

# MARRIAGE CIRCLES WORKBOOK

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*This workbook and curriculum was first produced in 2019 by Marriage Ministry of Hope Community Church. The concept of “Marriage Circles” derives from the re|engage curriculum by Watermark Church in Dallas, Texas. For best practices on how to use this workbook in a variety of settings and permission to reproduce these materials, please email [marriage@gethope.net](mailto:marriage@gethope.net).*

Visit [www.gethope.net/reengage](http://www.gethope.net/reengage) to register for the next re|engage class.

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# READ THIS FIRST!



**Perhaps you're holding this workbook in the hopes of "fixing" your spouse. You will be disappointed.** In order to participate in Marriage Circles, you are first required to draw a metaphorical circle around yourself. For the remainder of this study, you are agreeing to work only on the person inside the circle! But what about your spouse's issues? What about all of his or her faults? In Marriage Circles, how your spouse is doing inside his or her circle is none of your business! That might sound harsh, but that is the basic premise this study operates on. The truth is, you can't change anyone other than yourself anyway. So for now, leave your spouse's circle up to God. Your job is to work on your own circle. Period. Trust me. There's plenty of work to be done right there. Sooner or later in this study, you will be tempted to blame or complain about your spouse. Perhaps you'll want to compare your circle to his or hers. Be graceful, but gently remind each other often to "stay in your circle." The growth you experience will be worth it. Your marriage, no matter where you are, is worth investing in! You are not alone... and hope and help are available! My prayer for you as you hold this workbook is that you would understand more fully that the only One with a perfect circle is Jesus Christ. He loves you completely and unconditionally. When you trust Jesus, you are fully forgiven and fully accepted even though your circle is a mess! As you turn your attention to Him, you will be freed up to love your spouse out of response to how He loved you first. (1 John 4:7-19)

Dave Lanuti  
Marriage Pastor  
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# What to Expect and How to Grow the Most

**Marriage Circles was designed for married couples to complete in groups with other couples.** It's possible for you to work through the entire workbook with only your spouse, but you will be missing a vital aspect of growing in marriage: community with others. Your struggles are not unique. Sharing and hearing from other couples will encourage both your marriage and theirs! To begin, *find at least one other* couple (no more than 5 couples) who will agree to join you. If you're in a small group that is entirely comprised of married couples, you can start there!

Below is our recommendation for using our curriculum. **Before the scheduled group discussions:**

- Print out **two copies** of the Marriage Circles Workbook. One for you and one for your spouse.
- Spend time on **your own** reading the included Bible verses and jotting down your responses to each discussion question.
- **Schedule a time each week for a 1-on-1 conversation with your spouse to share your written responses before your group meets.** If you aren't having weekly 1-on-1 conversations with your spouse to review your responses, you aren't doing Marriage Circles! Put this on the calendar or it may not happen!
- Use the suggested **"conversations starters" any time** throughout the week to connect meaningfully.
- **Complete the weekly "challenges."** (Spoiler: Some are especially fun!)
- **At your comfort level,** be ready to share about your experience and responses with the group.

**Note:** Marriage Circles is not the place to complain or blame your spouse. **"Stay in your circle!"** Nor is it the place to discuss the intimate details of your sex life. Please exercise caution in your group discussion on the sexual intimacy lesson. Humility and authenticity are good when the goal is mutual encouragement, but don't "overshare." You should never feel pressured to answer any question you're not comfortable talking about in a group setting.

## Session One – Stay in Your Circle

### Key Scripture Passages

#### Matthew 7:3-5

*“3 Why do you see the speck that is in your [spouse]’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your [spouse], ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your [spouse]’s eye..”*  
(note: “spouse” substituted for “brother”)

#### 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

*“4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.”*

### Discussion Questions

1. Who and what have been the primary influences in your life when it comes to your view of marriage?
2. How have these influences made it difficult for you to love your spouse unconditionally, the way God loves you? How have they helped?

#### Read Matthew 7:3-5.

3. *“3 Why do you see the speck that is in your [spouse]’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your [spouse], ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your [spouse]’s eye..”* In Marriage Circles, you are required to draw a circle around yourself and only work on the person inside your circle. How your spouse is doing inside their circle is none of your business! In these verses, Jesus paints a vivid image of a similar idea. In marriage, this most often shows up as blaming and complaining. Why is it so difficult to stay in our circle? What are the things you most often blame and complain about?

