## GRACE TOGETHER

### 6-SESSION LEADERS GUIDE

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## Welcome

Welcome to the Grace Together Workshop!

This 6 hour workshop is unique in marriage ministries. We have crafted a program with several important components we think it's important for leaders to understand.

- 1. The workshop is based on the concept of Christian discipleship through marriage relationship. The marriage relationship is a primary place for people to come face to face with themselves, their pain, their defenses, and their character flaws. This provides an opportunity to live in grace- an unmerited gift of care and love- between spouses. The workshop creates an opportunity for small groups of couples to care for each other in a "Grace Together" under the foundation of grace received from Christ.
- 2. The workshop is focused on Colossians 3 as the primary scriptural text. This text is rich with instruction from Paul to the church in Colossus on how to show love, care, compassion, forgiveness, and grace to each other as a church community. Christian marriages are a small Christian community of 2 people so Colossians 3 (and all of scripture) that instructs on relationships is helpful for us. We rely on this Scripture as a reference point for our instruction.
- 3. This workshop was created by two Christian psychologists who use their expertise in marriage therapy, their collective 50 years of professional experience, and the latest research on marriage, small group efficacy, and human behavior to craft a very special workshop. While we lead with Christian ministry in this workshop, it is undergirded with the latest brain science and research on couple relationships. Informed by Christian teaching and our best observations of human behavior, we offer a high quality intervention in ministry for couples in your church and community. We have even done direct research on this workshop and found it to produce change both relationally and spiritually in couples (ask us for the article if interested in the science).

### **Your Leaders**

Jim and Jen are co-chairs of the endowed chair of Christian Integration at Regent University and co-directors of the Charis Institute.

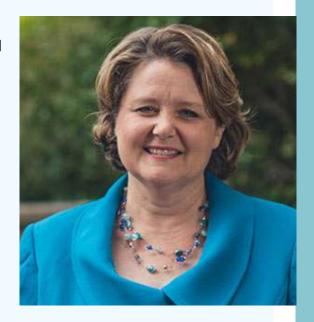


#### Dr. Jim Sells

Dr. James Sells, a licensed psychologist, holds more than two decades of training and practice in the fields of education, counseling, and psychology. His interests include marital and family therapy, supervision/professional identity formation, international applications of counseling, and forgiveness/reconciliation. As a scholar, researcher, and therapist, he strives to consider the great influences of culture and individual need as he attends to the grand theme of reconciliation and redemption. Sells is passionate about helping the Church increase its impact in response to its mission to "the least of these ..." Matthew 25:45.

#### **Dr Jennifer Ripley**

Dr. Jennifer Ripley has studied marriage and family structures for more than 25 years, with particular interest in the effects of hope and grace on marital reconciliation and resilience. She directs the work of The Hope Couples Project and trains emerging professional therapists in using this hopefocused approach. Additionally, Ripley has written a book, numerous articles and professional scientific presentations on the experiences of the couples she and her team have served – more than 500 couples and counting!



Are Jen & Jim a couple? No. People often ask us about our relationship- we are good friends, colleagues as professors at Regent University, and siblings in Christ. Jim is married for over 25 years to his wife Heather, and Jen is married also over 25 years to her husband, Jeff.

## **Workshop Goals**

#### **Goals:**

- 1. Relationship bonding for couples with each other and with other couples
- 2. Introduce basic concepts for group study
- 3. Root concepts in Scripture and Christian character as discipleship

#### **Take-Aways:**

- 1. New friends between couples
- 2. Inspiration to use character strengths in marriage as part of Christian discipleship
- 3. Hope that struggles and pain can lead to growth

#### **Note to Leaders:**

As you are making your way through the curriculum, you may see some text labeled "Note to leaders." These notes are what we will use to explain the reasoning behind a decision that we made in creating the curriculum. We understand that each church environment is different, and that following all of our directions to a T may not create the most effective session for your personal community. We have included these explanations of our reasoning because we want you to know which parts of the curriculum are important. We hope that this information will help allow you to adjust the curriculum as needed while maintaining the effectiveness of the event itself.

