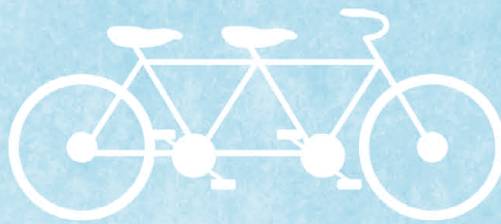


LEADER GUIDE



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GARY D. CHAPMAN

Leader Guide to The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study is the companion guide to *The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study*, which was originally published as *Building Relationships: A Discipleship Guide for Married Couples* ©1995 Gary Chapman. Lifeway Press.

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Welcome to the leadership family of *The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study*. You and your spouse are joining a growing number of Christian couples who are concerned about the spiritual and marital climate within the church today. Do not count yourselves among those who waste time decrying the low level of spiritual commitment and the weak, empty marriages of many Christian couples. Rather, commit to doing something to strengthen marriages.

My wife, Karolyn, and I want our relationship with Christ to be dynamic, and we desire to see similar growth in other marriages. We have found help in this guide, and we see it as a tool to stimulate growth in other couples. We desire that for you.

Some of you may have completed the guide. You recognize that the lead couple do not need to be perfect Christians or have a perfect marriage. The lead couple is a growing couple who encourages group members to complete assignments and creates a climate for group sharing. Couples learn much from each other as they share their strengths and weaknesses.

Others of you will be innovators, the first in your church to lead this study. This Leader Guide is written with you in mind. If you have a sincere desire for growth in your life and marriage, a genuine concern for other couples, and some basic abilities in leading group discussions, you have the qualities of a good leader for this guide.

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

As a lead couple, become familiar with the Bible Study. Pages 6–8 provide a clear statement of the objectives and the methods of reaching these objectives. The table of contents provides a picture of the areas of growth you and the other couples in your group will explore. Scan each chapter to get an idea of how each subject is treated.

Note that each week's basic format includes:

- Opening Activity
- Bible Study
- Learning Exercise
- Scripture Memory
- Daily Conversation with God
- Sharing Time with My Spouse

If you and your spouse are innovators, you will want to complete assignments at least one week ahead of the group so you can prepare the group for assignments. This will be especially important during the first few weeks as you and other couples establish a routine.

Chapters 1 and 2 are foundational. They introduce activities that will continue daily throughout the study. Chapter 1 gives instruction on how to have a daily conversation with God, sometimes called a daily quiet time. This regular conversation with God will help you get to know God better. Chapter 2 introduces a daily sharing time with your spouse for the purpose of getting to know him or her better. The hope is that couples will find these two daily experiences so meaningful that they will continue them after they complete *The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study*.

HOW MANY COUPLES?

A good-sized group consists of 5 to 6 couples plus the lead couple for a total of 12 to 14 people. Larger groups do not allow everyone to participate in the group sharing each week. Smaller groups may function well, but may lose some benefits of group interaction.

HOW MANY SESSIONS? HOW LONG IS EACH SESSION?

The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study is a 13-week study. The first session is an introductory, get-acquainted time. Books are given out at this session, and the assignments for the first week are explained. Each person needs to have a copy of the member book. The second group session will focus on the material covered in chapter 1, which the group will have completed the week prior to the meeting. Each week thereafter, the group will discuss the material they have completed during the previous week. The weekly group meeting should last 1 to 1.5 hours. Some groups prefer Sundays; others find it better to meet on weeknights in homes or at the church. Either setting is fine. Determine your meeting time before you recruit couples.

HOW DO WE RECRUIT COUPLES?

The most effective means of getting couples committed to the study is through a face-to-face invitation. The lead couple should talk personally with each couple, explain the purpose of the study, and invite them to be members of the group.



*God forgives
us based on
what Christ
did for us
on the cross.*



*The first
and greatest
responsibility
of the lead
couple is
to pray.*

If you are an innovator or lead couple, you may want to select the first five or six couples based on their leadership potential. Ideally, after they complete the study, some of them will lead additional groups. This is an effective way to broaden your leadership base.

HOW DOES THIS GUIDE RELATE TO MY CHURCH?

This study will help participants build spiritual disciplines that stimulate Christian growth. It is also a vehicle for helping the church foster strong, growing marriages. These two goals are at the center of the church's task to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

In some churches, a staff leadership couple may lead the first group. In other churches, the pastor may recruit a key lay couple to lead this ministry. In each case, the study needs to be under the general supervision of the pastor, God's appointed shepherd.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEAD COUPLE?

The first and greatest responsibility of the lead couple is to pray. Pray before you recruit couples. Pray as you visit and challenge couples to join you in this study. Pray after the group is formed, and pray throughout the 13 weeks of the study. Pray that God will use this guide to stimulate genuine, lasting growth in the lives of the couples involved, including you and your spouse.

A second responsibility of the lead couple is to guide the weekly group sessions. These meetings are to be sharing times in which each group member participates. The sharing will focus on the Bible study, Scripture memory, learning exercise, conversations with God, and sharing times with a spouse, which the couples have experienced during the week. This leader guide will give you ideas for varying the format week by week.

Leading the weekly group session is a shared responsibility of the lead husband and wife. Determine the most comfortable way of doing this. One way is for the husband to lead one segment of the session and the wife to lead another segment. The leader guide organizes the session into clear segments, which makes this method easy to follow. The leader guide does not, however, indicate who should do what. This is for you to decide. You will need to plan ahead each week and agree on what each of you will do.

Create a climate where genuine sharing can take place. This is best done as the lead couple sets the example. If you are open about your response to the assignments of this guide, the group will likely share freely also. Remember to share failures as well as successes. Group members might become discouraged if they think you are perfect.

The lead couple must not be viewed as having all the answers. When the questions are raised by group members, ask others in the group to contribute with questions such as “How do some of you feel about that?” Commend them for their answers with comments: “That’s good; I like that!” Your affirmation encourages group participation.

Some couples may need special encouragement. If you recognize that a couple is having problems with a particular part of the study, call or visit them during the week and offer additional help. If couples are absent from the session, call them as soon as possible to find out whether there is a problem. If couples must miss one of the weekly sessions, encourage them to discuss the material with each other and to keep up with assignments.

