

# WHO DID YOU REALLY MARRY?

Love Languages, Personality Types, Communication

**LEADER'S GUIDE**

**FOCUS**  
ON THE  
FAMILY



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
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*Essentials of Marriage: Who Did You Really Marry?*  
*Leader's Guide*

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# WELCOME!

Marriage can be tough—but learning about it doesn't have to be. In fact, we think you'll find this course easy to use, to the point—even fun.

At the heart of each session is a DVD presentation featuring some of today's top marriage experts.

Then there's the Participant's Guide—the book each of your group members will need to make the course personal.

Finally, there's the leader's Guide—the book you're holding right now. It's designed to help you turn the DVD and Participant's Guide into a lively group experience in which spouses learn and support each other.

## Preparing for the Session

Before each meeting, review the session plan in this book. Look at the corresponding chapter in the Participant's Guide. Preview the DVD segment if possible; then make sure it's cued up for your group to watch.

For most sessions, you'll need pencils or pens. For some, if your group is large, you may need chalkboard and chalk or other display surface and writing tool (newsprint and marker, white board and marker, etc.). You may also need to gather a few other easy-to-find materials, listed in “Setting the Stage” at the start of each session.

## Leading the Session

You'll find the session plans easy to follow. Instructions to you are in regular type; things you might say to the group are in bold type; suggested answers are in parentheses.

Each session, designed to last about an hour, includes five steps:

### *1. Getting Together (5 minutes)*

Using a game or other “icebreaker” activity, you'll grab the group's interest and build a sense of community. This step is optional; if your group members need help getting acquainted, or if they just like to have a good time, it can be especially valuable.

*2. Finding Yourself (5-10 minutes)*

Participants take a survey to help them see how this session topic might benefit them.

*3. Catching the Vision (20-25 minutes)*

Watch and discuss the DVD segment.

*4. Digging Deeper (10 minutes)*

If part of your group's mission is discussing God's Word, you'll want to include this Bible study step. If yours is more of a community outreach effort, you may wish to condense or delete this section.

*5. Making It Work (10 minutes)*

It's time for practical application, as group members use the corresponding section of the Participant's Guide to come up with action plans for their own marriages.

*6. Bringing It Home (5 minutes)*

For you, this is a brief wrap-up. For group members, it's something to read later: practical advice from a counselor.

## Tips for Success

- If your group is like most, you often run out of time before you run out of discussion questions and activities. What to do? Simply choose the exercises and questions you think will be most helpful to your group and concentrate on those. Try starting with the bare essentials—watching the DVD and applying the principles through the “Making It Work” activity—and add steps as your schedule allows.
- Invite discussion, but don't be surprised if some group members are reluctant to share personal information. If people want to reflect silently on a probing question, encourage them to do so.
- Couples will benefit most, of course, if both spouses attend your sessions. In some cases, though, schedules or interest levels may require some spouses to attend alone. If that's true in your group, be sure to help these individuals feel welcomed and supported. You'll need to adapt some activities in this guide accordingly. Instead of having spouses discuss a question, for example,

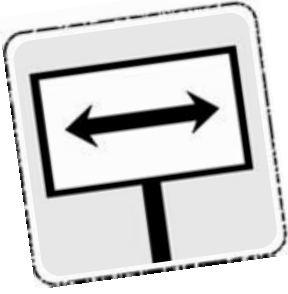
you may want to form subgroups of three to five—or simply skip questions that would be too personal for individuals to discuss with anyone other than a mate.

