

HomeBuilders Couples Series®

keeping your
Covenant

reproducible
introductory
study



a small-group study to enrich your marriage


FAMILYLIFE
Bringing Truth to Principles Home



Dear Friend,

Thank you for carving out time to attend a FamilyLife event or listen to our radio program, “FamilyLife Today.” We commend you for investing in your family.

Psalm 127:1a says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” *Keeping Your Covenant* is based on God’s Word and contains four sample studies from FamilyLife’s HomeBuilders Couples Series[®]. We believe that this little book can help you and your spouse draw closer together while reaching out to others.

Keeping Your Covenant is easy to use and packed with active learning exercises. It’s a great way to get to know couples from your neighborhood, church, or community. You’ll have fun, develop deep friendships, and learn how to apply biblical truths to your own marriage.

Would you like the Lord to use you to reach the next generation? Then consider guiding a small group through this introductory study. *Keeping Your Covenant* just might be the tool that God has put into your hands today to change your life and equip you to reach out to friends and loved ones.

Yours for godly homes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis & Barbara". The script is cursive and elegant.

Dennis and Barbara Rainey

P.S. Your HomeBuilders group is important to us! Please take a moment to register online at www.homebuildersgroup.com.

Go to
www.homebuildersgroup.com



At homebuildersgroup.com, you'll find everything you need to:

- ▶ register your group
- ▶ get started
- ▶ lead a group
- ▶ network with other leaders
- ▶ give feedback on your latest study using our evaluation
- ▶ get further training
- ▶ find additional resources

Connect with other couples today!

HomeBuilders Couples Series®

keeping your
Covenant

Newly Revised!

A reproducible introductory study to
the HomeBuilders Couples Series®

*“Unless the Lord
builds the house,
they labor in vain
who build it”
(Psalm 127:1a).*



Little Rock, Arkansas

Keeping Your Covenant: A Small-Group Study to Enrich Your Marriage

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Published by FamilyLife, a division of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 1-57229-1915

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This book is a revision of the original work, by the same title, published by FamilyLife in 1999.



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Before You Begin

Congratulations on deciding to invest your time and energy in your marriage. You will experience life-change through the biblical truths found in *Keeping Your Covenant*, develop lasting friendships, and be encouraged as you interact with other couples. May God bless you on your new journey!

Notes to Group Leaders

1. Additional copies of *Keeping Your Covenant* are available for purchase from FamilyLife. To place an order, you may go to our Web site at www.familylife.com or call us at 1-800-FL-TODAY. This study may also be photocopied or downloaded from our Web site; however, we ask that you do so only under the following conditions:
 - You are using the copies for a non-commercial purpose.
 - You will not use this material in (or on) a product for sale.
 - You will not sell the copies.
2. *Keeping Your Covenant* has been adapted from four existing HomeBuilders studies to give you a sample of different topics available to your group.
3. Your role is that of “facilitator”—one who encourages people to think and discover what Scripture says, who helps group members feel comfortable, and, who keeps things moving forward. You are to provide an open, warm environment where couples accept one another. You will also want to review the Leader’s Notes before each session.
4. There are only three ground rules for HomeBuilders group members:
 - Share nothing that will embarrass your mate.
 - You may pass on any question.
 - Complete the project with your mate prior to each session.
5. It is important to start and end your sessions on time. Also, it is important for couples to commit to attending all four sessions and

completing each of the HomeBuilders projects.

6. Please read the Leader's Tips section for additional information on:

- How to lead a session
- Inviting others to participate in a study
- How to handle childcare
- Leading a study in your church
- The most commonly asked questions

7. An excellent resource that provides greater detail on leading a HomeBuilders group is the *HomeBuilders Leader Guide* by Drew and Kit Coons. This book may be purchased through FamilyLife.

I Take You:

Receiving Your Spouse

Oneness in marriage requires receiving your spouse as God's perfect provision for your needs.



W A R M • U P

15 M I N U T E S

“What I Like, How About You?”

In each of the following six categories, how do you see yourself? How do you see your spouse? How does your spouse see you? On the spectrum for each category, place a *Y* where you see yourself and an *S* where you see your spouse. When you're finished, compare your results with your spouse's! Then share with the group the one category in which your ratings most closely agreed or disagreed.

• MUSIC

A little bit _____ A little bit
country _____ rock 'n' roll

• MOVIES

Comedy _____ Drama

(categories continued on next page)

• **NUTRITION**

Health food _____ Junk food

• **FINANCES**

"You can't take _____ "A penny saved is
it with you." _____ a penny earned."

• **VACATION**

Go, go, go _____ Slow down, relax

• **TECHNOLOGY**

Wired _____ Off-line



In Genesis 2:18-24, we find the familiar story of Adam and Eve. Our familiarity with Scriptures such as this can blind us to profound insights. Let's look at what we can learn from this passage to help us fully accept our spouse as God's provision.

Our Need for a Spouse

Read Genesis 2:18-20

1. What need did God build into Adam? How do we

share that need?

2. Why do you think God created Adam with the need for a helper?

God's Provision for Our Need

Read Genesis 2:21-22

3. How did God go about creating Eve? Be specific.

4. Why do you suppose God chose to create Eve this way?

Our Response to God's Provision

Read Genesis 2:23-24

5. How do you think Adam felt when he first saw Eve?

6. How were Adam and Eve able to recognize they were made for each other?

HomeBuilders Principle:

You can fully accept your spouse because of faith in God's character and trustworthiness.

You and Your Spouse

7. In what ways does modern culture encourage you to be independent of your spouse?

8. What are some things that cause people to reject rather than accept their spouses?

9. Consider the results of not receiving your spouse. What have you observed in the relationships of married couples who do not accept each other as God's provision for their needs?

