

MARRIAGE WHERE GRACE IS IN PLACE

by

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Theme: Meditation and dialog by couples on the scriptural themes of the gospel can enrich their couple life.

Setting: The following material is designed for use in a marital care group. It could also be used in a marriage program or retreat over a weekend. The marital care group is a small group of several couples who meet on a regular basis for a specific period of time (See *Strengthening Marriage in the Marital Care Group* below).

Objectives:

- To offer an opportunity for scriptural study of passages with significance for marriage relationships.
- To provide an experience of spiritual growth in marriage.

Presentation Helps:

[Presentation Helps #1 Marital Care Group Guidelines](#)

[Presentation Helps #2 Grace That Is Not In Vain](#)

[Presentation Helps #3 Living Lives of Love](#)

[Presentation Helps #4 Beginners at Forgiveness](#)

[Presentation Helps #5 Drink From Your Own Well](#)

[Presentation Helps #6 Marriages Worthy of the Gospel](#)

[Presentation Helps #7 Display Windows of Grace](#)

Notes to Program Leaders:

- Read the article *Strengthening Marriage Through Marital Care Groups*.
- Establish one or more marital care groups. Groups may be formed informally by several interested couples deciding to get together or your Family Ministries Committee may recruit one or more core couples for marital care groups and then post sign-up sheets to fill out these groups.
- Distribute the article *Strengthening Marriage Through Marital Care Groups* along with the Presentation Helps to the marital care groups. You may wish to reprint the sections for couple dialog from the Presentation Helps on separate handout sheets. Leave space between the numbered items for couples to write their responses before sharing them verbally with each other.

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE THROUGH MARITAL CARE GROUPS

What's a Marital Care Group?

A marital care group is several couples who make a commitment to meet periodically for the specific purposes of continuing to learn about God's plan for marriage, enjoying caring fellowship and support, working on common marital issues, and experiencing deeper levels of intimacy

within their marriages. Marital care groups operate on these ideas:

- *Couples need other couples.* The encouragement given them through association and interaction with other marrieds provides an affirmation of their own coupleness, helps a couple stay in touch with reality, and helps meet their need for fellowship with others like themselves.
- *Couples can help couples.* In the marital care group, couples experience an environment of trust and acceptance that enables them to examine their own behavior and marital interaction, to observe others and to try alternate ways of relating in order to meet the various needs of their relationship.
- *Couples have strengths on which they can build.* The marital care group affirms their strengths and recognizes that they alone are the only "experts" on their relationship. This support gives the couple freedom and opportunity to build on what they have and to find new areas in which to grow together.

Organization

The marital care group is a small group of 4-6 couples who covenant with each other to meet, perhaps in one another's homes, for 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours every 2- 4 weeks. The life of the group is limited to 9-12 months, at which time the group terminates or re-covenants for another period.

Participation

Participation in the group is open to couples who are committed to growth in their relationship. Couples who have experienced a marriage strengthening program of some type will likely find that the marital care group helps them practice, refine and reinforce skills they have begun to use. Opportunity to join the group at any time may remain open. However, as time passes, the sense of group trust and sharing may be interrupted by newcomers.

Leadership

One or more couples serve as facilitators of the marital care group with leadership rotating from session to session. Leaders should be open with each other as a couple, willing to share aspects of their relationship in prudent and helpful ways with other couples, and sensitive to others who need emotional support within the group. Leaders should be familiar with group process and have a high degree of propriety. They should be alert to their own limitations and the limitations of the care group. Orientation for group leaders should be provided before launching them upon their task (See Bibliography for resources).

Content and Process

The marital care group is not therapy nor a substitute for therapy. It is not designed to deal with serious marital difficulties. Couples in marital difficulty should be encouraged to seek the services of a counseling professional. Marital care groups exist for the purpose of allowing couples to focus on their own relationship. Although common bonds and socializing will develop within the group, this must be secondary to the primary task of concentrating on some aspect or issue affecting relationships.

Topics. The group should select topics together, taking input from individual couples. The group may construct an agenda of topics for an entire year, for several meetings in advance, or do so on a meeting to meeting basis. Books, tapes, video clips, exercises, scripture verses or other materials may be used as springboards for discussion. (See [Presentation Helps #2-7](#) for suggested topics for six sessions.)

Couple dialog. The marital care group process includes development of group trust, acceptance, commitment to confidentiality and self-disclosure through sharing. Couple dialog, the verbal

sharing of feelings and thoughts between spouses, should be private. In some groups, where there is skilled and experienced leadership and high levels of trust, an alternative format may be used which includes some open couple dialog within the group (See "The Deeper Event," *Caring for Marriage*, 1988).

Guidelines

Acceptance of some guidelines will enable the group to focus on its purpose and avoid marital issues for which it is unequipped (See [Presentation Helps #1](#) *Marital Care Group Guidelines*). These should be covered thoroughly at the onset of the group. They may be referred to from time to time as necessary to help the group stay focused.

Suggested Session Schedule

7:30 - 8:00 Social time
8:00 - 8:15 Welcome and prayer, introduction to program, guidelines
8:15 - 8:45 Theme thought and group discussion
8:45 - 9:15 Couple dialog
9:15 - 9:30 Planning for Next Meeting; Closing Remarks; Prayer

Bibliography

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