



Celebrate Love

*Your words of love
are sweet nectar to
your beloved.*

*Pour love words
unto thine heart and
Celebrate your love
in the Lord*

Psalms 119

‘Celebrate Love’

This resource was originally compiled and prepared by Eleanor and Raymond Roy of ME 132 Weekend. The original 6 sessions were conducted during the Love Circle Sessions of the ME 132 Weekend members and was found to be helpful for the growth in spousal relationship of married couples.

Love Circle Link Service Team has modified this resource for the use of today’s Love Circles. We are deeply grateful for their inspiring contribution.

Hope your Love Circle will benefit from this added resource.

Love,

Love Circle Link Service Team.

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The purpose of this session is to focus on our gifts as individuals and as a couple and see how we are making use of the gifts which God has given us.

Resources needed:

A lit candle, copies of the text "GIFTS", dialogue books or writing paper and pens

1 WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER

(Leader may use this prayer or use own prayer)

Dear Lord

As we come into your presence, we give you thanks for bringing us all here again this evening. Thank you for making it possible for us to want to be in fellowship and to learn and share with one another. Help us make these 2 hours most fruitful and beneficial for our growth in love. We pray for openness and sincerity in sharing our love and our lives, always remembering that sharing is a gift.

We also think of those who are not here with us this evening. We ask you Lord to specially keep them safe in your love and that they will be able to join us at our next Love Circle. We offer up to you this precious meeting, our presence and our time as gifts to you, Lord. We pray in your Holy Name, AMEN

2 INTRODUCTION

(Pass round the Handout on GIFTS – one per person)

Tonight, we focus on the many gifts God has given us. To help us do that we're going to read you an article extracted from the ME USA Magazine. This article is about a little girl growing into a woman. At every point in her life, she was endowed with God-given talents and gifts to live her life meaningfully.

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3 INPUT - AN ARTICLE ON GIFTS

Read the text on “Gifts”. Read it slowly so that the group members can digest the words. You may invite different voices to read the different paragraphs.

4 PRE-SHARING ACTIVITY

This is an exercise on Affirmation where we learn to accept the gifts we see in ourselves and the gifts others see in us.

1 IDENTIFYING OUR GIFTS

To help us identify our gifts, let us reflect on this question:

Qn What specifically are the special gifts God has blessed me with?

- Personal reflection

Invite couples to draw a line down the centre of their paper. On the left hand side, they make a list of their special gifts. On the right hand side, they make a list of their spouse’s special gifts.

- Couple verbal dialogue

Husband & wife exchange lists and talk about the gifts they see in one another. They add on to their list the gifts which they have missed out.

- Group sharing (can be skipped if time does not permit)

As couples share their list the others may add on to their own list and to the sharing couple’s list.

2 SHARING OUR GIFTS WITH OTHERS

Understanding what our gifts are, we turn to the larger community with this reflection question:

Qn Which of these gifts do I share with others?

How do/did the gifts benefit them? (Preferably recall specific incidences.)

How do I feel sharing these gifts?

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5 SHARING QUESTIONS

Couple Dialogue: Gifts which we keep to ourselves

Couples write their response to this question in the form of a love-letter to their spouse. Then share as a couple before sharing in the big group.

- Personal reflection and writing (10 mins)
- Couple dialogue (10 mins)
- Group Sharing (2 – 4 mins per person depending on size of group)

(Leader must take note that when sharing, there should be no interruptions or remarks from the others. When sharing goes out of focus, leader must re-direct to the question. There should also be no discussions in the midst of the sharing. Be sensitive and do it with tender loving care. At the end of sharing, the leader needs to sum up and re-emphasize the focus for the evening.)

Qn Share one gift I have hidden from others or which I protect and keep to myself like a child who doesn't want to share his/her toy? How has this impacted our spousal relationship? How can I do better? (Focus on how I can do better)

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

These questions may be used for couple dialogue at home or for group sharing if there is time.

