

I STILL DO
Choosing Each Other Again and Again

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2000*

Author's note: This marriage strengthening resource is designed specifically for use in Marriage Enrichment Groups (MEGs), but may be adapted to a series of sessions with couples or a weekend retreat.

Session 1: Trip Diaries Are a Good Idea

Getting Started. Enjoy a half-hour of fellowship, a time for getting to know one another, deepening friendships, and leaving behind the other dimensions of life to focus on your marriage. After introducing yourself as a leader couple and sharing briefly about Marriage Enrichment Groups distribute the handouts for the first session and take a few minutes to go over the guidelines together and to appoint a timekeeper.

Sharing Memories. The first evening is for getting acquainted and remembering. You may wish to ask spouses in advance to bring an item of cherished memorabilia from a good time in their marriage or something which symbolizes their love. Encourage them to bring something which they will feel comfortable sharing with the group as a way of introducing themselves, though no pressure is ever put on anyone to share. They may bring pictures, mementoes, stories, gifts, poetry, a song, etc. First give the couples time to share what they have brought with each other. Then, as a way of introducing couples in the group, invite those who wish to do so to share what they have brought and/or to tell a bit about their "beginnings" as a couple.

As alternatives, you may use the exercise "Pages From Our Trip Diary" ([Handout 1.2](#)) or "Riding Our Marriage Carriage" ([Handout 1.3](#)), to give couples the opportunity to call up memories of the "good" times they have shared. Give a copy of the exercise to each partner and allow about 10 minutes for husbands and wives to jot notes to themselves as instructed. Then give couples 10-15 minutes to share their memories with each other. When couples have had opportunity to talk with each other, the leader couple usually shares first in the group and then invites other couples to share from their rememberings. In keeping with the guidelines ([Handout 1.1](#)), all sharing in the group is voluntary. It is best to avoid "going around the circle," as this may create an awkward moment for a couple who prefers not to share from their story.

Couple Dialogue: Rediscovering Us. The remainder of the evening can be spent reflecting first individually and then as a couple on the exercise "Rediscovering Us" ([Handout 1.4](#)). If time permits, the leader couple may dialogue about their responses, in keeping with the guidelines, in the presence of the group. Couples need to see dialogue modeled. They will benefit greatly from hearing the stories of other couples whose experiences may be similar to their own. The group may be invited to share their thoughts about the value of looking to the good times in their marriages to rediscover the qualities which drew them to one another and have kept love alive through the years.

Summing Up. The highest tides in the world rise and fall in Fundy National Park in New Brunswick, Canada. The grandeur is awesome when they peak, the mud flats dismal as they ebb. Human love is like the tide. In the seasons when love crests, we are sure nothing could ever wrench us apart, but in the seasons when love ebbs, we may wonder if anything can hold us together. Remembering the beauty and strength of the tide at its peak can get help us through the low points. Reliving the good times can help to secure their return.

It is also helpful to look from time to time at the big picture. At Fundy National Park the tides rushing up the Petitcodiac River get all the press. We seldom reflect on the reality that tides, as impressive as they may be, are a phenomenon of the edges. The great ocean from which they surge is deep and wide, constant in its mighty presence, unmoved by turmoil at its outer rim.

It is from the great unchangeable ocean of God's love that we may draw as the tide ebbs and flows in our relationships. His love "suffers long and is kind; . . . does not envy; . . . does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [His] love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:4-8). In Him, it can be our own.

Closing. Close promptly at the agreed upon hour. Host couples as well as others participating need to be able to plan their schedules with confidence that they will be free to be about their other activities at the time the MEG group has covenanted to finish.

Session 2: Letting Go to Pave the Way for New Beginnings

Getting Started. Enjoy a half-hour of fellowship and re-entry into one another's lives. Distribute the session handouts as a way of transitioning into the enrichment time.

One-of-the-Ten Lists. A wife was approached at their fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration and asked what was the secret of their enduring and happy marriage. "There are lots of secrets," she confided, "but I'll tell you one that has served me well. When John and I got married, we really knew each other. And I was already aware of some things about him that were very different from my way of thinking and doing things. Some I knew we would need to work out together, but some I decided I could give him as a gift. So I made a list of ten things I didn't particularly like, but I could live with because I love John."

