

Choosing Marriage

WHY IT HAS TO START WITH WE > ME

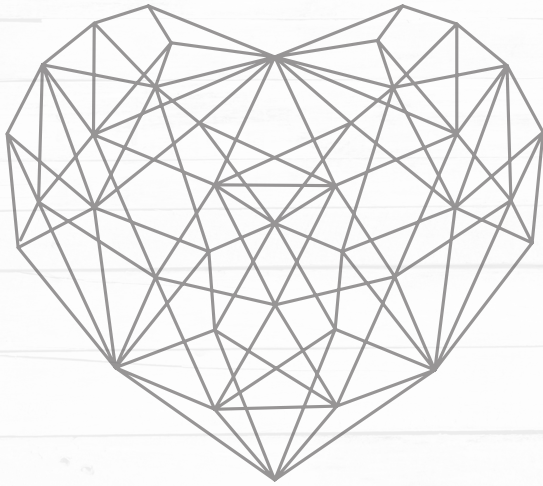


Small Group Study Guide

BY DEBRA FILETA, M.A., LPC

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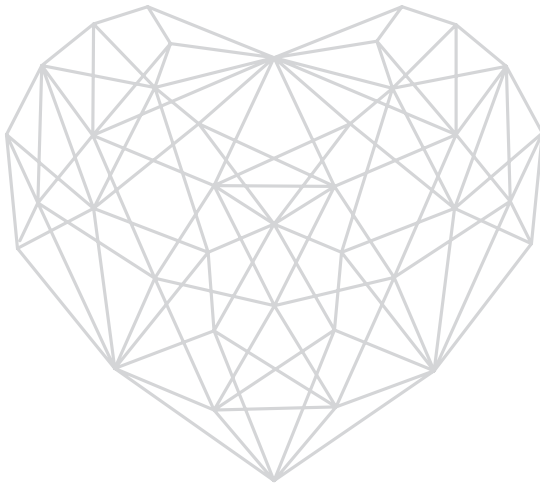
INTRODUCTION



Choosing marriage is one of the most significant and life-changing decisions you'll ever make. But many times, the expectations of marriage and the reality of marriage are completely different. No matter what your relationship status—single, dating, engaged, or married—join licensed professional counselor and author Debra Fileta in this series of discussions that will open your eyes to the choices you can make today to create a better relationship for tomorrow.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.truelovedates.com/choosingmarriage/>



HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

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Here is a brief explanation of the features of this guide:

Icebreaker Activity: You're invited to start your weekly small group with this optional activity that correlates to the daily lesson. It's a chance to have some fun and make some connections with your small group with little preparation necessary.

Video Lesson: Once you're ready to start the lesson, watch the correlating video and then use this section to fill in necessary blanks throughout the lesson.

Questions for Discussion: Use these questions as an opportunity to dig deeper into the lesson, applying the information to your life and current situation. See these questions as a launching point, and feel free to add to them, following the discussion as the Holy Spirit leads.

Big-Picture Takeaway: It's always a good idea to remember the one "big-picture takeaway" from each week's lesson as a way to retain the information you're learning. Review this takeaway with the group before you close the lesson and feel free to review the takeaways each time you meet.

Action Step: Learning new information is the first step, but taking action must follow. This action step is meant to give you a practical way to apply the things you've learned. Review this step together and discuss how you will make changes moving forward.

Prayer: Praying together as a small group is a great privilege and opportunity! As you close, take some time to pray as a group, using this simple prayer as a launching point. Feel free to share prayer requests at this time.

Memory Verse: Finally, review the memory verse as a group and take the challenge to memorize the recommended passage before next week's meeting.

WEEK ONE

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WE > ME

CHOOSING SELFLESSNESS

Icebreaker Activity (Optional): The Price Is Right — Gather 8 – 10 household items along with their purchase price and bring them to the middle of the group. Take turns going around the group and having each person guess the cost of each item, seeing who can get closest to the actual price.

Video Lesson: CHOOSING SELFLESSNESS

In a survey of 1000 married people, _____% of them said they believe that the average person does not understand the “cost” of marriage going into it.

Most singles agreed with the statement that marriage would require sacrifice, but over 50% of them said that marriage would also be _____.

Why Choose Marriage?

Because marriage _____ .

Because marriage _____ .

Because marriage _____ .

Because marriage _____ .

Because marriage _____ .

SELFLESSNESS VS PASSIVITY

Selflessness is NOT...

Selflessness IS...