10. If you truly receive your spouse as God's provision for you, how can that affect your attitude toward your spouse's weaknesses?

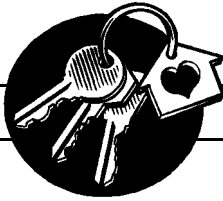
Answer questions 11 and 12 with your spouse. After answering, you may want to share an appropriate insight or discovery with the group.

11. What are some ways you need your spouse? In what ways has this changed since you were first married?

12. What are some differences in your spouse that God uses to complement you?

HomeBuilders Principle:

A God-honoring marriage is not created by finding a flawless spouse, but by allowing God's perfect love and acceptance to flow through an imperfect person—you—toward another imperfect person—your mate.



Individually write down as many ways as you can think of in one minute that your spouse has helped you during the last week. When time is up, exchange lists with your spouse. Everyone should then share with the group one thing from the list they received.

For an active illustration of the need for oneness in marriage, do this exercise.

For Extra Impact

Each couple in the group should have a common household tool that has two parts (like a pair of scissors, a manual can opener, or a pair of pliers). Take a minute to study your tool. Note any observations you have, specifically its function, how it

works, and what makes it unique. Then as a group discuss the following questions:

- What observations did you make?
- How would you compare marriage to these tools?

Make a Date

Make a date with your spouse to meet before the next session to complete the HomeBuilders Project. Your leader will ask you to share something from this experience.

DATE

TIME

LOCATION

HOMEBUILDERS PROJECT



6 0 M I N U T E S

As a Couple [5 minutes]

To start your date, pull out your wedding album, and take a few minutes to relive your wedding day. As you look at the pictures, talk about the way you felt at that moment.

Individually [30 minutes]

1. Do an inventory of the ways your mate is meeting your needs. Try to list 25 or more if you can. (List on a separate sheet of paper.)

2. Identify which of those are the five most important ways you need him or her.

3. Identify those differences in your mate that God uses to complete you.

4. Identify one or two areas in which you may have been rejecting or not totally accepting your mate. What has been the result of that rejection for you? For your mate?

5. Do you need to ask forgiveness for your lack of acceptance toward your mate? If appropriate, express this to your mate.

Interact as a Couple [25 minutes]

1. Share your answers from the individual section with your mate.
2. Affirm (or reaffirm) to your mate your acceptance of him or her as God's perfect provision for your needs.
3. Close your time together in prayer, thanking God for one another.

Remember to take your calendar to the next session so you can Make a Date.

To Be Your Husband/Wife: Making Your Relationship a Priority

To develop positive communication patterns, you must make your marriage relationship a priority.



W A R M • U P

15 M I N U T E S

A Modern Stone-Age Family

Read the following case study and discuss thoughts that might complete the blanks at the end.

Case Study

Wilma was getting fed up. Every night Fred came home from a hard day at the quarry and plopped in front of the TV to watch Championship Rock-Wrestling. He barely uttered a grunt the whole evening except for the noises he made while chowing down the brontosaurus ribs Wilma had prepared. Fred often ignored Pebbles and Dino, and

he left Wilma to bear the brunt of the cavework and parenting chores. Wilma was so tired at night that she usually was asleep before Fred came to bed. Finally Wilma was ready to explode, and one Saturday she confronted Fred.

Wilma says:

Fred responds:

Wilma counters:

Fred says:

After a few minutes of having fun with this scenario, discuss the following questions:

- What kinds of communication problems are Fred and Wilma experiencing?

- How have their priorities affected their communication? their relationship?

- How could they improve their communication?

If a new couple has joined the group, be sure to pass books around to record names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.

Project Report

Share one thing you learned from the HomeBuilders Project from last session.



A relationship is a living thing—it thrives with attention and withers when ignored. To maintain a healthy relationship, married couples should regularly examine how they spend their most precious resources—their time and energy—and determine whether they are following their priorities. Many couples find that each anniversary is a good time to evaluate priorities together.

Your Most Precious Resources

1. What pressures in your life make it a challenge for you to

give your marriage the time and energy it needs to grow stronger?

2. How do the following passages relate to making your marriage and home a priority in your lives?

- Ephesians 5:15-16

- Philippians 2:1-4

- Song of Solomon 7:10-13

3. What good examples of making a marriage relationship a priority have you seen modeled by other couples?

4. What effect would you say that priority has had on those couples' marriages?

5. What are some things you've done lately to make your relationship a priority?

Personalizing Your Marriage Priorities

Answer questions 6, 7, and 8 with your spouse. After answering, you may want to share an appropriate insight or discovery with the group.

6. How are you doing in making your marriage a priority?

7. What are some of the barriers you face as you think of taking time for your spouse every day?

8. As you look at your normal daily schedule, what could you change—what could you spend less time doing—to make more room for your relationship? What would be the best time of the day for you to set aside for time together?

Recreational Companionship

9. What have been some fun, creative dates you've had together since you were married? What type of effect have these had on your relationship?

10. What would it take for you to go out on dates—or on weekends together, away from the kids—more than you do?

Conserving Your Energy

11. What would happen if you were able to transfer the energy you normally give to your work to your family instead? What would that do to your family? What would that do to your work?

12. Understanding that transferring all of your energy from work to your family is likely impossible, what are some ways you *could* save more energy for your home life?

HomeBuilders Principle:

For communication within a marriage to be effective, you must reserve time and energy for your spouse.



W R A P • U P

15 M I N U T E S

Wishing-Not Well

Dig out five coins. Any coins will do—but you may be permanently giving up these coins. Form a circle if you aren't already in one. Close your eyes, and listen as the leader reads the following questions. Don't answer verbally, but for every question that you must answer "yes," toss one coin into the center of the circle. Try not to notice how others around you are responding.

