



BUILDING A

Eucharistic Marriage

COUPLE'S GUIDE

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A letter from Greg Schutte



There is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread.

ST. MOTHER THERESA OF CALCUTTA

All of us have experienced the feeling of physical hunger to some degree. That longing in our body for nourishment makes us aware of an imbalance or emptiness in our life, propelling us to action in order to fill a physical need. We can also experience this longing in many ways beyond just the physical, for there is a hunger in every human heart for emotional as well as spiritual connection with someone who loves us unconditionally. “The deepest desire of every human heart is to be seen and to see another in this same way” (*St. Augustine*).

We all have a hunger deep down inside of us to be seen for who we are – good, bad, and even ugly at times – and yet still be loved. We desire a companion who sees our innermost being and wants to walk with us through every trial we face in life. This yearning is fundamentally rooted in our desire to know God *and* experience His love for us. “*Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee oh Lord*” (*St. Augustine*). God’s design for marriage is that it offers a lens through which husband and wife can come to understand His love for them both. Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross and its timeless continuation through the Eucharist exemplifies a love that is intimate, sacrificial, and life-giving. His example shows spouses how to love one another, which requires each to mutually “lay down their lives” daily through the sacrifice of their own *desires* for the sake of their spouse’s *needs*. A healthy, strong, and loving marriage can also ease past relationship traumas as we work together in growing deeper in holiness, imitating Christ’s example as we “deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him.” The beautiful cross of marriage, if carried with God’s grace, is the force by which this broken world will return to Christ. Through the Eucharist, couples can rediscover what true marital love, lived out, should look like each day.

I want to welcome you to this marriage course which delves into this deep hunger. As you seek to strengthen your own marital love and commitment, I encourage you and your spouse to treat this video series as a sort of “7-week couple’s retreat” with the goal of discovering (or re-discovering) Eucharistic love, both for one another and for your heavenly Spouse.

My goals for you as you walk this journey are, first that you come to a deeper love for and relationship with our Eucharistic Lord in the Mass and in adoration. I have come to truly believe that the best way to live out our earthly marriage is to model it after the heavenly marriage revealed to us in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, also known as the Wedding Feast of the Lamb! Second, I pray that you come to a deeper understanding of marriage's vital importance not only for you and your spouse, but also for your kids and family. The preservation of your marriage covenant is imperative for family health. Because of this, I pray that you will do everything in your power to repair, strengthen, and solidify your marital bond every day by intentionally building new and healthy patterns into your relationship. My final prayer for each of you is that you will experience renewal in your marital covenant and allow our Lord to walk this journey with you. May He pour out His graces upon you, giving you the spiritual strength to develop virtuous habits and to become a model for others, which our world and our children desperately need.

God bless you wherever you are on your marital journey! I encourage you to ask the Holy Family for help and encouragement as you experience this 7-session course and learn to implement each of these concepts in your own marriage. Please be patient with yourself and your spouse on this journey toward building a Eucharistic marriage. Holiness takes a lifetime!



From the Eucharist comes strength to live the Christian life and zeal to share that life with others.

POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II

In Christ through Mary,

Greg Schutte, MSW, LISW-S

How to Use This Guide

Building a Eucharistic Marriage is a video-based program designed to guide you and your spouse through reflections on ways to strengthen your marriage. It also will equip you with tools to build and maintain a healthy marriage based on God's design for you and your spouse.

This guide is meant to be a companion to the Building a Eucharistic Marriage video series. In this section, you will find an explanation of the Therapeutic Model for Change and a breakdown of how to use the video and guide during each session.

EXPLANATION OF THE THERAPEUTIC MODEL FOR CHANGE

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) at its most basic asserts that our cognition (or ways of thinking) creates our emotions (or feelings) which in turn often shapes our behaviors (actions as well as inactions). But it can also go the other direction. The results of intentional actions or inactions (successful, unsuccessful, productive or unproductive) can, in time, start to shape our thoughts and feelings.

This course is built on a (CBT) model for change in that each session builds upon the one(s) prior and moves couples in a systematic progression for changing poor marital patterns into new, healthy and productive patterns for marital stability. Each session provides new ideas and understanding about healthy relationship patterns as well as provides tools for better connection and conflict resolution. For some of you, the information you receive may inspire new thoughts and feelings about any one of these areas and in turn motivate you to change a particular pattern. Or, you may simply choose to start implementing a new tool or a new behavior into your relationship, and through encouragement from each other and more positive results in walking through each situation together, it may change your thoughts and feelings about how to best approach each issue you encounter. Either way, the goal is to help build hope for you and your spouse that change and a Eucharistic marriage is possible.

GETTING STARTED

There are seven sessions throughout the course. As a couple, take out your calendar and pick seven days to work through each session. It is recommended to work through one session each week to allow for processing and implementing what is discussed in the session, but they can also be done every other week or once a month. Each couple processes things differently, so there is no right or wrong way to schedule this out. Go at your own pace. Mark each session on your calendar and set aside at least two hours.

If you have children, consider getting a babysitter and making your session a date night. Start the night off by making dinner with one another or treating yourself to take out and discussing the “Keep it Fun” Questions.

GOAL

Each session outline states the goal of the overall session and gives context for the video teaching, questions, and action items.

