read Matthew 18:34-35 (or you can read the whole story from 18:21-35). What does this say about forgiveness? What does it look like when a person is imprisoned by unforgiveness?

3D. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-5. How could you apply this to your marriage? If you have children, how could apply it to your parenting?

4. There is a good type of pride and a bad type of pride. The Bible talks clearly against the selfish, boastful, type of pride. How does pride make it hard to forgive?

5. Turn and talk to another couple, and then get ready to share your answers with the group. What could married people do when they forgive their spouses but there is no change in the hurtful behavior, making it difficult or impossible to reconcile?

6. Take turns reading items below describing the roles of the person who committed the offense (offender) and the one who was hurt (offended). What stands out to you on this list? What you would add?

Process of Forgiving:

ROLE OF OFFENDER

Acknowledge
Apologize
Clarify
Apologize again

ROLE OF OFFENDED

Listen
Receive
Believe
Accept

Process of Reconciliation/Rebuilding Trust:

ROLE OF OFFENDER

Accept Responsibility
Be Open/Honest
Take action steps
Establish new patterns
Demonstrate consistency
over the long term

ROLE OF OFFENDED

Express Feelings
Exercise Trust
Watch for change in spouse's actions
Observe spouse's ability to change
Look for durability of spouse's change

7. Take turns reading the six ways you can practice forgiveness in your marriage. Share with the group any success stories (without sharing too many details) of how applying these steps has helped you.

Six Steps toward Forgiveness

1. Identify negative emotions: Write down three ways negative emotions have impacted (or are still impacting) your marriage: Be aware of negative emotions that you have not yet processed. Talking to a close friend or counselor can help facilitate this.

2. Find a way to release yourself from negative emotions: Examples include counseling, improving your physical health, and practicing the expression of your thoughts, feelings, and wishes in a respectful way.

3. Take small steps to repair and let go of grudges: The number one thing that prevents couples from building trust and emotional attachment is the inability to bounce back from a conflict in a healthy way. The solution for this problem is to get really good at repairing your marriage.

4. Accept responsibility for your part in the interaction: One person's response will literally change the brain waves of the other person. Apologize to your partner when appropriate. This will validate their feelings, promote forgiveness, and allow you both to move on.

5. Don't let wounds fester: Challenge your beliefs and self-defeating thoughts about holding on to hurt feelings. Processing what happened will allow you to let resentments go so you can move on

to a healthier relationship. Keep the big picture in mind.

6. Think like a forgiving person: Avoid holding grudges and declare you are free to stop playing the role of victim. After all, we are all imperfect and deserve compassion.

Close in Prayer

Pray as a group that the Lord would help you to forgive others because Christ first forgave you while you were yet sinners.

Homework: Six Steps toward forgiveness

Take 30 minutes for this activity. First, answer questions 1–3 alone. Then review the “Six Steps toward Forgiveness” from the end of this lesson with your spouse and talk about how you can practice these more in your marriage. Next, share your answers to questions 1–4 with each other. As you take turns sharing, the offended spouse will follow the steps in 5–8.

Asking for Forgiveness

1. Admit to your spouse one thing that you did that was wrong or hurtful to him/her.

2. How can you take responsibility for what you did? What actions do you need to take to repair your relationship?

3. Assure your partner you will not do it again, apologize and ask for forgiveness.

Giving Forgiveness

5. Acknowledge how your spouse's actions caused you pain and anger.

6. Give up your right to “get even”, but share with your spouse that you want to be treated better in the future.

7. Let go of blame and resentment toward your partner.

8. Communicate to your partner that you forgive them.

APPENDIX A: 24 Guidelines for Resolving Conflicts in Marriage

Reprinted from Meier, P. (1981). *Seven secrets for a happy family*. Baker Publishing Group.

Disagreements are sure to happen in a marriage, but they do not have to lead to hurtful arguments. Here are some suggestions to help resolve conflicts with your spouse. Many of them are practical ways to put God's word (James 1:19-20, Eph. 4:15; 22-25) into action.

