

Foreword by Dr. Gary D. Chapman
Author of *The Five Love Languages*

Tools for a Great Marriage



*PRACTICAL HELP FOR BUILDING
A MARRIAGE THAT LASTS*

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Small Group Study Guide

A Small Group Study Guide for

Tools for a Great Marriage

by William Batson, MAFM

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Introduction

Welcome to the *Tools for a Great Marriage* small group study. We are pleased to provide this leader's guide as a small way of helping you lead a successful study of this book.

Studying with others is a very enriching and rewarding experience. You get to share in the wealth of insight a small group provides. Couples with a strong network of friends who believe in the value of long-term healthy marriages tend to have great marriages.

We have written 10 lessons for weekly, every other week, or monthly sessions with a group of married couples. You can abbreviate your study by combining sessions. If you use the weekly format, we suggest that you plan a fun time at the mid-point of the study. This may include something like a dinner or dessert night with some fun activities. Another fun and relaxing time at the end of the series is another means of having a successful group.

To help you with your small group study, we have designed the suggested format below. Of course, you are free to adapt this study guide to fit your own unique situation.

Suggested Session Format

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Sharing Question** – A question that helps couples get to know each other.
- **Chapter Discussion Questions**
 1. Allow at least 45-50 minutes for this part.
 2. You may not always be able to discuss every question listed in this section.
 3. When discussion and interest are high, you may take more than one session for each lesson.
- **Assignments** – Reading assignments and projects for the next session.
- **Prayer Time**
 1. Ask each person to share a prayer request that relates to him or her. It is better in this study to focus on the needs present in the room than on people outside the group.
 2. Encourage group members to write down these requests and pray for them until the next meeting.
 3. At each meeting, before giving new prayer requests, ask participants to share any answers to their previous requests.
 4. Conduct the prayer time according to what your group prefers. This may include going around the circle, choosing one person to pray a general closing prayer, or divide into smaller groups for the prayer time.
- **Announcements**

General Guidelines for Your Group

A successful small group study must have some general guidelines. Here are few that we have found helpful:

1. Set a definite beginning and ending time. Adhere to that schedule for the sake of those who have baby sitters and other commitments.
2. As the group leader, greet each couple as they come.
3. Set up the room for easy conversation with chairs in a circle, making sure that everyone can have easy eye contact with other group members.
4. Limit the size of the group to 12 people. This will enhance everyone's ability to participate.
5. Encourage group members to attend each of the sessions unless prevented by sickness or some other unpreventable event. It is their responsibility to call the group leaders if they are unable to come.
6. Refreshments may be served at the beginning or end of the study. You may decide not to have any refreshments other than a beverage. Do not let refreshments become a big issue.
7. Encourage members to share nothing about their marriages that will embarrass their mates.
8. Group members may "pass" on any question they do not want to answer.
9. To protect the integrity of the group, do not discuss with other people what group members share in the small group study unless you have their permission.
10. Any issues of concern that may create relational conflicts within the group should be brought to the attention of the group leaders before they are discussed in the group.
11. We have designed this study to be a group effort in discovering what the Bible teaches about marriage. Therefore, it is not necessary to have a lecture on the topics. The group leader(s) should encourage everyone to participate in seeking biblical truth and sharing what they discover. When questions are raised, the group leader(s) should not feel they have to have all the answers. Ask others in the group what they think.
12. It is not necessary to agree with everyone and some ideas may be challenged if they are not well grounded in the Bible. When doctrinal issues arise, you may want to speak with your pastor for any clarifications.

Session #1 – A Great Marriage Tool Bag

Chapter Idea: Every couple enters marriage with their own bag of tools, but many are frustrated by their attempts at fixing things. They either have the wrong tools or do not use the tools properly. Having the right tools in your marital tool bag and using them properly will help you build and sustain a great marriage.

OPENING PRAYER

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1. Have group members introduce themselves (names, town they live in, number of years married, favorite junk food).
2. Review ground rules for the group sessions listed on page 2 of the Study Guide.
3. Make sure everyone has a copy of the book, *Tools for a Great Marriage*.
4. Explain the basic agenda for each session.
5. Ask if there are any questions about the group study.