#### **Timing**

There are 6 sessions of about one hour each, longer if your group likes to discuss things longer. If you are doing this workshop as a "retreat" or one-day workshop you will need to watch your timing closely. If you are doing this workshop as a 6-week class or small group you will need to accommodate the needs of the group in terms of other commitments and childcare.

#### **Breaks**

If you are doing a retreat or whole-group workshop, you can play a funny videos during the break. We like to play clips from the Princess Bride found on Youtube then turn off the videos when ready to start up again. This naturally draws attention and brings everyone together again.

## Set Up

You will want to set up the room you are in to be comfortable for small groups of couples to have good conversation. Things that help foster good group conversation include.

- 1. If you are doing this in a church/ gym/ large community room with breakout groups then we recommend round tables with about 4 couples per table, no more than 6 couples or conversation won't flow. If you have to use rectangle tables then keep the groups smaller with 3-4 couples so they can see/hear each other well. Or consider no table for group discussion, and having groups form a circle with their chairs.
- 2. Set up tables to be welcoming in the tradition of your church community.
- 3. If you are doing this as a small group in a home then forming a circle with couches & chairs where a screen (for the videos) can be seen but isn't the focal point. It promotes conversation if people are primarily looking at each other in the circle, but can also see the screen.
- 4. Put some or all snacks on the tables/ on coffee table in a home-- if you can which encourages everyone to stay in their group during breaks to enjoy snacks & conversation together.
- 5. Thoughtfully select host couples for each group from the congregation prior to the event and ensure they are oriented to the curriculum. Host couples should be hospitable, easy to talk with, and likeable. If they are good at leading discussions that is ideal. Leaders who are used to lecturing, or those that "hog the floor" and want everyone to listen to them, aren't ideal for this type of curriculum.

## **Supplies**

You will need a way for the group to see and hear a video recording.

Photocopies of the participant guide (1 per person), pens for notetaking.

Tables and chairs around a room, or chairs in a circle in a home-type setting. A large piece of paper for each group or butcher paper on tables (for Session 4). Marker for each person. Items for a minute-to-win-it game (Session 5). Some small prizes for winners of game (Session 5).1 red rose per person (Session 6). Hospitality items like snacks, coffee/drinks, and a meal if desired.

# Session One: The Us: Who are We as a Couple and Why are We Here?

First Video (full group; 12 minutes)

Dr Sells and Ripley introduce why this workshop is good for couples, and introduce a couple who will demonstrate concepts through the workshop for us.

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Marriage is where two individuals form an \_\_\_\_\_\_. (us)

How many times in Javier and Gina's "rule of life" do they use the words "we", "our", or "us"? \_\_\_\_\_\_. (23 times)

Javier and Gina's Rule of Life

We will commit to seeking God's Kingdom first in all that we are and do. Our home will be a place where family, friends and guests find joy, comfort, peace and happiness. We will exercise wisdom in what we choose to eat, read and do in our home. We will learn to love another as we develop our own talents. We will exercise initiative in accomplishing our life's goals. We will act on situations as opportunities, rather than to be acted upon. We will always try to keep ourselves free from addictive and destructive habits. We will develop habits that free us from old labels and limits and expand our capabilities and choices. Our money will be our servant, not our master. Our wants will be subject to our needs and means. We will honor God and choose to obey him every day of our lives.

### **Discussion #1**

(Small group; approximately 25 minutes)

**Note to Leaders:** For each session, discuss the video notes and take -ways from the video before diving into the discussion questions/activity

Lead group through questions with goal to make them thing about gifting/grace in marriage

- 1. Everyone introduce names and how did you meet and marry?
- 2. Each individual uses the PERCIP questionnaire in their participant manual to pick one or two traits from a list of relationship virtue character traits that they perceive as their partner's best traits. Show their partner which ones they picked.
- 3. Share with the group, what is your partner's #1 positive character trait?
- 4. How has that trait been a gift to you in your family life? Could appear in marriage, kids, caring for elderly parents, or anything other current life circumstances.