Finally, the lead couple needs to be open to God’s leadership in identifying and encouraging couples in the group who have potential for becoming leaders of these groups. Your church needs a number of leaders so that every couple desiring growth may have the experience of building the marriage they’ve always wanted.

May God bless you as you embark on this ministry of discipleship to married couples.

—*Gary Chapman*

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

Session 1 is an introduction to *The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study*. This session is a time for getting acquainted and sharing what the couples can expect in this study. This session would be planned for one hour. Couples who come to this first session will not have their materials. Be prepared to provide each person a copy of the member book. Determine ahead of time if couples need to purchase these or if the church will provide them. *As leaders, you will need to complete chapter 1 in the book before reading the following information.*

As leaders, you will want to read our suggestions each week, and then develop your own teaching plan. You will not need to refer to the leader guide during the session, only to your notes. These notes may be written on a separate sheet, in the margins of the member book, or in the “Planning Notes” section for each session. We encourage you to be flexible and plan each session with your members’ needs in mind.

1. Begin the group session by asking: “What difficulties did you experience in getting to this meeting tonight? When we decide to do something good, often we experience difficulties in carrying it out. Let’s share some of the difficulties.”

Allow each group member to share informally any frustrations they had in getting to the meeting. Create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage interaction.

2. Provide paper and pencils to each group member. Suggest that all group members share aloud the following information: (a) name, (b) birthplace, (c) number of brothers and sisters, (d) what you enjoyed doing as a child, (e) number of children (if any) and their names and ages. You might want to list these on newsprint or a dry-erase board. Encourage group members to take notes as each member shares biographical information with the group. A first step in the sharing of our lives is providing basic information such as this.

3. Ask group members to tell the group why they chose to be part of this study. Encourage group members to share on a personal level why they made a decision to be a part of the study.

4. As the lead couple, give an overview of the guide, defining it as a personal growth study designed to help us grow in our relationship with God and in our relationship with our spouse.



“In our relationship with God, this study emphasizes such basic growth methods as the daily personal quiet time, a weekly Bible study, memorizing key Scripture verses (6 verses during the 13 weeks), and regular prayer. Throughout the study, you will find an emphasis in these four areas.”

“In building a relationship with our spouse, the study emphasizes a daily 10–15 minute sharing time. The Bible studies we will work through deal with various principles related to marriage. We will memorize verses that relate to marriage. We will share learning exercises with each other. All of these will assist us in strengthening our marriage relationships.”

“The Marriage You’ve Always Wanted Bible Study requires private time and sharing time. In our private times, we will complete weekly assignments. In our sharing times, we will tell each other some of what we have been learning through the week.”

5. Distribute a member book to each person. Ask them to look at the contents page. The chapter headings give an idea of basic subject areas they will cover each week. Have the group look at the Bible study in chapter 1. Suggest that it will probably take about an hour to complete the Bible study and learning exercise. Do not take time to look at specific questions. This will be done next week after the group has completed the Bible study.

6. Ask group members to close their member books. As lead couple, share the basic concept of a personal quiet time. Explain that a conversation with God is two-way: God talks and I respond to what He says; I talk and God responds to what I say. Emphasize that a quiet time is not simply reading the Bible and praying. A conversation with God is listening to God speak through the Bible and responding to what God is saying. Share the plan of reading one chapter per day, marking those ideas that stand out in the chapter, and talking with God about the things you have marked. Show members a chapter in your Bible as an example. Share with them your conversation with God this morning. Emphasize that although many of them may already have a quiet time, during this study, we suggest that they follow this method. Discourage the use of devotional guides during this study. Encourage reading one chapter in the Bible each day, choosing a book and working through that book until it is completed. Group members need not read the same book in the Bible. If you are asked to make a suggestion of a book to use, the gospel of John, one of Paul’s letters, Psalms, or Proverbs are good. Next week, and each week that

*Encourage
group
members
to share on
a personal
level why
they made a
decision
to be a part
of the study.*



*Throughout
the study,
we will
work to
create an
honest
atmosphere
where we
can share
openly with
each other.*

follows, group members will have an opportunity to share something they read in their quiet time during the past week. A form is provided on page 123 for members to record the chapter they have read each day.

7. Emphasize that throughout the study we will work to create an honest atmosphere where we can share openly with each other any difficulties we may have in our personal quiet times with God. We want to be honest about difficulties we encounter and questions we may have in establishing this daily conversation with God.

8. Allow time for questions and comments by the group. Close with prayer. As the lead couple, you may wish to pray, or ask if any couple would like to lead in prayer.

PLANNING NOTES

SESSION 2: ENHANCING MY CONVERSATION WITH GOD

In session 2, you will be discussing the material in chapter 1 of the Bible study. Assume that group members have completed chapter 1 since your first meeting. Group members need to recognize the importance of completing home assignments. From the beginning, hold up the ideal. The group experience will not be as effective if group members sense that the homework is not important. Also, and most important, couples will not grow as a result of the study.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin by saying: “As you know, this week we have started developing a personal time with God each day. We have read and marked one chapter in the Bible. We talked with God about what we have marked. Let’s begin our session by choosing one idea that you have marked in the Bible this week and sharing it with someone in the group. I would like for the men to share with another man and the women to share with another woman. You have one minute to select the verse you would like to share; then read it to the other person and tell him or her why you marked it. That is, what impressed you about this verse?”

After this exercise, allow individuals to share with the total group any difficulties they have encountered this week in their quiet time.

BIBLE STUDY

This week, the Bible study was geared to help us discover the value of getting to know God through the Scriptures. Work through the Bible study as a group. As you do, allow different group members to share their answers. On some questions, you may ask several to share their answers; on other questions, you may simply call for one answer. Question 3 will give the group the opportunity to share their salvation testimonies with each other. This will give you an idea of the spiritual background of group members. If you discover as you listen that some do not have a clear salvation testimony, you will want to pray for them. In the weeks ahead, take the opportunity to meet with them and lead them to assurance of salvation.