4. Why is it that blaming and complaining don't lead to relational growth? What does Jesus suggest to do instead? How might that look in marriage when you're struggling?
5. Share a time when your spouse showed you grace or forgiveness when it was undeserved. How did it make you feel?

### Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

6. *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.”*

Remembering to “stay in your circle,” which of the attributes of love do you personally struggle with the most?

7. Sometimes it's helpful to hear what God's love is NOT. Take a stab at creating the opposite of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. “Ex: Love is impatient...” As you hear the opposite of those verses, what convicts you most, and what practical steps do you think God wants you to take?

### 1-on-1 Conversation Starter

- Schedule a time this week where you can have an uninterrupted conversation with your spouse. With the circle still drawn around yourself, rather than asking “how was your day?”, ask:
  - What was your high and low this week?
  - What practical things can I do this week to help?

### Challenge for the Week

- Pick an attribute of love from 1 Corinthians 13 and ask God to help you love your spouse that way this week. Whether it's patience, kindness or not keeping a record of wrongs – focus on that one area so you can be a better spouse and find practical ways throughout the week to live it out. Share what area you're working on with your spouse. Before the next Marriage Circles meeting, find various opportunities to encourage your spouse's efforts to work on this area and thank him or her for “working on his or her circle.”

## Session Two – Lower Your Expectations

### Key Scripture Passages

#### Proverbs 13:12

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

#### Romans 5:23b-26a

“We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

### Discussion Questions

1. It would be awesome if marriage were easy! The truth is, at one time or another, we all experience disappointments, frustrations, and hurt in marriage. Unmet expectations over time lead to anger. Anger over time leads to bitterness and resentment. Proverbs 13:12 refers to this as a “sick heart”. To what extent are past experiences and disappointments contributing to a “sick heart” today?
2. How often do you think to yourself, “if only he/she would \_\_\_\_\_, then I would \_\_\_\_\_.”? What’s stopping you from “going first” and loving your spouse anyway?
3. According to James 1:19-20, anger does not lead to the righteousness that God desires. How do you typically respond when your expectations go unmet? Anger? Bitterness? Quiet resentment? What is the result of your response? Arguments? Shutting Down? Withholding love/affection?
4. Consider the deepest longings in your life. Consider your innate need for significance, purpose, acceptance, belonging, unconditional love and forgiveness. These needs are spiritual needs that can only be met fully by God. In what ways do you expect your spouse to meet these spiritual needs that he or she is not capable of fully meeting?

5. “The secret to a happy marriage is low expectations.” What do you think of this? Is it true? Or should we have high expectations of our spouse? How should our expectations of our spouse compare with the expectations we should have of God?

6. Here are some sobering truths to consider that impact our marriage expectations:

- We live in a broken, self-seeking world.
- We are selfish people marrying selfish people.
- The Good News is that Jesus didn’t leave us alone in our selfishness “to figure it out” on our own. We don’t have to hide in shame or fight alone for our marriage. Hope is available now.
- A day is coming when Jesus will return to redeem all that is broken and make all things new.

*\* If we believed these truths, how would it impact the way we respond when things don’t go as we expect them to in marriage?*

7. What are some of the areas of your marriage that your expectations do not line up with your spouse’s?

8. What do you think are some best practices to communicating expectations to your spouse in a healthy way?

9. What are some not so healthy practices to communicating expectations?  
Remember to stay in your circle!

### **1-on-1 Conversation Starter**

- Schedule a time this week where you can have an uninterrupted conversation with your spouse.
- Ask your spouse to share something he or she hopes to accomplish this year.

### **Challenge for the Week**

- Together, read Matthew 7:24 and James 1:19-20. In humility, with the circle drawn around yourself ask your spouse to share with you one area in which you are meeting and/or exceeding his or her expectations and one area in which he or she feel sadness, disappointment, frustration or anger. When listening to your spouse, do not defend yourself or rebut, but rather, give thanks for their honesty. Try to meet his or her specific need in a practical way this week.



