

Find Your Relationship Strengths

The Couple Checkup

Small Group Study Guide
A Church-Based Resource

Ron L. Deal, MMFT

www.couplecheckup.com

The Couple Checkup Small Group Study

by
Ron L. Deal, MMFT

Table of Contents

Welcome & Getting the Most from this Study Guide

Session 1	The Couple Checkup (Introduction).....	4
Session 2	Discover Your Strengths.....	6
Session 3	Communication—The #1 Skill.....	9
Session 4	Conflict—An Opportunity in Disguise.....	12
Session 5	Finances—More than Money.....	16
Session 6	Roles—Traditions, Trends, and Teamwork.....	20
Session 7	Spirituality—Live Out Your Values.....	24
Session 8	Closeness and Flexibility—Map Your Relationship.....	27
Session 9	Parenting—Creating a Balanced Family.....	31
Session 10	SCOPE Out Your Personalities.....	35

Welcome!

Your Relationship Deserves a Checkup

The odds are that sometime this year you will take the time to have a physical exam or get a dental checkup. Most people think nothing of it. Very few, on the other hand, take the time to get a relationship Checkup.

But your relationship deserves a Checkup.

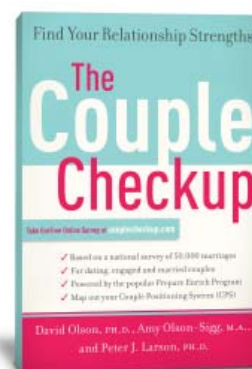
This group study provides an unparalleled opportunity for couples to enhance their relationship and build intimacy. It will help you to apply the principles found in *The Couple Checkup* to your relationship, whether dating, engaged, or married.

Congratulations, you're about to add strength to your relationship.

Ron L. Deal, Family Ministry Consultant
Member of the Couple Checkup Research Team

Getting the Most from this Study Guide

Whether you are an individual, couple, or group of couples studying this series together, this participant guide can be adapted to serve your needs. Each session walks you through discussion questions that will help you strengthen your relationship. Individuals and couples are welcome to complete the study by themselves (e.g., as part of a premarital counseling program), but we strongly recommend that you work through the material with a group of couples if possible (e.g., small group or Bible class). Research and our experience in marriage education suggest connecting with other couples in group discussion is a vital part of applying the principles found in *The Couple Checkup*. Together you will support each other and discover how to enhance your relationship. Premarital couples are also encouraged to attend groups with married couples to glean from their experience.



Get Started

Here are a few tips for your study.

- *Use this guide to take notes during the discussion.* Space is provided so you can write down key observations or applications for your relationship.
- *Get a copy of *The Couple Checkup*.* This study assumes you have a copy of the book and can read designated sections as part of the study. When used in combination, the book, online inventory, and study guide make an excellent learning system.
- *The Wisdom of Scripture.* We encourage you to look up and consider the scriptural references included in this guide.
- *Don't skip anything.* For those of you studying with a group, be sure to complete the "Before Your Small Group Meeting" sections. This will prepare you for the group discussion time and further your application of the material. Individual couples can discuss group sections on their own.
- *Terminology.* Because this study is applicable to dating, engaged, or married couples, we will use the term "partner" throughout the study.
- *Take the online *Couple Checkup* inventory.* This relationship profile is one of the most researched inventories of its kind and will give you tremendous insight into the current strengths of your relationship. It will also help you identify your growth areas and provide specific feedback on how you can deepen intimacy.

The online inventory adapts to your couple type, whether dating, engaged, or married, and provides personal feedback for your relationship type. It only takes each partner about 30 minutes to complete the inventory.

- *Come prepared.* Come to each group meeting with four items: a Bible, a copy of *The Couple Checkup*, your Couple Report, and this study guide.
- *Use discretion.* This group study may stir up lots of thoughts and feelings. Most people do not feel comfortable discussing every topic with others, but feel free to discuss sensitive issues with your spouse. Likewise, we suggest you keep private matters on any subject between you and your spouse; don't mention them in a group setting unless you have permission to do so.
- *Agree to a few group guidelines.* See the next section for some useful tips and practices to get the most out of every session.

Guidelines for Group Discussion

Group discussions that take place in a safe environment will benefit everyone. Take a few minutes during your first few meetings to review these guidelines and agree to abide by them.

Group Guidelines

- **Confidentiality** – We agree that what is said here stays here. We honor one another’s privacy and will not share stories or details heard in the group meeting with people who are not in attendance.
- **Honor** – Couples agree not to share intimate details without first asking their spouse whether it is okay to share with the group. If you’re not sure it’s okay to share, then it probably isn’t. Wait and ask your spouse outside of group.
- **Manage Personal Distress** – Couples in distress should not ignite conflicts within the group. If a hurt or disagreement arises please table it until you can manage it privately.
- **Advice** – We agree not to offer unsolicited advice to one another. If after telling about a frustration someone receives advice, they might feel judged and pressured to abide by the advice. This creates a sharing barrier for them and others in the future. Agree only to give advice if someone first asks for the group’s input.
- **Respect** – We agree to show common courtesy to one another. Examples include allowing everyone to talk (not dominating the group discussion time), not interrupting, not engaging in side-conversations during the group discussion, and showing up on time. Even making a commitment to regular attendance shows respect to others who are counting on us to be there. Call if you cannot attend a session.
- **Acceptance and Encouragement** –We will share our faith, love, and support and strive to “walk alongside” one another in mutual encouragement. If we disagree, we will continue to love in spite of our differences.

