

Charis Institute Presents

LOYAL LOVE

The process of growing in love and grace

KHESED & GRACE

Envision a marriage characterized by grace and khesed type of love

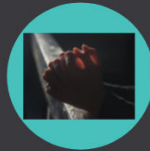


GRATITUDE & COMPASSION

Express gratitude for the gift of each other. Find loving compassion for the struggles in your lives.

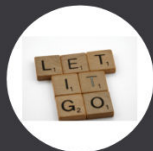
HUMILITY

Humility is a key to a healthy and happy relationship



FORGIVENESS

Forgive more easily and create a relationship characterized by forgiveness



TRUST & LOVE

Be trustworthy and trusting in a relationship characterized by a deep and abiding love



Loyal Love Small Group Leaders Guide

GOD, a God of mercy and grace, endlessly patient—so much love, so deeply true—loyal in love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin.

Exodus 34:6 (The Message)

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How to Use this Leaders Guide

Welcome to the Small Group Curriculum for “Loyal Love.” This leader’s guide will offer practical tips in leading a small group for couples. We are giving you a document that is full of possibilities. There is an opportunity to transform the concept of marriage in your living room or church basement.

We encourage you to try and cover all of the significant ideas in the small group curriculum, teaching, small group discussion, and memorable group activities.

Each week you will see Leader Instructions. These instructions take into account the progress of group development each week as the group becomes more comfortable with the material and each other over time. It also includes the supplies you will need for the discussion and activity.

The pattern each week is:

1. Before the meeting, there is a podcast for members to listen to about that week’s topic. There is also a website with dozens of optional theme-based ideas on the week’s topic. The more your

group engages in these activities, the more they will invest in each other. Encourage them without guilt or shaming anyone.

2. Opening group discussion. This is essentially to warm everyone up and get them oriented to the week's topic in their personal lives. The balance between being responsive to the Holy Spirit and events in people's lives with the time limits are needed here. We expect this will be 5-10 minutes most weeks.

3. Scripture Reading. Each week there is a scripture that grounds the ideas of the group in the Word of God.

4. Group discussion. This is the most critical part of the small group where people have a chance to apply the teaching, Scripture and weekly concepts to their everyday lives, share obstacles to living a life after the calling God has given them and support each other in loyal love. You should adjust this to the style of your group but not rush it. The bond happening around the room as people share life experiences is part of the "secret sauce" of life transformation. The questions draw out practical considerations for the Loyal Love concepts. The discussions apply concepts to varied life situations, and this is best done as a community that supports each other. The group works through roadblocks to implementing this in their real lives under the direction of prayer and the Holy Spirit. We expect this will be 30-45 minutes, depending on your time limits.

4. Group activity. This memorable group activity takes place most weeks to embody the concept in a thoughtful in-the-moment learning activity. Time varies, but generally 5-10 minutes.

5. Check in about the coming week's activities to take the concepts home into their everyday lives, 2-3 minutes.

6. Program Evaluation and Leader logging. The Charis Institute at Regent University is a research center that evaluates and improves the programs we implement. If your group is willing, we would like to talk with you about partnering to assess the program at your church/ community group. Please email us at charis@regent.edu for further information. Throughout this leader guide, you will see leader log. We believe it's helpful for you to stop and reflect on your leadership for your internal group evaluation, so we offer some reflection questions.



Week 0: The Delicious Meal as an Act of Love

Leader Instructions: The goal of a small group like this is to build Christian love, create bonds and relationships among the people who are attending. That is the most important thing that happens in a small group about relationships- the RELATIONSHIPS! The loyal love concept that is central to this Bible study should also be reflected in the caring relationships built among the people in the group. If it is possible, we suggest that your group, in its first meeting, get together for a meal. Think about the goals and style of your group. Is it more focused on the leader couple mentoring younger couples- then the leader couple might provide the meal as an expression of care. Is the group focused on empowering couples in their own ministry as a husband/wife? Then a potluck at home or church, or restaurant with a meeting room, might be the best method. You might ask the couples to make their very favorite or best dish to bring and share with the group. Ask your church to provide childcare if the couples have children. Make it a big deal. If the group is only going to be a short-term class without the expectation of deeper relationships, then some coffee and cheap donuts in the church basement might be best (kind of sad, though). Put some thought into Week 0 and send a message to the group about the importance and focus of this group.

Week 0 Group Discussion:

1. First, we want to check in on how everyone is doing in life? What is happening in your life right now? (If people in your group did the Grace Together workshop, ask about what from that workshop has “stuck with them”?)
2. What are you hoping to see in your marriage and personal life from attending this group?
3. How can we all pray for each other this week before our first meeting?

Give instructions on how to find the online podcast, materials, and workbook materials for Week 1. It can usually be helpful to have people pull out phones and navigate to the website, www.charis.regent.edu and find the Loyal Love online materials together.

Leaders notes on Registration “Check in” with 911 couples

Small groups like this can often handle many different types of couples, stages of life, and challenges faced by couples. Having a diversity of couples in the group can bring natural strengths and wisdom to the community of believers. However, there is one type of situation that this group is not intended to help with: the 911 Couple.