Q One gift I would like to ask the Lord to give to me at this time of my life is..... How does my answer make me feel?

Q One gift I would like to ask the Lord to give to my spouse at this time of his/her life is..... How does my answer make me feel?

6 ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEXT MEETING

Make the announcements about the ME Community, if any, and also about the Love Circle. Check with the group about the next meeting – date, time, venue and programme topic.

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7 CLOSING SONG/PRAYER

Leader can invite the host or anyone else to say the closing prayer, giving thanks to God for the gift of time and sharing for the evening. Remember to pray for any couples in the group in need of prayers, for the ME community and for the growth of their Love Circle in this journey of LOVE.

The leader can conclude with a Hail Mary or Our Father and finally the ME song, "There's a new world somewhere."

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GIFTS

Once upon a time, God gave the gift of life to a tiny baby girl. And He said, “I’m going to give this baby girl much. I’m going to give her a big smile and lot’s of enthusiasm, and the ability to dream. I’m going to give this baby girl the gift of insight and the gift of writing so she can share the gift of insight with others.” And He gave this baby girl’s parents much grace in their Sacramental Marriage, and they became wonderful role models for her. And after a while, He gave this baby girl the gift of younger brothers and sisters to teach her to share, and even a special brother to help her develop patience and tolerance. And as this baby girl grew, He gave her many opportunities to develop leadership skills, as she helped care for others when it was necessary for her mom to work outside the home. God gave this growing girl the people skills she would need to make new friends as she moved from city to city. And as the girl grew, she wondered what she would be when she grew up, and searched for the purpose of her existence.

And as the child became a woman, God gave her challenges along the way. He threw stones in her path, and gave her a winding, sometimes difficult road to follow. And this winding road took her into many unknown lands, and exposed her to many lifestyles and enabled her to incorporate into herself all those with whom she came into contact. And this young woman grew into a woman who encompassed so many traits of those people she met along the way, that new people were often attracted to her. God gave to her the gift of empathy, and she learned how to relate to people; and they began to relate to her as they saw a little of themselves in her. But the winding, tortuous road didn’t seem to be leading anywhere, and the young woman wondered to what end she was travelling. Yet every time the woman stumbled, or took a wrong turn, God was always there to pick her up and set her on the right course, whenever she asked for His help.

And then one day, God gave her a very special gift. He gave her a man who would love her more than anyone on the earth ever had. He gave her a man who was sensitive and caring and intelligent. A man who shared the same values. A man who had been given many of the same gifts she had. A man who would share with her the vocation to which she was called. And the woman accepted God’s

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gift, hesitantly at first, but then with joy and wonder that God so loved her as to give her the finest gift of all! And inside this very special gift were many hidden challenges that, though they weren't recognised as gifts at first, bore much fruit as she became strong and wiser from the challenge-gifts she accepted.

But still the woman searched. Still the woman felt restless and incomplete. She really believed there was something she was supposed to do; a purpose to her life that she just couldn't put her finger on. But God was not yet finished preparing her for His work. And He moved her again, and He put her in a parish that needed the special gifts she had to offer. But still He was not ready to call His cards. He gave her the gift of treasure, so that she could meet and relate to the more affluent people in her area. He sent her out into that community and exposed her to more materialistic world than the one she knew, so that someday she could deliver a message to them, and they would believe her because she was one of them. And just as she was finding herself beginning to drown, drifting in a sea of worldly possessions, God decided she was ready.

And He gave her the gift that would change not only her life, but the lives of everyone with whom she came into contact. He gave her the gift of the Weekend.

And God spoke to her and said, 'Woman, I have given you many gifts in your lifetime. I have given you a bright smile, and a friendly manner, and especially the gift of empathy. These gifts have brought you many relationships and nourished your need to love and be loved. I have given you enthusiasm and energy that has opened many doors for you and nourished your need to belong. I have given you the ability to dream and your perseverance in pursuit of those dreams has nourished your need for self-worth. I have given you the gift of insight and communication to share yourself openly with others, and that has helped nourish your need to be loved for who you are. All these gifts I have given you because I love you. And I have but one request of you in return, woman. Love one another as I have loved you. Keep not these gifts to yourself, but share them with the world. Then I will know that my gifts have been utilized to their fullest potential.