- Within the last month, have you ever let your day get so full that you barely had time to say good morning and good night to your spouse?
- Have you recently ignored your spouse—even for a minute—because of something you were watching on television?
- Within the last year, have you let work obliterate a time together that the two of you had planned in advance?

- Within the last six months, have you let a dispute over children, friends, or activities come between you?
- Have you ever let a hobby or other interest consume so much of your time that your spouse felt neglected?

Now open your eyes and look at all the coins in the center of your circle. Silently think about how each coin represents at least one dent in someone's marriage relationship. Consider what commitment you might want to make to God regarding making your marriage more of a priority in your life. If you feel comfortable doing so, share with the group any commitment you want to make. Then gather all the coins together and have someone buy a treat (however small) for your next meeting.

Make a Date

Make a date with your spouse to meet before the next session to complete the HomeBuilders Project. Your leader will ask you to share one thing from this experience.

DATE

TIME

LOCATION



As a Couple (10 minutes)

- Begin by sharing at least one example of a time you thought your spouse really made your marriage a priority.
- Tell your spouse about any commitment you made or considered making during the last session.

Individually (25 minutes)

1. What insight about communication in marriage have you gained from this session?

2. How do you feel about the amount of time and energy you are saving each day for your spouse? for your children?

3. How do you feel about the amount of time and energy your spouse saves each day for you? for your children?

4. What difference do you think receiving more of your spouse's time and energy would make in your life?

5. What could you do to make your marriage and your family a higher priority in your life? What will you do this week?

6. What differences do you think a change in priorities would make in your relationship and communication with your spouse?

Interact as a Couple (25 minutes)

1. Share your answers from previous questions.

2. If you haven't already chosen a time, what would be a good time each day for you to spend talking together? You might want to start with just ten minutes, but set a time and stick with it.

3. What changes would you need to make—and what obstacles would you need to overcome—to spend this time together?

4. Pray together, committing to God to follow through on making your marriage a higher priority this week.

Remember to take your calendar to the next session so you can Make a Date.

Love, Honor, and Cherish: Planting Positive Words

The words you speak to your mate have the potential to build up or tear down your mate's self-esteem.



W A R M • U P

15 M I N U T E S

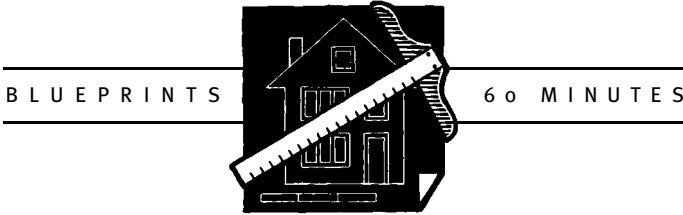
Guess Who

On a piece of paper or on an index card, list three or four descriptive words or phrases about yourself, then give your list to the leader. Once everyone has turned in their list, the leader will, in random order, read the lists to the group. After each of the descriptions is read, write a guess as to who in the group this list is describing. After all the lists have been read, share your guesses and then answer the following question:

- In what way do words have the power to paint a picture in our mind?

Project Report

Share one thing you learned from the HomeBuilders Project from last session.



If you have a large group, form smaller groups of about six people to answer the Blueprints questions. Unless otherwise noted, answer the questions in your subgroup. After finishing each section, take time for subgroups to share their answers with the whole group.

The Power of Words

1. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Looking at this childhood statement as an adult, how do you feel about it?

2. Think about the power of words in your life. What were some statements, either positive or negative, that you heard about yourself when you were growing up that you still remember?

3. What is easier for you to recall—positive or negative words? Why?

4. Words can be compared to seeds. Negative words can cause seeds to become weeds in a person's self-esteem, while positive words bear fruit. As a couple, look up one of the following verses and discuss what Proverbs has to say about the power of words.

- Proverbs 11:9

- Proverbs 12:25

- Proverbs 15:4

- Proverbs 16:24

- Proverbs 24:26

- Proverbs 25:11

After you and your mate have read and discussed your verse, share your verse and insights with the group.

5. Of the shared Proverbs verses, what truth most stood out to you and why?

The Power of Praise

Since words must be used carefully and constructively in building self-esteem, let's consider how best to speak rightly to your mate.

6. What is one of the best compliments or words of encouragement you have received?

7. Why do you think some people find it hard to give or receive praise? Which of these is harder for you to do?

8. For what character qualities can you give your mate praise?

9. It is important to praise your mate specifically. Complete the following statements about your mate:

- Thank you for ...

- You made me feel loved when ...
- I like being with you because ...
- I appreciate you because ...
- I admire you for ...
- I feel confident that you can ...
- One thing that you are really good at is ...

10. Read Ruth 2:2-17. What impact do you think Boaz's kind actions and words had on Ruth's self-esteem? Likewise, how do you think Boaz was affected by Ruth's kind words?

11. The pleasant exchange of words between Boaz and Ruth happened under ordinary daily circumstances as they both went about their work. In what way does their interaction challenge you to look at how you relate to your mate, especially the words you use, on a day-to-day basis?

12. As a group, brainstorm about creative ways to build up or praise one's mate and list them.

HomeBuilders Principle:

Generous praise can transform your mate and improve your marriage.

W R A P • U P



15 M I N U T E S

Form circles of no more than six people, with each circle having a paper cutout of a person. Pass the paper cutout around the circle. When the cutout comes to you, recall to the group a putdown of some sort, then tear off a piece of the paper person and pass the cutout to the next person. After the cutout has been around your group at least once, stop and read Ephesians 4:29.

