

DISCUSSION GUIDE
for
SIMPLE HABITS FOR MARITAL HAPPINESS:
Practical Skills and Tools That Build a Strong
SATISFYING RELATIONSHIP

Randy Schroeder, M.Div., Ph.D., M.Ed.

SIMPLE HABITS FOR MARITAL HAPPINESS will help you achieve a significant understanding of healthy words, behaviors, and tips in the seven major marital areas. Through this essential knowledge you will strengthen your relationship “oneness” (Matthew 19:6) and be able to “Correct your habits and change your actions for the better” (Jeremiah 18:11).

With this beneficial wisdom, you will possess the skills and tools to correct harmful habits by implementing healthier verbal skills and actions for increased relationship satisfaction. ***SIMPLE HABITS FOR MARITAL HAPPINESS*** and this ***Discussion Guide*** will enable you to become a “marriage expert” so you can ***show*** your spouse how much you love them.

HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

General Thoughts

1. You can utilize this ***Discussion Guide*** in the following three ways.
 - A. As a ***spouse***, you can answer the questions on your own and reflect on the practical wisdom in each chapter.

- B. As a *couple*, both of you can discuss together the questions in each chapter so you are even more connected to help strengthen your Biblical “oneness.”
 - C. *Two or more couples* in a small group may interact together to support, learn, and grow by sharing the *Simple Habits* that were most beneficial as well as valuable ideas for implementing those *Simple Habits* daily.
2. As you go through this *Discussion Guide*, identify and write down at least one significant *Simple Habit* in each chapter that will make a major difference in your marital satisfaction. When both of you identify a minimum of seven noteworthy *Simple Habits*, you will significantly increase your *Marital Happiness*.
 3. Change often takes time but understand that small changes can and will lead to greater improvement for a much happier relationship. Do not wait until tomorrow but *together act today* with these wonderful *Simple Habits* by learning, improving, and growing as a *spouse* and *couple* for a stronger, more satisfying marriage.

Couples In A Small Group

4. To keep each person focused, take a moment, and select a leader who will facilitate wholesome discussions.
5. Your primary goal is to just exchange ideas and reinforce beneficial *Simple Habits*, NOT try to solve any marriage problems.
6. Your second goal is for everyone to end each meeting feeling encouraged and motivated that their marriage will be strengthened and become even more rewarding because of these *Simple Habits*.
7. Your third goal is to provide opportunities for individual spouses or couples to practice the skills and tools learned from the chapter.
8. RELAX! I hope you enjoy this wonderful experience of growing as a spouse, improving your marital relationship, and supporting other couples. Your group is not a classroom and there are no tests!
9. Please be assured that there are no “dumb” questions, and the emphasis is on learning skills and applying effort to implement the *Simple Habits* for a more gratifying relationship.
10. Your leader must avoid letting anyone monopolize the meeting by trying to be the center of attention and not giving others a chance to share their thoughts. In addition, group members learn from each other so some members may want to just listen as a “spectator,” and simply learn through the comments of other spouses. Certainly, that is fine.

11. Intentionally, there are more questions with each chapter discussion than can be covered in a single meeting. With the input of members, your leader may need to prioritize questions that will be most beneficial for your group. Structure the meeting to establish time limits for the various questions to make your time together most productive.
12. Lower your expectations. There are NO perfect spouses, marriages, or discussion gatherings. Placing expectations that are too high on your group meeting may lead to disenchantment and limit the positive benefits for achieving a strong, satisfying marriage.
13. Every chapter has questions to stimulate discussion about specific *Simple Habits*. However, it might also be helpful for the leader to ask two open-ended questions like:
 - A. What was the most significant idea you gained from this chapter?
 - B. How do you plan to apply this valuable idea or *Simple Habit* in your marriage?
14. After the first meeting, perhaps begin subsequent discussions with a question like, “How did the *Simple Habit(s)* you emphasized during the last week make a positive difference in your marriage?”
15. At the end of the meeting if there is time, the leader may ask two general questions:
 - A. What *Simple Habits* from this chapter stand out in your mind?
 - B. How will you apply the ideas discussed in your own marriage during the next week?