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AND THE WOMAN KNEW WHAT SHE HAD TO DO!

2. Theme: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

This session is intended for couples to reflect on their goal/mission in life and to see if their lifestyle is in line with their ultimate goal. The desired outcome is that the couples are motivated to make changes to their relationship their top priority.

Resources needed:

A lit candle, dialogue books or writing paper and pens

1 OPENING SONG/PRAYER

An appropriate song and prayer may be led by couple hosting the LC meeting

2 INTRODUCTION

Our topic for tonight is “Begin with the end in mind” This means to start with a clear understanding of our destination - to know where we are going so that we can better understand where we are now. This helps ensure that the steps we take are always in the right direction.

In the context of our life, we must begin with the picture of the end of our life as our frame of reference, the criterion by which everything else is examined. Each part of our life, everything we say or do - today, tomorrow, next week, or next month - can be examined in the context of what really matters most to us. By keeping that end clearly in mind, we can make certain that whatever we do, on any particular day, is true to our quest. At our ME Weekend they played the song “*The Impossible Dream*”. These 4 lines from the song sum up very well why it is so important for us to have a clear idea of our quest.

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“And I know if I’ll only be true

To this glorious quest

That my heart will lie peaceful and calm

When I’m laid to my rest.”

At the end of my life, when I am laid to my rest, I would like to lie peaceful and calm in the knowledge that I have been true to my quest - that I have lived my life in the way I wanted - no regrets, no hindsight that I should have lived my life any other way. But what is my quest? What do I want to do with my life? Is it to be respected and remembered as a successful professional or business man, a multi-millionaire by 40, or honoured as a public figure or a very active church worker - a pillar of the church. Or do I want to be remembered as a devoted husband and father, as someone who always had time for others, a person who loved people and dedicated to helping people? What is it?

3 EXERCISE

This exercise is adapted from an exercise in the book “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” by Stephen Covey.

To help us discover our quest in life, we have an exercise for you. Make yourselves comfortable and relaxed. Clear your mind of everything except what I will invite you to do.

First I would like you to imagine, to see in your mind’s eye, see yourself going to the funeral of a loved one. Picture yourself arriving at the church - parking your car and now you’re just getting out. You’ve arrived a little late after the casket has been carefully arranged near the altar. As you walk into the church, you hear soft organ music. You see the flowers and wreaths. You see the faces of friends and relatives as you walk up the aisle, and you feel their sorrow of losing, and at the same time the joy of having known the deceased. You feel this radiating from the hearts of the people. You walk down to the front, to the casket and look inside and suddenly you come face- to-face, with yourself. This is YOUR funeral, some years from today. All these people have come to honour you, to express feelings of love and appreciation for your life. You take a seat in the pew and look at the programme for the service. And you see that your spouse will speak about you. Now think deeply. What would you like him, or her, to say about you - the kind of husband and father, or wife and mother, you are. Also the kind of brother or sister, neighbour, colleague, disciple of Christ that you were. In each of these roles what kind of

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person would you like his, or her, words to reflect? What special qualities or character would you like them to have seen in you? What specific things you did that you would like them to remember. What difference would you like to have made in their lives?

Take a few minutes to reflect - to immerse yourself in this scene. Then write the speech, the eulogy, you would like your SPOUSE to deliver. It must be about your positive qualities and achievements. Write them all down even if you feel embarrassed and uncomfortable about saying it because it is not quite true, not something you have achieved so far. Remember it is what you would like said about yourself in the future, several years from now. So it may not necessarily be a reflection of your life so far. You still have time to make it true. Be sincerely honest. Write the text in a manner for it to be read out to friends who have come for your funeral service. Take your time to write your Eulogy. When you have finished, just wait patiently for all the others to finish. Do not share with your spouse just yet.

