

EQUIP

marriage

Week One: Grow Oneness Through Commitments

THE BIG IDEA

Grow Oneness Through Commitments

Oneness in marriage does not depend on our feelings, experiences and desires but it grows through our commitments to live according to God's design for life and marriage. In Larry Crabb's book *The Marriage Builder*, he takes the biblical call for a husband and wife to live as one (Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5) and defines it as a pursuit of *soul oneness*. He says it this way: "Soul oneness is a commitment to minister to our spouse's needs rather than manipulating them to meet our own needs." It is a commitment that starts with confronting our natural bent toward selfishness in marriage to serve what is best for the whole.

BREAKING THE ICE

Do you know your mate?

Answer the following questions out loud for the group to hear if you dare but *if you do*, your mate has to answer the same question about YOU:

1. What is your mate's favorite food?
2. If money were not an issue, where would your mate choose to vacation?
3. What is the thing you do most that annoys your mate?
4. There are two natural responses to conflict: avoidance or attack. Avoiders isolate, and attackers are natural self-defenders and lawyers. Which one is your mate?

1. THE FALL *READ* Genesis 3:7-16, 20-21

During EQUIP: Marriage you were asked to look at God's response to the first broken marriage. What observations were made about God in the following verses:

- I. Verses 8-13
- II. Verse 15
- III. Verse 16
- IV. Verses 20-21

2. COMMIT TO GROW

GROUP: During the EQUIP: Marriage event you were asked to have a conversation with your mate about making 3 commitments to each other: Commit to **Pray, Serve and Have Fun** with each other. If you went to the event what happened with this assignment?

How did you do with those commitments? Did you define the what, when, and how-to follow-through?

What do you need to do to make these commitments happen?

If you were unable to attend, spend some time deciding how you would make those 3 commitments to each other tonight, as a commitment to preserve Soul Oneness, as Larry Crab defined it (see page one “Big Idea” section.)

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Discuss each commitment with your mate and decide

I will pray for you daily this week...

Ask for specific prayer requests.

I will serve you this week...

Ask your mate for input and decide what you will do daily.

I will commit to doing something fun _____ times this week...

Discuss what you like doing and can practically do this week.

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Week Two: Grow Through Self Awareness

THE BIG IDEA

Grow Through Self Awareness

A path that gives relationally “stuck” couples hope when they come seeking help is to tell them: “You can grow closer together and experience healthy conflict communication if you can grow self-aware of how you impact your mate, how your mate impacts you, and how life has impacted how you deal with conflict.” Add a genuine care for your mate to that self-awareness and you can grow closer and healthier in and through conflicts that will come in to your relationship.

BREAKING THE ICE

Helpful Videos

“The Circle of Relating Styles” and the “EAR Technique” are useful tools that build self-awareness and allows a couple to apply their new perspective in ways that bring practical care for their mate when the frustrations and stress of relationship trigger negative emotions. These tools were developed by Dr. Gary Sibcy who is a Christian clinical psychologist and teaches in the Counseling PhD program at Liberty University.

WATCH

The Circle of Relating Styles
<https://vimeo.com/290303815>

EAR Technique
<https://vimeo.com/290356391>

1. GROW AWARE AND CARE

WATCH The Circle of Relating Styles video and answer the following questions:

COUPLES:

- A. Which relating style best describes your comfort zone?

- B. How does your relating style affect the way you deal with conflict in marriage?

WATCH the EAR Technique video and answer the following questions:

COUPLES:

- A. Think of your last memorable conflict. How did blame or being right contribute to it?

- B. Is it harder for you to be empathetic or assertive in conflict conversations?

GROUP:

Each couple share one to two take-aways from your discussion together.
(No one should feel compelled to share but if there are things that benefit the group and our discussion please share. Risking some disclosure serves everyone because we are not alone in issues that come with marriage.)

READ Matthew 7:3-5

- A. From Jesus's word picture, what might be some examples of the "Log" in our eye when we are in conflict with each other?

- B. How does this connect or relate to the EAR Conflict Resolution Technique?

2. PEACEMAKING COMMITMENTS

Jesus directed us on how to respond to conflict. The order matters. We are called to our own part first. Ken Sande says it this way in his book *The Peacemaker*: Get the log out of your own eye first. The most important aspect of getting the log out of your own eye is to go beyond the confession of wrong behavior and face up to the root cause of that behavior. The Seven A's of Confession can help you articulate those root issues and own how you've impacted someone else.

- I. Address everyone involved (All those whom you affected.)
- II. Avoid “if, but and maybe” (Do not try to excuse your wrongs.)
- III. Admit specifically (Both attitudes and actions.)
- IV. Acknowledge the hurt (Express sorrow for hurting someone.)
- V. Accept the consequences (Such as making restitution.)
- VI. Alter your behavior (Change your attitudes and actions.)
- VII. Ask for forgiveness (See Matthew 7:3-5; 1 John 1:8-9; Provers 28:13)

COUPLES:

How are you doing with “owning your part first” in conflicts and how might applying these 7 principles help?

