



the
Bridge of Fellowship

**The Fellowship Journey: Crossing
the Bridge of Fellowship
Study Guide**

Introduction

We believe that the strongest marriages are those that have found a way to integrate seven foundational attributes of a healthy relationship. We like to call those attributes The Seven Bridges. Bridges help us get from where we are to where we want to go, and help us to avoid unnecessary obstacles. They connect two parts of a singular journey.

Relationships are also a journey. Along that journey there are many gaps, gorges, obstacles and other impediments. These obstacles make it more difficult to continue on that journey. Some of those obstacles are so challenging that many people give up before they reach their destination. Some couples just need a bridge in their relationship.

The Seven Bridges represent the relational characteristics of God found in a covenant relationship. God often describes his covenant relationship with his people as a marriage. A marriage that is thriving and exhilarating. By taking the time to understand the relational characteristics of God, we will begin to gain some insights into what a healthy relationship looks like. When we apply these attributes into our relationship with our spouse, and with God, we will start to experience the kind of relationship that only a perfect and almighty God can design. The Seven Bridges are:

The Bridge of Fellowship
The Bridge of Purpose
The Bridge of Celebration
The Bridge of Humility

The Bridge of Healing
The Bridge of Forgiveness
The Bridge of Patience

We cross a bridge one step at a time. Some bridges take longer than others. The goal is to have a clearly defined path where we can begin to move forward.

Journeys

We have developed a study guide for each of The Seven Bridges to help you more fully understand these relational characteristics of God. They are great for couples to explore together or for use in small groups. Each Journey has seven steps and will allow you to understand how these characteristics apply in a marriage. We hope that they will also help you develop a greater appreciation of the relationship God desires with you.

Step One: What is Fellowship?

Unity

Since the beginning, God has shown that fellowship is one of the most important attributes of a healthy relationship between God and man. Fellowship is at the core of what enables a relationship to grow and develop. When we look at the creation in Genesis, God appears to act somewhat independently as He creates the heaven and the earth, separates light from darkness, and creates plants and animals. His commands are singular in that He directs the creation and it happens. Such as "Let there be light..." in Genesis 1:3.

However, when He then created man, he made a particular change in His commands as He turned toward fellowship. In Genesis 1:26, He says "Let *us* make man in our image, in our likeness..." The complexity of the relationship between God and man resulted in a unique effort that required the Trinity to focus on working together to create man. Not only was it a team effort, but it was a recognition that man was to reflect the combined image of the Trinity. That is, man was actually a representation of fellowship itself; the image of the Trinity.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think that God wanted man to reflect the image of the Trinity?

Couple Discussion: What attributes of the Trinity do you feel your marriage best reflects?

Read: Genesis 2:24

While this passage has often been quoted as a guideline for proper boundaries as a newly married couple leaves their parents and join together to start a new family, it also further explains God's desire for marriage to be a natural reflection of the

fellowship of the Trinity on earth. In other words, it is a representation of God. The word "one" in the above passage is the same Hebrew word (*echad*) that describes God as being "one." See Deuteronomy 6:4 and John 17:7. John 1:1-2 further expands on the notion that not only was there oneness found in the Trinity, but that the Word was with God, suggesting a level of fellowship. In marriage, the physical coming together as one in sexual relations and creating a child that is the combination of both individuals is the final ultimate reflection of the individuality of each person, yet the absolute oneness that results.

Couple Discussion: What are some of the things that originally attracted us to each other?

Couple Discussion: In what ways do we demonstrate our oneness in our marriage?

Intimate Knowledge

Read: John 14:7-11, John 15:1-8

The last supper was a great representation of the fellowship that God desires with us. It was a time of honesty, openness, intimacy, service, encouragement and prayer to mention a few. An interesting comment that Jesus made to Philip was that it is possible to spend regular time with someone and still not know them. Knowing someone requires that you want to truly know them. The kind of fellowship that God desires with us enables us to fully know him.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you get to know your spouse over time?



