

Love Connects

A Day Retreat for Married Couples

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Love Connects – An Overview

“Love Connects” is a spiritual day-retreat for married couples. The focus is on the couple’s relationship with God and with each other. The retreat will help them explore ministry as a couple that will share God’s love with their community in a practical way. *Love Connects* is built on the belief that ministering together can be a vital way of strengthening a married couple’s relationship with each other and with God. It empowers them to look outward and to witness in their own community in ways that fit with their unique blend of gifts. It enables them to fulfill the call Jesus gave us to reach people in a wide variety of unique contexts.

Leadership of Love Connects

The likelihood of a successful retreat will be increased if this event is led by one or more married couples. The presentations are intended to be simple and short, leaving as much time as possible for the couples to connect with God and with each other. As part of their personal preparation, leaders themselves should do all the activities prior to the day-retreat. It would also be helpful if the leader couples met together for their own day of prayer for themselves and their presentations and to pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare the hearts of the couples who will attend.

Worship and Praise Songs

Praise and worship songs will add much to the spiritual impact of the day’s program. Prepare song sheets, hymn-books or PowerPoint presentations of the song lyrics. Choose familiar songs around the theme of God’s love for us, e.g., “The Power of His Love” (Hillsongs). Carefully choose the worship leader and plan appropriate accompaniment for this time of singing and worshipful praise.

Love Connects Program Outline

- Session 1: Introduction – Setting the Context of Love
- Session 2: Love – Experiencing God’s Connection to Us
- Session 3: Love – How Jesus Made Connections
- Lunch break
- Session 4: Love – Connecting Us in Marriage

- Session 5: Love – Connecting Us with Others
- Session 6: Love – Sharing Communion Together
- Banquet to close (optional)

Session 1: Introduction - Setting the Context of Love

Presentation Helps

Welcome. We're glad you're here, coming together as couples committed to loving God and each other and committed to sharing God's love with a hurting world. We hope that through this seminar you will come to appreciate more of God's love for each of you, more of God's love between you as a couple and that you will discover fresh ways to share God's love with your families, churches and communities

Setting the context. At the heart of all our relationships is God's love for us. We love because He first loved us and because He has powerfully connected us to Himself through the greatest love-gift ever—the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We want to experience more of the power of God's love between us as a couple as we lovingly connect together. We want to find ways to minister God's love to others through our loving connection with them.

Prayer of releasing and receiving. We may have come here with all kinds of thoughts in our minds. We may have the issues of the week tumbling around in our thoughts. We may have concerns for our children and the people who are caring for them. We may have ongoing concerns that have been with us for months, about relationships, health, finances, or other challenges. But here we are, for a spiritual retreat, in a sacred space which is a special gift from God in our over-busy lives.

We invite you to enter into a different kind of prayer with us, called a “palms up, palms down” prayer. As we hold our hands palms down, it symbolizes the way we can release our issues, concerns, worries, fears and burdens into God's loving care. As we hold our hands palms up, this symbolizes the way we can receive God's peace, love and joy, which we invite Him to pour into our lives to fill the places where our worries were.

[Attendees pray silently with thoughts guided by the prayer leader. The following prayer is a suggestion that can be adapted to suit the prayer leader and the context.]

“Father God, we want to thank You for Your love for us. It's so big that it is all around us, as well as inside each of our hearts. We have come here today to experience more of Your love for each of us, more of Your love between us and more of Your love that we can share with others. We will spend a few quiet moments wrapped in Your love and letting it soak into our hearts.

(Pause)

“But we have come with so many concerns and issues crowding our minds and filling up the space in our thoughts. We turn our hands palms down, symbolizing our desire to let go of these worries and concerns. You know the secret fears in our hearts. We know that Your perfect love casts out fear, and we ask You to soothe away our fears with Your love. We bring our burdens to You and trust You to take care of them for us. Some of the things that worry us are hard to release, even to Your care. Please help us to trust You more and drop these worries into Your loving hands. We will spend a few moments identifying the concerns that fill our hands and release them one by one into Your care.

(Pause)

“Thank you Father for the loving way You hold our concerns. Thank you that we can leave these heavy things in Your hands and we can rest from carrying them so tightly, trusting You to deal with them in Your loving way. We will now reflect for a few moments on our gratitude for Your love.

(Pause)

“At last we turn our hands, palms up, ready to receive Your loving gifts. Now that our hands are empty, please fill them with Your peace—the reassurance that You will take all of our worries and fears and transform them into hopes and joys. We will take a few moments experiencing the peace that Your love brings to our hearts.