“KEEP IT FUN” QUESTION

Each session will begin with one or two “Keep it Fun” questions. This guide makes room for a lot of reflection and discussion that will address roadblocks or areas for growth in your marriage. All of the questions have a goal to build deeper connection and more intimacy in your relationship -- the “Keep it Fun” questions do this while keeping it fun and taking time to draw your heart back to different moments in your relationship. It is suggested to start with this question to begin your session and then play the video.

VIDEO TEACHING

Each session has a teaching lead by Greg, Stephanie (Greg’s wife), and Fr. Alex. This is the bulk of the content for each session and will set the topic and tone for your discussion. Use the notes section provided in this guide to write anything that sticks out to you and anything you would like to discuss with your spouse.

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Each session will have Personal Reflection Questions. The Personal Reflection Questions are intended to help you sort through your thoughts and set the foundation for the Discussion Questions. These questions are intended for *personal reflection* and can be discussed as a couple afterward. Feel free to take time to reflect on these questions in whatever way you best process, such as with a journal or in silent thought.

If you and your spouse are external processors, these questions can be used as discussion questions instead. If you use these questions as a discussion, keep in mind that externally processing often means you are discovering what you think about something as you say it. The discussion, replacing silent thought or journaling, will serve the same purpose: sorting through your thoughts and feelings to have a more productive conversation with the Discussion Questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each session also has couples discussion questions. Some of these questions are asked by Greg during the video, so when directed, you can pause the video and take time to discuss if you find this helpful, OR you can discuss them after the completion of the video if this works better for the both of you. These questions are crafted to help you go deeper as well as to process the concepts together in order to build communication and understanding of each other's thoughts and perception in any one topic or concept.

Use the following tips to have the most productive conversation:

- @ When your spouse is speaking, listen to understand and don't listen with the intent to critique or disagree with them.
- @ If you ask them a question, make sure you want to know the answer.
- @ Try to always assume the best of each other. Engage with curiosity about your spouse. Before responding with a statement, ask a question to understand better (e.g., "I don't do that!" versus "Can you tell more about that?").
- @ Be gentle and patient with what you express and how you respond. The goal is to build connections and not cause more "walls" to be built.
- @ If you find yourself stuck on a question, hitting a communication roadblock, or the conversation is getting heated, try any of the following:
 - @ Take a "time out" to cool down. Make a note and come back to it. You don't have to go through every question during the session but can make intentional time to discuss it throughout the week.
 - @ Try approaching it in a different way: journal about how you feel before talking about it, walk while you talk, hold hands while working through it, use the Road to Calvary communication tool found in the resource section (covered in Session Four).
 - @ For continued frustration or disagreements in any one area, consider making an appointment to discuss it further with a marriage mentor or marriage counselor.

ACTION ITEMS

Each session has action items that give you practical ways of implementing the content. These tools are meant to help you build new patterns and change old patterns in your married life. Use them throughout the week and pick them back up whenever you find them most helpful. Take stock of which tools are most helpful throughout the 7 weeks and find intentional ways of weaving them into your routine as a couple.

Where Did the Time Go?



When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.

G. K. CHESTERTON

Goal: This session is meant to build your understanding of the importance of making and spending more time with your spouse and with God in order to keep you and your spouse connected and working together at knowing each other's needs at all times.

“KEEP IT FUN” QUESTIONS :

Begin your time with either or both of the questions below. If incorporating the session into a date night, consider discussing over a meal:

- @ What are at least two moments that you remember learning something surprising about me? What are they?
- @ What is one thing that you recently discovered about me that was surprising or that you didn't know about me?

► Watch “*Where Did the Time Go?*”

PERSONAL REFLECTION :

Following the video take at least 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions using a personal journal. Feel free to discuss these questions or keep them as a personal reflection:

- @ What cost am I willing to pay in order to “lay in the desert” of who my spouse is and what they need?
- @ In what ways do I currently feel known by my spouse? In what ways do I feel unknown by my spouse?

DISCUSSION :

