

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

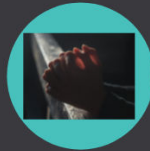


## GRATITUDE & COMPASSION

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

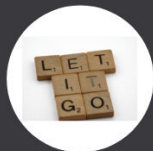
## HUMILITY

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 Participant 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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### **Week 0: The Delicious Meal as an Act of Love**

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?

Online podcast is available on [www.charis.regent.edu](http://www.charis.regent.edu)



## Week 1: A Khesed Marriage



Podcast & Online Materials: [www.charis.regent.edu](http://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:

**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, <sup>7</sup> **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?



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?

# 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.*

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## Week 2: Grace Together



### Podcast & Online Materials:

[www.charis.regent.edu](http://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

### 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?



### Week 3: Gratitude



**Podcast & Online Materials:** [www.charis.regent.edu](http://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

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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

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



“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.



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### 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.

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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



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### **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?

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, **humility**, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> 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.



# 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



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## **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

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

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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?

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/>

### **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.**



## Week 7: Trust, Trustworthy, and Trustworthiness



**Podcast & Online Materials:** [www.charis.regent.edu](http://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](http://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](http://charis.regent.edu))- we would love to share that with you.

## Week 8: Loyal Love

### 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:

## 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