## Session Three - Communication & Conflict

### Key Scripture

#### Proverbs 18:2

“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”

#### Proverbs 14:29

“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”

#### Ephesians 4:26-27, 29

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil... 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

#### James 1:19-21

“19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

### Discussion Questions

1. There are 4 types of negative communication styles that we often use in marriage:
  - a. **Withdrawal or Shutting Down**- an unwillingness to endure difficult conversations
  - b. **Suspicion**- unfairly assuming the worst of your spouse
  - c. **Escalation**- responding in such a way where the conversation gets increasingly hostile
  - d. **Invalidation**- dismissing or minimizing your spouse’s perspective.Which of the 4 types of negative communication styles are you most often guilty of when conflict arises in your marriage?

2. How does your communication style differ when you speak to your spouse compared to other relationships at home, work and friends? Why is that the case?
  
3. In marriage, we often repeat the same arguments over and over. What are the “common culprits” of conflict and disagreement in your marriage? Household Chores? Expectations? Parenting? Schedules? Sexual Intimacy? Priorities? Or something else?
  
4. Think back as far as you have to... What were the conditions in your life and marriage when your communication was at its best? What did that look like? What changed in you since then? Stay in your circle!
  
5. *With the circle drawn around yourself*, what would need to change today for you to be a better communicator with your spouse?
  
6. *Read Ephesians 4:26-27.* “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity for the devil.” To what extent do you implement this principle in your marriage? What happens over time when you go to bed angry?
  
7. Communication is the *lifeblood* of any relationship, including your relationship with God. In what ways can we communicate with God? How does God most often communicate with you? What connection does communication with God have to your marriage?

### **1-on-1 Conversation Starter**

- Schedule a time this week where you can have an uninterrupted conversation with your spouse. *With the circle still drawn around yourself*, ask your spouse the questions listed below.
  - Practice active listening. When he or she is done talking, reply with “what I hear you saying is . . . How accurate is that? “(and tell them what you heard). See how well you do.
  
- Ask your spouse the following questions:
  1. Where would you like to go on our next vacation?
  2. What is one habit that I can change that would bless you?

3. How do I display negative communication patterns? *Don't become defensive, but try to re-state your understanding of what he or she shared and be thankful for the insights.*

### **Challenge for the Week**

- Continue to practice active listening in every day, unscheduled conversation this week. When you get home, at meals, before going to bed, etc.
- Some example questions to ask your spouse so you can practice listening are: What did you think of Marriage Circles this week? What's coming up this week that you're worried/anxious about? What's coming up that you're excited about?
- **Extra credit:** Call your spouse while you're apart just to say you're thinking of him or her.
- **Extra extra credit:** Before bed sometime this week, read 1 Corinthians 13:113 together out loud. Then, even if it's not pretty or fancy, hold hands and briefly pray together. Ask God to bless your marriage and help you with communication.

## Session Four – Temptation and Guardrails

### Key Scripture

#### 1 Peter 5:8-10

*“8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”*

#### Ephesians 5:33

*“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”*

### Discussion Questions

1. Explain what positive and negative thoughts or emotions come to mind when you consider the word *commitment*. What are the benefits? What are the costs?
2. Is it a sin to be tempted? Explain the difference and connection between temptation and sin.
3. No one is above temptation, and no one has a temptation-proof marriage. Sometimes, we are guilty of leaving “doors to temptation” open in our marriage. What “doors” to temptation have you left cracked open that could one day compromise your commitment to your spouse?
4. Strong, lasting marriages have strong guardrails in place. What are some guardrails you’ve heard other couples have in their marriages? What do you think of those guardrails?
5. What guardrails should you install to safeguard your marriage? What fears are stopping you from installing them today?

6. Ask your partner the following questions:

- What things do I do to make it easier for you to love me and enjoy being my spouse?
- What things do I do to make it harder? Do not interrupt your spouse when he or she is sharing this. *Do not defend yourself. Instead, thank him or her for sharing and commit to working on those areas. If an apology is needed, offer one and ask for forgiveness.*

### 1-on-1 Conversation Starter

- Schedule a time this week where you can have an uninterrupted conversation with your spouse to continue the conversation from this week's questions. *With the circle still drawn around yourself:*
  - Men, ask your wife to share three ways you could better love her.
  - Ladies, ask your husband to share three ways you could better respect him.
- *Do not defend yourself, but rather restate what you heard to check understanding, then thank him or her for sharing.*
  - What open doors to temptations exist in our marriage that we weren't comfortable sharing at Marriage Circles? What guardrails do we need to add to safeguard and nurture our marriage? Who can you turn to for help and accountability?

