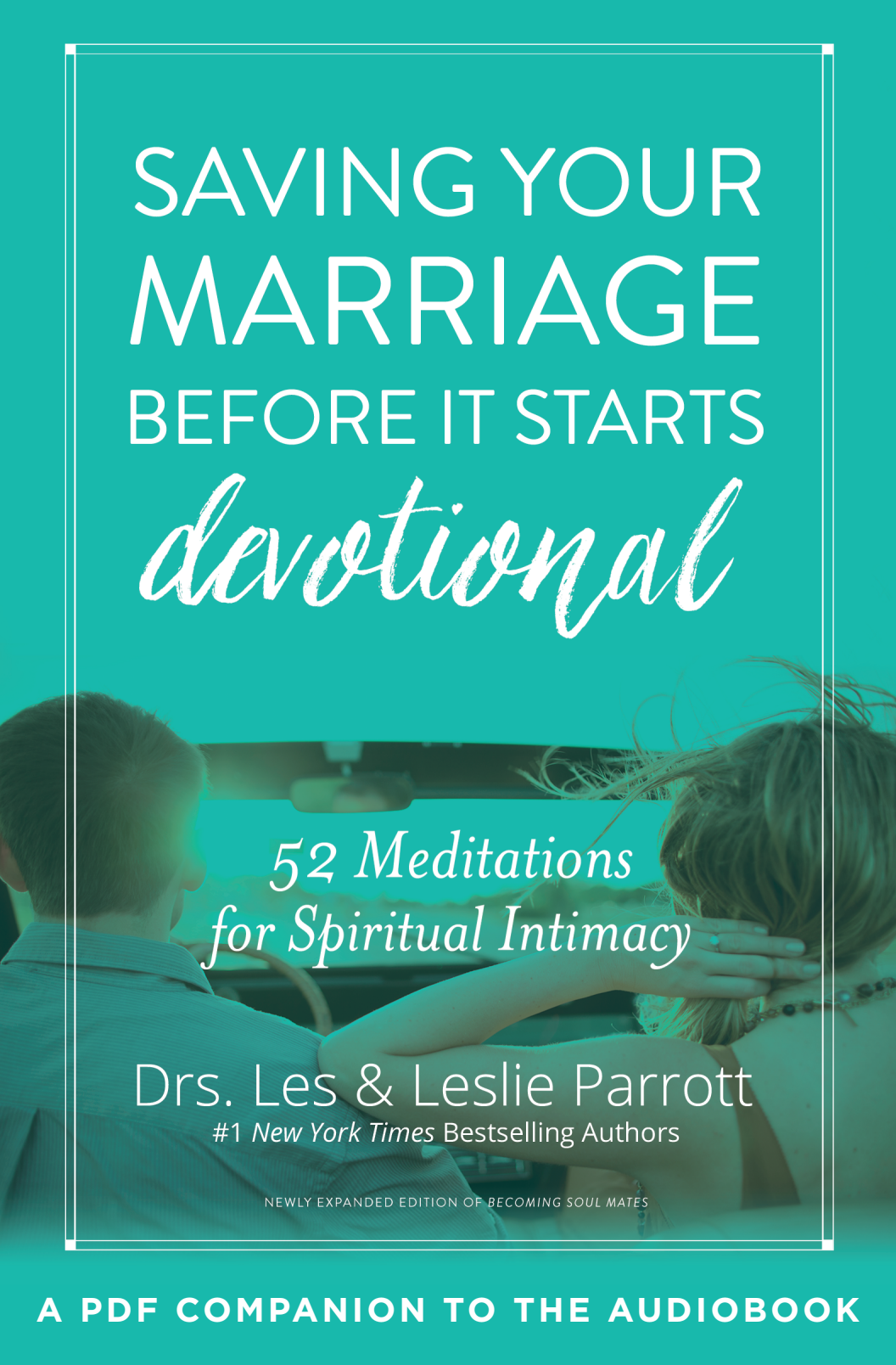


A photograph of a man and a woman in a car, viewed from the back. The man is in the driver's seat, and the woman is in the passenger seat, with her hand on the man's shoulder. The image is overlaid with a teal gradient.