(Pause)

“We open up our hands to receive Your joy in the place of our tears, and take a few moments to experience the happiness that Your love brings to our hearts.

(Pause)

“Our palms are outstretched to receive your beauty in return for our ashes and Your comforting love in return for our distress.

(Pause)

“Father God, throughout our time together, help us to know what we need to release to You, and what we need to receive from You so that we can enter more fully into the experience of Your love for us and for each other.

Thank you for Your love, through the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Experiencing God’s love in our lives. We know that God loves us all the time, but there are moments in any relationship where the love sparkles more brightly and it is experienced in a more intense or vivid way. Choose one of those sparkling moments from your relationship with God during the last week and share it with each other.

[Leaders briefly share their stories of special times when they experienced God's love during the previous week.]

You may have experienced God's love as you walked out in a crisp autumn morning with the frost and the colours of the leaves and the sparkle of the sun rise. You may have experienced God's love when something that you often struggle with came together smoothly and perfectly. Or maybe you experienced God's love in a smile or a hug, or someone going out of their way to help you. Or maybe there was a moment of appreciation or affirmation that was especially significant.

Reflect on that moment. Fully enter into that experience of God's love for you and immerse yourself in the experience. How did it feel? Which aspects of God's multifaceted love were you experiencing most vividly? Then tell your spouse about your special experience of God's love.

Couple sharing time. *[Allow 5-7 minutes for couples to talk together. Play some suitable instrumental praise music in the background. Invite brief feedback from the group. Ask how they experienced sharing these stories of God's love together.]*

Session 2: Love - Experiencing God's Connection to Us

Resources Needed

- A copy of *Father's Love Letter* DVD or video. (Visit www.fathersloveletter.com for details of how to obtain this video. Watch it several times as you plan for the retreat.)
- A computer or DVD player, projection equipment, sound amplifier and speakers, etc. to play the DVD so that it can be seen and heard clearly.
- A copy of the words of *Father's Love Letter* (available from the website) for each participant.
- A copy of *My Love Letter to God* (Handout #1) for each person, preferably copied/printed onto a good quality textured paper.
- Pens

Presentation Helps

Prayer. *[Open with a prayer inviting God to reveal His love for each person in a way that will transform their relationship with Him.]*

Introduction of *Father's Love Letter*. *[Tell the group how *Father's Love Letter* has touched your life. Invite the couples to listen to the words and hear them as a personal letter from God. Ask them to identify the aspect of God's love that is touching their heart most at this moment.]*

Show Father's Love Letter. [*Pause briefly at the end of the video presentation. Invite couples to reflect on what they have heard and seen. Sometimes it is helpful to view this short video twice, so that the participants can more fully absorb the beauty of the message.*]

Couple activity. [*Hand out a photocopy of the words of Father's Love Letter to each person present. If some participants speak English as a second language, you might like to offer them a copy of the words in their favourite language. (Check www.fathersloveletter.com for words and available languages.)*]

Invite the couples to read Father's Love Letter quietly on their own and to choose a verse or line which is especially significant to each of them personally.

Invite them to tell each other which sentences are most significant to them right now, and how God used the "letter" to inspire them.

Invite the group to share a few responses to the words and the experience.]

Activity – "My Love Letter to God." [*Distribute Handout #1 with the outline for writing a love letter to God. Play reflective background music. Allow at least 10 minutes for each person to write a love letter to God.¹ Let them know that they don't have to fill in every space—the printed words are just invitations to guide the thoughts of the writer. Invite couples to swap the letters that they have written and to read them silently. Or they can read their letters aloud to each other. After they have read each other's love letters to God, give them a few minutes to talk together about what they wrote and why. Let the reflective music continue during this time.*]

Invite anyone who wishes to do so tell the group how this activity brought them closer to God.]

Time of blessing. [*Invite couples to bless each other. Suggest the following simple blessing if they are not sure what to say.*]

May God bless you, (name of spouse), with a richer experience of His extravagant love, now and always. Amen.

¹ **Note to presenters.** Some individuals may struggle with reading or writing disorders or otherwise prefer to speak rather than write. If possible, have available one or more small hand-held voice recorders so they can speak their messages rather than writing them. Offer this alternative in such a way that anyone can use the recorder without embarrassment.

Session 3: Love - How Jesus Made Connections

Resources Needed

- One copy for each person of the small group Bible study *Love Connects – How Jesus Made Connections* (Handout #2).
- Bibles – one per person
- Pens
- One copy per person of *Couple Prayer Ideas* (Handout #3).

