



STUDY GUIDE

How to use this guide

Throughout each session, you will be given the opportunity to pause at various points to chat together about what you've just heard. We encourage you to at least begin a conversation on these topics, which may indeed continue well after the session is over. Take as much time as you need, but just be sure to hit play on the video again, when you're ready!

SESSION 1: THE GREATEST LOVE STORY EVER TOLD

1. As we begin, we'd like you to pause to take stock of your marriage. What's going well? Those are things to celebrate. Once you've done that, husbands, tell your wives one or two things about yourself that you feel you would like to work on that would improve your marriage. Then, wives share the same with your husbands. It's important at this stage to remember that we're in this together, and to recognise that we share the same goal – to see our marriages thrive, so that they increasingly become a source of joy and strength.
2. Diane talks about marriage being God's visual aid, to help us understand the kind of relationship that he wants us to have with him. Quoting Tim Keller in his book *The Meaning of Marriage*, she says that if we want to make intelligent decisions about our own marital future, then we need to look at marriage through the lens of the Bible and not through our own fears or romanticism, our experience or even our culture. Keller encourages us to see that "[t]he reason that marriage is so painful and yet wonderful is because it is a reflection of the gospel, which is painful and wonderful at once." He writes, "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

How does looking at marriage in this way change the way you think of your own marriage?

3. Read Galatians 5:22-26 together. Is your marriage marked by the Fruit of the Spirit? Which aspect of the Fruit of the Spirit is most apparent in your lives and in your marriage? Which aspect would you like to see more of, individually and as a couple?
4. Francis Chan in his brilliant book *You & Me Forever*, written with his wife Lisa, suggests that the antidote to selfishness or anything else that might be wrong in our marriages is to “stare at God.” He says, “When we stare at Him, everything else falls into its proper place.” He continues, saying that “sincere and concentrated prayer will do infinitely more than any human strategy for a happy marriage,” and that “time spent in God’s word is the best way to solve issues. We cannot do better than listening to His words.”

How do you feel you are doing with staring at God, and in working on your relationship with Jesus? How can you encourage one another to grow closer to Christ?

Perhaps in this session you’ve been moved to consider God’s love for you, in a way that you have never done before. To become a Christian and accept the invitation to the wedding feast of the lamb, at the end of time, you may wish to pray a simple prayer like this one, from a little booklet by Nicky Gumbel called *Why Jesus*:

“Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life (you might want to say sorry to him for the things that come to mind). Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong. Thank you that you died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free. Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Spirit. I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.”

SESSION 2: THE NITTY GRITTY OF MARRIAGE

1. In *The Marriage Book*, Nicky and Sila Lee describe communication as the bridge which connects husband and wife since we cannot read each other's minds. They say this: "When we choose to communicate, we let down the drawbridge and invite each other in(to our lives)."

How are you doing in the whole area of communication? It's such a vital part of marriage. What are those areas that you think you communicate well in? In what areas might there be room for improvement in your communication? Have you placed any barriers in the way of good communication – things like: thinking to yourself that you don't know where to start; or you don't know what to say; or maybe you are just worried that you might upset your spouse with what you feel you need to share?

2. Gary Chapman in his book *The 5 Love Languages* suggests that the main ways we tend to share and receive love are through loving words, kind actions, quality time, thoughtful presents, and physical touch.

How do you like to receive love? How do you show love? Are you showing love in the way your spouse likes to receive it?

3. Jim and Diane talk about the importance of spending quality time together. Do you have regular time marked out for each other? Some people go so far as to put it into their diaries so that it cannot be crowded out with other things. How could this work for you at the stage of life you are in, right now? Could you manage to make this a weekly thing? What about getting away on your own for a night or two if you have small children?
4. Tim Keller in *The Meaning of Marriage* talks about how "marriage used to be about us, but now it's about me." He goes on to say that "never before in history has there been a society filled with people so idealistic in what they are seeking in a spouse," which leaves both men and women "looking for a marriage partner who will fulfil their emotional, sexual and spiritual desires." The interesting thing is that this "me-marriage", this extremely idealistic view, has actually led to a steep decline in marriage and has for many, become an unobtainable thing.

How does this strike you? Do you expect your spouse to fulfil your every need? Are you putting unrealistic demands on your spouse to make you happy and fulfilled? How do you react to Jesus' statement in John 6:35 when he says "I am the bread of life," suggesting that he is the only one who can fill your deepest needs?

SESSION 3: THREE SECRETS OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE

1. In an article by Sara Wallace of *Gospel Centered Mom*, entitled “Marriage Shouldn’t Be Fair,” she points out that culture demands a 50/50 division of labour in the house and so on but she reminds us that we are called to a life of freedom in Christ. What that freedom actually means is that we are free to serve – not to be served. She makes the point that, “As Christians, we don’t find freedom in how we are treated by others, but in how we are treated by God in Christ.” She makes the point that our hearts naturally favour ourselves but “when we remember our value in Christ – that God sent His Son to die for us – our lives don’t have to revolve around being treated fairly. We are freed from the self-centredness that suffocates our joy and contentment.”

Is your marriage marked by service, or by demands if you feel things aren’t fair? How is your ‘self-centredness-o-meter’?

2. As Christians, our aim is to become more like Jesus. His life was marked by utter humility. In Philippians 2:5 we are reminded that Christ made himself nothing and took on the nature of a servant. He set aside his own rights and privileges to bring about our salvation.

In your marriage, how are you doing at setting aside your ‘rights’ and ‘privileges’ and putting your spouse first? Why isn’t it easy to do this, and how might you work on this, together? And how might things look different if you both approach your marriage like this?

3. CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity* writes, “When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love (them).”

Do you think love could be a choice for you in your marriage? If so, what would this look like, and how might this transform your relationship?

4. As Christians, you should be committed to your spouse’s holiness. In *The Meaning of Marriage*, Tim Keller points out that “marriage is for helping each other to become our future glory-selves, the new creations that God will eventually make us.”

I wonder if you have considered your marriage in that way? How are you doing on helping your spouse to become the person God wants him or her to be?

Resources Mentioned in *Let's Talk About Marriage* that you may find helpful:

Francis and Lisa Chan, *You and Me Forever* (San Francisco: Clare Love Publishing, 2014).

Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015).

Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, *The Road Back To You: An Enneagram Journey To Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

Nicky Gumbel, *Why Jesus* (London: Alpha International, 1991).

Timothy and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011).

Nicky & Sila Lee, *The Marriage Book* (London: Alpha International, 2000).

CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996).