SHARING QUESTION

1. What was the most unusual or the most creative wedding gift you received?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Introduce the study by reviewing the “tools” discussed in chapter one. You may want to display the tools and a tool bag to help couples visualize what the chapter is discussing. Ask them to think of other “tools” that might be symbolic of some aspect of the marriage relationship.
2. What would you like to gain from this group study of *Tools for a Great Marriage*?
3. How would you describe a “great marriage” to a couple considering marriage?
4. Ask a group member to read 2 Timothy 3:16. Discuss how the Bible can help couples build a great marriage. Ask for personal examples from the group. The group leader can model this with an example.
5. On page 18 in *Tools for a Great Marriage* there is a list of Bible verses that can be applied to married life. What are the real life differences that would be observed in a marriage that follows these guidelines?

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Before the next session, each couple is to complete “Your Marriage Checkup” on pages 175 & 176. (Note to Leader: Offer to meet with each couple in your group to review the results of their checkup. This could take place in your home, their home, or at a coffee shop. Use the time to help them celebrate their strengths and give them guidance in how to improve their growth areas.)
2. Read Chapter Two and complete the “Tool Time for Couples.”

Session #2 – Building on a Great Foundation

Chapter Idea: The Bible, God’s Word, is the spiritual foundation upon which to build a great marriage. As you read and listen to its wisdom, putting into practice what you learn, you will establish a rock solid spiritual foundation for your marriage.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. Where did you go on your honeymoon and what is one memorable moment (funny or serious)?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
(Note to Leader: This question is included in each of the following sessions. It is designed to help your group summarize the chapter content. Depending on your teaching situation, you may choose to simply summarize the chapter content yourself. This may be helpful in situations where people have not read the chapter for various reasons.)
2. Read Matthew 7: 24-27. According to Jesus’ teaching in this passage, how should a couple build their marriage?
3. The author, William Batson, wrote: “Unity and oneness in marriage is not automatic. It is the result of discipline, determination, and hard work” (p. 34). What do you do that promotes unity and oneness in your marriage?
4. How would you answer if someone were to ask you, “In what ways is your marriage uniquely Christian?”
5. What aspect of God’s character would you most like your marriage to reveal to the world?
6. After reading this chapter, what are three things you and your spouse want to do in the next 30 days to strengthen the spiritual foundation of your marriage?

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Three.
2. Complete the “Tool Time for Couples.”

Session #3 – Becoming a Host in Your Marriage

Chapter Idea: In a great marriage, each spouse focuses on becoming a host, not a guest in the relationship. In doing so, we are following the example of Jesus.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. What is your favorite restaurant and why?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. Read Mark 10:43-45. What is the relevance of Jesus' words about serving one another in today's modern marriages? How does Jesus' model of service influence your life and marriage?
3. What are some of the modern messages to men that keep them from becoming a host in marriage? What are some of the modern messages to women that keep them from becoming a host in marriage? How can you, or how do you, counteract those messages in your marriage?
4. Why does selfishness have such a devastating effect on a marriage relationship?
5. The author, William Batson, wrote: "I read about a wedding where the groom, instead of going through the traditional garter ceremony, brought out a basin of water and washed his bride's feet. The wedding guests probably thought he was crazy, but he had it right. Most people do not enter marriage thinking about becoming a servant" (p. 45).
 - a. When you got married, which expectation was dominant:
 - 1) I will meet my spouse's needs.
 - 2) My spouse will meet my needs.
 - b. How has this aided or interfered with your ability to approach marriage with a servant's heart?
6. What do you think would be the greatest improvement in marriages today if spouses became better servants of one another?
7. How have you and your spouse improved your marriage by becoming hosts?

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Four.
2. Complete the "Tool Time for Couples."



Session #4 – What’s Love Got to Do With It?

Chapter Idea: Love is very important in building great marriages, but the kind of love that exists in a great marriage is more than a feeling.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. What other married couple influenced you the most in the first five years of your marriage? How did they influence you?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. The author, William Batson, wrote: “Eventually, every good marriage hits a rough patch. In your marriage vows, you promised to love regardless of all the changes and adversities, regardless of the good times or the bad times, and regardless of whether you live in wealth or poverty” (p. 60). Give an example of how your love for each other has helped you get through a “rough patch.”
3. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. What is love and what is not love according to this passage?
4. The author, William Batson says, “An enduring love chooses to keep on loving when loving your spouse is not particularly satisfying. It’s easy to love someone who is good to you, shows kindness daily, and responds to your loving words or actions with the same love. We love them *because* of what they do” (p. 62). What are the long-term results of this style of love in a marriage?
5. God loves us in spite of our flaws. How does marriage teach us to love in spite of our mate’s imperfections? How have you seen your spouse love you in spite of a personal imperfection of yours?
6. Keeping love alive in marriage involves having fun together. What have you and your spouse done for fun that has really helped your marriage?

