

ED &
LISA YOUNG

CREATIVE MARRIAGE

THE CREATIVE
MARRIAGE

THE ART OF KEEPING
YOUR LOVE ALIVE



SMALL GROUP STUDIES

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Small Groups are a vital part of how we do ministry at Fellowship Church just as they are in many churches around the world. There are a number of different theories on how small groups should work and they are all great in different ways. The book you are holding is written with our model in mind. So take a minute to read the following explanation, then feel free to adapt as necessary.

Each of our small groups practices a three part agenda in every meeting. That agenda includes a social time, a discussion time, and a prayer time. Each of these elements share equal importance, but not necessarily equal time. To help you get the most out of this book we have included an explanation of each of the parts.

The first element of every small group meeting should be a time of socializing. This phase of the meeting should be about 30% of your time together. Welcome everyone as they arrive at the host home, make visitors feel welcome by introducing yourself and showing genuine interest in them. Enjoy some snacks, or if your group prefers, a meal together.

Then move on with second part of the meeting, the lesson. The lesson itself may take as much as 50% of your group's meeting time, but remember it is not the most important element. You may want to start this phase of your meeting with a short "icebreaker" to get everyone talking. The questions in the "Start it Up" section of each chapter are what we refer to as "level the playing field" questions that everyone should be able to participate in, regardless of their level of spiritual maturity or Bible knowledge. As your group moves through the "Talk it Up" section in each chapter, remember that it is more important to finish on time than to finish each and every question. It is okay to skip some to be sure you allow enough time to take care of the third phase of the small group time: "Lift it Up."

The "Lift it Up" section is a vital part of every small group meeting and should be about 20% of the meeting. During this time you will be able to share with the group what God is doing in your life as well as asking the group to support you in specific prayers. To help focus this time there are one or two questions at the end of each study that will prompt prayers based on the material you have just talked about. There is also a space for you to write down your prayer request(s) so you don't forget them and so you can communicate them clearly when it is your turn. Below that is a place to write down the prayer requests of the people in your group so you can remember and pray for each request throughout the week.

As an additional tool to assist you in your journey of spiritual development there is a "Step it Up" section at the end of each session. This section consists of five devotional thoughts that reinforce the lesson you've just completed and are designed to help you develop a regular quiet time with God. To get the absolute most from this study I challenge you to take five or ten minutes a day to read and apply these devotionals to your life. If your group meets twice a month or bi-weekly, choose five of the intervening days to incorporate these thoughts into your devotional life.

CREATIVE MARRIAGE

Sometimes people look at my marriage and think, “Wow, Ed and Lisa really have it together. They have been married for over 20 years and are still in love; they have fun together and I’ll bet they never fight. Being a pastor must make marriage so easy. If only my marriage could be like that.”



Well, Lisa and I do have a great marriage, and I love her more today than ever before. But it is not any easier for us than it is for you. We have worked and continue to work at having a great marriage. Specifically, we work hard at building a creative marriage, because I believe a great marriage is a creative one. God wants you to have a great marriage, too, if you are willing to put in the creative work necessary to make it happen. Having a creative marriage is based on your willingness to do whatever it takes to keep the love, the romance, the intimacy, and the communication in your relationship alive. Notice I did not say it is based on your spouse’s willingness to do that. I know how tempting it is, when doing a study like this, to point at your spouse and think things like, “Oh, he so needed to hear that! Get him!, hit him between the eyes,” or “She does that to me all the time and she is finally going to hear about it from someone else. I’ll just read that part out loud to her.”

Don’t go there. Too often we become so concerned with what our spouse is or is not doing that we become blind to the fact that we need to make some changes in our own life. So don’t focus on your spouse during the coming weeks; focus on yourself. That means no elbows in the ribs during discussions, none of those “ah-hah!” looks, and no finger pointing!

With that in mind, it’s time to roll up your sleeves and get ready to do some relational work, as you discover together what it means to have a creative marriage.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Young". The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops and a cursive style.



WEEK ONE

CREATIVE FOUNDATION

CREATIVE MARRIAGE

START IT UP

I have said it hundreds of times. At the conclusion of a wedding ceremony I look into the starry eyes of the bride and groom and say, “I now pronounce you husband and wife, in the presence of God and these assembled witnesses.” Then I add from the Bible, “What God has joined together, let no man separate.”