"What were the ten things?" the questioner interrupted.

"Oh, I don't remember the original ten," the woman responded. "I just know that when John does something I don't like, but it probably isn't worth trying to change and I can learn to live with it out of love, I just say to myself, 'He's lucky that's one of the ten!'"

Most couples get married with the notion that they will change their partners into just the person they want them to be. Most spouses turn out to be amazingly resistant to a make-over! Marriage is about accepting one another as real persons. Of course acceptance should never be offered as an excuse for treating one another poorly. We're talking about coming to understand that knights in shining armor and princesses in glass slippers live only in fairy tales. Marriage is also about coming down out of the dream world of courtship and early marriage to the real world of jobs and bills and children and housework and on and on. Over time, marriage is about living out the Serenity Prayer at very practical levels: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." So, if you were making a one-of-the-ten list today, what would be on your list?

Couple Dialogue. Give couples time to work as individuals and then dialogue as couples on "My One-of-the-Ten Gift List" ([Handout 2.1](#)).

Letting Go to Make Way for New Beginnings. David and Claudia Arp, popular authors on marriage and long-time members and contributors to the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME), suggest in their book *The Second Half of Marriage* (1996) that along about midlife, couples make a list of things they will never do or change. It's a time for coming to grips with some realities you just can't fool yourselves about anymore. Perhaps you've fantasized about taking a trip from coast to coast on a motorcycle, or drawn up plans in your heads for developing a piece of mountain property into your dream home. Maybe you've just hoped she'd

learn to pick up her shoes or he'd rinse out the sink more carefully after shaving.

Then there are the inevitable signs of aging that are not likely to reverse. Jim and Sally Conway offered this lament. He thanks God daily for his belt that keeps his belly from slipping and collecting in a pool of fat around his ankles! And she is only slowly beginning to accept under-eyes that resemble rising bread dough and the certainty she will probably never fit into those two-sizes-smaller clothes still hanging in the closet! Perhaps you are adjusting to the hard reality that your career may not peak as highly as you had hoped. You have to face it that your children will never be small again. And nothing has changed the fact that her keys are perpetually lost, his agenda too long for a reasonable day's work. Sometimes we have to "let go" of our fantasies to make way for new beginnings. So what's on your reality checklist that may require some letting go?

Couple Dialogue. Give couples another opportunity for personal reflection and dialogue around the exercise "Letting Go to Make Way for New Beginnings" ([Handout 2.2](#)).

New Beginnings. In his book *True Love*, Robert Fulghum (1997) collected love stories in response to his invitation: "Tell me a love story. Not one you've read or heard. One you've lived." One of the best stories was told to Fulghum by a husband of ten years. He thought he and his wife had a pretty good marriage, at least it had never occurred to him to look at anyone else.

Then a sequence of events began which left him both shaken and terribly excited at the same time. It all started when a note arrived at his office with no return address. It was from a woman who said she saw him often and had fallen in love with him. There were so many things about him she found irresistibly attractive. She especially liked the way he treated people and couldn't help but notice his fine manners. The letters came almost weekly. Sometimes she sent a poem. She never asked for anything. Never put him on the spot to meet or respond to her.

It wasn't long before the husband found himself scanning the mail, hoping there would be something from her. He felt terribly guilty, but never had he received letters from someone who seemed to understand him so well. In fact, he unconsciously began to live up to her image—started exercising to lose a few pounds, bought some new clothes, spent a few more minutes in front of the mirror each morning.

Then the mail got more exciting. She enclosed some pictures of men and women having fun together, some kissing and holding one another close. Nothing pornographic or lewd, just pictures of couples obviously in love. In her notes she spoke of the relationship she longed to enjoy with him. He had to confess, he longed for the same with her.

One day a dozen yellow roses arrived with a note inviting him to take the risk of meeting her. She would be sitting, the note said, in a nearby hotel lobby, wearing a yellow rose. He knew it was risky, but he had at least to get a look at her. He entered the hotel through a side entrance and took the elevator to the mezzanine overlooking the lobby. Hardly daring to look down, he furtively glanced around the lobby. There, sitting quietly and beautifully adorned with a yellow rose, was his wife. It was their tenth wedding anniversary.