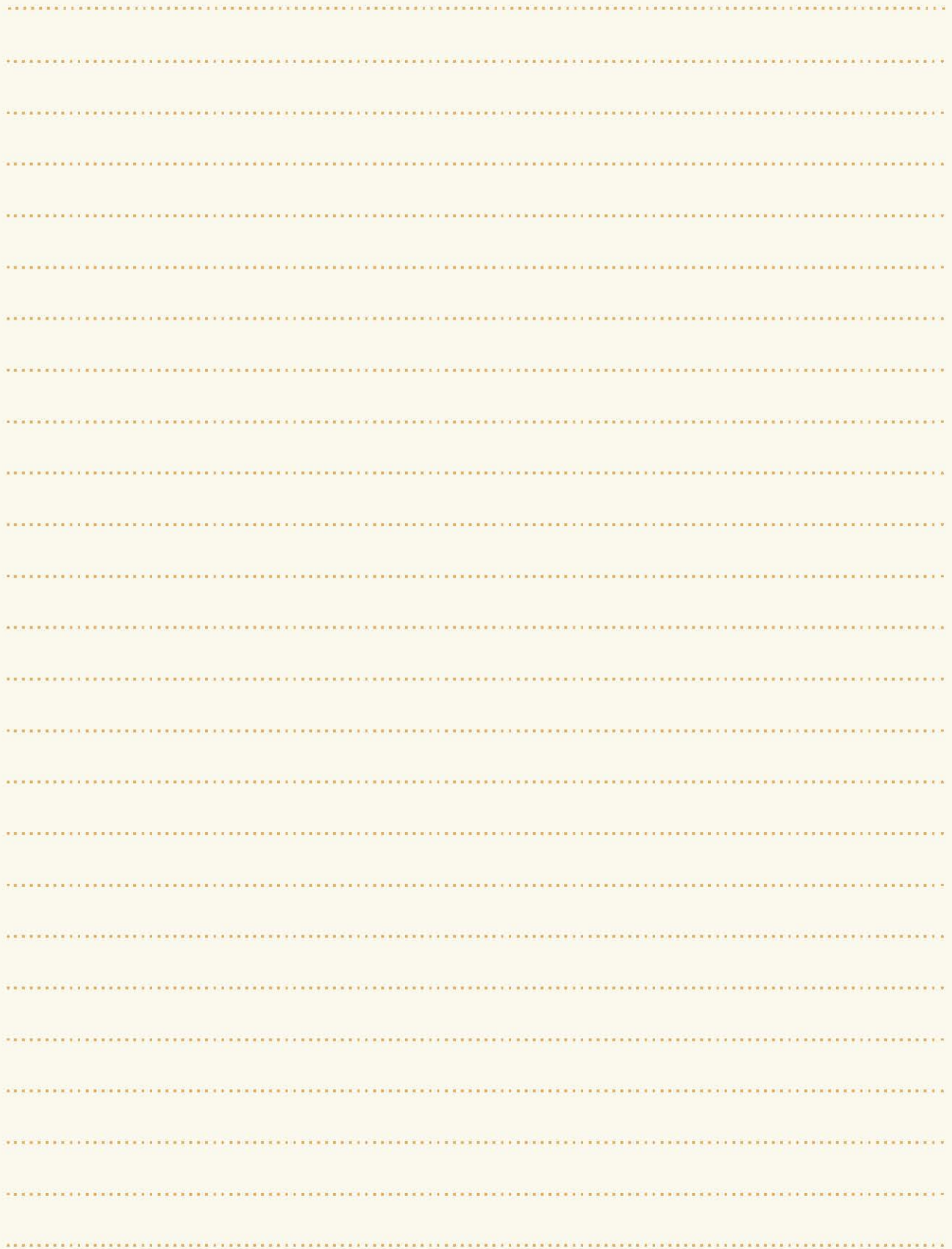
After taking time to reflect personally, use the following questions to have a discussion as a couple. When needed refer to the discussion tips found on page 5.

- @ In what ways is our marriage different now than when we were first married?
- @ How has knowing each other's differences been helpful to our marriage? What are some of our opposite traits that cause us to struggle?
- @ What distractions are currently the most stressful in our marriage or keeping us from knowing each other's needs?
- @ In what ways do you feel known by me? In what ways do we feel we have fallen out of knowing each other?

When the conversation comes to a natural end, close in prayer. Pray for the health of your marriage and one another. If needed, use the closing prayer found on page 21.

ACTION STEPS :

- Take the Love Languages assessment online (<https://www.5lovelanguages.com/quizzes/love-language/>). Share the results with each other and commit to honoring one another's love language at least once a day.
- Get out your calendar and plan a “check-in” time every day for the next week, date nights at least 1x per month over the next three months, and one hour to spend in adoration together (or as a family) at least twice over the next 30 days—if possible, try once a week.



Understanding God's Design

// *A great marriage is not when the 'perfect couple' comes together. It is when an imperfect couple learns to enjoy their differences.*

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, DAVE MEURER

Goal: This session is meant to encourage you to build a deeper understanding of how God's design for the Sacrament of Marriage and the Eucharist are intertwined, in order to inspire a deeper loving relationship and to keep you and your spouse from ever growing complacent in your marriage with Christ and one another.

"KEEP IT FUN" QUESTIONS:

Begin your time with either or both of the questions below. If incorporating the session into a daily ritual, consider discussing over a meal.

- What is one memory with me that makes you smile or laugh?
- What is your fondest memory or memories of our honeymoon (or the immediate weeks after our wedding)?

• Watch "Understanding God's Design"

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Following the video take at least 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions using a personal journal. Feel free to discuss these questions or keep them as a personal reflection.

- What do I understand the Eucharist to be and how does it play a role in my marriage?
- What was my understanding of marriage and hope for married life prior to our marriage? How is that the same? How has it changed?

DISCUSSION:

After taking time to reflect personally, use the following questions to have a discussion as a couple. When needed refer to the discussion tips found on page 6.

- What role does faith currently play in our marriage? In what ways do we want faith to play a role in our marriage? (Take a moment to each answer these questions and set some goals as a couple based on both of your answers.)
- What do you consider to be the meaning of life? How does our marriage play a role in that for you?
- What have you learned about yourself through our marriage so far? What have you learned about me?
- How can I better understand and support you in your dreams and hopes for your life?

When the conversation comes to a natural end, close in prayer. Pray for the health of your marriage and one another. If needed, use the closing prayer found on page 21.

