

Men: Your Marriage Matters...to God

Transform Your Marriage, Starting With You

6 Week Small Group Workbook

By
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Weekly Assignments

This study guide is designed to help you capture your notes in preparation for each session, to provide thought-provoking questions to ponder, and to make it easy to define key takeaways from our weekly discussions.

Be intentional during each week in your study. For your benefit, don't wait until the night before or the morning of the next session to start and "cram." Approach this intentionally and be open and willing to let the Holy Spirit lead you along the way. Explore both the subtle and the monumental paradigm shifts about your marriage and identify actions and next steps as you apply each week's written material along with the small group discussion.

Also, feel free to share prayer requests and your "lessons learned" from the past week with the group as you apply these concepts. Not only will you benefit but others will benefit from your experience and insights.

Additional Resources

Please visit our website at www.menyourmarriagematters.com for additional resources including:

- Free, PDF version of the book, *Men: Your Marriage Matters...to God*
- Leader's Guide PDF with helpful tips in facilitating men's small group studies using these materials
- 6-week men's small group Study Guide PDF (this booklet in electronic form)
- Videos designed both for leaders and to help kickoff weekly group meetings
- Links to additional videos and resources that may be helpful for readers and participants

Week 1 – Introductions and Orientation

Brief Personal Introduction by Participants (2-3 minutes each)

- Your Name
- Wife's Name, how long married, number of children, and their ages
- Current job or job/career pursuit
- Best thing about your marriage?
- The biggest challenge in your marriage?
- Your personal goal(s) for this 6-week study group

The Big Ideas:

- Many men desire to draw closer to God but don't recognize that marriage itself is designed by Him to do so. God wants a relationship with us and ultimately wants us to have the heart of Christ.
- Marriage is God's way of holding up a mirror for us to see our progress in becoming Christ-like.

Week 2 – Pre-read the following sections:

Introduction (page VII)

The State of Marriage Today (page 1)

Why is Marriage so Hard? (page 4)

Related Assignment: Identify the 2-3 most frustrating and challenging elements of your marriage relationship (i.e. conflicts, lack of connection, intimacy, etc.) and consider a few questions for each: Has it become better or worse over time? Do you think it's unique to your marriage relationship? What do you see as the root cause of the issue?

A Marriage Quiz (page 7)

Our Marriage Journey (page 9)

- Reflections from the previous week's discussion/to-do's:
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- Key 'aha's' on this week's readings:
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- Key questions/topics for discussion with the group:
 - i. How do you think God feels about the state of marriage in general today? (Page 1)
Your assessment?
 - ii. Why are so many marriages struggling today?
 - iii. Why is marriage hard from your perspective? (Page 4)
 - iv. Be prepared to discuss the "related assignment" from above - what makes your marriage challenging (share only as you feel comfortable with the group this week)
 - v. How did you fare in the Marriage Quiz? (page 7)
 1. Strengths?
 2. Weaknesses?
 - vi. If you are experiencing dissatisfaction in your marriage – is it logical to think your wife is as well? More or less dissatisfaction than you?
 - vii. Does it surprise you that men and women rank their marriages so differently?
 - viii. How different are marriage-related challenges for a Christian couple compared to those where one or both are not followers of Christ?
 - ix. Too many men conclude that they have to accept a mediocre marriage (or end it) and not knowing how to solve the problems is what wears a man out. Do you agree?
 - x. Can you relate to Peter and Devonie's marriage journey? (Page 9) In what ways?
- Your thoughts/questions?
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- What's my action plan going forward? What do I want/need to keep top-of mind?
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Capture Small Group Discussion Notes Here:

The Big Ideas:

- Marriage is Hard! Why? Because marriage is so strategic in God's masterful design
- Take an honest look at your marriage today – is there an opportunity, starting with you, and with God's help, to make it more abundant?