The Fellowship Journey

True fellowship with God enables us to grow stronger spiritually and results on our having a greater impact on the world. As you pursue a closer fellowship with your spouse, you will similarly experience a stronger marriage that will have a greater impact in your life and in the world.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you and your spouse want to have an impact?

Step Two: Why is Fellowship Important?

Teamwork

Read: Genesis 2:18

This passage gives a unique insight into the relationship of the Trinity and its desire for fellowship. God immediately recognized that it was not good for man to be alone. While man was created in the image of the Trinity, man was an individual and needed an equal to join in fellowship for a complete representation of the Trinity. There is a basic desire for fellowship that is inherent in the way God made us. As the components of the Trinity work together, mankind also has a need to fellowship with a mate to accomplish the work that God desires. Having fellowship with your spouse enables you to become a more complete representation of God's original intent.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think God chose marriage as the relationship that best reflects the Trinity?

Couple Discussion: How are you and your spouse working together to accomplish the work that God has set before you?

Rejoice

Not only does God want us to devote time in fellowship, but He wants us to rejoice in that fellowship. Enjoying each other and rejoicing together is a critical part of fellowship.

Read: Deuteronomy 27:7

A fellowship offering was a type of offering that gave thanks to God in a way that He could rejoice and share in fellowship with mankind. Part of this offering included having a meal. God clearly saw the importance of just taking time to have a meal together and rejoicing over the blessings that God has given you. Christ's death on the cross set us free from the necessity of the various offerings to God as a means of restoring our fellowship with Him. However, the purpose behind the offerings provides us with guidance that God saw as a very important aspect of His relationship with His people.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you could celebrate during a time of fellowship?

Couple Discussion: What are some traditions or ways that can help maintain and strengthen the fellowship you share with your spouse?

Step Three: What Hinders Fellowship?

Competition

One of the challenges in marriage is that while God designed it to be a reflection of the oneness of the Trinity, He also gave man and woman their own ability to choose to act independently and to choose to act in a healthy dependence with each other. The freewill that He gave mankind not only gives us the ability to choose to have fellowship with Him, but it also gives us the ability to choose to have fellowship with our spouse in a manner that is reflective of God's original design. This is where many married couples find themselves at odds with each other. They do not choose fellowship with their spouse

Read: Exodus 20:3-11

When God gave Moses the 10 Commandments, He was not only establishing the Law that defined right and wrong, but He also recognized the importance of maintaining fellowship at a personal level with His people and provided guidance for ways to avoid falling out of fellowship. This was such an important part of the 10 Commandments that the first two commandments focus specifically on this. The practical application of this into marriage is far reaching and provides a cornerstone upon which all fellowship with your spouse is built.

God made it clear that we should have no other gods or idols before Him. The intimate fellowship that God desires recognizes that when we put competing interests in our lives, it will diminish our fellowship with Him and make it that much harder to follow the remaining commandments.

Couple Discussion: What are some gods or idols you could put before God?

Couple Discussion: What are some gods or idols you could put before your spouse?

Words

The third commandment focuses on misusing God's name. Essentially, this boils down to respect. Showing the proper respect toward your spouse is essential in maintaining an environment where fellowship can be experienced. How often has a careless word spoken toward your spouse ruined what could have been a fine evening together. God recognized that when negative or disrespectful words are spoken, it creates a division in the relationship.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you could misuse your spouse's name?

Selfishness

Read: James 3:16 and 4:1-3

Selfishness is one of the greatest causes of conflict. When selfishness is demonstrated in marriage, it tears apart the core of the "oneness" that God designed in the marriage relationship for the purpose of individual gain.

Couple Discussion: In what ways is selfishness demonstrated in marriage?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways you can avoid or prevent selfishness?

People

Read: Mark 10:13-15

In this passage, we see Jesus desiring fellowship with children, which were being hindered from coming to him. The children were being verbally hindered by his disciples. Many couples allow people that are close to them (family and friends) to hinder fellowship with their spouse. Couples need to be careful to not allow those close to them to speak negative about their spouse, which hinders fellowship. Some couples discuss intimate issues about their marriage relationship with family and friends, which are not objective and qualified to guide them through the issues.

