

MARRIAGE WORKSHOP



*True love is often difficult to sustain in marriage.
Understanding God's meaning of love can help us
express love consistently to our mates.*

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A Word About Expressing Love

A dynamic marriage is energized by a steady flow of love between partners. Men and women have God-given needs that can be fulfilled only when love is communicated. Couples do well to cultivate various types of love. “Companionship love” seeks to strengthen the friendship bond. It says, “I’ll always be there for you, for better or worse.” “Affectionate love” seeks to identify with the feelings and emotions of our partners. It is a willingness to weep and rejoice together. “Compassionate love” responds to hurts and pain in our mates. It comes alongside to give a healing hug or an encouraging word. “Passionate love” is expressed through mutual physical enjoyment and sexual oneness.

FOCUS

*True love is often difficult to sustain in marriage.
Understanding God’s meaning of love can help us express
love consistently to our mates.*

Blueprints

(30-50 minutes)

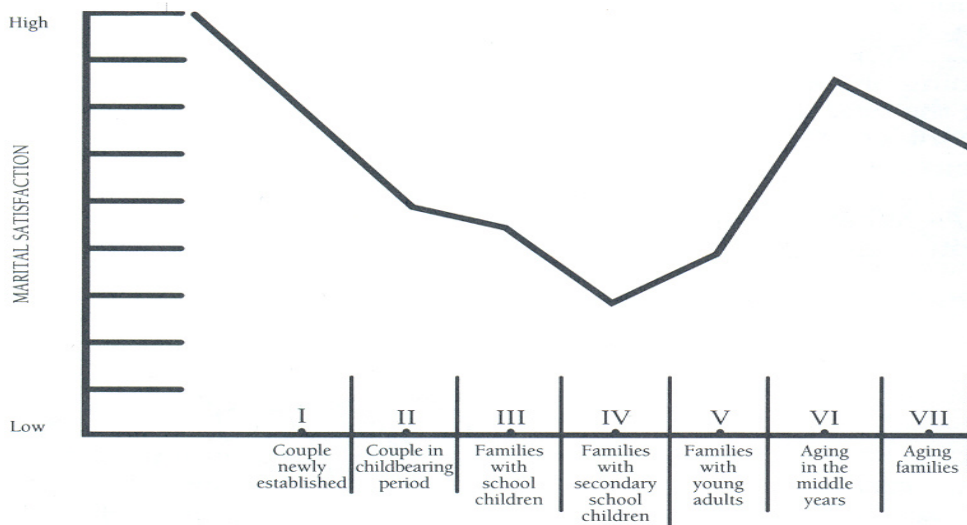
Session One

What's Happening To Our Love Lives?

Whether you have been married for only a few months or for many years, one thing is certain: Your marriage is changing! Every marriage relationship changes with passing years—often in ways we struggle to understand. And few of us are prepared for these changes.

The ways that people express love to their mates is often influenced by the amount of satisfaction they feel in marriage. This satisfaction is affected in turn by the pressures experienced during the different stages of a marriage. Take a look at the following graph:

Husbands' and Wives' Marital Satisfaction Over The Family Career



A. Why do you think couples report that their marital satisfaction is, on the average, highest at the beginning of a marriage?

B. Why do you think this satisfaction drops so sharply soon afterward—even before they have children?

C. Couples often say that their children are the “joy of our lives.” Yet the graph reveals that marital satisfaction continues to fall during the child-rearing years. Why do you think this is so?

D. How do you think work and career affect “marital satisfaction”?

E. Why do you feel the level of satisfaction in marriage increases during the later years?

Blueprints

Session Two

WHAT KEEPS US FROM EXPRESSING LOVE?

A. One threat to expressing love is a *faulty concept of what love is*. Many couples today are hindered by our cultural preoccupation with “fantasy love.”, Whether we realize it or not the media---movies, television shows, novels, etc.---has shaped our notion of what “love” is.

1. For example, how do movies and television shows usually portray the subject of “falling in love”?

2. How realistic are the relationships portrayed in the media? What is real and what is fantasy?

B. Another threat to expressing love is *selfishness*. How can selfishness hurt a relationship in the following areas:

1. Deciding how to divide household responsibilities?

2. Deciding how to spend leisure time?

C. Yet another threat to expressing love is *predictability*. Over the years, we develop habit patterns for relating to one another, and the marriage relationship loses its freshness and spontaneity.

1. What are some of the more memorable fun times you've enjoyed together as a couple?

2. How did these experiences affect your "love life"?

3. What keeps you from doing more of these things together?

A PICTURE OF TRUE LOVE

Robertson McQuilkin was president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary and happily married when his wife was stricken with Alzheimer's disease. Eventually he resigned his position in order to care for her. Read the following story, condensed from an article he wrote about his experience.

CASE STUDY

It has been a decade since that day, during a Florida vacation, when Muriel, my wife, repeated the story she had told just five minutes earlier. "Funny," I thought, "that's never happened before." But it began to happen occasionally.