### Challenge for the Week

- Pray for your marriage. Focus specifically on two things: **1) that you would give back control of your marriage to God, and 2) for God's forgiveness and healing in any specific areas of brokenness in your marriage.**
- Considering the specific areas of consistent struggle and temptation in your marriage, create a list entitled, "Our Marriage Guardrails."

## Session Five – Take Off Your Crown

### Key Scripture Passages

#### Philippians 2:1-8

“1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

#### Proverbs 11:2

“2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.”

### Discussion Questions

1. What is a good definition for *humility*? What is it? And what is it NOT?
2. Every husband and wife desires to wear the metaphorical crown in marriage. The problem is, both husband and wife are wearing their own crown! We all want our way, in our timing. We all think our way is right and we get frustrated when our way doesn't happen. Consider the moments when you are “wearing the crown” in marriage. What most often gets in the way of you showing humility to your spouse? Why is it often difficult to show humility to the ones you love most?
3. Take a moment to write down two or three moments when your spouse chose humility by putting your needs above his or her own. *As you are comfortable, share one of these moments with your Marriage Circles group.*
4. According to author Gary Chapman, there are 5 Love Languages<sup>1</sup>.

[5lovelanguages.com](http://5lovelanguages.com)

Do you know what your top 2 love languages are? Do you know your spouse's? How well do you communicate expectations regarding these love languages?

- a. **Quality Time**
- b. **Acts of Service**
- c. **Gifts**
- d. **Physical Touch**
- e. **Words of Affirmation**

- 5. What are the limiting factors and circumstances to you loving your spouse in this or her preferred love language?
  
- 6. Look again at Philippians 2:1-8. What are some of the ways Jesus put you first? Be specific. Make this list as long as you can.

### 1-on-1 Conversation Starter

- Find a time this week to share other “memories” you wrote down on how your spouse chose humility and put you first. *Thank your spouse... This is not an opportunity to blame or complain about current circumstances!*
  
- Finish this sentence without interruption:  
“I feel loved by you when \_\_\_\_\_”

### Challenge for the Week

- After hearing the list of humble things that you did that left a positive impact on your spouse, and how your spouse feels “loved by you when \_\_\_\_\_” reflect on Philippians 2:1-8 and look for opportunities to put him or her first (without having to be told what to do!) Consider his or her love languages when doing this. Be creative! (It’s like “Secret Santa”)  
*Here are a few ideas: Give a specific compliment, avoid complaining, write them a love note or text, give a meaningful gift, plan a date night, give positive physical touch/cuddling/kissing/massage etc., take care of a household chore you normally don't do, brag on each other in front of others, complete a fun project together, surprise him or her with a meaningful wrapped gift.*

## Session Six – When Things Turn Toxic

### Key Scripture Passages

#### Proverbs 18:21

“21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

#### Ephesians 4:29-32

“29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

#### James 3:5b-8

“How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

### Discussion Questions

1. We have all been guilty of dishonoring our spouse with our words. *Without pointing the finger at your spouse*, what are the times/circumstances in your marriage when you are most often guilty of this?
2. Stress is a harmful thing to relationships. We are more likely to dishonor our spouses in times of stress. What are some of the biggest stressors in your life currently that might be leading to negative communication patterns with your spouse? What practical steps could you take this week to relieve those stressors?
3. Modern secular research shows a direct correlation between the positive/negative ratio of communication and the overall stability of marriage. The healthiest and



most stable marriages display 5:1 positive to negative communication! <sup>1</sup>What is your ratio toward your spouse? Why is it difficult to give your spouse more praise?

4. If there was ever a person we don't deserve to receive honor from, it's Jesus. How does Jesus honor us even though we don't deserve it?
  