Introduction

Study Overview

Session 1: The Couple Checkup

WELCOME!

Take a few minutes to get to know each other as you begin this study together.

- A. When was the last time you had a dental appointment or annual physical? Why do we do this on a regular basis?
- B. How often do you get your car checked out or the oil changed?
- C. Why do you suppose couples rarely, if ever, get a “checkup” on their relationship?
- D. Take some time to introduce yourselves to one another:
 - Share a brief sketch of your family including whether you are dating or married and how many children you have. Share one peculiar thing about your family that most people do not know.

This study is about growing your relationship and encouraging others as they grow theirs.

To accomplish this each couple will be asked to:

- Read a corresponding chapter in *The Couple Checkup* before each meeting
- Review the corresponding section of your *Couple Checkup Inventory* results
- Discuss the “Before the Meeting” questions with your partner

During each session our group will share thoughts and insights into how to apply the principles of *The Couple Checkup*. Creating a safe environment where you and other couples can learn and find support is everyone’s job. To facilitate that safe environment, spend a little time reviewing the Group Guidelines. When you agree to abide by these guidelines, everyone has a shared expectation of how the group will interact. This deepens trust, and therefore, the level of support experienced.

Take some time now to:

- Review the Group Guidelines on the previous page together. Make sure that everyone understands them and is willing to abide by the guidelines.

Focusing On Strength

- If someone accidentally steps over a guideline, decide how will you remind each other of the boundary?

Most marital research focuses on problems or divorce. This study is based on the largest in-depth survey of marital strengths ever conducted and believes that building on your strengths is much more productive.

- Share a quality of strong marriages that you have witnessed in the marriages of family or friends.
- In general, what qualities do you think contribute to a strong marriage?

Prayer Time

A. Take some time to pray for your study and one another. Ask the Lord to provide valuable insights as you meet each week.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapters one and two (this is the only time you'll be asked to read two chapters before a session) and complete your "Before Your Small Group Meeting" discussion section. Also, please take time to complete your online Couple Checkup inventory at www.CoupleCheckup.com.

The Couple Checkup Online Inventory:

In the back of the Couple Checkup book, lift the cover to find a Voucher Code good for one free Individual Profile at www.CoupleCheckup.com. Each code can only be used once. One of you should use this code to set up your account and complete the inventory. Once finished, you can upgrade your account for half price allowing your partner to complete their inventory as well. The online system will then generate a comprehensive Couple Checkup report which compares your responses as it identifies your couple strengths and growth areas.

Before Your Small Group Meeting

Session 2: Discover Your Strengths

“We would like this book to extend a strengths perspective into your couple relationship. Assessing and affirming your relationship strengths increases confidence and the ability to respond effectively to your own needs. Our behaviors and achievements are often derived from the resources we perceive to be available to us. If we come to think of ourselves as lacking in some way or riddled with problems, we will become overwhelmed and unmotivated. Strengths are a way to celebrate and affirm what we already do well as well as a starting point for change.”

From *The Couple Checkup*, pg.16

- A. Read Chapters 1-2 of *The Couple Checkup* before your individual or small group discussion.
- B. Your Personal Couple Checkup Results:
 1. Our research found that knowing one partner’s level of satisfaction only predicts their partner’s marital satisfaction 25% of the time. Were there any results from your Couple Report that surprised you?

Record your observations here. _____

2. Which of the following keys to intimacy is a strength for you? Take time to affirm one another for these strengths.
 - Review your Communication and Conflict Resolution results in your Report
 - For Closeness & Flexibility refer to the “Map of Couple Relationship”
 - Personality is assessed on the Couple Checkup using the SCOPE Personality Scales in the back of your report. Similarity in personality makes compatibility easier. How similar are your personalities?
3. What is your Couple Type? (See “Summary of Strength and Growth Areas” in your Report)
 - What is encouraging or challenging to you about your Couple Type?

Small Group Discussion

- If you are a Conflicted or Devitalized couple, remember that you have already taken steps to begin a process of improving your relationship. Keep moving forward and trust that change can happen.
- A. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapters. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
1. Consider this quote:
“In her book *Lies at the Altar*, Dr. Robin Smith gives a narrative to how the “lies” we are socialized to focus on before marriage distract from the truth, and that the secret to every great marriage is that it is lived in truth. She elaborates that these “lies” are not conscious or deliberate; rather they are the result of unasked questions, unspoken needs, and a failure to truly see the relationship realistically.” (*The Couple Checkup*, pg. 17)
 - Discuss: In what ways is it tempting to view our relationships—not through the lens of truth—but through how we wish it were? Record any insights discussed by the group here.
 2. Consider this quote:
“Happy marriages are not marriages without obstacles; they are marriages where couples use obstacles as opportunities to grow in their partnership.” (*The Couple Checkup*, pg. 17)
 - What attitude must we have in order to view obstacles as opportunities?
 - What role does faith play in coping with obstacles?
 - Hebrews 12:7-11 suggests that hardship is discipline that God uses to grow us into righteousness. How do the challenges of marriage also function as God’s discipline or refinement of us?

