

Becoming Your Spouse's Better Half

Why DIFFERENCES
MAKE *a Marriage* GREAT

by Rick Johnson



EIGHT-WEEK LEADER'S GUIDE

EIGHT-WEEK LEADER'S GUIDE



Thank you for volunteering to lead a study of *Becoming Your Spouse's Better Half*. By leading this study, you have made a big step toward improving your marriage, the marriages of every couple in your group—and eventually, the lives of many others whom they touch.

Many of the couples who purchase this book are desperately trying to understand how to make their marriage work. With today's 50 percent divorce rate, it's hard for the average couple to remain optimistic about their union. The good news? The book in your hands offers hope that it's possible for marriages to not only survive—but to thrive!

As you prepare to dig in, you'll want to set the example, maintaining an uplifting attitude toward men and women at all times. (No gender bashing or airing dirty laundry.) It's ok to enjoy and laugh at some of our differences—and I encourage it—but the overall goal is to help husbands and wives understand and communicate better with each other. It's time to discover the unique and wonderful ways God created men and women—and then brought them together for his amazing purposes. Let's dig in!



PREPARATION

Begin with prayer.

Prayer is your most powerful tool—so make it a point to pray before you form a group, before each meeting, and during the week for each of the couples.

Develop relationships.

Remember to show love to each of your group members. I suggest contacting each couple in the group at least twice during the study to encourage and love them. You can do this by telephone, email, or in person. Consider offering refreshments at your meetings and planning a family potluck or a date night where you can practice together the things you've learned in the study.

Have a humble and caring attitude.

When someone answers a question, make an encouraging or affirming comment. Instead of using the word “should,” try “I *would* like to encourage you to . . .” Remember that some of your members may come from dysfunctional family backgrounds and the things you are discussing may be foreign to them. Men especially may be less likely to respond if they think they will be judged. You are discussing topics that lead to great vulnerability; handle with care!

Finally, have positive expectations that everyone in the group will be significantly impacted by what they experience through this study.



GROUP RULES: *Creating a Safe Environment*

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the most important rule. Shared personal information should not be taken outside the group, even under the pretext of asking someone outside the group to pray for group members. If someone attends the group without their spouse, they should not share with their mate what other group members have said, unless the spouse is a regular attendee.

Group Member Responsibilities

Everyone in the group must read the designated chapters each week. Remind group members that they will get out of the study only what they put into it. Additionally, each member should commit to attending at least 75 percent of the meetings. Some couples may need childcare, and you might consider providing this as a service through your church or consider hiring a few teenagers to provide childcare each week.

Group Dynamics

Since your meetings will be no more than two hours in length, consider keeping the group size to a minimum. I suggest no more than four to six couples. This leaves enough time for everyone to express something they would like to discuss from the reading. As leader, your challenge will be to make sure everyone is included and not let one specific individual dominate the discussion.

Finally, reach an agreement with group members that the purpose of this study is not to “fix” anyone (or any couple) or to serve as a counseling service. Keep advice general and refrain from giving advice to specific individuals. As you form your group, pray with couples from your church about inviting friends or neighbors of all faiths, beliefs, and cultures. This group will be a safe place for all to learn more about strengthening their marriages!



GROUP MEETINGS

The First Meeting

The first meeting serves as a “get acquainted” meeting. Make sure each group member has the book and has read the introduction, “Marriage is Tough,” before the meeting. Provide refreshments, keeping both the men and women in mind. (Men generally prefer Swedish meatballs over just fruit.) Then ask each couple to share about themselves as they are comfortable (children, family background, occupations). This also provides information for members to use to pray for each other over the course of the group.

I also encourage you to read the rules of the group aloud at the beginning of the first meeting, and then touch on them briefly throughout the study. For instance, you may want to remind the group several times that the information shared during meetings is confidential. Also, use a notepad in the initial meeting to write down the answers to the questions under “Week One.” Read the questions back as a learning exercise at your final meeting; group members might be surprised how their “felt needs” differed from their “actual needs.”