ACTION STEPS:

- Read the following paragraphs from the Catechism of the Catholic Church together and discuss:
 - 1322-1419 — The Mass
 - 1601-1686 — The Sacrament of Marriage
 - Note: The Catechism is referenced by paragraphs and page numbers.
- Set aside time to continue learning about yourself. Consider doing a Personality Assessment, such as the Myers Briggs Personality Test or the What They May Personality Profile, and share with each other what you discovered.

Recognizing That Which Divides



It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong.

G.K. CHESTERTON

Goal: This session is meant to educate you on the importance of self-reflection and self-evaluation of the sinful patterns in your life that have the potential to create division between you and your spouse and between you and God in order to help you recognize and address these issues before they create a deeper divide.

“KEEP IT FUN” QUESTIONS :

Begin your time with either or both of the questions below. If incorporating the session into a date night, consider discussing over a meal.

- Where did we feel most and what does your heart tell us?
- What things in your life have inspired you to become better?

• Watch “Recognizing That Which Divides”

PERSONAL REFLECTION :

Following the video take at least 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions using a personal journal. Feel free to discuss these questions or keep them as a personal reflection.

- What patterns of behavior have I brought into or developed in our marriage that my spouse seems to struggle with the most?
- How easy is it to recognize (and admit) my own blame when it comes to problems in our relationship? Is either or the more frequently, both of our current problems and list the ways you contribute to it.

DISCUSSION :

After taking time to reflect personally, use the following questions to have a discussion as a couple. When needed refer to the discussion tips found on page 6.

- How do we each currently deal with disagreements or conflicts in our marriage? In what ways has this been helpful? In what ways has this been difficult?
- What is a moment that we felt most united as a couple when being united? What word would you use to describe how you felt in that moment? What did I do to create this feeling and sense of unity?
- What is one area in our relationship that I want to improve and change my current patterns of responding during conflict?

When the conversation comes to a natural end, close in prayer. Pray for the health of your marriage and one another. If needed, use the closing prayer found on page 21.

ACTION STEPS :

- Get your calendar out and set aside time at least once a week to practice doing a Marital Examination of Conscience, which can be found on page 24.
- If you haven't gone to confession recently, consider going as a couple. You can confess your last penance to find out when they have confessions scheduled or to make an appointment.

Listening to the Heart



I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure that you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON, ROBERT MCCLOSKEY

Goal: This session is meant to teach a new tool for communicating more productively as a couple as well as encouraging both of you to listen more attentively to the voice of God through Scripture in order to understand God's desire for your marriage, family, and one another.

"KEEP IT FUN" QUESTIONS :

Begin your time with either or both of the questions below. If incorporating the session into a date night, consider discussing over a meal.

- What is one positive thing that I brought into your life that you didn't have in it before you fell out?
- What were two things that I have shared with you that you will never forget?

• Watch "Listening to the Heart"

PERSONAL REFLECTION :

Following the video take at least 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions using a personal journal. Feel free to discuss these questions or keep them as a personal reflection.

- What have been some of the pitfalls in our communication with each other early on in marriage and now now?
- Is there something specific that I have struggled to say or communicate to my spouse? What is it? Or, is there something I feel I say often but is not heard? What is it?

DISCUSSION :

After taking time to reflect personally, use the following questions to have a discussion as a couple. When needed refer to the discussion tips found on page 6.

- After reading Drago's list of common communication breakdowns that he sees in therapy,

what could we say are some of our struggles as a couple when it comes to communication?

- Are there any things that I currently say or do that make you feel misunderstood or are unhelpful?
- How can I be more loving in order to encourage you to talk to me about difficulties that you are facing with our relationship?

When the conversation comes to a natural end, close in prayer. Pray for the health of your marriage and one another. If needed, use the closing prayer found on page 21.

ACTION STEPS :

- Take out your calendar for the week and set time to read through the daily Bible readings together. Utilize guides for the Magnificat or Liturgy of the Hours. After some personal reflection time, talk about the readings. What stood out to you most? What does the passage teach you about what is important for your marriage or your family? (Spouses should refrain from engaging and simply listen and seek to gain some new insight from your spouse through their perspective.)
- This week, create uninterrupted time to talk with each other about your day and any important issues that need to be addressed. Make sure both of you are sharing even if you are not a big talker. Understand that if you choose to work on sharing your day, someone reading or being you might think it is, you can create an environment for the 70-80-10-10-10 system to play out. Practice utilizing the Road to Calmly communication tool found on page 22 in the daily conversation.

Where Mercy Is Found



*To keep your marriage brimming with love in the wedding cup,
whenever you're wrong, admit it; whenever you're right, shut up.*

OGDEN NASH, AMERICAN POET

Goal: This session is meant to open your heart to the gift of giving and receiving mercy in your marriage, in light of how Christ also gives us mercy, through acknowledging your faults and forgiving each other in order to help you and your spouse continually find healing in your brokenness.

"KEEP IT FUN" QUESTIONS:

Begin your time with either or both of the questions below. If incorporating the content into a dinner night, consider discussing over a meal.

- When was a time when you were really proud of you?
- What is a childhood memory or event that really shaped who you are today? What is one value that it taught you to live out?

• Watch "Where Mercy Is Found"

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Following the video take at least 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions using a personal journal. Feel free to discuss these questions or keep them as a personal reflection.