Now pass around the paper cutout again, but this time share a complimentary or affirming word and use tape to repair the paper person. After the pieces have been re-attached to your cutout, answer the following questions:

- How was this experience like what we do to people in real life?
- Compare what happened to the paper person to what happens to real people.

Make a Date

Make a date with your mate to meet before the next session to complete the HomeBuilders Project. At the next session, your leader will ask you to share one thing from this experience.

DATE

TIME

LOCATION

HOMEBUILDERS PROJECT



6 0 M I N U T E S

As a Couple (10 minutes)

To start your date, see if you can compliment each other all the way through the alphabet! For example, start

4. What are some words from your mate that encourage you and lift your spirit?

5. What are some words from your mate that bring you down and discourage you?

6. How can you more regularly communicate praise to your mate?

Interact as a Couple (35 minutes)

1. Share with one another your answers to questions 1-4 in the previous section. Be open, kind, and understanding toward one another.

2. Agree on any action steps you should take and how they will be implemented.

3. Read your sentence completions to your mate. Be gracious in receiving your mate's praise and affirmation.

4. Close by praying together, thanking God for your mate.

Remember to bring your calendar to the next session so you can Make a Date.

To Have and to Hold: The Power of Prayer in Marriage

Prayer promotes growth in your relationships
with God and with your spouse.

W A R M • U P



15 M I N U T E S

Practiced Prayer

Whether or not you grew up in a “Christian” home, you learned about prayer as you observed the attitudes and practices of family, friends, church members, or even characters in television shows and movies.

For fun, recite aloud any memorized prayers you still remember.

- What do you remember about your concept of prayer as a child?

- How has your concept of prayer changed since you were a child? Why?

Project Report

Share one thing you learned from the HomeBuilders Project from last session.



Barriers to Prayer

It's important to examine barriers to prayer so that couples can identify what keeps them from praying more.

1. What do you think keeps people from praying more than they do?

2. Why do you think many Christian couples spend little time together in prayer?

3. What does God's Word say about how prayer can help you grow in your relationship with God? Have each couple take one of the following passages. (It's okay for more than one couple to have the same passage or for a couple to take more than one passage depending on the number in your group.)

- 2 Chronicles 7:14

- Philippians 4:6-7

- Matthew 6:6

- James 1:5

- Matthew 26:41

- James 5:16

Read your Scripture together and discuss the benefit of prayer revealed in your passage. Then share your passage and what you discovered with the group.

4. If you've ever experienced one of the truths of the previous verses, tell about that experience. How have you

received God's wisdom or peace, or how have you experienced God's presence through prayer?

Basic Components of Prayer

Because prayer is talking with God, it's a wonderful way to develop your relationship with him. But many people know little about what to do as they pray.

The Psalms are among the best known and loved writings of all literature. Many psalms are actually prayers, and from them we can learn about basic components of prayer.

Praise

The element of prayer that the Psalms are best known for is praise. Throughout the book of Psalms, David and other psalmists express their adoration of God.

5. Read Psalm 96:1-10. What does it mean to praise God? If a person were to consistently spend significant time praising God, how would that affect the way that person looks at problems he or she faces?

6. What is something you can praise God for right now? Tell your group about it.

Confession

In Psalm 51, one of the greatest examples of confession in the Bible, David confesses his sins of committing adultery with Bathsheba and sending her husband off to be killed in battle.

7. Read Psalm 51:1-13. What was David seeking in his confession? What was the attitude behind his confession?

8. Read 1 John 1:9. What does God promise to do when we confess sin? Why is confession important in our relationship with God?

Supplication

Psalm 34 is often read and quoted to encourage us to bring our needs and desires to God in prayer.

9. Read Psalm 34:4-18. Quietly reflect on the effect prayer can have in a person's life. After a few minutes, share your thoughts with your group.

10. Read Matthew 7:7-11. How should this passage affect our attitudes about making requests to God?

Praying Together

Answer questions 11 and 12 with your spouse. After answering, you may want to share an appropriate insight or discovery with the group.

11. Read Matthew 18:19-20. How do these verses relate to praying together as a couple? How would your marriage benefit if you were to pray together more consistently?

12. Identify two or three things that make praying together difficult for you. What steps can you take to resolve one of these difficulties?

HomeBuilders Principle:

Praying together affirms your unified dependence on God and helps produce the cleansing, humility, and unity essential to continual spiritual growth in marriage.



W R A P • U P

15 M I N U T E S

Now it's time to practice what you've been learning. Turn to your spouse and talk about one need in your life right now—it could be something you'd like to see God accomplish in the lives of your children, in your marriage, in your careers, or in any other part of your lives. Take turns praying simple one- or two-sentence prayers. Spend a few minutes praising God, confessing sins as you need to, and telling God about your needs and the needs of others.

As a group, discuss “Where Do We Go From Here?” on page 48.

Make a Date _____

Make a date with your spouse to meet this week to complete the HomeBuilders Project.

DATE

TIME

LOCATION



As a Couple (5 minutes)

Begin by sharing with each other:

- The cutest or most humorous thing you remember praying for in your childhood or youth, or
- The cutest or most humorous thing you've heard a child pray for

Individually (20 minutes)

1. What insight did you gain about prayer in marriage from this session?

2. How well do you feel you and your spouse do at praying together? What is one thing you could do to improve in this area?

3. When you pray, on which of the three components (praise, confession, supplication) do you spend the most

time? On which do you spend the least amount of time?

4. Using Psalm 96 as a guide, spend time praising God for who He is and what He has done in your life. Write a list of specific things to praise God for.

5. Read 1 John 1:9. Now spend a few moments confessing any sin that is blocking growth in your relationship with God. Then thank God for forgiving those sins.