Presentation Helps

Introduction. [*Start the session with a short prayer. Sing a song about Jesus' love (optional). Read 1 Corinthians 13 from one of your favourite translations.*]

Small group study. [*Divide the group into small groups of 3-4 couples and give each group a copy of Handout #2 Love Connects – How Jesus Made Connections.*

Allow the groups 30 minutes to work through the Bible study. Invite them to prepare something to share with the larger group on each love characteristic they explored.

Call the groups back together to share their presentations and reflections.]

“Couple Prayer Ideas” handout. [*Distribute to each person Handout #3 Couple Prayer Ideas. Invite them to try one of the prayer activities with their spouse as the session closes.*]

Session 4: Love – Connecting Us in Marriage

Resources Needed

- A quantity of small, red, heart-shaped confetti
- An umbrella
- A funnel
- Instructions for writing love letters to each other (Handouts 4A, 4B)
- Quality writing paper and pens

Presentation Helps

A story of God's love. [*Tell a real-life story from your own marriage of how God's love for you inspired you to find a new or deeper way to love your spouse.*]

How do we live God's “1 Corinthians 13” love in our marriages? [*Talk warmly and light-heartedly about the real challenge of continuing to love another imperfect human being. Tell a story of how your spouse has loved and accepted you, even when you had made a mistake.*]

What changes, even radical changes, might we need to make in our lifestyle and habits to make space for our important relationships? It can be useful to compare the way we love each other with the pattern of 1 Corinthians 13 love. This should not discourage us, but help us to see the next steps to take. How patient am I? How could I be more patient? How is my spouse patient with me and how can I appreciate the efforts they are making to be patient with me?

We may get stuck and find it very hard to love in the 1 Corinthians 13 way—which is quite normal! If so, we can reflect on God’s patience towards us and learn from Him what it means to love each other patiently, kindly, and forgivingly. Growing into His love is a process.

Illustration. [*For this illustration you need an umbrella, a funnel, and confetti.*]

God’s love is raining down on you all the time because He is pure love. [*Sprinkle a little heart-shaped confetti on your spouse.*]

Sometimes, by our hard-heartedness, it is as if we are holding an umbrella over our spouse to prevent them from experiencing God’s love. [*Open the umbrella over your spouse and sprinkle confetti onto the umbrella, showing how it interferes with the way God’s “love” can touch our spouse.*]

But God calls us to be funnels, opening our arms wide to catch as much of God’s love as we can, and to focus it onto our spouse. [*Use the funnel and pour more confetti through it, showing how the funnel concentrates God’s “love” confetti onto your spouse.*]

How can we be funnels of God’s love for our spouse? [*In the presentation that follows, your own experience of repentance and receiving forgiveness can be very powerful.*]

Pray and talk to God about His love for your spouse. Ask Him to help you understand how His heart, for your husband or wife, was hurt by your action toward your spouse. Confess your sin to God and ask Him for a heart of flesh, a heart of compassion for your spouse.

Know that Jesus would have died for that one hurt if that was the only sin in eternity. Ask your spouse to tell you how your wrong action affected them. Be prepared to listen to their pain and sadness. Admit you were wrong. Say, “I was wrong when I did that. I am sorry that I hurt you. I don’t want to hurt you that way again. With God’s help I want to change.”

Don’t demand forgiveness. Confess your sins and leave the rest to the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness is a process, not always an instant response.

Couple activity – writing a love letter to each other. [*Give each person a copy of the instructions for writing a love letter to their spouse (Handouts 4A, 4B) and a sheet of quality paper and a pen. Separate the husbands and wives as they write and give them half an hour to write a love letter to each other. After 30 minutes, invite them to come together and read their letters to each other.*]

Close this session by providing refreshments (special drinks, pieces of tropical fruit, chocolates, etc.) so couples can give treats to each other as they read through and reflect on their letters together.]

Session 5: Love – Connecting Us with Others

Resources Needed

- Copies for each participant of *Sharing God’s Love with Others –Our Audit* (Handout #5A) and *Sharing God’s Love with Others – Working Together* (Handout #5B)
- Pens
- A married couple with a shared ministry who will give their testimony during the session (see “Testimony from a Couple” below)
- Flip-chart and markers

Presentation Helps

Prayer. *[Begin the session by praying for the couples present. Thank God for His love for them and the way He has gifted them with spiritual gifts, talents, education, experience and passions, etc. Pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire the couples and help them to discover fresh ways in which they can work together to share God’s love with others.]*

Introduction. Love was put in our hearts by God for us to share with others. A happily married couple who work together in a ministry that blesses others is one of the greatest witnesses—to their children, their wider family, their church and their community. Love is not self-seeking and inward looking, but looks outward to see who else needs to experience God’s love.