3. Consider this quote:
- “Simply understanding the differences and obstacles in our relationship removes some of the power they have over us. Awareness generates in us the ability to maneuver more intelligently, perhaps by confronting the challenge that these issues pose rather than tripping over them. Knowledge IS power...” (*The Couple Checkup*, pg. 30)
- Read James 1:2-8. Knowledge that gives direction to life in scripture is referred to as “wisdom”. Sometimes we seek the Lord’s wisdom but then remain closed to what He is trying to show us. How can you open yourself to the Lord’s wisdom for your marriage?
 - Discuss as a group how you will share wisdom with one another during your group time. Is it permissible to “give advice” to one another? How might you go about doing so?

B. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you’re not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

A. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?

B. Pray as a group about the relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter three in *The Couple Checkup* book and complete your “Before Your Small Group Meeting” discussion section.

Session 3: Communication—The #1 Skill

*“The good news is that communication is a learned skill; something that can be taught and practiced.” From *The Couple Checkup*, p. 36*

Before Your Small Group Meeting

- A. Read chapter three in *The Couple Checkup*.
 - Take special note of your communication style and the communication pattern in your relationship (pages 41-44).
- B. Examine the Communication page of your *Checkup Couple* report.
 1. Your level of satisfaction is:

 2. Your partner’s level of satisfaction is:

 3. Review the Couple Results section taking note of your Agreement Items and Discussion Items.
 - Together with your partner, give a real-life example of an Agreement Item.
 - Give an example of a Discussion Item. (If a disagreement occurs, talk about it as long as the discussion is productive.)
- C. Complete Couple Exercise 3.1 found on page 52 of *The Couple Checkup*.

Small Group Discussion

- A. Open: This chapter indicates that every couple—happy or unhappy—needs to continually enhance their communication skills. Why do you think that is?
 - In what way is it encouraging to you that 82% of all couples, both vitalized and discouraged couples alike, have at least one complaint about how they communicate?

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- B. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
1. Consider this quote:
“It is essential to remember that communication often has less to do with the words we use and more to do with their underlying meaning.” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 35)
 - What makes it difficult to hear the underlying meaning when communicating with one another?
 2. “Listening is not the same as hearing.” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 39)
 - Why is listening so much more difficult than hearing?
 - Read James 1:1-20. Share about someone you know who is “quick to listen.”
 3. Consider this quote:
“One might suggest that all of the following communication skills and suggestions are really about increasing emotional safety so dialogue can be productive rather than threatening.” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 45)
 - Solomon agrees. He points out twice that it’s better to live on the corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome spouse (see Prov. 21:9 & 25:24). Without emotional safety we just tend to hide from one another.
 - What is something you learned in this chapter that could enhance the safety in your relationship?
 4. Engaged couples have the tendency to look for positive qualities in their partner and overlook negative ones. Married couples, on the other hand, are tempted to focus on the negatives in their partner and relationship. (see *The Couple Checkup*, p. 38)
 - Discuss why you think this is.
 - What can engaged couples do to be more realistic about one another?
 - What might married couples do to affirm their strengths rather than focus on their negatives?

C. Digging Deeper:
Here is a list of the communication skills discussed on pages 45-50 in *The Couple Checkup*. Share an example of your partner doing one or more of these.

- Meaningful dialogue
- Self-disclosure
- Assertiveness and “I” statements
- Active listening using paraphrasing
- Daily compliments

D. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you’re not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

1. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?
2. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

Prayer Time

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter four in *The Couple Checkup* and complete your “Before Your Small Group Meeting” discussion section.

Notes / Action Plan

Before Your Small Group Meeting

Session 4: Conflict—An Opportunity in Disguise

Conflict is actually essential for the healthy functioning of a relationship. Happily married couples are five times more likely to resolve their differences than discouraged or unhappy couples. (Reported in *The Couple Checkup*)

- A. Read chapter four in *The Couple Checkup* before your couple and group discussions.
- B. Review your progress from last week's action plan generated from the "How do you get there?" questions on the bottom of page 51.
 1. How well did we implement our plan from the previous session?
 2. What changes did you notice?
 3. Do you want to continue the Plan or modify it?
- C. Examine the **Conflict Resolution** page of your Couple Checkup report.
 1. Your level of satisfaction is:
 2. Your partner's level of satisfaction is:
 3. Review the Couple Results section taking note of your Agreement Items and Discussion Items.
 - Together with your partner, give a real-life example of an Agreement Item.
 - Give an example of a Discussion Item. (If a disagreement occurs, talk about it as long as the discussion is productive.)

Small Group Discussion

- D. If you have a low-level conflict that you feel prepared to process as a couple, complete Couple Exercise 4.1 found on page 74 of *The Couple Checkup*. If in the past you have had repeated difficulty resolving issues or find that problem discussions escalate into heated arguments, table this exercise until after your group meeting. It's okay to wait till you have learned some important skills before trying to resolve the issue.
- A. Open: Share a strength.
Over time, growing couples discover attitudes and actions that help them resolve or manage their differences. Take a few minutes to share one thing you have learned to do or say that seems to help your relationship. Take note of the tools others have learned to use.
- B. Group Check-in: Whether Conflict Resolution is a strength or growth area in your relationship, all of us can learn new skills to improve how we manage disagreements. Share one insight you gained from this chapter about how you act during disagreements.
- C. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
1. Consider this quote:
"A majority of couples in our survey (78 percent) report they go out of their way to avoid conflict with their partner. Couples who ignore problems in hopes they will disappear find the opposite will happen." (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 59)
 - Are there times when avoiding conflict may be best?
 - Why does repeatedly avoiding conflict inadvertently create more conflict?
 2. Consider this quote:
"Expressing anger can be done constructively, but it can also be done in ways that destroy relationships... A healthy express of anger is non-judgmental, direct, and straightforward. It makes clear our needs without hurting the other person." (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 63)

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- Read Proverbs 29:11: “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.” Love is not easily angered (1 Cor. 13:5) and love manages itself when it is angry. What are some ways to manage anger in a relationship?
- What are some ways to calm yourself when feeling overly angry or out of control?