6. What prayer needs do you have or know about? List them as prayer requests, then pray through the list.

Interact as a Couple (35 minutes)

1. Share with each other the insights of your individual time.

2. What do you see as the value of praying together?

3. Choose a time and place for regular prayer together.

4. One tool that can help make prayer meaningful and significant in your life is a prayer journal. In it you enter particular prayer needs and dates, leaving some space so that later you can record what happened after you prayed. As part of this study, keep a prayer journal for the next few weeks. Doing this will give you a measurable way of seeing God at work in your lives. Few experiences are more exciting!

5. Following the outline of praise, confession, and supplication, spend a few minutes in prayer together.

Where Do We Go From Here?

You have been working on the most important commitment of your life—spending time with God and with your spouse. You may be asking yourselves, “Where do we go from here?”

If your group decides to do another study together, you’ll be glad to know that FamilyLife’s HomeBuilders Couples Series offers other studies on a variety of topics. And more titles are being added.

As a group, decide:

- When will we begin a new study?
- What study will we use?
- Who will facilitate it?
- Where will we meet?
- Who will order the materials?

Current HomeBuilders Study Guides

Ideal for New Groups

Building Your Marriage

by Dennis Rainey

(7 sessions). Discover and apply God's basic blueprints for a strong, healthy marriage that will last a lifetime.



Growing Together in Christ

by David Sunde

(6 sessions). Discover the power and joy you and your mate can find together by developing an exciting, daily relationship with Christ.

Great for Outreach or Specific Needs

Resolving Conflict in Your Marriage

by Bob and Jan Horner

(6 sessions). Every marriage has its share of conflict. Learn to transform conflicts into opportunities to energize your marriage and increase your love for your mate.



Mastering Money in Your Marriage

by Ron Blue

(7 sessions). You can learn how to manage money wisely regardless of your income level. Through this study, you can put your finances under God's control. Discover how you can make money matters a tool for growth instead of a bone of contention in your marriage.

Improving Communication in Your Marriage (new!)

by Gary and Barbara Rosberg

(6 sessions). Learn how to improve your ability to communicate clearly and resolve conflict with your mate.



For Experienced Groups



Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem

by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

(8 sessions). Improve your marriage by learning how to encourage your mate. Experience new levels of love and fulfillment.

Other exciting new studies are under development!

To order HomeBuilders resources call **1-800-FL-TODAY** or visit our Web site at **www.homebuildersgroup.com**.

Leader's Tips

Who Can Lead HomeBuilders?

Leading a HomeBuilders group does not require an expert Bible teacher or even a couple with a “good” marriage. A facilitator, not a lecturer, leads the group. The main function of the facilitator is to provide an environment of openness, warmth, and acceptance of one another.

The facilitator is a fellow member of the group who has the added responsibility of guiding the group in the right direction within the limited time period. The best leaders are couples who are willing to share their successes and weaknesses while trying to have a better marriage.

If you are unsure about your ability to lead, consider co-leading with another couple. You can divide the responsibilities. Together you can trust God to work in your lives and help other couples.

By leading a HomeBuilders group you will:

- Invest in your own marriage
- Study the Bible
- Grow in Christian character
- Have fun, make friends, and deepen friendships
- Serve your church
- Do your children a favor by strengthening your family
- Make a difference in the lives of others

Starting a HomeBuilders Group

As a couple, commit to each other and to God to make the HomeBuilders group a priority for the time it will take to complete the study. (Remember, it only requires a short-term commitment. You may choose to meet weekly or every other week.) Decide how you will share responsibility for organizing and leading the group, preparing for the session, phone calling, and details of hospitality.

Inviting Couples to Participate in a Neighborhood Group

Consider asking the couples who attended a FamilyLife Conference or an I Still Do™ event with you. You may also want to invite your friends, neighbors, co-workers, couples from church, and parents from the PTA or your children's sports. A personal invitation is always best when you tell how much a FamilyLife Conference, I Still Do event, or other FamilyLife outreach has meant to you.

Show potential group members the materials and tell them about the discussion format. You will want to assure couples that the study will help make a good marriage better, and that they will be making a limited time commitment.

Starting HomeBuilders in Your Church

If you are interested in starting HomeBuilders in your church, volunteer to lead a group there. Make it clear to your pastor that you will do the work, and show him the HomeBuilders promotional and study material. (Contact FamilyLife for other available HomeBuilders information.) Explain how the principles from the study have affected your life and share how churches can use HomeBuilders in a variety of ways. But, if the pastor is not interested, respect his wishes and start a neighborhood group.

Small Groups—Churches most frequently use HomeBuilders in small groups or as an evening Bible study. If small groups already exist at your church, talk with the person who makes decisions on the

curriculum. If there are no small groups currently meeting, you could offer to organize a “pilot project” and begin with one or two groups.

Retreats or Weekend Emphasis—A church or Sunday school class often sets aside a weekend to emphasize strong marriages. This provides a great setting to share a series of HomeBuilders sessions.

Sunday School—There are two important adaptations that will need to be made if you want to use this study in a class setting: 1) The material you cover will need to focus on the content from the Blueprints section of each session. The Blueprints section is the heart of each session and designed for 60 minutes. 2) Most Sunday school classes are geared around a teacher format versus a small group format. If this study is to be used in a class setting, the class will need to adapt to a small group dynamic. This will involve an interactive, discussion based format and may also require a class to break into multiple smaller groups (we recommend groups of six to eight).

Church Promotion—Consider the following ideas:

- Send invitations to church members and neighbors.
- Advertise in the church bulletin, newsletter, or flyers.
- Conduct an introductory meeting to demonstrate the effectiveness and fun of HomeBuilders.
- Have your pastor endorse HomeBuilders from the pulpit.
- Use sign-up sheets.
- Invite your pastor or couples’ Sunday school teachers to observe an existing class.

