

Building Unity

SESSION FOUR



Prayer

*Heavenly Father,
We thank you for the ability
to heal and to grow through our love.
Help us to be open to your graces
of humility and repentance
in seeking forgiveness.*

*Fill us with compassion for each other
and a deep desire for unity.*

We ask this through Jesus, our Lord, Amen.



Concept: COUPLE UNITY

THE MOST IMPORTANT VALUE FOR A COUPLE IS THEIR UNITY.

This is the "trump card".

All decisions and choices should be measured against how well it advances their unity.



Tool: STOP. REFLECT. CONNECT

FOR DECISION MAKING

When disagreeing about an issue:

STOP:

- Call a time out
- Cool off, self-soothe
- Pray for wisdom

REFLECT (TIME-OUT TO ASK 'WHY?'):

- What do I want?
- Why is it important to me?
(i.e. the underlying values)
- How important is it (1-10)?

CONNECT:

- **Unclutter** (make physical contact)
- **Understand** (values): How can I embrace my fiancé's value?
- **Brainstorm** possible solutions: What is in the best interests of our relationship?

What's Important to You?

This activity is designed to help you identify your values and then sort them into ideals and priorities. It's like holding up a mirror so that you can see yourself clearly. There are no right or wrong answers – your ideals and priorities are yours but if you don't know what they are, they will run your life. Once you know clearly what your priorities and ideals are, you can make conscious choices about how to change if you want.



Session Film: PART 1

Available in the Member Hub or from your mentors.
www.SmartLoving.org/Engaged/Mentor



Part 1: IDEALS

Imagine that you have only one year left to live. How would you spend it? Then, think about your obituary: how would you like to be remembered? Make a list of all the things that you think are the most important things in life.

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Part 2: PRIORITIES

1. TIME PRIORITIES

Think about your typical week: do a mental movie of yourself noting all the things on which you spend significant time (i.e more than 1 hour/week).

Approx hours/week

- Sleep/resting
- Health/fitness
- Beauty/grooming/hygiene
- Eating and preparing food
- Commuting
- Work/study
- Time with fiancé
- Time with my family
- Time with my fiancé's family
- Time with friends
- Prayer/spiritual reflection
- Attending church
- Community service
- Grocery shopping
- House work/garden
- Renovations/home hunting
- Recreation/hobbies (eg TV, craft, sport, etc)
- Internet
- Wedding planning
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2. MONEY PRIORITIES

Think about your typical expenditures in a month: Roughly how much do you spend on the following?

Approx \$/month

- Groceries
- Wedding preparation
- Accommodation (mortgage/rent/saving for)
- Utilities
- Education/professional development
- Car/transport
- Hobbies/recreation (specify)
- Health/fitness
- Charitable giving
- Services (cleaner, gardener, accountant etc.)
- Savings for the future (retirement)
- Savings for holidays
- Clothes
- Home (furniture, decorating etc.)
- Childcare/children's education (if applicable)
- Coffees, lunch, take away etc.
- Tobacco/alcohol etc.
- Gifts
- Support of family/friends
- Technology (phone, internet, gadgets etc.)
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Part 3: THINK ABOUT IT

1. In your list of Ideals:
 - Tick any item that wasn't represented in either your time or money priorities. In other words, you believe it's important but it isn't a practical reality in your life.
 - Is this something you'd like to change in the future?
2. In your list of Priorities:
 - Tick any item (time or money) in which you think you either over-invest or under-invest.
 - Underline any item in which you think your fiancé under or over-invests.
3. As you enter marriage, you will need to reevaluate your priorities to accommodate your fiancé.
 - How open are you to letting your fiancé influence your priorities?
 - How willing are you to make changes in order to make loving your future spouse your highest priority?



Activity: **DECISION MAKING**

STOP

Together, pick a topic about which you disagree, or an important decision you need to make. Make it very specific.

Example Topic: Evening Meals

Say the prayer before you begin writing. Write...

REFLECT: TIME OUT TO ASK: WHY?

• **Desires: What do you want?**

eg His: I want a peaceful, meal-time, I don't care so much about the food.

Hers: I want to cook gourmet meals, lavish abundance.