- Don't allow laughter at anyone's expense. If some of the discussion questions seem likely to cause embarrassment, feel free to omit them; if they would be more appropriately answered between husband and wife in private, encourage group members to do so later.
- Instead of pressing group members to reveal information they're not comfortable sharing, tell an occasional story on yourself if you like. Propose the following guidelines to participants: Before raising a question or referring to an experience, make sure it won't embarrass your spouse; if in doubt, privately ask your spouse's permission beforehand; maintain confidentiality.
- Let participants know that if they're struggling in their marriages, help is available. Provide contact information for local Christian counselors, especially any who are connected with your church. If your church staff doesn't know of a therapist, Focus on the Family has a referral network of Christian counselors. For information, call 1-800-A-FAMILY and ask for the counseling department. You can also download free, printable brochures offering help for couples at <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/articles/brochures.aspx>.
- If possible, each group member—not just each couple—should have a Participant's Guide. Otherwise, spouses won't be able to write individual responses to opinion questions. It's a good idea to have a few extra copies of the participant's guide on hand so that visitors (and those who forgot their books) can take part.
- If you don't have an answer to every question, join the club! It's okay to say, "I don't know." Ask group members to share wisdom from their experience. Refer people to books like *Complete Guide to the First Five Years of Marriage* (Focus on the Family/Tyndale House, 2006), which contains help for almost any stage of married life.
- Have a good time! Marriage may be serious business, but most of your group members probably would appreciate a light touch as they learn. Let your group be a place where spouses can laugh together and gain perspective on their marital challenges.
- Pray. Pray for your group members during the week. Urge them to pray for each other. Ask God to help each person become the loving, effective mate he or she was meant to be.

For additional tips on leading your group, see the “Instructions for Leaders” feature on the DVD. You can also find further advice for your couples at [focusonthefamily.com/marriage](http://focusonthefamily.com/marriage).

Ready to have a lasting, positive impact on the marriages represented in your group? May God bless you as you lead!

**Note:** Many issues addressed in this series are difficult ones. Some couples may need to address them in greater detail and depth. The DVD presentations and this guide are intended as general advice only, and not to replace clinical counseling, medical treatment, legal counsel, or financial guidance.



## Session 1

# OPPOSITES ATTRACT

“It takes all kinds.” But when two very different kinds find themselves in the same marriage, the results aren’t always pretty. Often the contrasts that attracted couples end up repelling them.

In this DVD segment, bestselling author and counselor Dr. John Trent looks at the differences between spouses—and how concentrating on strengths can make those differences assets instead of liabilities. Host and counselor Dr. Greg Smalley adds a story from his own family, too.

Group members will have fun deciding what types they are, and how to make the most of it.

### **Session Aim**

To help spouses appreciate rather than lament their personality differences, and to concentrate on combining their complementary strengths.

### **Setting the Stage**

- Read this session plan and Chapter 1 in the Participant’s Guide.
- Provide pencils or pens.
- Photocopy the Step 1 list if you want to use this icebreaker; bring a small prize if you wish to award one.
- Cue up the DVD to segment 1, “Opposites Attract.”



# 1. GETTING TOGETHER

## Optional Icebreaker

(5 minutes)

To help group members “get connected”—and introduce the topic at the same time—try the following activity.

Before the session, photocopy the list that follows (one copy per person).

TOWN WHERE YOU WERE BORN  
FAVORITE DESSERT  
AGE AT WHICH YOU GOT YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE  
TIME WHEN YOU USUALLY EAT LUNCH  
WHETHER YOU HAVE A COMB IN YOUR POCKET OR PURSE  
FAVORITE BIBLE STORY WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE  
LETTER YOUR MIDDLE NAME STARTS WITH  
NUMBER OF LANGUAGES YOU SPEAK FLUENTLY  
COLOR OF CAR YOU USUALLY DRIVE  
LEAST FAVORITE SPORT  
TALLEST BUILDING YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN  
PREFERENCE FOR BOW TIES OR NECKTIES  
LAST MOVIE YOU SAW IN A THEATER  
WHETHER YOU'RE AFRAID OF HEIGHTS  
WHETHER YOU USUALLY SLEEP ON YOUR SIDE,  
BACK, OR FRONT  
NUMBER OF TIMES YOU'VE ACTED IN A PLAY  
PREFERENCE FOR MACS OR PCS  
WHETHER YOU BROUGHT A BIBLE TODAY  
WHETHER YOU'RE WEARING A WATCH  
WHETHER YOUR WATCHES ARE SYNCHRONIZED

When your meeting begins, have people form pairs, preferably with participants they don't know well. Circling items on their papers, partners have one

minute to come up with a list of things they have in common. The pair with the most circled items wins. Award a prize if you like.