Childcare

It is important that your group focus on the study material without distractions and interruptions. Ask your group what works best for them. Childcare must be dependable. Some couples will not be able to commit to every group session if childcare is not provided. Here

are some suggestions:

- Arrange babysitting in one house and hold the study in another.
- Pool resources to hire a babysitter.
- Contact your youth pastor for referrals.
- Ask if any couples have older children who would baby-sit.
- Use available childcare or church facilities when the nursery is open.

Leading a HomeBuilders Group

Before you begin each session, agree as a couple how much you will communicate about your own marriage. Sharing openly will help others apply the biblical truths to their lives. Study the leader's notes and pray regularly for your group. Also, discuss as a couple leadership responsibilities for each session.

It is also important to practice hospitality. Making friends is a key to creating an environment in which God will change lives. In our impersonal world, many couples are hungry for friendships. God will use your relationships in an atmosphere of mild accountability to encourage couples to apply the lessons to their lives.

Starting the Session

- It is important to start on time. Share the following ground rules at the beginning of the first session, and review them as needed:
- Share nothing about your marriage which will embarrass your mate. Your mate is the best judge about what is appropriate.
- You may “pass” on any question you do not want to answer. Nobody is forced to say anything.

Each couple should complete the HomeBuilders Projects (questions for each couple to discuss and act on) between each session.

The Session Itself

Simply read through the questions to lead the study. At first, you may

need to wait for answers. Don't jump in too quickly with your own ideas, couples will wait for you and you will end up teaching the material. Ideas you can solicit from the group will mean more to the participants than those you "teach." When discussion is going too long or gets off the subject, just read the next question to stay on track.

Each session in this study is comprised of the following categories: Warm Up, Blueprints, Wrap Up, and HomeBuilders Project. A description of each of these categories is as follows:

Warm Up (15 minutes)

The purpose of Warm Up is to help people unwind from a busy day and get to know each other better. Typically the first point in Warm Up is an exercise that is meant to be fun while introducing the topic of the session. The ability to share in fun with others is important in building relationships. Another component of Warm Up is the second question (except in Session One) which is designed to provide accountability in relation to the HomeBuilders Project that is to be completed by couples between sessions.

Blueprints (60 minutes)

This is the heart of the study. In this category, people answer pertinent questions related to the topic of study and look to God's Word for understanding. Some of the questions are designed to be answered by couples, in sub-groups or in the group at large. There are notes in the margin, or instructions within a question that designate these groupings.

Wrap Up (15 minutes)

This category serves to "bring home the point" and wind down a session in an appropriate fashion.

HomeBuilders Project (60 minutes)

This project is the unique application step in a HomeBuilders study.

Prior to departing a meeting, couples are encouraged to “Make a Date” to do this project with their spouse prior to the next meeting. Within the HomeBuilders Project there are three sections: 1) As a Couple—a brief exercise designed to get the date started in a fun way, 2) Individually—a section of questions for husbands and wives to answer separately, 3) Interact as a Couple—An opportunity for couples to share their answers with each other and make application in their lives.

In addition to the above regular features, there will occasionally be an activity that is labeled For Extra Impact. The purpose of these activities is to provide a more active or visual way to help make a particular point. Be mindful that within a group, people have different learning styles. While most of what is presented is verbal, a visual or active exercise now and again is helpful to engage more of the senses and appeal to people who learn best by “seeing, touching, and doing.”

What about prayer?

An important part of a small group is prayer. However, as the leader, you need to be sensitive to the level of comfort the people in your group have toward praying in front of others. Never call on people to pray aloud if you don't know if they are comfortable doing this. There are a number of creative approaches you can take such as you modeling prayer, calling for volunteers, and letting people state their prayers in the form of finishing a sentence. A tool that is helpful in a group is a prayer list. You are encouraged to do this, but let it be someone else's ministry to the group. You should lead the prayer time, but allow another couple in the group the opportunity to create, update, and distribute prayer lists.

What about refreshments?

Many groups choose to have refreshments. They help create an environment of fellowship. If you plan on having refreshments as a part of your group, here are a couple of suggestions: 1) For the first session (or two) you should provide the refreshments and then allow the group to be involved by having a sign up. 2) Consider starting your group

with a short time of informal fellowship and refreshments (15 minutes), then move into the study. This way if a couple is late, they only miss the food and don't disrupt the study. You may also want to have refreshments available at the end of your meeting as well to encourage fellowship; but remember, respect the group's time by ending on time and allowing anyone who needs to leave right away the opportunity to do so gracefully.

Building New Leadership

As you lead, begin to look for potential leaders who might multiply your group into new groups. Someone may even express interest in leading. Here are a few pointers to help you in building new leaders:

1. Look for others who demonstrate availability, teachability, and faithfulness.
2. Select a couple in your group who demonstrates maturity in their Christian walk and marriage and who you feel would be good discussion leaders. Challenge them to lead.
3. Invite them to start by first asking one or two questions, then leading part of the session, and finally leading an entire session by the end of the study.
4. Challenge them to start a group after the current study is completed.
5. Ways you can help them get started are by:
 - Answering questions
 - Providing moral support by attending their group's first meeting
 - Expressing encouragement on a regular basis
 - Offering to help when necessary

Most Commonly Asked Questions

1. **Who should participate?**

The concepts in this study will benefit any couple, whether they are newlyweds, engaged, or have been married for many years.

2. **What is the best size group?**

We recommend from four to seven couples (including you and your spouse). If you have more people interested than you think you can accommodate, consider having someone else lead a second group.