SAVING YOUR MARRIAGE BEFORE IT STARTS *devotional*

*52 Meditations
for Spiritual Intimacy*

Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Authors

NEWLY EXPANDED EDITION OF *BECOMING SOUL MATES*

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Session One

LIVING HAPPILY EVER AFTER

YOUR TURN

- Why would the passage from 1 Timothy warn against putting your hope in wealth? How does being “rich in good deeds” apply to marriage?
- Give an example of a time when you experienced peace and contentment in your marriage even in the absence of creature comforts. What made it so?
- If you are like most couples, you probably believe a little more income would make you a lot happier. What kinds of differences do you think you would notice?
- Do you agree with the writer of Ecclesiastes that “better [is] one handful with tranquillity than two . . . with toil”? If so, how are you applying that to your marriage relationship?
- In what practical ways are you investing in your marriage so that it will outlast material possessions?

Session Two

DOUBLE YOUR SERVE

YOUR TURN

- What role does shared service play in your spiritual journey together? Are you reaching out as a team the way you would like to?
- Give an example of how your partner has inspired you to do a specific good deed.
- In your opinion, how is intimacy in marriage linked to shared service?
- Bonhoeffer said that shared service gives your marriage “dignity and meaning.” What does that mean to you?
- How can the two of you more effectively practice shared service in your marriage? What specific things might you do?

Session Three

ALL FOR A BAR OF SOAP

YOUR TURN

- Discuss the meaning of Christ's message about forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer and how it relates to your marriage.
- Give an example of a time when forgiveness broke the cycle of blame and pain in your marriage.
- Sometimes it is as difficult to ask for forgiveness as it is to grant it. How can each of you work on taking the initiative in this?
- Have you ever fallen into the trap of believing marriage is supposed to be fair? What allows you to make a shift from fairness to forgiveness in your marriage?
- What is one thing you can do to prepare in advance to face the next unfair situation with repentance and forgiveness between you?

Session Four

LIGHTEN UP

YOUR TURN

- Jesus was accused by some of enjoying life too much! In your opinion, how does his life model humor and fun?
- What things make you laugh together? How is your sense of humor similar to or different from your partner's?
- Does your humor as a couple ever turn hurtful? If so, when are those times and how can they be prevented?
- Give an example of a time when your partner's sense of humor lifted you out of a dark mood or a worried frame of mind.
- What can you do this week to lighten up as a couple?

Session Five

YOUR MONEY MATTERS

YOUR TURN

- Discuss the meaning of Christ's message about money from Matthew 6:19–21 and how it relates to Paul's warning against the love of money in 1 Timothy 6:10.
- Give an example from your upbringing that illustrates your attitude toward money management.
- What are the financial goals you share as a couple, and how are you working to meet them?
- Most marriages have a “spender” and a “keeper.” Talk about your roles and how each of you can learn from the other.
- How can the two of you prepare in advance to make your next money conflict less troublesome?

Session Six

IN THE BEGINNING . . . GOD CREATED SEX!

YOUR TURN

- Discuss the link between spirituality and sexuality. How would each of you articulate this connection? How could your sex life be a barometer of your spiritual health as a couple?
- Give an example from your early years that illustrates how you were educated about sex.
- One place in marriage where we want to keep the mystery, excitement, and fascination is in sexual intimacy. Talk about what you could do as a couple to avoid falling into a boring routine.
- Talk about how the two of you initiate sexual intimacy in your marriage. How could your times of lovemaking be better for each of you?
- How could the two of you more effectively celebrate the gift of sex in marriage?

Session Seven

CARING ENOUGH TO COMMIT

YOUR TURN

- Commitment is essential to knowing who God is. How would you describe this quality of God to a person who does not know him? What biblical examples and personal experiences would you use to illustrate God's commitment?
- Give an example of how God's commitment to you has been realized in your life.
- Some people are pessimistic about lifelong marriage. They have seen too many marriages fail. What makes you believe your marriage will be "till death do us part"?
- Commitment stems from a conscious decision. What are you doing to reaffirm this decision in your marriage? How is your commitment expressed?
- If someone were observing your marriage for signs of commitment, what would they take note of?