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Five.
2. Complete the “Tool Time for Couples.”

Session #5 – Help! We’re From Different Worlds

Chapter Idea: God wants you to honor and respect your spouse. To do less reflects a lack of God’s goodness and presence in your life and marriage. If you accept your spouse only in part, you can love him or her only in part. A great marriage can happen when you see each other as different, rather than wrong.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. How did you celebrate holidays (Christmas, birthdays, etc.) in your home when you were a child?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. How are men and women different in the following areas:
 - a. Use of time?
 - b. Use of money?
 - c. The way they parent?
 - d. Ideas about leisure?
 - e. Jobs and careers?
3. (*Note to Leader: Bring in two large puzzle pieces as a visual aid for this question.*) The author, William Batson, wrote: “God’s plan is for diversity in marriage with no division. Think of you and your spouse as two puzzle pieces fitting together, created by God to complement each other” (p. 78).
 - a. How do you and your spouse “complement” one another with your differences?
 - b. What has been particularly challenging about adjusting to your differences?
4. How is this statement by the author true in marriage: “In many cases, the differences that initially brought you together may be the differences that will push you away from each other” (p. 79).
5. Read Romans 15:7. How does accepting one another in marriage bring praise to God?
6. What are the personal contributions your spouse makes to your life for which you regularly thank God?

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Six.
2. Complete the “Tool Time for Couples.”



Session #6 – The Two-Edged Sword of Marital Communication

Chapter Idea: Communication can be a two-edged sword. Through communication, either your marriage will grow, or it will be destroyed. It depends on the type of communication tools used.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. How have you seen God in your life since our last group meeting?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. The author, William Batson, wrote: “Communication can be a two-edged sword. Through communication, either your marriage will grow, or it will be destroyed” (p.88). Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 14:7-11. What principles or guidelines can you learn from this passage about communication in marriage? Encourage the couples to write these down on a sheet of paper.
4. Read 2 Corinthians 6:11-13.
 - a. What is the Apostle Paul requesting of the Corinthians?
 - b. What may hinder someone from opening their heart and sharing freely with their spouse?
5. Give an example of how you used one of the *Positive Communication Tools* in your marriage this past week.
6. The author, William Batson, wrote: “Communication is vital, but it is not the goal in a great marriage. The goal is to show your love for God and for one another” (p. 101). How do the communication tools in this chapter help us show people our love for God and one another?

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Seven.
2. Complete the “Tool Time for Couples.”

Session #7 – You Spent How Much?

Chapter Idea: Good financial management is a strategic tool for building a great marriage. If you don't learn to manage your money, it will manage you. Couples in great marriages agree on how to handle money.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. Tell about a special gift you received from your spouse. What made it so special?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. The author, William Batson, wrote: "Good financial management is a strategic tool for building a great marriage. If you don't learn to manage your money, it will manage you. Couples in great marriages agree on how to handle money" (p. 105). What practical tips can you give a newly married couple on how to keep money from ruining their marriage? How have you protected your marriage from the money battles?
3. Read Hebrews 13:5. Why is contentment so important to handling money in your marriage? What is the negative impact to marriage when there is a lack of contentment?
4. Ask each couple to share one or two of their core values about money.
5. On page 112, the author quotes Ron Blue who said: "Money is a tool God uses to mold us to His image." Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
6. Read Proverbs 3:9. How can a married couple honor the Lord with their money?

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Eight.
2. Complete the "Tool Time for Couples."



Session #8 – Ground Rules for a Fair Fight

Chapter Idea: Through healthy conflict, couples learn to appreciate, understand, and accept other points of view. They focus on how to manage conflict successfully when it does arise.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. Think back to your childhood. What did you learn, good or bad, about how to resolve conflict in your family?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. What happens to a marriage when offenses are left to fester and conflict is not resolved?
3. What are positive benefits in a marriage that uses the ground rules for a fair fight?
4. Read Proverbs 12:22. A couple struggles with insecurities about their relationship. The husband wants to know if he should lie to his wife to protect her feelings. What would you tell him?
5. Dr. Gary Smalley is quoted on page 125 as saying, “The external problem is rarely the problem.” How does this relate to dealing with offenses and conflict in marriage?
6. Read Ephesians 4:32. How would you define forgiveness? How are you to forgive your spouse? Describe how God has forgiven us. (Here are some passages that describe God’s forgiveness: Psalm 32:1-2; Isaiah 38:17; Micah 7:19; Hebrews 10:17-18; 1 John 1:9.)
7. Why is forgiveness so necessary in marriage?
8. How would you answer this wife: “I have forgiven him, but I have trouble with my feelings when I remember what he did.”