What is the 911 couple? The 911 couple is one that is in crisis at the time. They may have a recent affair or infidelity, they may be seriously considering separation, they may have aggression or violence in their home in the past year, or just all their discussions seem contemptuous. This type of couple will sometimes show up in couple groups looking for help, but without a context of the best kind of help for their needs. They may feel ashamed of their problems and discouraged, so careful listening and encouragement to get the right kind of help is important.

How do we know if there are 911 couples? You might bring the list of registered couples to your pastor or church leader “in the know” about families in the church to see if there are any concerns that a couple is a 911 couple. We also recommend when people register to sign up for your group that there is a disclaimer in your registration materials that says something like this

Disclaimer: “Please be aware if your relationship is in some kind of crisis such as a recent infidelity, aggression, frequent uncontrolled arguments, or seriously considering separation, that we would like to offer help specifically for your relationship instead of this group which will not focus on those issues. We don’t want to neglect these kinds of important needs. Please talk to XX or call the church office to ask about [describe what your church offers here].”

What should we do with the 911 couple? Consult with your pastor or pastoral counselor on staff on what is best for the couple. Typically couples like this are best served with a combination of pastoral care/counseling, professional counseling, men’s or women’s ministries, prayer ministries, and other supportive ministries of your church. Essentially you want the couple to first address their marital problems one-on-one with a counselor (at your church or in the community) while getting individual care from your church community and then later join a couples group once the crisis has been resolved. If the couple has children, then some care and nurturing of the children may also be wise.

What if a 911 couple shows up in the group and we see the disruptions? Consult with your pastor or pastoral counselor on staff. If a couple is fighting during the group, they may not be ready for a group like this. If you see a couple getting upset, withdrawn, or really uncomfortable in the group, you might ask them individually (not in front of the group or their spouse) how they are doing and

if the group material is affecting them. You can pray for them and ask if perhaps men's or women's ministries might be good right now and some marriage counseling that is tailored specifically for their needs.

What about the former 911 couple? If a couple has completed some counseling and some time has passed since there was infidelity, violence, high conflict, and they are living together and planning to stay together, then this group can be very good. If they are currently in counseling, they should talk about their desire to start this group with their counselor to think through what their goals and needs are at this time. The primary thing that is important is that the couple is able to benefit from the group and not engage in conflict during the group or after the group. We don't want people to fight DURING or ABOUT the group.



Week 1: A Khesed Marriage

Leader's Instructions.

Before group:

The leader read over the lesson, listen to the podcast, and read the Scripture. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group- a group text, or email, or phone calls help increase the welcoming spirit of the group, especially since this is the first group. Make sure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any important information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Set a tone of hospitality, care, and enjoyment for your group. As people enter, welcome them graciously with things like places for everyone to sit, drinks, or a snack. The hosting couple doesn't need to be perfect (have peace, not stress), but you can also be an example for the other couples in compassion, kindness, care, and love for them all. This warmth and love is the key component of forming an effective group.

Supplies needed: Handouts/workbooks for everyone, A whiteboard or butcher paper (way to write down people's ideas so everyone can see it and for the game), plain paper, and pen/markers for everyone.

Reference and use Week 0 Group Discussion Questions above if discussion didn't happen at the Week 0 dinner.

Note to leaders:

- IF people are really taking concepts home with them, you should encourage them. Put most of your attention to what IS working for people instead of what is not working to encourage everyone to take the ideas home with them.

- IF they have had a hard time taking concepts home, you can brainstorm as a group what gets in the way of Christian living at home. Listen for habits, and busy schedules, and things that distract us and pull us away from the things that are actually most important. Making changes to any unhealthy family habits takes a lot of time and support. You might think about ways to break down large complex things into small do-able plans. You might stop and pray for those that are having a hard time- asking God for wisdom and strength. The whole point of doing an 8-week group together is to help everyone create pathways for positive changes together, so this part of the group is really important!!



Podcast & Online Materials: www.charis.regent.edu website. Click on the Loyal Love program link. Listen to the podcast and explore procured internet ideas before the group.

Week 1 Discussion:

Someone open a Bible and read Exodus 34:4-7

This Scripture is our inspiration: Exodus 34:6-7: GOD, a God of mercy and grace, endlessly patient—so much love, so deeply true—**loyal in love** for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. (The Message).

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷**keeping steadfast love** for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, (English Standard Version)

1. The word for loyal love, or steadfast love, in Hebrew is “khesed” sometimes also written “heh-sed.” It is a word with multiple ideas infused into one word: love, commitment/covenant, mercy, kindness & generosity. It is the kind of love expressed by someone who is keeping a promise, like a marriage vow of love. It is more than words but acting lovingly towards the other, even when they don’t deserve it. Reflect on the steadfast love of God in your life. What is something you could say shows how God has shown His steadfast love to you (could be from Scriptures, Christian history, or your personal history)?



2. Micah 6:8. “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy (khesed) and to walk humbly with your God.” This famous verse also uses the word khesed. In fact, the Hebrew word khesed appears over 250 times in Old Testament Hebrew scriptures. It is often considered by scholars to be the root concept for the New Testament concept of grace. How have you defined grace? What is grace, and what is not grace?