Testimony from a couple. *[Introduce the team ministry couple. Invite them to tell their story. Interview them to discover how they chose this ministry, how they manage working as a team, and the challenges and the joys they have experienced together. In what ways did their ministry bless their own marriage?]*

Some ideas for ministering together as a couple. Your ministry can be as simple as having the church youth group over for an evening several times a year, providing Sabbath hospitality for visitors, teaching a Sabbath School class together, or providing a gardening ministry for the senior or disabled people in your community.

Finding our shared ministry. *[Encourage the group to share their responses to the following question while you write their answers on a flip-chart.]*

How do we find our place in God’s plan? *[Answers might include “pray,” “study,” “explore,” “talk together,” “try things out,” “listen to wise and spiritual mentors,” etc.]*

Worksheets - “Sharing God’s Love with Others.” [Review with the couples the worksheets *Sharing God’s Love with Others – An Audit (Handout #5A)*; *Sharing God’s Love with Others – Working Together (Handout #5B)*. Explain how to complete the various parts on “spiritual giftedness,” “our skills and talents,” etc. Pray a prayer of blessing on the couples as they separate to complete their worksheets. Ask God to guide them as they discover how He wants to bless others through their couple team ministry. Allow couples approximately 15 minutes to fill in their worksheets individually and then bring them back together to spend time talking together and praying about what they have discovered.]

Discussing the possibilities of a shared ministry. [Allow the couples 30 minutes to pray and talk together. Let them know that discovering their unique couple ministry is likely to be an ongoing process. God may call them as a couple to different team ministries throughout their life together, and may also call each of them to their own unique personal ministries. The important thing is to remain open to where God wants them to minister together, and to be ready to stop, start or modify a ministry as God guides them.]

Feedback to the group. [Invite each couple to tell the group of at least one ministry where they would like to serve together. You might like to suggest to the couple some creative ways to report to the group their thoughts about their team ministry activity, e.g., using a mime or preparing a poster. (Make sure that appropriate supplies are available for them to use to make this creative report.)]

Closing prayer. [If a closing communion service is planned, inform the couples of the plans at this time, including the plans for couple foot-washing.

Invite the couples to hold hands as you pray that God will bless and guide them in their team ministry together.]

Session 6: Couple Communion Service

Creating a special time of communion for the couples brings the spiritual day-retreat to an inspiring conclusion. A couple communion service can be done in many different ways to suit your context. This program outline is offered to guide your planning.

Resources Needed

- Foot-washing supplies (bowls, warm water, towels, containers for used towels and water)
- Moisturizing cream for couple-footwashing (optional)
- Sheets of blank paper (for alternative “foot-washing”)
- One portion of unleavened communion bread per couple (using a heart-shaped cookie cutter, cut the rolled dough into hearts; bake in the usual way)
- Grape juice
- One stemmed glass per couple
- Words for any songs that may be used, either song sheets, hymn-books or PowerPoints

- Bibles for Scripture reading
- CD player and appropriate instrumental praise music and possible song of commitment
- Copy of *A Love Letter from God to a Married Couple* (Handout #6).
- Suitable decorations for the communion room – candles, flowers, etc.
- Gift-wrapped couple devotional book for each couple as a parting gift (optional)

Presentation Helps

Introduction. [*Set a spiritual context that summarizes the themes of the day.*]

Prayer. [*Pray a short prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to bless the couples as they minister God's love to each other and to those around them.*]

Song/hymn. [*Sing a devotional song/hymn such as "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" by Stuart Townend that speaks of the sacrificial love of God expressed through Jesus Christ.*]

Scripture readings. [*Choose husband-wife teams to read the following scriptures.*]

- Psalm 103:1-14
- Ephesians 3:14-21

Couple foot-washing. [*Often the person whose feet we most need to wash are those of our spouse. If you wish to have couple foot-washing, it is important to use a room large enough to give each of the couples appropriate space to talk and perform this act with appropriate privacy. The use of a moisturizing cream for couples to massage into each other's feet if they wish can be a nice addition to the regular foot-washing.*]