#### Note to leaders:

Why is everyone sitting in groups? Research has shown that the most change in relationships comes from small group, peer discussions rather than listening to one person talk at the front of the room. Throughout the event/group, it was our intention to foster a small-group setting within each seating group. This is why there are so many small group discussions, activities, and games throughout the workshop. Additionally, it is smart to sit people in groups with similar after-event availability, in the efforts to begin bonding among couples who could later form the small groups for the 8-week curriculum. While we understand that each church might go about this in different ways, the group setting is essential to an effective event. It can be tempting to spend a lot of time talking up front, but research has shown again and again that the change will come from members being in groups talking to each other.

#### My partner is:

- 1. Wise. has been someone I turn to for wise help
- 2. Courageous. does not shrink away from relationship fears
- 3. Persevering. will persevere in tough times
- 4. Honest, is honest and sincere
- 5. Authentic. is warm and genuine
- 6. Kind. Does kind and compassionate things for me
- 7. Fair. Always does her/his share
- 8. Forgiving. is easily able to forgive me
- 9. Humble. is a humble person, not self-seeking
- 10. Thoughtful. is careful and thoughtful in what is said or done in our relationship
- 11. Self-controlled. is able to remain cool under pressure and regulate impulses or emotions
- 12. Grateful. expresses gratitude toward me for how I contribute to the relationship
- 13. Hopeful. is hopeful and expects the best
- 14. Humor. has a great sense of humor and is playful
- 15. Insightful. knows what makes me tick, is aware of what is going on in my emotions and mind
- 16. Protective. protects me, always makes me feel safe
- 17. Companion. makes me feel like I am never truly alone
- 18. Intimate. is someone who makes our sexual experiences positive for me
- 19. Committed. never waivers in commitment to our relationship and me
- 20. Godly. holds to a good set of spiritual beliefs

Or Something else:

## Session Two: Christian Vision of Marriage

Play Session 2 Video (full group; 10 min)

Dr. Ripley and Dr. Sells describe the main concept of an "Us" as a couple for Session 2, introduce Colossians as our scripture source and set the tone for the workshop.

#### Video #2 Notes

When we marry we are no longer two individuals but an (Us)
C.S. Lewis wrote death itself will start to work (backwards)
Of the things Dr. Jen listed as real world imperfections. Which one do you mos resonate with today? (laundry, work stress, kids, home improvement, etc.)
If a husband relinquishes himself for the other, and the wife relinquishes herself for the other, then both are invested in (caring for the other)
Set aside a "me first" and focus on the (Us)
Humility is most evident through the mindset of we can (surrender)
Are you willing to see what God will do if you put your down your? (self)
Other Notes:

### **Discussion #2**

(Small Group; Approximately 25 minutes)

Turn to Colossians 3:1-4 and read it together.

(NIV version) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

- 1. Dr. Sells states that our identity is now in Christ, and this is similar to how our identity after being married is being a wife/husband. We are a new "us." How is being an "us" as a couple similar to how the Trinity (GodJesus-Holy Spirit) is an "us"?
- 2. "For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ..." says verse 3. What things have you given up in your life in your decision to follow Christ?
- 3. Similarly, marriage requires couples to give up self-focused things for the sake of the marriage/ family. What things do you try to do to build up your relationship/family even though it's not easy for you as an individual?
- 4. Think of all the relationship-type roles that you play in your life (i.e., spouse, son/daughter, sibling, parent, church member, employee). How should a Christian try and set your mind on "things above" in those relationships? To be more Christ-like in how Christians relate to others in those roles?
- 5. Turn to your spouse right now (if spouse isn't there, consider writing down a couple things to say later on) and state how you enjoy being part of the mysterious two-in-one "us" that is your relationship. If you want to improve your relationship, tell your spouse your intent to do that.

Leaders: End the group praying for each couple.

#### Note to leader:

You will notice in session 2 there are a couple of questions relevant to experience of being a Christian, or Christian teaching on the Trinity. Be sensitive to any members who might not be Christians, or are not mature in their faith, and not require everyone to respond to all discussion questions. This workshop can be a blessing and draw people towards maturity or believing in Christ if it's inviting and hospitable to everyone. Judgmental attitudes about Christianity are usually perceived as hurtful by those who don't yet believe or are immature in faith.