Grace

AN UNDESERVED GIFT OFFERED GENEROUSLY OUT OF LOVE

CHARIS.REGENT.EDU

*Leaders: Note here that people may refer to different types of grace and definitions of grace. We use a relational concept of grace most often in this curriculum as **an undeserved gift generously offered out of love**. But there are also these concepts people may bring up, and they are all definitions from different perspectives.*

- *salvific grace which is from the cross of Christ,*
- *grace from the Holy Spirit for God working in us*
- *sacramental grace through communion and other church sacraments, often in high churches or Catholic church,*
- *grace which means charming often referring to a woman,*
- *grace as in the prayer said before a meal*

3. What does it mean to be gracious or khesed towards your spouse in your marriage? How could a spouse give an undeserved gift in marriage?

4. Cast a vision of a khesed marriage. Life together over the long haul can grow in khesed or not grow. How has your spouse been khesed (khesed: gracious, loyal, covenant-keeping, merciful, loving, kind, tender) in your relationship? How can a couple grow khesed in a marriage?

Group Activity

Say to the group: We want to do an activity to help us all understand this. Did you play the game Pictionary? This is similar. Get into groups of 2 couples each.

Each person: Draw on paper a picture that represents something stressful or painful for your life right now. Stick drawings or symbols are a-ok!

Everyone in the group: Guess what it is that is stressful for you.

Each person: Pass around the drawings and say what you would likely want to do to handle each of the 4 stresses drawn if that stressful thing were to happen to you: one normal, maybe even self-protective, thing and one gracious thing towards your spouse. You can help everyone think of ideas too.

Give the drawings back to the original person.

Closing the Group

Everyone comes back together to focus on the take-home activities linked from the website to help increase the grace in our marriage. Bring up the correct webpage (charis.regent.edu and navigate to the Loyal Love page) on their phones, so everyone is sure to find it. And then ask if anyone notes something that looks interesting to them.

End the group with an all-group prayer that everyone would have the wisdom to know what a gracious response can be to the stresses in each life.

Leader's log Week 1 A Khesed marriage

This is a chance for you to evaluate the work of your group with a weekly leader's log. So we have questions each week for you that we ask one or both leaders to complete and perhaps send to us. Please contact us at charis@regent.edu about sharing your observations.

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God be leading you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you are feeling led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God is teaching you about co-leadership and your own relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.

The Grace-Filled Group



Grace is an undeserved gift given out of love without expectation of return

Grace-filled small group

The grace-filled group will not give up on encouraging each other in creating a good marriage, but will also respond with kindness and understanding to struggles in marriage.



The best couple small group is grace-based

There is a never-give-up attitude of encouragement for each other and strong supportive and understanding attitude.

charis.regent.edu

Week 2: Grace Together

Leader's Instructions.

Before group:

The leader read over the lesson and Scripture and listen to the podcast. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group between meetings- a group text, or email, or phone calls. Make sure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any important information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Supplies needed: Paper/pen for group activity



Podcast & Online Materials:

www.charis.regent.edu website.

Click on the Loyal Love program link. Listen to the podcast and explore procured internet ideas before the group.

Group Time

Check-in from the previous week:

Discuss what happened the previous week in the at-home activities recommended. Did any of those activities really speak, inspire or help someone? Focus on the positive here – how it was helpful.

- IF they have had a hard time taking concepts from group discussion home, you can brainstorm as a group what distracts us from our goals of being a loving, khesed, gracious couple or family? Listen for bad habits, and busy schedules, and things that distract us and pull us away from the things that are actually most important. Remember that the whole theme of this lesson is grace, so we want to ponder how God is gracious towards us when we don't live up to some high expectation. In fact, if your group becomes "performative," where everyone is trying hard to impress others, then you will be acting in ways that are the opposite of the group's message. Being gracious is

looking to God for strength to do the things we simply can't do ourselves. You might stop and pray for those having a hard time- asking God for wisdom and strength. The whole point of doing an 8-week group together is to help everyone create pathways for positive changes together, so this group is really important!!

Group Discussion

1. How did things go this week in being grace-filled at home in your marriage? Did anyone have hopes of really being graceful last meeting and then found that the stresses of life distracted you from your plans? Confession is good for the soul.
2. God's response when we "fall short" and don't live perfectly is one of grace. We can easily fall into performance in a group like this trying to do everything perfectly. Or we can drop out or stop trying. How could we be grace-filled as a group where we don't try and perform or pretend we are perfect, and we don't give up?
3. Why do we need grace for living together as a couple or family?

