

STUDY

Marriage Enrichment Study Guide

A 6-session couples study on communication, forgiveness, intimacy, and long-term covenant faithfulness -- with biblical teaching, practical exercises, and honest discussion questions

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Equipping pastors and leaders to serve with excellence, integrity, and lasting Kingdom impact.

Session 1: The Covenant Foundation -- Why "Until Death" Changes Ever

Marriage enrichment is not crisis intervention. It is the intentional investment in a relationship that is functioning adequately and could be genuinely thriving. Many couples who would never describe their marriage as troubled would honestly describe it as less than what they hoped -- less connected, less intimate, less characterized by the kind of joyful, mutual, covenant-shaped love that they intended when they made their vows. This study is for those couples: people who want more from their marriage not because they are in trouble but because they believe marriage can and should be one of the most beautiful things in their lives.

Session 1: The Covenant Foundation -- Why "Until Death" Changes Ever

The theology of covenant is the most important single idea for marital health, because it defines the relationship's fundamental character and the framework within which all the specific skills and practices make sense. A contract is a conditional exchange: I will do my part as long as you do yours. A covenant is an unconditional commitment: I give myself to you entirely, regardless of conditions. Malachi 2:14 calls the marriage relationship a "covenant" -- the same word used for God's relationship with Israel. The covenant character of marriage does not mean that feelings of love will always be present or that the relationship will always be easy. It means that the decision to stay, to work, to forgive, and to invest is not contingent on the emotional return. The couple who understands this will navigate difficulty very differently from the couple who is operating from a contract framework.

Sessions 2-4: Communication, Conflict, and Forgiveness

Session 2 -- Hearing Each Other: The research on communication in marriage is consistent: the quality of listening determines the quality of the relationship far more than the quality of speaking. Most couples who fight are fighting because one or both partners feel unheard. This session teaches the skills of reflective listening (reflecting back what you heard before responding), emotional attunement (naming and validating the feeling before addressing the content), and the dangerous communication patterns to avoid (John Gottman's "Four Horsemen": criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling). Session 3 -- Navigating Conflict: Conflict is not the enemy of marriage -- it is the material from which intimacy is built, if handled well. The goal is not to avoid conflict but to develop the specific skills that allow conflict to produce understanding rather than escalation. Session 4 -- The Practice of Forgiveness: Forgiveness is the most specifically Christian dimension of marital health. The Gospel claims that forgiveness is both possible and necessary -- possible because Christ has forgiven us, and necessary because without it the accumulated hurts of a shared life become an impossible weight. This session works through what forgiveness actually is (not minimizing, not forgetting, not trusting immediately) and how the Gospel makes it available.

Sessions 5-6: Intimacy and Long-Term Vision. Session 5 addresses physical and emotional intimacy as expressions of the one-flesh union described in Genesis 2:24 -- not primarily performance but presence, vulnerability, and mutual delight. Session 6 addresses the long-term vision: What are you building together? Not just managing the present but pursuing a shared future that reflects both partners' deepest values and aspirations. The session ends with a couples' vision exercise in which partners individually and then together articulate what they want their marriage to look like in 10, 20, and 30 years.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What is the most personally significant insight from this resource for your specific ministry context right now?

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2. Where is the greatest gap between the principles here and your current practice? What is one specific step to begin closing that gap?
3. Who in your leadership community needs to engage with this material? How will you bring them into the conversation?
4. What accountability structure will you put in place to ensure the commitments you are making here are actually kept?

The work described in this resource is not the extraordinary work of exceptionally gifted ministers. It is the ordinary, daily, faithful work of people who have decided to take their calling seriously -- to prepare, to pray, to show up, and to trust God with what only he can do. Do the ordinary things with extraordinary faithfulness. That is the whole of it.

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