5. Can you remember a time when your spouse complimented or praised you in front of others? What did he or she say and how did it make you feel? *Can't come up with anything? See the next question.*
  
6. No matter what your answer was to the previous question, take a couple minutes to write down three qualities about your spouse that made you fall in love with him or her. This is an opportunity to practice what you're learning. *Share one of these qualities about your spouse to your Marriage Circles group.*

### **1-on-1 Conversation Starter**

- Add to the list you of qualities that made you fall in love with your spouse. Include ways you've seen him or her grow since the day you met. Write them down... make the list as long as you can! Find a distraction free time this week to exchange these lists with each other.

### **Challenge for the Week**

- Confess to your spouse that you have not been as honoring as you could be with your words. Don't make any excuse as you confess this. And don't accept, "That's OK" as a response. It isn't OK! Rather, tell your spouse how you plan to change moving forward and in humility, ask, "do you forgive me?"
- Endeavor to go the entire week saying nothing negative about your spouse. If (when) you mess up, confess your shortcoming to God, accept His grace, and ask Him to strengthen you as you try again.

**Extra Credit:** At some point this week, brag on your spouse in front of others. (i.e., co-worker, waiter, your children, small group, etc.)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-magic-ratio-the-key-to-relationship-satisfaction/>

## Session Seven – Forgiveness

### Key Scripture Passages

#### Matthew 18:21-22

“21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

#### Psalm 103:8-12

“8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

#### Matthew 6:9-14

9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

### Discussion Questions

1. Which is more difficult for you? Asking for forgiveness or receiving forgiveness? What makes it a challenge for you?
2. What is it about you that might make it difficult for your spouse to ask for forgiveness from you? Ask your spouse for insight on this and stay in your circle!
3. Do you believe it's possible to “forgive and forget?” How could forgiving and remembering help you move toward greater future oneness?

4. Once you forgive your spouse for an offense, the debt has been canceled—they owe you nothing! Even though it may not be possible to forget the offense, to what extent are you guilty of continuing to bring up forgiven offenses? Do you keep a mental scorecard that you remind your spouse of? How could you grow in this area?
  
5. What offenses against each other have you not fully dealt with and offered or received forgiveness?
  
6. What is the difference between saying, “I’m sorry” and asking, “Will you forgive me?” In your marriage are the words “will you forgive me” spoken often? Why or why not?
  
7. Our ability to extend forgiveness to our spouse is directly related to our ability to understand and receive God’s forgiveness for our own sin. Our relationship with God would not be possible without forgiveness of our sin. What keeps you from **1) embracing God’s forgiveness** and **2) offering forgiveness to your spouse more fully?** (e.g. Lack of humility? Shame or sense of inadequacy? Desire to be right? Unwillingness to go first in apologizing?)

### 1-on-1 Conversation Starter

- Ask each other to fill in this prompt: I’d finally be happy if \_\_\_\_\_. Ask each other how you would complete that sentence. Then discuss this idea: The only thing that would make us truly happy is that we are **forgiven** and Jesus made a way for us to continue in that forgiveness. Do you disagree with this statement? Does this change your previous response?

### Challenge for the Week

- On your own, take a walk outside in nature where you can gain a sense of the bigness of God and the smallness of you. Confess any shortcoming and failure to God and allow Him to speak to your heart in the quiet of nature. Then share your experience with your spouse.
- Agree on an appropriate time and place where you address unforgiven offenses against each other. Go into this with an attitude of offering forgiveness based on your undeserved forgiveness from God. This is not a place to defend yourself or win an argument. This is a place for reconciliation—canceling old debts and getting on the same team again.

## Session Eight - More Than Sex<sup>2</sup>

### Key Scripture

#### Genesis 2:24-25

“24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

#### 1 Corinthians 7:2-5

“2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

#### 1 Corinthians 13:5

“[Love] does not insist on its own way...”

### Discussion Questions

1. Sex is a *part* of intimacy in marriage. However, intimacy is more than *just* sex. What is a more complete definition of intimacy?
2. How would you describe your emotional intimacy with your spouse?
3. How would you describe your spiritual intimacy with your spouse? What connection is there to spiritual intimacy and sex?

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<sup>2</sup> See brief note at the bottom of page 4 regarding healthy discussions for this topic.

4. In what ways/shared activities (think *beyond* sex here!) do you feel most connected to your spouse? When do you laugh together the most? What are the times in your marriage when you're having the most fun?
  