Someone read Scripture:

Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The two great grace questions:

4. Recall a time when someone was good to you—who was under no obligation—but they did it anyway. Think beyond your parents, siblings, spouse, children, and all the people with whom you have frequent exchanges. Think of the "good Samaritan" kind of gift. One that cost another time, money, attention, resources, and they did so 1) without strings; 2) without credit; 3) without expectation. And you were the recipient of their goodness.
5. Now recall when you were good to another because you were there, and you could. Again, use the same parameters. Think beyond family members or others in your regular circle. [It doesn't count that you mowed your neighbor's front lawn—because the weeds and unkempt grasses were making the whole neighborhood look bad!]
6. The Big Idea of grace is quite simple. Be good to your wife. Be good to your husband. Be good, and don't wait for him or her to be good first. Be good before, not after they have earned goodness. Be good before, not after he or she demonstrates goodness to you. Who can express goodness first? You are good because it is how Jesus loves God. How God loves Jesus and How God—Father, Son, Spirit loves us.

Grace is also how we encourage everyone in the group to relate with each other. If you miss a meeting or “blow it” at home with a big fight or aren’t applying the ideas at home- let’s respond with loving care. Encourage each other to do good in your marriages without giving up. We have expectations that we are all in this race together and not sitting on the sidelines. But without guilt, shame or blame. Respond with grace. How do you want to extend gracious love as a group to each other?

Group Activity

We would like you to break up into two groups. Your spouse is to be in the other group. We can be mixed men and women in both groups (to get the inside scoop from the other gender) or divide by gender—your choice.

Think of a group of “grace gifts” that can be extended to your husbands and wives. Grace gifts are acts of love and care that are undeserved, motivated by your love for each other and your love for God.

Ideas: Do a chore for your spouse, leave a love note, offer a backrub without expectation of return, clean out their closet, list all the things you are grateful for about your spouse, cuddle up to a movie together, buy something he/she would like, make a favorite meal, plan a getaway, etc.

Closing the Group

End the group by sharing the plans for this week’s at-home grace-building work as the Holy Spirit leads (if time is limited or the group is large, share with 1-2 people in the group). Following Christ is a daily alignment of our heart with God’s heart. This group can encourage us to work with God, working in you, your family, and those around you. Someone in the group prays for everyone and that God will lead them in selecting the things to do at home that fit God’s plan in their lives.

Leader's log Week 2- Grace Together

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God lead you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you feel led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God teaches you about co-leadership and your relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.



Week 3: Gratitude

Leader's Instructions.

Before group:

The leader read over the lesson, listen to the podcast and meditate on Scripture. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group- a group text, or email, or phone calls. Ensure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any critical information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Supplies needed: Ways to move chairs for the group to break into groups of 4 people, if possible.



Podcast & Online Materials: www.charis.regent.edu website. Click on the Loyal Love program link. Listen to the podcast and explore procured internet ideas before the group.

Group Time

Check-in from the previous week: What at-home activities or efforts are happening, anything people are finding effective to promote grace and love in their home? Focus on sharing ideas of anything people are doing that seems to be going well. We want to encourage each other as a group. However, we will not shame people who are not in a place in life to engage in between meetings. Practice grace together.

You might open the group with prayer for everyone living out grace at home in following God's leading in their lives- asking God for wisdom and strength. The whole point of doing an 8-week group is to help everyone create pathways for positive changes, so this group is really important!!

Group Discussion:

1. What is your definition of gratitude?
2. How do you express gratitude in your daily life?

Read Scripture: Colossians 3: 16-17; Luke 17:11-19

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. Colossians 3:16-17

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." Luke 17:11-19

3. In what way can we be like the nine lepers in thanking God for our spouse? What am I taking for granted in my family that I am grateful for if I stop to think about it?
4. What kind of role does gratitude play in my relationships?
5. How often do you express gratitude in your relationships? (Relationships can include spouse, kids, family, coworkers, fellow church members, etc.). How about sharing one thing you are grateful for about this small group of people?
6. How might gratitude be an antidote to the stress, self-focus, and defensiveness that we all fall into sometimes?

Group Activity:

Divide into groups of four (two couples) and have each group discuss the following prompt:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV) says "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Briefly share about a time in your life when it was hard to be grateful. Why was it challenging to be grateful during this time?

Looking back, is there anything that happened during that situation that you can be grateful for in the present?

Each spouse turn to each other, hold both hands and look in each other's face if you can, and state three things you are grateful to God for your spouse. The other couple writes the things down and gives them to the couple to put on their fridge/mirror/specific place in their home. Then switch, so everyone has a chance to say the three things. Discuss how you could add to this throughout the week.

Closing the Group

A group member can close the group by praying a prayer of Thanksgiving. You can read this prayer or create your own as the Lord leads.

Lord- we are grateful for the gift of married love in our lives. We recognize that we do not deserve and have not earned this love that our spouses give us. We realize that we often take for granted and forget to thank you for marriage. You created marriage so we would not be alone, and we are grateful for your gift of marriage. You, Lord, taught us how to love through your example on earth and the Scriptures. You provide everything we need. Lord, we are grateful for the gift of our spouse. Thank you for the person you created at their birth through their parents' union. Thank you that we met, fell in love, and married. Thank you for loving and growing my husband or wife into the person they are today. Thank you for the personal and spiritual gifts you have given my spouse, a blessing to me and all who live in our home. Thank you for whatever days we can spend together on this earth. Help us to live lives of gratitude to you for the gift of marriage.