The man and the woman exchange vows, rings and kisses. And at this point, everything seems so perfect, so right. At that moment, everyone hopes the perfection will last forever. On the day of your wedding, you expect nothing less than relational perfection to last for a lifetime.

Think back to your own big day. For some, that may be just a short jog down memory lane. For others, that special day is tucked behind decades of life. No matter how long ago your wedding was, dust off those memories and answer the following questions.

1. What are some of the most vibrant memories from your wedding day?

2. What were a few of the most prevailing expectations for your marriage on that special day?

On the day of your wedding ceremony, you are convinced that marriage is for keeps. But you add a few kids, a few in-laws, a few financial problems, and the routines of everyday life make a forever marriage seem not so certain anymore.

Some couples tell me, “Ed, we have a great marriage. We are more in love today than we were when we walked down the aisle. Our marriage is great!”

Other couples hopelessly shrug their shoulders and say, “Well, our marriage is about average. It’s mediocre. We’re just doing time in this prison cell of predictability.”

Still others say, “Forever? How about foreclosure? My marriage is hanging by a thread. It’s in the deep weeds.”

It does not matter if you have a great, average or struggling marriage; there is one powerful reality that you must download. Your marriage matters to God. The marriage relationship is the most important earthly relationship you will ever be a part of. It is the anchor of the family unit. Good marriages can change our communities, our cities, our states, our nation, and even our world. And something this important deserves our undivided attention.

TALK IT UP

You have probably heard someone teach about marriage, or you have read a book, or been a part of a discussion on how to improve your marriage. Chances are, at some point in that study, you heard a statement similar to this, “If you want a healthy marriage, you have to think less about yourself and more about your spouse.”

That is common advice for improving your marriage. But during this study I encourage you to do something radically different.

If you want a healthy marriage, during this study you need to think less about your spouse and more about yourself. It might sound unorthodox, but let me explain what I mean.

The tendency for married couples who want to improve their marriage is to put the focus on the other person. Too often, we focus on what our spouse needs to start doing and how we want them to change. But that is not the way to build a strong marriage.

During this series, I'm going to challenge you to ask some I-centered questions:

“What do I need to do differently?”

“What should I change in order to strengthen my marriage?”

“How should I address the issues at hand to help my spouse feel loved and valuable?”

By asking these questions and putting the focus back on yourself and your responsibilities, your marriage has the chance to grow stronger and reach greater heights. Those I-centered questions are actually the key to strengthening your marriage because they expose areas that you can improve by God's grace and with his help.

THE VALUE OF THE VOWS

3. Do you remember the vows you said on your wedding day? Use the blank space below to try to write out your wedding vows. How much do you remember compared to other people in the group?

Your vows are an important part of your marriage. And yet, they are easy to forget. The following is an example of traditional wedding vows:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband/wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, forsaking all others, until we are separated by death; as God is my witness, I give you this promise.

We make an enormous commitment on our wedding day. In fact, none of us truly knows exactly what we're committing to on our wedding day. We don't realize all of the implications of our words. If we knew all that would be involved in marriage, most of us would probably be too scared to ever get married.

But that's specifically why those marriage vows are so critical. The real value of our vows is something that we can only really understand after years of commitment. Our vows provide a foundation of stability for our marriage. They are a solemn promise that every one of us makes before God, a minister, and our family and friends. When we say those vows, we are promising to remain faithful to the covenant of marriage—no matter what the cost.

A few years ago, I went with Lisa to her twentieth high school reunion. As I walked into the hotel ballroom, the lights were blinking and the dance floor was packed. Videos of the glory days of high school were playing on the side screens, and people twenty years older, with twenty excess pounds, were still trying to “shake that groove thing.” It was also twenty times more entertaining to watch than it was in high school!

What was happening at this celebration? The reunion committee was attempting to bring the past into the present. They were trying to make events from twenty years ago current for today.

And that is precisely what you need to do with your vows. Take those promises that you made during your wedding before God and your witnesses and pursue them passionately in the present.

A great way to celebrate your wedding anniversary is to recite your vows to your spouse at least once a year. You don't have to say them word for word the way you did on your wedding day, but put the same sentiment in your own words.

Tell your spouse how much you love him or her. Let your spouse know you are serious about your commitment to love them and that your marriage is not just based on freaky feelings. Remind them of your forever commitment, no matter what happens. Give them an assurance of your love, honor and faithfulness. Let them know that nothing will come between the two of you as long as you live. Bring the promises of the past into the present, pursue them passionately, and continue to move those vows into the future.