A "foot-washing" alternative. [*If there are no facilities for couple foot-washing, then you could try the following alternative. Give each person a sheet of white paper. Invite them to think of one thing they do that they would like to stop doing because they know it is hurting their spouse. Instruct them not to write on the paper, but to fold, tear, or shape the paper in any way they wish to represent and communicate the action(s) that came to their thoughts. Give a few moments for couples to share their papers with each other. Pray a "releasing" prayer as a group. The couples will dispose of their papers before receiving the communion emblems (see below). Destroy the collected papers after the service. Since they are blank, they do not contain confidential information, so they can be placed in paper recycling bins, shredded, or burned as deemed appropriate.*]

Receiving the emblems. [*Invite a pastor or elder to bless the bread and the grape juice. Play devotional background music. Invite the couples to come forward to one of the serving tables and to throw their paper shapes into a dry foot-washing bowl placed beside the table. When they reach the table together invite them to hold hands as one of the lead couples prays a brief prayer of blessing on each couple. The lead couples can lay hands on the participant couples if they wish and pray for their team ministry and their shared witness to the world.*]

The “lead” wife hands the receiving wife a generous glass of grape juice and the “lead” husband hands the receiving husband a heart-shaped piece of unleavened bread. The couple return to their seats and serve each other, sharing their bread and grape juice. As they wait for the other couples to be blessed, they are encouraged to pray for each other, or to tell each other of times when they experienced God’s grace and love.]

Closing song. *[Choose a song such as Steven Curtis Chapman’s “I Will Be Here.” Give the couples an attractive copy of the words to read as you play the CD. You might also like to create a PowerPoint presentation of words and pictures to illustrate the song. Alternatively, choose a song of commitment to God and to each other such as “Side by Side We Stand.”]*

Benediction. *[Close with the prayer in Handout #6 A Love Letter from God to a Married Couple, an imagined love letter from God to the couples.]*

Gift. *[Give each couple a wrapped gift, such as an inspiring couple devotional book (optional).]*

Banquet. *[A special celebratory meal can provide a beautiful conclusion to the day-retreat. Whether you have a simple agape feast of breads, fruits, nuts and simple spreads, or a three-course meal, you might like to invite some of the couples to tell the whole group a story or testimony of something wonderful God has done for them during their life together.]*

Feedback. *[Invite feedback about the day-retreat so you can modify it on another occasion to suit the needs of your context.]*

Follow-up. *[At about six months after the day-retreat, you might arrange a pot-luck supper for couples and invite them to share reports of their ministries. Use “show-and-tell” style, with photographs or other materials they have to share. Encourage couples to pray for each other’s ministries and to network and support each other’s projects in every way they can.]*

My Love Letter to God

An exercise to respond to an awareness of God's personal love for me.

Dear Father God,

[Write some sentences of praise and adoration for the gift of His love.]

[Write about some of the differences that His love has made in your life.]

[Thank Him for the effect His love has had on your life.]

[Thank Him for the effect of His love, lived through you, on your spouse.]

[Ask Him to help you develop one specific aspect of His love that you would like your spouse to experience more fully through you.]

[Thank Him for reading your love letter to Him and for hearing the response of your heart to His love.]

Amen.

Handout #1 *My Love Letter to God*

Love Connects - How Jesus Made Connections

A Small Group Bible Study

♥ Think of a time in Jesus' interaction with others when He demonstrated these 1 Corinthians 13 aspects of love in action. [*Today, you don't have to explore all of these characteristics in your small group – just focus on two or three of the following characteristics of a loving relationship. Save the others for a couple devotional time with your spouse.*]

Patience
Kindness
Unselfishness
Courteousness
Humility
Forgiveness
Protection
Hopefulness
Appreciation

♥ When did Jesus specifically show this characteristic in His relationship with others? [*Find and read the Bible story of this event.*]

♥ What did He do and/or say that helped you to identify this characteristic of love?

♥ How might those around Him have experienced His love in this moment/event?

♥ Take some time to put yourself in the position of the person with whom Jesus was interacting at this time. How would you have experienced His love?

♥ How might the experience of Jesus' love for you have changed your life?

♥ How might this kind of love be expressed in the context of a marriage relationship?

♥ If you were to take a photograph of something in the 21st century that would depict this kind of love in some way, what would be in the picture?

♥ Be ready to spend a few moments sharing your thoughts with the bigger group.

Couple Prayer Ideas

Because prayer is a very private and personal experience, praying together as a couple can be very challenging. Working out a way to share praying together can feel strange to begin with. However, it is worth persisting in this as prayer can truly bind us together in God's love. It invites us into a special place of intimacy with each other and with Him.

Importance of the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit helps us to know what to pray for and how to pray together. Be open to listening to how the Spirit wants to work with both of you, to develop your spiritual intimacy with each other and with God.