Couple Dialogue. Give spouses the rest of the time to write as guided by *Beginning Again* ([Handout 2.3](#)). Encourage couples to share what they have written at home tonight.

Closing. Guard the edges of your meeting to encourage couples to come regularly despite their busy schedules.

Session 3: Communication: Key to Tomorrow's Intimacy

Getting Started. Take time for fellowship and housekeeping tasks, like distributing session handouts, planning who will host upcoming sessions, evaluating how things are going, i.e. is

everyone happy with the time, setting, program in general, etc.

Communication Caricatures: Before and After. In preparation for this session, gather together, if possible, an assortment of stuffed animals, "beanie babies," pictures from books and magazines, etc. that can be spread out on the floor in the middle of the group to stimulate discussion. Invite the participants to reflect on the kinds of communicators they have observed and the animals that could be used to characterize the various styles. (For example, are you like a turtle who prefers to be left alone in your private domain until you decide to come out? Or are you more like a chameleon who tries by what you say to just fit in to the surroundings? Then there are the skunks whose style keeps everyone else careful about what they say lest they "set them off," or the moose who will attack anyone in sight or the kangaroos who jump to another topic when communication gets the least bit uncomfortable. Territorial gorilla types are always on the defensive, bent on proving their point, while the parrots chatter incessantly, clamoring to be heard, and the beavers are ever at work, too busy to talk now, etc.)

Then open discussion on the following two questions: If you could pick one of God's creatures that would characterize the kind of communicator you would like to be married to, what would it be? (For example, dolphins send "sonar" messages which communicate messages and moods so clearly mates can understand and find one another no matter how murky the environment around them. The giant pandas of China communicate love through warm non-verbals and gentle vocalizations, etc.) What characterizes the kind of communication you consider to be optimal in a marriage relationship?

Couple Dialogue. Give couples a few minutes to dialogue together about communication in their marriage using "My Caricature as a Communicator: Before and After" ([Handout 3.1](#)) as a starter. *Honesty Tempered by Love.* David Mace (1982) writes in his book *Close Companions: Honesty in marriage is a good principle; but the ethic of honesty must always give way to the higher ethic of love.* (p. 76)

Discuss as a group what you think he means. David himself expands:

Too much disclosure too soon may produce a backfiring effect and bring a negative response. Making disclosures requires the right setting and the right time. In a few situations, unwise disclosures can be damaging—for example, betraying the confidences of others, or telling your partner you don't like him or her. . . . [Marriage enrichment] is designed to bring husband and wife out of the strained detachment and unreality into which many conventional marriages settle and to get the couple started on a new life together, characterized by new openness and new trust. Many couples with dull, dreary marriages long for something to happen that will take down the walls of deception they have built between them. (p. 76)

Couple Dialogue. Allow couple dialogue time around the exercise "Communication in Our Marriage" ([Handout 3.2](#)).

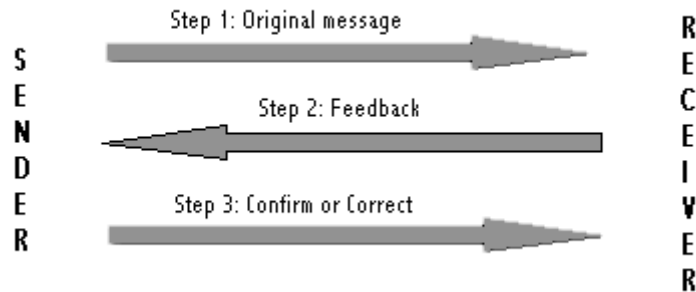
The Communication Cycle. Couples need both a desire to communicate more openly and the skills to do so effectively if they are to break down the "walls of deception" that David Mace identified in many marriages. The good news is that while communication is at the top of most every survey of felt needs among married couples, the skills necessary for good communication are not out of the reach of any couple who want to learn them.

The first lesson in "Communication 101" in anybody's book introduces the three steps in the communication cycle:

1. Original message
2. Feedback to verify whether the message was correctly understood
3. Confirmation or correction of the original message

David Mace graphically portrayed the process this way:

The Communication Cycle



From Mace, D. (1982). *Close companions*. Winston-Salem, NC: *The Association of Couples in Marriage Enrichment*, p.77. Used by permission.

