



THE MARRIAGE TABLE · JESUS & MARRIAGE

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

Follow Jesus together. One conversation at a time.

Fourteen guided sessions alongside Jesus & Marriage. Use privately as spouses or with a group of couples. Each person may keep their own copy.

Abide. Become. Be Sent.

A free discipleship resource from MSSNL.

For spouses and groups of couples · mssnl.org/table/marriage

Begin with grace, not a score.

This is discipleship, not a test of your marriage.

1. **Read:** prepare with the chapter and Scripture in context.
2. **Listen:** take turns; speak for yourself and do not interrupt.
3. **Practice:** choose one small action you can take, not a demand for your spouse.
4. **Pray:** ask Jesus for grace to live what you have learned.

For a couple: allow about 45–60 minutes. Reflect quietly first, then take turns sharing only what feels appropriate. For a group: meet for about 75–90 minutes, with time for couples to talk privately. Everyone can pass.

Each person owns their reflections. Online notes belong only to the signed-in account; a spouse or group cannot automatically see them. If you freely choose to use one device together, either person may keep separate notes instead. Store printed notes securely. Never collect or circulate a couple's private worksheets.

Safety comes first

This is a discipleship resource, not licensed counseling, and it makes no promise to repair any marriage. Never use it to pressure a spouse toward reconciliation, disclosure, sex, submission, or any kind of control. If there is physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or spiritual abuse, or you fear for your safety or your children's, do not work through these sessions together. Do not confront your spouse with what you write here. Contact a confidential professional, a trusted pastor, a domestic violence hotline, or local emergency services. Skip any question that is unsafe to answer. Anyone may pass on anything, at any time.

Your session guide.

Go at a pace that leaves room to practice. Read the book alongside this workbook. The following page numbers lead to each session's teaching.

1. Introduction: A Sacred Covenant Built on Compassion • **page 4**
2. Chapter 1: Marriage Begins With Covenant • **page 6**
3. Chapter 2: Love and Respect • **page 8**
4. Chapter 3: The Love That Lays Itself Down • **page 10**
5. Chapter 4: Learning to Hear One Another • **page 12**
6. Chapter 5: Boundaries • **page 14**
7. Chapter 6: Accountability • **page 16**
8. Chapter 7: Discipline • **page 18**
9. Chapter 8: Shame and Offense • **page 20**
10. Chapter 9: Fear and Anger • **page 22**
11. Chapter 10: Support and Trust • **page 24**
12. Chapter 11: Encourage and Pray • **page 26**
13. Chapter 12: Compassion and Vision • **page 28**
14. Conclusion: A Marriage That Reflects Christ • **page 30**

Free book, audiobook, and EPUB: mssnl.org/jesus-and-marriage

Introduction: A Sacred Covenant Built on Compassion

Prepare: Read the Introduction, A Sacred Covenant Built on Compassion.

Listen to Scripture

Genesis 1:27 says God made both male and female in his image, so neither spouse gives the other their worth. Genesis 2:24 describes a man leaving his parents and holding fast to his wife so they become one flesh. Matthew 19:6 has Jesus saying that what God has joined together, no one should separate. John 15:5 has Jesus teaching that a branch bears fruit only by remaining in him.

The teaching

Two people bring histories, personalities, expectations, and wounds into one home. The introduction begins at creation: husband and wife are both made in God's image and both answer to him. Marriage joins them without erasing the personal responsibility each carries before the Lord. Genesis 3 shows how sin brought hiding, blame, and fear into the first home, and the book names what that looks like now: pride, selfishness, fear, and the urge to control. Neither spouse can be the other's savior; both need Jesus, who gives forgiveness and new life. The book offers three practical frameworks, BAD (Boundaries, Accountability, Discipline), SOFA (Shame, Offense, Fear, Anger) and STEP (Support, Trust, Encourage, Pray), and is clear that none of them measures the worth of a marriage. It also states plainly that covenant faithfulness is never an excuse for violence, coercion, manipulation, or abuse, and that a harmed spouse may need protection and professional help. Begin with your own heart before your spouse's.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Introduction: A Sacred Covenant Built on Compassion