Three years later, when Muriel was hospitalized for tests on her heart, a young doctor called me aside. "You may need to think about the possibility of Alzheimer's," he said. I was incredulous. While I had barely heard of the disease, a dread began to lurk around the fringes of my consciousness.

When her memory deteriorated further, we went to a neurologist friend, who gave her the full battery of tests and, by elimination, confirmed that she had Alzheimer's. We went to the Duke University Medical Center, believing we should get the best available second opinion. My heart sank as the doctor asked her to name the Gospels and she looked pleadingly at me for help.

Muriel never knew what was happening to her, though occasionally when there was a reference to Alzheimer's on TV she would muse aloud, "I wonder if I'll ever have that?" The situation did not seem painful for her, but it was a slow dying for me to watch the vibrant, creative, articulate person I knew and loved gradually dimming out.

So began years of struggle with the question of what should be sacrificed: ministry or caring for Muriel. Should I put the kingdom of God first, and, for the sake of Christ and the kingdom, arrange for institutionalization? Trusted, lifelong friends---wise and godly---urged me to do this.

"Muriel would become accustomed to the new environment quickly," they said. Would she? Would anyone love her at all, let alone love her as I do? I had often seen the empty, listless faces of those lined up in wheelchairs along the corridors of such places, waiting, waiting for the fleeting visit of some loved one.

Years later Muriel cannot comprehend much nor express many thoughts. But she knows whom she loves, and she lives in happy oblivion to almost everything else.

She is such a delight to me. I don't have to care for her; I get to. One blessing is the way she is teaching me so much---about love, God's love.

Muriel cannot speak in sentences now, only in phrases and words, and often words that make little sense: "no" when she means, "yes," for example. But she can say one sentence, and she says it often: "I love you."

She not only says it, she acts it. The [Columbia Bible College] board arranged for a companion to stay in our home so I could go daily to the office. During those two years it became increasingly difficult to keep Muriel home. As soon I left, she would take out after me. With me she was content; without me she was distressed, sometimes terror stricken.

The walk to school is a mile round trip. She would make that trip as many as ten times a day. Sometimes at night, when I helped her undress, I found bloody feet. When I told our family doctor, he choked up. "Such love," he said simply. Then after a moment he continued, "I have a theory that the characteristics developed across the years come out at times like these." Thus Muriel teaches me, day by day.

I came across the common contemporary wisdom in this morning's newspaper in a letter to a national columnist: "I ended the relationship because it wasn't meeting my needs," the writer explained.

The counselor's response was predictable: "What were your needs that didn't get met by him in the relationship? Do you still have these same needs? What would he have to do to fill these needs? Could he do it?" Needs for communication, understanding, affirmation, common interests, sexual fulfillment – the list goes on. If the needs are not met, split. He offered no alternatives.

I once reflected on the eerie irrelevance of every one of those criteria for me. But I am not wired for introspection; I am more oriented outward and toward action and the future. I even feel an occasional surge of exhilaration, as I find my present assignment more challenging than running an institution's complex ministry.

As she needed more and more of me, I wrestled daily with the question of who gets me fulltime – Muriel or Columbia Bible College and Seminary. When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, "in sickness and in health... till death do us part?"

1. What impact does this story have on you as you read it? How does it make you feel?

2. What lessons can you learn about love from this story?

3. What do you think gave Dr. McQuilkin the strength to make such a commitment to his wife?

Homebuilders Principle

The world has a faulty concept of what love is. A relationship with God, however, makes it possible to express a lasting, unconditional love to your mate.

The Love Chapter

First Corinthians 13 is often called the “love chapter” of the Bible because it contains such a beautiful description of what true, godly love is. Read **1 Corinthians 13: 1-3:**

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

A. Based on this passage, how would you describe the value God places on love?

B. How would you apply this passage to marriage?

Construction

(to be completed as a couple)
(10 minutes)

During the remainder of this study on Expressing *Love in Your Marriage*, we will look more closely at the “love chapter” in **1 Corinthians 13**. In particular, we’ll look at the different descriptions of love in **verses 4-7**. These verses describe God’s love for us and the type of love we should show to one another.

“Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1. Discuss together how Robertson McQuilkin showed this type of love to his wife.
2. In the passage, circle two or three characteristics of love which you would like to see developed in your life.

Home Builders Project #1

Individually: 30-45 minutes

1. One of the primary ways we learn to express love is by observing our parents. For each of the following areas, evaluate how your parents expressed their love for one another:

	Poor				Excellent
Commitment	1	2	3	4	5
Verbally	1	2	3	4	5
Emotionally	1	2	3	4	5
Physically	1	2	3	4	5
Spiritually	1	2	3	4	5
Socially	1	2	3	4	5

2. Review the questions and notes from **Blueprints** section two.

3. How well were you and your mate prepared as you began your marriage relationship?

4. Look again at the graph showing levels of marital satisfaction at different stages of marriage.

a. At what stage is your marriage now?

b. What are some of the challenges and pressures you are facing in your relationship and in your life?

c. How would you rate your own level of satisfaction with your marriage and with the love you are expressing toward each other?

