

PRAYERS FOR MARRIAGES

EMMAUSRD

Session 1

Building Strong Foundations: Learn to understand each other's needs

DAY 1

Psalm 127:1 (NIVUK)

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.

Lord, build strong homes. Let husbands and wives build great relationships and families together with you at the centre. Guard families, strengthen marriages, and build strong walls of protection around them.

DAY 2

Proverbs 24:3-4 (NIVUK)

By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;
by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

Lord, let homes be built with your wisdom. As husbands and wives come to know you better, and to understand your ways, may their lives together be made strong; as they come to understand each other more intimately, may marriages thrive and may every aspect of their lives together be blessed.

DAY 3

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIVUK)

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Lord, may husbands and wives always lift each other up whenever one stumbles in the way; may they keep their relationship alive and vibrant through their love and care each for the other. May they stand together against all opposition and remain united and strong. May your love and grace bind them together into an unbreakable cable, which doesn't fray or come apart no matter what strain is put on it.

DAY 4

Matthew 5:3 (NIVUK)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Lord, we need you in our marriages, for we are poor in spirit and cannot make it on our own. May we experience the riches of your kindness and the strength of your help. Now let your kingdom come and your will be done in every part of our lives together.

DAY 5

Matthew 5:4 (NIVUK)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Lord, we need you in our sadness, Lord strengthen marriages when moods are low and we walk through times of sorrow and pain. In those moments especially may husbands and wives comfort one another, not avoiding the hurt the other carries.

DAY 6

Matthew 5:5 (NIVUK)

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Lord, may husbands and wives learn to walk together in meekness, not with each insisting on their own way but with a heart to serve each other; in this way, may they see the big picture you have for them together

DAY 7

Matthew 5:6 (NIVUK)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Lord, may husbands and wives have a deep and desperate desire to live their best possible lives together; may they not be priggish and self-righteous, but loving, kind and fair; may they work together for your justice to prevail in their families and in their wider worlds. Let them be wholly satisfied as you fulfil their desire to live the right way and to do the right thing.

Session 2

The Art of Communication: How to listen and communicate effectively

DAY 8

Matthew 5:7 (NIVUK)

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Lord, we pray for a spirit of relentless forgiveness and mercy towards one another. May we truly see our spouses as you see them; help us to be kind. In our marriages, may we overlook each other's weaknesses and forgive each other's failures to always meet our expectations – just as you always forgive us.

DAY 9

Matthew 5:9 (NIVUK)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Father, may we discover your peace in our marriages. May we find true

harmony in selfless love one for the another. We pray for every couple presently experiencing discord and stress, and ask that you, Holy Spirit, would stir them to pursue peace, that strife may be turned to joy so that they may experience together the Father's loving embrace.

DAY 10

James 1:19-20 (NIVUK)

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Lord, we ask that, as couples live together as husbands and wives, you would give us ears to listen well and the patient persistence to love one another no matter how frustrated we may sometimes feel. Holy Spirit, we invite you into our marriages. May we have the grace to let go of the anger we think we are entitled to when our plans are challenged, and may we experience the delight of your best life for us.

DAY 11

Proverbs 18:21 & 15:4 (NRSVA)

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. ... A gentle tongue is a tree of life.

Lord, thank you that you who are the Word, have given us the gift of words. Help us only to speak kindly to one another; may our words always encourage and build up and not tear down. We ask that in our marriages, we may learn to lovingly praise each other, and that in so doing, we may discover that we are truly praising you.

DAY 12

Psalms 19:14 (NRSVA)

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

Lord, in our marriages may we not be careless with our words, for to be careless with words is to be careless with each other's hearts. May the words we speak truly reflect the goodness which you have created in us. Help us not to speak unkindly, unthinkingly and unadvisedly to the ones we love best – especially when we are tired and feeling stressed. May we never take one another for granted.

DAY 13

Ephesians 4:29 (NIVUK)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Lord, we pray for all marriages which have ceased to be the sanctuaries of solace which they were intended to be, and where words have become weaponised in order to wound. Lord, may hurting couples find their language transformed, that, from healed hearts, lips may once more speak helpful words – words which bind up wounds, build up broken families, and bring blessing.