3. Scripture outlines a number of principles for managing conflict in relationships. Our research validated the power of these principles. Read each scripture below and match it to a ground rule for fighting fair (found on pages 68-69 in *The Couple Checkup*). Discuss how each principle might apply to your relationship.

God’s Wisdom for Managing Conflict	Ground Rules for Fighting Fair
• “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” (Proverbs 12:18)	• Focus on the behavior, not the person.
• “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1)	• Remember good communication skills.
• “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.” (Proverbs 18:13)	• Be specific.
• “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:29)	• Say it respectfully.
• “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing...” (1 Peter 3:9)	• Stay calm.

4. Review the 10 Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict on pages 72-73. Which of the steps do you think is most important and why? Keep in mind that this structure will not prove helpful unless you maintain the attitudes discussed in the previous question (God's Wisdom for Managing Conflict).

D. Digging Deeper: Knowing Yourself

1. Acknowledging your own negative responses in conflict is vital. We all have them, and we are responsible to manage them. Review Figure 4.3 (page 71 of The Couple Checkup) and share at least one Destructive Approach that you are trying to manage within yourself.

2. According to page 65, typical conflict buttons for men include feelings of inadequacy and disrespect. Typical buttons for women include messages and feelings around value, care, and love. How are these buttons true for you?

E. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you're not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

A. Prayer requests. According to 1 Peter 3:10 whoever would "love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech." Assuming you want to have "good days" this week, what specific action will you take to improve your ability to manage conflict?

B. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter five in The Couple Checkup and complete your "Before Your Small Group Meeting" discussion section.

Before Your Small Group Meeting

Session 5: Finances—More Than Money

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Matt. 6:24 NIV)

God has a great deal to say about money and the accumulation of possessions throughout the Bible. Obviously He understands the temptation it presents us and He wants us to maintain a healthy perspective about its place in our lives. This lesson will guide your thinking and attitudes about money in your relationship.

- A. Read chapter five in The Couple Checkup before your couple and group discussions.

- B. Examine the Financial Management page of your Checkup Couple report.
 1. Your level of satisfaction is:

 2. Your partner’s level of satisfaction is:

 3. Review the Couple Results section taking note of your Agreement Items and Discussion Items.
 - Together with your partner, give a real-life example of an Agreement Item.
 - Give an example of a Discussion Item. (If a disagreement occurs, talk about it as long as the discussion is productive.)

- C. Review your progress from last week’s action plan generated from the “How do you get there?” section on page 74.
 1. How well did we implement our plan from the previous session?

 2. What changes did you notice?

 3. Do you want to continue the Plan or modify it?

Small Group Discussion

- A. Open: What do you think about this statement?
Money is often cited as a key reason couple's divorce. However, those who study marriage often view it differently. Money doesn't cause problems per se, but when attitudes and values about money clash, couples find they have many disagreements that divide them. Keeping a biblical perspective about money is the solution to such difficulties.
- B. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
1. "If you sometimes feel as though financial issues dominate your life, you are not alone. It is estimated that we spend up to 80% of our waking hours earning money, spending money, or thinking about money. A survey conducted by American Express Financial Advisors revealed that 66% of Americans spend more time thinking about money and careers than they do about sex, health, or relationships." (The Couple Checkup, pages 79-80)
 - Now Read Hebrews 13:5
 - How does God's promise never to leave us help us to keep our lives free from the love of money?
 - Practically, we do have to think about earning money or spending money, but how can we find contentment with what we have?
 - What does Jesus mean when he says, "You cannot serve both God and Money"? (Matt. 6:24 NIV).
 2. "Consumerism interferes with interpersonal relationships by replacing the normal common-sense desire for an adequate supply of life's necessities, community life, a stable family and healthy relationships, with an ongoing and insatiable quest for things. We can assume it is this quest for things that has led to a substantial increase in consumer debt and bankruptcies. Many studies have found a link between financial problems and marital dissatisfaction and divorce. But even in marriages and families without debt or financial strain, using money as a model of success and happiness is sure to disappoint." (The Couple Checkup, pg. 83)

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- Now Read Ecclesiastes 5:10
 - People are often fascinated with the luxurious lives of rich people. We often envy what they have. What do we think money or the accumulation of material things will give us that we don't already have?
 - Solomon says that those who love money or wealth will never have enough. Why not? What is meaningless about this pursuit?
 - By comparing ourselves to those who have more, we rarely view ourselves as being a "lover of wealth." What do your couple spending habits say about your attitude toward the accumulation of things?
3. "Spenders and savers are the classic money personalities. The top two financial issues for 72% of married couples in our national survey were related to spending and saving. Not surprisingly, saving/spending problems are common among couples because individuals often have different personal styles of spending and saving." (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 85)
- Now Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10
 - Spenders and savers alike struggle with contentment. What insights does this passage give you regarding contentment and the role of money in your life?
 - What kinds of temptations do people who want to get rich fall into?
4. There are four common orientations or attitudes toward money.
- Money as status.** *A person with a status orientation toward money is interested in money as power—as a means of keeping ahead of his or her peers.*
- Money as security.** *A person with a security orientation is conservative in spending and focuses on saving.*
- Money as enjoyment.** *A person with an enjoyment orientation gets satisfaction from spending, both on others and on himself or herself.*
- Money as control.** *A person with a control orientation sees money as a way of maintaining control over her or his life and independence from a partner or other family members." (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 89-90)*

Now Read
Luke 12:13-21

- Which of the above attitudes describes the “rich fool”?
- Jesus called him a fool. Why?
- What does it mean to be “rich toward God” in your marriage?