5. Which of the “threats” to expressing love (from section II of **Blueprints**) are affecting you the most at the present time? Evaluate them on the following chart, and then explain your answers.

	Serious Threat				No Threat
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Faulty concept of what love is</i>					
<i>Selfishness</i>					
<i>Predictability</i>					

6. Think of the next 5 to 20 years of your life. If you change nothing about the way in which you express love to your mate, what do you think will happen to your relationship?

7. In his book, *Love Life for Every Married Couple*, Ed Wheat states, “It is God’s will in every marriage that the couple love each other with an absorbing spiritual, emotional and physical attraction that continues to grow throughout their lifetime together.” From this statement, what can you conclude about the difference between God’s view of love and man’s view of love?

Interact as a couple: 30-45 minutes

1. Take turns sharing with each other your answers to the questions in the individual section. It’s important to listen carefully! Talk one at a time, and take notes on what your mate says.

2. Stephan Covey, in his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, tells us that we should “begin with the end in mind.” We often make plans for the future- for vacations, for career, for children’s education, etc. But how often do we apply this advice to marriage?

It’s a helpful exercise to look into the future and envision what you’d like your marriage to look like 20 years down the road. What do you want to feel toward each other? What type of relationship do you want to have? Discuss this together. Then write in the space provided a brief description of what you would like marriage to look like in 20 years.

3. Discuss together some things you feel you would like to begin doing differently as a couple. List three or four in the space provided.

4. This study on *Expressing Love in Your Marriage* may be one of the most important steps you take toward strengthening your relationship. Signal your commitment by signing the following pledge:

“I commit myself to completing this HomeBuilders study on *Expressing Love in Your Marriage*. I will work through the projects and seek to apply the principles to my life and to our marriage.”

(signed) (date)

(signed) (date)

5. Close your time together in prayer, thanking God for the opportunity of working through this material and improving your love relationship.

Remember to bring your calendar to the next session so you can
Make a Date.

Warm-Up

Option B

Love Is Patient, Love Is Kind

Focus

*You can love each other as God has loved
you – with patience and kindness.*

1. Begin this session by sharing one thing you learned from **HomeBuilders Project #1**.

2. What does the phrase “unconditional love” mean to you? Take a moment and write a definition, then share it with the group.

3. Why is it so difficult to show this type of love to others – and to your mate?

4. Do you think it is even possible to show this type of love?

Blueprints

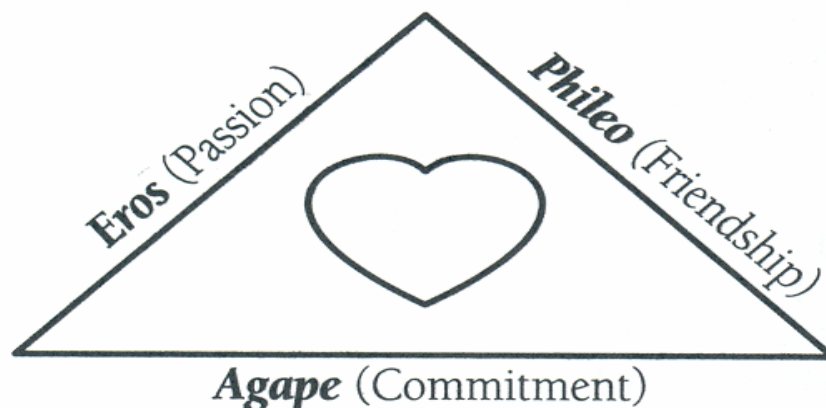
(20-30 minutes)

I. GOD'S KIND OF LOVE

In our last session we looked at what keeps couples from experiencing lasting love in their marriages. We also began to look at God's perspective on love, which is described so beautifully in **1 Corinthians 13: 1-7**.

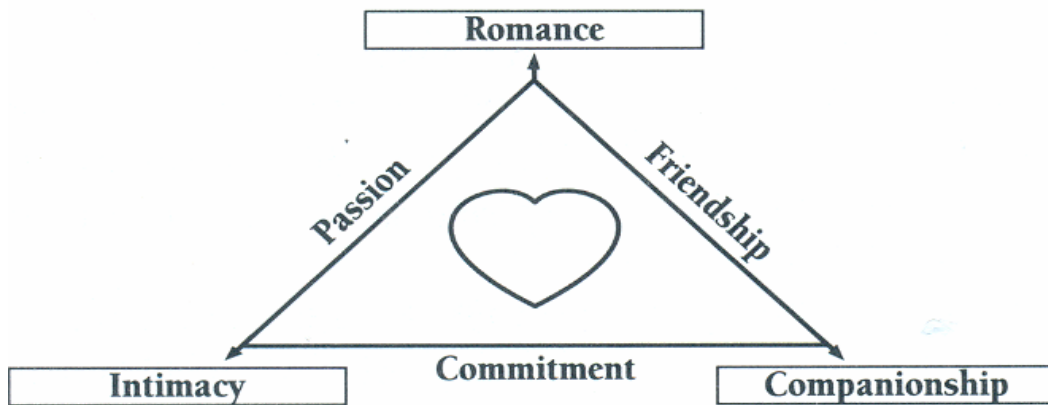
Love is such a powerful need in marriage for all of us that it would be a good idea to continue our study of love from God's perspective.