• **Values: Why is it important to you? What good will come of doing it this way? Where does this value come from?**

eg His: No stress, relaxing, allows me to recover from a busy day. Bad memories of stress in a past relationship.

Hers: Make people happy, show that I love them, I like to be admired for my cooking. My Mum was like this.

• **Rate: How important is it to you? (scale 1 - 10)**

eg His: Peace = 10, Food = 4.

Hers: Show love = 8, Praise = 6-7

CONNECT

Unclutter, exchange papers and discuss. Then answer the questions:

• **How can you embrace your fiancé's value?**

eg His: Show an appreciation for the meal and acknowledge the love behind it.

Hers: Keep stress down at dinner time.

• **Brainstorm possible solutions** and note the implications for your relationship.

eg Their Ideas:

- Go to the pub before coming home to de-stress.

Meets emotional need for relaxation outside relationship.

- Have gourmet meals but make sure everything is ready before husband gets home. Adds stress to wife.

- Have fancy meals on only some days, have simple meals on others with emphasis on stress-free. Reduces resentment; meets important emotional needs in both.

• **Evaluate: What is in the best interests of your relationship?**

eg Their Solution: Solution three. Honours both our values, and avoids either meeting needs outside the relationship.

WORKspace

STOP: **TOPIC**

Lord God, Grace us with wisdom and understanding. Unite our hearts with your heart that we may be guided by your desire for our marriage. Amen.

Reflect: **DESIRES**

Reflect: **VALUES**

Reflect: **RATING**

Connect: **EMBRACE YOUR FIANCÉ'S VALUES**

Connect: **IDEAS/ POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Connect: **EVALUATE/SOLUTION**

Conflict



Reflect ON YOUR LAST ARGUMENT

HARSH START-UP

This is when the argument opens with an attack. It immediately puts the other on the defensive.

- **Soft Start-up:** "I'm worried about our relationship and I'd like to talk about it with you."
- **Harsh Start-up:** "We need to talk about how you aren't pulling your weight in this relationship."

CRITICISM

Criticism is different to a complaint. Complaints relate to a person's actions, whereas a criticism involves a judgement about the other's motives.

- **Complaint:** "I thought we had an agreement to check with each other before we commit to any engagements. I feel controlled when you don't do that."
- **Criticism:** "Why didn't you check with me BEFORE you committed us to that engagement? You don't care about what I want to do."

CONTEMPT

Contempt is a more cynical extension of criticism, and often involves character assassination.

- **Contempt:** "You're so manipulative and controlling. It's a miracle you have any friends."

GLOBALISATION

Another common habit is to globalise the complaint beyond the specific incident. Whenever the words "always" or "never" are used, it's a sure sign of globalisation. Stick to the incident at hand and avoid bringing up ancient history.

- **Globalisation:** "You always do this! I never get consulted. You've been doing this from the day we married. It's always the same with you."

DEFENSIVENESS

While it's understandable that a person would get defensive when they are being criticised or blamed, it is not a helpful reaction. The more defensive one is, the more persistent the accuser tends to become, which escalates the argument.

STONEWALLING

Stonewalling is refusing to interact. It may involve physically leaving the other (e.g. storming out, locking oneself in another room) or emotionally tuning out (e.g. watching TV, reading the paper). In 85% of marriages, the stonewaller is the husband. One reason for this trend is that a man's body is more easily 'flooded'.

Flooding is a stress reaction and includes physiological changes such as an increase in blood pressure and heart rate. Flooding can be triggered by confrontation or emotional discussions and causes intense emotion which is overwhelming and disorientating. This is one reason why women are more likely than their husbands to bring up sensitive issues and why the 'Stop' step in 'Stop.Reflect.Connect' is so powerful. When you're flooded, 'Stop' allows you to regain self-control.

REJECTING REPAIR ATTEMPTS

Within any argument, often one or both will make some gesture of conciliation. It might be through humour, touch, eye contact or words. When this happens, if the other person doesn't recognise and/or respond, the person waving the white flag feels rejected, adding fuel to the argument.

* John Gottman, Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work



Reflect: ARGUMENTS

How often do you argue?