I've taken the marriage vows and put them into modern day vernacular that will help you get started:

“I commit, before God and you, to creatively love, honor, and respect you; to be true to you in all situations—for the rest of my life.”

4. Brainstorm ideas for keeping your vows current in your marriage.

Why are these vows such a big deal? The vows begin, “I commit before God...” We could talk night and day about the value of the vows and how important it is to keep our commitment to our spouse. But it all begins with God.

We have to be on the same page with him and his plans for our marriage. Our understanding and appreciation for the marital commitment flow from the commitment that God (through Christ) has already made to us. When we realize that God loves us unconditionally and took the initiative with us, we will have the endurance and drive necessary for a dynamic and lasting marriage.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

5. What does God's willingness to take the initiative in our relationship with him communicate about his commitment to us?

6. How could you apply God's example of love to your marriage?

When you get into a conflict and you feel the temperature rising, remember the value of the vows. When one is in the mood for sex and the other is not, remember the value of the vows. When you get to the end of a tough day, you're in a bad mood and want to lash out at your spouse, remember the value of your vows. When parenting pressures begin to interfere with having a regular date night with your covenant partner, remember the value of the vows. When sickness or financial trouble put a strain on your relationship, remember the value of the vows.

Remember... Remember... Remember.

If I am going to remember the value of the vows—to love, honor, and respect—I have to realize that living out these sacred vows takes roll-up-your-sleeves and grit-under-your-fingernails type work.

A TIRELESS MWE

Recently I boarded a flight and flew out to the west coast. After I took my seat, I noticed a man step on the plane with a look on his face that clearly

showed he was having a bad day. He walked through First Class, looked enviously at the empty seats, and sat down in Coach across the aisle from me.

When the flight attendant walked by, this man said, “Excuse me, honey. I noticed some empty seats in First Class. Are there any available?”

She smiled sweetly and replied, “There are some empty seats, but there are none available for you.”

The man sat there stewing. After a minute he took out his wallet and thumbed through some cards. The same flight attendant walked back and he said, “Miss, I have this travel agent card and I wondered if you would put me up in First Class now.”

She smiled again, said, “No,” and kept walking.

What was happening here? This man was trying to get into First Class, but he hadn't paid the price.

The same thing happens in marriage. If you want to have a first class marriage, you have to pay the price. The price tag is hard work; it's something I call the MWE—Marital Work Ethic. And the reward is well worth the payoff.

7. Make a list of the most valuable things in your life. Then discuss the amount of work it takes to attain or maintain each of those valuable things.

We are a society of instant gratification. If it is not quick, easy, express, overnight, or disposable, we don't want anything to do with it. We think, “If it takes a lot of work, there must be another way.”

Then, one day, we get married and discover that marriage takes work, negotiation, sweat, toil, pain, and sacrifice—and that it is for keeps. Our

disposable culture clashes with the permanency of the marriage relationship. No wonder so many marriages today abandon their vows and end in divorce.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Colossians 3:23

There are going to be times that you are so angry, so hurt, so crushed by your spouse that you will not want to work on improving your marriage. Those times are specifically when you must remember Colossians 3:23. Even during those times of anger and hurt, God wants you to work with all your heart. He wants you to work at remembering your vows. You not only promised your spouse that you would work on your marriage, you promised God. So when you work in your marriage, you are working for the Lord.

8. When are some of the times it is most difficult to work at improving your marriage?

9. What could you do to remind yourself that your work is not only for your spouse, it is for God?

Ask God to develop a tireless Marital Work Ethic within your heart, because marriage takes work. And to carry out that work in positive and consistent ways through decades of change, it not only takes work; it also takes creativity.

KEEPING IT CREATIVE

Creativity in your relationship is a badge of honor before you get married... the well-planned dates, the unexpected gifts, the love notes and cards and much more.

Then there is the proposal.

Men go out of their way to make special reservations, order the best flowers, search for the perfect ring and much more—all to make that moment just right.

10. What are some of the creative things you did for each other before you were married, or in the early days of your marriage?

It is amazing how quickly creativity can fade in a marriage. The creative work that once brought excitement and passion to the relationship gets replaced with routines and excuses. And we ignore one of the foundational characteristics of God... creativity.