The New Testament was written in Greek, a language which uses three different words for "love." A satisfying relationship is the natural result of a marriage that balances all three kinds of love.



- **“Eros”** is the emotional side of love. It suggests feelings, passion and sensual desire. Many people today would define “love” in this way.
- **“Phileo”** is used to describe friendships. This is the “dating” and “courtship” side of marriage.
- **“Agape”** was a new word created by the New Testament writers to express God's perfect, unconditional love. This purest and deepest kind of love involves a conscious decision to act in the best interests of another person, not because of what he or she has done, but because you have decided to love. “Agape” is the word for love used in 1 Corinthians 13. It is the commitment side of marriage.

A. According to the following illustration, why is each type of love necessary in a marriage?



B. Why do you think the Bible writers felt a new word was necessary for God's highest expression of love?

C. In each of the following verses, "agape" is the word used for love. What does each verse tell you about the characteristics of God's love?

1. Romans 5:8

2. John 3:16

3. 1 John 4:19

So far we've seen that love – as God intended – is very different from what most of us experience and express in our relationships. Then we read in 1 John 4:11, ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. In other words, God's love should be a model for the way we love others. You may feel that this sounds great, but it's a little unrealistic. After all, how many people do you know who love others like this – even, or perhaps especially, their mates?

Believe it or not, you can love and be loved as God has loved you. It's what He intended for you. As we look more closely at 1 Corinthians 13, we'll begin to see how this type of love can be expressed in practical terms.

Homebuilders Principle

We can learn how to express love in our marriage by studying God's unconditional love for us and then using these principles as a guide.

II. Love Is Patient

“The key to everything is patience. You get the chicken by hatching the egg... not smashing it.” – Arnold Glasgow

A. What are some situations that cause you to become impatient with your mate? (Be careful not to embarrass your spouse.)

B. Read the following case study:

Case Study

It had been a particularly difficult day for Teresa. The sales reports for her territory, as well as next quarter's projections, were due to the vice president of marketing before she left for home. Two of her sales representatives were late in giving their reports to her and Teresa's administrative assistant had to leave work early because of a sick child. Teresa understood her assistant's dilemma and allowed her to leave, but then she had to scramble to get all the information together, prepare the reports and fax them to St. Louis.

Not surprisingly, Teresa was harried and bone tired when she finally arrived home at 7:00 o'clock that evening. And as she walked through the door, instead of finding dinner prepared and waiting, the kids bathed and ready for bed, she found her husband, Josh, watching Monday Night Football while the kids played wildly in their bedrooms. When she walked into the den, Josh looked up from the TV and said, “Well, you're finally home! We're starved. What's for dinner? And by the way, Brad needs some help with his homework tonight – he has a spelling test tomorrow.”

Teresa slumped into a chair and threw her purse on the floor.

1. What would be Teresa's natural response to her husband?

2. If Teresa exhibited patience at this point, what might it look like?

C. What does **2 Peter 3:9** say about God's love demonstrated by patience?

D. Read **Colossians 3: 12,13**. In this passage Paul tells Christians, the "chosen of God," how to relate to one another. What do you suppose Paul had in mind when he used the phrase "bearing with one another" to describe being patient?

E. Read the following statement twice: "We free our mates to change when we accept them as they are and make no demands that they change."

1. How does what we've studied so far about God's kind of love underscore this statement?

2. Sometimes you may find yourself becoming impatient about personal characteristics or traits that your mate cannot change. For example, you may be task oriented while your mate is more people oriented. You may operate at peak efficiency in the morning, while your mate's internal motor doesn't really get moving until the afternoon. These characteristics shouldn't be seen as weaknesses or problem, simply as differences!

a. What are some ways that you and your mate will probably always be different?

b. What are some constructive ways you have found to adjust to these differences and demonstrate patience to your mate?

Construction

(to be completed as couple)
(5 minutes)

Individually:

1. Consider for a moment the areas of your marriage that you feel require some patience on your part. List four or five of these irritants in the space provided.

2. What would it take for you to be more patient with your mate in these areas? Would you need to approach the situations differently? Why?

3. In what specific ways do you think your mate would benefit if you were able to show more patience?

Interact as a Couple: (5 minutes)

Share your answers from the individual time with each other.

Blueprints

(15-30 minutes)

III. Love Is Kind

In his book, *Ephesians*, John MacArthur writes, “Just as patience will take anything from others, kindness will give anything to others, even to its enemies. Being kind is the counterpart of being patient. To be kind means to be useful, serving and gracious. It is active goodwill. It not only feels generous; it is generous. It not only desires others’ welfare, but works for it.”

But what does kindness look like in practice? Let’s look at some examples.

