



Week One

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for bringing us together. Help us to grow in friendship and to grow in our faith today and throughout the entire series over these next 6 weeks. Amen.

If your group is new or you have some new members, start with this simple icebreaker.

- Tell everyone your name and what you like to do for fun.

If your group is new or you have new members, let's remember that we want this group to be a place of authenticity but we understand trust takes time to build and transparency is not the same as authenticity. So, while honoring the newness of our friendship, let's simultaneously allow people to get to know the real us.

Talk It Over

This weekend we started our new series #relationshipgoals. During this series, we will be looking at various types of relationships and various practices we can adopt to bring greater health to our relationships. This first week the content was focused more on marriage, but the general principles apply to all relationships.

- Whether you are married, dating, single, or single again, when you think of a long-lasting, healthy marriage, what sorts of qualities do you think are important?
- Who in your life has the sort of marriage you admire? What specifically about their relationship do you appreciate?
- In your opinion, what are some common misconceptions we have adopted as a culture about a long-lasting, healthy marriage?

Read James 4:1 (NLT)

Regardless of your marital status, conflict is a part of life. The book of James tells us that often our reason for external or relational conflict is the internal conflict we each have inside of us.

- Tell us about a time you blamed someone for a problem that really was more your problem.
- How easy or hard is it for you to examine what's happening inside of you when a conflict starts to rise?

Read James 4:2 (NLT)

Often our internal conflict starts to flare up because we are not getting what we want. Our expectations are not being met so we "wage war".

- Depending on how we grew up, our personalities, and so forth, we might "wage war" differently. What are some of your most natural "wage war" tactics? Do you shut down, get loud, get mean?
- Looking back, what are some ways you have grown in your capacity to deal with conflict?

The book of James tells us that God desires to be the source of our contentment. Consequently, when we misplace where we search for contentment, we fuel our own hurt and frustration; this is how misplaced

(Content continued on the next page.)

expectations work. The idea here is God doesn't want us to look to others to be our ultimate source of contentment.

- In what ways do you sometimes expect too much from others?
- Have you ever had someone expect too much from you? Without sharing names, tell us a little bit about how it felt to be on the receiving side of expectations that were too big.

Read James 4:3 (NLT)

Even when we allow God to be the source of our life we will need to learn to deal with our wants and expectations in healthy ways. Just because we trust in God, we won't always get what we want. Learning to deal with our wants and expectations in a healthy manner is a powerful way to transform our relationship with God and others — this is true in our work, homes, friendships, communities, and beyond.

- Unmet expectations can be hard to move past. What are some unmet expectations you have had to work hard at getting past? *This can be about any area of life — even something still in process. There is no need to tie up your struggle in a neat bow.*
- Following up to the last question, what good have you seen healthy expectations bring to you and your relationships?

Read Romans 12:18

The absence of conflict is not an indicator of health. What determines health in a relationship is how conflict is handled. Let's look at some principles and actions to help us walk through conflict well.

Principle One — Understand many conflicts are perpetual. Some studies show that roughly 70% of the problems we have in our marriages won't go away because they reflect differences and preferences hard-wired into us. (Note, we aren't talking serious issues here that come down to moral issues of right and wrong.)

Action Step One — Identity what your perpetual problems are.

Action Step Two — Learn what you can live with. In other words, don't make mountains out of molehills.

- Think of your most satisfying relationships. What are some perpetual problems you have learned to overlook?
- Looking at your marriage, your closest friendships, or even the people you work with, are there some perpetual problems you need to learn to live with? Without oversharing, tell us about something you might need to start overlooking.

Principle Two — Resolve conflict through forgiveness. Not all conflict should be resolved through compromise. Some conflicts demand we name the problem, change, and learn to do the hard work of forgiveness. Learn to deal with the issues that need to be dealt with and learn to forgive.

Action Step One — Be truthful. We must communicate about real issues. Being truthful might cause its own wave of problems, but marriage is worth the difficult conversations and work. In fact, being truthful is so important, we believe at EastLake we should be willing to spend the money on professional help when we need it.

Action Step Two — We must also be loving. All things need to be dealt with in a spirit of love, even truth. Being truthful is not an excuse to be rude or self-centered.

- Have you ever struggled with forgiveness? If so, what are some real-life practices you have used to forgive when it's been hard?
- When is it hardest for you to be truthful? Why is this the case?

- When is it hardest for you to be loving? Why is this the case?
- While healthy relationships require unhealthy behavior to change, forgiveness is something we should work to do even when and even if the behavior doesn't change. In your own words, describe how forgiveness can exist even when behavior hasn't changed.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

Love is not a feeling; love is a commitment that takes work.

- Looking at the list of qualities used to describe love in 1 Corinthians, what traits come naturally?
- What traits from 1 Corinthians require more intentionality for you to practice?
- What is one next right step you plan out and commit to doing this week in light of all we covered?

Closing Prayer

God, thank you for meeting us here. Thank you for loving us as we are but always inviting us into better ways of being and living. Help us to take what we talked about today and apply it to our lives. Help us to learn to deal with conflict in better ways so we can honor you and ourselves, and enjoy the gifts of long-lasting, meaningful relationships. Amen.

If your group is new, be sure to cover any important details for next week's meeting.

How To Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.