Randy Schroeder, Ph.D., M.Div., M.Ed.
DrRandy@DrRandySchroeder.com
www.DrRandySchroeder.com
260-348-8777

Schroeder Counseling & Consulting, Inc.
Cornerstone Lutheran Church
4850 East Main Street
Carmel, IN 46033

CHAPTER 1

THE HABIT AT THE HEART OF YOUR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE: FORGIVENESS

1. Colossians 3:13 (AMP) provides the foundation for forgiveness, “*bearing graciously with one another, and willingly forgiving each other if one has a cause for complaint against another; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so should you forgive.*” Since the entire substance of the Christian faith is “forgiveness,” why is apologizing and forgiving also at the heart of every satisfying marriage?
2. Does this chapter provide any insight into your own past challenges with apologizing and forgiving? Explain.
3. Select a sentence(s) or paragraph from this “Forgiveness Chapter” and describe why that idea was most meaningful for you.
4. What kind of spouse do you need to be to accept responsibility for your hurtful words and actions?
5. When a spouse is hurt intentionally or unintentionally, why is it often a major challenge for the offender to apologize and the offended to forgive?
6. How do you best like to hear an apology? For example, do you like an apology to be verbal, written, both verbal and written, standing, seated, certain time of day, etc.? Explain your reasons.
7. Why is it so difficult to request forgiveness with “Will you please forgive me?”
8. Why is “letting go” of forgiven “cuts and lacerations” going to be a major challenge for every spouse? What can help you achieve the goal of “letting go”?
9. In your marriage, what will be the necessary steps to initiate the Apologizing and Forgiving Process in a healthy manner?
10. How can you and your spouse practice the three part Apologizing and Forgiving Process so that it becomes an essential component for keeping your marriage healthy?

MY SIMPLE HABIT ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK IS . . .

Write down one *Simple Habit* or skill from this chapter that will make a positive impact on your relationship. Why do you believe that particular *Simple Habit* will make an encouraging significant difference for your marriage?

MY PLAN FOR IMPROVING AS A SPOUSE DURING THE NEXT WEEK IS ...

Your plan or goal is not to be disclosed to the group but may be shared with your spouse.

A PRAYER FOR OUR MARRIAGE

Heavenly Father, soften our hearts to repent and apologize when we hurt our spouse. Through the power of the Holy Spirit give us the strength to forgive our spouse and others. In view of your forgiveness, strengthen us to follow you God and your ways day after day.

Help us to love and walk in your path of forgiveness to restore all our relationships. Gracious God, thank you for your forgiveness and always accepting and loving us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

THE FOUR PRACTICAL WISDOM HABITS: Stay In Love After The Honeymoon

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV) declares “*there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.*” Why is it essential for couples to take “daily time” to talk, hug, kiss, and “regular time” to date?
2. How did your parents’ relationship influence your perspective of the Four Practical Wisdom Habits?
3. Why do the Four Practical Wisdom Habits so easily slip away in a marriage?
4. Why is an eye-to-eye heart talk almost nonexistent in most marriages after the first few years of marriage?
5. Why is it so difficult for many couples to demonstrate a meaningful hug and kiss on a daily basis?
6. Identify the Practical Wisdom Habit that you feel will be most difficult for you to implement. How can you overcome the challenges associated with implementing that Practical Wisdom Habit?
7. How do a daily ten-minute talk, lengthy hug, and lingering kiss set the tone for your emotional connection each day?
8. Why will knowing how to Date Your Mate make an important difference in your marriage?
9. What *Simple Habit* from this chapter spoke most personally to you and why?
10. How have the Four Practical Wisdom Habits made it easier for you to be a more nurturing spouse in order to stay in love after the honeymoon?

MY *SIMPLE HABIT* ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK IS . . .

Write down one *Simple Habit* or skill from this chapter that will make a positive impact on your relationship. Why do you believe that particular *Simple Habit* will make an encouraging significant difference for your marriage?

MY PLAN FOR IMPROVING AS A SPOUSE DURING THE NEXT WEEK IS ...

Your plan or goal is not to be disclosed to the group but may be shared with your spouse.