Week 3 – Pre-read the following sections:

Homework Assignment: Write a prayer this week to God expressing your struggles and hopes in your marriage. In essence, cast a God-centered vision for your marriage. (Do this honestly and resolutely – there is no need to share with others in the group unless you feel led to do so)

What is an Abundant Marriage? (page 13)

God's Design for Men and Marriage (page 17)

Six Guiding Principles (page 22)

- Reflections from the previous week's discussion/to-do's:
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- Key "aha's" on this week's readings:
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- Key questions/topics for discussion with the group:
 - i. Insights and perspectives on this week's "homework assignment" (above)?
 - ii. Has your definition of a "good" marriage changed over time? (page 13)
 - iii. Which elements of an abundant marriage are most elusive and why?
 - Honest and transparent communications (page 14)
 - Love is a verb, not a noun or an emotion (page 15)
 - Affection and intimacy (page 15)
 - Children are nurtured and launched (page 15)
 - Both spouses are growing in their relationship with God (page 16)
 - Others?
 - iv. What is your perspective on God's design for men and marriage? (page 17)
 - v. How would you define our role as 'spiritual leaders' of our marriage/family?
 - vi. Do you ever feel your prayers are unanswered (as though God doesn't hear them) if you don't *live with our wives in an understanding way* (1 Peter 3:7) (page 18)?
 - vii. Do you agree that "God has purposed your marriage as a primary vehicle to draw us closer to Him by enabling us to become more Christ-like?" (page 19)
 - viii. Did the common objections of men sound familiar? (page 19) Which do you feel personally?
 - ix. Why is it so uncommon for married couples to invest in their marriages or get help?
 - x. Is it possible, in your mind, that a husband can transform his marriage, starting with himself only? (page 21) Why or why not?
 - xi. Be prepared to discuss each of the following "Guiding Principles" (What is difficult about each? Do you agree with the principle?)
 - **Husbands (and all men) are called to be Christ-like** (page 22)
 - **God designed marriage to help show us how we're doing on the journey to Christ-likeness** (page 23)

- **A Christian man has the ability to transform his marriage even if his wife is less interested** (page 24)
- **God designed your wife to profoundly respond to your progress** (page 25)
- **You, as the husband, are responsible for the health of your marriage (doesn't mean you are to blame though)** (page 25)
- **When we draw closer to God we will also draw closer to our wife in the process** (page 25)
- Your thoughts/questions?
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- What's my action plan going forward? What do I want/need to keep top-of mind?
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Capture Small Group Discussion Notes Here:

The Big Ideas:

- God has a strategic, abundant design for your marriage – and there is hope in that vision
- The Six Guiding Principles in God's design for marriage and our role as husbands in this design

Week 4 – Pre-read the following sections:

The Husband's Nature (page 27)

God Designed Your Wife to Respond to Your Christ-likeness (page 29)

Purpose and Priorities (page 31)

It's Not Just About Trying Harder: The Power of the Holy Spirit (page 36)

The first 2 strategies from “22 Practical Strategies”: (page 39)

1. You'll make no progress without intentionality (page 40)
2. When pride comes, then comes disgrace (page 41)

- Reflections from the previous week's discussion/to-do's:
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- Key “aha’s” on this week's readings:
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- Key questions/topics for discussion with the group:

- i. Do you agree with Ken Nair's outline of the 4 common prejudices men tend to carry? (page 27)
- ii. Being dismissive might be the most common manifestation of these prejudices – can you think of things you do that could be considered by your wife to be dismissive?
- iii. Why do you think so many 25+ year marriages tend to fail?
- iv. Have you ever thought that your wife is the source of the trouble in your marriage (honestly)? Did it make it easier to disregard her complaints?
- v. “She's not perfect either! Why is it fair that I have this responsibility and not my wife?” “It sounds like husbands could get all the blame!” Can you relate to these objections?
- vi. “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart* (Prov 21:2) – can we use our marriage circumstances to discern God's ways vs. our own?
- vii. There is a built-in desire in a wife that causes her to be dramatically affected by acceptance or rejection from her husband (page 29). Have you experienced this?
- viii. Many women would rather not tell the truth than face rejection from their husband – Agree?
- ix. How does the thought of encouraging your wife to evaluate your character affect you? Do you think there's much difference between your wife's opinion and yours?
- x. What would your wife say is typically your attitude toward her counsel - do you seek it?
- xi. What would it take to train you to hear questions from your wife as questions, not challenges? (page 30)