A. Read **Luke 10:30-35**.

1. What actions of kindness did the Samaritan perform that expressed God’s love?

2. How would the principles of love expressed in this parable apply to kindness in a marriage relationship?

B. Read Jesus’ words in **Matthew 11:28-30**.

In the original New Testament language (Greek) the word “easy” in this passage comes from the same root as the word “kind” in 1 Corinthians 13:4. This conveys the idea that a practical way to show kindness is to help relieve or lift the burden of another person. And perhaps the best place to practice this type of love is within your family.

1. Looking back at the case study, what could Josh be doing to show kindness and relieve Teresa’s load?

2. **Men:** What steps could you take to relieve your wife's load in some pressure situations right now?

3. **Women:** What steps could your take to relieve your husband's load in some pressure situations right now?

C. What types of things communicate kindness to you?

D. Share one way your spouse showed kindness to you recently.

Homebuilders Principle

Loving your mate with kindness means taking the initiative to give blessings and to relieve your mate's burdens.

IV. Conclusion

In the early church, applying and living out these loving principles of patience and kindness caused a revolution in the way Christians related to one another. By expressing “agape” love in your marriage, it is possible to see a similar revolution in your home. Right now. Today.

Nothing can overcome the power of expressing your love for your mate in the way that God loves you. Nothing.

Home Builders Project #2

Individually: 30-45 minutes

1. Review the material in the **Blueprints** section.

2. God's Love
 - a. What are some specific ways God has demonstrated His unconditional love for you?

 - b. How has God demonstrated patience and kindness to you?

3. Love Is patient
 - a. Look back over the list of patience- trying situations you made during the **Construction** time. Think about your home life and your marriage relationship, and add any other specific situations that are testing your patience.

b. Looking at your list, consider: How do you typically respond in those situations?

c. How specifically could you apply what you've learned about patience in dealing with the same situations? List three possible strategies.

d. What are some situations where you cause your mate to be impatient? What can you change in your own habits to improve this situation?

e. Complete the following sentence: I wish my mate would be more patient with me when

4. Love Is Kind

a. Review the story of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:30-35**). How have you responded in the past when your mate has had a problem?

b. What's an area where you need your mate to be a good Samaritan for you?

c. What are some specific ways you can begin helping to relieve burdens from your mate this week?

Interact as a couple: 30-45 minutes

1. Share your answers from the individual time.
2. Choose two or three specific situations in which you feel you need to show more patience or kindness to each other. What are you going to do differently over the next week to make improvements? Write out a brief plan in the space provided.

3. Close your time together in prayer.

Remember to bring your calendar to the next session so you can
Make a Date.

Home Builders Principles

HomeBuilders Principle #1: Good decisions can make pressure reasonable and bearable.

HomeBuilders Principle #2: Our decisions are a mirror of our values; they should reflect our desire to put God first in our lives.

HomeBuilders Principle #3: Wise decisions are born out of wise counsel – from God (the Scriptures) and from godly advisers – and from prayer together as a couple.

HomeBuilders Principle #4: Life does not consist of possessions, but of relationships – with God, with our families and with our fellow human beings.

HomeBuilders Principle #5: Couples need to be honest with each other about the influence of materialism in their lives.

HomeBuilders Principle #6: Couples need to seek contentment within the means which God has provided.

HomeBuilders Principle #7: Nothing is as wearisome as wandering through life.

HomeBuilders Principle #8: Unacknowledged sin has a price: Exhaustion! Real rest is found in a clear conscience.

HomeBuilders Principle #9: In some areas of life, letting go may be the best strategy. Couples can decrease pressure in their lives by deciding to cut down on their responsibilities, expectations and commitments.

HomeBuilders Principle #10: Advance preparation is the best pressure-release valve for a new marital season.

HomeBuilders Principle #11: Couples need to make their sexual relationship a high priority.

HomeBuilders Principle #12: To build true sexual intimacy, defeat selfishness by focusing on what your mate needs.

HomeBuilders Principle #13: Freedom in marriage is found by embracing what is right, not in redefining what is right.

HomeBuilders Principle #14: If your Christianity is not defined practically, it will be practically worthless.

HomeBuilders Principle #15: A couple cannot face the pressures of today's amoral culture unless they walk together in agreement with their standards.

DECISION MAKING AND PRESSURE

Focus

Making wise decisions is essential in resolving the pressures we face in life.

Session One

A Word About Pressure

All of us face pressure. Some of it is just the natural “stuff” of everyday life. But some of it isn’t. It’s brought upon us by our own lack of planning, poor choices, wrong values, unresolved conflicts and leaving God out of our lives.

Option B

1. Think back over the past 12 months. What have been 1-3 highlights of your year, and why?

2. Share with the group the low point of your year, and tell how it created pressure in your life.

3. Share what you hope to get out of the study.

Blueprints

I. Living in a Pressure – Cooker World

A. What circumstances or expectations cause you to feel pressure during a typical week – at work or at home?

B. How do you typically react to pressure? How does it affect you physically and emotionally? How does it affect you personally?