Then ask: **Is having things in common what makes you another person's "type"? Is it better to marry someone who's like you, or your opposite?**

(Opinions will differ. People often are drawn to friends who are like themselves, but to spouses who "complete" them by being different. It's probably more important to understand and adapt to your spouse's personality than it is to duplicate it.)

**What if you and your spouse don't have much in common personality-wise? Can you still get along? Is "getting along" all you can do? That's what we'll be talking about today.**

## 2. FINDING YOURSELF

### Identifying Your Needs

*(5-10 minutes)*

Have group members turn to the "Finding Yourself" section in the Participant's Guide. Ask them to take the survey, which will help them think about how they're handling the issues discussed in this session.

**1. If you and your spouse were musical instruments, what kind would you be? Why?**

handbells in a choir

dueling banjos

an electric guitar and an acoustic guitar

a gloomy oboe and a perky flute

a loud trombone and a muted trumpet

other \_\_\_\_\_

(Answers may vary widely. In the interest of time and marital harmony, avoid letting the group get sidetracked in a discussion of how screechy or monotonous a particular spouse/instrument is.)

**2. When it comes to marriage, which of the following sayings do you agree with? Why?**

- \_\_\_ “Opposites attract.”
- \_\_\_ “It takes all kinds.”
- \_\_\_ “Birds of a feather flock together.”
- \_\_\_ “It takes one to know one.”
- \_\_\_ “Men are from Mars, women are from Venus.”

(Opinions will differ; explanations will be the most informative part of this answer.)

**3. Which of the following ideas do you think are false? Why?**

- \_\_\_ God has one person picked out for you.
- \_\_\_ You need to find your soul mate.
- \_\_\_ Some personality types are incompatible.
- \_\_\_ It's a good idea to understand your spouse's personality type.
- \_\_\_ Generally speaking, gender determines personality type.
- \_\_\_ If you married the “wrong” type, you'll be miserable.

(This is also an opinion question, but a convincing case can be made against all but the fourth option.)

**4. Did you and your spouse take a personality test before marriage? If not, why not? If so, what effect did it have? \_\_\_\_\_**

(If participants are reluctant to answer out of guilt over not taking such a test, or because the test seemed to have little or no effect, assure them that many couples haven't been tested. And taking a test doesn't mean you've resolved your personality conflicts.)

**5. Would you say that your parents were the right “type” for each other? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_**

(Some group members may recall ways in which their parents' differences were complementary. Others may say that their parents stuck together and made things work because it was the right thing to do, not because they were a “match made in heaven.”)

**6. What does it mean to say that spouses are “perfect for each other”? Does this describe any couples you know? \_\_\_\_\_**

(As needed, point out that when most people use this phrase, they mean that the spouses meet each other's needs or enjoy each other's company.)

**It's tough to find people who are literally "perfect" for each other. So how do we make a great marriage out of personalities that are as different as they can be? Let's see what the experts have to say.**

### 3. CATCHING THE VISION

#### Watching and Discussing the DVD

*(20-25 minutes)*

After viewing the DVD, use questions like these to help group members think through what they saw and heard.

**1. What do spouses usually mean when they say the following? Do you think these sayings are facts, half-truths, romantic notions, or myths? Why?**

- "Opposites attract."
- "You complete me."
- "She's my better half."
- "He's everything I'm not."
- "I don't know what I'd do without her."