- xii. A Christ-like husband – does it lead to a perfect wife? Likely not. On the other hand – If you have an imperfect wife, would Jesus have loved her any less? Be prepared to discuss.
- xiii. Do you have clarity on your purpose in life? What is it? (page 31)
- xiv. What's your view of the purpose of marriage – utilitarian or sacred? (page 32) God's view?
- xv. How does your view of the purpose of marriage translate to your personal priorities? What are your most prominent priorities? Does your calendar align with these?
- xvi. If you were to ask your wife what priority she plays in your life, what would she say?
- xvii. Becoming Christ-like requires that we let the Holy Spirit help to change us (page 36) – do you agree or not? Why is this concept elusive to most? Read Gal 2:20 and be prepared to discuss how it applies to your role as a husband.
- xviii. **Strategy #1** - How intentional have you and your wife been about improving your marriage? What has prevented this from being a priority? (page 40)
- xix. **Strategy # 2** - How can pride get in the way of a husband being Christ-like? (page 41) Which of these scripture verses related to pride (page 41-42) most strongly convict/inspire you?
 - a. *When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom* (Prov 11:2).
 - b. *Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor* (Prov 18:12).
 - c. *Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life* (Prov 22:4).
 - d. *Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him...* (Prov 26:12).
 - e. *For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted* (Matthew 23:12).
 - f. *Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all* (Mark 9:35).
- xx. What's the hardest part of "dying to self" in marriage?
- Your thoughts?
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- What's my action plan going forward? What do I want/need to keep top-of mind?
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Capture Small Group Discussion Notes Here:

The Big Ideas:

- We are innately self-oriented, prideful, and imperfect – it's in our nature and at the heart of the gospel
- It's not about trying harder...it's the power of the Holy Spirit living in and through us!
- You won't make progress without being intentional
- Humility and selflessness is our call; even as strong, capable men/husbands

Week 5: Pre-read the following sections:

Strategies #3 through #8 from "22 Practical Strategies": (starts on page 43)

3. Your wife can make the first move...but it almost never works (page 43)
4. Forgiveness and repentance (page 44)
5. Communications (page 47)
 - Assume the best of intentions, not the worst (page 48)
 - Women confront to connect (page 49)
 - The 5 love languages (page 49)
 - Transparency and vulnerability (page 50)
 - Learn to fight fair (page 51)
 - Marriage staff meetings (page 53)
6. Sex and intimacy (page 54)
7. Staying married is about burning the ships (page 56)
8. Joy is found when you stop expecting your spouse to make you happy (page 57)

Homework Assignment: Prepare for these checkpoint questions on your progress-to-date:

- What has changed, if anything, since we started this journey?
- What are your 'lessons learned' so far?
- Your commitments going forward to improve the health of your marriage:
 - Attitudes?
 - Time allocation and priorities?
 - Other?
- Reflections from the previous week's discussion/to-do's:
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- Key "aha's" on this week's readings:
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- Key questions/topics for discussion with the group:
 - i. Checkpoint Questions on our progress to date: see homework assignment above
 - ii. **Strategy #3** Your wife can make the first move...but it almost never works. Why?
 - iii. **Strategy #4** - Forgiveness and repentance – is there one (or even a few) unconfessed sins in your marriage that are worth praying about confessing and repenting?
 - iv. What makes this confession and repentance process so difficult? Do you agree this has the potential to profoundly change your relationship for the better?
 - v. **Strategy #5** - Which of the "Communications" topics were most useful and why?
 - Assume the best of intentions, not the worst
 - Women confront to connect

- The 5 Love Languages
- Transparency and vulnerability
- Learn to fight fair
- Marriage staff meetings

vi. Men's unwillingness to give their wives the freedom to say exactly how they feel is at the heart of relationship disagreements. Do you agree, or not? Why?

vii. Can you imagine the closeness we could experience if we accept our wives totally into our confidence?

viii. **Strategy #6** - Sex and Intimacy - Have you experienced the difficulties that arise based on the difference between men and women and our sexual drive/motivation? Why would God design us this way?

ix. In your view, how important is sex in a marriage relationship?

x. Note: From Gary Thomas in his book, *Sacred Marriage* – the strong sex drive in a husband is one of God's designs to keep a man focused and interested in the relationship as he should be. Agree or not? How masterful was God's design?

xi. **Strategy #7** – Is staying married really about 'burning the ships'? How absolute is this in your marriage?

xii. **Strategy #8** - Joy is found when you stop expecting your wife to make you happy – do you agree? What's the source of your joy? What part of this resonated with you?

xiii. What expectations do you have for your wife in your marriage? What about desires?