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What do you hope this season of reading will be, and what makes you hesitant?
2. Where have you noticed yourself expecting your spouse to supply a security or worth that only God can give?
3. Where have you seen God's grace in your marriage so far? Name one specific thing for which you are thankful.
4. What would make this a safe table for you? What do you need others to know about how you want to take part?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Read the Introduction, then write down one thing you are thankful for in your spouse and one area where you want to look at your own heart. Pray about it alone before any conversation together.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord Jesus, you are the center of every home. Show us what you have already given, give us honest hearts, and help us follow you together. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 1: Marriage Begins With Covenant

Prepare: Read Chapter 1, Marriage Begins With Covenant.

Listen to Scripture

Matthew 19:3-6 records the Pharisees asking Jesus about divorce, and Jesus answering by pointing back to creation and the one flesh union God joins. Malachi 2:14 calls a wife the husband's companion and wife by covenant, with God as witness to the vows. Genesis 2:24 gives the pattern: leave, hold fast, become one.

The teaching

A wedding lasts a few hours; a covenant is meant to shape the years after it. Jesus answered a question about divorce by returning to the beginning, which shows that marriage rests on God's design and not only on human preference. The chapter notes the surrounding conversation about hardness of heart, so Jesus's words must not be flattened into a rule that every troubled marriage looks the same. Malachi confronts men who worshiped while treating their wives treacherously, which means faith and private conduct cannot be separated. Marriage includes affection and friendship but does not depend on feelings staying easy. The chapter also keeps covenant faithfulness from being used as a weapon: the covenant calls for truth, repentance, protection from harm, and careful discernment, not for hiding what is really happening. Faithfulness is lived out in daily choices, not only in the vows.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 1: Marriage Begins With Covenant

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What did you promise on your wedding day, and which of those promises have become more meaningful or more difficult with time?
2. Where might your private conduct differ from the faith you publicly profess? Reflect on this one alone and speak only to what you choose.
3. How has your view of marriage been shaped by your family, by culture, or by church? Where has it been helpful, and where has it been harmful?
4. What would it look like to treat your spouse as a companion by covenant this week, whatever you are feeling?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Together or separately, reread your vows if you have them, or write down in one sentence what you meant to promise. Choose one small act that honors that promise this week.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Father, you witnessed our vows. Teach us to take them seriously and gently. Where we have been careless, forgive us, and give us grace for faithful days. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 2: Love and Respect

Prepare: Read Chapter 2, Love and Respect.

Listen to Scripture

Ephesians 5 speaks of love and respect near the end of Paul's teaching on life in Christ. Ephesians 4 calls believers to put away corrupting talk and speak what builds up. 1 John 3:1 celebrates the Father's love that makes believers his children, which grounds identity in a gift rather than in a spouse's approval.

The teaching

Love and respect are shown in different ways, and many arguments begin in ordinary things: a late night at work, a purchase not discussed, a forgotten task. The chapter shows how a husband may hear criticism as proof that nothing he does is enough, while a wife may hear a broken plan as proof she cannot depend on him. Underneath, each may be asking whether they are valued. The chapter grounds identity in the Father's love, so neither spouse has to demand worth from the other. It notes that Christian traditions differ in how they understand headship and submission in Ephesians 5, and asks readers to study carefully and charitably. Whatever view is held, the chapter does not support control, coercion, or silence that costs someone safety. Both spouses are called to speak truthfully, put away contempt, and serve. The chapter closes by inviting gratitude for the love and respect already present.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 2: Love and Respect

Reflect first; share by choice

1. When do you most feel loved by your spouse? When do you most feel respected? How do you think those compare to what your spouse would say?
2. What ordinary disagreement tends to go badly for you, and what do you tell yourself in the middle of it?
3. Where do you look to your spouse for an identity or security that belongs to God?
4. How have you been taught to understand headship and submission, and has that ever been used in your life to pressure, silence, or control someone? Speak only as you feel safe.