In the beginning God created.... Genesis 1:1

If you have any questions about God's creativity, all you have to do is take a glimpse at creation. From the beauty of the landscape to the variety of animals to the marvels of the human body, there are countless examples of God's creativity throughout the world.

11. Why do you think God's characteristic of creativity gets ignored or moved down the priority list in marriage?

Doing things the same old way just won't work, because our needs are moving targets. And those needs can only be met when you study your spouse. You have to really understand the other person if you want to meet their needs. Love in a marriage flourishes when both partners are working to meet the needs of the other. This doesn't come easily, but it is well worth the effort.

Our marriage has taken a lot of work for Lisa and me, but the work is worth it. What I often find is that couples hit a relational sticking point and don't work on the personal junk that is at the root of their problems. Instead, they simply throw in the towel, abandon their vows, and opt for an easy way out—divorce. And rather than looking for creative solutions to their marital problems, they end up taking the same junk into the next marriage...and the next marriage...and the next marriage.

Situations like this get ridiculous quickly. Don't let that happen to your marriage. Work hard now and keep working for as long as it takes. Make a commitment before God to keep creativity in your marriage for the long haul. Say, "God, this deal is for keeps. I am going to make creativity and innovation permanent features in my marriage."

WRAP IT UP

God is doing great things, and he wants to do even greater things in every marriage. My marriage has room for improvement. Your marriage has room for improvement. So let's develop and live out the value of our vows as we commit to a Marital Work Ethic. Marriage is for keeps. And building it with creativity can change the course of your marriage. So ask God to help you discover how to make your marriage more vibrant, more alive, and more creative than ever!

Prayer Requests:

STEP IT UP

Take a step further over the next few days and spend some time reflecting on the following devotional thoughts that reinforce the previous session. Use these as reminders to take what you've learned and apply it to your everyday life.

DAY 1

What comes to mind when you think about the characteristics of God? Some would say, "God is holy. He is completely set apart from us because he is perfect."

Someone else might say, "God is all-powerful. He is able to do anything he chooses to do."

And still others would say, "God is wise. He knows all and understands things we are unable to grasp."

While these are all true characteristics of God that we should admire and imitate, there is one characteristic that we often seem to forget or ignore.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

We have heard so much about God being the Creator that it is easy to ignore the implications of that fact. Take some time to think about what you just read. God took the time to creatively come up with the exact shape and size of this planet. He designed the vast array of scenery and spoke the multitude of the earth's inhabitants into existence. He took the time to give them unique abilities and appearances. And with his hands, God very literally created and formed mankind. In all of this, he displayed his creativity.

God's creativity is one of the most vital characteristics that should be imitated in our marriages. We must choose to exercise this foundational characteristic if we want a healthy relationship, because creativity is the key to growth and strength in our marriage. You may think you are ill-equipped to be creative. But remember, you are created in the image of God, the Creator. In you he placed the ability to be creative. Ask him to help you unleash that creativity in your marriage today.

Are you intentionally creative in your marriage?

If not, what is keeping you from being more creative in your marriage?

Notes:

Prayer Requests:

DAY 2

Read Ephesians 5:1

Do you see yourself as a “dearly loved” child of God? That can be a hard thing to embrace, even when you accept the fact that God forgives you. You are more than just forgiven, more than tolerated, more than liked. You are loved as one of God’s children. Because of his love for you, God wants the best for you. He wants you to succeed.

As you attempt to imitate him, you must remember that God loves you and he wants you to succeed in being like him. That truth applies to being creative in your marriage as well. God wants to empower you with creative thoughts and the ability to follow through with those ideas. You can do it because you are a “dearly loved” child of God.

Ask God to give you some creative thoughts. Then, spend five minutes dreaming up creative ideas you can implement in your marriage this week. Don’t stop at the first idea that comes to mind. Make a list of your favorite ideas, and put them into practice.

DAY 3

Read Colossians 3:23-24

Have you ever wondered about the phrases, “piece of cake” or “cake walk”? Some quick research will show that those phrases came from late nineteenth century promenade contests that typically occurred in African American culture. Essentially, the couple with the best stroll would win a cake. So, you could literally just take a leisurely stroll and win a free cake. Today we use that phrase to say that something is easy.