Finally, encourage every member or couple to keep a notebook of insights gleaned from the book, relationships, and group time. They should also designate a page in their notebook called “Prayer Requests.” At the end of each meeting, every participant should relate a prayer request for the coming week that the others can pray for. When you conclude next week’s meeting, review each person’s request from the preceding week. Then track the results to see how God is answering prayer and working in your lives.

General Meetings

Begin each meeting with a short prayer, asking a different couple to lead the prayer each week. (If they say “no thanks,” say ok and lead the prayer yourself.) Nothing creates greater intimacy between a husband and wife than praying together, and this time in the group serves as a great model. At the end of each meeting, I encourage you to pray as a group over one couple. I have yet to find anyone, even non-Christians, who objected to being prayed for. I allow group members to abstain from participating in the group prayer if they so choose—but again, I have not yet found anyone who did.

As you begin your discussion time, begin by asking everyone what point in the book stood out for them and why. After giving each person a chance to respond, proceed by reading and allowing discussion of each question. One approach is to have a different person read each question aloud, and then give every group member an opportunity to answer. As a leader, feel free to expound on questions, skip a question in order to spend more time on another one, or encourage others to ask questions not listed in the book. The only bad question is one not asked.

Please note that, starting with week 2, the second question each week is intended for women to answer, the third for men, and the fourth to be answered jointly. You will probably also find that for questions 2 and 3, the opposite gender can add insights after the questions are answered to clarify how men and women work, adding depth to your discussion. Encourage group members not to target their marriage in answers, but to try to keep things general. Keep the tone positive and loving and the group will follow!



EIGHT-WEEK STUDY OUTLINE

Week 1

Group introductions, review group rules, group prayer.
Introduction, Men's Modes and Women's Moods

1. Why did you decide to join the group?
2. What do you hope to learn from this study?
3. On page 23, Rick Johnson encourages us to go into the study with the "expectation that it will change your marriage and draw you closer to your spouse," reminding us that high expectations usually improve the odds of reaching a goal. On a scale of one to ten, ten being the highest, how high is your expectation that this book study can significantly grow your marriage?

Week 2

MEN'S MODE #1—AMOROUS: NEVER GIVE UP!

WOMEN'S MOOD #1—ROMANTIC: ROMANCING THE HOME

1. What stood out to you in this week's reading?
2. Ladies, in what ways were you challenged to understand the importance of sex to a man?
3. Men, most women need romance (before or separate from sex) in order to feel loved. Share some ideas for sparking romance that are appropriate to share with the group.
4. A man can solve problems *by having sex*; a woman needs to resolve problems *before having sex* (p. 130)! Knowing this, what might be some creative solutions to getting past relational hurts so a couple can enjoy both romance and sex?

Week 3

MEN'S MODE #2—WORK: EVERY MAN'S BLESSING, EVERY MAN'S BANE

WOMEN'S MOOD #2—NESTING: HOME SWEET HOME

1. What stood out to you in this week's reading?
2. Ladies, how does it feel to know that one of the biggest ways a man shows his love for you is through providing?
3. Men, discuss how a woman generally acts when she has a safe and secure environment to call home. How might a husband and wife work together to make their home a haven for themselves and others?
4. Do you feel that this week's mode and mood are always true for men and women? How might the dynamics change when both spouses work full time? Discuss how busy couples can keep a realistic balance between financially providing and keeping a safe and inviting home environment.

Week 4

MEN'S MODE #3—PLAY: WIN THE GAME!

WOMEN'S MOOD #3—PLAYFUL: WHAT ARE LITTLE GIRLS MADE OF?