- Your thoughts?
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- What's my action plan going forward? What do I want/need to keep top-of mind?
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Capture Small Group Discussion Notes Here:

The Big Ideas:

- Confession, repentance, and forgiveness will bring healing and are often the door between mediocrity and abundance in your marriage
- Effective communications is less about technique and far more about our attitude, transparency, and vulnerability
- Sex and intimacy is one of the spiritual 'fruits' of our Christ-likeness, not the goal

Week 6 – Pre-read the following sections:

From “22 Practical Strategies”:

9. The couple that prays together, stays together (page 59)
10. Loving others at the expense of your wife (page 59)
11. We'd give up our life for our wife, but won't take her advice (page 60)
12. Does your enthusiasm for your wife match your dog's? (page 61)
13. Marriage as the training ground for life (page 62)
14. Are you dating your wife? (page 62)
15. Marriages without margin will struggle (page 63)
16. Don't do life alone (page 64)
17. This trip requires some unpacking (page 65)
18. Five feet for five minutes (page 65)
19. Managing money together (page 66)
20. Marriage and raising kids (page 68)
21. Empty nest stage (page 70)
22. For those aspiring to marriage (page 73)

What Constitutes Success? (page 76)

- Reflections from the previous week's discussion/to-do's:
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- Key “aha’s” on this week's readings:
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- Key questions/topics for discussion with the group:
 - i. **Strategy #9** - Do you and your wife pray together regularly? How can you become more intentional in this area?
 - ii. **Strategy #10** - Do you tend to treat other people in your life even more graciously than your wife?
 - iii. **Strategy #11** – What makes welcoming/accepting advice from your wife difficult?
 - iv. **Strategy #12** - Does your enthusiasm for your wife match your dog's?
 - v. **Strategy #13** - Do you believe that the lessons God designed for us to learn in marriage can make us more effective in other relationships (children, friends etc.)?
 - vi. **Strategy #14** - Are you dating your wife? What's the evidence to convict you?
 - vii. **Strategy #15** – Do you and your wife have enough margin in your life/marriage? What can you do to create more?
 - viii. **Strategy #16** – Do you have other Christian couples that you ‘walk’ with and mutually support? How can you proactively find one or more?
 - ix. **Strategy #17** – Have you and your wife ‘unpacked’ some of the trials and tribulations in your respective pasts to better understand their impact on your marriage? How can you begin to do so?

- x. **Strategy #18** – Have you tried this small experiment?
- xi. **Strategy #19** – Are money-related issues a strength or weakness in your marriage? What can be done to improve in this area?
- xii. **Strategy #20** – What are the biggest challenges in raising your children that impact your marriage?
- xiii. **Strategy #21** – What worries you most about the empty-nest stage of your married life? How can you proactively address these challenges?

General Discussion Questions:

- I. Common objection: “Won’t a wife who is always shown preference become selfish?”
- II. Can you recall times when you weren’t receptive to your wife’s needs because you felt like your burden was greater than hers (or workload, etc.)?
- III. Sometimes it takes years for a wife to trust her husband again. Does it sometimes get tempting to “give up” on dying to self and becoming more Christ-like when we’re not seeing a change in her response to you?
- IV. If you had to write on a piece of paper your commitment to become more Christ-like, what would it say?
- V. There’s an immense need for workers in the field of struggling marriages. Do you have a heart to help others in this arena of marriage?
- VI. Have you tried to define what “success” looks like in an abundant marriage for you and your wife? Does she share your perspective?
- VII. Be prepared to discuss your progress in this journey over the past 6 weeks!
- VIII. Should your wife be encouraged to read this book? Why or why not?
- IX. What are your biggest questions that we haven’t yet discussed in our group study?

- Your thoughts?
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- What’s my action plan going forward? What do I want/need to keep top-of mind?
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Capture Small Group Discussion Notes Here:

The Big Ideas:

- Change/transformation in your marriage won’t occur quickly – it’s a marathon, not a sprint
- Success is not defined as a perfect marriage – it is our commitment to the journey to Christ-likeness (the rest is in God’s hands)
- I pray that other men you know will benefit from what you’re learning and applying!

Marriage Matters Final Session Survey Questions:

- What did you like about the book and/or the discussion meetings?
- What did you not like?
- You each shared your goals for the study in the first meeting – how satisfied are you that your goals were met? Why or Why not?
- Do you think it's practical to do this study over 6 weeks or would you prefer longer?
- Do you think there is an ideal group size? If so, what is it?
- What else would you change/add/delete about our study: Format? Timing? Location? Other?
- Any other thoughts, suggestions, or anecdotal stories any of you may have would be very helpful as I pursue this calling to help men to transform their marriages (and their life in Christ)!