Well, marriage is not a piece of cake or a cake walk. You cannot just leisurely stroll through your relationship and hope to have a prize-winning marriage. Marriage takes work. There are times you have to roll up your sleeves and really dig in.

God expects this type of wholehearted work. In fact, this type of wholehearted work is for God. When you put elbow grease into your marriage, you are actually working for and glorifying God.

Knowing that you are working for God should make it easier to put the work into your marriage, even when you are not happy with your spouse. You are ultimately working to please God, not your spouse. But, as you work to please God, you will end up pleasing your spouse.

When things in your marriage start to get tough, what can you do to remind yourself that you are ultimately working for God?

DAY 4

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Anything worth winning takes work and dedication. It is not just something that happens by chance. Your marriage is the same way. God wants your marriage to have direction and discipline. Great marriages don't just happen by chance. They take work and discipline.

You would probably love for your spouse to read about the need for direction and discipline, but God wants you to hear it. Each person must make his or her own decision. If you want direction and discipline in your marriage, it starts with you making a decision to run your marriage in such a way as to win the prize.

Think about your marriage's direction. If you keep doing what you are right now, what will your marriage be like in ten years?

If it is not headed where you want it to go, and where God wants it to go, what do you need to do to improve the direction of your marriage?

DAY 5

Your spouse was clearly in the wrong. It is absolutely his or her fault. You would take some of the blame if you deserved it, but in this case you don't. This whole fight could be over if your spouse would just own up to what he or she did. Instead, your spouse is acting angry and resisting you. What should you do?

Read Romans 5:8

It is sobering to think that while we were clearly in the wrong, absolutely at fault and resistant to God, he chose to bridge the gap and settle the conflict. God made the sacrifice when it was not his fault. God paid the price when it was not his debt. He took the initiative to show his commitment to us even when we were not committed to him.

To have a successful marriage, we should reflect that commitment and initiative with our spouse. We should take the initiative to reconcile conflicts even when we are right. We should show our commitment to the marriage even when we think we are the only one doing any work. We should attempt to show the love that God showed.

What is an area in your marriage that needs you to take initiative like God took in his relationship with you?



LEADER'S GUIDE SESSION ONE

CREATIVE FOUNDATION

CREATIVE MARRIAGE

LEADER'S NOTES

1. What are some of the most vibrant memories from your wedding day?

The day of your wedding can feel like one of the fastest days of your life. It starts with the final preparation for the ceremony. From there is time with groomsmen and bridesmaids. Then, the ceremony happens and it seems like everything happens at the speed of light until the moment you drive away from your reception.

Despite the speed of the day, there are moments that stick in the recesses of your mind. There are those images of the first time you see your soon to be spouse in full wedding attire. There are the moments of camaraderie with your friends who came to celebrate your relationship. There are those moments of joy with your family that stay with you.

2. What were a few of the most prevailing expectations for your marriage on that special day?

The marriage expectation bar can be set pretty high before the ceremony. There are expectations about communication and attention. There are expectations that this relationship will not run into the same obstacles as other couples. There is an expectation for the amount of sexual intimacy and it can be totally different depending on if you are the bride or the groom. Some expectations are reasonable; others end up showing you did not know as much as you thought.

3. Do you remember the vows you said on your wedding day? Use the blank space below to try to write out your wedding vows then compare what you wrote down with what others in the room remembered.

Tip: Not everyone makes the same vows so keep that in mind as you compare what was remembered. You may want to see if those who wrote their own vows could remember them better than those who used standard vows.

4. Brainstorm ideas for keeping your vows current in your marriage.

Keeping vows current starts with thinking about what was promised. This means going beyond just memorizing the words. How to fulfill those promises must be at the forefront of the mind. Then, once you know what to do, find ways to remember what you should do. This could be placing strategic notes, having friends encourage you, having evaluative talks with your spouse or reciting your vows on a regular basis. If you will practice this, you can keep your vows current.

5. What does God's willingness to take the initiative in our relationship with him communicate about his commitment?

It seems like the person who takes the initiative in a relationship is generally the most committed. Think back to early dating relationships. Most of the time, the person who was the most interested in the relationship called the most, wrote the most notes, asked when they could hang out... in general they took the initiative.

God showed his commitment to being in a relationship by showing love to the very people that sinned against him. God had every right to stay angry and punish his creation, yet he sacrificed so he could offer a road to forgiveness. If God was committed enough to overcome the first obstacle of sin by sacrificing his son, that shows he is committed enough to overcome any other obstacle.