A PRAYER FOR OUR MARRIAGE

Almighty God, our time is in your hands. Help us to wake up each day with the desire to live as your dear child. By your power, may we make the most of our opportunities with our spouse and others every day.

Give us confidence and absolute trust in your never-ending love for us. Transform us by your love, Lord, so that we can daily express your love to our spouse and others. In Jesus name. Amen.

CHAPTER 3 HABITS THAT PROMOTE EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, AND SPIRITUAL CLOSENESS

1. John 15:14 (NIV) states, “*Love each other as I have loved you.*” How significant is it for couples to “love each other” daily with specific words and actions?
2. Explain the importance of possessing skills, tools, and tips, like the ones in Chapter Three, to effectively “love each other” day-in and day-out?
3. Why is regular church attendance and ongoing prayers with your spouse so essential for your relationship?
4. Identify a few barriers that may prevent you from implementing some of the *Simple Habits* in this chapter.
5. Being closely connected with your spouse is essential for a fulfilling, loving marriage. Why is developing emotional intimacy so difficult for many couples?
6. What is the number one *Simple Habit* from this chapter that you believe will heighten the closeness between you and your spouse? Give your reasons.
7. Why is it so important for spouses to daily encourage, compliment, and thank each other?
8. Why is spending *planned time together* indispensable in a marriage relationship?
9. How do the *Simple Habits* from this chapter help you overcome taking your spouse and marriage for granted?
10. After reading the *Simple Habits* in this chapter, how will you be different going forward so that you are a more encouraging partner?

MY SIMPLE HABIT ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK IS ...

Write down one *Simple Habit* or skill from this chapter that will make a positive impact on your relationship. Why do you believe that particular *Simple Habit* will make an encouraging significant difference for your marriage?

MY PLAN FOR IMPROVING AS A SPOUSE DURING THE NEXT WEEK IS ...

Your plan or goal is not to be disclosed to the group but may be shared with your spouse.

A PRAYER FOR OUR MARRIAGE

Lord Jesus, you demonstrated your saving love for us in actions through your crucifixion and resurrection. Help us to always be thinking of ways to show our love and thanks to you God through actions as well.

Cause the truth of our eternal heavenly inheritance to govern every aspect of our marriage and earthly life. By the love of Jesus, motivate us every day to serve our spouse and others. Strengthen our faith in Jesus through the Bible so that we may serve you faithfully. Increase our love daily for our spouse and others. In Jesus name. Amen.

CHAPTER 4 COMMUNICATION HABITS THAT BUILD UP A MARRIAGE

1. I Peter 3:10 (TLB) describes positive communication nicely, “*If you want a happy, good life, keep control of your tongue, and guard your lips.*” What are some ways to “control your tongue and guard your lips” to avoid hurting your spouse and marriage?
2. Why do so many couples have communication problems in their marriage? How may one’s family-of-origin impact communication problems within a marriage?
3. What does ideal, daily communication in a marriage look like for you?
4. Why does effective communication have to be *consistent* for marital happiness to be present?
5. How does your tone of voice, body language, and facial expression often make the difference in your marriage between being happy rather than unhappy?
6. Based upon the knowledge from this chapter, how will these skills, tools, and ideas help you communicate more effectively with your spouse?
7. When do you most like communicating your inner feelings, likes, dislikes, and just being completely open? Explain your reasons.
8. How do unknown and/or unrealistic expectations affect marital happiness?
9. Why is it important to make specific expectations known almost on a daily basis for a gratifying marriage?

10. How does good communication impact the emotional and physical closeness in a marriage?

MY SIMPLE HABIT ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK IS ...

Write down one *Simple Habit* or skill from this chapter that will make a positive impact on your relationship. Why do you believe that particular *Simple Habit* will make an encouraging significant difference for your marriage?

MY PLAN FOR IMPROVING AS A SPOUSE DURING THE NEXT WEEK IS ...

Your plan or goal is not to be disclosed to the group but may be shared with your spouse.

A PRAYER FOR OUR MARRIAGE

Almighty God, thank you for the great love you have shown us. Give us the desire to carry out your will and please you in everything we say and do. Help us to mirror your love to our spouse and others.