Importance of praise. Praise is so central to our relationship with God. It changes our perspectives on God and on our lives and experiences. Praising God together is one of the easiest places to start to strengthen our spiritual connection with each other.

If your spouse doesn't feel ready to pray with you yet. ♥ Show them gentle kindness; it is the Holy Spirit's job to prompt, not ours to push. ♥ Prayer is a way of showing concern for others. Ask your spouse what they would most like you to pray for. Pray aloud only what they have requested. ♥ When you pray together, ask God to help you to be humble so that your behaviour cannot be interpreted as spiritual superiority. ♥ Avoid behaviour which might leave your spouse feeling discouraged, as this can distance you from each other and from God. Remember that the aim is for spiritual closeness and intimacy.

Confession. ♥ Practice praying prayers of confession privately until you feel ready to share together. ♥ If your offence has been against your spouse, then praying for forgiveness from God in their presence may contribute to their healing experience. ♥ Be careful that your prayers are not used to hurt each other. Be aware of the importance of praying humbly, so as not to spiritually "intimidate" the other person. ♥ There may also be a place for confessing to each other and before God the wrongs we have done to others. Praying together about this helps keep us accountable to each other for working with God to find new ways to relate to others.

Questions to think about and talk about together. ♥ What are my concerns about praying together? ♥ What might be my spouse's concerns about praying together? ♥ What might help make it easier for me to pray with my spouse? ♥ What might make it easier for my spouse to pray with me? ♥ How might God use prayer to help us grow closer to Him and to each other?

Silent hands prayer. This is one of the simplest of all prayers. ♥ Talk for a few minutes about each of your prayer concerns, praises and thanks. ♥ Then hold hands and silently pray for the other person. ♥ Squeeze hands after a few moments and say "amen" together. It can feel so good to know that someone else is praying for us.

Sentence prayers. Prayer is often best when it is simple. We can feel guilty if our minds drift during other people's long prayers! ♥ Try praying alternate sentences. The husband prays one sentence followed by the wife praying the next sentence. ♥ You might like to be guided by the ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thankfulness and Supplication) model of prayer, praying one

or two sentences in turn for each section of your prayer together. As you get used to the idea, you can increase the amount of sentences you pray under each section.

Prayer book. Keep a journal of thankfulness to God. ♥ At the end of each day think of everything you want to thank God for and write it in a small diary. ♥ In the morning, write down together the concerns you each have for the day that you would like the other person to consider in their prayers for you.

Prayer notice-board. ♥ Use a pin board or magnet board (even a fridge door will do!) and create a prayer notice-board, with a collage of prayer requests, praising thoughts, thanks, cards, photos, texts, answers to prayer, and any other clippings. ♥ If you like being creative, make a beautiful scrapbook of your prayer-life together.

Conversational prayers. These are like sentence prayers where you pray a few sentences at a time and then stop and let the other person pray. Try to follow each other's ideas and link your prayers together as if you were having a conversation with each other and with God.

Prayer cards. Buy some index cards in four different colours to represent aspects of prayer, e.g. Yellow – Praise; Blue – Confession; Green – Thanks; Pink – Prayer requests. ♥ Take a few cards each and write different sentence prayers according to the colour-coded theme of the card. ♥ Lay them out together on the floor in rows of different colours and then take turns reading the cards aloud as you pray together. ♥ Alternatively, lay them out and read them silently together whilst holding hands. ♥ Or shuffle the cards and deal them into two piles. Take a pile each and arrange them into a prayer sequence. Read each prayer aloud to each other.

Blessings on each other. ♥ Pray a simple blessing on each other when you part, when you meet again, when you get up from bed and go to bed. ♥ Create your own words and traditions for doing this, such as kissing each other on the forehead or hand before you say the words. ♥ Create a special blessing gesture or signal so that you can secretly bless each other in public or show that you are praying for each other. ♥ Explore Numbers 6:25, 26; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Pray for specific requests. Try and be as specific as possible when you pray for each other, and rejoice together when prayers are answered, even if the answers were not what you were expecting or hoping for. It can be helpful to take a broad and eternal perspective on answers to prayer and to keep in mind that God works all kinds of things that look very messy to us into His beautiful plans.

Prayer reminders. Carry a small item with you that reminds you to pray for each other when you are apart, such as a button, a piece of ribbon, or other small, significant or symbolic item.

Prayer times. ♥ Pray for each other at a certain time of the day every day, by setting an alarm on your watch, mobile phone, or electronic diary. ♥ Perhaps you could text or e-mail each

other your prayers or even try praying together online using an instant text communication service.