Leader's log Week 3: Gratitude

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God lead you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you feel led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God teaches you about co-leadership and your relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.



“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”

HENRI NOUWEN

Week 4: Compassion

Leader's Instructions.

Before group:

The leader read over the lesson, listen to the podcast and meditate on Scripture. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group- a group text or email. Ensure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any vital information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Supplies needed: Ability for members chairs to break off into groups of 4



Podcast & Online Materials: www.charis.regent.edu website. Click on the Loyal Love program link. Listen to the podcast and explore procured internet ideas before the group.

Group Time

First, we want to check in on how everyone is doing? What are things sticking with you from the small group? Have you noticed anything different or done anything different in your family life or spiritual life due to the small group?

Group Discussion

1. What is compassion? Consider how compassion is a feeling and an action.
2. When your spouse is in pain and struggling, do you sometimes want to give compassion and sometimes just want to retreat from the situation?
3. Can you think of a time in your life where you were struggling with something, and someone at work or in your friends/family gave you a “judging” or “silver lining” answer? What happened? What was it like for you?
4. Has anyone had a time in your life when you were struggling, and someone didn’t say anything profound, but they just showed up and were there with you? How was this healing?

Read Scripture: Colossians 3: 12-17

12-14 So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

15-17 Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way. Colossians 3:12-17 (The Message)

5. Among the things listed in Colossians 3, is there anything there to help us be compassionate and bring peace in our relationship with others?

Let’s look at the list of “to-dos” and “to avoids.”

To do:

1. Allowing the other person to have a perspective that is unique to them
2. Recognizing the pain and emotions in the other person
3. Communicating that you see and accept their experience

To avoid:

1. Avoid judging them for having their perspective
2. Avoid finding a “silver-lining” things and saying “at least...”

6. How can you see these principles changing your interactions with others?

Group Activity

One of the leaders shares a personally painful life story (a few minutes, not hours this time). Ask everyone in the group to listen and be present with the person in their story. Share with the group how their attentiveness, good listening, and willingness to be present in your story is affecting you now.

Couples to get into groups of 4 and try to share a painful life story (the pain should not be something caused by your mate) and just listen, be present, and allow themselves to feel compassion alongside each other.

Closing the group

The take-home message here is that we live in relationships, and compassion is a foundational relationship character of God. So we who follow after God seek to emulate that compassion in our relationship with others, especially at home. This week we encourage everyone to focus on compassion in their family. You can do this in a lot of ways. Remember, the goal is to increase your capacity for compassion from today to the future. It's a life-long journey, not a single week of tasks.

1. You can look for ways your spouse has pain in life (at work, in parenting, in friends or family, in health) and offer to listen and be present in their pain so they don't feel alone.
2. You might consider ways to show compassion to people in this group, your extended family, or others in our church who are in a time of pain and suffering as a spiritual practice.
3. You can do some daily activities focused on learning more about compassion, such as reading Scripture about compassion, listening to a podcast on the way to work or while working, reading a devotional on compassion, watching a youtube video on compassion, or something you create yourself. Anything that will get your mind, heart, and spirit focused on the topic of compassion this week.
4. We will share what we found helpful and what we did to practice compassion next week.

Close in prayer, asking God to make His compassion known to each group member who shared their stressful or painful experiences.

Leader's log Week 4: Compassion

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God lead you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you feel led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God teaches you about co-leadership and your relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.

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HUMILITY

NOT THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF
YOURSELF
NOT THINKING TOO LOW OF
YOURSELF
OTHER ORIENTED INSTEAD OF
SELF-FOCUSED
RESPECT FOR OTHERS
WORSHIP GOD ON YOUR
KNEES
WILLING TO ASK FOR HELP
WILLING TO ACCEPT CRITICISM
OR IDEAS FROM OTHERS

APPLYING HUMILITY TO
YOUR MARRIAGE

LIVING IN AWE
OF GOD

Week 5: Humility

Leader's Instructions

Before group:

The leader read over the lesson and Scripture. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group- a group text, email, or phone calls, especially for anyone who missed last week or is going through a tough time. Ensure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any critical information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Supplies needed: A way to do a foot washing ceremony between partners. This can be done by having warm soapy rags available from a nearby kitchen or bathroom. Each couple gets a warm soapy rag to wash each other's feet. You might also decide to use a bowl or sink to ring out dirty water afterward and towels or paper towels to dry feet.



Podcast & Online Materials: www.charis.regent.edu website. Click on the Loyal Love program link. Listen to the podcast and explore procured internet ideas before the group.

Group Time

Check in about the week: Last week, we focused on compassion. Did any of you notice your spouse being more compassionate at home? Was there anything in particular you attempted to focus on compassion, and it helped you?

Group discussion

Important! Part of married life is knowing what things you are both good at and not so good at, and accepting the journey you are on together has bumps, bruises, and limitations in being human—one “rule” for this discussion about humility. Humility has to do with having an accurate understanding of your limitations or weaknesses. It’s not fair to share with the group your partner’s limitations. It’s OK to share your limitations. But it’s **not OK** to share your partner’s weaknesses or limits. That can hurt your relationship. Does everyone agree?