We pray you will help us listen to and love our spouse and others with the same kind of empathy and compassion you loving God have shown to us. May we radiate the love of Jesus in all we say and do. We are so very thankful for the privilege of being able to lovingly communicate daily with our spouse. Jesus, thank you for your victory over sin and for giving us the crown of life and the promise of heaven. In Jesus name. Amen.

CHAPTER 5 HABITS THAT GUARD YOUR RELATIONSHIP

1. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) shares the importance of protecting our thoughts, “*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*” What does it mean to “guard your heart” in your marital relationship?
2. Why is it important for every couple to identify intolerable flaws or deal-breakers that may weaken or even break a marital bond?
3. Why is it important to set “guards” and clear boundaries to ensure that your spouse is respected, and your marriage supported?
4. Select a sentence(s) or paragraph from the chapter and describe why that idea was most meaningful for you.
5. How may what you learned from your parents’ relationship positively and perhaps negatively impact your marital satisfaction?
6. Why is it so hard to overcome false beliefs or unhealthy behaviors that may create marital unhappiness?
7. What is the most difficult aspect of this chapter for you?

8. What specific strategies can be implemented to strengthen the “guards” in this chapter so those potential intolerable flaws or deal-breakers don’t damage a marriage?
9. What are other intolerable flaws or deal-breakers not listed in this chapter that may threaten a marriage?
10. How is a spouse appreciated and valued when a marital partner sets appropriate “guards” against intolerable flaws or deal-breakers?

MY SIMPLE HABIT ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK IS ...

Write down one *Simple Habit* or skill from this chapter that will make a positive impact on your relationship. Why do you believe that particular *Simple Habit* will make an encouraging significant difference for your marriage?

MY PLAN FOR IMPROVING AS A SPOUSE DURING THE NEXT WEEK IS ...

Your plan or goal is not to be disclosed to the group but may be shared with your spouse.

A PRAYER FOR OUR MARRIAGE

Dearest Savior Jesus, the lies of our flesh say we will be happy if we follow worldly temptations and lust. We thank you Christ that you live in us and strengthen us to resist worldly temptations. Continue to help us persevere through every temptation and keep our eyes fixed on heaven. Through the power of Jesus’ resurrection give us victory today and every day over worldly lust, our sinful flesh, and the devil.

We ask for your help to follow in your footsteps Jesus. Guard our hearts, protect our minds, and give us your strength to not sin against you God and our spouse. Give us the strength and desire to live our life to your glory through serving our spouse and others. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 6
HABITS THAT KEEP THE BOND OF PEACE:
Have Respectful Disagreement Discussions

1. Proverbs 20:3 (NIV) “*It is to one’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.*” Why is self-control an essential virtue for avoiding strife and quarrels?
2. What does the statement “It is not so much what couples disagree about as it is *how* they disagree” mean to you?
3. Why do most couples not have guidelines and effective ways for resolving marital concerns?
4. How do unresolved disagreements interfere with marital growth and relationship satisfaction?
5. How important is it for both spouses to feel heard and respected during a disagreement discussion? Explain your reasons.

6. Why is nonverbal communication just as important as verbal communication for a productive disagreement discussion?
7. What *Simple Habit* from this chapter spoke most personally to you and why?
8. Why is it important for both spouses to identify solutions when having a disagreement discussion?
9. During a disagreement discussion, what obstacles make it difficult to understand one another's perspective and solutions?
10. What other *Simple Habits* or guidelines may help keep the "Bond of Peace"?

MY SIMPLE HABIT ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK IS . . .

Write down one *Simple Habit* or skill from this chapter that will make a positive impact on your relationship. Why do you believe that particular *Simple Habit* will make an encouraging significant difference for your marriage?

MY PLAN FOR IMPROVING AS A SPOUSE DURING THE NEXT WEEK IS ...

Your plan or goal is not to be disclosed to the group but may be shared with your spouse.

A PRAYER FOR OUR MARRIAGE

Gracious God, we pray for your help when our marriage faces disappointments and problems. Help us understand each other's viewpoint, and then seek your help and guidance in resolving our differences for the peace and contentment of our marriage.