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

"A good marriage comes from a series of decisions over an extended period of time, with the commitment of two people choosing to love each other no matter what may come their way." — *Choosing Marriage*, pg. 23

Questions for Discussion:

What is the overall message that culture sends about marriage?

What messages have you received from your family of origin about marriage?

What are some of the hard things you've witnessed in marriages around you (or in your own marriage)? What are some of the great things?

In what ways do people have a tendency to confuse selflessness with passivity?

What does selflessness look like in day-to-day life?

Big-Picture Takeaway: The healthiest relationships are found when we learn to apply the formula of sacrificial love: WE > ME.

Action Step: Choose a “random act of kindness” this week to offer as an act of selfless love to your significant other. If you’re single, choose one of your closest relationships. Try to choose something you wouldn’t normally do as an act of “sacrificial love.” Some ideas include writing an encouraging note, buying a small but thoughtful gift, and serving in an unexpected way.

Prayer: Jesus, give us eyes to see the value and purpose of marriage. Open our hearts to understand how we can apply the formula of WE > ME, living a life of selflessness in our marriages as well as in our closest relationships.

Philippians 2:4 ESV “Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Answer key: 96%, easy, makes you better, teaches commitment, invites you to take responsibility, reminds you that you need Jesus, is so much bigger than you, selflessness is not always saying yes, keeping your hurts to yourself, failing to voice your needs, selflessness is putting other's needs and wants before your own, stepping out of your norm, learning to compromise.

WEEK TWO

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WALLS WILL FALL CHOOSING VULNERABILITY

Icebreaker Activity (Optional): Play a round of the game Jenga with your small group.

Video Lesson: CHOOSING VULNERABILITY

We all come into relationships with _____, barriers that we possess in need of being taken down.

The Wall of _____ .

The Wall of _____ .

The Wall of _____ .

The Wall of _____ .

The Wall of _____ .

70% of married couples reported having less than _____ of meaningful conversation each week.

The Four Levels of Conversation:

Level 1: _____

Level 2: _____

Level 3: _____

Level 4: _____

“There’s no wall too high, too strong, or too deep that can’t be overcome with love, with effort, and with the help of our mighty God.” — *Choosing Marriage*, pg. 74

Questions for Discussion:

Which walls do you tend to build up in your closest relationships, and why?

Growing up, which of the four levels of conversation were most often expressed in your family of origin? Which were not often expressed?

Which of the four levels do you tend to be most comfortable with? Which of the levels would you like to become more comfortable with?

Read and reflect on James 1:19. Which part of this verse do you tend to struggle with? How does this play out in your life?

Big-Picture Takeaway: We all bring walls into relationships that we learn to recognize and begin taking down through healthy communication.

Action Step: Set aside 20 minutes this week with your

significant other. If you're single, choose someone in your closest circle of friends or family. Be deliberate about using that time for intentional communication that includes the four levels of conversation.

Prayer: Jesus, open our eyes to the walls we may have erected that keep us from loving others the way you call us to love.

Psalm 18:29 "With my God I can scale a wall."

Answer key: walls, avoidance, invalidation, denial, passive-aggression, humor, 60, facts, opinions, feelings, beliefs.

Additional Notes

WEEK THREE

#REALTALK

CHOOSING AUTHENTICITY

Icebreaker Activity (Optional): Two Truths and a Lie — Have each person in the group share two truths about themselves and one lie, and the rest of the group has to determine which fact is false.

Video Lesson: CHOOSING AUTHENTICITY

We live in a world where everyone is out to present their _____.

_____ is a biblical discipline that's been lost in mainline evangelical Christianity.

In surveying 1,000 married people, _____% of them reported that confession of their sins and struggles was the thing they talked about the least, if at all, in their marriage.

Confession is an important part of building _____.

Apology is asking for _____, but confession means _____.

Sin happens in the _____, healing happens in the _____ (John 12:46, Ephesians 5:11-13).

There is power in _____ and _____ between two people (James 5:16).

Five Secrets You Should Never Keep in Marriage

#1: _____

#2: _____

#3: _____

#4: _____

#5: _____

Speaking the truth in _____ (Ephesians 4:15).

“Struggle becomes a stronghold when we are living a life marked more by our facade than by our authenticity.” —

Choosing Marriage, pg. 148

Questions for Discussion:

How do you relate to the idea that our culture teaches us to present our picture-perfect self?

How has social media affected our desire to present a certain image of ourselves?

When you hear the word confession, what thoughts, ideas, and feelings come to mind? Is it something you've heard a lot about in your faith culture or something that was rarely discussed?