Prayer “consequences.” ♥ Write out your prayers on two pieces of paper and swap them between you, adding a sentence at a time and folding over the top of the page so that it cannot be seen until the prayer has been completed. ♥ Take it in turns to choose different prayer themes, special requests, or sentence starters. For example, the wife might suggest that the prayer starts with praising God for His love. Each partner would then write, “Dear Father in heaven,” followed by a sentence praising God for His love. They would then fold the top of the paper down to cover their first sentence and swap papers. The next portion of the prayer would be suggested by the husband, and each of them would write a different response on their paper, fold it down again, and swap papers. The wife would suggest a different prayer focus for the next part of the prayer, and so on. When the prayers have been completed, the papers can be unfolded and read out loud as you pray together.

Daily prayer “menus.” Instead of praying for your entire prayer request list every day, it might be helpful to group your prayer request lists in some way and pray for one category at a time. In this way you develop a prayer “menu,” praying for your family members one day, colleagues and work issues the next day, overseas issues and workers the next day, local church and community issues another day, and so on.

A Love Letter to My Husband

This love letter takes the ideas of the popular ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) prayer and adapts them to sharing loving thoughts with a marriage partner. The following questions and ideas are a sample of some of the things you might like to write about, but feel free to write what is most meaningful to you and what would enable him to feel very much loved.

If you prefer to speak rather than write, feel free to do so. Maybe you could use this outline to help you jot some brief notes so that you remember to say everything you want to say to your husband.

Adoration

- Write a few sentences of appreciation.
- What do you most appreciate about your husband?
- What does he do that makes your life more enjoyable, easier or interesting?
- What do you appreciate about his physical appearance?
- What do you appreciate about his spirituality?

Confession

- What one thing would you genuinely want to apologise to him for, in a non-defensive and honest manner?
- How can you let him know that you realise how much this action has hurt him?
- What do you plan to change so that you won't hurt him again, in this way, in the future?
- How will your relationship with God and your husband help you to avoid making the same mistake again?

Thanksgiving

- What things in your relationship are you most thankful for? See if you can list at least five.

Supplication

- Write a short prayer, from you to God, for your husband.
- What prayer requests would he like you to pray on his behalf?

Et Cetera

- What else would you like to say to your husband about the love that God has put in your heart for him?

What next?

- Sign and date the letter.
- Be ready to read your letter to your husband.
- Thank him for his letter to you.
- Keep the letters to read again in the future.

A Love Letter to My Wife

This love letter takes the ideas of the popular ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) prayer and adapts them to sharing loving thoughts with a marriage partner. The following questions and ideas are a sample of some of the things you might like to write about, but feel free to write what is most meaningful to you and what would enable her to feel very much loved. Use a separate piece of paper to incorporate the ideas below into a letter. If you prefer to speak rather than write, feel free to do so. Maybe you could use this outline to help you jot some brief notes so that you remember to say everything you want to say to your wife.

Adoration

- Write a few sentences of appreciation.
- What do you most appreciate about your wife?
- What does she do that makes your life more enjoyable, easier or interesting?
- What do you appreciate about her physical appearance?
- What do you appreciate about her spirituality?

Confession

- What one thing would you genuinely want to apologise to her for, in a non-defensive and honest manner?
- How can you let her know that you realise how much this action has hurt her?
- What do you plan to change so that you won't hurt her again, in this way, in the future?
- How will your relationship with God and your wife help you to avoid making the same mistake again?

Thanksgiving

- What things in your relationship are you most thankful for? See if you can list at least five.

Supplication

- Write a short prayer, from you to God, for your wife.
- What prayer requests would she like you to pray on her behalf?

Et Cetera

- What else would you like to say to your wife about the love that God has put in your heart for her?

What next?

- Sign and date the letter.
- Be ready to read your letter to your wife.
- Thank her for her letter to you.
- Keep the letters to read again in the future.

Sharing God’s Love with Others Our Audit

Take some time to make an “audit” of the gifts, skills, interests and ministry-passions that you think God has given to you and your spouse. Each partner uses their own copy to fill out the columns for “Myself” and “My Spouse.” Discuss and compare your notes following the *Working Together* instructions on the next page.