Particularly focus on item 9. Share your personal testimony of memorizing Scripture. We will memorize only six verses throughout the study, but they are practical verses. Urge members to develop the habit of Scripture memory.

On question 10, encourage group members to share but do not force anyone to do so. It is, however, in the sharing of personal matters that we will help each other most. Indicate that throughout the study, there will be an opportunity to check when you have completed certain assignments. This is to encourage us to complete the assignment rather than gloss over it.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Allow each group member to report at least one item listed under My Relationship with God or My Relationship with My Spouse. As members share answers to this exercise, they will help each other establish goals for the next three months. Encourage group members to take notes as they listen to others.

LOOKING AHEAD

Share with the group before you leave that this coming week each person will begin establishing a personal sharing time with his or her spouse. Just as we will have a personal time with God, we will also have a daily sharing time with our spouse to get to know each other better. Urge members to complete the Bible study and learning exercise early in the week so that they may practice the sharing time as many days as possible. Note also that on page 123, there is a form for them to record the book and chapter they have read and marked each day in their conversation with God. Close the session with a brief prayer. Ask God to help group members accomplish the goals listed in this past week's learning exercise.

PLANNING NOTES

SESSION 3: ENHANCING MY CONVERSATION WITH MY SPOUSE

Session 3 is a discussion of the material in chapter 2. Members will have completed chapter 2 of the Bible study the week prior to the meeting.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin this session by allowing each member to share with their spouse one verse they read and marked in their Bibles during their conversation with God. Spend a few moments discussing any difficulties that group members are having with their personal quiet times. Be sympathetic with any difficulties. Ask group members for suggestions to help others.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Share briefly with each other your success or lack of success with the learning exercise this week. The basic idea was to share three things that happened in your life each day and how you felt about those three things. As the lead couple, begin with your own report of what happened this week in your sharing times. Be honest about the number of days you and your spouse had the sharing time. You do not have to be perfect in order to be of help to the group. Your honesty and openness will encourage the group to be honest and open. Very few of the group will have had a sharing time every day during the week; many will have had it only once or twice. This is fine; we have plenty of time to establish this pattern. After several couples have shared successes or failures, emphasize the importance of following the suggested pattern in the learning exercise: share three things that happened in my life today and how I feel about them. Encourage everyone to use this format during the study, even though couples married for some time may say, "Well, we talk; we have a sharing time; we are just not using this format." Couples commonly share events but not feelings. The learning exercise will encourage couples to begin to share feelings and come to gain freedom in sharing emotions. As we share events and emotions we become more intimate.

BIBLE STUDY

Work through the Bible study in chapter 2. Brief but clear answers to the first four questions will be adequate. Emphasize the necessity of communication.



*You do not
have to be
perfect in
order to
be of help
to the group.*



*You will
find couples
gaining
encourage-
ment from
each other.*

Questions 5 and 6 are application questions. Several members in the group should have the opportunity to share answers. As they reveal common hindrances to open communication, you will find couples gaining encouragement from each other. Several members may want to share examples of times when they have not spoken clearly and miscommunication has resulted. This will help the group see the common problems of miscommunication in a marriage. Question 6 grows out of the concept of James 5:12. Allowing members of the group to share illustrations will help clarify the principle for other group members.

Question 8 emphasizes the value of listening carefully and hearing our spouse before we give an answer. Group members may wish to share ways they have discovered that ensure mutual understanding. We will have additional material in chapter 6 on listening to emphasize reflective listening and some of the common techniques for developing understanding. Assure the group that throughout the sessions, we will work to enhance communication; the basic building block will be our daily sharing times. As a beginning point for communication, we will share with our spouse three events in our day and how we felt about those events. Beyond that, we may feel free to communicate anything else we would like, but this will be the foundation of our sharing times. Our objective is to make this a daily part of our relationships. You may need to discuss briefly hindrances group members anticipate in accomplishing this objective. Offer appropriate suggestions. For example, couples apart because of vocations may complete some of their sharing times by phone or e-mail.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Allow husbands and wives to quote Ephesians 4:32 to each other. If they have not memorized the verse fully, encourage them to concentrate on memorizing it this week so that next week they can share it with the group.

LOOKING AHEAD

Draw the group's attention to page 123 where they will find a chart for recording the books and chapters they are reading from the Bible each day. Suggest that they write in week 1 the material they recorded on page 11, and to write in week 2 the book and chapters they recorded on page 23. The book and chapters they read this week will be written in week 3. Draw attention to page 125 where members will record their daily sharing times with their spouse. Again, week 1 will be blank and week 2 will contain the checks they have already written on page 23. The sharing

times they have this week will be recorded under week 3. The purpose of the forms is to provide a record of our successes and to encourage us to make our conversation with God and with our spouse a consistent part of our daily lives. This is an exercise in personal accountability. Encourage the group to complete the Bible study material for chapter 3 early in the week and to seek consistency in daily quiet time with God and daily sharing time with their spouse. Close the session with a brief prayer time. Ask for God's direction in our lives as we seek to continue to grow in our relationship with Him, with our spouse, and with each other.

PLANNING NOTES

SESSION 4: LEARNING TO FORGIVE

Session 4 is a discussion of the material in chapter 3. The group will have completed chapter 3 the week prior to the meeting. Our topic is forgiveness.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin this session by focusing on Scripture memory. Ask husbands and wives to quote Ephesians 4:32 to each other. Ask for a volunteer to quote the verse to the entire group. Don't force any particular group member to do this; whoever shares will set the pace for others. Those who have not memorized the verse should be encouraged to concentrate genuinely on memorizing it this week. The objective is to review the verse daily so that the principles found in the verse will become a part of our lives.

DAILY CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Ask group members to turn to page 123 and share with their spouse the record of their personal quiet times. As they show each other this form, they should also report on their progress. The husband may say to his wife, "I did pretty well this week; I had a quiet time for four days out of the seven," or "I really haven't gotten into the swing of this yet, but next week will be different." This brief time of accountability will encourage consistency during the coming weeks.