- When have I struggled with apologizing for my mistakes? If I find it difficult to apologize, what is it that makes it so hard for me?
- What has my idea of forgiveness been? How I have struggled with forgiving my spouse? Can I trust someone without forgiving them?

DISCUSSION:

After taking time to reflect personally, use the following questions to have a discussion as a couple. When needed refer to the discussion tips found on page 6.

- What does an apology look like for you? What helps you feel like an apology is truly sincere?
- How have we grown in the area of apologizing and forgiveness in our relationship? How can we continue to grow? In what ways can we add more gentleness into our responses to apologies?
- What does trust mean to you in a relationship?
- Is there something in our relationship now that we are needing to apologize for and/or ask forgiveness for?

When the conversation comes to a natural end, close in prayer. Pray for the health of your marriage and one another. If needed, use the closing prayer found on page 21.

ACTION STEPS:

- At Sunday Mass, pray the Lords of God with intense concern for your wife and with the desire for God to give you the grace needed to trust and to "forgive others as you have been forgiven."
- Look for more opportunities to bring healing and mercy into your home. Both in apologizing and in forgiving, gently and sincerely. Use the Apologizing and Forgiveness resources found on page 21.

Committed to Change



You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.

C.S. LEWIS

Goal: This session is meant to inspire you to daily recommit yourselves to each other and to encourage you to actively make changes in the personal and relational patterns that are causing marital strife in order to help you rebuild trust, reliance, and affection for each other.

"KEEP IT FUN" QUESTIONS:

Begin your time with either or both of the questions below. If incorporating the session into a date night, consider discussing over a meal.

- What are the three things that we enjoy doing together?
- What were two changes that I have noticed you've made in your life that were inspiring to me and this is why?

• Watch "Committed to Change"

PERSONAL REFLECTION:

Following the video take at least 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions using a personal journal. Feel free to discuss these questions or keep them as a personal reflection.

- Read Ephesians 5:21-25. What does the passage mean to me? What does it mean for our marriage?
- When do I feel the most appreciated by my spouse? How do I try to show my spouse how I appreciate them?

DISCUSSION:

After taking time to reflect personally, use the following questions to have a discussion as a couple. When needed refer to the discussion tips found on page 6.

- If we had a mission statement, what would it say? How does the passage from Ephesians influence that?
- How do you see that I process struggle or stress

in our relationship? How do I perceive the way I process struggle or stress in our relationship?

- How as a couple can we build more transparency in our relationship?
- What tools can we utilize to keep our marital relationship on a healthy path? How can we actively committed to each other on an ongoing basis?

When the conversation comes to a natural end, close in prayer. Pray for the health of your marriage and one another. If needed, use the closing prayer found on page 21.

ACTION STEPS:

- Review the Christ and Our Father prayer and reflect on their meaning in your life. Are they just a nice prayer to you or do they mean you to provide more depth their meaning for your life and what it is you are committing to in your life? Consider ways that you can live out the call to forgive your spouse as Christ forgives. Consider ways you can "lead" your spouse's needs as Christ leads us through His grace.
- This week, seek to intentionally make changes to certain behavior patterns that would be helpful to your marriage. This could be a great time to increase finding each other's Love Language.
- Consider the areas of your marriage in which you and your spouse have had deeper struggles and prayerfully consider what changes you can make to create more peace and unity. Utilize the GRIFF model to help you make these changes found on page 26. Pray for the grace to make these changes with love and without resentment. Every week, strive to do more of accepting your spouse that, and less of wanting they change.

Eucharistic Love and the Grateful Heart



I used to believe that prayer changes things. But now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things.

ST. THERESA OF CALCUTTA

Goal: This session is meant to help you better express and assess your and your spouse's needs in order to build more understanding and opportunities for being Eucharistic through the gift of your actions, through your sexual union, and through showing each other more gratitude.

"KEEP IT FUN" QUESTIONS :

Begin your time with either or both of the questions below. If incorporating the content into a date night, consider discussing over a meal.

- When was our best time? What do I remember feeling during that time?
 - What are some of our fondest memories of being romantic in our time of dating?
- ▶ Watch "Eucharistic Love and the Grateful Heart"

PERSONAL REFLECTION :

Following the video take at least 10-15 minutes to reflect on the following questions using a personal journal. Feel free to discuss these questions or keep them as a personal reflection.

- Are there issues that seem to come up over and over again without resolution? Or are there things that we just agree to disagree on? What are they and what are my needs from my spouse in these areas?
- Based on today's discussion on the marital union, is there anything that stands out? Is there anything present in our marital union that we should address?

DISCUSSION :

After taking time to reflect personally, use the following questions to have a discussion as a couple. When needed refer to the discussion tips found on page 5.

- What are some of the ways we show each other love or gratitude on a regular basis? What are some ways you want to experience more gratitude from me?
- What is one emotional need that you need me to meet? Be specific about what that looks like.
- What is our plan to recognize times of thanksgiving in our marriage?
- Do we currently utilize NFP in our marriage? If not, what are our current thoughts about NFP and are we open to learning more about it?

When the conversation comes to a natural end, close in prayer. Pray for the health of your marriage and one another. If needed, use the closing prayer found on page 21.

ACTION STEPS :

- Spend time learning your spouse's needs in more detail.