Personal Reflection & writing time

When all have finished read through the following:

Now read through what you have written and pick out the essence of what has been written. Condense it into a short phrase - something like an epitaph to be placed on your tombstone - a short phrase which would capture the essence of what you want to be remembered for. This will be the **mission statement** for your life.

Personal Reflection 2 - 3 mins

Share what you have written with your spouse. Then write down your thoughts and feelings as you read each other's speeches.

Couple Sharing 5 mins

Personal Reflection 5 mins

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4 SHARING QUESTION

- Q1 Ask couples to read out their Eulogy & Epitaph.
- Q2 Share their thoughts and feelings as they read what their spouse had written in his/her eulogy & epitaph.

5 DIALOGUE QUESTION

How do I feel realizing my mission in life?

In the light of what I have written, what changes do I want to make?

How does my answer make me feel?

Personal Reflection & Writing time 5 mins

Couple Sharing 5 mins

6 WRAP-UP

Most of us are extremely busy, caught up with work, household chores, family obligations, and for some of us parish work, often we have no time to think - to reflect on what really is important for us. At our ME Weekend, many of us realized we had not put enough priority on our relationship with our spouse and with God. Now tonight, we become even more aware of what we want to do with our lives. We become more aware of our quest, our mission. It could be a decision point. Is the way I am living my life right now consistent with what I want to be remembered for? If I wrote that I want to be remembered as a devoted husband and father, am I fully living out my life right now so that these words will be spoken? If I wanted to be remembered as a person who had time for people, then am I already making this a way of life NOW? The times I spend with my spouse and family, on my spiritual growth, and even on my involvement with the church, are these in line with my mission in life? What changes do I want to make so that at the end of my life that eulogy that I have written tonight can be delivered with deep feeling.

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7 ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEXT MEETING

8 CLOSING PRAYER/SONG

Host Couple may lead with an appropriate concluding song and prayer.

3. Theme: I COUNT AND YOU COUNT

This objective of today's session is to bring about the awareness that in order to have a **good marriage**, we need to **boost each other's self-worth**. The desired outcome is that the couples are motivated and resolved to work at **making their spouse feel important**.

Resources needed:

A lit candle, dialogue books or writing paper and pens

1 OPENING SONG/PRAYER

An appropriate song and prayer may be led by couple hosting the LC meeting

2 INTRODUCTION

Tonight we take a look at our source of self-worth - whether it is from within or outside our relationship and how this affects their relationship

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3 PRESENTATION

Read the following extract adapted from the book “*I count - You count*” by George Calden.

When we consider how we would like to feel about each other, the two words that most often come to mind are LOVE and RESPECT. They touch upon our needs:

- the need to feel likeable and good about myself,
- the need for self-worth,
- the need to feel that I count ~ that I matter.

I need to feel like a person, a somebody. I want to value and respect myself. I dislike feeling small and inadequate. Much of our lives is devoted to maintaining our feelings of self-worth and warding off feelings of inadequacy. We strive to win acceptance from others. We try to improve or hold on to our physical attractiveness. We struggle for success at work. We hope to measure up as good marriage partners. We want to be respected as parents. We are uniquely different people, but all of us share the need for self-worth. All of us strongly wish to feel I COUNT.

4 SHARING QUESTIONS

Read out the two sharing questions slowly for the couples to copy them in their dialogue books. Allow 5 minutes for personal reflection and writing and another 5 minutes for couple sharing. If time permits, couples may share with the Love Circle.

WHEN I FELT “I DO NOT COUNT”

Qn 1. Share a recent incident when you felt LESS important to your spouse than his or her

WHEN I FELT “I COUNT”

Qn 2 Share a recent incident when you felt MORE important to your spouse than his or her.....

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5 COUPLE DIALOGUE QUESTION

These dialogue questions are for husband and wife only. No group sharing.

Qn. What are some of the positive things I would like you to do to give me a greater feeling of “I COUNT”?