5. In most marriages, sex drives do not line up. It is not a sin to have a high sex drive and it is not a sin to have a low sex drive. It's how we behave that may cause us to sin against our spouses. *Drawing the circle around yourself*, how do you most often respond when your expectations of sex are not met?
  
6. What would be a healthy way to communicate your expectations with your spouse when it comes to sex? (refer to both 1 Corinthians 7:2-5 and 1 Corinthians 13:5). Is there a chance you're *over-emphasizing* sex or *underemphasizing* it?
  
7. With the "*circle around yourself*", in what ways are you neglecting emotional and spiritual intimacy with your spouse that is leading to a lack of physical intimacy? How are you doing with each of the following:
  - a. Too much time/energy at work
  - b. Too much time/energy with kids
  - c. Too much time/energy with hobbies/sports
  - d. Too much time/energy in front of a phone/computer/tv
  - e. Too much time/energy with other friends
  
8. What are some practical suggestions for how you can move toward emotional and spiritual intimacy in light of the list from Question 7?
  
9. There is incredible freedom to enjoy physical intimacy exclusively with your spouse. God wants you to enjoy amazing sex with your spouse! However, as soon as anyone else is introduced visually (including pornography), physically (affair), emotionally (not all affairs are physical), or mentally (fantasizing of others sexually), that intimacy is destroyed. If any of these intimacy killers exist in your marriage, where can you turn for help?

## 1-on-1 Conversation Starter

Find a time this week to ask your spouse the following questions. Do not make demands or assign blame (see 1 Corinthians 13:5), but rather seek to *understand* your spouse and put his or her needs before your own.

1. How did you feel loved by me this past week?
2. What can I do to deepen our emotional intimacy?
3. What next step can we take to deepen our spiritual intimacy?
4. In what ways could I enhance our physical intimacy?

## Challenge for the Week

- Ask your spouse which area is the most difficult for the two of you to experience closeness: relational, spiritual or sexual? Without arguing, defending yourself, or commenting on his or her response, ask them what they feel might be a hurdle in this particular area of closeness. Seek to understand, not to “win an argument”. Be mindful that age and health may be factors!
  - What next steps do you think God is nudging you to take so you can address this issue and enhance your intimacy together?
- **“Mandatory” assignment #1:** Plan a date where you can build emotional intimacy by: 1. Laughing together 2. Affirming each other. Ex: You are great at \_\_\_\_\_. I appreciate how you \_\_\_\_\_.
- **“Mandatory” assignment #2:** Agree to circle a day on the calendar where you can both look forward to sex! Agree in *advance* how you will avoid the “normal routine.” Leading up to that day, build anticipation and emotional and spiritual intimacy by flirting, laughing together, reading God’s word together, praying together and serving each other in practical ways. Have fun!

# MARRIAGE CIRCLES

## Session Nine - Move Toward Oneness

### Key Scripture Passage

#### John 17:21-23

“...That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

#### Ephesians 4:1-3

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

### Discussion Questions

1. How is your marriage different from your parents' marriage? How have some of those habits (good or bad) that you grew up with affected your marriage?
2. Make an honest assessment of the words below as priorities in your life. Rank them 1-9 (feel free to add to this if priorities are missing). Avoid the temptation to give the “churchy answer.” Consider the time you spend, the money you spend, and the energy you spend when ranking these. Also consider the “gap” that exists between each (e.g. kids are far more important than hobbies)
  - a. Work, Spouse, Friends, Recreation, Kids, God, Hobbies, Exercise, Education. Share your list to the group.

3. As a group, discuss what a healthy prioritized list would be and the healthy “gaps” between each. *Leave room for humble disagreement.*
  
4. *With the Circle Around Yourself*, what practical things would need to change in your life and marriage for you to move toward the *healthy* priority list?
  
5. Generally speaking, is it easier for you to help your spouse or to let them help you? Why?
  
6. Our conversations with our spouse rarely go beyond our work and kids. How well do you know your spouse’s biggest dreams and greatest fears for the next few years? What dreams and fears have you never communicated to your spouse?
  
7. Think ahead 10 years from now. How do you want your marriage to be described?
  
8. What’s the most important next step *you* need to take as a spouse in order to move toward the marriage you described in previous question?

### **1-on-1 Conversation Starter**

- Remind each other of your response to how you want your marriage to be described in 10 years.
  - *Without blaming, complaining, or defending yourself*, ask your spouse what specific things you can do to move toward making that a reality?