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Choose one way your spouse seems to receive love or respect and offer it once this week without asking for anything back. Also remove one corrosive phrase from your speech.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

God our Father, you have called us your children. Settle our identity in you, so we can love and respect without demanding. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 3: The Love That Lays Itself Down

Prepare: Read Chapter 3, The Love That Lays Itself Down.

Listen to Scripture

John 15 records Jesus teaching his disciples to abide in his love and keep his commandments, and to love one another as he loved them. 1 John 3 points to Jesus laying down his life and calls believers to love in deed and truth. Ephesians 5 connects a husband's love with the sacrificial love of Christ.

The teaching

Love begins as a promise and is learned through shared responsibility: illness, financial uncertainty, disappointment, and changed plans. We can sincerely love someone while remaining deeply attached to our own comfort. The chapter shows a husband reluctant to give up his evening and a wife stretched thin by one more demand. Jesus gave a deeper pattern in his final teaching before his arrest: love willing to bear cost. The book is careful that this is not a love that disappears into someone else's demands. Laying yourself down does not mean accepting abuse, excusing sin, or having no needs. It means willingly serving someone's good under Christ. The chapter asks couples to apologize, reconsider decisions, share burdens, and return to conversations that remain unresolved, all with humility and hope.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 3: The Love That Lays Itself Down

Reflect first; share by choice

1. Where has serving your spouse become hard lately? What is the real reason: tiredness, hurt, preference, or something else?
2. What need of your spouse have you overlooked because it interferes with your plans? Do not ask your spouse to say it for you.
3. How do you tell the difference between sacrificial love and giving in to someone's demands or control?
4. What would it mean for you to carry one extra burden this week without keeping score?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Ask one question in turn: What would make this week lighter for you? Listen, and then do one small thing from the answer. Do it without announcing it.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Jesus, you laid down your life for us. Teach us a love that serves truthfully and is not driven by fear. Make us willing, and keep us wise. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 4: Learning to Hear One Another

Prepare: Read Chapter 4, Learning to Hear One Another.

Listen to Scripture

Proverbs 15:1 teaches that a gentle answer turns away wrath, while a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs more widely warns against answering before you have listened. Ephesians 4 describes putting away old patterns of speech and speaking in ways that give grace. James 1 urges believers to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

The teaching

A couple will share thousands of conversations, and the way they handle them shapes how well they understand one another. Sharing a home does not mean knowing what the other person is carrying. A spouse can assume motives, reach conclusions before hearing the facts, or prepare a reply while the other is still speaking. The chapter draws on Proverbs: wisdom connects careful speech with humility and patience. A gentle answer is wisdom about how words affect a conversation, not a guarantee of outcome. Paul gives the deeper reason: believers have a new life and speak accordingly. The chapter encourages listening to understand, asking questions, restating what you heard, choosing a good time, and confessing when a conversation turns sharp. It also notes that some topics need a pause and that no one should be cornered in a conversation.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 4: Learning to Hear One Another

Reflect first; share by choice

1. When your spouse raises a concern, what do you usually do first: defend, explain, withdraw, or listen? What do you imagine they experience?
2. What assumption about your spouse's motives have you been carrying that you have never checked?
3. What makes it hard for you to say something difficult? What would help you say it more gently?
4. Which of your habits of speech or silence do you most need to confess or change?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Practice one listening exchange in turns. One speaks for three minutes about a small, non-explosive topic while the other listens without interrupting, then says back what they heard and asks, did I get that right? Switch.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord, make us quick to listen and slow to speak. Guard our words, soften our tone, and help us hear what is really being said. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 5: Boundaries

Prepare: Read Chapter 5, Boundaries, the first part of the BAD framework.