Qn. What are some of the positive things I can do to give you a greater feeling of “YOU COUNT”?

6 WRAP UP

In a good marriage, there is a high I COUNT and a high YOU COUNT feeling despite the usual disagreements and irritations. This is because when I feel worthwhile and likeable, I can more easily let you know that you are also a likeable and worthwhile person. In other words, when I feel I count, there is a good chance that I will help you to feel that you count also. I can afford to withdraw “reserves” from my COUNT BANK and deposit them in yours. Love between two people exits when their YOU COUNT feelings are as strong as their I COUNT feelings. When we do not let each other know that I COUNT and that YOU COUNT, love flies out of the window.

7 ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEXT MEETING

8 CLOSING PRAYER/SONG

Host Couple may lead with an appropriate concluding song and prayer.

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4.

Theme: INSECURITY

Resources needed:

A lit candle, copies of 'My Anxieties' (one per couple), dialogue books or writing paper and pens

1 OPENING SONG/PRAYER

An appropriate song and prayer may be led by couple hosting the LC meeting

2 INTRODUCTION

The theme for tonight's Love Circle is INSECURITY. This session calls for couples to be aware of their insecurities and needs. The session helps us to recognize our feelings of insecurity and our behaviour patterns when we feel insecure.

3 SCRIPTURE READING

PART 1: HOW CONFIDENT AM I OF MYSELF

The aim of these readings is to point out that great people experience feelings of insecurity, so we should not be ashamed or afraid to admit to these feelings.

Introduction :

God knows that insecurity is the most common suffering man experience. This is repeated many times in the Bible. In all instances, the teaching is "Do not fear, have trust in the Lord." A good example of what happens when we fear and have no trust is seen in Matthew 14: 22 - 33.

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First Reading:

When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were terrified. "It's a ghost" they said and screamed with fear. Jesus spoke to them at once. "Courage" he said "It is I. Don't be afraid."

Then Peter spoke up. "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you." "Come" answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. "Save me, Lord!" he cried. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?"

Reflection :

In this reading, we see Peter losing confidence in himself the minute he began to take notice of the wind. Quite probably his self worth was at stake. His thoughts could have been: " Why didn't I think of the wind? Why was I so stupid to try a stunt like that! Now what am I going to do?" We see him beginning to panic. Aren't we like that many times. We go head-along into something, a project perhaps, without thinking it completely through. We go merrily on our way until someone raises question or makes a comment. Then we become doubtful. We begin to wonder: "Am I doing the right thing? Will I fail? Have I thought over the matter thoroughly enough?" We may react to our doubts and fears by showing annoyance over the question or becoming defensive. Deep down we may be angry with ourselves for being slip shod, or reckless, or failing to see the problem. We begin to doubt our own capability, and we slowly sink in a whirlpool of our insecurity.

Second Reading :

The prophets too suffered from insecurity. For example, in Exodus 4: 10 - 13, when God spoke to Moses calling him to save the Israelites Moses replied, "No Lord, don't send me. I have never been a good speaker, and I haven't become one since you began to speak to me. I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant." The Lord then said to Moses, "Who gives man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? It is I, the Lord. Now go! I will help you to speak, and I will tell you what to say." But Moses answered, "No Lord, please send someone else."

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Reflection:

Many of us are like Moses in this respect. When we are called to do something, or to take up a position we tend to think that we are not good enough, and that someone else can do the job better. We do not have confidence in ourselves. We allow our poor self worth to prevent us from doing many things.

SHARING QUESTION

Qn. Share a time when I had no confidence in myself or when I had lost confidence in myself.

4 INPUT

PART 2: PRESENTATION

Allow a couple to read 'My Anxieties' as an input.

The aim of this article is to get the couples thinking more about insecurity and how our unmet needs give rise to our feelings of insecurity. The main point to get across is that we should be aware of our insecurities and not run away from them.

5 DIALOGUE QUESTION

Qn. One area of my relationship with my spouse I am anxious about is.....