Session Eight

TURNING “ME” TO “WE”

YOUR TURN

- In your experience, how does the work of the Holy Spirit enable us to transcend self-centeredness?
- Give an example of a time when you set aside selfish concerns to be more loving toward your partner. Looking back, can you see any fruit that your choice produced in your marriage?
- In what concrete ways is your life more “whole” now that you are married?
- When is the “individual survival mode” most likely to dominate your relationship? Give specific examples.
- Discuss in specific terms how you can work together to turn the balance of your marriage into a “we”-centered relationship.

Session Nine

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A TEMPERAMENT MAKES!

YOUR TURN

- How do you and your partner handle differences? How could you improve the way you do this?
- Give an example of a time when your partner allowed the gift of your uniqueness to be evident in your marriage—a time when your differences were appreciated.
- How do you see the diversity of the body of Christ reflected in your marriage? In other words, how do your gifts differ from and complement one another?
- Discuss the tendency married people have to either sweep differences under the rug or try to change their partner. Where do you each fall on this continuum?
- What specific traits do each of you bring that create balance and completion in your marriage?

Session Ten

IF YOU BUGGED YOURSELF, WHAT WOULD YOU HEAR?

YOUR TURN

- How is the topic of our conversations related to our spiritual journey?
- Give an example of a conversation topic that you and your partner sometimes focus on that is not healthy or productive.
- If you recorded a typical conversation between you and your partner over dinner, what would you hear? What topics come up most often?
- What type of conversation would you hear most often in the family you grew up in (critical of family, critical of others, materialistic, or issues and ideas)?
- What practical things can you do as a couple to avoid negative conversations?

Session Eleven

SLOPPY AGAPE

YOUR TURN

- How have you allowed feelings to dictate your approach to marriage? Be specific.
- Give an example of a time when you met a need of your partner's out of a compulsion to please or simply to feel like a loving person. Did it backfire?
- Discuss how you can support one another in activities that meet your deepest spiritual needs.
- How can you distinguish between your partner's feelings and his or her genuine needs? Discuss what signs to look for in each other.
- What practical things can you do as a couple to encourage a focus on being loving persons rather than doing loving things?

Session Twelve

IT'S MY MARRIAGE AND I'LL CRY IF I WANT TO

YOUR TURN

- How have tears played a part in your marriage? How would each of you rate on a “tearfulness scale”?
- Give an example of a time you personally cried with your spouse. How comfortable was that experience for you?
- How does Christ’s response to the death of Lazarus impact you? What does it tell you about expressing your feelings through tears?
- Discuss how your spiritual well-being may be linked to your emotional well-being in marriage.
- How can each of you more effectively take into account the emotional well-being of your partner? How can you give him or her the freedom to express even sad emotions?

Session Thirteen

RAPUNZEL'S LOVE LESSON

YOUR TURN

- Why do you think it is difficult to accept God's gracious unconditional love?
- Give an example of how your personal significance was recently affirmed by your partner.
- Have you been trapped in the prison of fear of rejection?
- What is one thing your partner can do to affirm your worth and value?
- Discuss ways you can work as a couple to strengthen your awareness of God's love and grace this week.

Session Fourteen

LISTENING WITH THE THIRD EAR

YOUR TURN

- How do each of you practice the art of reflective listening? What do you consciously do to make it work?
- Give an example of how you personally have practiced the art of listening with your partner. What made it difficult or easy?
- Does reflective listening come more easily to one of you than it does to the other? Why or why not?
- How does listening relate to your spiritual journey?
- What is one way you can each practice reflective listening to strengthen the bonds of your marriage this week?

Session Fifteen

IS PRAYER YOUR STEERING WHEEL OR YOUR SPARE TIRE?