1. What is something you know you aren’t very good at? (Ideas include things like sports, artistic endeavors, singing, academics).
2. How did you know that you aren’t good at that thing? (typically you tried and failed at it sometime in life).
3. When we find something we aren’t good at, how do people usually respond to that?

Our inspiration scripture for this series is Colossians 3: 1-17. Looking primarily at verses 12-14, would someone read those three verses?

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

4. What does the word “Humble” bring to mind? What has been your experience with that word/idea?
5. Think about your limitations in terms of your marriage. No one is good at every aspect of being married. Look at the list of Christian character in Colossians 3:12-14. From that list or your experience, what is something about you that you know is a genuine shortcoming for you?
6. Spouse- as you listen to your partner state a limitation. Often that limitation has been part of stress or pain in your life. Your limitations, faults, and sins can bring pain to your spouse too. Do

you have compassion for your partner's limitation, or do you feel angry and want to defend yourself from that pain? How?

7. One powerful way to handle pain, defense, and offenses in a marriage is to live in humility instead of defensive pride. We will go into an activity next that demonstrates how we desire to show humility in the face of the stress, pain, and limitations of living as an imperfect, human couple. You might note that we will not try and focus on becoming perfect people, spouses, or parents. The entire Scripture is a very long story of how humans can't do what's right all the time. We fall short of perfection every day. How we respond to falling short, with humility on our knees instead of prideful and defensive, is what it means to follow Christ in humility. How does the Holy Spirit convict you of short-falls and bring you to your knees?

Group Activity

Foot washing is a long-standing practice in Christianity as a sign of humble service. We want to do a foot washing ceremony where each partner gets on their knees, washes their partner's feet, states a limitation or painful thing that they know they do that is hard on their marriage and prays a blessing on their partner. If you have any circumstances that don't allow this due to injury or health issues, then an alternative of face washing or handwashing could work. But foot washing is an experiential activity that will make the lesson memorable for everyone, so don't bow out because you are afraid of what others think of your toes. The point is not to think about yourself but humble yourself. Try not to miss this opportunity. As you wash feet, you could say words of humility to each other such as confessions of ways you know you have had limitations or faults and sins that are not easy for your spouse.

An idea of what to say: I know that when I am _____, this is not easy on you. I love you.

Leaders might put on some worship music in the background and let each partner wash the other's feet and then pray a blessing on each of them.

Closing the group

We STRONGLY suggest that you ask each couple to take a couple of minutes to consider how they will try to express humility this week and tell a same-gender group member what they will do for accountability. This will increase the probability you will do it. If the kids are invading the room and the coffee is burning, and this is impossible, make sure you emphasize that group members should make commitments to each other like a couple of what they will do this week before the day is done.

Leader's log Week 5: Humility

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God lead you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you feel led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God teaches you about co-leadership and your relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.

How to REACH Forgiveness

Forgive others



or yourself

R: Remember the hurt. As honestly and clearly as possible.

E: Empathize with the offender. We are all human here.

A: Altruistic gift of forgiveness. We all need forgiveness sometimes and giving forgiveness is a gift we have all needed.

C: Commit to forgive. Make a decision to be forgiving, even if you still have some emotional struggle with forgiveness.

H: Hold onto Forgiveness. Work towards complete decisional and emotional forgiveness over time

Reconcile if both parties are ready and trustworthy

Week 6: Forgiveness

Leader's Instructions

Before group:

The leader read over the lesson, podcast, and Scripture. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group- a group text, email, or phone calls, especially for anyone who missed last week or is going through a tough time. Ensure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any critical information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Supplies needed: Erasable markers or pens (try it out to see that you can write on your hand and then wash it off pretty quickly). A sink or a big bowl of soapy water. The ability to play some worship music that fits your group, for example, a youtube worship song on your TV or play on a music player.



Podcast & Online Materials: www.charis.regent.edu website. **Click on the Loyal Love program link. Listen to the podcast and explore procured internet ideas before the group.**

Group Time

Check in about the Week: Last week's lesson was about humility. How did the foot-washing ceremony last week affect you after we left? Was there anything you did this week in your quiet time or in the way you communicate together at home that focused on humility?

Group Discussion

Important! We have another "rule" for this discussion about forgiveness. It's not fair to share with the group how your partner has hurt you. It's OK to share how you hurt your partner since that's your offense. But it's not OK to share something your partner did that hurt you here in this group. That can hurt your relationship. Does everyone agree?

1. The Bible often tells the reader to forgive in strong language throughout the whole Bible. This is a major teaching of Christianity. How do you define forgiveness in a marriage relationship compared to Jesus' forgiveness of us?
2. Other than your marriage, have you ever needed to be forgiven? Can you think of a time? What was it like for you?

Scripture to read: Colossians 3:5-14

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

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. (English Standard Version)

3. If you look at Colossians 3:5-9, you see a long list of painful offenses. When someone causes pain and hurt, there is a sense of an injustice gap. Someone was unfairly harmed in a way they did not deserve. Everyone has to figure out what to do with that injustice gap.