Listen to Scripture

Matthew 5 records Jesus's teaching on adultery, showing that obedience reaches into the heart and not only outward acts. Proverbs 4 and 6 speak about guarding the heart and the destructive consequences of sexual unfaithfulness. 1 Corinthians 10 warns against overconfidence and encourages taking care not to fall.

The teaching

Every marriage needs love and protection. Boundaries are wise limits around what matters, placed early, before habits and relationships quietly weaken the covenant. The chapter links boundaries to the heart: Jesus taught that faithfulness reaches beyond what others can see, and Proverbs speaks of guarding the heart because the springs of life flow from it. Paul warns people who think they stand to take heed. Boundaries may involve time, technology, friendships, money, work, and family. They must not be turned into control. A boundary is a limit you set on your own conduct; it is not a rule imposed on a spouse to restrict them, monitor them, or isolate them. The chapter also affirms that someone harmed by their spouse may need a boundary of protection, including separation, and that such a boundary is not unfaithfulness.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 5: Boundaries

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What responsibilities or relationships take more of your attention than you intend, and what is quietly weakening your marriage?
2. What is one boundary you could set on your own conduct, around phone, work, friendships, or time, to protect the covenant?
3. How can you tell a healthy boundary from a controlling rule? What would be a warning sign that you or someone else was moving toward control?
4. Is there a boundary you need for your own safety or wellbeing? You do not need to share it here.

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Each of you writes one boundary on your own conduct, not your spouse's. Share only if you wish, and invite your spouse to respond with an honest question rather than a demand.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord, guard our hearts and our home. Show us the limits we need, keep us from controlling one another, and protect anyone who is in danger. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 6: Accountability

Prepare: Read Chapter 6, Accountability, the second part of the BAD framework.

Listen to Scripture

James 5 comes near the end of James's letter and calls believers to confess sins to one another and pray for each other. Proverbs 12:1 sets love of discipline against hatred of reproof, treating teachability as part of wisdom. Galatians 6:1 calls spiritually mature believers to restore someone caught in transgression gently, while watching themselves.

The teaching

We resist correction, and marriage tests that resistance. The chapter asks who actually knows you well enough to speak truthfully, and whether you invite such people or avoid them. Proverbs describes teachability as part of wisdom; the point is not insult but a willingness to hear what is true. Galatians 6 requires gentleness and self-watch from anyone who corrects. Accountability does not mean a spouse becomes the other's monitor or judge, and it does not mean confession on demand. It is offered by mature friends and church community, freely received, with the aim of restoration. The chapter also states that some matters, including abuse, addiction, trauma, or danger, need qualified professional care and not only friendly accountability.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 6: Accountability

Reflect first; share by choice

1. Who in your life knows you well enough to speak the truth to you? Who have you kept at a distance, and why?
2. How do you usually respond to correction from your spouse? What would receiving it with humility look like?
3. What is the difference between accountability and policing a spouse? How can you tell when someone has crossed the line?
4. Is there something you need to bring to a pastor, a mature friend, or a professional rather than to your spouse?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Choose one trusted person, not your spouse, with whom you will have an honest conversation about your own life this month. Tell your spouse only what you freely choose to tell.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Father, make us teachable. Give us friends who tell us the truth with gentleness, and make us gentle when we must speak. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 7: Discipline

Prepare: Read Chapter 7, Discipline, the third part of the BAD framework.

Listen to Scripture

Luke 5 describes a season when crowds gathered to hear Jesus, and yet he withdrew to lonely places to pray. Galatians 5 lists the fruit of the Spirit, including love, patience, gentleness, and self-control. Scripture treats rest as part of life under God, as the biblical teaching about Sabbath shows. Philippians 2 reminds believers that God works in them as they respond.