Couple Discussion: How do you handle difficult times and challenges in your marriage and do you have objective and qualified people to mentor you during these times?

Step Four: What Promotes Fellowship?

Transparency

Read: 1 John 1:5-10

Fellowship requires that we are "living in the light." Living in the light requires that we are transparent and honest. Not only does transparency and honesty keep you in fellowship, but it also draws you into fellowship.

Couple Discussion: What do you think "living in the light" looks like in marriage?

Quality Time

Read: Exodus 20:3-11

The fourth commandment focuses on our fellowship with God by honoring the Sabbath. As in any relationship, God recognized how important it is to set aside specific time for each other and to honor each other during this time. God also acknowledges that we are busy and have a lot to get done, so He allows us plenty of time to focus on our tasks. In other words, while he desires that intimate time of weekly fellowship, He doesn't place unreasonable demands on our time, thus supporting the 6 days of labor. This enables us to minimize any distractions during the time of devoted fellowship.

Couple Discussion: In what ways do we establish a regular "Couple Sabbath" to devote time to each other in fellowship with minimal distractions?

Couple Discussion: What are some additional ways we could devote that time together?

Couple Discussion: Why is it important to allow your spouse to focus enough time on their responsibilities?

Repentance and Forgiveness

Read: Acts 2:38-39

Fellowship between mankind and God is established at the point of forgiveness. It is at that point that he sends the gift of the Holy Spirit resulting in the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). While God made forgiveness available to all mankind at the cross, it must be accepted through repentance. This establishes two very important principles for marriage. When couples demonstrate a willingness to repent and forgive, they will experience a greater level of fellowship. Forgiveness is so important to fellowship that it alone is one of The Seven Bridges.

Couple Discussion: In what ways do we make it easy and/or difficult for our spouse to repentant and forgive in our marriage?

Step Five: How is Fellowship Demonstrated by God?

Having the kind of fellowship with your spouse that God desires is more complex than talking over breakfast in the morning, watching a movie together or riding bikes on a Saturday afternoon. While these may be very important acts of fellowship, they do not in and of themselves define the level of fellowship that God designed for marriage. To better understand the fullness of fellowship that God desires to be present in marriage, we are going to take a look at the attributes of fellowship demonstrated by God.

Pursuit

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:9

Scripture is clear that God is calling us into fellowship. He is proactive in seeking fellowship with us. Being intentional about fellowship is important in any relationship. When you proactively seek fellowship, you make your spouse feel pursued. This feeling of being pursued was likely a very significant part of the dating experience with your spouse. We are drawn towards those that demonstrate a desire to be with us.

Couple Discussion: What are some things that your spouse does or could do that would make you feel pursued?

Covenant

Read: Genesis 9:11-13 and 17:7-11

God's promises are bound in a covenant. When one offers a covenant, there is recognition that it will not be rescinded. A covenant also contains a sign as a physical reminder of the covenant. A covenant is important in establishing fellowship, because it provides the comfort and security necessary to fully devote to each other with out fear of rejection. 1 John 4:13 states that "perfect love drives out fear." God's covenants reflect his perfect love, unconditional love. We

do not have to fear separation from God because of the perfect love reflected in his covenants.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that fear can enter into a marriage relationship?

Marriage requires that each person make a covenant with their spouse. Through your vows, a covenant of life-long commitment is established, which is physically represented by your wedding rings.

Couple Discussion: What are some other ways you can remind each other of your marriage covenant?

Protection

Read: Psalm 23

David gives us an insight in the nature of the fellowship of God. David's fellowship with God was a result of God demonstrating a proactive involvement in his life. It was an involvement that reflected both a guide and a defender. The comfort this provided David enabled him to walk boldly into difficult times because he knew God was with him and God was prepared to protect him. David proclaimed that he would dwell with God in fellowship because of the confidence provided through God's protection.