DAILY SHARING TIME WITH MY SPOUSE

Have the group turn to page 125 and repeat the process as they talk about their sharing times. If they are not being consistent, take a moment to discuss what changes they need to make so that they can have these sharing times. At this stage, participants need to recognize the value of the daily quiet time with God and the daily sharing time with their spouse. There is nothing more fundamental to spiritual and marital growth than these two disciplines.

BIBLE STUDY

If time permits, walk through each of the Bible study questions, receiving brief answers from one person on the factual questions and letting several members share on discussion questions.



*The experience
of asking God
to help us list
our failures is
a vital exercise
in marital
growth.*

In question 2, the word *confess* literally means “to agree with.” When we confess sin, it means that we agree with God that what we have done is wrong. Questions 5, 6, and 7 distinguish between forgiveness and forgetting. We know that God is omniscient; He knows all things. When God forgives us, it does not mean that He is no longer conscious of our sin. It means, however, that God chooses no longer to hold our sin against us. When we forgive others, it does not mean that we will never remember the wrong they have done; it means that we have promised never to hold that wrong against them. Forgiveness is a promise, not a feeling. We have not failed when we remember a sin that we have forgiven. When feelings of hurt, disappointment, or anger come to mind over a sin we have forgiven, we should tell God what we are feeling and thank Him that it is now forgiven. We would pray, *Father, You know what I'm thinking and feeling, but I want to thank You that that sin is forgiven. Help me to do something positive today.*

In questions 10 and 11, the group will discover that when we sin against our spouse, we are to go to him or her, confess our sin, and ask forgiveness. When our spouse sins against us, we are to confront him or her lovingly (see Matthew 18:15).

Questions 13 and 14 point out the responsibility we have to forgive others when they are willing to confess their wrong.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Ask the group to turn to page 30 to see if they have recorded the date they completed this exercise. Do not ask them to share this date with the group, but encourage those who perhaps have not completed this exercise to do so as soon as possible. The experience of asking God to help us list our failures is a vital exercise in marital growth. Encourage every couple to complete the exercise. Assure couples that these lists will not be shared with the group; they are to be shared only with each other.

LOOKING AHEAD

Next week, the topic is learning to serve our spouse. One of the most important principles in marriage is learning how to serve each other. Encourage the group to do the Bible study early in the week and to complete the learning exercise. Challenge members to seek to be more consistent in daily conversations with God and in daily sharing times with their spouse. Remind them to record these on pages 123 and 125 this week. Close the session with a prayer time. During this prayer, offer an opportunity for members to pray voluntarily.



PLANNING NOTES

*Do not put
pressure on
every group
member to
share, but
recognize
those who
are open to
sharing.*

SESSION 5: DEVELOPING MY SERVE

Session 5 is a discussion of the material in chapter 4. The group will have completed chapter 4 the week prior to the meeting. Our topic is learning to serve our spouse.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin the session by focusing on our conversation with God this week. Ask members to select a verse they marked. Allow several members to share their verse with the group, why they marked it, and what the verse means to them. Do not put pressure on every group member to share, but recognize those who are open to sharing. You may wish to allow individuals to express difficulties they still have being consistent in this daily time of conversation with God. Allow group members to encourage each other.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

This week, the group began memorizing 1 John 1:9. Since this may be a familiar verse, many group members will find it easy to memorize. You may wish to ask for a volunteer to try quoting 1 John 1:9 for the group. Then have two or three members quote for the group Ephesians 4:32. The experience of quoting the verse in front of the group will strengthen the one who is quoting and encourage others to review Scripture verses consistently. We will have another week of review on these verses. By next week, everyone should be able to quote both of them.

BIBLE STUDY

To begin the Bible study, have someone read Mark 10:35–45 for review. Ask one person to characterize the attitude of James and John.

Ask several members to summarize the teaching of Mark 10:42–45. After the discussion, ask: “What is the difference between being a servant and a doormat?” The group will generate a good discussion over this question. Before the session, create your own answer. To get you started, one difference is that the servant is active while the doormat is passive.

In question 2, you need not read John 13:1–17 since this story is familiar to most people. After a discussion as to how Jesus served the disciples, let the group share answers to what foot washing in Jesus’ day would compare to in today’s world.

Encourage group members to add to their lists as they listen to others' ideas.

Question 3 focuses on the differences between studying about servanthood and being a servant. It is one thing to talk about being a servant; it is another thing to serve our husbands or wives in the routines of life throughout the week.

Question 4 provides an opportunity for application of the principle found in question 3. Allow several members to share their answers to question 4, but do not force anyone to share.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Have members turn to page 38 and share something they listed under number 1. These need not be profound acts of service, but something they have done for each other that they know the other person wanted done. As group members listen to others share, it will give them ideas of what they might do. Next, allow members to share the ideas they listed in number 2. Again, as individuals share, encourage the group to note additional ideas they hear from others. Draw the group's attention to numbers 3 and 4 on pages 38 and 39. Hopefully, they have completed and recorded these acts of service. If not, encourage them to do so this week. Emphasize to the group that it is our desire to develop a servant's attitude; that means we think daily in terms of practical ways that we can serve each other. This attitude of service is perhaps the most important attitude in developing a healthy marriage.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage the group to seek to grow in consistency this week in their daily conversations with God and in their daily sharing times with their spouse. The topic for next week is emotions. Encourage the group to do the Bible study early; it is a little longer than usual. Close the session with a brief prayer thanking God for His model in Jesus Christ of what it means to be a servant.

PLANNING NOTES

SESSION 6: BECOMING FRIENDS WITH MY FEELINGS

In session 6 you will discuss the material in chapter 5. The group will have completed chapter 5 the week prior to the meeting. Our topic focuses on emotions.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin by asking couples to share with each other the two verses they have memorized over the last five weeks. Next, lead the group to say each of the verses in unison. Finally, ask members to quote the verses to someone other than their spouse.

DAILY CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Say to the group: “We want to do something bold in this session. Turn to page 129 and show the record of your conversations with God to two other group members besides your spouse. This is scary because it means that you have to be totally honest about your degree of success or failure.”