The teaching

Every marriage develops habits, some intentional and some by default through busy schedules. Discipline here means repeated practices that strengthen faithfulness, such as prayer, Scripture, rest, follow-through, and margin. Jesus himself withdrew to pray even when demands were high. Human limits are not moral failures; God made us with a need for rest. The chapter is careful not to make discipline a way of earning God's favor: believers cannot form themselves apart from the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is a gift that grows as they respond. Start small. A simple conversation, a realistic prayer rhythm, a promise kept, or more margin can be an appropriate beginning. Discipline is also never an instrument for controlling a spouse's schedule or spiritual life.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 7: Discipline

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What habits in your marriage were formed on purpose, and which just happened?
2. Where are you exhausted or overcommitted, and what would it cost to create margin?
3. What small practice of prayer, Scripture, or rest could you realistically keep?
4. How can you invite your spouse into a practice without pressure? How will you respond if they decline?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Pick one small practice, such as five minutes of prayer, one meal without screens, or a weekly check-in, and decide a realistic day to start. Each person may choose their own.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord Jesus, you rested and prayed. Teach us rhythms that make room for you and for each other, and grow your fruit in us. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 8: Shame and Offense

Prepare: Read Chapter 8, Shame and Offense, the first part of the SOFA framework.

Listen to Scripture

Romans 8 opens by describing what God has done for those who belong to Christ: there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 4 warns against bitterness, wrath, and malice, and calls believers to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving as God in Christ forgave them. Genesis 3 shows hiding and blame as the first responses to shame.

The teaching

Difficult emotions come to every marriage: regret, misunderstanding, disappointment. SOFA gives language for four of them, and this chapter takes shame and offense. Shame hides, and sends people into silence and concealment, as Adam and Eve hid and blamed. Romans 8 meets shame with the truth that those in Christ are not condemned. Offense, held, grows into resentment, and Paul tells Christians to put away bitterness and forgive as they were forgiven. The chapter distinguishes forgiving from pretending: forgiveness does not require reconciliation when harm continues, does not erase consequences, and does not mean you trust before trust is earned. Telling the truth about what happened matters. Where wounds are deep or involve abuse, trauma, or ongoing harm, the right step is qualified care and safety, not a quick forgiveness conversation with the person causing harm.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 8: Shame and Offense

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What are you tempted to hide in your marriage? What does shame tell you will happen if it is known?
2. What offense are you holding? Is it still something to address, or something to bring to God and release?
3. How do you understand the difference between forgiveness, trust, and reconciliation?
4. What would it mean to bring one thing out of hiding, to God first, and then, only if it is safe and you choose, to another person?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Alone, write down one thing you have been hiding or one offense you have been carrying, and bring it to God in prayer. Decide whether and when a conversation or professional help is the right next step. Do not force a disclosure on yourself or your spouse.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Father, there is no condemnation for those in Jesus. Bring into the light what we hide, soften what has hardened, and heal what has been wounded. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 9: Fear and Anger

Prepare: Read Chapter 9, Fear and Anger, the second part of the SOFA framework.

Listen to Scripture

Mark 3 records Jesus meeting a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, with anger directed at hard hearts and grief at their stubbornness, showing that anger may be righteous but is never the same as a loss of control. James 1 calls believers to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Galatians 5 describes the fruit of the Spirit, including gentleness and self-control.

The teaching

A husband and wife are known more closely than almost anyone else, which means fear and anger have somewhere to land. Fear may lead to control or withdrawal; anger may lead to harmful speech or action. The chapter observes that Jesus was angry at times but his anger was never self-serving or harmful. James notes that human anger does not produce God's righteousness. Self-control grows by the Spirit, and so the first step is to notice what is happening in your body and heart and bring it to God. The chapter is clear that anger and fear are not excuses for harm, and that anyone who frightens, intimidates, or harms their spouse needs to take responsibility and seek qualified help. Likewise, a spouse who is afraid of their partner is not obligated to stay and discuss it; safety is the priority.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 9: Fear and Anger

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What are you afraid of in your marriage, your home, or your future? What do you do when that fear rises?
2. What does your anger look like when it shows up? Where does it go: out, in, or away?
3. What would help you pause before responding, and what would help you return to a conversation with gentleness?
4. Do you ever feel afraid of how your spouse will react? If so, this is not a question to explore together; consider speaking to a trusted professional or pastor in confidence.