Couple Discussion: In what ways has God shown his protection in your lives?

Step Six: How is Fellowship Demonstrated in Marriage?

Activities

Spending time together enjoying activities is vitally important for a couple to experience healthy fellowship. Many couples over-commit themselves with too many obligations that detract them from spending quality time together, or they just don't make time together a priority.

Couple Discussion: What are some of the fun ways that we demonstrate our fellowship with one another?

Couple Discussion: What obligations do we have that interfere with the time we could spend together?

Couple Discussion: What are some new hobbies that we could enjoy together?

Sex

Read: Genesis 2:24-25

The description of God bringing Eve to Adam in the garden is a beautiful illustration of fellowship itself in how God brings a husband and wife together and the intimacy that develops in that relationship. Sex is a very important aspect of fellowship. So much so that Paul encourages husbands and wives to not deprive each other, which results in a temptation that destroys fellowship (1 Corinthians 7:5).

Couple Discussion: How healthy is our sex life? What are ways it could improve?

Communication

Communication at an intimate level develops fellowship and is essential for a healthy and growing relationship. While many couples appreciate the importance of learning "how" to communicate more effectively, they should also recognize the importance of "what" and "how often" they are communicating. Getting to know your spouse doesn't stop once you say, "I do." When you take the time to continually learn about your spouse's dreams, experiences, fears, anxieties, hopes, struggles, passions and goals, you will find that your relationship with your spouse will grow and strengthen.

Couple Discussion: How healthy is our communication?

We encourage couples to try using the Couch Time! questions on the Seven Bridges website to help them develop a regular habit of communication at an intimate level. When you take the time to continually get to know your spouse, you will grow closer to your spouse in greater fellowship.

Step Seven: Steps to Fellowship

Prayer

Read: John 17: 1-26

At the end of the last supper, Jesus took time to pray for the disciples. He understood that mere fellowship was not enough to spur the disciples on to the calling God had laid before them. It took the intervention of God in the supernatural through prayer to prepare them for their calling. True fellowship requires prayer. The act of prayer is not just words, but is the solicitation of God into the relationship. It brings forth the power, the strength, and the gifts that are embedded deep within each of us. Praying with and for your spouse enables the supernatural to happen in your marriage. It brings God into the relationship.

Couple Discussion: How is our prayer life individually and as a couple?

Couple Discussion: What are some things that would help you make prayer a more regular part of the fellowship with your spouse?

Empathy

Read: Luke 22: 39-46

Even in the perfect fellowship between Jesus and God, he still needed to pray. His prayers revealed His heart. They revealed his anguish. It demonstrated a complete openness with the Father. When Jesus expressed his anguish that was contrary to the will of God, God did not respond in wrath or anger. God responded with an angel to strengthen Him.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that we could "send an angel" to each other when we express our anguish?

Encouragement

Read: Romans 1:11-13, Philippians 2:1-2 and Hebrews 10:24-25

When we encourage others, we draw closer in unity. This is a simple principle in all relationships. We want to be with those that affirm and esteem us. It is important to take time to let your spouse know what you appreciate about them and to encourage them daily.

Couple Discussion: What are some of the things you appreciate most about your spouse?

Husband

Wife

Encouragement is also shown when we communicate appreciation for our spouse and the positive attributes they bring into the relationship. When we feel appreciated, we begin to take down walls of defensiveness that hinder fellowship.

Couple Discussion: What skills, passions, ideas and attributes do each of you individually bring into your marriage that makes your marriage stronger than you as individuals?

Husband

Wife

Conclusion

Fellowship is about being one with your spouse. It involves a daily decision to not let anything separate that oneness and come between you. It is an intimate knowledge that occurs when you come together in unity and share your life with your spouse. Fellowship builds trust, enhances communication and allows a couple to truly experience each other in an intimate way.

God designed us for this type of fellowship and to experience it in our marriage, as well as in our relationship with him. It reflects the characteristics of God himself in the Trinity.



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SEVEN BRIDGES