YOUR TURN

- Why do you think Jesus preached against hypocrites who love to pray in public? Why did he preach against “babbling” pray-ers?
- What were your experiences of prayer in your family growing up?
- Give an example of a time when you offered intercessory prayer for your partner. How did it impact your role in the situation at hand?
- Talk with your partner about the times you spend in personal prayer. Discuss how often you pray for each other.
- What can you do, in practical terms, to keep from treating prayer as a spare tire—only for emergencies?

Session Sixteen

THE DEADLY EMOTION OF ANGER

YOUR TURN

- What is the difference between feeling angry and committing a sin? Some believe they are the same thing. What about you?
- Give an example of a time when your partner's response enabled you to transform your anger into a positive outcome. What can both of you learn from that?
- Have you ever confused fatigue, nervousness, or being uptight with anger? How can you avoid this common error?
- What can you do, in practical terms, to resolve anger before it erupts? What can you do, for example, before discussing a typically hot issue?
- Since anger is inevitable, how can you and your partner work together to anticipate it and deal with it constructively?

Session Seventeen

THE EXTRA MILE IN MARRIAGE

YOUR TURN

- Why do you think Christ was so shocking in his definition of love? Do you believe it is obtainable?
- How have you struggled with the extra-mile principle? Have weariness or busyness been obstacles for you? What else makes the extra mile in marriage difficult for you?
- What price do most couples pay for doing only the bare minimum, only what is expected in marriage?
- Give an example of a time when you benefited from the extraordinary love of your partner.
- How can you work together to practice the extra-mile principle in your marriage? Give some examples of ways you might walk the extra mile for one another.

Session Eighteen

HELP FOR THE ROMANTICALLY IMPAIRED

YOUR TURN

- Scripture says that “love covers a multitude of sins.” What does this mean to you, and how does it apply to marriage?
- Give an example of a time when you tried to be romantic with your partner and it didn’t turn out that way. Are you able to laugh about it?
- How is your partner’s idea of romance different from yours? Discuss your idea of the perfectly romantic day or evening.
- In what specific ways do you appreciate your partner’s “romance language”—even when it is different from your own?
- The romance that couples enjoy decades after their wedding is often the result of how they built romance into their early years together. What are you doing to make romance a natural part of your marriage?

Session Nineteen

OUR LONGING FOR BELONGING

YOUR TURN

- What do you think Christ means when he says he will make his home with us?
- Give an example of a time when you felt a keen sense of belonging with your partner. What made it so?
- When do you most often long to belong, and in what ways?
- How was belongingness cultivated in your family as you were growing up?
- What is one thing you would like your partner to do to make you feel more like you belong? What is one thing you can do to create the same sense for your partner?

Session Twenty

THE CHURCH: A GREENHOUSE FOR GROWING SOUL MATES

YOUR TURN

- Talk about the place worship holds for you as a couple. Rate its importance to you on a scale of one to ten.
- Give an example from your upbringing that illustrates the role worship has played in your life since you were a child.
- What are the goals you share as a couple for church involvement, and how are you working to meet them?
- What is the highlight of the typical worship service for you? If it is the music, what is your favorite chorus or hymn?
- How can the two of you work to make worship as a couple more meaningful to both of you?

Session Twenty-One

NAMES CAN NEVER HURT ME—OR CAN THEY?

YOUR TURN

- Forgiveness is so fundamental to the message of Christ. What examples from Christ's life can you think of that illustrate this?
- Give an example of how you recently benefited from the ability of your partner to overlook a critical comment or behavior.
- When are you most likely to be critical of your partner?
- Have you talked about the difference between being criticized in public versus in private? What ground rules might help your relationship?
- How has your spouse's attentiveness and feedback contributed to your improvement? What works best for you in hearing critical information?