(In one way or another, these sayings acknowledge that many of us are drawn to those of the opposite sex who have contrasting personalities. Often it's because we want someone to "make up for" personality traits we lack. An introvert might like the idea of marrying an extrovert who can be the couple's "front man" in social situations, for instance. Opinions will differ on the validity of these statements; some people feel "completed" by a spouse, for example, but expecting a spouse to do that is unrealistic.)

**2. According to Dr. John Trent, what are the four personality types? If you were to express them not as animals but as different kinds of cars, what would they be?**

(The types: lion, otter, golden retriever, and beaver. People's choices of corresponding cars will differ, but here's one possibility: Hummer [lion], any sports car [otter], any minivan [golden retriever], and Volvo [beaver].)

**3. Which of the following “personality pairs” do you think would get along better? Why?**

- **lion and lion**
- **lion and golden retriever**
- **otter and otter**
- **otter and beaver**

(As needed, point out that every combination has its challenges. Two lions locked in a power struggle might clash frequently and loudly—unless they clearly divided their “territories” and respected each other’s judgment. A laid-back otter might take advantage of an industrious beaver, going to parties and leaving the beaver to do the housework—unless the otter developed empathy and the beaver developed assertiveness. The good news is that any combination can learn to get along. “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” [1 Peter 4:8].)

**4. Let’s say a couple has to decide whether to move 1,000 miles away so that the husband can take a new job with more pay and bigger challenges. All the wife’s friends are in the current location, and neither spouse knows anyone in the new place. How might each of the following personality combinations approach the question, and what do you think each couple would decide? Why?**

- **otter wife and beaver husband**
- **lion husband and golden retriever wife**
- **two golden retrievers**
- **two otters**

(The otter wife might make staying with her friends a top priority; the diligent beaver husband might value the job more highly. The lion husband might want the challenge of the new job; the golden retriever wife might go along to keep the peace. Two golden retrievers could have trouble making a decision, each deferring to the other. Two otters might debate which option promises more opportunities for fun and requires the least attention to deadlines. As for the decisions these couples make, it may depend less on their personalities and more on their willingness to voice their preferences and put each other’s interests first.)

**5. John Trent points out that lions tend to approach problems aggressively; golden retrievers tend to step away from problems. How could spouses with these personalities serve as “checks and balances” on each other in the following situations?**

- **The couple’s 12-year-old son is on a soccer team, but the coach hardly ever lets him play.**
- **The couple’s 10-year-old daughter won’t practice her piano playing between lessons.**
- **The couple’s 14-year-old cat will die without a \$7,500 operation.**
- **The “golden retriever’s” widowed 80-year-old mother is no longer able to take care of herself.**

(The golden retriever could check the lion’s inclination to aggressively confront the coach; the lion might help the golden retriever see the value of taking action. The two spouses might alternate different approaches in convincing their daughter to practice, the lion challenging her to rise to the occasion and the golden retriever empathizing with the difficulties and helping to overcome them. The lion could make a quick choice about the cat, either saving its life or keeping the golden retriever from a prolonged and agonizing decision-making process. The lion might spring into action regarding the elderly parent, contacting experts and agencies; the golden retriever might ease the transition for the mother with reassurance and household help.)

**6. How would you describe your personality type and that of your spouse? What conflicts do you think John Trent would expect you to have? Do you actually tend to have them? If not, why not?**

(If you think participants wouldn’t be comfortable answering this for the whole group, have them discuss it as couples only. As needed, point out that conflicts aren’t inevitable. If group members with “clashing” personalities have learned from experience how to minimize conflicts, encourage them to share advice with the group.)

**7. How have personality differences between you and your spouse played a positive role in your marriage? If your spouse suddenly swapped personalities with someone else, what would you miss most about those differences?**

(Answers will vary. If possible, use this as an opportunity for spouses to affirm each other.)

## 4. DIGGING DEEPER

### Bible Study

(10 minutes)

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)*

**1. Are you more like Mary or Martha? Is your spouse more like Martha or Mary? If the two of you have differences in this area, has it caused conflict?**

(Let people think about this without pressing them to answer aloud.)