### Session Three: PAIN

Large Group or Retreat-style Scramble Activity (for large workshop format; 5 minutes)

**Large Group Leader:** How long have you been married? We are going to do a little "get to know someone new activity." If you have been married between 0 and 5 years, go to X spot. 5-10 years should go to X spot, 11-20 years X spot, 21-30 years X spot, and X spot for 31 and up. Once you are there, find a couple that has been married for the same among of time as you (or as close as you can), and introduce each other's top character traits from Session 1 in your workbook. When you are done, go back to your table. Go.

Your organization may want to give out badges or ribbons or stickers for nametags or similar indicators of what "character club" the person belongs to. Or you could have them write their top character trait on their nametag.

**Large Group Leader:** How many couples have the same top trait? How many have different top traits?

**Small Group Adjustment:** If you are doing this is a small group context you might have the group order themselves in length of marriage and take a group picture together. Then talk about how many couples have the same or different top character traits.

**Online small group adjustment:** You might consider taking a screenshot of everyone on the screen (or multiple screens if needed) and share the screenshot with the group. Ask permission before taking the screenshot. Encourage people to put the picture someplace on their phone/devices and use it to remember to pray for each other throughout the week.

You might note how partners rarely end up with the same top trait- God loves diversity. The "We" of each couple is unique, with the gifts each partner brings to their family.

#### **Note to Leader:**

Why the sudden game in the middle of a marriage retreat/workshop? One of the most important parts of this event is to create a bond between couples in your church. Feel free to switch around the kind of game that is being played, as long as the goal is maintained. The goal of this activity was to start some discussion and interaction between the groups while reminding couples of positive traits that each individual has.

### **Session Three: Pain**

#### **Play Session 3 Video**

(full group; 24 minutes)

In this video Drs .Sells & Ripley explain how pain is part of life together as a couple. People respond to pain in ways that will defend them against the experience of pain. But our defenses can sometimes actually be painful to our spouse, creating a feedback loop.

Scripture: Colossians 3:5-10 (NIV)

Other Notes:

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.[b] 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

The (limbic) system in our brains takes over when in pain.
The presence of people's(defenses) becomes(offensive) to us.
Stanley had to get along with his (boss) and (wife) at the same time
Imani believed she is all (alone)
What happens to when in pain. (Us)

### **Session Three: Pain**

Scripture: Colossians 3:5-10

Fill in your half of this worksheet below and then ask your partner and fill in their half. Important rule is not to write how your partner stresses you! Only write stressors other than your partner

His Life Stressors (Not in Marriage, Her Life Stressors (Not in Marria<sub>s</sub> Us Write Her Feelings Here Write His Feelings Here

#### Painful feelings word bank

Angry type feelings: Agitated, bothered, irritated, offended, enraged, furious

Confused type feelings: Clueless, lost, mixed up, mystified, perplexed, stumped

Attacked type feelings: blamed, cornered, attacked

Fear type feelings: anxious, apprehensive, concerned, fearful, edgy, nervous, petrified

Hurt type feelings: Belittled, broken, inadequate, insignificant, rejected, small, wounded

Lonely type feelings: abandoned, alone, disconnected, forgotten, unappreciated

Overwhelmed type feelings: Ambushed, shocked, stunned

Sad type feelings: blue, bummed, disappointed, discouraged, grieving, helpless, hopeless

Tired type feelings: Burned out, drained, exhausted

## **Session Three: Discussion**

Discussion (Small Groups; 30 minutes).

- 1. When something in life gets under your skin, what do you usually do?

  Do you tend to fight the pain or try and escape it?
  - 2. How might God allow pain in your life as a way to strengthen your character?