Session Twenty-Two

LOVE MEANS HAVING TO EAT HUMBLE PIE

YOUR TURN

- The Bible underscores the importance of humility again and again. Why do you think humility is one of the marks of wisdom?
- Give an example of a time when your partner's apology was an encouragement to you.
- Talk about how the two of you deal with apologies. Do you have your own unique styles of saying "I'm sorry"?
- Sometimes a person will offer a premature apology—without true sorrow—just to put an end to discomfort. Have you ever been caught in this trap? How can you avoid it?
- How can the two of you more effectively pursue the habit of humility in your marriage? Be specific.

Session Twenty-Three

WHEN STRESS STRIKES YOUR MARRIAGE

YOUR TURN

- What are you anxious about? Are you able to present it to God? If not, why not?
- Talk about how the two of you relax as individuals. What do each of you do to manage stress?
- Give an example of a recent stress outside your marriage that placed tension in your relationship. How does this happen, and what can you do to diminish it?
- Discuss the current pace of your lives. If you are like most people, you are often stressed out. What can you do this week to slow down?
- What is one thing you can each do for the other that will alleviate stress?

Session Twenty-Four

DESPERATELY SEEKING SCRIPTURE

YOUR TURN

- Many people feel guilty for not spending more time reading the Bible. Do you ever struggle with consistent study of the Scripture?
- Does Bible study come more naturally to one of you than the other? This is not uncommon. What can you do to learn from each other?
- We all have our own devotional style. Describe to your partner how you go about your personal study time in the Word.
- Give an example of a time when Scripture encouraged or influenced you at a critical point in your life.
- How has your marriage been blessed and nourished by reading the Word of God?

Session Twenty-Five

HELP! WE NEED SOMEBODY!

YOUR TURN

- Why is seeking guidance so crucial to acquiring the wisdom that leads to a fulfilled life?
- Give an example of a time when advice, insight, or counsel from a trusted source facilitated growth in you or your marriage relationship.
- Identify an experienced, healthy couple you might invite to mentor you as a couple. What do you think about this idea?
- Take an inventory of your relationship. Are there any red flags that might alert you to the need for marriage counseling? How can you be sure you are being honest about your real needs?
- What can you do in a concrete way to ensure that you will seek help if and when it is necessary for your marriage?

Session Twenty-Six

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

YOUR TURN

- Discuss the meaning of Christ's warning about the destructiveness of contempt in relationships. Why would he mention this?
- Give an example of a time when a disagreement strengthened your marriage—a time you were strengthened because of your honest admission of conflict.
- What have been your models for learning how to resolve conflicts? How did your parents fight?
- When it comes to difficult issues, what are the roles each of you tend to take? How can you learn from the strengths of the other?
- How can the two of you prepare in advance to make your next conflict a “good fight”? Talk about this in specific terms.

Session Twenty-Seven

A KISS ON THE LIPS

YOUR TURN

- In your opinion, why is truth so fundamental to love? Can you have love without truth?
- How have you struggled with being truthful (a desire to protect, a propensity to exaggerate, a tendency to control or to avoid a conflict, etc.)?
- Give an example of a time when you benefited from an honest, if painful, answer from someone. How did it help you?
- What experiences have you shared that have strengthened and developed the trust between you?
- How can you work together more effectively to “speak the truth in love”?

Session Twenty-Eight

HOW IRON SHARPENS IRON

YOUR TURN

- How do you incorporate the process of personal change into your spiritual pilgrimage? How does God speak to you about things you need to change?
- Has being married increased your level of self-awareness? If so, in what ways?
- Share with your partner the desires you have for personal improvement.
- Give an example of a time when your partner's feedback helped produce a positive change in you.
- What can you do to more effectively promote growth in one another? In other words, how can you "sharpen" each other?

Session Twenty-Nine

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING “I LOVE YOU”

YOUR TURN

- How do you make your love “overflow” for each other?
Does your faith influence your expressions of love?
- How was love expressed in your family while growing up?
How often were the words *I love you* used?
- Is it more difficult for one or both of you to express loving words routinely? Why or why not?
- Tell about a recent incident when you were especially appreciative of your partner saying “I love you.”
- What can you and your partner do to cultivate a free exchange of loving messages in your relationship?