DAY 14

1 Corinthians 13:12-13 (NIVUK)

Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Lord, may we, in our marriages, truly see each other face to face. Help us to stop hiding, to be completely open, utterly honest, and unafraid to be fully known. May we always believe in one other, always inspire each other with hope for the future, and, above all, always choose love.

Session 3

Resolving Conflict: Develop methods to resolve conflict and disagreements

DAY 15

Psalm 46:10 (NRSVA)

Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.

Father, help us to let go of those concerns which most deeply trouble us – may we put all our trust in you. Help us to stop – to cease from fighting and stressing ourselves out. May we abandon our anxieties, and all the things we are convinced we need to worry about. Help us to start from a place of calm, to stand in your presence, at the still point of a turbulent, and troubled world. You, who are exalted among the nations, be exalted first in our marriages and in our homes. Let peace on earth begin with us.

DAY 16

Romans 15:5-6 (NIVUK)

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, in our marriages, may we have the steadfastness of spirit to always stick together and keep going, no matter what obstacles we may face. May we always be encouraged by you, the God of all encouragement. Enlarge our capacity to always love and be kind to each other. May we walk in harmony, stepping out to the beat of your drum, singing in tune together a song that glorifies you!

DAY 17

Galatians 5:22-26 (NLT)

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

Lord, pour your Spirit out over all our marriages and homes. May our families be like orchards, bearing the fruit of your presence and life. May they be full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Help us to nail our self-centred desires and anxieties to the cross – and leave them there. As we have found life by your Spirit, may we know your voice and follow the leading of the Spirit, remaining open to you and your grace every moment.

DAY 18

Philippians 2:1-5 (NLT)

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Father, help us all in our marriages to find the strength that grows from your love, and the tenderness that radiates from the Spirit of Christ who first embraced us, so that we may love each other from that place of security which we find in you, and not with any of the neediness masquerading as affection, which is the fruit of our insecurity.

May we love each other just as Jesus loves – not out of self-interest, but

with humility, desiring only the best for the other, that we may walk and work united in your loving purpose for us together.

DAY 19

2 Corinthians 13:11,14 (NIVUK)

Encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Lord, in all our marriages, may our homes be havens of peace. Help us each to first find peace within ourselves – the peace that comes as we allow ourselves to be embraced by the loving grace of Jesus. As we wrestle with our own fears and anxious thoughts, may we not turn this into fighting with each other. Help us to live in your love. Come Holy Spirit!

Just as the holy dove alighted on Jesus at his baptism, may the spirit of peace so rest on us that we may live in peace, even when storms rage around us. May we experience the unlimited kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ. May God overwhelm us with his love, and may the Holy Spirit join our hearts together always.

DAY 20

Ephesians 4:1-4 (NLT)

Lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

Lord, we pray for marriages, that husbands and wives might have a strong sense of your calling and purpose, and that we may live lives worthy of your call. May we humbly and gently bear with each other, for we each have our weaknesses and irritating ways which can annoy our spouses, especially after many years together. Help us to recognise

where we need to change, but may we have the patience to give our partners room for you to transform them and not try to do it all ourselves. May we be strengthened as we seek to remain united in purpose, and united in spirit – through the transforming presence of the Spirit of Christ in us, binding us together in your peace. One body, one Spirit, one hope for the future.

DAY 21

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NLT)

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance... love will last forever!

Lord, in our marriages, may we always love like this.

Now read through these Bible verses again in an attitude of prayer, but this time, wherever you see the word 'love', say your name, and let the loved one be your spouse. You might like to imagine this for other couples as well.

Session 4

The Power of Forgiveness: Learn how to apologise and forgive as a couple

DAY 22

Ephesians 4:32 (NRSVA)

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Father, in our marriages, may we always be kind to each other. Come and melt our hardened hearts, so that we may become healers of each other's wounded hearts, for we all carry scars and we each have flaws

we are frequently blind to. May we be filled with the strong and tenderhearted compassion of Jesus. May we always be ready to forgive each other from the heart, and not to cherish resentment, for we have found great kindness and forgiveness for everything in Christ.