When Wife A speaks to Husband B, she sends an ORIGINAL MESSAGE. Often this is the point at which communication breaks down. Husband B may be reading the paper or thinking about a difficult task facing him on the job. Or he may have tuned down Wife A because it seems she has been talking nonstop since he got home from work. Husband B doesn't want to admit, however, that he hasn't been listening, so he collects the bits and pieces he has heard and puts them together in his mind into a message he *thinks* is what she said.

Another scenario. Wife A and Husband B always get into a fight when they talk about finances. Wife A has always lived by a carefully planned budget. Husband B is usually responsible about money, but more spontaneous. Husband B sends Wife A an ORIGINAL MESSAGE about the telephone bill. Wife A has already seen the bill and is angry that he has made so many long distance calls to his mother. She definitely has a message to send to him about that, and she puts the finishing touches on just what she will say in her mind while he is talking. Wife A assumes Husband B is only making excuses anyway. She totally misses his tone of voice, the look on his face, and his aside that his mother is paying for several of the calls because she asked him to call when it was convenient to help her make a decision about some home repairs.

Communication breaks down after Step 1 in such scenarios because Spouse B doesn't really "hear" what Spouse A has said. He or she may think they've heard and jump to conclusions based on what they think they heard, but they may or may not have fully received the ORIGINAL MESSAGE. The only way to be sure is to continue with Step 2.

Step 2 involves Spouse B checking back with Spouse A to make sure he/she "heard" correctly. To "hear" well requires the undivided attention of eyes and ears and heart. Eyes to pick up on nonverbals. Ears to listen carefully to the words. Heart to enter into the feelings of the speaker. In Step 2, the receiver FEEDS BACK to the sender both the content and the feelings of the message he or she thinks they heard. It is important for the FEEDBACK message to identify both what the receiver heard, and how the receiver thinks the sender is feeling about the message at hand. Introductory words such as "I hear you saying . . .," "The message I'm getting is . . .," or "You want me to understand that . . ." are helpful beginnings to such FEEDBACK messages. They are a means of confirming that the receiver got the content of the message correctly.

Identifying the feelings behind the words can be a bit more difficult. But the messages we send to one another always have a feeling component. Unless the feelings are understood, the message cannot be fully grasped. The only way to know if you have understood the feelings correctly, is to FEEDBACK the feelings you are hearing and observing and ask for confirmation or correction of your perceptions.

In Step 3, the sender either CONFIRMS or CORRECTS the receiver's understanding of the content of the message and perceptions of the feelings behind the words. If correction is necessary, the sender re-sends the message again as clearly as he/she can to give the receiver another chance to understand. Steps 2 and 3 must be repeated until the sender agrees that the receiver has fully grasped the message.

Group Exercise. Give couples a few minutes to work together to choose the best Step 2 response in the exercise "What Did You Say Again?" ([Handout 3.3](#)). Go over the exercise together as a group when every one has had a chance to make their selections. (The best responses are: b, c, a, a, b, b. Note that the best response always includes a statement of the content and an identification of the feelings the receiver thinks he heard. It never contains a new message from the receiver or an attack on the sender.)

For discussion: How will an increased awareness of the communication cycle improve communication in a marriage? What gets in the way of our following through on all the steps in our day to day lives together? What changes will be necessary if we are to maximize the benefits of the Step 1-2-3 Communication approach to completing the communication cycle?

Couple Dialogue. The remainder of the time will be given over to practicing the Step 1-2-3 Communication skill by couples.

Suggest that the couples choose an issue they would like to talk about. Pick an issue which they are able to talk about quite easily. It should not be an issue over which they have serious conflict. Give each couple a piece of cardboard on which has been printed the diagram of the Step 1-2-3 Communication approach. This cardboard will help the couple remember the steps and identify who is sending a message and who is receiving the message at any given point in the process, i.e., who has the "floor" at any given time. During the first cycle of communication, the sender of the original message has the "floor." He/she retains the "floor" until he or she has confirmed that the receiver has fully understood the message in Step 3. (Note that Steps 2 and 3 may need to be repeated until the message has been correctly received.)

When the first receiver has correctly understood the message, he/she then has the "floor." He/she sends a new message and retains the "floor" throughout the Step 1-2-3 Communication process until his/her partner has fully understood, etc.