C. What do you typically do to reduce pressure in your life?

II. How Decisions Affect The Pressure We Experience

Case Study

Jim and Lisa enjoyed their life in the Midwestern town where they had both grown up. Jim managed the local office of a national insurance firm and did well. He didn't earn a large salary, but housing in their town was pretty cheap, so his earnings were enough to allow Lisa to stay home with their two young children. They belonged to a church they both enjoyed, and their parents lived within 10 minutes of their neighborhood.

Then Jim received a visit from his district manager. "I'm moving up to the head office in New York," the manager said. "I need to find a replacement, and you're my first choice."

For Jim, this seemed like the opportunity of a lifetime. The new position would mean a substantial increase in salary and would even give him the opportunity to do some traveling. The only drawback was that the family would have to move to St. Louis, about three hours away. Jim knew he would miss his family and friends, but he was excited about the prospect of advancing his career.

By the time Jim arrived home that night, he had practically decided to take the new job. "This is my chance to move up the ladder," he told Lisa. "I even mentioned the possibility to a couple of my business clients, and they said I might not get an opportunity like this again."

“But I don’t want to leave,” Lisa protested. “I’m happy here – I don’t want to leave my family and friends.”

“ But we’ll never have the chance to get ahead if we stay here. This way we can afford to get a larger house. We’ll be able to sell our old car and get a minivan and with the kids getting bigger, you know we need one.”

Eventually Jim won her over. Three months later they found themselves in a new home, a new city and a new minivan. But now they were facing a new set of problems they hadn’t anticipated.

First, there was a job, which turned out to require quite a bit more than “a little traveling.” Jim was often out of town three or four days a week, and often he needed to work on Saturdays as well. Lisa sometimes felt like a single mother, and it seemed worse because she was unable to lean on her family to help with the kids as she had before. On top of that, she became pregnant again.

They missed their families and their friends terribly. They joined a good church, but their lives were so hectic now that they had a hard time meeting new friends there. Jim was often so tired on Sundays that he just wanted to sleep in anyway. And he was out of town so often on weekday nights that they decided they couldn’t commit to joining a couples’ Bible study.

Their new life went on like this for a year, and then came the big bombshell: Jim’s company was sold to a larger conglomerate which already had a district manager in that area. Jim’s work was highly regarded by his new employers, however, and once again he was offered a new position as a regional manager working out of Chicago. “We need people like you, Jim,” he was told. “In a few years you’ll probably be moving on up to the New York office.”

A. What pressures were Jim and Lisa feeling as they made their first decision about moving?

B. In what ways did Jim and Lisa’s decision increase the pressures they felt?

Much of the pressure we feel each day is unavoidable – it’s a part of life. But the decisions we make in response to the situations that cause pressure are critical. We can make decisions that reduce pressure and help us cope with it. Or we can make decisions that make the pressure worse than what we’re presently feeling.

Homebuilders Principle

*Good decisions can make pressure
reasonable and bearable.*

1

- C. How does our culture give people the idea that “climbing the corporate ladder” is so important?

- D. In the end, many of the decisions we make are influenced by our personal values – what we consider important. What factors should Jim and Lisa consider as they make their decision about whether to move to Chicago?

Construction

(to be completed as a couple)

- A. How did you observe your parents making decisions as you grew up? Share any good or bad lessons you learned from them.

When two individuals enter into marriage, they often discover that they have different decision-making styles than their mates. One person may make decisions quickly, while the other deliberates for a few days. One may take a factual approach to the decision; the other makes it more emotionally. The result can be conflict and pressure.

- B. In what ways do you and your mate differ when it comes to how you make decisions?

Blueprints

III. Principles of Good Decision Making

In our lives each of us will make thousands of decisions. They set our direction, reveal our values and determine our course. Decisions determine our destiny and play a key role in how we handle the pressures we face each day. Yet few people ever receive formal training in how to make good decisions. Even fewer ever take the time to hammer out a biblically based strategy for decision making – one that is based on how God wants us to make our choices.

- A. **Principle #1: Put God first.**

Read **Matthew 6:33,34**. How would you apply this truth to decision making?

Homebuilders Principle

*Our decisions are a mirror of our values;
they should reflect our desire to put God first in our lives.*

2

- B. **Principle #2: Obey the Scriptures.**

1. Upon what does **Matthew 7:24-27** say we are to base our decisions? How can this affect the pressures you face in your marriage and family life?

2. In many areas, Scriptures is so clear that deciding what to do should not take you long. For example, the Bible states in **Exodus 20:14** and many other passages that adultery is a sin; God is crystal clear on that issue. What are some other examples of decisions that should be easy to make because of Scripture’s clear guidance?

- C. **Principle #3: Seek God’s wisdom – together.** For some decisions, you may not be able to find a verse or passage from Scripture that provides clear guidance. When this happens, you will need to seek the Lord together as a couple and ask for wisdom. Here are some suggestions for how to go about seeking the Lord as a couple:

1. Pray for guidance. Read **Proverbs 3:5-7**.

- a. How does this passage apply to making decisions?