We can handle that injustice and pain in a lot of ways. Can you think of ways you often deal with that injustice gap?

4. When it's time to confess your offenses against your partner, how do you usually do that? What is your practice? Is it something you have intentionally thought about and planned and submitted your confession practice to Christ?

5. Empathic repentance is a special kind of confession where you remember something that your spouse has done that has offended you. Perhaps an unkind word, being ignored or hiding something from you. For empathic repentance, you pair that memory with something YOU did similar, even if not equal in severity or frequency. If your spouse said something unkind, remember a time you said something unkind. If your spouse hid something from you, remember something you didn't share or hid from him/her. On your own, confess to God how you have done the same offense. Empathic repentance increases your empathy for your spouse- it helps us remember we are all human. Whenever you feel bitterness or unforgiveness, try and take root in your heart; try empathic repentance. Would empathic repentance help you be a more forgiving spouse?

Empathic Repentance

Consider the offense of your partner/ other person. Remember when you have done something similar in some way. Ask forgiveness and be remorseful for your own sin.

6. Regularly confessing and forgiving each other is a practice that is important in practicing the way of Jesus in our homes. It can be challenging, but how would you like to practice forgiveness as a regular part of your marriage?

Experiential Activity

We want to confess together that we need forgiveness in our lives. What we are going to do is admit to God that we are imperfect spouses. You have a choice here of how you want to do it. You might do empathic repentance, where you take a hurt against you and confess how you have done something similar. Or you could take something you have done that was hurtful in the past and admit it.

The leader might have brought some markers or pens. They aren't permanent markers. You can write on your hand a word that symbolizes what you are confessing, just 1-2 words. Then have some time of prayer and worship about the confession. When you are ready, go to a sink or bowl of soapy water. When you feel ready, go to the sink and wash the word off your hand as a sign that you are releasing that to God through your confession.

Come back together as a group after the hand-washing and allow people to either have a time of confession and worship on their own, a time of confession and worship as a couple or as a whole group. Let the Lord lead you in what your group needs today.

Note: This week's material is heavily influenced by the REACH model of forgiveness created by Everett L. Worthington, Ph.D., <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/>

Closing the group

Let's close in prayer, and in that prayer, ask for God's forgiveness in our marriages for how we have offended in the past and for God's strength to be able to forgive.

Leader's log Week 6: Forgiveness

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God lead you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you feel led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God teaches you about co-leadership and your relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.



Week 7: Trust, Trustworthy, and Trustworthiness

Leader's Instructions.

Before group:

The leader read over the lesson, podcast, and Scripture. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group- text, email, or phone calls, especially since this is the first group after the retreat event. Ensure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any vital information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Supplies needed: blank index cards for everyone in the group



Podcast & Online Materials: www.charis.regent.edu website. Click on the Loyal Love program link. Listen to the podcast and explore procured internet ideas before the group.

Group Discussion

First, a check-in. We have been doing this now for seven weeks. What about the group has been helpful for you?

1. What is trust? What does it mean to trust? What does it mean to be trustworthy? What is trustworthiness? (think about both trust in feelings & action)

Let's read Scripture together: Psalm 32:10; Psalm 56:3; Proverbs 31:11

Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the LORD'S unfailing love
surrounds the one who trusts in him. (Psalm 32:10; New International Version)

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:3; New International Version)

Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value. (Proverbs 31:11; NIV)

2. Think about this statement: To be trusted, you must be trustworthy. Now, think about how you build trust in your relationships.

Think of a business you trust. Why do you trust that business?

Think of someone you know that is trustworthy. What have you observed that shows that person is trustworthy?

How do trust and trustworthiness relate?

3. What aspects of God's trusting relationship with us need to be present in our marriages?
4. The Proverbs 31 woman is described as trustworthy. As you think about your roles and responsibilities in your marriage, what is a trustworthy husband or wife?
5. Perhaps one of the most vulnerable things we do as a couple is sex. How does sex require trust and trustworthiness as a couple?

Experiential Activity

As we look ahead to after this group is over, we want to consider how we can be faithful and trustworthy in continuing to extend grace in our marriages so that they reflect the character of Christ. Break into groups of 4 (2 couples each) and discuss how you can be a trustworthy, gracious spouse after this group is over. Share ideas for continuing to set your hearts and minds on things above as Colossians 3 encourages us.

Pass out index cards, and each couple brainstorms ideas on how they would like to continue the things they have learned in this program after the small group is over. Write down some ideas on the card. Take your index card and put it someplace where you won't lose it- your Bible? Your refrigerator? Folded in your wallet? Nightstand?

During this week, find something that characterizes something important that you have learned in this class. Perhaps a song that reflects ideas important to you. Maybe an image, or Bible verse, or poem. It might be something from the charis.regent.edu website of procured ideas, or it might be something you find that is personal to you. Bring that thing with you next week and consider how to make it a part of your life. If you can post to the Charis Facebook group (link though charis.regent.edu)- we would love to share that with you.