Session 4: Anger: One of the Best Ways Couple Grow

Getting Started. Enjoy your fellowship. This is an important time for group formation and bonding. By now, however, the temptation will be very real to let your fellowship time extend into the time you have committed to the meeting. Guard it's edges, making sure you keep marital growth the primary focus of your time together.

Group Discussion. In his collection of love stories, *True Love*, Robert Fulghum (1997) includes a three-line note written on perfumed stationery. It was shared with him by a middle-aged man who informed him that he had received it at least ten years back from his wife—to whom he was still married. It read simply:

*My dearest Harry:
I hate you, I hate you, I hate you.
Respectfully, with all my love, Edna.*

This note makes us laugh, but it reveals some pretty healthy couple dynamics. What's healthy about this note? What do you think characterizes the relationship of this couple? What do you imagine happening after Harry read the note from Edna? Why do you think he's still married to the same woman 10 years later?

Bible Study. A cartoon recently appeared in the newspaper which pictures a bedraggled couple sitting across the desk from their marriage counselor. The marriage counselor is responding, "Yes, I remember suggesting that you never go to bed angry. However two years is a long time to go without sleep!"

Another cartoon portrayed a woman in a seminar on anger exploding, "Good Christians don't get angry, and this whole discussion irritates me!"

We have interesting ideas about anger that arise from many areas of our lives. Many Christians feel uncomfortable with negative emotions. We aren't sure we should have them as Christians, we know that we do and we aren't sure what that means, and we don't know what to do with them when we have them.

Work together as foursomes to read the following Bible passages and discuss what they teach us about the emotion of anger.

Mark 3:1-6 (cf. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 10) - Anger is a God-given emotion which stirs us to action in behalf of someone who is being mistreated or oppressed.

Eph. 4:26 - Anger is part of the experience of the "new person" in Christ. But there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to use anger in relationships.

2 Samuel 13:1-22 - Anger is the God-given emotion that helps a person stand up for themselves and set a limit on abusive treatment.

2 Samuel 6:16-23 - Anger can put an end to intimacy in a marriage.

Couple Dialogue. For the first couple dialogue session of the evening, give couples time to explore their own experience with anger in their marriage using "Anger in Our Experience" ([Handout 4.1](#)).

Group Discussion. David and Vera Mace in their couple devotional *In the Presence of God* (1985), make this startling comment:

By getting behind the anger to the hurt feeling that has triggered it, the couple can learn something important about their relationship and clear it up. This is one of the most valuable ways in which relationships grow. (p. 58)

What do you think David and Vera Mace mean when they say "by getting behind the anger to the hurt feeling that has triggered it"? Someone has likened anger to the tip of a huge iceberg. Anger is what you see above the water, but the bulk of the "iceberg" of emotions lies beneath the surface. What "below-the-surface feelings can you name which are likely to give rise to anger if there is no way to express them or to resolve the problem with which they are associated? What might happen if couples could learn to express these feelings when they arise rather than waiting for them to escalate into anger? What uses of anger lead to destructive relational damage? How do you think the emotion of anger might be used constructively in a marriage to bring growth to the relationship rather than destruction?

Processing Anger. Anger is growth-producing rather than destructive in marriages when it is processed. Processing anger is a skill that can be learned by couples dealing with the normal range of anger which all human beings experience. There is anger which is beyond the normal range of everyday emotion, anger which is so intense as to be categorized as rage. In some circumstances, rage takes over the identity of a person and they go from being angry about something to being an angry person. This range of anger is usually a symptom of issues that need to be addressed with professional help.

Before this session, work together with your pastor or another person working in the helping professions to put together a list of Christian counselors in your area to whom couples who find themselves needing additional help with handling anger can turn. Provide this list as a handout for this session.

Learning in Small Groups. Use [Handout 4.2](#), "Processing Anger," for presenting the material in small groups. Let two couples work together to "teach" one another the four levels at which anger is processed. Each person takes a few minutes to familiarize themselves with one of the four points. When everyone has had a chance to go over the material assigned to them, they present the four points to each other in order.

Couple Dialogue. Close this session with opportunity for couple dialogue. "Growing Together Through Anger" ([Handout 4.3](#)) is provided as a dialogue starter. Recognize that some couples may go deeper in their dialogue around this issue than they have on some other issues. If possible, provide some extra space and privacy for couples as they dialogue together.