... Never ... Rarely ... Weekly ... Daily ... More

What usually happens (tick):

- Do you dig in and hold your ground?
- Do you give in for the sake of keeping the peace?
- Do you shout, hit or throw?
- Do you withdraw and give the cold shoulder?
- Do you bring up old injuries to support your case?
- Do you check out and just let the issue solve itself?
- Do you get others to back you up?
- Do you complain to friends/family?

Who is more often the first to apologise?

- I am
- My fiancé

- Do you actually say "I'm sorry"?
- Have you ever said "Please, forgive me"?

What makes it difficult for you to apologise?

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What makes it easier?

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ONE Again

Adopt a structured Reconciliation Process

Because you are not at your best when you have been hurt, it is wise to have a formal process that you have agreed on in advance. You can reconcile using the Stop-Reflect-Connect & L.I.F.E. tools together.

STEP 1: STOP!

Separate. When you're hurt, it's easy to say hurtful things that you later regret. Separate for a time to cool off, but agree on a time when you will come back together to address the issue. Letting your mind play over the injury or the argument is not 'cooling off'! You will have to employ some self-soothing techniques and avoid your self-talk becoming destructive.

Pray. Before you begin to write, pray for compassion and humility. Prayer gets us out of our self-pity and reminds us of the importance of our relationship.

STEP 2: L.I.F.E.

Writing will help you to probe more deeply into your own emotions and will assist you to listen more openly to the other. Using the L.I.F.E. framework, describe your strongest emotions in vivid detail. Be very disciplined: Avoid judgements and share only what you are feeling.

Listen. Take turns to read your reflection to each other. This is not the time for discussion. The Listener should focus on hearing and understanding the emotions of the other. Do not try to explain why you acted that way. Do not tell your fiancé why they shouldn't feel that way. Just listen with an open heart to their pain.

STEP 3: REFLECT!

Write a Love Letter to your fiancé. Begin with an appreciation for their goodness. This will help to give you perspective about their offence and help them to listen more openly to your pain because they will be confident in your love. Then write how you understand your fiancé to feel. This is called 'cloning the injury' and it simply means that you 'recreate' the hurt of your fiancé by empathetically describing it back to him/her. Finally, express your sorrow and ask for forgiveness.

STEP 4: CONNECT!

Come together and Unclutter. Make physical contact: hug, kiss, sit close, hold hands, make eye contact. Take turns to read your letters to each other. Discuss if necessary. Express your sincere regret and ask for forgiveness. (More than "I'm sorry" is called for here). When forgiveness has been granted, ask God to heal your fiancé and restore them to wholeness.

Your relationship has a rich love history and is so much more than this single incident. Reassure one another with as much physical touch as possible. At the very least, look into each other's eyes, hold hands and sit close.

You are more important to each other
than any single issue



Concept: **FORGIVENESS**

Forgiveness is not an emotion.

FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE; A CHOICE TO LET GO OF YOUR RESENTMENT AGAINST YOUR FIANCÉ.

Forgiveness is a vital step to the restoration of your unity.



Tool: **STOP . LIFE . REFLECT . CONNECT**

FOR RECONCILIATION

Before disconnection and resentment becomes entrenched...

STOP:

- Separate & Self-soothe
- Pray for compassion & humility

L.I.F.E.:

- Write about your strongest emotion
- Read to each other

REFLECT:

In a Love Letter write:

- Appreciation
- 'Clone' your fiancé's emotions with Emotional Communion
- Express your sorrow

CONNECT:

- Unclutter
- Share letters
- Ask for forgiveness and pray for healing



Activity: RECONCILIATION

STOP

Remember the last time you hurt each other, or identify an area where you feel hurt, discouraged or let down in your relationship with your fiancé and have not yet reconciled.

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Say the following prayer before you begin writing:

*Lord, help me to see the goodness in my fiancé.
Give me compassion and the willingness to understand his/her point of view.
Grant me the grace of humility and do not let pride keep me from loving my fiancé the way you want me to. Amen.*

REFLECT

L.I.F.E.

Using the L.I.F.E guide, describe your emotions about the issue on which you have decided to focus. Focus on the strongest emotion and embellish it.