Resources

Prayers

SESSION OPENING PRAYER :

Lord, in Your great love, You gave us the Eucharist and the Holy Mass as a gift of your heavenly nuptial love. Walk with us as we journey on this 7-week retreat toward building our marriage into one that is filled with Eucharistic love and thanksgiving. Open our hearts to understanding the great depths of Your love for us, and inspire in our hearts this same kind of love for each other. May we grow in knowing You more intimately through the Mass, as well as knowing each other more intimately through the sacrificial gift of our lives. We pray all of this to You, Lord Jesus, through Mary, and in union with St. Joseph. Amen.

SESSION CLOSING PRAYER :

Lord, in Your great love, You have brought us together in the Sacrament of marriage. As we live the Christian life together, please strengthen us in our resolve to love and care for one another as we vowed on our wedding day. Help us to utilize the tools and resources available to us to maintain a strong foundation of love in our relationship. In particular, we offer to you (*name a particular struggle in your marriage right now*). We trust in your abundant mercy and love for us and lean into your grace in this time, knowing that you always show us the way to love you through our love for one another. We pray all of this to you, Lord Jesus, through Mary, and in union with St. Joseph. Amen.

PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS :

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
And where there is sadness, joy.

O divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is pardoning that we are pardoned.
And it's in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER (FOR THE END OF THE RETREAT):

Lord Jesus, You have taught us what it means to love Your spouse with a tender, sacrificial, and generous love. We have walked this journey toward developing a marriage that is more Eucharistic in how we give and receive from each other. We have learned the importance of spending more time with you and with each other. We have learned more about the depth of what the Mass means to our lives as well as what our marriage means to You. We have discovered the importance of knowing our own sinfulness as well as knowing the heart of our spouse and the heart of You, our beloved Lord. We have discovered not only the significance of mercy and forgiveness in marriage, but also how vital it is to change those patterns in our life that create division with each other as well as with You. But most of all we have come to see the beauty of what it means to be Eucharistic in how we love each other. You have taught us this love through the gift of the Mass and the everlasting gift of Your body, blood, soul and divinity given so freely to us in the Eucharist. We consecrate our marriage again to You, through Mary and in unity with St. Joseph, and we pray for Your grace to fill our marital union from this day forward. Give us the strength to make these new ideas into long lasting Sacramental habits for the well-being of our marriage. May Your Will for our marriage increase, as our will for our marriage decreases. Amen!

Road to Calvary

Communication Technique

The *Road to Calvary (RTC)* technique is an effective method for improving communication and helping you in conveying a message to your *beloved* in a gentler way. It also improves your ability to listen with the intent of understanding your spouse's perception and needs. The RTC tool will facilitate communication where each person can safely express his or her "heart" (or more accurately, their perception) while feeling heard and not attacked. Communication often breaks down when we become defensive at what we hear before we take the time to truly understand our spouse's perception (*whether or not it matches our own perception*), struggles, and needs. Disparaging or disagreeing with our spouse's perception and needs will only create more "walls of separation," which can cause our spouse to feel unheard and misunderstood, inevitably shutting down the flow of communication. The result – further divide. The RTC technique calls you to put pride and resentment aside and to truly open your heart to learning and understanding one another. Through it, you will learn the skills you need to create an environment where each person feels that they can express their perceptions and needs. Let's get started, and REMEMBER, once you've learn the tool, practice makes permanent!

So, how do you eat an elephant? Answer: one bite at a time. Many issues in life are interconnected, BUT it's important to deal with one topic at a time and to work through it successfully before moving on. Progression of any topic should involve four steps which we call the A.R.E.A. for Hope:

Acknowledge Feelings and Perceptions (Bring into the Room) – In this initial step, your goal is to express your own perception and fully understand that of your spouse. It requires the one speaking to be clear, direct, gentle, and concise. It requires the listener to seek common and understanding rather than trying to win a debate or allowing themselves to get mad. If anger or strong feelings occur, take a timeout, take a "time-out," and start through separating and praying for a reasonable time, then return and try again. This part is not about trying to change a habit of competing perceptions (I'm right, and my perception is best).

Replicate Destructive Patterns (Addressing Patterns of Resistance) – In this step, it is important to gently address and genuinely receive information about non-verbal communication (tone or body language) or statements which communicate that language or content that causes either person to feel that message is being rejected or ignored. The hope is to share information about destructive communication patterns and to both work at changing the behaviors.

Explain Feelings, Understand Needs (Changing Patterns in What We Say) – In this step, utilizing your understanding of your spouse's perception, you should now seek to understand what each of your needs are with regard to the topic being addressed. Then, come up with a new way to help your spouse in getting his or her needs met. This calls for humility, generosity, and sacrifice, and has to be a two-way street.

Agree to a Plan of Action (Walk our Talk) – In this step, you agree to a plan for supporting one another effectively in the area of your marriage. This will involve reaching to immediately put it into action, gently reminding and encouraging each other as you work to make a change, and giving adequate time to build new patterns into your relationship.

How and Why?