## Session Four: PAIN DEFENSE OFFENSE CYCLE

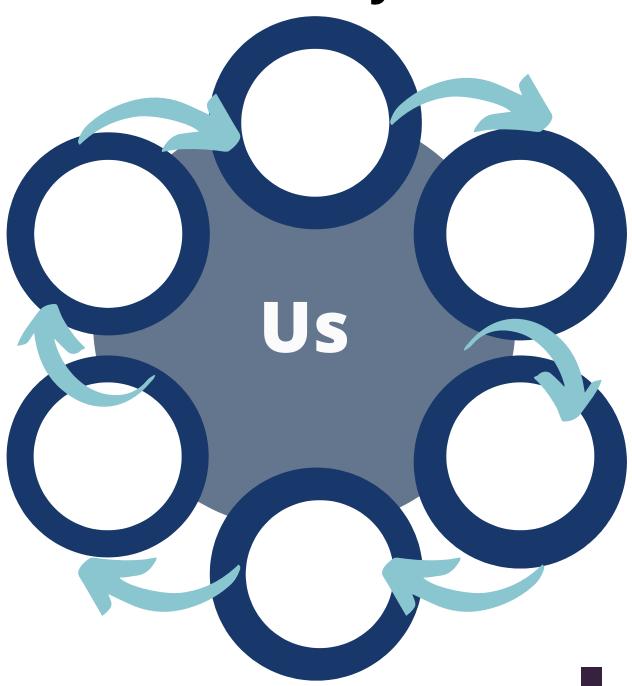
Theme: What to do when you get caught in a cycle of pain-defense Session 4 Video (full group; approximately 15 minutes)

Dr Ripley and Sells describe how pain and defenses can become a feedback loop that couples can get caught in. Demonstrations from the actor couple show how this can happen to any couple.

actor couple show how this can happen to any couple.
Their(pain/defense) feels like it's against me.
The baby's first defense is to (cry)
What examples did the speakers give of good ways to handle pain? (ex. exercise, etc.)
Do you use any of the examples that the speakers gave in your life?
The suit that protects you can also (hurt) you.
Defense can become (offensive)
Adding healthy responses and using them more (often)
Scripture reference was Colossians 3: (8-10)

Other Notes:

## Session Four: Pain Defense Offense Cycle



Answer: pain, defense, offense, pain, defense, offense. In that order starting anywhere in the circle.

## Session Four: PAIN DEFENSE OFFENSE CYCLE

- 1. When during the week is the most stressful time for your family?
- 2. Do you see the pain-defense-offense pattern happening at that time more often? How?
- 3. Do you have complicated situations in your lives that are hard to live with? Able to share one?
- 4. Do you find that you "use up" all your patience, kindness, and self-control while at work/parenting/ministering to others and you have little left for each other at the end of the day? How?

#### **Prayerful Group Activity.**

(Small groups; 10 minutes)

For large group format we recommend you play a background song or two during this activity to set the tone. The song "Together" by Steven Curtis Chapman is a good option, or "Take me to the King" by Tamela Mann and Kirk Franklin.

Leaders ask people in the group to take a marker and write on the butcher paper a word that reflects stress and pain in their life that affects them at home. As many words as they can think of- difficult things at work, family, kids, neighborhood, or even at church. Words might be things like "too much to do". Or "I feel alone" Or "disrespecting me" It might be about their marriage, but it might also be something stressful that affects all their life, including their marriage.

Online group adjustment: Many online platforms allow for annotation, or for participants to write on a whiteboard. Or participants could type into the chat feature their answers. If a very small group sharing verbally might be most effective for this online.

Each group now has a huge list of stresses on the paper, and we want to submit this pain, defense and offense to God. Each couple is in this together, and we are all together as a church community.

Then when you are done, crumple the butcher paper and all carry it to an altar/cross/symbol. If you are in a home just come together in the middle of the room or take it to a fire pit and burn it. Then come back to your seats and the group leaders are going to go around and pray for each couple. If you are online you will just go straight to prayer for each couple.

Depending on your set-up, it may be time for a lunch or a significant break at this point. The last session was likely a little heavy and time of eating and/or fellowship will be restorative. The conversations that happen at a meal together are very important for the whole program.

If you are doing this as a weekly group (in person or online) you might consider adding some time here after session 4 just for open discussion, fellowship or enjoying a snack, breakfast, lunch or dinner together as a group.