What am I willing to do to overcome this anxiety? How does my answer make me feel? (HDMAMMF?)

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6 WRAP-UP

Life without insecurity is impossible. Neither is it an ideal way of life. What is important is not how to eliminate our insecurity, but how we see it and face it, and grow as a person because of it. Insecurity can bear good results. For example, through our insecurity many people turn to God and are strengthened by him. Insecurity should be viewed as an invitation to growth. Sharing our insecurities with our spouse helps us to grow in relationship with each other. It makes us more open as a person. This helps our spouse to get to know us better. This will lead us to greater love and understanding of each other.

7 ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEXT MEETING

8 CLOSING PRAYER/SONG

Host Couple may lead with an appropriate concluding song and prayer.

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MY ANXIETIES

We all experience insecurity sometime or other. Our fast pace of life and the keen competition we feel among people make us push ourselves to succeed in life. Two common worries among many people are job and financial stabilities. Those among us who have taken loans to buy a house, or to start a business, may have experienced feelings of insecurity about this. For example, we worry whether we can meet the payments for the loan without having to make too many sacrifices on our standard of living. Occasionally we may experience fears arising from thoughts such as “What if I lose my job, get retrenched, meet an accident or fall ill!” These fears become even more acute when someone we know loses a job or dies suddenly. When the property or stock market falls, we worry about our losses. Parents worry about their children - how they are doing in school, the friends they mix with, what of their future?

At a deeper level, there is mental insecurity. We are constantly haunted by questions such as: “Am I leading a worthy life? What do people think of me? How do they see me? We all want to draw attention from others. We want to be praised, to be loved and to succeed. We are sensitive to criticism. We tend to compare ourselves with others. We think others are more gifted, or luckier. We want more and more. These feelings of insecurity are normally experienced by almost everyone. What is important is that we are aware of our feelings of insecurity, and that we do not run away from them.

Our feelings of insecurity tell us something about ourselves. We should view them as warning signs that one of our needs is not met. Perhaps we don't feel loved, or our self-worth is affected. For example, in a situation when one's life gets habitual and stops growing, when husband and wife take each other for granted, a feeling of discontent soon creeps in. It stems from the feeling of being unimportant and unloved. When we begin to think we are unimportant, our self confidence goes. We become afraid and unsure of ourselves. When caught with such insecure feelings, we tend to become a closed person. A good example of this situation is: Here is a guy whose self-worth is at stake. At a meeting, many suggestions are offered to improve a situation. However, because he is afraid to show that he does not know, that he does not have the answer or the situation under control, he shuts his mind to all these situations. He sees them more as criticisms than as suggestions, and then he comes out defensive and unlistening. In the process he causes much unhappiness. Likewise our spouse and children are greatly affected when we are unhappy and discontented as a result of our insecure feelings.

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The intent of this programme is for the women to be aware of the simple ways they erode their husbands confidence, and for the men to be aware of their feelings and response to their wives behaviour. Hopefully, couples understand themselves and spouse better, make positive changes in behaviour and grow in their relationship.

Resources needed:

A lit candle, Copies of 'Knight in Shining Armour', dialogue books or writing paper and pens

1 OPENING SONG/PRAYER

An appropriate song and prayer may be led by couple hosting the LC meeting

2 INTRODUCTION

Tonight's programme is based on a funny story taken from the book "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus" by Dr John Gray. It's an interesting, easy-to-read book with many practical suggestions for improving communication & getting what you want in your relationships.

3 PRESENTATION

Hand out the story on the 'Knight in Shining Armour' (one per couple) and allow the couples to read silently.

(In the story even though it seems to be the princess throwing the nooses and poisons, in reality it could be either spouse especially in today's world where each partner is seen as equal).

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4 Dialogue Question

Choose one of the questions below and write a loving letter to your spouse.

Qn 1. In what ways do I throw nooses and poisons at my spouse which over time may undermine his confidence.