3. **What if one partner does not want to participate?**

Expect that some people will attend the first session wishing that they were somewhere else. You can dispel a great deal of anxiety and resistance at the first session by mentioning that you know that there are probably some who came reluctantly. Briefly comment that you are confident that each person will enjoy the study and will benefit from it. Mention that the commitment to *Keeping Your Covenants* short-term (only four sessions) and that the potential benefits could last a lifetime. Also, assure the group that at no time will anyone be forced to share publicly if they do not wish to do so.

4. **Should an individual join the group alone?**

It is best if a person does not join HomeBuilders alone. Learning the principles and seeing everyone else working together on their marriages would cause discouragement and dissatisfaction with the individual's spouse. This does not mean if a person's spouse is out of town, perhaps on business, that they should skip the study. If their spouse is a regular member, they should attend.

5. **Can someone from any religious background participate?**

Yes. Some people may not be as familiar with the Bible or may feel uncomfortable talking about their relationship with God. Simply be sensitive to the fact that each person will be at a different stage in their spiritual journey.

6. What is the best setting for a group meeting?

To create an atmosphere that is friendly and comfortable, it is recommended that you do this study in a home setting. In many cases the couple leading the study also serves as host to the group. Sometimes involving another couple as host is a good idea. Choose whatever option you feel will work best for your group taking into account factors such as the number of couples participating and location.

7. What time schedule should we follow?

The material presented in each session is designed for a 90-minute study; however, we recommend a two-hour block of time. This will allow you to move through each part of the study at a more relaxed pace and include time for fellowship or refreshments. However, be sure to keep in mind one of the cardinal rules of a small group: Good groups start and end on time. People's time is valuable, and your group will appreciate your being respectful of this.

8. What are the ground rules for the study?

- Share nothing that will embarrass your mate.
- You may pass on any question.
- Complete the project with your mate prior to each session.

9. What is the group leader's responsibility?

It is critical that you assume the role of facilitator. Help the group interact and discuss the information. Be careful not to lecture or allow the group to ramble aimlessly. Guide the group using the leader's tips and notes at the back of this booklet. Strongly encourage group members to complete every project — by doing so they will get the most from the sessions. Commit to pray regularly for the couples in your group.

10. Do you have suggestions about facilitating the group discussion?

Keep the focus on what Scripture says. When someone disagrees with Scripture, affirm him or her for wrestling with the issue and

point out that some biblical statements are hard to understand or to accept. Encourage the person to keep an open mind on the issue at least through the remainder of the sessions.

Avoid labeling an answer as “wrong”; doing so can kill the atmosphere for discussion. Encourage a person who gives a wrong or incomplete answer to look again at the question or the Scripture being explored. Offer a comment such as, “That’s really close” or “There’s something else we need to see there.” Or ask others in the group to respond.

11. How can I get everyone to participate in group discussion?

Rather than pose a question, ask non-participants to share an opinion or a personal experience.

The overly talkative person can be kept in control by the use of devices that call for responses in a specific manner:

- “I’d like this question to be answered first by the husband of the couple with the next anniversary.”
- “... the wife of the couple who had the shortest engagement.”
- “... anyone who complained about doing the project from the last session.”

12. How much should we communicate about our own marriage?

Your best resource for communicating with others is your own life and marriage. But as a couple, be sure that you agree about the issues and experiences you will share.

Leader's Notes

Included in this section are notes that relate specifically to a given Blueprints question. **Not all Blueprint questions in a session will have an accompanying note.** The questions that do have related commentary are designated by a number (for example, Blueprints question number four in Session One would correspond to the numeral 4 in Session One Leader's Notes).

Session One • I Take You: Receiving Your Spouse

(The following notes relate specifically to Blueprints questions in Session One. *All Blueprint questions do not have accompanying notes*.)

2. To keep him from feeling self-sufficient. To enable him to recognize his need of God and of his mate.

3. What follows is how some commentators develop the meaning of Genesis 2:21-22. You may want to share these thoughts with your group.

Caused Adam to sleep: Some people speculate that the sleep made the surgical procedure easier and kept Adam from offering unwanted advice to the woman's design.

Took a rib: This implies God recognized the equality of woman with man and depicts the strong emotional bonds between the sexes.

Closed the flesh: Adam was not harmed by this endeavor.

Made a woman: She was totally God's handiwork.

Brought her to Adam: God is obviously concerned about Adam's response to the woman and wanted her to be recognized as coming from Him.

6. Obviously Eve was the only woman there, and we also can assume there was an immediate attraction between them. However, the only clue given in the passage is that Adam must have recognized that God was presenting her as a gift from God. Adam trusted God who had created him and who had now provided a mate for him.

8. If the issue of spouse abuse is raised, call attention to these Scriptures that provide wise counsel: Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13-15 teach God's establishment of governmental authority to control those who do wrong. A person in danger should not hesitate to contact the authorities for protection. Romans 5:8 shares Christ's example of loving the sinner even though hating sin (Psalm 45:7). One spouse's wrong acts do not excuse retaliation by the other. Proverbs 14:7 says to "stay away from a foolish man." This does not mean divorce; it simply advises establishing enough space to avoid the influence of the fool.

9. Note: Rejection of the gift is rejection of the giver.

It's possible someone may ask, "When we were married, neither of us even knew God, let alone trusted Him. How could my spouse be God's gift to me under that circumstance?" Refer the question to the group to answer. As you discuss this question, mention that the Scriptures clearly show that God is sovereign in the affairs of individuals and nations.

10. You can regard your spouse's weaknesses as opportunities for you to be needed and as tools of God to cause you to trust Him. Also, you should realize that some weaknesses will probably never be changed, and those that are changed will only occur in a climate of loving acceptance.