Now Read
Luke 12:22-34

- In verse 22 Jesus’ use of the word “therefore” indicates that being rich toward God means that we don’t have to worry about your life. Our provision is a matter of faith, not how much money we have. If you maintained this attitude in your marriage, what would change?
- When finances are stressed, why is it so hard to trust God to provide (see verse 28)?
- How would you know if you were seeking possessions over the Kingdom of God?
- Jesus seems to be teaching us, then, that money is simply a tool, but it is in “God we trust.” Your stewardship of money over the past 60 days is a good testimony to your attitude toward money. Is it a tool or your treasure?

C. Digging Deeper: If you oriented your couple financial attitudes around the scriptural principles presented in this lesson, how might your lifestyle, giving, or spending habits change?

D. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you’re not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

- A. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?
- B. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter seven in The Couple Checkup and complete your “Before Your Small Group Meeting” discussion section.

Session 6: Roles—Traditions, Trends, and Teamwork

“Marital satisfaction and intimacy are much more likely when partners share responsibilities and decision making.”

The Couple Checkup, p. 130

Before Your Small Group Meeting

A. Read chapter seven in *The Couple Checkup* before your couple and group discussions. Roles in marriage relate to how couples allocate leadership responsibilities and household tasks. This can be an emotionally-laden topic. As you consider how to balance roles in your relationship remember to consider what is equitable and fair.

B. Examine the Roles & Responsibilities page of your Checkup Couple report.

1. Your level of satisfaction is:

2. Your partner’s level of satisfaction is:

3. Review Figure 7.2 on page 131.

- Which model best describes the role patterns in the family you grew up in?
- Which model best describes your marital role pattern now?

4. Read together the case study (Amy) shared on pages 140-142. What insights does this story give you for your relationship?

C. Complete Couple Exercise 7.1 and 7.2 (pages 145, 146). This will take some planning, but try to complete it before your next group meeting.

Small Group Discussion

A. Open: Our expectations for marital roles stem from a number of sources. Religious beliefs, cultural trends, and our individual ideas of what roles signify in a relationship are just a few of those sources (see pages 128-129).

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- What were the dominant social and cultural roles expectations for men and women in your grandparent's generation?
 - What do think are the dominant expectations for men and women in society today?
- B. Group Check-In: Ephesians 5: 21-28 suggests a balance in how men and women are to love and care for each other. Men carry the responsibility to empower their wives (just as Christ made the church "more" because of his sacrifice) and set a spiritual direction for their home. Women are responsible to work beside their husbands in carrying out this direction. Both are to submit to one another and sacrifice for the good of the other.
- Some assume this balance of power includes specific household roles and tasks for husbands and wives. What do you think? Does your church have a position on this?
 - How is this similar or different from current cultural expectations?
- C. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
1. We tend to assume that men prefer what some call "traditional" gender roles. An interesting finding in our study was that both men and women prefer sharing tasks and decision-making equally based on interests and ability (egalitarian roles) rather than gender. Figure 7.4 (page 136) shows that couples are four times more likely to be happy when both partners view the relationship as egalitarian and are four times more likely to be unhappy when both partners view it as traditional.
 - Why do you think this is?
 2. One problem stemming from an unfair division of labor occurs when wives silence their own opinions to keep the peace. Over time they may then emotionally disconnect from the relationship.
 - What advice would you give a woman in this situation?
 - What would you tell her husband?
 3. Review and consider the "Looks Can Be Deceiving" section on pages 136-137 as a case study for your group.

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- Peter and Heather’s story demonstrates that external chores and duties change throughout the seasons of a couple’s life.
 - How has the division of roles in your marriage changed?
 - What “internal” attitudes dictate how “external” roles are determined?
4. Review the suggestions for improving your role relationship (found on pages 137-143). Discuss how they might apply to your relationship.
- Women and men both need to be part of the solution. What makes it difficult for women to surrender some of their household responsibilities to their husband?
 - Divide...and then stay out of it! Why is it difficult to let go of monitoring how the other performs their duties?
 - Accept a lower standard. When the other does a job to a lower standard than you, we suggest you find a way to live with it. Why is that so difficult?
 - Forget about helping. When men and women refer to “helping” the other with a chore, they imply that it isn’t their responsibility. What language could you use to show mutual responsibility for household tasks?
 - Have a plan. Without a plan, most couples retreat into gender-based traditional roles (which may be acceptable to both persons). Why do you think this is?

D. Digging Deeper: Would someone care to share what you learned about yourself or your marriage from completing Couple Exercise 7.1 (page 145)?

- Who has completed Couple Exercise 7.2? Who would be willing to try it before our next meeting?

E. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you're not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

A. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?

B. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter eight in The Couple Checkup and complete your "Before Your Small Group Meeting" discussion section.