In Preparation for Next Week. Prepare two pieces of paper for each couple, one with "FP" printed on it, the other plain. Lay these two pieces of paper on the floor in front of each couple and instruct each spouse to pick up one piece of paper. The "FP" holders will meet privately with the leader couple briefly after the meeting. The leader couple will share with the "FP's" (Fun Planners) the good news that for the next MEG session you will meet together for 1 hour only. The rest of the evening will be devoted to couple fun. It is the responsibility of the FP to plan an evening of fun for their spouse and keep it a secret until next week. Distribute [Handout 5.2 Fun, Fun, Fun!](#) to help them with ideas. A spending limit can be set if the leader couple thinks this is wise. The point is not that couples need to spend a lot of money, it is just to provide time for busy couples to enjoy one another.

Session 5: Play Together, Stay Together

Getting Started. Enjoy!

Introduction. Play. A simple word, known even to children. A word easily translated into experience for some. A difficult word to put into practice for others. Likely, we all wish we could play more. Some of us wish we could play more easily. We have messages to deal with from our families of origin and strong work ethics which leave us vulnerable to overwork. And though we may give assent to the old saying "the family that plays together, stays together," we continue to struggle to leave work at the office, to find time for vacations, to relax with a good book in the evening, or to "fritter away" a whole Sunday just playing with the kids, without feeling guilty.

Couple Dialogue. Think about your "play-potential" together using "Our Play-Potential Quotient" ([Handout 5.1](#)).

Realizing Your Play-Potential. Claudia and David Arp are champions of couple fun. Their two books *52 Dates for You and Your Mate* (1993) and *10 Great Dates to Revitalize Your Marriage* (1997) are full of creative ideas. Their ideas are based on two beliefs: you can build your marriage and make a "time out" together out of anything and fun doesn't have to cost much of anything. Keep a few of their ideas (see [Handout 5.2: Fun, Fun, Fun!](#)) handy for planning future fun times. Meanwhile, your spouse has planned a surprise for you for the rest of the evening.

Closure. Send couples off on their fun evening.

Session 6: The Gift of the Magic Eyes

Getting Started. The fellowship time continues to be a good buffer between the day's busyness and your goal to set aside some dialogue time for your marriage.

Introduction: A Fable. In the village of Faken in innermost Friesland there lived a long thin baker

named Fouke, a righteous man, with a long thin chin and a long thin nose. Fouke was so upright that he seemed to spray righteousness from his thin lips over everyone who came near him; so the people of Faken preferred to stay away.

Fouke's wife, Hilda, was short and round, her arms were round, her bosom was round, her rump was round. Hilda did not keep people at bay with righteousness; her soft roundness seemed to invite them instead to come close to her in order to share the warm cheer of her open heart. Hilda respected her righteous husband, and loved him too, as much as he allowed her; but her heart ached for something more from him than his worthy righteousness. And there, in the bed of her need, lay the seed of sadness.

One morning, having worked since dawn to knead his dough for the ovens, Fouke came home and found a stranger lying on Hilda's round bosom.

Hilda's adultery soon became the talk of the tavern and the scandal of the Faken congregation. Everyone assumed that Fouke would cast Hilda out of his house, so righteous was he. But he surprised everyone by keeping Hilda as his wife, saying he forgave her as the Good Book said he should.

In his heart of hearts, however, Fouke could not forgive Hilda for bringing shame to his name. Whenever he thought about her, his feelings toward her were angry and hard; he despised her as if she were a common whore. When it came right down to it, he hated her for betraying him after he had been so good and so faithful a husband to her.

He only pretended to forgive Hilda so that he could punish her with his righteous mercy. But Fouke's fakery did not sit well in heaven.

So each time that Fouke would feel his secret hate toward Hilda, an angel came to him and dropped a small pebble, hardly the size of a shirt button, into Fouke's heart. Each time a pebble dropped, Fouke would feel a stab of pain like the pain he felt the moment he came on Hilda feeding her hungry heart from a stranger's larder.

Thus he hated her the more; his hate brought him pain and his pain made him hate.