When marital difficulties arise, grant us patience and heavenly wisdom as we seek solutions. Lead us to have God-pleasing discussions and to respect our spouses when we disagree. Help us to live in harmony with our spouse and others. May our love for our spouse always reflect Jesus sacrificial love for us. In Christ's name. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

HABITS THAT SECURE GOD-PLEASING FINANCIAL HARMONY:

Save, Budget, and Spend Together

1. I Timothy 6:10 (GW) "*Certainly, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people who have set their hearts on getting rich have wandered away from the Christian faith and have caused themselves a lot of grief.*" How does a spouse avoid the temptation trap of "loving money"?
2. What were your parents' attitude toward money and how they spent money?
3. Why are finances the number one issue that couples seem to disagree?
4. In terms of financial spending, how can a couple determine what is a "want" versus a "need"?

5. In the area of finances, why do unhappy couples have credit card problems, disagree on how to spend money, and struggle agreeing on how to handle finances?
6. Explain why it is so important for *both spouses* to be involved in financial planning, budgeting, and saving?
7. Being *good givers* is difficult for all of us. How can a couple determine how much to give to God's work and charities?

CONCLUSION

8. When establishing new *Simple Habits* why is “feeling uncomfortable to become comfortable” with healthy words and behaviors an essential goal?
9. How has this book changed your understanding of what produces a loving, satisfying marriage?
10. How does *SIMPLE HABITS FOR MARITAL HAPPINESS* motivate and encourage you to take daily action as a spouse and as a couple?

MY SIMPLE HABIT ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK IS . . .

Write down one *Simple Habit* or skill from this “Financial Harmony” chapter that will make a positive impact on your relationship. Why do you believe that *Simple Habit* will make an encouraging significant difference for your marriage?

MY PLAN FOR IMPROVING AS A SPOUSE DURING THE NEXT WEEK IS ...

Your plan or goal is not to be disclosed to the group but may be shared with your spouse.

A PRAYER FOR OUR MARRIAGE

Loving Lord God, you have blessed us with so much more than we could have ever imagined. Forgive us when we are ungrateful and fill us with a greater appreciation for our blessings that we might live a truly contented life. We pray that you will provide us with peace in the promises in your Word more than the promises that are fleeting in this temporary world.

Gracious Heavenly Father, change us from the inside out so our words and actions are shaped by Jesus' love as we then show love toward our spouse. With changed hearts may we look forward to loving our neighbors as ourselves, including our spouse.

Faithful God, we pray that you will help us to always appreciate the good things of this life, but Lord God, keep those good things from getting in the way of our relationship with you and our spouse. Gracious God, you have made us wealthy indeed through the forgiveness of sins and one day soon we will live with you forevermore in the mansions of heaven. In Jesus name. Amen.

Dear friend,

*Thank you so very much for taking time from your valuable schedule to read **SIMPLE HABITS FOR MARITAL HAPPINESS: Practical Skills And Tools That Build a Strong SATISFYING RELATIONSHIP** as well as work through this **Discussion Guide**. I pray that this knowledge will enrich your relationship enjoyment and diminish disappointments in every aspect of your marriage!*

*As you incorporate specific **Simple Habits** in your marriage, you might also humbly share with others your newly discovered knowledge, skills, and tools that made a dramatic difference in your satisfaction. Through communicating your exciting new **Simple Habits**, you may enhance their relationships and further strengthen your marriage for a more positive future. Please also spread the word about **SIMPLE HABITS FOR MARITAL HAPPINESS** with your family members, friends, and contacts in ways that are most comfortable for you.*

If you have not purchased a book or want additional books, I encourage you to buy a book from Crosslink Publishing or Amazon. Box sets of 25 books may also be purchased from Crosslink Publishing at a special pricing of 40% off of retail with free shipping within the United States.

*I really appreciate your strong desire to improve and grow in your relationship knowledge through my Christian marriage book. My prayer is that our Loving God will bestow you with heavenly wisdom to retain what you learned and grant you strength to incorporate **Simple Habits** for an even greater “oneness.”*

May our Heavenly Father richly bless your life and relationships!

In gratitude,

Randy Schroeder