Notes / Action Plan

Session 7: Spirituality—Live Out Your Values

“Spirituality is deeply personal, as we come to our own faith journey through a combination of our upbringing, our education, our beliefs, and ultimately, our own encounter with the divine.”

The Couple Checkup, p. 148

Before Your Small Group Meeting

- A. Read chapter eight in *The Couple Checkup* before your couple and group discussions.
- B. Examine the Spiritual Beliefs page of your Checkup Couple report.
 1. Your level of satisfaction is:

 2. Your partner’s level of satisfaction is:
- C. Review the Couple Results section taking note of your Agreement Items and Discussion Items.
 - Together with your partner, give a real-life example of an Agreement Item.
 - Give an example of a Discussion Item. (If a disagreement occurs, talk about it as long as the discussion is productive.)
- D. Complete Couple Exercise 8.1 on page 161 of *The Couple Checkup*.

Small Group Discussion

- A. Open: Discuss this statement.

Marriage is one of God’s tools for shaping us into the image of his Son. Ultimately, shared spirituality is not about enhancing the couple’s relationship (it does that, too), but about refining us to be more like Christ.
- B. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
 1. Consider this quote:

“In a real sense, God’s unconditional love is a model for partnership. A couple’s mutual faith helps them focus on the positive aspects of each other and encourage and respect one another. Their marriage

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

is a sanctuary—a source of care, mutual protection, comfort, and refuge. While feelings can often vacillate, their faith provides the foundation for a commitment that sustains the relationship.”

(*The Couple Checkup*, p. 150)

- In what way does God’s love for you teach you how to love your partner?
- How can faith provide a foundation for commitment to a marriage?

2. Consider this quote:

“Couples who had high spiritual agreement reported much higher levels of satisfaction in most other important areas of their relationships. Those with high agreement had greater marital satisfaction and felt better about their communication and conflict resolution, financial management, sexual relationship, closeness, and flexibility as a couple. (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 149)

- How does sharing your spiritual values and activities facilitate a closer relationship?

3. When two people are equally “seeking first the Kingdom of God” they are moving in the same direction and will find themselves closer. When only one is moving in this direction, couples move apart.

- What advice would you give a couple who has differing spiritual values?
- How might couples work through these differences?

4. Consider this quote:

“Be continuously curious about your partner’s spiritual beliefs.” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 153)

- Many couples only discuss spiritual matters when engaged in religious activity (e.g., attending church services). How can you share your faith journey with your partner more often?

5. Our research found that strong couples rely on their faith during difficult times more than unhappy couples do.
 - Loss, suffering, and uncertainty are part of life. Share a time that your faith made a difference in your marriage during a difficulty.
6. Just over half of all couples have an unresolved issue related to their spiritual beliefs (see p. 157).
 - What gets in the way of resolving spiritual differences?
 - What challenges might you face if you let issues remain unresolved?

- C. Digging Deeper: Couples who engage in corporate worship together on a regular basis sometimes report a struggle in praying privately together.
 - What makes praying together as a couple difficult?
 - If you practice this, even occasionally, share how it is initiated and who prays.
 - If you do not pray together on a regular basis, challenge yourself to begin doing so. What needs to change for you to accomplish this goal?
- D. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you're not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

- A. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?
- B. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter nine in *The Couple Checkup* and complete your "Before Your Small Group Meeting" discussion section.

Session 8: Closeness and Flexibility—Map Your Relationship

“Past studies have continually found that communication and conflict resolution are what most distinguished happy from unhappy couples, but in our survey, closeness and flexibility were found to be as important as communication and conflict resolution when predicting marital success.”

The Couple Checkup, p. 163

Before Your Small Group Meeting

- A. Read chapter nine in *The Couple Checkup* before your couple and group discussions.
- B. Examine the Map of Couple Relationship page of your Checkup Couple report. Closeness is defined as the level of emotional connection you feel to your partner (or family members). Flexibility refers to how open to change you are in your relationships.
 1. Your name on the Map indicates the level of Flexibility and Closeness you perceive in the relationship. Write down each dimension.
 - Level of Flexibility:
 - Level of Closeness:
 2. What is your partner’s perception?
 - Level of Flexibility:
 - Level of Closeness:
 3. Review the descriptions at the bottom of the Map of Couple Relationship page.
 - Give examples of how Flexibility and Closeness function in your relationship?
- C. Review Figure 9.1 on page 165 in *The Couple Checkup*. Take turns sharing responses to the following:
 1. Which level of closeness best describes the family you grew up in (your “family of origin”)?
 2. Keeping in mind that we tend to repeat or do the opposite of the closeness style of the family we grew up in, how is this similar or different to your current relationship?

Small Group Discussion

- D. Review Figure 9.3 on page 169.
1. Which level of flexibility best describes your family of origin?
 2. How is this similar to or different from your current relationship?
- A. Open: Throughout this chapter, healthy closeness is defined as a balance between individuality (separateness) and togetherness. In what ways does God maintain this same balance in His relationship with us?
(Hint: God wants to draw near to us, but He never limits our free will.)
- B. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
1. Closeness is not just a feeling. It also has a “doing” element. Discuss how couples can live these qualities of close couples:
 - Making togetherness a priority.
 - Enjoying free time together.
 - Pursuing activities you do together.
 2. Read again the poem “On Marriage” from Kahlil Gibran:
“Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other’s keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other’s shadow. But let there be spaces in your togetherness, And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 166)
 - Our culture idealizes closeness. It’s what Hollywood movies are made of. But “space in our togetherness” is also important. What seems unromantic about this notion?