Of the five secrets mentioned, which do you think could be the most difficult to address with others?

When it comes to speaking the truth in love, do you tend to lean toward offering truth without love, or love without truth? How can you take steps toward finding that proper balance?

Big-Picture Takeaway: In order to live a life of authenticity, confession is an important discipline that must be practiced. Bringing our sins and struggles into the light begins to heal us from the inside out.

Action Step: Find some time to get alone with God this week and ask him to bring to mind the specific sins and struggles that are currently in your life. Get together with your significant other, pastor, or mentor and begin the process of speaking the truth in love and living a life of authenticity.

Prayer: Jesus, you alone know the darkness inside of our hearts. Give us the strength to confess, expose, and bring our struggles into the light. We want to be healed by Your grace.

James 5:16 “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

Answer key: picture perfect self, confession, 50%, trust, forgiveness, bringing things to the light, darkness, light, prayer and confession, past secrets, secret sins, financial secrets, health-related secrets, relationship secrets, love.

WEEK FOUR

IN LOVE OR IN NEED?

CHOOSING FULLNESS

Icebreaker Activity (Optional): How Full? — Fill a large jar with gum balls (or candy of choice). Have each person use their own strategy to guess how many items are in the jar. Discuss your strategies. The person with the best guess takes the jar home!

Video Lesson: CHOOSING FULLNESS

Many people fall in love only to realize that their love was actually based on _____.

Too many people go into marriage hoping it will _____, only to be disappointed in the end.

You can only feel as complete in marriage as you do while _____.

Codependence is Not Oneness

Codependence proclaims _____.

Oneness affirms _____.

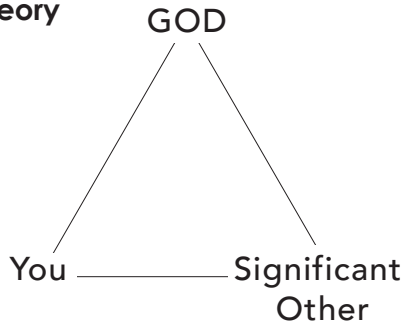
The Lie of Independence

I don't _____ anyone.

Healthy Interdependence

_____ each other is so much more valuable and meaningful than _____ each other.

The Triangle Theory



There is no greater joy than giving and receiving love out of our overflow, rather than out of our scarcity.

“Oneness in marriage is more than a gift we’re given to enjoy; it’s a responsibility that’s entrusted to us. It’s a call to become better together for the sake of one glorious thing: loving Christ and making Him known.” — *Choosing Marriage*, pg. 197

Questions for Discussion:

What are some examples of unhealthy codependence and unhealthy total independence that you've seen in our culture, media, or entertainment?

On the scale of codependence, interdependence,

and total independence, which category do you tend to exhibit most in your marriage or in your closest relationships?

What are some factors that may have influenced how you engage in interpersonal relationships?

What are some steps you can take to fill yourself up so that you can engage in healthy relationships that give out of overflow rather than out of scarcity?

If you're married, in what ways has the process of oneness made you and your spouse better together? If you're single, describe a marriage you've witnessed in which you've seen the concept of "better together" played out?

How can you apply the Triangle Theory to your current relationship status (whether you are single, dating, or married)?

Big-Picture Takeaway: Your relationship will only be as healthy as you are standing alone. In order to achieve healthy interdependence, we need to be relying on God more than we're relying on one another.

Action Step: This week, choose one thing you can do to strengthen your relationship with Jesus so that you can fill yourself up. Some examples: memorize a passage of scripture, commit 15 minutes each day to connect with God through His Word and prayer, spend some time writing to God by journaling your thoughts and prayers, and commit some time to solitude and reflection.

Prayer: Jesus, we want to be filled to overflowing. We want to know and experience the fullness of Your love for us in a way that impacts how we love others. Fill us up. Pour your love over us, today.

Ephesians 3:17-19 “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Answer key: need, complete them, standing alone, I’m desperate without you, I’m better with you, need, Choosing, needing.

Additional Notes

About the Author

Debra Fileta is a Licensed Professional Counselor, national speaker, relationship expert, and author of the books *True Love Dates: Your Indispensable Guide to Finding the Love of Your Life*, *Choosing Marriage: Why It Has To Start With We > Me* and *Love in Every Season*. She's also the creator of the popular relationship advice blog TrueLoveDates.com, as well as the Love + Relationships Podcast, reaching millions of people with the message that healthy people make healthy relationships.

Debra and her husband, John, have been joyfully married for more than a decade and have three beautiful children. Connect with her on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

