

LEADER'S GUIDE

Us In



Mind

by Ted Lowe

HOW CHANGING YOUR THOUGHTS
CAN CHANGE YOUR MARRIAGE

Overview

THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF MARRIAGE ADVICE OUT THERE—and a lot of it is *good* advice. But chances are, we all know couples who, even though they knew all the right things to do, still found their marriage struggling. Maybe that's even been true of your own marriage. How it started couldn't be further from how it's currently going. It isn't that we want an unhappy, unhealthy, or just plain stuck marriage—it's that we want something better and something different but haven't been able to crack the code on how to make that vision of a healthier marriage a reality.

A lot of us have been there. And while there is no such thing as a miracle cure for any kind of relationship,

what you'll discover in the next few weeks digging into *Us In Mind*, is that changing your marriage, improving your marriage, and bettering your marriage may not be as complicated as you think. In fact, it's possible that the only thing you do need to do it is...you.

Because in most cases, changing your marriage begins with changing YOUR thoughts. And no one has more control over your thoughts than you.

Over the next few weeks, we'll unpack five key thoughts that literally have the power to transform your marriage and the marriages of those in your group. It's a big promise. But when we begin to think and live with *us in mind*, it can become a reality.

Leading Your Group

A GROUP CENTERED AROUND THE TOPIC OF MARRIAGE can feel especially vulnerable. It may take some time for everyone in your group to feel safe enough to share their experience. That's okay! There's no timeline. Each time you meet, but especially in the beginning, remind the group that it is the collective responsibility of everyone there to create a space for everyone to share as much or as little as

they feel comfortable doing. The goal is for couples to feel seen, heard, and less alone in their marriage journey. For that to happen and real growth to take place, everyone in the group needs to know that their stories, experiences, and sharing stay in the group.

Finally, some general tips as you start out.

General Tips

1. As the leader, you set the pace for the group. Vulnerability breeds vulnerability. Your willingness to share openly and honestly sets the tone, so set an example in this.
2. On the other hand, respect is important for the group to be a safe place for every person in the group. You may need to remind members to not disrespect their partner or their partner's boundaries for the sake of vulnerability.
3. Silence is not the enemy. Just because no one is jumping to answer a question right away, doesn't mean you need to fill in the gaps. Give the group space to process before rushing in.
4. And, remember, the goal is not to get through all of the questions. The questions are a guide, a suggestion. You may spend the whole time on one. Or you may not get to any! That's okay. The objective is to facilitate connection between couples themselves and other couples in the group. How ever that happens—with the help of questions or not—is a win.
5. Finally, you are the leader, but you don't have to be the hero. You may need to encourage members to seek professional counseling or therapy if they are struggling extensively.



Intentional Thought: Remember Who I Am

WHILE THIS IS A MARRIAGE BOOK, the ideas in this book are really more about what we can personally take responsibility for when it comes to our own way of thinking. But being able (and willing) to admit the areas we know we need to work on does not come easily or naturally.

As the group kicks off, be sure to steer conversation away from any blame or antagonism that may come up between couples. Remember, you are a guide, not a counselor. This isn't therapy for one couple with an audience of several other couples.

The point of each conversation will be to help each individual in the partnership to see where they can improve on *themselves*, and not point out flaws in their spouse.

IN CLOSING

This week, look for ways to reinforce God's message to your spouse and discount Fred's message to them. Write down the message you think God most wants you to hear and put it on your steering wheel, bathroom mirror, phone wallpaper, and above the kitchen sink. Look for ways to repeat it throughout the day and week.

Response

Ice Breaker

Everyone tell the story of how you met.

Discuss

1. What is one thing about your spouse that you see or admire in them that you wish they could better believe for themselves?
2. What is the message your "Fred" speaks the most loudly to you? What do you think are the messages your spouse's "Fred" speaks the most loudly to them?
3. How have you seen the messages from your "Fred" impact your marriage in a negative way?
4. How do you see choosing not to believe Fred's message impacting your marriage in a positive way?
5. What is the message you think God is most wanting you to hear right now, that "Fred" is keeping you from hearing?
6. What do you think is the message God most wants your spouse to hear that their "Fred" is keeping them from hearing?



Intentional Thought: See the Best

ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN MARRIED for any amount of time can tell you that there are the rose-colored glasses of early dating, and then there is the reality of day-to-day life with another human. There's the season in a relationship when every little quirk is endearing, and the one where it all becomes annoying.

The truth is, it isn't that our spouses just one day became someone who drives us crazy. It's that the way we saw them and who they always were, changed. And when the lens we see our spouse through changes, who we believe our spouse to be changes as well—and not always for the best.

This week, help guide your group to use a new kind of lens to see their spouse—the Philippians 4:8 lens. Because a new view may not improve your spouse, but it will improve how you see them.

IN CLOSING

This week, make a note on your phone or write out on an index card all of the adjectives from Philippians 4:8. Then “catch” your spouse exemplifying each of the adjectives. When you see them being patient, kind, etc, don't just make a mental note yourself, tell them you noticed!

Response

Ice Breaker

Have everyone tell two truths and a lie about their marriage and have everyone guess the lie.

Discuss

1. What are three things about your spouse that caused you to fall in love with them?
2. What is your partner's biggest pet peeve about you? What is your biggest pet peeve about your partner? (Keep these light!)
3. Human psychology tells us that when it comes to our own shortcomings, we are more likely to see our flaws as exceptions to our very good character. But when it comes to others? We see their bad behavior as the totality of who they are. In other words, we see the best in ourselves, and not in others. We believe the best about our own actions, and stop short with our spouses. How has choosing to not see the best in your spouse affected your relationship in a negative way?
4. What is not choosing to see the best doing for YOU?
5. Take a minute and read Philippians 4:8 NIV. Have everyone pick one of the words Paul uses in that verse and give an example of how their spouse has exemplified that quality recently.