The pebbles multiplied. And Fouke's heart grew very heavy with the weight of them, so heavy that the top half of his body bent forward so far that he had to strain his neck upward in order to see straight ahead. Weary with hurt, Fouke began to wish he were dead.

The angel who dropped the pebbles into his heart came to Fouke one night and told him how he could be healed of his hurt.

There was one remedy, he said, only one, for the hurt of a wounded heart. Fouke would need the miracle of the magic eyes. He would need eyes that could look back to the beginning of his hurt and see his Hilda, not as a wife who betrayed him, but as a weak woman who needed him. Only a new way of looking at things through the magic eyes could heal the hurt flowing from the wounds of yesterday.

Fouke protested. "Nothing can change the past," he said. "Hilda is guilty, a fact that not even an angel can change."

"Yes, poor hurting man, you are right," the angel said. "You cannot change the past, you can only heal the hurt that comes to you from the past. And you can heal it only with the vision of the magic eyes."

"And how can I get your magic eyes?" pouted Fouke.

"Only ask, desiring as you ask, and they will be given you. And each time you see Hilda through your new eyes, one pebble will be lifted from your aching heart.

Fouke could not ask at once, for he had grown to love his hatred. But the pain of his heart finally drove him to want and to ask for the magic eyes that the angel had promised. So he asked. And the angel gave.

Soon Hilda began to change in front of Fouke's eyes, wonderfully and mysteriously. He began to see her as a needy woman who loved him instead of a wicked woman who betrayed him. The angel kept his promise; he lifted the pebbles from Fouke's heart, one by one, though it took a long time to take them all away. Fouke gradually felt his heart grow lighter; he began to walk straight again, and somehow his nose and his chin seemed less thin and sharp than before. He invited Hilda to come into his heart again, and she came, and together they began again a journey into their second season of humble joy. (From the book *Forgive and Forget*, 1984. Copyright © 1984 by Lewis B. Smedes. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.)

Couple Dialogue. Use [Handout 6.1](#), "Magic Eyes," as a starter for this couple dialogue period. Because of the private nature of this session's topic, it is best to offer couples as much privacy as possible during the dialogue periods.

The Three Stages of Forgiving. Louis Smedes, in his book *The Art of Forgiving* (1996), outlines three stages in the forgiveness process:

1. We rediscover the humanity of the person who hurt us.

The process of forgiveness begins with the realization that we are all sinners. This recognition does not make excuses for injuring another person, nor does it diminish the magnitude or the wrongness of the hurtful behavior. In fact, this realization opens our eyes wide to the possibility that this person may wound us again. But seeing one another as "bruised reeds" (cf. Matt. 12:20) is the first step in the process of forgiving.

2. We surrender of our right to get even.

The natural response of human beings who have been deeply wronged is revenge. We want to give the person who inflicted us with terrible pain a taste of their own medicine. We savor the opportunities for vengeance, and more times than we would like to admit, we take deliberate steps to turn opportunities into what we think will be sweet retribution. An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. Most of us have discovered, however, that revenge is like a sugar-coated pill. It's sweetness is short-lived, and the bitterness which follows sours the entire system. Forgiveness offers another scenario. It does not turn from holding the person responsible for his or her behavior. It does not remove the hard consequences which follow in the wake of destructive relational choices. But it does free the person who has been wronged from the equally destructive work of payback and revenge.

3. We revise our feelings toward the person we forgive.

As we move step by step through the process of forgiveness, we move from an experience of deep pain toward healing. As we rediscover the humanity of the person who has hurt us and as we forego our right to payback, we find ourselves in time changing our feelings toward the person. We know we are at this stage in the process when we begin to be able to hope for some good things in the life of the person who has hurt us and we are at last able to wish them well. These steps are a separate process from the process of reconciliation which must take into consideration the response of the other person and the magnitude of the damage done. Forgiveness gives relationships every chance for restoration, though it recognizes that it may not be safe or possible for the persons in every situation to be fully reconciled.

An Experience in Forgiveness. The well-known philosopher Robert Fulghum shares a story from his marriage in his book *Uh-Oh!* (1991). Read the story together as a couple and use [Handout 6.2](#)

for dialogue.

Closure. Have couples pray together. If this is the final meeting of your MEG group, discuss possibilities for a future period in which you will meet together. Discuss the possibility of spawning a new MEG group and recruiting new couples.

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