

Closer: A Marital Enrichment Seminar for Couples Desiring to Draw Nearer
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I. How you rate your marriage is important.

II. God's outwardly focused design for your marriage (Gen 1-2)

A. Discussion questions:

- Do you as a couple have a clear vision for why God joined you together, and why you uniquely exist? (i.e., what specifically is your mission as a couple?) Spend time discussing this together.
- In the next decision you're facing together, how does this mission and calling direct or impact that decision?
- In what ways can you make disciples or bear witness for him (Matt 28:19)? How can you increasingly serve God in your marriage?
- Some will make statements like, "Being in war together (fighting for the kingdom of God) is what keeps us from being at war with each other." Or, "We don't have time to fight! We have so much to do out in the world!" These may be exaggerations, but what seed of truth do they contain? Have you personally seen this during seasons of active ministry in the life of your marriage? Are your conflicts shorter-lived or resolved quickly when engaging in caring for others?

B. Thoughts to consider:

- Placing marriage into the context of stewarding and serving (in) God's world may sound vague and abstract, but it is supremely concrete and down to earth. Take the "excellent wife" passage of Proverbs 31:10-31. We see a marriage partnership where the husband and wife come together in the service of God. Neither carves his or her own path. They both pull the plow together. The wife manages her household and runs a business. She's practical, full of energy, and skillful. Her love extends beyond the walls of their home as she works hard *not only* to provide for her family but also to *give to those in need*.

- C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* speaks of friendship that draws closer as the two look outward at something besides themselves:
 “Friendship arises out of mere companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening friendship would be something like, ‘What? You too? I thought I was the only one...**they share their vision**—it is then that friendship is born. And instantly they stand together in an immense solitude...In this kind of love, as Emerson said, ‘Do you love me?’ means, ‘Do you see the same truth?’ –Or at least, ‘Do you care about the same truth?’ The man who agrees with us that some question, little regarded by others, is of great importance, can be our friend.”
- Isn’t it interesting that the Bible is surprisingly (to our contemporary minds) quiet and without many examples (apart from the Song of Songs) on emotional intimacy and intensity in marriage? Pricilla and Aquila (e.g., Romans 16:3-5) are a good example of this. We know very little about their relationship, children, or intimacy. What Scripture highlights, though, is the way they serve as partners in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. Praise, affirmation, & encouragement, essentials after the fall (Gen 3)

A. Discussion questions:

- When it comes to affirmation, praise, and encouragement ask yourself:
 - ~ What is it like to be my wife/husband?
 - ~ What does it *feel* like to be married to me?

- Would your wife/husband say along with Song of Solomon 5:16, “*His(her) mouth is full of sweetness; (s)he is wholly desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend.*” Is this something that you both would like to grow in?
- Peter (1 Peter 3:7) says, “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, *showing honor* to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, *so that your prayers may not be hindered.*” Is it possible (or likely) that our prayers (we see no reason why this wouldn’t be true for wives as well as husbands) are less effective or even blocked from God’s hearing because we do not regularly *show honor* to one another? Have our prayers been held hostage by a lack of praise and affirmation? (Ongoing neutral quietness or an attitude of outright criticism and disappointment are the opposites of honor and praise.)
- Spend a few moments praising and affirming one another for the growing qualities of Christlikeness that you witness and experience in each other.

IV. The centrality of effective prayer and what hinders it

A. Discussion questions:

- Praying with and for one another is one of the most challenging (but important) tasks of marriage. Take a moment to share what makes praying with and for one another so difficult for you personally.
- As you ponder the reasons given throughout Scripture for our prayers not being effective, is there any one that strikes you as possibly hindering your prayers together?
- What would you like to pray for together? What is God burdening each of you with that could spring into prayer with one another?
- What is the best and worst time to pray together knowing your schedules and energy levels?