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- Gibran suggests that each partner is a “pillar” that stands on its own. Your emotional health is not dependent upon your partner. Why is it important to maintain responsibility for your own emotional well-being?
3. Discuss how flexibility impacts relationships over time. “Relationships that have “balanced” levels of flexibility are somewhat structured, and members sometimes share leadership. Roles are well-defined and stable, but they can change depending on current needs.” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 170)
 - Read the case study about Kyle and Judy on page 171. Note how this inflexible relationship functions well before the couple has children, but becomes problematic after.
 - Some people are more open to change. What makes change difficult for some people?
 - What happens if you have too much change in a marriage or family?
 4. There are three common issues related to closeness and flexibility in a relationship (see *The Couple Checkup*, p. 172).
 1. One person wanting to spend more time together while the other wants more space.
 2. Couples who differ on how organized they should be with their time.
 3. Drifting apart and experiencing too little closeness.
 - How might couples compromise on these matters?
 - Not being defensive about the other’s needs (e.g., wanting more time with you) is challenging for many people. What attitude is needed in order to serve the other regarding closeness and flexibility?

5. Before this session you were asked to review Figures 9.1 and 9.3 (pages 165 and 169 in The Couple Checkup) and discuss them in light of your family of origin and current relationship.
 - What observations did you make about the relationship styles you grew up with and the one you have now?

 - What insights did you gain about your couple relationship?

C. Digging Deeper: We theorize that humility is a fundamental attitude of flexible, adaptable people. They are not rigid in their thinking or prideful that their way is always right. Is it any wonder that our study found that flexible couples compromise more and share leadership equally?

- It's clear in scripture that God "opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Pride creates opposition and distance while humility fosters closeness. How does pride and humility in your relationship foster either distance or closeness?

D. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you're not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

- A. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?

- B. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter ten in The Couple Checkup and complete your "Before Your Small Group Meeting" discussion section.

Before Your Small Group Meeting

Session 9: Parenting—Creating a Balanced Family

“Before I got married, I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children, and no theories.” John Wilmot
The Couple Checkup, p. 191

- A. Read chapter ten in *The Couple Checkup* before your couple and group discussions.
- What makes the above quote by John Wilmot so humorous?
 - In what ways can you relate to it?
- B. Examine the Children & Parenting (or Stepparenting) page of your Checkup Couple report.
NOTE: if you do not have children, this page will not be included in your Report. We recommend you study this section if you anticipate ever having children.
1. Your level of satisfaction is:
 2. Your partner’s level of satisfaction is:
 3. Review the Couple Results section taking note of your Agreement Items and Discussion Items.
 - Together with your partner, give a real-life example of an Agreement Item.
 - Give an example of a Discussion Item. (If a disagreement occurs, talk about it as long as the discussion is productive.)
- C. Review the parenting styles described on pages 198-200. Discuss these questions together.
1. How were you parented as a child and teen? Did your mother and father use the same or different parenting styles? What are your reactions to their style? Did it feel fair? Was it effective?
 2. What style feels most natural to you as a parent? Is this the same style you would like to use?

Small Group Discussion

3. What concerns do you have about your partner's parenting behavior? Share one concern. Listen with openness and manage any defensiveness you may feel.
- A. Open: Parenting is a humbling process. Time and time again raising children reminds us that we cannot control everything and that our theories of child-rearing don't always prove correct.
 - Share a time that you were humbled or realized that you still have much to learn.
 - How often do you pray for yourself as a parent, as well as your children's development?
 - Some parents "pray in the moment" when dealing with their children. How can you make this a part of your parenting?
 - B. Group Check-in: Your Couple Checkup Report indicates your current relationship strengths. When did you see one of your strengths at work this past week? Share a recent example where you tried to/did put a strength into action.
 - C. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.
 1. Consider this quote:

"Children are great imitators of all kinds of behaviors..."
(The Couple Checkup, p. 192)

Scripture makes it clear that parental modeling is a powerful force in the lives of children. How we live and how we love sets an example that they will follow.
 - Read Deuteronomy 6: 4-8. Instilling values in children occurs when we teach faith during the natural rhythms of life (e.g., at home, when traveling, at bedtime, etc.). But verse 6 indicates that the first method of teaching Godly values is modeling them ("upon your hearts").
Share some ways you are modeling godly values for your children.
 - How are you modeling relational strengths as well?

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

2. Guarding your marriage against the strains of child-rearing is an important goal for all couples. One or both partners in 82% of couples report that having children has reduced their marital satisfaction. To some degree a drop in satisfaction is to be expected; even 60% of happily married couples report this. And yet, couples must proactively guard against “giving their marriage away” to the process of parenting.
 - What can you do to remain connected during the childrearing years?
 - What leisure activities do you engage in to keep fun and friendship alive in your relationship?
 - Focusing more on children than on sustaining your marriage may cause a drift in your relationship. This is a problem for 64% of couples. Describe how you can strike a balance between parenting and your marriage.
3. Shared parenting increases marital satisfaction. “...satisfaction with how the responsibility of raising children is shared is the most significant issue distinguishing happy couples from unhappy ones. Happily married couples are twice as likely (61%) to be satisfied with how child rearing and parenting are shared than unhappily married couples (30%).” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 201)
 - Parenting is a sacred honor. Some believe that mothers and fathers together reflect the full parental nature of God. How do you share and divide up parenting responsibilities in your home?
 - How do you support one another with the children?
4. Agreeing on Discipline. “Happily married couples are much more likely to agree on discipline than are unhappily married couples. Thus, it’s important to discuss and develop a joint plan for discipline. It sounds so basic, but the fact is many couples

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

disagree on how to discipline their children.” (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 205)

- Most people discipline their children as their parents disciplined them, or they do the opposite. Is this true of you?
- Would your children say the two of you discipline similarly or differently? Give an example.
- If you have different styles or parenting philosophies, how can you get “on the same page”?