DAY 23

Colossians 3:12-13 (NLT)

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Lord, may we truly embrace who we are in Christ – representatives of the new humanity, made holy and deeply loved by God. Now, starting here in our marriages, may we know what it is to put aside the old look we once wore and take on a new identity – wearing with confidence the kingdom uniform of kindness and compassion, humility, meekness and patience. Instead of complaining and seeing the negative in every situation, may we put all our trust in you, the forgiving God. May we be the first to forgive each other – and ourselves – so that, free from everything of the past which might seek to drag us backwards, we can look ahead together with joyful hope.

DAY 24

Colossians 3:14-15 (NLT)

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

Father, we pray for ourselves and for other marriages that, as we learn to forgive and let go of past hurts, we may truly embrace love as our new identity. Let it be your love which defines who we are as lovers made new in Christ. As we learn to love each other better, may the peace of Jesus rule our lives and our homes. May it begin from the heart and

spread from the inside out into our communities. For you have called us to be one body – one flesh – and we will forever give you joyful thanks.

DAY 25

Colossians 3:16-17 (NLT)

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

Lord, may our lives harmonise together. May we stay in tune with each other, moving in time to the beat of the same drum as we improvise every kind of song. May our psalms be gritty laments when they need to be, and may we have the courage to cry out our anguish, “moanin’ the blues” when no other sound will suffice. Yet, may the chorus always, in the end, be transposed from minor to major with a crescendo of hard rocking gospel joy!

DAY 26

Matthew 6:9-15 (PHILLIPS)

Pray then like this—“Our Heavenly Father, may your name be honoured; May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day the bread we need, Forgive us what we owe to you, as we have also forgiven those who owe anything to us. Keep us clear of temptation, and save us from evil”. For if you forgive other people their failures, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you will not forgive other people, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your failures.

Heavenly Father, may your name be honoured in our marriages. May your kingdom come, and your will be done in us here on this little bit of earth; may it be a reflection of heaven. Father, you know all our needs even before we ask, and you know what we need today; we are trusting your provision – Lord, give us today everything we need right now, and help us to stop worrying about the rest. Father, let may your open and

free forgiveness be at the heart of all our marriages – for we are praying for others as well as ourselves. Thank you that we each come to you as people made new and forgiven by you; so, we also choose to forgive freely from the heart. Keep us free from every temptation – especially the temptation to hold on to grudges and hurts; save us from that evil. Amen.

DAY 27

1 Peter 4:8 (NRSVA)

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.

Father, in our marriages, may we stand together under your love umbrella, so that, protected from the elements, a fervent fire of love may ever warm us. May we cease from focusing on faults, rather, with 20/20 faith-vision, help us to see all the best things in each other. May we not be stirrers of strife, but kind encouragers of faith, hope, and love.

DAY 28

Ephesians 2:4-10 (PHILLIPS)

God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, gave us life together with Christ—it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved—and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with him in Christ in the Heavens. Thus he shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness he has expressed towards us in Christ Jesus. It was nothing you could or did achieve—it was God's gift to you. No one can pride himself upon earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do.

Father, in our lives together, help us to remember that all we ever have – all the joy, all the love, all the life – comes from you as gift. May we let go of everything we imagine we deserve and trust ourselves to your rich mercy. May we always remember that we are each forgiven – made new – and that we are one in the gift of grace.

Session 5

The Impact of Family – Past and Present: Explore the impact of your family on your relationship

DAY 29

Genesis 2:23-24 (NLT)

“At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’” This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

Exodus 20:12 (NLT)

Honour your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Dear God, help us, for families are complicated! In our marriages, no matter how we try, we all (at least sometimes) get caught somewhere between properly leaving our fathers and mothers, whilst still honouring them – especially as they get older and begin to need us more. Help us each to find freedom from those unhelpful habits and destructive patterns of behaviour which we have brought with us from the homes in which we were nurtured. May we always remember the good things, but without that cloying nostalgia which can so sour the present, for we are not those children any more. May we all, as husbands and wives, be joyfully and unashamedly united, recognising that sometimes, in spite of our best intentions, we will disappoint our parents and infuriate our own children. Forgive us, for we are only human after all, and nothing reminds of that more than our families.

