

# HANDLE WITH CARE

Emotions, Finance, Sexuality

LEADER'S GUIDE

FOCUS<sup>®</sup>  
ON THE  
FAMILY



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
Carol Stream, Illinois

*Essentials of Marriage: Handle with Care*  
*Leader's Guide*

Copyright © 2009 by Focus on the Family  
All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

Focus on the Family and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, CO 80995.

A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

*TYNDALE* is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Tyndale's quill logo is a trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior permission of Focus on the Family.

Cover design by Jessie McGrath

Cover image (top) copyright © by Tarek El Sombati/iStockphoto. All rights reserved.

Cover photo of bride and groom copyright © by Image Source Photography/Veer.  
All rights reserved.

Cover photo of couple holding boxes copyright © by George Doyle/Getty Images.  
All rights reserved.

Cover photo of couple near fire copyright © by Corbis Photography/Veer. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-58997-581-1

Printed in the United States of America  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 / 15 14 13 12 11 10 09

# CONTENTS

Welcome! .....	v
1 One Step at a Time .....	1
2 Great Sex in a Godly Marriage (Part 1) .....	11
3 Great Sex in a Godly Marriage (Part 2) .....	23
4 Expressing Your Anger the Right Way .....	33
5 Dealing with Depression Together .....	45
6 The Wonderful World of Finances .....	57
About Our DVD Presenters .....	69

# 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

# ONE STEP AT A TIME

In this DVD segment, Drs. John Trent and Greg Smalley present a little idea that gets big results: improving your marriage a step at a time instead of trying to leap the Grand Canyon in a single bound.

Small changes are doable—and they work. In fact, it's the little things that often make the difference between couples who do well and those who struggle. Making minor, frequent course corrections on your marital journey prevents panicky, wrenching attempts at change later. And when it comes to changing your spouse, keep your expectations small, too.

### Session Aim

To help group members improve their marriages by making small, relatively easy “course corrections” instead of insisting on major, more difficult changes that are less likely to happen.

### Setting the Stage

- Read this session plan and Chapter 1 in the Participant's Guide.
- Provide pencils or pens.
- Bring a team prize if you want to award one for the contest in Step 1.
- Cue up the DVD to segment 1, “One Step at a Time.”

## 1. GETTING TOGETHER

### Optional Icebreaker

(5 minutes)

Here's a fun way to get started—and introduce the subject at the same time.

Form teams; give each team a piece of paper and pen or pencil. Give instructions along the following lines.

**On your paper, please write this nursery rhyme:**

**“Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water;**

**Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after.”**

**Now here's your challenge. Change these two phrases in the poem: “fetch a pail of water” and “Jill came tumbling after.” The result has to rhyme. The team that most radically alters the meaning of this story by changing those phrases wins. You've got two minutes! Go!**

When teams have made their changes, have them share their masterpieces with the group. If you like, award a prize for the most altered (or the funniest).

Here are examples of what you might hear:

“Jack and Jill went up the hill to wallow in self-pity;

Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill did sue the city.”

“Jack and Jill went up the hill to catch a mess of fishes;

Jack fell down and broke his crown, fulfilling all Jill's wishes.”

On the other hand, some teams may have been stymied. Ask all of them: **Was it easy or hard to make these changes? Why?**

**If I'd asked you to change just one word, which one would you have chosen? Why?**

Note that making major changes—in nursery rhymes or in marriage—can be tough. But even small changes can make a big difference. That's what this session is about.

## 2. FINDING YOURSELF

### Identifying Your Needs

(5-10 minutes)

Have group members turn to the “Finding Yourself” section in the Participant's Guide.

Here's a questionnaire to get you thinking about whether you'd like to improve your marriage. Give people a couple of minutes to fill it out individually. Then give volunteers the chance to share a few of their answers.

1. Before you were married, which of the following did you agree with?

Which do you agree with now?

- "You can't change your spouse."
- "Once we're married, he [or she] will change."
- "I'll get used to him [or her]."
- "I wouldn't change a thing."
- "If things don't change, I'll go crazy."

2. When it comes to changing your spouse's behavior, which of the following have you tried? What were the results?

- nagging
- prayer
- an extreme makeover
- counseling
- brain surgery
- recommending a book
- setting a good example
- bribery
- other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Let's say your spouse has a habit of leaving dirty clothes on the floor.

Which of the following describes your most likely response?

- resentful silence
- yelling, "Why don't you stop leaving dirty clothes on the floor?"
- picking up the clothes and being thankful that he or she isn't dead or having an affair
- starting small by asking him or her to pick up just the socks
- declaring a zero tolerance policy on all dirty laundry
- other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Would you rather lose one pound a week for six months, or a pound a day for a month? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Would you rather try to quadruple your savings account in 40 days or 40 years? Why?** \_\_\_\_\_
6. **What might the two previous questions have to do with the process of improving your marriage?** \_\_\_\_\_

Most of these are opinion questions, of course, and answers will vary. After hearing replies to the last question, though, you may want to add comments like the following.

**Whether we're talking about losing weight or making money, it's usually easier to make changes slowly and in small steps rather than trying to "build Rome in a day." That's true of marriage, too. In our DVD presentation, Dr. John Trent and Dr. Greg Smalley have some practical things to say about that.**

### 3. CATCHING THE VISION

#### Watching and Discussing the DVD

*(20-25 minutes)*

After viewing the DVD, use questions like these to help couples think through what they saw and heard. To save time, you may want to ask the questions directly rather than having group members write answers in their Participant's Guides and share them.