5. Review the “Reminders for Improving Your Relationship and Parenting” on page 211 in *The Couple Checkup*. Share an item that is a strength in your family and one that needs improvement.

D. Digging Deeper: Without a doubt, parents are God’s “plan A” for children. We provide for their physical and emotional needs and teach values.

- What proactive steps are you taking to instill faith into your children?
- Overindulgence (discussed on pages 206-207) is detrimental to children because it steals their opportunities to learn responsibility, persistence, and delayed gratification. How might it also be a detriment to their faith development?

E. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you’re not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

- A. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?
- B. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

For Next Week

Be sure to read chapter eleven in *The Couple Checkup* and complete your “Before Your Small Group Meeting” discussion section.

Before Your Small Group Meeting

Session 10: SCOPE Our Your Personalities

“Exploring personality similarities and differences can be a fascinating and fun process. It can also shed light on the challenges faced by couples who love one another but have very different preferences in their approaches to life.”

The Couple Checkup, p. 213

- A. Read chapter eleven in *The Couple Checkup* before your couple and group discussions.
- B. Examine the SCOPE Personalities Scales (five pages) of your Checkup Couple report.
 1. What did you learn about yourself? Was anything surprising?
 2. What insights did you have into your partner’s personality?
 3. The chapter suggests that while you can’t change the natural expression of your personality, you can choose to have balance in your life (see page 217).
 - Are there ways in which your personality is out of balance and interferes with other aspects of your life?
 - What might you do to bring it back in balance?
 4. The Couple Discussion section at the bottom of each personality description on your Couple Checkup Report represents the “intersection” of your personality types.
 - Which aspects of your personalities are different?
 - Which are similar?
- C. Review your progress from last week’s action plan generated from the “How do you get there?” discussion on page 210.
 1. How well did we implement our plan from the previous chapter?

Small Group Discussion

2. What changes did you notice?

3. Do you want to continue the plan or modify it?

A. Open: When the personalities of partners are similar, it is easier for them to get along. But different personalities (e.g., an extrovert and an introvert) can actually become a mightier strength when couples learn how to appreciate each other. How might this be?

B. Review and discuss the following key points from the chapter. Make application to your relationship when appropriate.

1. Consider this quote:

“A common misperception is that you can change personality traits if you don’t like them. While we might achieve slight adjustments in personality over time, our personality is pretty much set by the time we reach adolescence.” (The Couple Checkup, p. 214)

- What is the implication of this truth for couples?
- What advice would you give someone who doesn’t like an aspect of their partner’s personality?

2. Consider the four stages that David Augsburger (*The Couple Checkup*, p. 216) says couples go through on the way to mature love. Which stages can you relate to? What challenge does the fourth stage present to you?

- Stage 1: During courtship, couples accommodate or tolerate one another’s differences to avoid conflict and keep their dream relationship alive. What makes us prone to do this?
- Stage 2: After the wedding, when the reality of a spouse’s personality sets in, partners try to eliminate the objectionable differences by criticizing or demanding change. How likely is it that you can change the personality of your partner? What happens when you try?

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- Stage 3: When couples reach the third stage, they begin to appreciate the differences in personality as creative, necessary parts of the person they love and of the marriage itself. What has to change within a person before they can appreciate the differences of their partner?
 - Stage 4: Mature partners with a mature love then celebrate and delight in their differences, recognizing that each is acceptable and beneficial to the health of the relationship. This type of mature love requires accepting both the other and yourself. How so?
3. Consider this statement:
“In our study of fifty thousand couples, personality was found to be a powerful discriminator between happy and unhappy couples. When negative personality traits (i.e., withdrawn, moody, and controlling) become chronically out of balance, they are like a toxic poison to your relationship. (*The CoupleCheckup*, p. 218)
- Read Galatians 5:22-23. If being moody, controlling, critical, and unreliable is a toxic poison to a relationship, what impact would living the fruits of the Spirit have?
 - Take some time to discuss each fruit of the Spirit (e.g., kindness, gentleness, self-control). Share practical examples of how you can live them out in your relationship with your unique personalities.
4. How are you learning to manage your couple personality differences? Share an insight from your Couple Checkup Report. For additional help, reference the sections on pages 221-227 entitled “Handling Couple Differences”.

Small Group Discussion (Cont.)

- C. Digging Deeper:
Discuss this statement: One reason God made your partner different than you is so He could grow you.
- D. Open Discussion: Share a principle or insight you learned from the book that was helpful or, if you're not sure you understand something, pose a question to the group for discussion.

Prayer Time

- A. Prayer requests. What would you like others to pray for on your behalf this week?
- B. Pray as a group about the key relationship principles you discussed and how you can implement them in your relationship.

Group Close

Take some time to celebrate what you have learned throughout this study. We encourage you to continue meeting with your group to study additional ways to enrich your marriage and family life. If you'd like, have additional sessions to study through chapters six (sexuality) and twelve (achieving goals) in The Couple Checkup.