

A 5-WEEK GUIDE FOR COUPLES AND SMALL GROUPS

UNCOMMON MARRIAGE

BIBLE STUDY



TONY &
LAUREN **DUNGY**

WITH NATHAN WHITAKER & STEPHANIE RISCHÉ

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Uncommon Marriage Bible Study

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A NOTE FROM THE DUNGYS



Welcome to Your Journey to an Uncommon Marriage

We are so glad you have joined us on this adventure to an uncommon marriage! After more than thirty years together, we are still learning about marriage, about each other, and about God's desires for us as a couple. We've been through a lot—big victories, devastating losses, and everything in between. But through it all we've experienced God's faithfulness. We've witnessed firsthand that His plan for marriage is good, and we're eager to share a few of the things He's taught us along the way.

Over the years we've mentored a number of couples—including friends from church and young football players and their wives—and we've also shared some of our marriage journey with the members of the small group that meets at our home. We wish our living room were big enough to invite all of you over to talk about marriage and the good things God has planned for you and your spouse.

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But since there would be some logistical issues with that, we'd like to invite you to join us on the pages of this study instead.

May the Lord bless you as you grow deeper in your marriage and strengthen your bond with the teammate God has given you.

Tony and Lauren Dungy

Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

SESSION 1:
AN UNCOMMON
FOUNDATION



BEFORE YOUR FIRST SESSION

Read chapters 1–3 of *Uncommon Marriage*; find a wedding photo to share with the group.

GETTING STARTED

Where It All Began

If possible, bring a wedding photo to your first session. Allow time for everyone to share their photos, and then discuss the following questions.

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What was the biggest disaster or something that didn't go as planned on your wedding day?

What is a special memory from your wedding?

BUILDING AN UNCOMMON MARRIAGE

Making Decisions Together

Practically from the moment they say “I do,” every couple is faced with the daunting task of merging two sets of opinions into one unified decision. Where will we live? How will we spend our vacations? How often will we see family? Which way will we hang the toilet-paper roll? Some decisions are life changing; others are mundane, but whatever the issue, being able to communicate well when making decisions together is essential to having a healthy marriage.

Tony says, “Early on, we learned to ask God for two things when praying about decisions: first, that He would give us His infinite wisdom and direction, and second, that He would put us on the same page. Over the years, we’ve come to realize that when we are frustrated with each other, it’s because we haven’t spent enough time praying or communicating about spiritual matters to understand each other’s heart on something” (ch. 2).

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1. When you're facing a big decision, how do you usually go about making it? Are you an internal processor, or would you rather talk through everything? Are there certain people you go to for input or advice? Do you rely on your gut feeling? Do you make a list of pros and cons?
2. How does your decision-making style differ from your spouse's? How have you learned to work together with your different wirings?

3. When Tony and Lauren were seeking God's will about whether they should move to one of the big-city teams or to the Kansas City Chiefs, there was no "booming voice from the sky" clearly telling them which way to go. Ultimately, though, they sensed that Kansas City was the right fit for their family. Do you and your spouse seek God's will in your decision making? If so, what does that look like? What are some ways you might be more intentional about doing that?

Dealing with Change

The Dungys experience a number of significant transitions in these first three chapters, including bringing foster children into their home, having two children of their own, starting a new job, and making a major move away from family. Some changes in marriage are anticipated and planned, while others come as a surprise and may be entirely beyond our control. Either way, change can rock a relationship, prompting a couple to either drift apart or lean in toward each other.

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Sometimes a major life change can happen in a single moment. This was the case for the Dungys when Tony announced he was thinking of leaving the Steelers after being asked to take a demotion. Lauren says, “It was painful, even though Tony pointed out that this might be the Lord’s way of moving us along. That didn’t make it any easier. And, by the way, where was He moving us? We had no idea” (ch. 3).

4. What significant changes have you faced since you’ve been together?

5. In what ways have those changes drawn you closer together? In what ways have they threatened to pull you apart?

Making Sacrifices

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis describes love as “a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by [in Christian marriages] the grace which both partners ask, and receive, from God.”* Early in their relationship, Lauren and Tony realized that marriage isn’t just about feelings; it’s about the decisions a couple make to remain unified and committed to each other even when they don’t necessarily feel like it.

When it came time to move away from Pittsburgh, Lauren and Tony both made sacrifices for the greater good of the family. Lauren chose to support her husband even when it meant moving away from her family, friends, and church home: “I was crying and very emotional, but I told Tony I would support him either way. If he wanted to look for another job, I didn’t mind moving. That was the sacrifice you made for life in football. I was in it with him” (ch. 3). Tony, too, made sacrifices by putting his family ahead of his career. Joining the staff of the San Francisco 49ers would have been a good career move, but he chose what was best for his children instead: “[The 49ers] wanted me to coach offense, which would have broadened my horizons professionally. Yet the team’s location, a big city

* Sources for quotations from anyone other than the Dungys are provided on page 107.