Articulating Feelings/Perception and Recognizing Destructive Patterns

Rules for successful engagement:

1. First, agree which spouse will start in the speaking position. If you are the one holding the cards (or speaking), you will be stating what is going on in your heart about a particular issue (your perception). Be respectful of the other person by using mostly "I" or "I feel" statements as opposed to "you" statements. When you, as the speaker, feel you have to refer to the listener as "you," refer to factual statements (i.e. "When you told me to shut up" vs. "When you called me a jerk"), then follow up with how it made you feel. Keep your statements to 2 or 3 sentences at the most before the one not holding the cards (or listener) reflects back what they've heard and, after the listener repeats back what he or she has heard, and you as the speaker acknowledge feeling heard, you should give the cards to the listener to respond from his or her perspective regarding the same issue. When talking, speak for yourself and don't make assumptions about the other person. Keep statements brief.
2. If you are the person not holding the cards (or listener), you need to listen closely to what is being said without interrupting or using non-verbal communication to upset, intimidate, or create "noise" in the discussion. You are to look at the cards, when needed, if it helps to remind you that you are called to be like Christ to your spouse and to listen, even if you feel the words are unjust or inaccurate. You are there to listen and then reply back exactly what you've heard, which can sound like, "What I heard you say is..." If the speaker feels heard, he or she should let you, the listener, know by saying, "Yes, that's correct," or "Yes, I feel heard." If the speaker does not feel heard or you can't remember something, this is the time for the speaker to restate what was said. This is also not a time for rebuttals by the listener, but only for stating what you heard the speaker say (to the best of their ability).
3. We encourage couples to touch in some way. Staying connected (especially physically) can be helpful in preventing spouses from emotionally closing off from each other.
4. It is not important for the listener to agree, but rather to hear and understand what the other person is feeling. Remember, their perception is their reality.
5. Be kind. Harsh words are not of God and neither bear fruit nor build bridges.
6. Don't hog the speaker position, but make sure you share it equally with your spouse.

Exploring Solutions, Understanding Needs, and a Plan of Action (*Road to Calvary, Continued*)

6. Again, following rules in section A, you also need to work on conveying and understanding one another's needs in the area being addressed. This time, the speaker is to communicate by using "I need" statements as opposed to "you need to" statements. Once the speaker feels like the listener understands his or her need and the actions they can do to meet it, the speaker should state that he or she feels heard and understood and then should give the credits to their spouse to state one of their needs dealing with the same issue. (The speaker's needs should not override the other person's needs but work in cooperation with the needs of their spouse.)
7. Again, following rules in section B, the listener needs to listen and then reply back what he or she has heard. Then, as needed, the listener can ask clarifying questions about ways to help the speaker in getting his or her needs met. (If they say they need more support – you could ask, "What things can I do to make you feel more supported?" or "What do I need to do differently because it makes you feel unsupported?" You can clarify more about their needs regarding amount of time, what activities would help, what specific things do we need to discuss, etc.) Again, the speaker can reiterate what was said if the listener can't remember.
8. While doing this step, continue to follow the guidelines in section C, D, E, and F above.
9. Discuss only one or two needs each night now. Diving into too much at once only drives us back to an overload of information, just facts, and old patterns that keep us stuck. More needs can be discussed in time.
10. Remember, Christ walked the road to Calvary for every one of us, step by step, stone by stone, feeling the pain, and led to the cross. It is a journey that got us to this point. It is a journey that will lead us to a marital resurrection. God died for our "need" to be with Him for all eternity. Let us be willing to die to ourselves for the needs of our spouse. When you recognize your spouse's needs, you **WILL** be willing both of you to go forth and start feeling one another's needs on a regular basis!

The Marital Examination of Conscience

PRIDE:

- @ Do I find it hard to admit to being wrong when it comes to a certain issue between me and my spouse?
- Do I put my spouse down or complain about my spouse to others?
- Do I seek to uplift my spouse or do I use words or statements that label them or keep them "in their place"?
- Do I think or act as if my faith, job, position in the community, values, etc. are better than my spouse's?
- Do I mindlessly criticize my spouse/children?
- Do I manipulate my spouse to get my way?

ENVY:

- @ Am I jealous of the gifts that my spouse has that I don't possess or that other people compliment them for?
- Do I feel frustration in the gifts that my spouse has that I don't?
- Do I find joy in my spouse's successes, or do I get more annoyed by them?
- Do I find myself at odds with my spouse because I want our life or our marriage to be like someone else's instead of working to better our marriage?

ANGER/MALICE :

- Am I unwilling to let go of anger towards my spouse?
- Am I unwilling to forgive them for a particular offense or realize they have made?
- Do I seek to control my spouse with things I say or do OR by things I won't do for them?
- Do I withhold sex from my spouse as a way of "teaching them a lesson"?
- Do I allow my unresolved anger towards others in the past or present to negatively affect my relationship with my spouse?
- Am I too controlling of what my spouse wears, where or if he/she works, who he/she is allowed to be friends with, etc.?

AVARICE :

- Do I put possessions as more important to me than my spouse by what I say or do or how I spend the bulk of my time?
- Do things of this world distract me from building up my relationship with my spouse? Do I spend more time on social media than I do at building up time to face interactions with my spouse and those who are important to me?
- Do I spend outside of my income? Is my spending an area of conflict in my marriage?
- Do I work with my spouse on our finances, or do I withhold it or them without helping at all? OR do I keep my spouse from being a part of working on our finances?
- Do I deliberately take money from my spouse, without their knowledge or consent?
- Do I keep my spouse from going to churches because of my concern for money? Am I willing to title for the blessing of God to come upon my spouse, my family and me?
- Is my reason for my marriage and family to help them in their journey toward heaven, or is it more of an earthly reason to get more money, power, or possessions?