1. What stood out to you in this week's reading?
2. Ladies, discuss this statement: "Men need dreams even if they never act on them" (p. 64). What specific words might wives use to encourage their husbands to dream and play?
3. Men, what does a man need to do in order to value his wife's creativity and playful girl-like spirit? (Example: make time for her.) Give three more examples.
4. If both genders need play in their lives, what "common activities" can you list that could encourage and build up both spouses? (Example: taking a fun class together.) Give at least three more examples.

Week 5

MEN'S MODE #4—SUSTENANCE: MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE

WOMEN'S MOOD #4—NURTURING: TENDING THE NEST

1. What stood out to you in this week's reading?
2. Ladies, did this chapter make you feel needed in your husband's life? How so? Did any creative ideas come to mind on how a woman can help a man maintain balance in life?
3. Men, discuss what would be missing in your life without a woman's nurturing influence. How do you feel about the statement: "If you make sure your wife is happy, you can be sure that you will be happy as well" (p. 465).
4. Talk time: Go around the circle and have everyone who is comfortable call out one of their top needs in marriage, excluding sex. (Example: understanding.) Take note of how needs are different or similar between women and men.

Week 6

MEN'S MODE #5—PROTECTOR: GUARD AT THE DOOR

WOMEN'S MOOD #5—CYCLE: THE MOON AND THE TIDE

1. What stood out to you in this week's reading?
2. Ladies, discuss why some women may misinterpret a husband's protective nature as being controlling. In what ways do women benefit from their husband's desire to protect them?
3. Men, who among you is brave enough to tackle this question: what are some tried-and-true ways to help a woman weather her monthly cycle? Women, do you find it helpful for your husband to remind you that PMS may make things seem overwhelming, but this too shall pass? Why or why not?
4. Engage in a word association game. Starts with words that associate with the concept of a "husband wanting to be a protector." (Example: hero.) Next, say "PMS" and again have members call out the first word or phrase that comes to mind. (Example: dark chocolate!) Let kindness rule, but don't be afraid to have fun with this game!

Week 7

MEN'S MODE #6—CONNECTION WITH GOD: MY LIFE MATTERS IN THE UNIVERSE

WOMEN'S MOOD #6—SPIRITUAL: MY SWEET BABY GIRL

1. What stood out to you in this week's reading?
2. Ladies, does church appear different now, seen through the eyes of a man (ch. 6)? How might you respect the different ways we experience spiritual things, while also encouraging men to love God more?
3. Men, is it possible that we often think a woman is spiritually strong when inside she feels like a vulnerable little girl, aching for affirmation? Do you feel it is possible for a husband to help "heal some of the wounds that have damaged her heart" (p. 193)? How?
4. Discuss these statements that people often believe and then assign group members to read a truth from Scripture to counter them:
 - I can never trust anyone, not even God. *Read Hebrews 4:3-5*
 - I'm unlovable and will always fear rejection. *Read Romans 8:38-39*
 - I don't believe in God. *Read John 3:16-20*
 - My life will never be significant. *Read Psalm 139:1-3, 13-16*

Week 8

MEN'S MODE #7—GUY TIME: FRIENDS, FATHERS, AND MENTORS

WOMEN'S MOOD #7—GIRLFRIENDS: THE SISTERHOOD

Wrap up—read aloud!

1. What stood out to you in this week's reading?
2. Ladies, did you get emotional when you read about the profound effect a father has on his son's self-worth, even as an adult? Discuss the feelings this provokes. Now offer ideas wives can use to encourage husbands to pursue and take time with other men (without nagging).
3. Men, you already knew your wives use consistently more words than you do on a daily basis. What are three ways a marriage could benefit when the wife has plenty of time with female friends and mentors?
4. On page 213, Rick Johnson says he believes "love requires nearly constant forgiveness." What has this group study helped you to discover about love and forgiveness in marriage? If someone asked you to name the most important thing you learned through this study about marriage, what would you say?
5. Lastly, read back the answers to the expectations from week 1, so group members can see how their actual needs might have differed from their felt needs.

May God bless you and your families!