After the group has done this, ask for volunteers to share with the group what they feel is needed in order for them to be more consistent in their daily conversations with God. As they share about themselves and their struggles, others will find encouragement. Remind the group after this exercise that we have sought to create a climate where we can be open with each other; our purpose in sharing openly is not to make us feel guilty but to stimulate growth.

DAILY SHARING TIMES WITH MY SPOUSE

Turn to page 125 and do the same thing with the record of sharing times with our spouse. After the group has physically shown their records to two other group members, allow volunteers to give ideas on how sharing with their spouse can become a more consistent part of their experience. Some group members may suggest that sharing three things that happened today and how they feel about them seems to be mechanical. Do not argue with this idea; it may well seem mechanical to some couples. Affirm that if we will commit to have the sharing time daily, we will find ourselves sharing more ideas and feelings. Eventually, it will become less mechanical. But, if we allow ourselves to say, “Well, we are sharing but just not following that format,” we will not experience as much growth as if we consistently share three experiences and feelings.



*Allow
volunteers to
give ideas on
how sharing
with their
spouse can
become
a more
consistent
part of their
experience.*



It is helpful to

share negative

emotions in

a positive

way and

determine

constructive

changes

that can

be made.

BIBLE STUDY

Because of the length of the Bible study, you will likely not have time to go through every question. You may wish to receive brief answers for question 1. Encourage group members who are willing to share their description of a grief experience. This is a personal question, but it will help everyone to hear illustrations. Give your answer to the actions Jesus took because of His anger and sorrow, and then ask several group members what we can learn from His example.

Brief answers will also suffice for question 2. Have husbands and wives share with each other the last time they had feelings of depression. Take a moment in the group for them to do this. Then have the group discuss actions Jesus took when He felt sorrow and depression. Also ask them to discuss what we can learn from His example of handling sorrow and depression. Do not worry about discussing how Jesus dealt with fear. The pattern in these questions is similar to the others. Instead, move directly to discuss personal responses to fear.

If time permits, allow the group to share brief answers to question 3. If not, go directly to question 4 and discuss our response to negative emotions. Summarize the discussion by reminding group members that negative emotions normally come as a response to some external action on the part of others. The emotion itself is not sin, but we have the responsibility to control that emotion by praying for God's direction, sharing the emotion with others, and taking positive action.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Ask the group to focus on the four questions at the beginning of the learning exercise on pages 47 and 48. Ask: "What emotion do you feel about the session we've just completed?" Let one or two persons share their emotions and what stimulated those emotions.

Continue the discussion by asking:

- What happened in the group that stimulated that emotion and why do you feel this way?
- What is there about your personality and background that would tend to make you feel this way?
- What will you do in response to this emotion?

Another approach to this exercise would be to have husbands and wives pair off in the room and share with each other their answers to the four steps. Consider this approach only if the group indicates that they have not completed that part of the learning exercise. If they have completed it, it should be indicated in Sharing Time with My Spouse (p. 125). Wrap up this section by reminding the group that negative emotions are not sinful; instead, they may show a need for behavioral changes in our relationships. It is far more helpful to share these negative emotions in a positive way and determine constructive changes that can be made.

LOOKING AHEAD

Remind the group that this week each of us was asked to share with our spouse something we discovered in our Bible reading. Couples may desire to do this more regularly. It is an easy way to talk to each other about spiritual matters. If they did not complete this part of their home assignments this week, urge them to do so soon. Indicate that next week our topic will be learning to listen, an important part of communication. Members will also begin memorizing a new Scripture verse and will have a couple of challenging learning exercises. Encourage members to begin Bible study early in the week. Close with a brief time of directed prayer, asking the group to pray silently as you mention various topics one at a time. Focus on particular needs within your group.

PLANNING NOTES

SESSION 7: LEARNING TO LISTEN

Session 7 focuses on the materials in chapter 6. The group will have completed chapter 6 the week prior to the meeting. The topic is listening.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin by saying: “This week we began memorizing a new Scripture verse on listening, speaking, and getting angry. Who would like to quote the verse for us?” Give as many group members as would like the opportunity to quote James 1:19. Encourage those who have not yet memorized the verse to concentrate on doing so this week. This verse has many practical implications for marriage.

BIBLE STUDY

Ask class members to give brief answers to question 1. Conclude by saying: “The bottom line in understanding a person is asking questions and listening carefully.”

In question 2, Paul says of his Jewish audience that they hardly heard with their ears. The King James version uses the phrase “dull of hearing.” Ask group members to share ideas on what it means to be dull of hearing. The questions dealing with possible reasons the Jews did not want to hear what Jesus taught and why we sometimes become dull of hearing with our spouse are good discussion questions. Ask several group members to share their answers. Also ask if members would like to give an example of a time when they did not want to hear what their spouse was saying because they were not willing to make the necessary changes listening would require.

Move on to question 3. If group members are willing to share, encourage them to help each other by identifying some personal problems and sharing suggestions.

After brief answers to question 4, ask if one or two group members would be willing to tell about the last time they gave an answer before they really understood what their spouse was saying (question 5). Ask: “What is the best way to keep this from happening?” You may wish to allow husbands and wives to pair off and share their answers to question 6.

Encourage them to apply the Old Testament passage to their marriage. As a group, discuss question 7. Suggest that members take notes as others share their answers.



*Our topic
this week
is one of
the most
significant
in the entire
study: loving
God and
loving your
spouse.*

SESSION 8: LEARNING TO LOVE

Session 8 is a discussion of the material in chapter 7. The group will have completed chapter 7 the week prior to the meeting. Our topic this week is one of the most significant in the entire study: loving God and loving your spouse.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin by having the husbands form one group and the wives form another group. Give them a few minutes to share with each other something they have read and marked in their Bibles this week. Ask them to read the verse and share briefly with the group what God said to them through the verse. If one group finishes before the other, ask them to continue sharing with each other strengths and weaknesses of their conversations with God.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

When the group is reassembled, have a volunteer quote Ephesians 4:32, another person quote 1 John 1:9, and another quote James 1:19. Encourage the group to continue reviewing these verses at least once a day.

BIBLE STUDY

Let the group review their answers to questions 1 and 2 silently. Ask one or two members to share a summary of what they learned in this section about God's love for us.