6. How could you apply God's example of love to your marriage?

God took the initiative and made the necessary sacrifice to restore the relationship. When you feel frustrated with your spouse, when they have wronged you, when you have the right to be mad – remember how God loved you. Take the initiative with your spouse to restore the relationship.

7. Make a list of the most valuable things in your life. Then discuss the amount of work it takes to attain or maintain each of those valuable things.

Tip: Let the entire group brainstorm valuable things in their lives. Then, pick some of the most common answers to think about the work involved in attaining or maintaining those things. You may also compare the work to attain those things versus the work to maintain them. Which work was harder? Which work came more naturally? Which work was closer to your expectations?

8. When are some of the times it is most difficult to work at improving your marriage?

The obvious answer is that it is most difficult to work on improving your marriage when you are mad at your spouse. During those times, someone has to put their emotions aside and think about the other person.

It can also be difficult to work on your marriage when things are at their busiest. In the midst of many other activities and commitments it is easy to put your marriage on the back shelf. The idea is that your marriage is not going anywhere so you can always come back and work on it, but the other opportunities could fade at any moment. The truth is, there will always be other opportunities. But if you do not work on your marriage, it will not always be there.

One commonly overlooked time that can be difficult to work on your marriage is when things are going well. In those times of contentment, it is easy to become complacent and stop doing the things that got you to that place in your marriage.

9. What could you do to remind yourself that your work is not only for your spouse, it is for God?

Praying for your marriage can be a great way to remember the work is also for God. Thank God for the good parts of your marriage. In doing this you are acknowledging his involvement. Also, ask for his help. He does not expect you to fulfill your vows on your own strength. It is easy to get so wrapped up in fulfilling the marriage vows that God gets left out. By praying for your marriage you will keep God a part of your marriage and remember that your vows were to him as well.

10. What are some of the creative things you did for each other before you were married, or in the early days of your marriage?

Tip: Let the group discuss this question for a while. The goal is to inspire new ideas by listening to the ideas of the past. Hearing what was once done can be a great way to evaluate what is currently being done. When everyone is reminded of how much work they once put in, it can be a wake up call for the lack of effort now. Also, hearing the creative ideas can bring out the competitive side of the men. As they hear the women remember what was once done for them it can spur the men on to new actions.

One important part of this question is to not let it turn into a time of criticism for what is not being done. The goal is to show appreciation for what was done, not criticize what is not being done now. If this question turns into spouses attacking each other for a lack of creative effort, there is little chance creativity will come out of the conversation.

11. Why do you think God's characteristic of creativity gets ignored or moved down the priority list in marriage for other of God's characteristics?

Creativity is a characteristic of God that is overlooked in general. God's love, his commitment, grace and mercy seem to be what is keyed in on. The result is those characteristics are then emphasized in marriage. The problem is the Bible is permeating with examples of God's creativity. Creativity is constantly evident in his relationship with his creation. By noticing God's creativity in general, it will keep creativity from being ignored in the marriage.

CREATIVE NOTES

ICEBREAKERS

You're Invited

Before the first meeting in the *Creative Marriage* series, send out invitations to your small group that look like wedding invitations. Invite your group to learn how to have the creative marriage God desires for them.

BRIDGE – God invites us to experience a creative marriage.

Have Your Cake...

Cut two pieces of cake for each couple. Each couple must feed their spouse the cake, but they may not use any utensils, only fingers.

BRIDGE – Marriage is a give and take relationship. If what we give our spouse makes a mess, they will be tempted to retaliate. But, if we work together we can avoid many of the marriage messes.

Sign of the Times

Contact the members of your group before the meeting and ask them to bring their wedding pictures. Display the wedding pictures at your meeting. Let members of the group vote on different categories based on the wedding pictures. The following are examples of categories: couple that changed the most, couple that looks the same, best male hair style, best female hair style, etc.

BRIDGE – Marriages change over time. The way things were in the beginning are not always the way things are now. Marriage takes work. If we do not add to the work that got us to our wedding pictures we will not make it to anniversary pictures.

Wedding Music

Ask couples to try to remember the songs they had in their wedding. Compare the music that each couple used to see how many songs are similar. For added entertainment, let each couple choose which of their wedding songs was their favorite then try to sing the chorus.