DISCUSS AS A GROUP:

Which step of confession is the hardest to execute? Explain.

3. PRAYER *READ Philippians 2:1-9*

GROUP: Spend time thanking God for the complete provision of relational reconciliation Jesus provided.

COUPLES: Spend time asking God to help you give up your personal desires and rights in order to care for the oneness he has called you to in marriage.

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HOW DID YOU DO ON YOUR COMMITMENTS THIS WEEK?

I will pray for you daily this week...

Ask for specific prayer requests.

I will serve you this week...

Ask your mate for input and decide what you will do daily.

I will commit to doing something fun _____ times this week...

Discuss what you like doing and can practically do this week.

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Week Three: Beliefs Inform Behavior

THE BIG IDEA

Belief Examination Comes Before Behavior Modification

We often want to fix what we don't like about marriage with a behavioral action plan. We like "7 steps to a better marriage..." or a "30 day marriage challenge" that will empower us to make our marriage what we want it to be. The biggest issue may be a desire for something good we want in marriage that becomes a demand. The problem may be a subtle belief that marriage is supposed to serve me and what I want in life, instead of what God's Word says. Conflicts reveal beliefs and motivations of the heart.

BREAKING THE ICE

Secular psychologist John Gottman created a marriage lab where he studied couples for 20 years and his research conclusions have some value. One of the myths he discredits is: "Conflict is bad." From Gottman's research, one of the four most damaging signs a marriage is in trouble is not the presence of conflict but the absence of it. Couples who are apathetic toward each other are in a very disconnected marriage.

Watch this short video to start the conversation:
<https://vimeo.com/66753575>

1. BELIEF EXAMINATION: *READ James 4:1-3*

GROUP:

- A. What is the source of conflict in relationships according to this passage?
- B. How does knowing the sinful nature of your heart serve your goal to live in what God designed for marriage?

COUPLES:

- A. Examine a recent conflict or disagreement, what did you fight about? What resulted from the conflict?
- B. How would you handle that conflict differently today?

2. EXPOSING IDOLATRY:

Ken Sande, in his book *The Peacemaker*, gives a tool that allows us to examine our response to conflict that often reveals our pursuit of idols in our lives. The tool helps us re-center our focus on God's design for oneness in marriage when conflicts will trigger our self-centered desires.

The Progression of an Idol is a depiction of a downward destructive and divisive spiral in a relational conflict that progresses as we behave with resolve to get what we want. The progression is as follows:¹

- I. **I Desire-** Conflict always begins with some kind of desire. Some desires are inherently wrong, such as vengeance, lust, or greed. But many desires are not wrong in and of themselves. But functional versus dysfunctional behavior is determined by a person's response to someone who blocks a desired goal.
- II. **I Demand-** Unmet desires have the potential of working themselves deeper and deeper into our hearts. This is especially true when we come to see a desire as something we need or deserve, and therefore must have in order to be happy or fulfilled. There are many ways to justify or legitimize a desire. When we see our object of desire as being essential to our fulfillment and well-being, it moves from being a desire to a demand. Ask: Is there something I desire so much that I am willing to disappoint or hurt others in order to have it?
- III. **I Judge-** When a demanding attitude doesn't get us what we want we may result to justifying ourselves as right and calling our spouse wrong. Author Dave Powlison writes: "We judge others—criticize, nit-pick, nag, attack, condemn—because we literally play God. This is heinous...When you and I fight, our minds become filled with accusations: your wrongs and my rights preoccupy me. We play the self-righteous judge in the mini-kingdoms we establish."
- IV. **I Punish-** Idols always demand sacrifices. When others fail to satisfy our demands and expectations, our idols demand that they should suffer. Whether deliberately or unconsciously, we will find ways to hurt or punish people so they will give in to our desires. This punishment can take many forms. It can be aggressive or passive aggressive. As we grow in faith and awareness of our sin, most of us recognize and reject overt and obviously sinful means of punishing others. But our idols do not give up their influence easily, and they often lead us to develop more subtle means of punishing those who do not serve them

COUPLES:

- A. How does this idol progression reveal patterns in your conflict with each other?

GROUP:

- A. How does this admitting patterns of idol progression in your relationship benefit your marriage and your relationship with God?

¹ Adapted from *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande

3. PRAYER: *For this section, break out into couples for a time of prayer.*

COUPLES:

- Spend time praying for courage to face hurtful attitudes and actions that conflicts expose in your relationship.
- If any hurtful attitudes and actions have been identified tonight confess them to God and each other.
- Spend time thanking God for things about your mate that you appreciate.

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