Briefly give your answer to question 3. Share a personal example of how God's love was evident in your life.

Lead the group through a discussion of questions 4 and 5. The second part of question 5 points out the important truth that the reason Christ can say, "If you love Me, do what I say," is because He knew that all these commands are for our welfare. Thus, Christ's request for obedience was itself an act of love.

Encourage group members to share their answers to the second part of question 6. Shared answers will give other members ideas about how to express love.

Questions 7 and 8 deal with expressing love in the husband/wife relationship. As you lead the group through these questions, give special attention to those that

require application. A discussion of these questions will affirm that loving one's spouse is a matter of attitude and action far more than it is an emotion. However, there is an emotional aspect of love. The learning exercise focuses on meeting each other's emotional need to feel loved.

LEARNING EXERCISE

The learning exercise will help each person discover his or her emotional love language and the love language of the spouse. Read the five love languages (pp. 67–68). Say: “We may like to receive all five, but for most of us, one is more important than the others. This is our primary love language. A husband and wife seldom have the same love language. The key is learning the primary language of our spouse and choosing to speak it regularly. To do this is to enhance emotional intimacy in marriage.” After you have reviewed the concept, ask husbands and wives to get together and share with each other their love language. They likely have done this already in private. If they have, suggest that this is an opportunity for them to affirm their love language to each other.

While the husband and wife are together, have them look at page 69 and review the suggestions and actions that have been completed this week. If the couple has not completed this exercise, ask each marriage partner to suggest one thing that the other can do in the next few hours to help raise the level of their emotional tank. Encourage couples to play the Tank Check Game for the next two weeks, and to do a more efficient job of meeting the emotional needs of their spouse over the coming weeks.

As a lead couple, you might want to know more about love languages. Couples in your group may also want to know more. For a more complete understanding of the love language concept, you may want to read Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages*, published by Northfield Publishing.

LOOKING AHEAD

Say: “Next week, our topic is how to resolve conflict. We will discuss how to resolve normal conflicts that arise in marriage. The lesson material is rather long, so begin the Bible study early in the week. We will also begin memorizing Philippians 2:3–4 this week.” Encourage members to read the verses several times a day in preparation for memorizing. Close the session with prayer.

SESSION 9: LEARNING TO AGREE

Session 9 focuses on materials in chapter 8. The group will have completed chapter 8 the week prior to the meeting. The topic this week is how to resolve conflict.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin by saying: “Our Scripture verse this week is a long one. Would anyone like to quote Philippians 2:3–4?” Encourage someone to try. If no one is willing to quote the verse, divide the group into pairs; do not allow husbands and wives to be together. Give the pairs several minutes to help each other learn the passage. Say: “All of us want to memorize this verse because of its many implications for marriage.”

DAILY SHARING TIME WITH MY SPOUSE

Reassemble the group. Let one or two couples tell how their sharing time is progressing. If a couple is having difficulty making this a regular part of each day, encourage the group to join them in prayer and encouragement.

DAILY CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Ask members to share with the group the book in the Bible from which they have been reading this week. This will give members an idea of what others are doing and will also focus on the importance of a daily time with God.

BIBLE STUDY

Call for brief answers to questions 1–3. Spend most of the time with question 4. Ask wives to share the instructions they listed and husbands to share the instructions they listed in response to Ephesians 5:22–23. You may want to ask: “Who has the more difficult job, the husband or wife? Why?”

Allow the group to share brief definitions to: *submit*, *respect*, and to *feed* (*nourish* in KJV) and *care for*. Ask husbands and wives to pair off and share with each other what positive changes they could make to be better at feeding and caring for (husbands) and submitting to and showing respect for (wives) their spouse.

Reassemble the group. Let members share answers briefly and raise any questions they may have concerning the remainder of question 4.



*If a couple
is having
difficulty
making daily
sharing a
regular part
of each day,
encourage the
group to join
them in prayer
and encour-
agement.*



*Give
members an
opportunity
to express
their
thoughts
and feelings*

Lead the group through a discussion of questions 5, 6, and 7. In question 5, clarify that both husband and wife are equal in worth, intelligence, and importance but that the husband is the loving leader among equals. You may find group members who have negative feelings toward the idea of the husband being the leader among equals. Give these members an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings; do not feel that you have to convince them of this position. Acknowledge to the group that we are all continuing to grow in our understanding of the biblical implications of this passage. The passage clearly emphasizes mutual submission.

Be aware of time. This issue has the potential of taking up a lot of your time. Be sure to leave time to discuss the learning exercise. Remember, as in all our Bible study discussions, it is not necessary to discuss every question.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Ask the group to share personal illustrations of the three patterns of conflict resolution that they recorded on page 80. These illustrations will help other group members understand how the three patterns can be applied to life.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage members to focus on memorizing Philippians 2:3–4. Remind them of the importance of their daily conversations with God and their daily sharing times with their spouse. Encourage members to record these on pages 123 and 125. Next week, the topic is Developing a Positive Response to Anger. The feeling of anger is not a sin; how we respond to anger will make it either an asset or a liability to marriage. Encourage the group to begin the Bible study at the first of the week and to complete the learning exercise as early as possible so they can practice it by the end of the week.

PLANNING NOTES

SESSION 10: DEVELOPING A POSITIVE RESPONSE TO ANGER

Session 10 is a discussion of the material in chapter 9. The group will have completed chapter 9 the week prior to the meeting. The topic focuses on how to respond positively to anger.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin this session by focusing on Conversations with God. Divide the group into pairs. Ask each husband to share with another husband and each wife to share with another wife one verse they marked in their Bible reading this week, and why they found this verse significant. After this brief sharing time, move directly to the Bible study.

BIBLE STUDY

Have a volunteer share his or her answers to questions 1 and 2. After question 2 has been answered, ask: “What do the answers to these two questions tell us about anger?”

Questions 3–5 relate to each other. Question 3 deals with Jonah and his anger. Ask for brief answers to each part of this question. Question 4 deals with the anger of the elder brother in the account of the Prodigal Son. After hearing brief answers to this question, ask several members to share their responses to question 5. Conclude this response by saying: “We can only explain our actions and hope that the other person will understand. We can neither force him or her to understand nor to cease to be angry.”