Consider

- (a) offering unsolicited advice
- (b) correcting his behaviour and telling him what to do
- (c) correcting or criticising his decision or initiative?

Now that I am aware of my behaviour how can I do better?

Qn 2. In what ways does my spouse throw nooses and poisons at me?

Consider

- (a) offering me unsolicited advice
- (b) correcting my behaviour and telling me what to do
- (c) correcting or criticising my decision or initiative?

What are my thoughts and feelings in these situations?

How do I behave in these situations?

Now that I am aware of my behaviour how can I do better?

Group sharing

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5 WRAP-UP

Men and women are very different and without an awareness of what is important for the opposite sex, they unknowingly turn off and hurt their partners. Women generally don't realize the ways they communicate that are unsupportive & hurtful to the male ego.

Deep inside every man there is a hero or a knight in shining armour. More than anything, he wants to succeed in serving and protecting the women he loves. When he feels trusted, he is able to tap into this noble part of himself. He becomes more caring. When he doesn't feel trusted he loses some of his aliveness and energy, and after a while he can stop caring. In today's context, the women can also be the knight in the story in certain domains such as child rearing or even career where they feel they do not need the nooses and the poisons.

7 ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEXT MEETING

8 CLOSING PRAYER/SONG

Host Couple may lead with an appropriate concluding song and prayer.

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Knight in Shining Armour

A knight in shining armour was travelling through the countryside. Suddenly he hears a woman crying out in distress. In an instant, he comes alive. Urging his horse to a gallop, he races to her castle where she is trapped by a dragon. The noble knight pulls out his sword and slays the dragon. As a result, he is lovingly received by the princess.

As the gates open, he is welcomed and celebrated by the family of the princess and the townspeople. He is invited to live in the town and is acknowledged a hero. He and the princess fall in love.

A month later, the noble knight goes off on another trip. On his way back, he hears his beloved princess crying out for help. Another dragon has attacked the castle. When the knight arrives, he pulls out his sword to slay the dragon. Before he swings, the princess cries out from the tower, "Don't use your sword, use the noose. It will work better." She throws him the noose and motions to him instructions about how to use it. He hesitantly follows her instructions. He wraps it round the dragon's neck and then pulls hard. The dragon dies and everyone rejoices.

At the celebration dinner, the knight feels he didn't really do anything. Somehow, because he used her noose and didn't use his sword, he doesn't quite feel worthy of the town's trust and admiration. After the event, he is slightly depressed and forgets to shine his armour.

A month later he goes on yet another trip. As he leaves with his sword, the princess reminds him to be careful and tells him to take the noose. On his way home, he sees yet another dragon attacking the castle. This time he rushes forward with his sword but hesitates, thinking maybe he should use the noose. In that moment of hesitation, the dragon breathes fire and burns his right arm. In confusion he looks up and sees his princess waving from the castle window. "Use the poison," she yells. "The noose doesn't work." She throws him the poison, which he pours into the dragon's mouth, and the dragon dies. Everyone rejoices and celebrates, but the knight feels ashamed.

A month later, he goes on another trip. As he leaves with his sword, the princess reminds him to be careful, and to bring the noose and the poison. He is annoyed by her suggestions but brings them just in case. This time on his journey he hears another woman in distress. As he rushes to her call, his depression is lifted and he feels confident and alive. But as he draws his sword to slay the dragon, he again hesitates. He wonders, Should I use my sword, the noose or the poison? What would the princess say? For a moment he is confused. But then he remembers how he had felt before he knew the princess, back in the days when he only carried the sword. With a burst of confidence he throws off the noose and poison and charges the dragon with his trusted sword. He slays the dragon and the townspeople rejoice. The knight never returned to the princess. He stayed in the new village and lived happily ever after. He eventually married, but only after making sure his new partner knew nothing about nooses and poisons.