## Session Five: Grace & the Story of a Healthy Family

Theme: Grace is a better defense than our natural defenses

As you gather together for the new session a fun video can help bring people back to their seats. Here is a J.C. Penny Commercial "You're in the Dog House" (5:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Twivg7GkYts

Minute to Win It Game (Small Groups; 5 minutes). This will need to be prepared beforehand by the church. Small group leaders should select a game from the link below (adults love them, or other similar minute-games). We have done the chopsticks and minimarshmallow pick-up game and it worked out well with one small group "winning" a small snack-type prize for finishing first.

https://www.playpartyplan.com/minute-to-win-it-games-for-kids/

Online group adjustment: There are many fun online games that can be played through online meeting platforms. Things like Trivia, a game of 20 questions, charades or something you find online in a google search. Think about the age and personalities of your group participants. Playing together as a group for a few minutes as you start the group can help everyone feel bonded as a group.

#### **Play Session 5 Video**

(full group; approximately 15 minutes)

For four sessions we have been stuck. Caught in a cycle of Pain—Defense—Offense. This session talks about putting on the clothes of compassion, forgiveness, humility and other Christian character as a better defense. The tactic of purpose, peers and passion are the strategy for wearing the clothes. And a more loving marriage is the outcome.

#### Scripture: Colossians 3: 12-13

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

The three things essential in succeeding at any task

,	(purpo	se)
•	(pe	ers)
	(pract	(0)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Grace) is both the grand essential theme of God's redemptive plan and the way that couples intentionally alter their conflict cycle.

## Small Group Discussion #5: The Grace Gift

(Small Groups; 30 minutes)

- 1. (Have the couple define grace and discuss) What is the definition of grace? what does it mean to you?
  - 2.(Couples share with the group) Share a time when someone who had not need to be good to you went out of their way to do so.
  - 3. (Couples share with the group) Now share a time when you showed someone grace from which there was not obligation, expectation or necessity...It was just good to do.
- 4. Go back and look at the top character traits you said were your spouse a couple of weeks ago. When we and our spouse are not engaging in or embodying these virtues, how can we give grace? Is it difficult to give grace or receive grace during those times?.
- 5. Where do you get your support for Christian living? Extending grace and living a positive-virtue marriage can't just be done by deciding to do it. What are life-habits you can develop to support that?

oPossible supportive places for Christian living

- Church services
- Listening to podcasts/watching YouTube videos about your faith
- Attending retreats
- Christian classes
- Small group Bible study
- Talking with friends/family about spiritual things
- Worship music
- Reading scripture
- Prayer
- Reading stories about Christian heroes
- Studying theology
- Serving others
- Celebrating holidays like Easter or Christmas

## Small Group Discussion #5: The Grace Gift

What spiritual practices do you engage in on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis?

Are there any practices on that list that affect your relationship with your spouse for the good?

5. Return to the list of positive virtues from the very first activity. What did your spouse say was your #1 relationship virtue? What is something you could do more of, inspired by that positive trait? For example, if your #1 trait is being forgiving, then you can offer forgiveness for relationship offenses more quickly and fully. (Have the couple turn towards each other and say a gratitude statement using the virtues they previously identified for each other in a simple listen and repeat style)

What purpose, peers or practice do you need to accomplish that?

## Session Six: The Good Marriage

Theme: "Above all these put on love, which binds together all the virtues."

Put the words of Scripture into action in our home-life.

Session 6 Video (full group; approximately 15 minutes)

The doctors review 5 steps inspired by Colossians 3 to control the weeds and grow the love in marriage.

Scripture: Colossians 3: 14-17

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The Formula	
1. Raised with (Christ)	
2. Mind and heart set on things above.	
3. Identify the pattern: offense)	(pain, defense,
4. Exercise the exchange of (	(Grace)
5. Clothe yourself with good things (grow) the roses.	(control) the weeds.

## #6: Control Weeds, Grow Love

(Small Groups; 30 minutes)

- 1. Like Corduroy we find in goodness, what we always wanted. What good thing from Colossians 3 have you always wanted in your marriage?
- 2. Talk to your spouse and pick 1-2 objects in your home that represent your love story. Tell the group what object you selected and why.