Ask one person to read and respond to question 6. Allow the group time to discuss the meaning of Ephesians 4:26–27.

Ask someone to identify the three challenges of James 1:19. Ask: “How are the first two challenges related to the last one?” You may wish to summarize James 1:20 yourself.

Ask different group members to paraphrase the proverbs in question 8.

Lead the group briefly to answer questions 9–11. Have several group members share their practical suggestions for putting off anger as found in Ephesians 4:31

and Colossians 3:8. Summarize by saying: “We should always try to identify the source of our anger, try to find answers to questions we have, seek to understand the actions of the other person, and seek to find a solution to the thing that stimulated anger. Our learning exercise focuses on applying this truth.”

LEARNING EXERCISE

Summarize the negative response to anger: blowing up. Allow members to share voluntarily an example from their own lives. Open and honest sharing by you as the leader will encourage others to be open and honest. Repeat the same with the other negative response: clamming up. Ask members to share illustrations from their experiences.

Summarize for the group the positive responses to anger: admitting anger, restraining your response, sharing your problem, and looking for a solution. Ask a member to quote or read the four bulleted statements on page 89, which apply these steps. Ask husbands and wives to pair up. Give each of them a chance to recite these four statements. Open the discussion for couples to ask questions and make comments about this procedure.

Some individuals will have difficulty making the first statement, “I am feeling angry right now.” Some members will want to substitute a word for anger such as frustrated. The purpose is not to make them use the word *anger* if in fact another word better describes their emotion. However, we do want them to be able to admit anger if that is what they feel.

Statement 2, “But don’t worry, I will not attack you,” reminds us of what we will not do. Statement 3, “When you have time, I would like your help in solving a problem,” acknowledges that it is our problem and we are asking for help. We are not demanding that we talk about it at this moment. Statement 4, “My problem is this: I feel angry when...I really need your help in finding a solution,” identifies what has hurt us and asks for our spouse’s help in solving our problem. Two adults looking for answers will find them.

Someone in your group may question the value of memorizing these four statements, assuming they will not be remembered in the heat of anger. This is precisely why we encourage members to memorize them and repeat them numerous

times. We are far more likely to use the statements in a real-life situation when we have used them in practice sessions. These statements have helped many couples break destructive patterns of expressing anger. If we are sincere in our desire to break destructive patterns, they can work for us too.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Lead the group to review Scripture verses as a group or in pairs. If time is limited, encourage the group to continue reviewing the four verses daily this week.

LOOKING AHEAD

Say: “The topic next week is the ministry of intercession. It will be an exciting chapter, but some of you may find it threatening. Some couples find it difficult to pray together because of the way they treat each other. Other couples never learned how to pray with someone else. In chapter 10, you will learn how to pray together conversationally. Work carefully through the Bible study. Complete the learning exercise even though you may feel uncomfortable in doing so. Let’s close our session with prayer.”

PLANNING NOTES



*Positive
responses
to anger:
admitting
anger,
restraining
your response,
sharing your
problem, and
looking for
a solution.*



In this session we will take significant time to pray conversationally.

SESSION 11: LEARNING THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

Session 11 focuses on the materials in chapter 10. The group will have completed chapter 10 the week prior to the meeting. The topic is the ministry of intercession.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin this session by focusing on Scripture memory. Ask each couple to review the first four verses we have memorized. Reassemble the group and ask if anyone can quote Jeremiah 33:3, the verse we began memorizing this week. Give one or more members the opportunity to quote the verse.

DAILY CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Ask the husbands to get in pairs and the wives to get in pairs. Ask the group to turn to page 123 and share with their paired-off partner their record of conversations with God. Lead them to discuss briefly their progress of reading and marking Scripture, and discussing it with God.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Ask individuals to share with the group their responses to conversational prayer this week. Did they find it difficult? Impossible? Rewarding? Encourage both negative and positive comments. Let those who are hesitant to pray aloud share their feelings.

Indicate that one of the things we would like to learn in this study is to pray in a group by means of conversational prayer. Tell the group that in this session we will take a significant amount of time to pray conversationally. Indicate that it is one thing to talk about conversational prayer, yet another to experience it. We want to focus on experiencing conversational prayer.

Review for the group the basic approach to conversational prayer: an individual will pray about only one subject briefly, then others will have an opportunity to pray about the same subject. After a pause, someone else may bring up a new subject, and one or more may join in praying about that subject. This will continue through as many subjects as come to mind. Do not take time to share prayer requests before you begin the prayer session. Subjects will simply be brought to the group in prayer, and members can join with others as they bring the subject before God.

Use at least 15 minutes of your group session for conversational prayer. After this prayer time, ask members to express how they feel about the experience they have just had. Again, encourage both negative and positive responses. This experience will, hopefully, establish a base for additional conversational prayer during the next two sessions.

BIBLE STUDY

Move to a discussion of the Bible study section entitled Prayer and the Marriage Relationship. Read 1 Peter 3:7 in several translations. After discussing the Bible study questions, channel the group's attention to the Prayer Quotient Inventory. If group members have not completed this inventory, ask them to do so this week. Encourage couples to pray together at least three times this week.

LOOKING AHEAD

Say: "Our session next week is entitled Making Money an Asset to Marriage. Continue to review Philippians 2:3–4 and Jeremiah 33:3. Pray together conversationally at least a few times this week. Let's close the session with a brief prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for the privilege we have to approach Him in prayer."

PLANNING NOTES

SESSION 12: MAKING MONEY AN ASSET TO MARRIAGE

Session 12 is a discussion of the materials in chapter 11. The group will have completed chapter 11 the week prior to the meeting. During this session, the group will consider making money an asset to marriage.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin this session with a 5–8 minute period of conversational prayer. If group members arrive late, they can join the prayer time. Encourage members to be open and honest and pray about anything of concern. Follow the suggestions in last week's material on how to conduct conversational prayer.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Have individual members volunteer to quote the first five verses we have memorized. Also ask the group to quote these verses in unison. Then ask someone to quote the verse we began memorizing this week (Luke 12:15).