Myself	My Spouse
Our spiritual gifts - 1 Cor. 12:1-31 •Offering wise counsel •Clear understanding •Faith •Ministering to the sick •Preaching •Discernment •Communication • Evangelism •Teaching •Helping others •Organising events	
Our talents – ways in which God has gifted us from birth •Music •Art •Writing •Drama •Fixing things •Creativity •Making friends easily •Other talents	
Our skills and education – skills we have acquired and learnt •Teaching •Plumbing •Driving •Conducting a choir •Presentation skills •Counselling •Cooking •Parenting •Other skills	
Ministry areas we are passionate about • Working with teens •Elderly •Children •Music groups •Married couples •The sick •Prisoners •Individuals with special needs •Community outreach •Hospitality •Other ministry areas	

Sharing God's Love with Others Working Together

The goal of this exercise is to discover how God could use the love He has given to your marriage as part of His mission plan for sharing the good news of His love with the world. By the end of this exercise we hope you will find something that God has uniquely equipped you to do together. It may be big or it may be small. It should be something you will enjoy doing together and it needs to be something that expresses God's love to your target group in a practical way. Pray that God will guide this process as you work together with Him to explore His mission plan for your marriage.

- ♥ Swap your *Our Audit* worksheets and look at what your spouse has written.
- ♥ Compare the sheets and see where you have agreed and where there are differences.
- ♥ God is calling you both to a shared ministry that will also share His love with others. What ministry do you think that might be? Perhaps you are already involved in a shared ministry, such as leading a small group, or teaching a Sabbath School class or leading a Sabbath School division. What have you learned from the audit that might enhance that shared ministry?
- ♥ On a separate sheet of paper write down some ideas about how you could use your unique blend of gifts, talents and skills for a ministry to one of your identified target groups.
- ♥ Plan to do something small in your chosen shared ministry area within the next three months. What will you do? And when will you do it? Write it below.

- ♥ Write a mission statement for your “couple team ministry” that focuses on how you will both work together to share God's love with others. Work out your mission statement on spare paper and then write your final mission statement here:

- ♥ Prayerfully dedicate yourselves to this ministry.
- ♥ Be prepared to present your vision in a simple or creative way to the rest of the group.

Handout #5B *Sharing God's Love with Others – Working Together* © Karen and Bernie Holford.
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A Love Letter from God to a Married Couple*

To the two of you,

You have been married for a while now and I just wanted to write and say how happy I am that you have committed yourselves to each other in love.

I expect you have discovered by now that marriage is not necessarily an easy option in life. You will have had your fair share of disagreements, but I hope that you have also had many amazing moments of closeness.

When I gave you the gift of marriage I had four main things in mind.

Firstly, I wanted you to be able to experience the incredible closeness and oneness that I share with My Son and My Holy Spirit. We are three Persons, different from each other, yet We are One. I wanted you to be able to experience the power and passion of My love for you both and for the whole world through the power and passion of your love for each other. Love each other in ways that I would show love for you if I were in your home, being willing to serve each other, and seeking each other's happiness. Strive for closeness as friends, lovers and spiritual companions. It can be hard work; it will hurt at times, but it will be worth all the effort.

Secondly, I knew that life on earth would hold many challenges and struggles and that it would be easier and happier when you could share those with someone who cares for you intensely. You are both very different from each other and sometimes this drives you crazy! But I gave each of you different talents, different ideas, different ways of communicating and thinking about things, so that you would have more resources, skills, and abilities that would enhance your life together. I wanted you to support each other, mutually, in your family and in your ministry.

Thirdly, I want the best for each of you. I want you to grow, develop and mature as Christians. A loving and committed relationship can help you both to grow in your ability to be patient, kind, and unselfish, even considering ways to meet each other's needs before the other has even noticed that they have a need! I want you to learn how to forgive each other and accept each other, just as I forgive and accept you. It's a high goal, I know, and it won't happen overnight, but I want to journey with you as you

make these discoveries and as you develop your spiritual maturity through your intimacy with each other.

Fourthly, I need you to be witnesses of My love for you and the difference My love has made in your relationship and your lives. If you have children, they need to experience the love I have for them through the ways you show love to them. This world is hurting and hungry for love. As you both grow in My love for you, I need you to share this love with others. I want them to see that a Christian marriage is a positive experience. Find a ministry where you can serve others together, making sure that you always protect the special relationship you have with each other.

Commitment to another imperfect human being is not an easy choice. Believe Me, I know! I have been committed to billions of human beings for thousands of years!

I just want you both to know that My love is here for you all the time. When you don't know how to love each other, or forgive each other, or comfort each other, or support each other, just come to Me and let's work on it together. Marriage is, after all, My idea, and My gift to you, and if it's not working as well as it could, bring it to Me, work with me, and let's look for some miracles together.

Now, as ever, all My love, always,

Your Father God.

**In this letter we have used our creative imagination to express some of God's loving intentions for our married relationships.*