Session Thirty

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

YOUR TURN

- Why do you think Christ ministered to the sick and the needy?
- What does “in sickness and in health” mean to you? How do you and will you live out this part of your marriage vow?
- Describe to your partner how you like to be treated when you are ill (doted on, left alone, etc.).
- How do you feel when your spouse is sick? Talk about the role of helping the sick partner. What is the toughest part?
- Give an example of a time when you were ill and the care of a parent or loved one was especially meaningful.

Session Thirty-One

THE POWER OF LOVE IN ACTION

YOUR TURN

- How do you experience the love of Christ in your life?
When have you felt most loved by God?
- Give a personal example of a time when an unexpected or painful blow was mitigated by love in your life.
- Since misery doesn't always love company, what can you do now to ensure that when misery strikes your lives you will not be pulled apart?
- What can you do as a couple to cultivate a reliance on the power of God's love in times of difficulty?
- Do you agree with Emmet Fox that no matter how deep the trouble, a sufficient realization of love will dissolve it?
Why or why not?

Session Thirty-Two

AVOIDING THE BLAME GAME

YOUR TURN

- The Bible emphasizes personal responsibility and free will. Why do you think this is part of the gospel message?
- Have you noticed society's tendency toward victimhood? Why do you think so many people are quick to blame others?
- Give an example of a time when you decided to rise above your negative circumstances. How did you adjust to something that was beyond your control? What allowed you to have a positive attitude?
- How does your partner demonstrate personal responsibility? What mature choices have you seen him or her make?
- In practical terms, what can you and your partner do to foster a blame-free relationship?

Session Thirty-Three

YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME!

YOUR TURN

- How can you work together to keep the destructive influence of guilt and fear from entering into your marriage?
- Give an example of a time when you received compassion and understanding from your partner.
- Why do you think Christ so strongly admonishes us not to pass judgment on each other (see Luke 6:37)?
- Give an example of how you have been motivated to do something for your mate because you felt guilty.
- What is one step you can take together as a couple that will decrease controlling maneuvers in your relationship?

Session Thirty-Four

SEX, SEX, SEX . . . ENOUGH ALREADY!

YOUR TURN

- Do you identify with the scenario in the opening paragraph of this session? Why or why not?
- What causes tension in your sexual relations? What, if anything, do you disagree about and why?
- Give an example of an intimate encounter with your partner that brought you deep emotional fulfillment. What made it that way for you?
- Discuss how your sexuality can be woven into a pattern of personal dedication as a couple. What concrete steps can each of you take toward this goal?
- How can you infuse your sexual intimacy with more physical pleasure?

Session Thirty-Five

PAY NOW, PLAY LATER

YOUR TURN

- Discuss how each of you practices the art of delaying your gratification. Does it come easier to one of you than it does the other?
- Give an example of how you personally have patiently practiced delayed gratification.
- How do patience and delayed gratification relate to your spiritual journey with Christ?
- Name one or two areas in your lives that could benefit from the discipline of delayed gratification. How could you as a couple practice it?
- How could practicing delayed gratification buoy your marriage?

Session Thirty-Six

HOW TO BE A WISE GUY (AND GAL)

YOUR TURN

- Scripture points to the fact that wisdom is more about who you are as a person than it is about what you say or do. What do you make of this?
- Was there a time in your relationship when the emotions of love overruled sound judgment? What can you learn from that experience?
- Give an example of a time when you humbled yourself to ask for help. How did it increase your wisdom?
- Is it a struggle for you to ask for help? How about your partner? Does it prevent either one of you from becoming “wise”?
- In what areas do you find that your spouse is especially wise? How did he or she develop that wisdom?

Session Thirty-Seven

THE ROLE OF OPTIMISM IN MARRIAGE

YOUR TURN

- Why do you think hope is talked about so often in Scripture?
- Give an example of a time when you saw your partner demonstrate hope and optimism.
- Have you ever fallen victim to learned helplessness and given up hope? What did you do to overcome it?
- Talk about the home you grew up in. Was it basically optimistic or pessimistic? What can each of you learn about being optimists from your families?
- Is there something right now in your life that could be given a boost with a shot of optimism? How can you help each other cultivate this virtue?