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This programme calls for couples to look at their relationship with their parents and in-laws, and to see how this relationship affects their lives as husband & wife. This is a very sensitive topic. It is one which may generate strong feelings

Resources needed:

A lit candle, Handouts A and B, dialogue books or writing paper and pens

1 OPENING SONG/PRAYER

An appropriate song and prayer may be led by couple hosting the LC meeting

2 INTRODUCTION

Tonight's topic is on parents and parents-in-law - our relationship with them and its effects on our lifestyles and relationship. For example, do your parents still treat you, or your spouse, like a child? What are your thoughts and feelings about this? Perhaps yours is the reverse case - your parents are overly dependent on you. How does this influence your life? For example, if your parents are staying with you, do you experience a lack of privacy, or do you experience greater freedom and peace of mind because they can look after your children? How does this affect your couple relationship?

Then there is the case of demanding parents or obligations to parents. For example, do you have to visit them, or bring them out x number of times a week or a month. How does this affect your life? Do you feel a loss of autonomy? Do you find it difficult to make plans for yourselves and your family? Does it put a strain on your finances? Do you find yourself in a situation where you have to take sides?

What about parents who are very independent - they don't bother you and you don't bother them? How does this kind of relationship affect your lives? How do you feel about

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the distance between you and your parents - between you and your in-laws - between your spouse and his/her parents - between your spouse and your parents?

In many ways, our parents influence our lives - it's just a matter of degrees. Even in death, they have an influence over our lives. How do you feel about the death of our parents? How has it, or how will it affect your life and your relationship with your spouse? For some, the death of a parent could be accompanied by deep feelings of loss, of rage, of guilt for not having done enough, of regret for not letting them feel you loved them, or perhaps of resentment towards your spouse as you judge him/her of not caring enough for your parents when they were alive.

3 SHARING QUESTIONS

Distribute Handouts A and B. (one per person) Allow the couples 5-10 minutes for personal reflection and writing and another 5 minutes for couple dialogue before the group sharing.

4 DIALOGUE QUESTION

Qn. In what ways do our parents (living or dead) influence our lives now in our relationship? How does my answer make me feel?

5 Wrap up

We best understand our spouses when we see him/her in the light of his/her relationship with his parents. As spouses we can choose to learn our spouse's childhood experiences, communication patterns as well as his personal preferences through the eyes of the in-laws. We can choose to be open and accepting, even making a decision to love and be loved by our in-laws. We can have attitudes of building unity and community. Let the words of Ruth who stayed with her mother-in-law Naomi inspire you:

"Do not ask me to abandon or forsake you! For wherever you lodge, I will lodge, your people shall be my people and your God my God. (Ruth 1: v 16-15

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HANDOUT A: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARENTS

Spend 5 minutes to write your response to the following. Share what you have written with your spouse when you have finished.

Q1 What are my thoughts and judgments about my relationship with my parents?

.....

.....

Q2 When I think about my relationship with my parents, I feel

.....

On a scale of 1- 10, the intensity of my feelings is

Q3 What do I see myself doing? How am I responding or reacting to my thoughts and feelings? What have I chosen not to do?

.....

.....

.....

Q4 Is my need for love and belonging met in this relationship?

Is my need for self-worth met in this relationship?

Is my need for autonomy met in this relationship?

Q5 What changes, if any, would I like to see in this relationship? How can I take responsibility to improve this relationship? What will I try to do?

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HANDOUT B: MY RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARENTS

Spend 5 minutes to write your response to the following. Share what you have written with your spouse when you have finished.

Q1 What are my thoughts and judgments about my relationship with your parents?

.....
.....

Q2 When I think about my relationship with your parents, I feel

.....

On a scale of 1- 10, the intensity of my feelings is

Q3 What do I see myself doing? How am I responding or reacting to my thoughts and feelings? What have I chosen not to do?

.....
.....
.....

Q4 Is my need for love and belonging met in this relationship?

Is my need for self-worth met in this relationship?

Is my need for autonomy met in this relationship?

Q5 What changes, if any, would I like to see in this relationship? How can I take responsibility to improve this relationship? What will I try to do?

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