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Agree, each for yourself, on one pause practice: step out for ten minutes, breathe, pray, and return to say what you need. Tell your spouse only if it is safe and you want to. If you are unsafe, do not announce it; use a safety plan from a hotline or professional.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord, you know our fears and our anger. Settle us, make us gentle, and show us where we need help. Protect anyone who is afraid. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 10: Support and Trust

Prepare: Read Chapter 10, Support and Trust, the first part of the STEP framework.

Listen to Scripture

Galatians 6 tells believers to bear one another's burdens, and also to carry their own load, so support does not replace responsibility. 1 John 3 points to Jesus laying down his life and calls believers to love in deed and truth. Proverbs connects integrity with security because a person's life matches their words.

The teaching

A husband and wife can both see that something needs attention and wait for the other to begin. Support is carrying burdens together with care: sharing tasks, noticing exhaustion, and saying I'll take this. Galatians keeps personal responsibility in view: bearing burdens does not mean doing someone's growing for them. Trust grows through honesty and consistent faithfulness, not through demands. John adds that love is shown in action. Proverbs ties integrity to security, because a life of words and conduct that match is safe to live beside. The chapter notes trust broken by betrayal or harm is rebuilt slowly, by changed conduct over time and often with qualified help, and cannot be commanded. No one should be told to trust someone who continues to cause harm.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 10: Support and Trust

Reflect first; share by choice

1. Where could you use more support in your marriage? Where have you been trying to carry too much alone?
2. What does your spouse do that makes you feel supported? Have you said so?
3. What commitment have you made that you need to take more seriously? What apology have you postponed?
4. What has trust looked like in your marriage? Is there something that needs repair, and is it safe and wise to pursue it?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Each person names one burden they would like help with and one way they can offer support. Choose one and do it this week. Keep one promise you have been neglecting.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

God, help us carry each other's burdens and our own. Make us people who keep our word, and heal what trust has been damaged. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 11: Encourage and Pray

Prepare: Read Chapter 11, Encourage and Pray, the second part of the STEP framework.

Listen to Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5 calls the church to encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with all, and to rejoice, pray without ceasing, and give thanks. Philippians 4:6 tells believers to bring requests to God with thanksgiving, and promises the peace of God guarding their hearts. Romans 8 comforts believers in weakness, because the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us.

The teaching

A couple can fill their days with responsibility and slowly stop noticing the good. The person closest to them can become the one whose faithful efforts they notice least. Encouragement gives voice to what is good: patience, courage, hard work, humility. Paul's instructions in 1 Thessalonians reach particular needs: the idle, the fainthearted, the weak. Encouragement therefore is specific, not flattery and not a replacement for truth. Prayer brings concerns, wisdom, forgiveness, and thanks before the Lord. Romans 8 comforts believers who do not know what to pray, because the Spirit intercedes. Praying together should never be used to lecture, make a point, or press a spouse. Where it is not safe or comfortable to pray together, pray privately.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 11: Encourage and Pray

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What have you noticed about your spouse's faithfulness lately that you have not said aloud?
2. What would specific, honest encouragement sound like from you this week?
3. What concern are you carrying that you need to bring to God? What makes it hard to pray about it?
4. How do you each feel about praying together? Is there a form of praying together that would feel safe and welcome to both of you?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Give your spouse one specific, truthful word of encouragement in person or in writing. Then pray, aloud or silently, for one thing each of you named, without commentary.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord, open our eyes to the good you are doing, and open our mouths to say so. Hear our requests, and give us your peace. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Chapter 12: Compassion and Vision

Prepare: Read Chapter 12, Compassion and Vision.