L = LIST

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| <input type="checkbox"/> sad | <input type="checkbox"/> apathetic | <input type="checkbox"/> guilty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> heartbroken | <input type="checkbox"/> isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> overwhelmed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> depressed | <input type="checkbox"/> angry | <input type="checkbox"/> embarrassed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> abandoned | <input type="checkbox"/> controlled | <input type="checkbox"/> belittled |
| <input type="checkbox"/> defeated | <input type="checkbox"/> restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> ashamed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hopeless | <input type="checkbox"/> furious | <input type="checkbox"/> confused |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hurt | <input type="checkbox"/> irritated | <input type="checkbox"/> burdened |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> annoyed | <input type="checkbox"/> disempowered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unworthy | <input type="checkbox"/> frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> inadequate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> insignificant | <input type="checkbox"/> repulsed | <input type="checkbox"/> panicky |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unappreciated | <input type="checkbox"/> desperate | <input type="checkbox"/> rejected |
| <input type="checkbox"/> helpless | <input type="checkbox"/> jealous | <input type="checkbox"/> unworthy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> inadequate | <input type="checkbox"/> envious | <input type="checkbox"/> insecure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> invisible | <input type="checkbox"/> resentful | <input type="checkbox"/> others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lonely | <input type="checkbox"/> suspicious | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excluded | <input type="checkbox"/> trivialised | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> empty | <input type="checkbox"/> neglected | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> alienated | <input type="checkbox"/> afraid | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tired | <input type="checkbox"/> anxious | |

I. F. = I FEEL/FELT ... (Identify the strongest emotion)

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when ... (briefly describe the incident or behaviour that hurt you)

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E. = EMBELLISHMENT

• **Intensity:** How strong is the emotion?(use words or the scale 0-10)

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• **Image:** Use some adjectives, similies or emotional word images to describe the emotion

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• **Impact: Physical sensations**

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• **Impact: Perception.** How does this emotional injury affect the way you see:
- yourself?

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- your fiancé?

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- your future together?

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• **Impact: Reaction.** How do you react to this injury?

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LISTEN

Take turns to simply read what you wrote to your fiancé. The Listener should not comment or do anything other than just focus on hearing and understanding the emotions of their fiancé. Use the space to take notes.

My fiancé's strongest emotions (name and images):

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The impact (physical sensations, perception, reactions) of my behaviour on my fiancé is:

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Stories OF THE HEART

The hurts that seem to do the most damage in our marriage are the little pin pricks of misunderstanding, taking each other for granted, criticising each other or being rude. They don't seem important at the time, so we usually ignore them. After a while though, they accumulate and before we know it, we're in a big fight over something really silly. The thing is, it's actually all the little tiny hurts that are the problem. We've learnt we need to acknowledge and forgive EVERY hurt, no matter how insignificant it may seem, otherwise it festers and makes us oversensitive and reactive.

REFLECT

Love Letter

Write a love letter to your fiancé, using the following format:

1. **Write down how much you appreciate your fiancé.** Affirm them and tell them how much you value them.
2. **Emotional Communion.** Describe your fiancé's emotions in full. Do not try to explain why they shouldn't feel that way or blame someone else. Just focus on establishing empathy and understanding in your writing.
3. **Express your sorrow.** Write how much you regret the pain caused to your fiancé. Ask for forgiveness. (15 mins)





Connect & Reconcile

1. **Unclutter**, make physical contact.
Pray together for humility and compassion.

*Lord Jesus,
we come before you wounded in spirit.
Give us humility so that our pride
does not keep us apart any longer.
And grant us compassion;
a deep and urgent longing
to unite with each other in our pain. Amen.*

2. **Take turns to share your love letters** with each other. Ask for clarification or revisit your emotions of hurt if there is a sense that you haven't been fully understood. Maintain an attitude of respect and vulnerability.

3. **Ask for forgiveness:** At the appropriate time ask your fiancé for forgiveness. Then pray the prayer below.

*Lord, I thank you for the gift of my fiancé.
You have given me this wonderful man/woman,
to love, respect and cherish.
Forgive me for hurting him/her
and heal him/her of any injury
caused by my actions.
I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*"Where sin abounded, grace
abounded all the more. Rom 5:20*