Session Two • To Be Your Husband/Wife: Making Your Relationship a Priority

(The following notes relate specifically to Blueprints questions in Session Two. *All Blueprint questions do not have accompanying notes*.)

2. If you make the most of your time (Ephesians 5:15-16), you will use it wisely and not waste it on things that are not important. Regarding others as more important than yourself will influence how you use your time and how you make your decisions (Philippians 2:1-4). Song of Solomon 7:10-13 speaks of taking delight in each other. This couple spends time together, they desire each other, and they enjoy each other's love.

3. If people have trouble coming up with examples, share the following example:

Each weekday evening, my dad arrived home from work around 5:30 p.m. The four kids would run to greet him, and then he would sit down with my mom and talk for about an hour. What did they talk about? The business. The children. Their relationship. We kids knew we weren't invited, and believe me, we didn't want to be there. But occasionally I would go into the kitchen and watch them through the doorway. I recall some pretty serious times when they were dealing with problems in the family business. Other times I remember laughter or true emotional intimacy. But they always talked.

Today, Barb and I are following their example. The first thing we do each day when I come home from work is head into the living room and talk. We look forward to it each day, and it sets the mood for the rest of the evening. It's an oasis in a hectic day

8. This may be a difficult area for some people to confront, because in many cases it means cutting back on activities they enjoy or on responsibilities they have committed to. For some, it may mean working fewer hours or taking work home less often. Some may have to choose not to pursue promotions, raises, or new job opportunities. Some may have to cut back on time spent with hobbies or other outside activities. For still others, it means making a conscious effort to put the same type of effort and creativity into their families, even if they can't give as much.

Session Three • Love, Honor, and Cherish: Planting Positive Words

(The following notes relate specifically to Blueprints questions in Session Four. *All Blueprint questions do not have accompanying notes.*)

1. For many people the reality is words hurt much more than “sticks and stones.”

7. People can find it hard to give praise for several reasons: They have rarely received it, so they don’t know how. They may feel they should praise others sparingly, so that their position of authority and power is strengthened. Also, some find it easier to poke fun or playfully disagree than to express affirmation and support. Sometimes this is a habit in which the person has good intentions, but simply does not feel comfortable directly expressing a positive emotion.

People can find it hard to receive praise if they sense the person’s attitude is not one of honest appreciation. If a person’s attitude and actions are not in tune, they sense they are being flattered, or manipulated.

10. Ruth was surprised and pleased that she had been treated so kindly by Boaz (verse 10). She was comforted and encouraged (verse 13). She must have felt valued by Boaz’s kind actions and words. Boaz must have felt appreciated by Ruth’s kind words. He recognized that the Lord was with Ruth (verse 12).

Session Four • To Have and to Hold: The Power of Prayer in Marriage

(The following notes relate specifically to Blueprints questions in Session Three. *All Blueprint questions do not have accompanying notes.*)

2. Christian couples often know they should pray together, but just

don't do it. They let other activities and priorities take precedence. Another reason may be that they don't feel comfortable doing it.

3. Prayer can help you:

- Experience healing and forgiveness (2 Chronicles 7:14)
- Receive God's peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
- Experience God's reward (Matthew 6:6)
- Receive wisdom (James 1:5)
- Not fall into temptation (Matthew 26:41)
- Experience healing (James 5:16)

5. Praising God means declaring who He is and what He has done for us. Worship and praise raise our awareness of God's presence in our lives. The more we praise God the more we notice the ways He touches every aspect of our experience. We begin to see our problems more in the context of God's power and control.

7. David wanted to restore his relationship with God. He was totally humble before God.

8. When we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins. Confession also restores our relationship with God after it has been damaged by sin.

9. This psalm not only talks about what God will do to answer our prayers, but it also discusses what He does in our hearts when we pray.

10. God is eager for us to seek Him, and we should approach Him as we would a father who loves us deeply.

HomeBuilders Couples Series®

Small Group Study

Keeping Your Covenant

*A Reproducible Introductory Study
to the HomeBuilders Couples Series*

A godly home is built by knowing and applying God's blueprints for marriage. By attending a FamilyLife Conference, participating in an I Still Do™ event, or listening regularly to our radio program "FamilyLife Today," you have shown that you care about your family.

Keeping Your Covenant is a life-changing tool that is fun, easy to use, and very practical. Everything you need to lead this small-group study is included in this booklet. You'll find the following sessions to be thought-provoking and refreshing, and they will even fit into the schedule of today's busiest couples.

- **Session One: I Take You: Receiving Your Spouse**
(Adapted from *Building Your Marriage* by Dennis Rainey)
- **Session Two: To Be Your Husband/Wife: Making Your Relationship a Priority**
(Adapted from *Improving Communication in Your Marriage* by Dr. Gary and Barbara Rosberg)
- **Session Three: Love, Honor, and Cherish: Planting Positive Words**
(Adapted from *Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem* by Dennis and Barbara Rainey)
- **Session Four: To Have and to Hold: The Power of Prayer in Marriage**
(Adapted from *Growing Together in Christ* by David Suride)



FAMILYLIFE™
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Product #: 5371
ISBN 1-57229-1915



9 781572 291911

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A division of Campus Crusade for Christ

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The HomeBuilders Couples Series® is designed to strengthen marriages and develop supportive relationships with other couples. Whether you've been married for years or are newly married, this series will help you and your spouse discover timeless principles from God's Word that you can apply to your marriage. There's no better way to build your marriage than in the fun and friendly environment of a small-group Bible study.



Dennis Rainey is the executive director of FamilyLife and host of the nationally syndicated, daily radio program, "FamilyLife Today." He is a best-selling author and the senior editor of the HomeBuilders Couples Series.