- b. Why do many couples find it difficult to pray together about decisions they face?

- d. How could you as a couple better prepare for decisions through prayer?

2. Honestly evaluate your options. Read **Luke 14:27-32**. Why do you think so many people fail to “calculate the cost” as they contemplate a decision?

3. Seek counsel.

a. Read **Proverbs 12:15; 13:20; 15:22**. What typically prevents people from following the advise in these verses?

b. How can you determine whom to approach for counsel?

4. Decide which of your choices is the wisest and commit your decision together to the Lord. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Why are you better off making your decisions together as a couple?

Homebuilders Principle

*Wise decisions are born out of wise counsel –
from God (the Scriptures) and from godly advisers –
and from prayer together as a couple.*

3

IV. Conclusion

To manage pressure in marriage, it's essential that a couple understands and practices good decision making. You can use the principles learned in this session for a multitude of decisions in your life.

In the remaining sessions you will study five crucial areas that bring enormous pressure to families today. If they are not handled properly, they can crush a marriage relationship.

Homebuilders Project #1

Individually: 30 minutes

1. Review Session One and write down the most important concept or truth you learned.
2. Take a look at the principles for decision-making outlined in Section III of **Blueprints**. What do you think are your greatest strengths and weaknesses in this area of your life?

Strengths: _____

Weaknesses: _____

3. What action do you need to take in order to improve your decision-making ability? (For example: keep a daily prayer time, involve your spouse more in decisions, etc.)

4. What do you think are your mate's greatest strengths and weaknesses in decision making?

Strengths: _____

Weaknesses: _____

5. What two or three pressures are you currently facing that a wise decision might alleviate?

6. Are there any decisions you've made lately which you need to reevaluate-choices which have caused additional pressure on you, your mate, or your family? If so, list them here.

7. What is one thing you'd like to implement in your marriage as a result of this study.

Interact as a couple: 30 minutes

1. Share your answers from the individual portion of this project.

2. As you look at the subject of decision making, discuss:

What is one thing you're doing right as a couple?

What is one thing you need to stop doing?

What is one thing you need to start doing?

3. Take a look at your weekly schedule. What are some decisions you could make that would alleviate any time pressure you feel?

4. Close in prayer together. Pray for one another, for wisdom, and for any decisions you need to make.

Remember to bring your calendar to the next session so you can
Make a Date.

The Pressure of Materialism

Focus

Couples can reduce pressure in their marriages by taking a hard look at how materialism influences their financial decisions.

Session Two

Warm-Up

1. Choose one of the following:
 - a. Tell about something dumb you've seen or heard other people do with money.

- b. Share something dumb you've done with your money.

- c. Share a childhood scheme that you had for making money. What was the result?

2. Why do you think so many couples report that finances are major source of pressure in their marriages?

3. How have you experienced pressure as a couple as you have managed your financial resources? If you are willing, tell about your first conflict over money, or a recent difficult discussion you've had.

Blueprints

I. What is Materialism

A close look at our country's financial status will reveal that an astonishing number of Americans are in debt. Unfortunately, this places a great deal of pressure on today's marriages.

There are many things a couple can do to improve their financial management skills. Many couples, for example, do not keep even a simple budget to keep track of their spending. What's really needed, however, is for us to take a hard look at the materialistic attitudes that pressure us into poor financial decisions.

The second college edition of Webster's New World Dictionary provides some interesting definitions of the word "materialism": ... the doctrine that comfort, pleasure, and wealth are the only or highest goals or values ... the tendency to be more concerned with material than with spiritual or intellectual goals or values.

- A. How can you tell if a person is materialistic?

- B. Can someone be poor and also materialistic?

C. State whether you agree or disagree with the following statement and why:

“Christians are nearly as materialistic as anyone else.”

II. The Causes and Results of Materialism

A. Why is it so easy to be materialistic in our culture today?

B. If you can, tell about one purchase you made during the last 6-12 months. Share about a time when you made a poor decision about a purchase, investment or finances because of the cultural pressure of materialism.

C. Read the following case study:

Case Study

Like many young couples, Robert and Maria began their married life in an apartment. During their first four years of marriage, they both worked, and eventually they managed to save enough money for a small down payment on their own home. Soon after Maria gave birth to their first child, they purchased a three-bedroom home in a neighborhood where quite a few other young couples lived. The house wasn't especially large, but it seemed adequate to meet their needs. They also wanted to be able to live on one income, and they were able to do that with this house.

During the next several years, Robert and Maria had two more children, and they enjoyed refurbishing the home. Robert continued to take on more responsibility at work, and his income increased accordingly. When their youngest child entered kindergarten, Maria decided to take a part-time job as a preschool teacher.

After they had been in the home for nine years, Robert and Maria began to feel a bit restless. “This house is starting to feel small,” Maria said. “The kids could use more room to play and entertain their friends.”

It seemed as if all the couples they knew were moving into their second homes. “You should see the house that the Spragues moved into,” Robert said. “Just walking through it made me jealous!”