BRIDGE – It is easy to forget many parts of the wedding day, but God wants us to remember our wedding day. That day is a significant day of covenant between God and your spouse. It takes work to remember and live out the important promises of our wedding days.

Wedding Dress Guess

Contact the wives prior to the meeting and ask them to bring their wedding dresses. Display the wedding dresses and let everyone try to guess which wedding dress matches each wife.

BRIDGE – We all change. Who we were on our wedding day may not be who we are now. The same is true with our relationships. It takes work to maintain a healthy relationship after the wedding.

HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

Vow Redo

Let each couple rewrite their vows based on their experiences in marriage so far and what they expect in the coming years.

BRIDGE – It is hard to understand the depth of your vows on your wedding day. Your vows take on new meaning as you experience the rollercoaster ride of marriage.

Boys vs. Girls

Divide your group into males and females. Each group has to write new wedding vows. Once the vows are written, compare the two sets of vows and discuss the perspective of each gender as seen in the vows.

BRIDGE – Husbands and wives can have very different views on marriage. It takes working together to overcome the differences and build a healthy marriage.

General to Specific

There are parts of wedding vows that can be very general. Look through common wedding vows and discuss the specifics you have experienced from the general vows you took. For example: for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, etc.

BRIDGE – Even though we may not understand all the specifics of the vows we made, God still expects us to fulfill them. He gives us the strength to be faithful if we will trust in him as we learn the depth of the commitment we made to our spouse.

VISUAL REINFORCEMENTS

Wedding Pictures

Contact the members of your group before the meeting to ask them to bring their wedding pictures to be displayed at the meeting.

Wedding Reception

Put out food that reminds people of a wedding reception. Make hors d'oeuvres, wedding punch and a small cake.

MEDIA REINFORCEMENTS

“Canon in D” by Pachelbel

This is the traditional song played for the entrance of the bride. Ask the couples to try to remember their feelings on the day of their wedding when they heard this song. Remembering how we felt can be a powerful reminder of the commitment we made, but memories are not enough. It takes a current commitment to have a healthy marriage.

“Till Kingdom Come” by Coldplay

This song communicates one person's commitment to a relationship through all the events of life. Marriage takes a commitment that will not give up. It takes a commitment that will last no matter what obstacles come.

“White Flag” by Dido

The artist proclaims her undying commitment to love. The chorus tells that there will be no surrender, no raising the white flag on her love. God wants us to bring a no surrender approach to our marriage.

“I Walk the Line” by Johnny Cash

The promise in this song is to stay committed because of love. Walking the line means avoiding certain things that will damage your relationship as well as making choices to build the relationship.

“Follow Through” by Gavin DeGraw

He proclaims his love, but follows it up by saying if this relationship is going to work there must be follow through. The wedding day does not make the marriage. It takes follow through with a tireless MWE.

TAKE HOME OBJECT (Reminders of the lesson)

Written Statement

Print copies of Ed's modern day vernacular vows. Give each person a copy and have them sign and date it like they would a formal contract. Signing a contract can be intimidating because of its seriousness. There is something about seeing our name signed on an agreement that holds us accountable. We need to remember the significance of the commitment we made on our wedding day. By signing our vows we can use these papers as a reminder of the commitment we made.

Mirror Mirror...

Purchase small mirrors that can be passed out to each member of the group as a reminder to look in the mirror over the next few weeks of this study. This study is not about what your spouse can do to improve your marriage, it is about what you can do.

Tracking Your MWE

Print out calendars of the next month for each member of the group. Ask them to write down the work they put into their marriage. Then, use the calendars as a tool for making sure they are practicing a tireless MWE.

OTHER

Grapple Surprise

You can find grapples in your local grocery store. A grapple is an apple that tastes like a grape. Pass out samples of grapples without telling the members of your group what they are.

BRIDGE – Marriage is not always what we expect. There are times we discover what marriage really is only after we have made the commitment and experience it.

Best Decisions

Let couples share what they believe are some of the best decisions they made for the health of their marriage.

BRIDGE – Great marriages do not just happen. They take conscious decisions that are accompanied by tireless work.

Wedding Day Disasters

Let couples share some of the events that seemed like disasters on the day of their wedding.

BRIDGE – Successful marriages do not give up. Remember the tenacity that you used to overcome those wedding day disasters and apply it to current obstacles.

Write God a thank you note for giving you that blessing.