Session Thirty-Eight

THE VALUE OF TENDER TOUCH

YOUR TURN

- Why do you think Christ was so attuned to personal touch?
- Give an example of how you benefited from a recent touch from your partner.
- When do you most often want to be touched by your partner and in what ways?
- Do you feel differently about touching in public versus touching in private?
- What is the one thing you would like your partner to understand about you and touching?

Session Thirty-Nine

NO ONE NEEDS TO BE A FOOL

YOUR TURN

- How have you sought God's will in your life and what difference has it made?
- Wise decisions take time. What goes into your decision making process as a couple?
- Many things can lead to foolish choices. Chief among them is anger. Has anger ever led you to a foolish choice? How?
- If you were to be as specific as possible, what do you think God's will for your marriage is this week?
- In practical terms, what can you and your partner do to protect your marriage against foolish choices?

Session Forty

HAVING THE TITHE OF YOUR LIFE

YOUR TURN

- Jesus counsels us not to “store up treasures on earth.” How do you understand and live out this concept?
- Give an example of a time when you identified a financial need and gave as a team to help meet that need.
- What struggles have you encountered in trying to agree on joint giving? What are you doing to resolve them?
- Take some time to conduct a financial inventory. Identify any changes you might make in the ways you spend and give money as a couple.
- In practical and specific terms, how can the two of you more effectively share in the joy of giving?

Session Forty-One

AVOIDING THE NUMBER ONE MARRIAGE PROBLEM

YOUR TURN

- Why do you think the Bible so often emphasizes the ability to listen? Why does it single it out as a mark of wisdom?
- What is one thing you would like your partner to understand about your need to be listened to and understood? How would you like him or her to improve as a listener?
- Give an example of how you benefited from a recent time of communication with your partner—a time when he or she was an especially good listener.
- When do you most often want to be listened to by your partner? How do you convey this to him or her? Or do you?
- Do you feel that gender differences help or complicate listening? Give examples to support your comments.

Session Forty-Two

THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

YOUR TURN

- Many times the Scriptures talk about being thankful. Why do you think the virtue of gratitude is highlighted so often in the Bible?
- What is it about your partner that makes you the most thankful?
- Give an example of a recent time when your partner, out of courtesy, said “thank you” and it gave you a little boost.
- So often our gratitude goes unspoken. We feel grateful, but we just don’t say it. Share with your partner some “thank you”s you have been withholding.
- Take an inventory of the strengths of your marriage. How often do you give thanks to God for these gifts?

Session Forty-Three

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

YOUR TURN

- How does your faith enable you to practice mutual submission in your marriage and how does your marriage teach you about submitting to God?
- How was the principle of mutual submission modeled in your family growing up?
- It is difficult to submit to another's needs if you are unaware of them. Talk about how the two of you make your needs known to each other (i.e., are you direct, indirect, emotional, rational, etc.?).
- Give an example of a time when each of you practiced mutual submission.
- In most marriages the wife makes some decisions, the husband makes others. But then there are some matters that are so important that they require both husband and wife. What are some examples of these important issues for you?

Session Forty-Four

GOD'S PERFECT LOVE

YOUR TURN

- How does God's love, as expressed in the Romans passage, shape your love for your partner?
- Give an example of how you have recently encountered God's love demonstrated in your marriage through your partner's actions.
- Discuss how God's love can sustain you in marriage even when one of you falls short of the mark on love.
- What is one way you and your partner can seek to become more "rooted and established in God's love"?
- Why do you think God's love is described as an "unchangeable" love? How does this inform your approach to loving your partner?

Session Forty-Five

THE GUILT-FREE DROP

YOUR TURN

- Some Christians believe that God wants them to feel guilty. Do you have a hard time believing that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”?
- Give an example of a time in your life when you were afforded grace instead of guilt. What did that do for you?
- Discuss the difference between true guilt and false guilt and how both affect marriage.
- When are you most tempted to make your mate feel guilty? Why?
- Talk about some real-life situations where you might give one another a “guilt-free drop.”