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Nine.
2. Complete the “Tool Time for Couples.”

Session #9 – Great Sex in a Great Marriage

Chapter Idea: In his infinite wisdom, God personally and lovingly created us male and female. He designed us so that we could enjoy within marriage the complete expression of the sexual dimension. The marriage bed is to be honored and enjoyed by both husband and wife without guilt or restraint.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. Where did you learn your first lessons about sex? What was good or bad about your first lessons?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. How did your religious training help or hinder you in developing healthy attitudes toward marital sexuality?
3. Read Proverbs 5:18-23 and Hebrews 13:4. What do these verses mean in practical terms? What are the consequences of violating these instructions?
4. The author, William Batson, wrote: “Men tend to define intimacy as some form of action, such as sexual intercourse, participating together in a recreational activity, and physically doing something for his wife...Women tend to view intimacy as the sharing of an emotional bond, warmth, closeness, and vulnerability. This is accomplished most often through meaningful heart-to-heart conversations” (p. 140). Do you agree? Explain. What are the challenges in marriage caused by these differences and similarities? How have you overcome these challenges?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 and Philippians 2:3-5.
 - a. How often should a married couple make love according to these verses?
 - b. According to these verses, how might *The Principle of Satisfaction*, taught in Chapter 9, guide us in serving, respecting, and giving preference to our spouse?
6. The author, William Batson, wrote that a great lover is a disciplined lover. His first suggestion to becoming a disciplined lover is: “*Make sexual intimacy a priority.* – This starts with a positive attitude about sex, and the determination to prevent the “stuff of life” from crowding in on this vital area of married life. Give your best time and energy to this important part of your marriage” (p. 148). Why is this so important? What can a married couple do to keep their sexual intimacy from being overwhelmed by the “stuff of life?”

ASSIGNMENTS

PRAYER TIME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Chapter Ten and the Epilogue.
2. Complete the “Tool Time for Couples.”

Session #10 – Building a Great Marriage in Stormy Weather

Chapter Idea: God calls us to ride out the storms together for a greater purpose, a purpose bigger than our comfort and happiness in life. We have the opportunity to grow deeper into Christ, draw closer to each other, and show a pessimistic, cynical world the glorious strength of grace and faith.

OPENING PRAYER

SHARING QUESTION

1. What do you want your friends and family to say about your marriage at your golden wedding anniversary party?

CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a key thought or lesson that stands out for you in this chapter?
2. How have difficulties in your married life served as an instrument of growth for you individually and as a couple?
3. The author, William Batson, quoted Gary Thomas (*Sacred Marriage*) as saying: “If your marriage is tough, get down on your knees and thank God that he has given you an opportunity for unparalleled spiritual growth” (p. 161). What is your reaction to that statement? How can tough times be good for your marriage?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.
 - a. What is the relationship between God’s ability to comfort us and our ability to comfort others?
 - b. When have you, because of God’s comfort in a stormy time, been able to comfort someone else? What did you learn from the experience?
5. Have couples look at the story of Charlie and Rita on pages 153 and 154. What suggestions would you make to this couple?
6. How do the following Bible verses help a married couple protect their marriage from stormy weather?
 - a. 1 Peter 5:6-7
 - b. 1 Peter 4:8
 - c. James 1:4
 - d. Romans 8:29
7. Do you and your mate face stormy weather the same way? Who is more proactive? Who is more passive? How does your marriage benefit from each approach?

ASSIGNMENTS (see next page)

PRAYER TIME



ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Make plans for you final get together as a group. This is a fun time with food and conversation about how each person has benefited from this study. You can also discuss where you go next as a group.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Encourage each couple is to go back to “Your Marriage Checkup” on pages 175 & 176. Using a different colored pen, complete the checkup to see how they have grown in their level of satisfaction. *(Note to Leader: Offer to meet with each couple in your group to review the results of their checkup. This could take place in your home, their home, or at a coffee shop. Use the time to help them celebrate their strengths and give them guidance in how to improve their growth areas.)*
2. As the leader, you may also offer to help the couples complete the “Preventative Maintenance Plan for Your Marriage” on page 179.