LECHERY :

- Am I in another relationship with someone besides my spouse (emotionally or sexually)?
- Am I hooked on using or watching any form

of pornography (soft porn - scantily clothed individuals vs. hard porn - graphic images or explicit porn - seeing, showing sex)?

- Do I guard my spouse from images, words or experiences that would arouse lust in me?
- Do I look upon my spouse with lust and want sex more for my own needs than as a gift to be mutually shared? Do I treat my spouse as more of an object to be used than as a person made in the image and likeness of God?
- Have I pushed my spouse into sexual experiences that are uncomfortable for them or against their values and beliefs?
- Do I dress modestly so as to not cause scandal? Do I flirt with others just to get attention from them?

SLOTH/APATHY :

- Do I put God at the center of my marriage and my own faith union with my spouse, or is my faith becoming weakened due to my lack of involvement in my relationship with God?
- Do I find myself doing too many personal pleasures than I do reading or working on my marriage relationship and helping my spouse with getting their needs met?
- Do I avoid getting into deep discussions with my spouse for any reason?
- Do I disregard the commitments with my spouse?
- Do I allow daily projects and/or activities for my spouse and our marriage?
- Do I plan for having time with just my spouse, or do I put this to no effect into our time together? Do I put this effort into our special family traditions (i.e. anniversary, Birthdays, Mother/Father's Day, etc.) or do I give that my time and effort to make sure they are special?
- Do I willingly accept my spouse's sacrifices and offer them for the happiness of my family?
- Do I hinder my family's spiritual growth (pray with them daily, frequent communion of the Eucharist, regular images in home, etc.)?
- Do I share the responsibilities of raising my family fully with my spouse?
- Do I allow our entrance into my home because I am too tired to speak up?

CELESTIAL ONLY :

- Do I ever need to comfort me when I am in conflict with my spouse?
- Do I seek to take care of my body knowing that it is not only a temple of the Holy Spirit, but is also a gift to my spouse with which I have become one flesh?
- Does my use of food cause division in my marriage?
- Do I indulge inappropriately or excessively in other sensory pleasures that cause division in my marriage (i.e. TV, internet use, drugs or alcohol, video games, etc.)?

First to God:

Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins because of Your just punishments, but most of all because they have offended You, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to confess my sins to You and my spouse, to make reparations for my sins, and to amend my life. Amen.

Then to Our Spouse

(After talking to them about the issue at hand):

Dear *(Spouse's Name)*, I have sinned against God and against our marriage covenant. I am deeply sorry for the ways I have turned against you in my actions, words, or inactions. You are a gift of God and made in His likeness and image, and you deserve my unhindered love and the free sacrifice of my life to you as a gift for aiding you on this journey to heaven. I firmly resolve with the help of God's grace and through the request of your prayers for me, to repair the damage I've caused, to amend my life, and to fulfill the covenant I swore to you in our marriage.

S.H.I.F.T.

S. - See the problem as a problem

H. - Have a desire to change

I. - Information (New) on what needs to be done

F. - Faith that God can and will help you change

T. - Time to make the new change into a lasting pattern

Apologizing and Forgiveness

APOLGIZING

If you make a mistake, practice to offer quick and sincere apologies. Don't get in a habit of apologizing just to avoid conflict, but really seek to recognize your blame in any marital struggle. When you find yourself dealing with bigger issues, make it a habit not to engage in heated verbal battles. If you can't discuss them calmly, they will get out of hand and cause even more anger. When discussions get heated, practice taking a verbal time-out and walking away to reduce your anger and regain control over your emotions. Pray for help in dealing with the issue and take time to gain a new perspective on the situation, especially trying to think about your spouse's perspective. Once things have calmed down, come back together and try, with forgiveness for your part in the breakdown of the situation as well as your struggle with controlling your emotions. Then utilize the Road to Calmly communication tool to have a more productive conversation. Also work toward handling your pride in admitting and apologizing for any mistakes you may have made that have led to the heated battle between you and your spouse in the first place.

FORGIVING

This week, seek to give grace and mercy to your spouse in the little problems or struggle. Work towards not using your voice, scolding or bringing up the past when your spouse makes mistakes. Offer forgiveness as quickly as you can to your spouse especially if they are seeking forgiveness. When not to dredge up all of your spouse's past faults but rather to work together, says that both of you can work together to reduce similar problems from happening again. Only bring up the past if it is a way to help your spouse recognize patterns of which they may not be aware. If you do this, try to find a gentle way of presenting it. Seek to understand how you can be helpful in supporting your spouse's attempt to improve their behavior and actions.

If you are the one seeking forgiveness, do not take this gift lightly. If you want to regain trust, it cannot be demanded, but rather it will call for you to work with your spouse on making things better and maybe even making some drastic changes to your behavior or habits. (This will be discussed more in our next chapter.)

* Remember, Apologizing is not easy but never apologizing creates deeper marital division. And forgiveness in the small things leads to a more merciful heart when the big mistakes happen.



BUILDING A

*Eucharistic
Marriage*