Listen to Scripture

Matthew 9 describes Jesus seeing the crowds and being moved with compassion because they were harassed and helpless. James 4 reminds people who plan their futures with confidence that they do not know what tomorrow will bring, and that all plans belong under the Lord's will. Romans 8 describes hope that waits for what is not yet seen.

The teaching

Marriage is lived in the present and shaped by the future a couple is building. Many couples begin with meaningful hopes about the home they want, the people they will serve, and the way they will honor God. Some hopes are fulfilled; others change or remain uncertain. Jesus saw people with compassion, and that compassion invites spouses to see one another as people who carry burdens the other may not fully understand. James warns against presuming on the future, and calls for plans held under the Lord. The chapter holds together two things: facing present difficulties without pretending, and continuing to build wisely for the future. Vision here is not a five-year plan to impose on a spouse, but a shared willingness to live faithfully under Jesus in whatever season comes.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Chapter 12: Compassion and Vision

Reflect first; share by choice

1. What did you hope for when you married, and how have those hopes changed? What are you grieving, and what are you grateful for?
2. Where might compassion help you see your spouse differently this week?
3. What decision about work, family, money, or ministry are you facing, and how can you bring it to God and to wise counsel?
4. What is one way you would like to serve others together, or separately, in this season?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Take turns completing the sentence: In this season, I hope we will... Listen without correcting. Then choose one small, shared or separate way to live that out in the next month.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord, give us compassion for each other and wisdom for what lies ahead. Hold our plans loosely and your will firmly. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Conclusion: A Marriage That Reflects Christ

Prepare: Read the Conclusion, A Marriage That Reflects Christ.

Listen to Scripture

Matthew 7 closes the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus describing the wise person who hears his words and acts on them, building on the rock. John 15 reminds followers that fruit comes through remaining in him. Ephesians 5 ties marriage to Christ and the church, and Romans 8 holds out the hope that nothing can separate believers from the love of God in Christ.

The teaching

A marriage is built over a lifetime. The wedding starts the covenant; the days that follow give it expression through ordinary responsibilities, hard conversations, and unexpected change. Through every season one foundation matters: Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord, and his authority reaches how we speak, spend, decide, and respond when we have sinned. A marriage can include affection and admirable effort and still need the life only he gives. Neither spouse can be saved by being a better spouse. A marriage that reflects Christ will never be perfect; it will be two imperfect people continually receiving his grace and responding to his truth. The book ends with an invitation: receive his words, trust his grace, let his teaching shape your responsibilities, love the person beside you with truth and compassion, and keep following Jesus wherever he leads. For some readers the right next step is safety, boundaries, or professional help, and that too is faithful.

Listen. Practice. Pray.

Conclusion: A Marriage That Reflects Christ

Reflect first; share by choice

1. Looking back, what have you learned about Jesus, about yourself, and about your spouse in these sessions?
2. Which of the frameworks, BAD, SOFA, or STEP, has been most helpful, and which will you keep using?
3. What one practice will you continue, and what one step might you take, alone or together?
4. What help do you still need, such as a pastor, a mentor couple, or a professional, and who will you ask?

My reflection — what is Jesus inviting me to notice?

One faithful next step

Write a short plan with one practice, one conversation or step, and one person to ask for help or prayer. Choose a date to look at it again, either together or on your own.

My action and when I will take it:

Pray

Lord Jesus, we build on you. Keep us hearing your words and doing them. Hold our marriages and our homes, and lead us wherever you go. Amen.

Couple: take turns without fixing each other. Group: each couple talks privately first; share only an agreed, non-private takeaway. No spouse has to answer for the other.

Keep walking together.

A finished workbook is a beginning, not a verdict.

Keep returning to Scripture, honest listening, and small acts of compassion. Revisit any chapter when needed. Ask for wise help when a conversation or pattern is beyond what this resource can support.

One practice I want to keep:

How and when will we check in?

Who could encourage us without taking over?

Free to print for your couple or group. Keep MSSNL attribution; do not sell these resources or imply certification.