Intentional Thought: Choose Empathy

IF THE HOME RENOVATION TV SHOW CRAZE

has taught us anything, it's that no matter how big a disaster the house may be, in one hour, it can be beautiful enough to be featured in *Architectural Digest*. We like quick fixes and tied-up bows. We enjoy resolution and happy endings—and the faster we can get there? The better. And while that may work in television, it turns out, real life is much more complicated. It isn't that things *can't* be fixed. It's that sometimes the "fix" isn't the end we should be aiming for.

When it comes to marriage, this can be one of the easiest temptations we fall into. We think making things better is the worthiest objective. But sometimes, more than anything, our spouse needs a listening ear, a sympathetic conversation partner, and a compassionate presence. Not a fixer. A friend—who strives to understand.

This week, guide your group to see the benefit of being a listener, in being present rather than trying to make things better for their spouse. As you lead, keep the same principle in mind—that you aren't there to fix, but be a sympathetic and listening ear to the people in your group.

IN CLOSING

This week, review the ideas of "I see you," "I get you," and "I got you." Take some time, just the two of you, to share how you would like your spouse to express that they see you, get you, and got you. Is there a particular way you would like them to empathize? What would empathy look like to you?

Response

Ice Breaker

Everyone share what their biggest surprise about marriage was

Discuss

1. Why do you think fixing is so much easier than empathizing?
2. What benefits does fixing offer that empathy doesn't? What benefits does empathy offer that fixing doesn't?
3. How have you seen empathizing lead to a greater connection between you?
4. What are some practical ways you can demonstrate empathy?
5. Share a time when someone has "seen you", or "gotten you". What did that look like? What made that experience memorable?
6. What is one way you can communicate in actions or words that you have each other's back?



Intentional Thought: Pause

SOMETIMES MARRIAGE IS LIKE AN OLD

WESTERN MOVIE: an argument is brewing, and it feels like whoever can draw the fastest, wins. We try to beat our spouse to the punch by getting on the offensive first.

But you don't have to have been married for very long to know that's a fast track to an unhappy marriage. Still, what we know to be true, and how we live don't always line up. We can know that a slowness to speak and get angry is best for our relationship, but that doesn't mean we aren't spewing venom the next time we've taken offense.

This week, guide your group to begin to think through what one small step in the right direction might look like for them in their marriage when it comes to conflict. None of us are perfect in our relationships, but we all have the capacity to get better. Encourage your group to make "better" the goal and not "perfection."

IN CLOSING

This week, when you notice you are being triggered by something that typically leads to a conflict with your spouse, pay specific attention to what is happening in your body. Does your heart rate increase? Does your face flush? Do your muscles clench? Does your mind race? As much as possible, be an observer of yourself at that moment. Then, do what you can to turn the emotional temperature (and physical responses) down. Intentionally relax your muscles, take five slow, deep breaths, and so on. Think through how your approach to that brewing conflict was affected by your slowing down and recalibrating. Talk with your spouse about how intentionally making this a regular habit could help the two of you handle conflict in a healthier way.

Response

Ice Breaker

What is one piece of advice you would give your newly married self?

Discuss

1. What's the stupidest fight you've ever gotten in?
2. What kind of confrontation style did you observe the most, growing up? How do you think that impacted the way you address confrontation now?
3. When it comes to arguing styles, what do you relate to the most? Do you tend to confront, ignore, or run away?
4. As a couple, what are some of the triggers that lead to conflict in your relationship?
5. Read James 1:19 NIV together as a group. What do you wish you could do better when it comes to addressing conflict? Be quick to listen? Slow to speak? Or slow to get angry/take offense?
6. How do you think your ability to handle conflict in your marriage would change if you worked on these ideas from James?



Intentional Thought: Love First

ATTEND ANY MARRIAGE CEREMONY, and chances are you will hear some version of the traditional wedding vows. There are promises to remain faithful in sickness and health, in riches and in poverty—you get the idea. It's all very moving.

But let's be honest. Get a few years into the marriage, and this abstract idea of "good times and bad", doesn't seem particularly practical. What about when you're unloading the dishwasher for the millionth time? Or picking up your spouse's clothes scattered on the bathroom floor? Or changing your partner's oil? Or handling the finances? What about all the day-to-day stuff you do for your spouse that just gets plain...old, tiring, and annoying?

Maybe love is far more about the small self-giving actions for each other than the big promises made. No one mentions those things in their vows. As you wrap up your time in this book, encourage your group to bring the lofty ideas of "love" down to the practical things that make up life.

Loving first, in a self-giving way as Jesus demonstrated, means loving in the mundane, un-extraordinary, boring ways that may not ever get noticed, but have a profound impact—on you, your spouse, and your marriage.

Response

Ice Breaker

What is one wish you have for your marriage in the next five years? (This can be fun or serious!)

Discuss

1. Who have you seen model "love first" in their marriage?
2. What are three practical ways you can "love first" when it comes to the relationship with your spouse?
3. What are three ways you have seen your spouse love you first?
4. What resistance do you feel to "loving first"? What do you think it costs you to live this way?
5. Of the five intentional thoughts we worked through, what is the one that is hardest for you? Which one comes the most easily? What do you think you and your spouse do the best on together?
6. What is something you hope to do differently in your marriage as a result of these past several weeks meeting together?

