

Re|Engage TEST-DRIVE LESSON

TO COMPLETE BEFORE WEEK 1

INSTRUCTIONS:

PART 1: PERSONAL ASSIGNMENT:

READ THE LESSON – prayerfully reflect (highlight, underline, etc. important insights or questions). *Write answers to every question.*

PREPARE TO SHARE - Select at least one insight *about yourself* you will be willing to share in a small group on week 1.

TIME REQUIRED: 15 - 30 MINUTES

LOCATION: ALONE in a distraction-free, quiet place

PART 2: COUPLE ASSIGNMENT:

DISCUSS WITH SPOUSE – take turns discussing your written answers to the questions at the end of the lesson. Ground rules: Focus on listening and understanding from spouse's point of view. Ask questions to further understand your spouse's point of view and corresponding emotions. No disagreeing or arguing about the "rightness" of their perspective.

TIME REQUIRED: 30+ MINUTES

LOCATION: WITH YOUR SPOUSE in a distraction-free, quiet place



TEST-DRIVE LESSON

God completely understands the extent of your marriage struggles. Whenever struggle, weakness, or failure in marriage is brought to light, be encouraged; God is orchestrating your rescue. (Paul Tripp)

YOUR STORY IS STILL BEGIN WRITTEN

Every great story follows the arc of a main character's journey. If there's a Prologue, we find the main character's backstory. Then, the story unfolds with a somewhat predictable arc — there's a beginning, a setback, a crossroads, a breakthrough, a resolution, and in some stories, an Epilogue, where the reader catches a glimpse of the central character's legacy. And just like with every great story, your marriage story is unfolding. You may be enjoying the bliss of a calm beginning, suffocating under the weight of a heavy setback, or you may be terrified by the uncertainty of the crossroad your marriage is facing. Wherever your story presently is, God cares deeply about you, and His deep love for you makes your marriage story extremely important to Him. He can see far into the future and see what your marriage can become, and the legacy he intends to leave your family tree. He wants the arc of your marriage to head toward the good, pleasing and perfect will He has for it.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2, NIV)

Our Shared Prologue:

We all share the same prologue. Our common backstory begins at the Creation story. God created man and woman in His likeness. They related perfectly to God as their loving Creator. And their flawless vertical relationship with God shaped the nature of their horizontal relationships with the rest of creation — the planet, animals, and mate — all were in perfect relationship to each other. Imagine a world without disease, injustice, lack of resources, or violence. Imagine relationships without arguing, misunderstandings, competition, disappointment, or hurt. That's how it was.

Then the story went off the rails.

Humanity broke faith with God and fell victim to a great lie — a lie that God was holding back on Adam and Eve — and so they began the dead-end pursuit of meeting their needs and finding happiness apart from the One who made them. Ever since then, we all have inherited and amplified our ancestor's dead-end pursuits. Like with the first man and woman, our life-giving vertical relationship with God was

exchanged for what Paul Tripp describes as self-autonomy (“I don’t answer to anyone but me”) and self-reliance (“all that I need is within me”). Rather than God being central to life, our default is to make self central. Little do we know that sin is anti-social, and because it is, every horizontal relationship on the planet is strained when we put self first. And rather than selflessly loving others, we love others to the extent that they serve our needs and our personal search for happiness. This is our common backstory.

Your Unique Marriage Beginning:

Against the backdrop of our autonomous and self-reliant search to meet our needs and find happiness, you found each other. Perhaps fireworks went off. Perhaps you had calm admiration and felt secure. Perhaps your souls trembled that you had found your soul mate. Perhaps your friendship was so rich with laughter and understanding that you couldn’t imagine living life without each other. Perhaps your missions in life seemed to perfectly intertwine long into the foreseeable future — you knew you were made for each other. Perhaps you couldn’t contain the passionate chemistry between you. Perhaps your marriage had tremendous practical benefits. Regardless of what it was like exactly, it was something good enough to convince you to enter into marriage.

Your Setback:

How do marriages that have such sweet beginnings end up in bitter times? Every marriage faces two gravitational forces, that if not addressed, will result in a marriage setback. The first is drift. Every couple must understand that the natural movement in marriage is to drift toward isolation instead of oneness. Couples that enjoy oneness in marriage constantly fight drift.

The other gravitational force is stockpiling. Stockpiling is neither good nor bad. It is simply describing the fact that things build up over time. If couples are investing wisely into their marriage, there will be a stockpile of blessing. If couples allow offenses and unmet needs to accumulate over time, there will be a stockpile of disappointment, hurt and distance. Your marriage as you experience it today is the outcome of stockpiling thousands of tiny daily choices you have collected over time.

In addition to these two gravitational forces that pull marriages apart over time, marriages may face a betrayal or major life event that can threaten the stability of marriage in the blink of an eye.

Your Crossroads:

You face a marriage crossroads when you're no longer certain which direction it's going to end up. It can be a very scary, if not terrifying, place to be. Will this marriage last or fail? Will this marriage be a source of joy or a source of grief?

Re|Engage is an important intentional step to reject the road that leads to divorce or marriage unhealthiness and to choose the road that leads to healing, oneness, and renewed joy. The great news about a crossroads is you don't have to wait until you hit the crossroad of a crisis. Every day provides a number of small opportunities to fight drift, shape your stockpiling, or to work through what threatens your marriage.

But if you do find yourself at a major crossroads, know that the enemy's agenda for your marriage always and only can lead to a toxic or broken marriage. He uses wrong thinking and the negative emotions from our unique marriage setbacks to steer us to trust our own solutions for the crossroads we face. Yielding to God's way, in contrast, leads you and your spouse down the road of marriage blessing.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10 NIV)

QUESTIONS:

Generally speaking, which do you believe presents the biggest problem for couples to experience a great marriage? Attitudes, actions, words, or emotions? Write down a few reasons for this belief.

How have you seen drift and/or stockpiling at work in the arc of your marriage story? Write down a few specific examples:

Write down what comes to mind when reading the opening statement from this lesson: *“Whenever struggle, weakness, or failure in marriage is brought to light, be encouraged; God is orchestrating your rescue.”*

What story do you think God wants to write for your marriage over the next 4 months? For the next 4 decades? For the next 4 generations?

That concludes the test drive lesson. This lesson follows the length and style of each chapter in the Re|Engage workbook. Every week, you will be completing a short lesson and self-reflective questions on your own, followed by sharing answers with your spouse, and coming prepared to share something during your mentor group time each Wednesday.