**2. Did Jesus imply that Mary's personality was superior, or that she'd made a better choice? How can a spouse's choices make a bigger difference than personality type?**

(Jesus seemed to be affirming Mary's choice, not criticizing Martha's personality. Being worried and upset aren't the same as being detail-oriented and hard-working. All of us are free to make good choices regardless of our personalities. For example, a "lion" could choose to forgive a spouse, as could an "otter." They might do it differently, but the forgiveness would make a bigger difference than personality would.)

*When the time came for [Rebekah] to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment;*

*so they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.*

*The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

*Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)*

*Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."*

*"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"*

*But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.*

*Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.*

*So Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:24-34)*

### **3. How would you describe the personalities of Jacob and Esau? How might spouses with those personalities interact?**

(Jacob may have been more introverted, Esau more extroverted. Jacob apparently was a schemer; Esau was impulsive.)

### **4. Isaac and Rebekah each preferred one son over the other. What happens when spouses prefer their own personalities and wish their mates were more like themselves?**

(They may try to change their spouses; they might grow resentful when it doesn't happen.)

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.*



*And now I will show you the most excellent way.*

*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

*Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. (1 Corinthians 12:27–13:10)*

**5. According to this passage, how can people with different strengths work together?**

(By respecting their God-given differences; by having a common goal; by valuing love over abilities.)

**6. Do you believe that love can overcome personality differences in a marriage? Why or why not?**

(Answers will vary. Love doesn't erase personality differences, but gives them less power in a relationship. Spouses who love each other unconditionally tend to accept their differences and commit to staying together despite them.)

## 5. MAKING IT WORK

### Applying the Principles

(10 minutes)

Have the group turn to the “Making it Work” section in the Participant’s Guide. Let couples have fun with the “superheroes” exercise. When they’re done, encourage them to share results with the group.

Then ask: **How could seeing yourselves as this kind of team affect the way you get along?**

(We'd share a common goal; we'd be more grateful for our differences; we'd be more interested in looking out for each other.)

**How could you use that kind of cooperation and finding strength in differences to overcome challenges you're currently facing?**

(Answers will vary. Encourage couples to take a more complete inventory of their strengths this week, and to apply them to a current challenge. For example, a couple might decide that its strengths are honesty and hospitality. If the couple is having trouble with a child's friend, a frank talk with the friend's mother over dessert might help.)

Call attention to the suggestion in the Participant's Guide that group members rent and discuss a movie this week that features a man and woman with very different personalities—like *Romancing the Stone*, *The King and I*, and *The Music Man*. Point out, too, that if they'd like to find out more about personality types, they can get *The Two Sides of Love* by Gary Smalley and John Trent, Ph.D. (Tynedale, 1990). To take a test from that book, they can go to <http://listen.family.org/images/PersonalStrengthsSurvey.pdf>.

## 6. BRINGING IT HOME

### Reinforcing Your Point

(5 minutes)

Remind group members to read the “Bringing It Home” section of their Participant's Guides this week. It includes a counselor's advice on living with each other's differences.

You may want to conclude this session with comments like the following.

**If you tend to see your spouse's personality in the worst possible light, try this sometime. Make a list of your spouse's traits—maybe the top 12 or so—and circle all the negative ones. Then come up with a more positive term for each of those traits.**

**For instance, you may see your spouse as “pushy.” But you could also see him or her as “assertive” or even “brave.” If you find “nitpicking” on your**

**list, try renaming it “quality control” or “attention to detail.” This shift in perspective won’t change your spouse, but it may help to change your attitude. And when you get right down to it, that’s about the only thing you *can* change.**

If you haven’t already done so, encourage any struggling couples to contact a Christian counselor recommended by your church. You may want to print the counselor’s contact information and give it to all participants, or even pass out the therapist’s business cards.

If your group is comfortable doing so, have a volunteer close in prayer for couples who may be having a hard time understanding and adjusting to each other’s personalities.