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on the West Coast, didn't seem right to me because of where we were as a young family" (ch. 3).

6. What are some of the sacrifices—big or small—that you've made for your spouse or for your family?

7. What couple do you admire for the godly sacrifices they've made for each other or for their children? What is the most significant lesson you've learned from them?

Building a Spiritual Foundation

The Dungys talk about the importance of establishing a healthy spiritual foundation as a couple. Many of the habits they formed at the beginning of their relationship, such as going to church together, praying together, connecting spiritually, and seeking God's wisdom, are patterns they have hung on to throughout their marriage. These routines have endured as they've entered new life stages and faced difficult seasons.

Whether you're nearing your wedding day or you've been married for a while, it's never too late to be intentional about incorporating habits like these into your relationship.

8. Tony says, "If I had to name the number one thing that got our marriage off to a great start, it was finding the right church home. It provided a solid foundation for us as a newlywed couple" (ch. 2). How important do you think finding a church home is to building a foundation in marriage?

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9. In this season of your life, what qualities must a church have to be the right fit for your family—to be a true “church home”?
10. Tony and Lauren emphasize the importance of having a strong vertical relationship (with the Lord) and a strong horizontal relationship (with each other): “We established the habit of spending time talking about God—and to God—together” (ch. 2). What are some ways you’ve seen other couples you respect connect spiritually?

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11. What habits have you established as a couple to connect spiritually? What are some habits you'd like to incorporate more regularly into your marriage?

Keep in mind that there isn't one right formula for this. The way you connect with each other and with God may look different from the way other couples connect, and the specifics may differ depending on your season of life and unique circumstances. Don't feel pressure to fit into a certain mold; the important thing is to be intentional about nurturing your spiritual bond as a vital part of your relationship.

LOOKING AT GOD'S WORD

Read these Scripture passages and discuss what they mean to you.

Making Decisions Together

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart;
do not depend on your own understanding.*

*Seek his will in all you do,
and he will show you which path to take.*

PROVERBS 3:5-6

*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear
a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."*

ISAIAH 30:21, NIV

What do you think it means to seek God's will and "not depend on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5)? What are some ways you might be more intentional about doing that?

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The Bible tells us that God's voice is real and will guide us as we walk through life (Isaiah 30:21, NIV). What are some of the ways you have heard God's voice in your life?

Dealing with Change

*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.
You rule throughout all generations.*

*The LORD always keeps his promises;
he is gracious in all he does.*

PSALM 145:13

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

HEBREWS 13:8

Though change can rock our lives, the Lord and His love are the same “yesterday, today, and forever”

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(Hebrews 13:8). How could this perspective affect the way you and your spouse respond to change as a couple?

Making Sacrifices

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

JOHN 15:13

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

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The Bible instructs us to think of “others as better than [ourselves]” and to “take an interest in others, too” (Philippians 2:3-4). How do you demonstrate that you think well of and take an interest in your spouse?

Practically speaking, how might you implement other principles from the Scripture passages in this section in your marriage and family life?

Building a Spiritual Foundation

You must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up.

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7

Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

EPHESIANS 3:17

An important part of building a spiritual foundation is committing yourself wholeheartedly to God's commands (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). What do you think it would look like for you and your spouse to do this?

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In Ephesians, Paul says that when Christ enters our hearts, our roots “grow down into God’s love” and keep us strong (3:17). Why do you think it’s so important to have a strong spiritual foundation together as a couple?

WRAPPING UP

What’s one takeaway from this session you would like to focus on as a couple or as a family in the week ahead?

How can the rest of the group pray for you?

ON YOUR OWN

(To be completed after the session.)

Set aside some time to spend as a couple in the week ahead. Try to find about fifteen minutes away from other distractions to apply what you learned in this session to your relationship.

- * Is there something you would like to start doing to connect with each other spiritually (praying together, reading the Bible together, attending a Bible class, talking about spiritual things, etc.)? What might it look like to build this habit into your life?

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- * If you haven't found a church home, make a list of the things you're looking for in a church and then plan how you will find the right one. (You might start by talking to friends for suggestions and looking online for churches in your area.)
- * If you already have a church home, are there ways you'd like to plug in more and make connections? Are there ways you could be using your gifts there? How could you be intentional about building authentic community?
- * Spend some time praying together. Ask God to give you wisdom as you make decisions, to help you build a strong foundation for your marriage, to trust Him in the midst of life changes, and to cultivate a relationship marked by selflessness.