DAY 30

Psalms 27:9-10 (NRSVA)

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

Father, we pray for every couple floundering because of relationships with their wider families. Bring comfort to husbands estranged from fathers, and wives estranged from mothers. We pray for great grace for parents no longer speaking to their children, and we cry out for all those who are experiencing the terrible pain of separation – which wounds like forsakenness – as they mourn the loss of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters. We pray especially for those grieving the loss of children. Father, in our pain do not forsake us. Lord, restore our hearts in your great mercy – restore the hearts of children to their parents, and parents to their children. Lord, take us up in your loving embrace; heal broken hearts, save wounded families, and make us whole.

DAY 31

Malachi 4:6 (NIVUK)

He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents...

1 John 3:1 (NIVUK)

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Father, we come to you as prodigals, each welcomed in your loving embrace. In your mercy, may we see miracles of restoration in families, in marriages, and in broken hearts.

DAY 32

Psalms 128 (NIVUK)

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots round your table. Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you live to see your children's children – peace be on Israel.

Father, we ask for your blessing on every marriage. May we honour you in our lives together; may we tread the path you place before us with integrity and joy. May we embrace good times and hard times with equanimity; may our hope and trust in you never be shaken. May we be blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and may we also be blessed with the blessings of your good earth. May we enjoy good food of every kind – pizza, pasta, paella, pasanda, pork pies, peaches and pavlova.

May we imbibe delicious drinks, whether porcelain cups of exquisite tea, or Massimo mugs of Mountain Malabar coffee; may we enjoy cola-floats, full-bodied reds, pink champagnes, prosecco, sparkling spring water, and craft beverages of every kind (consumed always in due moderation!). May our feasting be enjoyed with great conversation amongst family and friends. May our children be blessed, and may they learn to know you, love you, and walk in your ways. We pray for the ‘prodigals’, that they may return. May your blessings continue through the generations, and may it not stop with us, but may your bounty and grace flow out through us into our towns, cities, villages, nations and continents, until the whole earth is filled with your glory!

DAY 33

Genesis 1:26-28 (MSG)

God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature. So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.” God created human beings; he created them godlike, Reflecting God’s nature. He created them male and female. God blessed them: “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”

Father, we pray that you will bless every couple and make them fruitful in every aspect of their lives together. Bless families through generations; may they prosper in your grace, caring for your creation on your good earth.

DAY 34

Ephesians 3:14-19 (PHILLIPS)

I fall on my knees before God the Father (from whom all fatherhood, earthly or heavenly, derives its name), and I pray that out of the glorious richness of his resources he will enable you to know the strength of the spirit's inner reinforcement—that Christ may actually live in your hearts by your faith. And I pray that you, firmly fixed in love yourselves, may be able to grasp (with all Christians) how wide and deep and long and high is the love of Christ—and to know for yourselves that love so far beyond our comprehension. May you be filled though all your being with God himself!

Father, we pray for all families, especially those over whom past hurt casts dark shadows. Thank you that no matter what brokenness we experienced in our families of origin, we all share the same ever-loving Heavenly Father who longs to reveal in us all the depths of the love of Christ.

DAY 35

Genesis 5:1-2 (NRSVA)

When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them 'Humankind' when they were created.

Father, thank you that whatever our personal experience of family is, or has ever been, we are all members of one human family. None of us are uniquely privileged, for we all stand together under the umbrella of your grace, each of us created in your image, each of us blessed, named, and loved by the one Heavenly Father from whom comes every good thing. We pray for those for whom being a member of their own immediate family is a daily challenge. We ask that in your mercy you would heal wounded hearts and memories. Give us each the courage and the wisdom to love wisely and well. And thank you that our past does not determine our future, for you make all things new.

Session 6

Good Sex: Find ways to develop greater sexual intimacy

The theme for this week is ‘Good Sex: Find ways to develop greater sexual intimacy’. I think it would be true to say that the prayers for this session have been the most challenging to craft. Ever since St. Augustine abandoned his mistress to become a bishop and decided that sexual desire, even within marriage, was the source of all human ills, as it was the means by which original sin was transmitted to every person, Christian authors have not always been particularly positive about the ways they have approached human sexuality.

However, by the 17th Century, the Book of Common Prayer could at least recommend the physically intimate aspect of marriage because it might lead to the procreation of children, and with the secondary benefit of preventing fornication. The Apostle Paul’s recommendation of the single life has certainly contributed historically to a suspicion that celibacy should be the path chosen by the most dedicated followers of Christ.