### **Challenge for the Week**

- Identify one thing you have prioritized above God and your spouse at times (e.g. job, kids, parents, friends, hobbies). Share that with your spouse and confess this to God and your spouse.



**Extra Credit:** As you wrap up Marriage Circles, plan a time to celebrate this small, but significant accomplishment. Together, plan a fun date night out (or in)!

## Optional Session – Marriage > Parenting

### Key Scripture Passage

#### Deuteronomy 6:4-8

“4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”

#### Colossians 3:12-15

“12 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

#### Colossians 3:18-21

“18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”

### Discussion Questions

1. Parenting styles vary greatly, and even siblings vary greatly! There’s no single “correct” way to discipline all children perfectly. However, conflict arises when you and your spouse are not on the same page with parenting and disciplining your children. How does your parenting style differ from your spouse’s? How has that caused tension in your family?

2. Rather than taking a reactionary approach to resolving these parenting differences as they arise in real-time, how could you and your spouse take a more proactive approach to achieve greater unity?
3. Many parents talk about prioritizing their marriage over their children. Few successfully pull this off. To what extent are your children's schedules and need for attention hijacking the intimacy in your marriage?
4. What practical tips from your own marriage could you share with the group that would encourage others to prioritize their marriage?
5. Dating your spouse when there are small children in the family is a challenge! Childcare can be expensive. What creative ideas can you come up with as a group in order to find childcare so you can date your spouse again?
6. Take another quick look at Deuteronomy 6:4-8. Parenting is your primary opportunity for discipleship. How can you "redeem" the normal routines of daily life to teach your children about God's love for them at various ages/stages of childhood?
7. As a group, come up with at least 5 "better" questions than "how was school today?" so you can connect with your child? *Example: "What did you do today that I would be proud of?"*
8. Part of our mission statement is to *love people where they are*. As parents, how can you make an effort to "enter into your kids' world" in their specific age and phase of life?
9. If you haven't figured it out already, you can't do this marriage or parenting thing on your own! Your children need other influences along

with yours as they continue to grow. Hope challenges you to find 5:1. Five adults that are also a part of discipling your children. How many adult role-models do your children have regularly impacting their lives? Who are they? Don't have 5? Who could you ask? (Who would your children ask?)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### **1-on-1 Conversation Starter**

- Ask your spouse to share ways that you could be more unified as parents. What practical change could you make this week to re-prioritize your marriage over the kids' schedules.
  - *Without blaming, complaining, or defending yourself*, ask your spouse what specific things you can do to move toward making that a reality?

### **Challenge for the Week**

- Find a 1-on-1 time with each of your children where you can “enter into their world.” (Do/Talk about the things they enjoy). If they're old enough, ask them how you're doing as a parent. Listen without defending yourself and thank them for their honesty and share how you will make an effort to improve. Ask them who are the 5 adults in their life that they know personally and admire.

# THIS WAS GREAT...BUT NOW WHAT?

- **Continue Meeting.** Your Marriage Circles Group doesn't have to stop meeting!
  - Consider creating a new Small Group together or joining an existing one with other couples from your Marriage Circles group. Go to [www.gethope.net/smallgroups](http://www.gethope.net/smallgroups) for info
  - Other great studies available for free on Right Now Media <https://gethope.net/rightnow-media/>
- **Sign up for the next re|engage class.** Dive deeper in a 9-week study that has transformed hundreds of marriages at Hope. Spaces limited. [www.gethope.net/reengage](http://www.gethope.net/reengage)
- **Join our team of marriage mentors.** If you have a growing relationship with Jesus and a growing marriage, your next step may be to serve in Marriage Ministry at Hope. Email us to find out more.
- **New Relationship with Jesus?** If you began a relationship with Jesus Christ for the first time, we want to celebrate that with you and encourage you to grow in that relationship. Email us.
- **Share your story.** How has Marriage Circles impacted your marriage? We love hearing what God has done in others' lives. Sharing your story helps ensure we continue to offer more opportunities like this to others.

Email us: [marriage@gethope.net](mailto:marriage@gethope.net)

Website: [gethope.net/marriage](http://gethope.net/marriage)

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