Session Forty-Six

STOP STEWING AND START DOING

YOUR TURN

- Why does Scripture tell us to not be anxious about anything?
- In what ways has your marriage suffered as a result of worry?
- What recurring issues tend to cause the most anxiety and worry for each of you?
- Give an example of a time when you experienced peace rather than anxiety in the face of fearful circumstances. What made it so?
- How can you help each other release worry and rely on Christ for peace and provision?

Session Forty-Seven

SINKING YOUR ROOTS DOWN DEEP

YOUR TURN

- Christ invites us to “abide in him.” What does this mean to you, and how does it nurture your spiritual root system?
- Most married couples experience times of uprooting from family or friends. What has your experience been?
- Give an example of a project or activity or experience which has “intertwined your roots” as soul mates.
- What are the goals you share as a couple that increase your rootedness in each other?
- How are the two of you growing together in an understanding of God’s Word? Can you think of some specific examples?

Session Forty-Eight

DO YOU DREAM WHAT I DREAM?

YOUR TURN

- Scripture underscores the value of dreams and visions. Why do you think this is?
- Give an example of a time when your partner was a catalyst for something beyond your expectations—a time when he or she helped you dream.
- What are the dreams you share for your future together? How do you see your marriage, ten, twenty, thirty years from now?
- Sometimes a spouse will unknowingly shoot down a partner's dream. Has this happened to either of you? How can you prevent this from happening?
- Have you ever written down goals as a couple? If you were to note three goals for your marriage, what would they be?

Session Forty-Nine

A LITTLE HEAVEN ON EARTH

YOUR TURN

- Do you have any tangible reminders in your home that serve as an impetus for creating a little heaven on earth through your marriage?
- What selfish pattern do you see in yourself that you would like to change? How does it impact your marriage?
- How do you work cooperatively to meet each other's needs? Give some examples.
- What is a concrete step each of you can take right now to initiate a pattern of increased kindness in your marriage?
- Are there areas of your life where you are ruggedly independent or reluctant to accept help? Share with your partner how he or she can offer the type of assistance you desire.

Session Fifty

A MILE IN MARRIAGE MOCCASINS

YOUR TURN

- While the word *empathy* is never used in the Bible, it is, in a sense, what the whole gospel message is about. Talk about the way empathy is ultimately demonstrated in the life of Christ.
- What is one area where you would especially like your spouse to empathize with you?
- It is easy to jump to conclusions and become critical without first understanding why your mate did something. What would allow you to catch yourself the next time you are tempted to do so?
- In what ways have you consciously or unconsciously wished your partner was more like you? Are you ready to let that expectation go?
- Give an example of a time you consciously tried to empathize with your partner. Was it hard work? What happened as a result of your effort?

Session Fifty-One

THE QUESTION THAT COULD CHANGE YOUR MARRIAGE

YOUR TURN

- The Bible lists many admirable qualities, virtues, and traits. Out of the ones mentioned in the passage from 2 Peter, which ones do you find toughest to practice?
- Share with your partner how you think you might be difficult to live with at times. What qualities would make it hard for you to be married to you?
- Share with your partner the qualities he or she possesses that make it easy for you to be married to him or her.
- What makes it so difficult for most spouses to pass over minor offenses in marriage?
- Talk about one thing each of you is going to work on this week to become easier to live with.

Session Fifty-Two

SOUL TO SOUL FOREVER AND EVER

YOUR TURN

- Can you sense that God is rejoicing over you and your marriage? How do you, as a couple, join in his celebration of you?
- How is your marital maturity tied to your spiritual development? Can you separate the two? Why or why not?
- Talk about the meaning of your wedding anniversary. How do you like to mark this important milestone?
- What are the signs in your relationship right now that indicate you and your partner are on your way to becoming lifelong soul mates?
- In your mind's eye, what will your fiftieth wedding anniversary look like? What emotions will you be experiencing? What will you be most thankful for?