However, the Bible does not speak with just one voice, and even Paul speaks many words of wisdom to the married. There are also sections of Scripture which are surprisingly erotic – and some which are shockingly explicit. In these prayers I have tried to tread a careful path between unnecessary salaciousness and overly pious prudery. But you probably didn’t hear too many prayers like these in Sunday School.

DAY 36

Proverbs 5:18-19 (NIVUK)

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. ... may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.

Father, we pray for marriages, that husbands and wives would find great joy in sexual intimacy. For those in whom the fire has faded, may there be a stirring of the flame. For those who have become bored with what now feels like dutiful routine (to be avoided if at all possible), may the holy magic return! And may satisfactory intoxication abound!

DAY 37

1 Corinthians 7:2-4 (MSG)

It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. Marriage is not a place to “stand up for your rights.” Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out.

Lord, we pray for marriages, that true intimacy would grow out of passionate love. Let it be a true love which gives and keeps on giving; a love which is patient and not demanding of its rights; a love joyously abandoned to giving pleasure and not obsessed with putting on a performance. Just as Adam and Eve in the garden were naked and unashamed, may there be no shame or embarrassment between husband and wife in every act of making love, but always only kindness – for our hearts are more fragile than we like to show.

DAY 38

Song of Solomon 2:10-12,14-15 (NIVUK)

My beloved spoke and said to me, ‘Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. ... My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding-places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.

Lord, we pray for a new season for every marriage. We ask especially for couples who have settled prematurely for the companionship of a discontented winter; may the fresh sap of spring rise once more. We pray for couples for whom sex feels more like a problem than a pleasure, especially for those who have married (whether recently or many years ago) with unhealed wounds. We pray for husbands and wives for whom physical intimacy brings back memories of betrayal or abuse. Father,

heal those hurts; open up the clam-shell hearts of men and women who have learned to shut down their emotions in order to survive. May a new voice of healing love call them forth. We pray for those who have felt unlovely, who instinctively hide their bodies and their hearts, may they find the courage to emerge from the rocky crevices in which they have hidden. May new life and new love blossom.

DAY 39

Song of Solomon 8:6-7 (NRSVA)

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned.

Lord, may love burn as an unquenchable fire between husbands and wives. May marriages be protected with strong flood-defences against every threat. Seal hearts, minds and lives together, that your kingdom might come, your will be done in every home.

DAY 40

Matthew 1:18-25 (NLT)

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All of this occurred to fulfil the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son

was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. Father, as husbands and wives, as parents, and as people seeking to live as faithful followers of Christ, help us to order our priorities aright. Like Mary and Joseph, who began their marriage with unusual 'complications', may we always remember that hosting the living presence of Jesus is the most important thing. As we seek first your kingdom, we put our trust in you to fulfil everything else in its time.

DAY 41

Psalm 127:1-2 (NIVUK)

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat – for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Father, let your prosperity and peace rest on every couple. May every marriage be built as a house the Lord builds; every home as a city guarded by God. May every anxious husband and every worried wife find their repose in you; and may we each luxuriate in the satisfied sleep of those beloved of God.

DAY 42

Song of Solomon 4:10,16 (NRSVA)

How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! ...Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

Lord, may every husband and wife delight in every aspect of their love for one another. As the years go by, may the wine be richer, the fragrance deeper, and the fruit ever sweeter.

Session 7

Love in Action: Learn your partner's 'love language' and how to love them well

DAY 43

Song of Solomon 2:1-3 (CEV)

She Speaks: I am merely a rose from the land of Sharon, a lily from the valley.

He Speaks: My darling, when compared with other young women, you are a lily among thorns.

She Speaks: And you, my love, are an apple tree among trees of the forest. Your shade brought me pleasure; your fruit was sweet.

Lord, strengthen the bonds of affection between husbands and wives. May we learn to speak fluently each other's languages of love. May there be music and moonlight and love and romance; and after the poetry of the dance, may there be spaghetti Bolognese and the putting up of shelves.

DAY 44

Song of Solomon 4:9; 5:10-11 (NRSVA)

He Speaks: You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. ...

She Speaks: My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven.