1. **Do small changes or big ones work best when you're trying to do the following? Why?**
- **turn up the volume on a car radio**
  - **color your hair**
  - **add salt to soup**
  - **be more honest with your spouse**

(Answers may vary, but the first three of these adjustments generally are best made in small increments so that they aren't overdone. And a spouse who isn't used to being candid could overcompensate by "letting it all out" in the name of honesty, regardless of its effect on his or her mate.)

- 2. How was Dr. John Trent's near-accident like some people's approach to married life? How might one or both spouses be "asleep at the wheel"? What kinds of things wake them up?**

(Some spouses are on "autopilot," paying little attention to the way their relationships may be drifting. Often it takes a crisis—a mate who wants a separation, for instance—to sound the alarm.)

- 3. In each of the following cases, what small course corrections might help? What overcorrections might be too much?**

- **You want your spouse to help more with household chores.**
- **Your spouse thinks you spend too much time with your parents.**
- **You read in a book that husbands and wives should pray together daily, and you've never done it once.**
- **Your spouse says he or she would like "more physical affection."**

(Small changes could include adding one chore a month for the next three months to a mate's "to do" list; asking that a spouse have lunch with you once a week instead of with his or her mother; starting with *silent* prayer together; agreeing to have a hug and kiss each morning when leaving for work. Overcorrections might include demands that a spouse make "reparations" by taking on all the chores, or being responsible for chores he or she needs time to learn how to do; prohibitions on a spouse spending *any* time with parents; a new rule requiring daily prayer; pressure to double the frequency of sex.)

- 4. How did John Trent solve his "pointing problem"? Would you use his pay-a-fine strategy in the following situations? If not, why not? If so, what would the fine be?**

- **You keep forgetting to empty the cat litter box, leaving your spouse to take care of it.**
- **Your spouse wants you to talk more.**
- **Your spouse wants you to talk less.**
- **You're usually late getting ready when you're supposed to go out for the evening.**

(John Trent imposed a fine on himself, enforced by his family. Opinions will vary on whether that strategy would work with most marital problems. A

spouse who wants to be held accountable might benefit; using a penalty to get a spouse to talk less or more, however, probably wouldn't address the real issues behind a lack or excess of communication.)

**5. Why did John Trent and his wife pay a babysitter and go to the food court once a week? Would that be a 2-degree change for you, a 45-degree change, or a 180-degree change? What might make a change like that worth it?**

(The Trents needed time together. Answers to the other questions will vary; some couples may be willing to pay anything to get out of the house, while others may lack the resources to pay a sitter. This may be an opportunity for your group to consider trading child-care services.)

**6. How is trying to get your spouse to change like pushing a rope? Which of the following do you think John Trent means when he suggests walking in the right direction while holding on to the rope?**

- being a good example to your spouse and encouraging any progress
- telling your spouse where to go and controlling him or her
- staying in step together and keeping your spouse close
- other \_\_\_\_\_

(The will to change comes from within. When a spouse is ready to change, he or she needs encouragement and a model [the first and third choices], not commands and controls.)

**7. Have you ever tried to make a change that was “too big”? If so, what happened? Why might one small change lead to another?**

(Group members may recall anything from a home remodeling project to an effort to give up TV for a year. Since a small change is more likely to be successful than a radical one, the positive result can encourage a spouse to try additional changes.)

**8. How would you answer someone who says, “My marriage needs big changes, not small ones”?**

(Opinions will vary; you might point out that a series of slight course corrections can get you closer to your goal than a grand plan that's too demanding to follow.)

## 4. DIGGING DEEPER

### Bible Study

(10 minutes)

Depending on the priorities of your group and the time available, have volunteers read some or all of these Bible passages and discuss the questions that follow them.

*A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. . . .*

*David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."*

*Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth."*

*But David said to Saul . . . "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."*

*Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."*

*Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.*

*"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. . . .*

*As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.*

*So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. (1 Samuel 17:4, 32-34, 37-40, 48-50)*

#### 1. How did small things make a big difference in this story?

(Five stones and a sling did what an army couldn't.)

**2. What did Saul assume about the best way to change the situation? How might that attitude lead to discouragement?**

(Saul probably wanted to fight fire with fire—a champion who was as intimidating as Goliath. When we assume that serious problems require massive resources we don't have, it can convince us to give up.)

**3. What was the real reason for David's success?**

(God's help.)

**4. How could this story serve as a pattern for changing things in a marriage?**

(David's attitude made all the difference. He used what was at hand, including his faith, and took a step in the right direction.)

*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

*By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."*

*But he answered, "You give them something to eat."*

*They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"*

*"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."*

*When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."*

*Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand. (Mark 6:34-44)*

**5. How did small things make a big difference in this story?**

(A boy's lunch became a meal for thousands.)

**6. What did the disciples assume about the best way to change the situation?**

(They figured a huge—and unavailable—supply of food was needed.)

**7. What was the real reason why Jesus' approach worked?**

(The boy gave what he could; divine power did the rest.)

**8. How could this story serve as a pattern for changing things in a marriage?**

(Instead of assuming we “can’t get there from here,” we can surrender what we have to God and see what He’ll do with it.)

*He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”*

*He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” (Matthew 13:31-33)*

**9. Why do you suppose God seems to like using small things in big ways?**

(It gives us a reason to credit Him instead of the resources He provides; it may be an expression of His creativity or even His sense of humor.)

**10. What’s one small thing you think He’s used to improve your marriage?**

(Answers might include a habit or tradition couples have formed, such as praying for each other during the day, leaving love notes on the refrigerator, or sponsoring a needy child in another country. Spouses might also cite a problem that’s taught them patience or teamwork, like an illness, financial loss, or personality conflict.)


**5. MAKING IT WORK**
**Applying the Principles**

*(10 minutes)*

Have the group turn to the “Making It Work” section in the Participant’s Guide. Allow at least five minutes for people to work through the “flight plan” exercise as couples or individuals.