#### **Group Leader Note**

Do not shame or call attention to anyone who says something you do not feel is important enough (e.g. computer, videogame console, etc.). Let the Holy Spirit do conviction here if it is needed, not in front of everyone in the group

- 3. What is one thing you want to remember, and do in response to what we have learned in this group today?
- 4. Will you continue as a group? Take some time to plan for going forward. The second stage in this program is an 8-week small group called "Loyal Love" where the group focuses each week on a relational character trait. We recommend you plan to meet no more than 2 weeks from the end of this workshop.

## **Loyal Love**

The 8-week small group format is similar to the 5-hour workshop/retreat setting with a focus especially on discussion, fellowship and relationship building among the group members.

Week 1: Cast a Vision

Week 2: Grace Together

Week 3: Gratitude

Week 4: Compassion

Week 5: Humility

Week 6: Forgiveness

Week 7: Trust, trustworthy, and trustworthiness

Week 8: Love

#### Note to Leader:

An alternative to doing this program in an 8-week format is to meet less frequently, or monthly for dinner together as a group and the 8 lessons. However, it is much more difficult to build strong relational bonds in a new group that meets infrequently. Put the challenge forward- create relationships with each other that are deeper and more meaningful than before. It can build group bonds to solve this problem of competing pulls for our time and attention together.

- ·Clarify when and where you will meet
- ·Establish details: Snacks/Meals, Childcare, What to bring
- ·If someone in your group cannot make the time your group decides on, get another time that they could attend, write it down, and give it to the Small Groups Coordinator if your church has multiple groups going on
- ·If someone cannot meet up at all in the future, encourage them and thank them for making the time to come that day

## Final Rose Commitment Activity

(Whole Group; 10 minutes)

The leader can read verbatim or summarize in their own words. We want to finish this workshop today with a promise to Control the Weeds...Grow the Roses...

In the Rose Ceremony in a wedding, the Bride and Groom give each other a rose. The Rose Ceremony is placed at the end of the wedding, just before being pronounced husband and wife. We thought that a chance to recommit yourselves to your love as a couple here, in front of this group of people, would strengthen your bond with each other. It goes like this:

A single red rose means "I love you." Your gift to each other was once your wedding rings – which are an outward demonstration of your vows of love and respect; and a public showing of your commitment to each other. Now, for a gift as husband and wife, I want you to give each other the rose that you hold. As you give the rose to your spouse, make a new promise of love based on what you learned in this workshop.

(Couples exchange roses & promises)

I would ask that wherever you make your home in the future – whether it be a large and elegant home – or a small and graceful one – that you both pick one very special location in your home for roses. This way, on special occasions, you may take a rose to that special spot in your home, both as a recommitment to your marriage, and as a recommitment that this will be a marriage based upon love.

And try to remember this: In every marriage, there are times where it is difficult to find the right words. It might be difficult sometimes to say, "I am sorry," or "I forgive you." "I need you" or "I am hurting."

If this should happen, if you simply cannot find the words to express what you really feel, go to that spot that you both have selected and leave a rose there. That rose placed in that special location can say what matters most of all. The rose you place there will say the words "I still love you." The other should accept this rose for the words that cannot be found and remember the love and hope that you both share today.\_\_\_\_

# Final Rose Commitment Activity Continued

It was love that brought you together then you married. It is only love which can make it a glorious union. It is by love which your marriage shall endure.

**Online group adjustment:** You could remind participants the week before and send an email/message 1-2 days before your meeting that a rose exchange is happening, and if they want to participate to pick up 1-2 roses in their local store. If couples don't get a rose, they can still say the words and exchange a "verbal gift" to each other as a couple. Present the Rose Ceremony as equal options to exchange a rose or to hold hands and look into each other's eyes while exchanging verbal statements.

#### **Note to leaders:**

It just got...kind of metaphorical? Yes, that was intentional too! The reality of it is that many marriage retreats are more of a mountaintop experience than the beginning of long-term relationship change. Weekly small groups are better predictors of relational change. But these last few activities are intended to tie the memories of the retreat to concrete objects that the couple will have in their home. The goal is to create something that, when they are home, they will sometimes come across these items and remember what was covered today!

#### **Dismissal**

Dismiss the group with a blessing, prayer, Scripture, or other church tradition.