Robert and Maria spent a few weekends with a realtor and came upon a house of their dreams. It had just been built, and it offered four bedrooms, 3,000 square feet, a sun room, a huge backyard, crown molding throughout the house, and brand-new appliances in the kitchen. The problem was the price.

Their house payment would more than double, and the only way they could afford that would be for Maria to find a new job with more hours.

Their budget would be pretty tight, but they were convinced that house would be worth any sacrifice. "This is the home I've always wanted." Maria said. "I just know we'll be happy here."

1. What were some of the attitudes and pressures that led Robert and Maria to decide to purchase the second home?

2. What kinds of pressures are they likely to experience as result of this decision?

3. How did Robert and Maria's decision reflect their values?

- D. In what ways has the tendency to compare yourself with others affected you and your financial decisions?

- E. What do the following Scriptures say about materialism and handling money?

1. **1 Timothy 6:6-10**

2. **Luke 12:15-21**

3. **Matthew 13:18-23** (with particular emphasis on **verse 22**)

*Homebuilders Principle my
Life does not consist of possessions,
but of relationships-with God, with our
families and with our fellow human beings.*

4

Construction

(to be completed as a couple)

Complete the following exercise individually
and then share your answers with your mate:

Materialism: A Self-appraisal

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I would be happier if I could double my Income.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I really love buying things.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I find myself often thinking about new things I'd like to buy.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My car makes me feel good about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I find my self-worth is tied to how my home looks.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I have a long list of things I wish I could buy.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I find myself using up a great deal of emotional and mental energy finding or thinking of things I'd like to buy.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My kids are preoccupied with things they want.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My closet is full of nice clothes that I don't wear because they're out of style	1	2	3	4	5
10. We would give more to church or charities if we could control our spending better.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Husbands: I would be willing for my wife to stay at home with our children, if it didn't mean a significant drop in our income.	1	2	3	4	5
12. We would be in full-time ministry if it didn't involve a sacrificial life-style.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Other people's opinions of my life-style matter a lot to me.	1	2	3	4	5

Blueprints

III. Reducing the Pressure of Materialism

- A.** Take a healthy inventory of your present life-style, with a particular emphasis on your values and attitudes toward materialism.
- 1.** Discuss the “self-appraisal” exercise you worked on during the **Construction** time. In what one or two areas are you more materialistic than you wish you were?

 - 2.** What are common ways that you rationalize materialistic attitudes?

Homebuilders Principle
Couples need to be honest with each other
about the influence of materialism in their lives.

5

- B.** Continue growing in your understanding of the biblical perspective toward money and possessions.
- 1.** Read **Matthew 6:33**. How can you practically apply this principle when making financial decisions?

 - 2.** What practical advice can you glean from **1 Timothy 6:6-12** (especially verses 11 and 12) that would help you avoid materialism’s grip?

Homebuilders Principle
Couples need to seek contentment
within the means which God has provided.

6

C. Make value-driven decisions together as a couple.

1. How can determining what true success means in life help in conquering materialism?

2. Share some ideas that have worked to help you communicate together and make value-driven decisions as a couple on financial matters.

3. What is one thing you need to do as a couple to work together and reduce pressure from materialism?

IV. Conclusion

A key to making good decisions that will reduce the pressures you feel about your financial situation is simply to be honest with yourself. Here are a few questions you can use when making financial decisions:

- Am I seeking contentment in this purchase?
- Is this a need or a want?
- Have we prayed about this purchase and discussed it as a couple?
- Will it create additional pressure over the next one to five years?
- Will it cause us to go into debt?
- Will our family relationships suffer because of this decision?

HomeBuilders Project #2

Individually: 30 minutes

1. Review the **Blueprints** questions and your responses to the **Construction** project. Write down any issues you want to discuss with your mate.

2. How would you honestly rate your success as a couple in resisting materialism and its pressures, and why?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Poor				Average				Excellent	
“We caved in our values to the pressures.”					“We are immovable-firmly in place.”				

3. (Answer if applicable.) How would you evaluate your success as parents in raising children who know how to resist materialism and its pressures? Why?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Poor				Average				Excellent	

4. What decisions from the past are causing pressure today on you and your mate? Are there any decisions you can make today that would reduce the pressure?

5. Reread **Matthew 6:33** and **1 Timothy 6:6-12**. Is there anything God seems to be saying to you and your family through these passages?

6. How can you as a couple work together to reduce future pressure from materialism in your lives?

7. If you can, write down a single action point, which, if you began implementing it, could really begin to make a difference in reducing pressure in your marriage and family.

Interact as a couple: 30 minutes

1. Share your answers from the individual portion of this project.
2. List together some specific steps you can take as a couple to reduce the pressure of materialism in your financial decisions.

3. Are there any specific decisions you need to make about finances right now? Look back over the decision-making process outlined in Session One and the principles for reducing the pressure of materialism from Session Two. Evaluate the steps you need to take to make a wise decision in this area.

4. Close your time together with prayer, asking God for the wisdom and strength to make sound decisions about finances.

Remember to bring your calendar to the next session so you can
Make a Date.