Closing the group

VERY IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT:

Next week is our last week with this small group curriculum. Charis Institute is constantly doing program development and evaluation of our materials. There are likely a set of research questions for everyone to complete for Charis Institute. Would you please answer those questions so that this program can be continuously improved based on participant feedback? Ask your leader for the link to those questions.

Close with prayer.

Leader's log- Week 7 Trust

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God lead you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you feel led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God teaches you about co-leadership and your relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.

Week 8: Loyal Love



Leaders Before group:

The leader read over the lesson, podcast, and Scripture. Pray for each member of your group. Connect with the people in your group- text, email, or phone calls, especially since this is the first group after the retreat event. Ensure everyone is reminded when and where you are meeting and any critical information like childcare, snacks/food, etc.

Supplies needed: A cheap toothbrush for everyone in the group

Group Discussion:

1. Everyone in the group brings a poem, image, song, Bible verse, or something that reflects something important that you learned in this group. Please share it with the group.
2. What has not happened yet that you feel God is leading you towards growth in the coming months as a couple?

Turn to Scripture and read: Colossians 3:14

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Col 3:14 NIV)

3. This verse points to how important and central love is for Christian living. Let's return to how you fell in love once upon a time. How has your love changed since you first fell in love?
4. We define love, from a relational perspective, as valuing each other and refusing to devalue each other. How has this program helped you to value each other more and reduce devaluing? What have you noticed?

Group activity

Hand out a toothbrush for each person. Brush your partner's teeth (without toothpaste to reduce mess). Now sit behind your partner without looking at what you are doing and brush your partner's teeth. Which one is working better? How clean are the teeth getting if you can't see what you are doing?

Intentionally, thoughtfully attending to teeth brushing makes for healthier teeth. Intentionally thoughtfully attending to your marriage will make for a healthier marriage. How much more critical is our marriage than our teeth?

5. We use a toothbrush metaphor in caring for your marriage. If you use a toothbrush daily, then your teeth will do as well as possible. But if you forget about brushing for weeks and mistreat your teeth, eventually, they will get cavities, gum disease, and fall out! Keeping up a routine of caring for your marriage is very important. Will this group continue and do that together with another Bible study? Does your church have other options for continuing to grow your marriage? Does this group want to start a monthly dinner gathering?

We offer the following ideas for long-term care for your marriage:

1. The appendix of this small group guide offers a monthly theme that couples can focus on in their quiet times or date nights, a positive virtuous theme for that month to maintain their marriage. Those themes can be the basis of a monthly dinner gathering of couples.
2. We also recommend 1-2 “retreats” together as a couple alone together annually (life, babies, and illnesses happen but as a regular practice),
3. weekly dates together to focus on each other without distractions (even if at home in the living room)
4. doing a marriage class, workshop, or retreat annually
5. every time you see a toothbrush, remember that your marriage relationship needs and deserves good virtues and habits, at least as much as your teeth.

In thinking about the toothbrush metaphor and the “Give it a Year” concept. It’s not about following that exact formula. But it is helpful to create specific goals and commitments as a couple to intentionally shape our marriages and families to be patterned after Christ’s teachings in the Bible. What do you see God doing and planning (I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord) in your marriage to follow Christ with grace together?

Closing the Group. (this may take from 10-30 minutes depending on your group size and style, plan accordingly)

As we close, we want to put each couple in the middle of the group and pray a blessing on each one of us. If there is anything specific, we can pray for the couple ask for that. And allow for one person (if time is limited) or everyone to pray for each couple as you close out the group experience.

Leader's Log Week 8: Loyal Love

1. What concepts did the group seem to grab hold of and discuss well?
2. What concepts did members seem to misunderstand or have less interest in?
3. How might God lead you to respond to the group in-between meetings through prayer, communication, get-togethers, or however you feel led?
4. If you are leading this group as a couple, reflect on what God teaches you about co-leadership and your relationship.
5. Length of group time and participant names.

Afterparty: Give it a Year

Month	Theme	Christian application	Family application
January	Compassion	Focus on Christ's compassion	Express and experience compassion for each other
February	Love	Focus on God's love	Express love
March	Sacrifice	Make a sacrifice to join in Christ's suffering as we enter Lent season	Make a sacrifice as a family for others who are in need
April	Prayer	Spend focused time in prayer	Pray together as a family
May	Confession/ Forgiveness	Confess sins to God, receive forgiveness	Empathic repentance in the family
June	Joy & Sex	Enjoy God forever	Engage in joyful activities as a family; Enjoy the gift of sex together
July	Peace	Pray for peace in the world, your city, the people in your life	Make peace with anyone in your family where there is tension
August	Rest	Take time alone to rest in God. Subtract things from your life that cause hurry	Rest together as a family, slow down, subtract busyness as a family.
September	Humility	Focus on the humility of Christ	Engage in acts of humility with family members
October	Trust	Trust in the Lord for any anxious thought	Focus on being a trustworthy spouse or parent, keeping your word
November	Gratitude	Give words and prayers of gratitude	Journal or create a gratitude board/ pumpkin as a family
December	Grace, Gift-giving	Focus on the gift of Christ's presence in the world	The family give gifts to underserved people