1. Sincerely commit your lives to Jesus Christ as Lord.
2. Consider the marriage a life-long commitment, just as Christ is eternally committed to His bride, the Church.
3. Agree to always listen to each other's feelings, even if you disagree with the appropriateness of those feelings.
4. Commit yourselves to both honesty and acceptance.
5. Determine to attempt to love each other unconditionally, with each partner assuming 100 percent of the responsibility for resolving marital conflicts (the 50/50 concept seldom works).
6. Consider all the factors in a conflict before bringing it up with your mate.
7. Confess any personal sin in the conflict to Christ before confronting your mate.
8. Limit the conflict to here and now--never bring up past failures, since all past failures should have already been forgiven.
9. Eliminate the following phrases from your vocabulary:
 - "You never" or "You always"
 - "I can't" (always substitute "I won't")
 - "I'll try" (usually means "I'll make a half-hearted effort but won't quite succeed")
 - "You should" or "You shouldn't" (these are parent-to-child statements).
10. Limit the discussion to the one issue that is the center of the conflict.
11. Focus on that issue rather than attacking each other.
12. Ask your mate if he would like some time to think about the conflict before discussing it (but never put it off past bedtime--see Eph. 4:26).
13. Each mate should use "I feel..." messages, expressing his response to whatever words or behavior aroused the conflict. For example, "I feel angry toward you for coming home late for supper without calling me first" is an adult-to-adult message, whereas "You should always call me when you're going to be late for supper" is a parent-to-child message. A parent-to-child message will cause the mate to become defensive.
14. Never say anything derogatory about your mate's personality.

Proverbs 1:12 tells us that he who despises (belittles) his neighbor lacks sense (NASB).

15. Even though your mate won't always be correct, consider your mate an instrument of God, working in your life. Proverbs 12:1 says, "He who hates reproof is stupid" (NASB).
16. Never counterattack, even if your mate does not follow these guidelines.
17. Don't tell your mate why you think he or she does what he does (unless he asks you), but rather stick to how you feel about what he does.
18. Don't try to read your mate's mind. If you're not sure what he meant by something he said, ask him to clarify it.
19. Commit yourselves to follow the instructions carefully in the "Dealing with Anger Biblically" section of this chapter. This will help you avoid depression, which results in increased irritability and increased marital conflicts.
20. Be honest about your true emotions, but keep them under control. Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back" (NASB). Proverbs 15:18 says, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention" (NASB).
21. Remember that the resolution of the conflict is what is important, not who wins or loses. If the conflict is resolved, you both win. You're on the same team, not opposing, competing teams.
22. Agree with each other on what topics are "out of bounds" because they are too hurtful or have already been discussed (for example, in-laws, continued obesity, and so on).
23. Pray about each conflict before discussing it with your mate.
24. Commit yourselves to carefully learn and practice these 24 guidelines for "fighting fair" in marriage and agree with each other to call "foul" whenever one of you accidentally or purposefully breaks one of these guidelines. (You may choose to agree on a dollar fine for each violation!)

APPENDIX B: Overcome On-line Resources List

Session 1: Overcoming Isolation

- How to Care for Negative Emotions in Your Marriage by Focus on the Family: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/how-to-care-for-negative-emotions-in-your-marriage>
- Immanuel Approach: <http://www.immanuelapproach.com/>

Session 2: Overcoming Anger

- The Gift Exercise: <http://roderscc.com/soul-healing-love/toolsexercises/>
- A Simple Way to Stop an Argument Before it Gets Toxic by Focus on the Family: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/a-simple-way-to-stop-an-argument-before-it-gets-toxic>
- 30 min. podcast by Focus on the Family about controlling your tongue with guest Deborah Smith Pegues: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/controlling-your-tongue>
- 2-30 min. podcasts by Focus on the Family about anger in marriage with guest Ted Cunningham: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/resolving-anger-in-your-marriage-pt1>

Session 3: Overcoming Disagreements

- Personality test: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>
- What Are You Really Fighting About? by Focus on the Family: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/what-are-you-really-fighting-about>

Session 4: Overcoming Unforgiveness

- The Best Way to Properly Apologize to Your Spouse by Focus on the Family: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/the-best-way-to-properly-apologize-to-your-spouse>
- How Forgiveness Can Transform Your Marriage: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/forgiveness-can-transform-marriage/>
- 30 min. podcast by Focus on the Family about boundaries in marriage with guests Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend: <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/establishing-healthy-boundaries-in-your-marriage>