Lord, may marriages be strengthened as husbands and wives speak loving words of affirmation to one another. May we each take more notice of the little things we appreciate in our spouses, and better learn to speak out casual compliments – words to build up, bring life and carry kindness.

DAY 45

Genesis 29:18,20 (NIVUK)

Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, 'I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.' ... So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Lord, let marriages be strengthened as husbands and wives take time and care to please one another – as much as is reasonably possible – in every little thing they do. May we live freely and serve one another humbly in love.

DAY 46

James 1:17-18 (NIVUK)

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIVUK)

Since you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Father, thank you that you are the source of every good and every perfect gift. You are always kind, always generous towards us, whether we think we deserve it or not. In each of our lives, but especially in our marriages, may we act as who we truly are – as your children, the firstfruits of a new creation. May we excel in the grace of giving – and receiving – gifts.

DAY 47

Song of Solomon 7:10-12 (NIVUK)

I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us

go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom – there I will give you my love.

Father, we pray for busy couples, distracted by the vicissitudes of their frantic lives; may they find spaces in which to share quality time together – time to get away, time to savour candle-lit dinners free from the anxious clamour of mobile devices, time to watch sunsets on warm sandy beaches, time to think, time to be with each other. And if that seems impossible this week, may husbands and wives at least enjoy meaningful moments of connection, even if only between the cracks in the chaos.

DAY 48

Song of Solomon 8:3 (NRSVA)

O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!

Father, embodied as we are in the fragility of flesh, it is our bodies of muscle and bone which sometimes crave, not just ‘somebody to love’, but some other actual body – ‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’ – to make that love feel real. May marriages be nurtured by a loving touch – the encircling of a waist, the holding of a hand, the massaging of a weary shoulder, a stolen kiss, a welcoming embrace.

DAY 49

1 John 3:11,18 (NRSVA)

This is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

Father, we pray for marriages, that they be made strong in your love. May marriage be the matrix in which we learn to live the reality of selfless love with those for whom we have the greatest affection (even if they can also annoy and infuriate us the most). May husbands and

wives learn to speak fluently each other's 'languages of love'; and may this love, which we nurture together, flow out to nourish a love-hungry world.

DAY 50 – A Marriage Prayer For Everyone

We pray for every teenager, lonely or in love; may they live well through the heartache and heartbreak of their youth, and grow to be kind, caring, open-hearted adults, capable of strong friendships and lifelong commitment.

We pray for hope-filled couples intending soon to marry; may they negotiate well the anxiety and stresses of preparation, and may they thoroughly enjoy their exhilarating happy day, and go on to build a truly fulfilled life together.

We pray for every married couple, for the blissful and the bored; may they find new recipes to add fresh spice to their lives together, and may they be blessed with every blessing of earth and heaven.

We pray for those facing hard times; for the financially stretched – the unemployed, and the under-employed; for over-busy husbands and wives struggling to find time to be together; for those saddened by baby-loss; for those troubled by fractious toddlers, or tormented by feckless teenagers, may they find comfort, strength and hope through your kindness.

We pray for those suffering ill health, for partners who have become carers, for providers who now feel powerless, for those experiencing mental illness, or who have faced debilitating injury; may your grace be sufficient and your love without measure.

We pray for those who feel trapped in unhappy relationships – for the lonely, the unloved, the betrayed, and the broken. We remember especially those who have suffered abuse; may forgiveness and healing come to hurting homes. And give courage to find a way of escape to those for whom there is no other healthy option.

We pray for those who were once with a partner, but through bereavement, divorce, or the breakdown of a relationship, are now treading a lonely path; may they walk through every emotion – sadness, anger, guilt, relief, or bitter regret – and discover new purpose, in order to embrace the future with hope-filled expectation. We pray especially for those left to raise children alone; may they find great strength in you.

We pray for those who long to be married, but, for whatever reason, are not. May hopes be fulfilled, and may dreams come to pass; and, in the meantime, may they excel at being single; though sometimes alone, may they never be lonely, and may they find satisfaction in meaningful work, joyful independence, and fantastic friendships.

We pray for couples who are in long-term relationships, but, perhaps because of past hurts or misgivings, have never quite got around to getting married; may they walk the future with courage and wisdom.

Finally, may we each find a place of intimate embrace within the family of God. Amen.

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