DAILY SHARING TIME WITH MY SPOUSE

Ask several group members to share with the rest of the group their progress in the daily sharing times. Ask if they note any improvement in the quality of their sharing times since the beginning of the study. Give opportunity for group members to ask questions and make suggestions to each other. Say: “After we have completed this guide, we hope that each of you will continue to have a daily sharing time with your spouse. May this last for the rest of your lives.”

DAILY CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Ask members to share with the group the book in the Bible they presently are reading. Give opportunity for one or two members to share with the group something they have read this week that has been exciting and meaningful to them.

BIBLE STUDY

Say: “The Bible study this week leads us in a discovery of three areas of financial responsibility.” Before question 1 in the member book, you may want to circle the word *first*; before question 6, the word *second*; and before question 10, the word *third*. As the lead couple, this will help you visualize the three divisions of the Bible study.



Begin with the first financial responsibility: giving. Lead the group in a discussion of questions 1–5. Ask for brief answers and provide an opportunity for group members to ask questions. At the end of question 5, give the group an opportunity to share personal testimonies of what giving has meant in their lives or struggles that they may have had with giving.

The second area of financial responsibility is providing for the needs of our families. This involves our responsibility to work. Lead group members in a brief discussion of questions 6–9, letting individual members share answers. Question 9 is especially interesting. This Scripture indicates that if we put our giving to God first, He will see that we will have the funds to meet the needs of our families.

A third area of financial responsibility is saving. Lead the group in a discussion of questions 10–13. After considering these questions, discuss the difference between saving and hoarding. The basic answer is one of attitude. Saving projects a purposeful attitude; that is, saving to give, saving to meet future needs of the family. Hoarding projects an attitude of greed, accumulating as an end in itself. The person who finds self-worth or emotional security in hoarding large sums of money will never be able to save enough.

If time permits, lead the group in a discussion of the remaining questions.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Allow the group to share what they discovered as they worked through the learning exercise and discussed it with their spouses. If couples will share some individual differences they have resolved or are working on, this could be helpful to others. If group members have not completed this exercise, encourage them to do so this week.

LOOKING AHEAD

Say: “Our final session will be Developing Mutual Sexual Fulfillment. This week, you will be asked to write from memory all six memory verses, so begin early in the week reviewing the verses. Begin the Bible study early in the week.” End the session with prayer. Thank God for each couple and the commitment they have demonstrated to strengthening their marriage by being an active member of the group.

*Discuss the
difference
between saving
and hoarding.
The basic
answer is one
of attitude.*



PLANNING NOTES

Encourage

each

husband

to give

an honest

response to

what sharing

has meant to

him and his

marriage.

SESSION 13: DEVELOPING MUTUAL SEXUAL FULFILLMENT

Session 13 is a discussion of the material in chapter 12. The group will have completed chapter 12 the week prior to the meeting. This is the final session of this study. The topic is developing mutual sexual fulfillment.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Begin this session by focusing on conversations with God. Ask the wives to share with the group a report of their responses to this part of *The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study*. What has the daily quiet time meant in their lives over the last three months? Encourage each one to give a brief report. Husbands may make comments or ask questions, but only the wives will be sharing.

DAILY SHARING TIME WITH MY SPOUSE

Ask husbands to share with the group their responses to the daily sharing times we have been practicing in *The Marriage You've Always Wanted Bible Study*. Encourage each husband to give an honest response to what sharing has meant to him and his marriage. Wives may make comments or ask questions, but only husbands are asked to share.

After this reporting time, encourage couples to make this practice a part of their married lives. Say: "Nothing is more fundamental to marital growth than a daily sharing time with our spouse. A couple cannot stray too far from each other when they consistently have a daily sharing time. It is our desire that you make both the daily quiet time with God and the daily sharing time with your spouse a lifelong practice."

BIBLE STUDY

For the sake of time, begin the Bible study discussion with question 4. Lead the group in a brief discussion of questions 4–7, encouraging several members to share answers to the questions regarding companionship and sexual adjustment in marriage. Conclude the study by indicating that the Bible speaks candidly and openly about sexual matters. Husbands and wives must communicate if they are to have mutual sexual fulfillment.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Ask the group for their general response to the learning exercise. Do not discuss individual ideas but ask: “In what way did you find the learning exercise helpful?” Draw the group’s attention to pages 115–119 and the optional assignment. Indicate that the four books listed provide practical help, and that most Christian couples will find it a growing experience to work through one or all of these books. Almost all sexual problems can be solved by careful reading and discussion of the material in these books.

LOOKING AHEAD

Use this time to allow group members to express their comments about *The Marriage You’ve Always Wanted Bible Study*. Ask: “What has this study meant to you?” Receive both positive and negative comments with an optimistic spirit. Encourage group members to continue practicing the skills they have learned.

Indicate that some of the group members may be interested in serving as lead couples to help other couples go through *The Marriage You’ve Always Wanted Bible Study*. Indicate that no couple can be a lead couple unless they have completed the assignments for the course. If they are interested, they should complete all assignments and talk with you. If applicable, have the coordinator of the course talk with them. Indicate that it is the desire of church leaders that all couples in the church have the opportunity to experience *The Marriage You’ve Always Wanted Bible Study*. This means several lead couples are needed since groups are limited to five to six couples to allow everyone to gain the most from the group experience.

Many groups have found it valuable to have a social get-together about six weeks after the conclusion of the study. This may be a covered-dish dinner or an informal fellowship in the home of one of the couples. The purpose of this get-together is to encourage each other to continue to practice the things they learned in this study, and to encourage those who may become future leaders. If the group is interested in a get-together, the lead couple may want to appoint two couples to plan and coordinate it.

Conclude this final session with a time of conversational prayer. Reserve 8 to 10 minutes for this prayer time.

PLANNING NOTES



*Husbands and
wives must
communicate
if they are
to have
mutual
sexual
fulfillment.*

Visit: www.GaryChapman.org for a schedule of Dr. Chapman's marriage conferences or to receive a daily e-mail from Dr. Chapman on practical ideas for stimulating marital growth.