

L E A D E R ' S G U I D E

10 Lifesaving Principles
FOR WOMEN
in Difficult Marriages

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Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version.

To the leader:

The women in your group have varying reasons for being in your study: Some are currently struggling in a difficult marriage. Others may have been in difficult marriages in the past and want a clearer understanding of what they experienced; others may want to find out how they can help women, maybe even family members, who are in difficult marriages.

A difficult marriage is any marriage in which a woman finds herself struggling with persistent and pervasive problems. She may be dealing with addictions, abuse, control, anger, personality problems, dysfunctional patterns, physical problems, mental illness, or any other persistent problem that interferes with having a healthy relationship.

Women in difficult marriages feel alone, unloved, hopeless, trapped, afraid, disillusioned, guilty, discouraged, and ashamed. They typically react to the abuse by denying and appeasing to keep the peace or fighting to force change by getting angry, nagging, explaining, controlling, and blaming. Abused women put all their energy into the marriage, ignoring their own lives and sometimes even their children.

The specific circumstances of the women in your group include endless possibilities, but their dilemmas are basically the same. The solutions involve understanding and applying the 10 Lifesaving Principles. Change is a process that occurs at a different rate for each person. Application of these principles requires growth, and growth takes time. Therefore, you may not see major changes during the short time you are in the study group, but you will see each woman grow in understanding and begin to apply the principles.

You are not there to give advice, only to guide their study of the 10 Principles. Each woman has to apply them to her life in an individual way. Some of their circumstances are complicated. If you are concerned about someone's safety or someone seems to be completely overwhelmed, you can refer her to professional counseling for additional support.

Because people may be sharing personal information, it is important that the group is a safe place. Things that are shared in the group should stay in the group. Confidentiality means that group members do not talk about each other with group members or anyone outside the group. Women can and should share their personal experiences but should not give each other advice about what to do in individual situations nor criticize or comment directly about what other women are doing. Instead, encourage them to empathize and support each other by being good listeners and by sharing their own experiences. Women want to know they are not alone and that others understand rather than being told what to do.

Before answering the study questions, talk to your group about confidentiality, not giving advice, and being good listeners. Remind them they are there to share their personal experiences and grow at their own pace. Also, remind them that each woman can share many or few personal details as she is comfortable with.

The questions will have the corresponding page numbers listed, so you can read or reference the accompanying material in the book. All Scripture verses are taken from the NIV, but feel free to use other translations to enhance your discussions.

Lifesaving Principle 1

Understand Scriptural Truths

Women in difficult marriages typically have misunderstandings about what Scripture teaches about submission, love, respect, rights, forgiveness, long-suffering, gentleness, peace, and perseverance. They also wonder how God feels about them: Does He care? Is He punishing them? Is it too late to redeem their lives? These misconceptions have to be corrected in order for them to have a firm foundation on which to make changes and apply the principles to their lives.

1. Read Neh. 9:16-21, Ps. 34, and Exod. 2:23-25. How does God feel about His people when they sin? Is your hardship the result of your own choices, other people's choices, or God's punishment? How do you think God views your marriage? (pages 7-8)
2. Read Gen. 29:31-35. Leah's husband didn't love her. How did God feel about her? Look at the names of Leah's sons. What insights do the names give into Leah's emotions? Do you see a shift in her focus from her husband to the Lord? When you think about God's compassion toward Leah, does it change your perception about what God thinks about you?
3. Read Eph. 5:21-33. Explain how you think submission works in a healthy marriage. How do you struggle with submission in your marriage? (pages 8-10)
4. Read Rom. 13:1-7, Acts 5:27-29, Exod. 1:15-21, 1 Sam. 25, and Esther 1-2:1. What submission principle do these verses support? How does the exception to submission apply to your marriage? (pages 11-13)
5. Read Eph. 5:25-33. What responsibilities and restraints does your husband have as the head of the home? Do his actions affect his position as the head of the home in any way? Read the first paragraph in the section, "Forfeiting of Headship," and discuss Laurie Hall's quote on the difference between positional and structural authority. (pages 13-15)
6. Read Eph. 5:8-11, Gal. 5:19-23, and Heb. 12:5-11. How can you fulfill your responsibility to live in a way in which you bring light rather than darkness into your marriage? What fruit is being produced in your marriage? What part do you play in bearing that fruit? (pages 15-17)
7. Read Gal. 6:7-9 and 1 Pet. 3:13-17. How are you suffering in your marriage? Is it suffering for good or for evil? (pages 15-17)

8. Read Lev. 19:3, 32, Eph. 5:33; 6:5, 1 Pet. 3:7, and 1 Thess. 5:12. How is respect or honor shown in relationships? Why do you think God wants respect in all of our relationships? What things have you heard that might have led you to conclude that God does not value respect in your difficult marriage? How can it be right to ask for respect from your husband? (pages 17-18)
9. Read Col. 3:3-5, Acts 16:37; 22:25, and Matt. 5:38-39. What have you believed about “rights” in your marriage? How has that affected how you have acted in your marriage? Do you feel any differently now? (pages 18-19)
10. Read 1 Cor. 13. How should you apply agape love to your marriage? What parts of the description of agape love have you misunderstood? (pages 19-21)
11. Read 1 Pet. 3:1-7 and Matt. 11:28-29. How did Jesus exhibit a gentle spirit? Is gentleness the same as tolerance and passivity? If gentleness refers to an inner peace and strength from trust in God, how does that change how you apply gentleness to your marriage? (pages 13 describing Sarah and 20-21 “A Gentle and Quiet Spirit”)

Lifesaving Principle 2

Reach Out

Women in difficult marriages often struggle in isolation. Some have never told anyone about their problems. Others have told only close relatives. Others have told outside people and been discouraged or hurt by their responses.

The church tends to give “pat answers” or quick spiritual fixes that discount the deep feelings and complex issues of difficult marriages. Sometimes, the answers cause guilt by inferring that if a woman were able to trust, believe, pray, submit, and be a godly wife, everything would be fine. Most have tried these things, and they haven’t worked. Although those answers are valid, a woman in a difficult marriage needs more: she needs to know she isn’t alone and that she has options and be given tools to deal with the difficulties. One of the ways she gets these things is to share with others who have experienced similar problems.

We are emotionally wounded in relationships, and we need emotional bonding in relationships to be healed. Your study group may be the first time the women have reached out about their problems in a group or church setting. Participation in this group can be a powerful step in healing.

1. Look at the list of reasons people isolate on page 23. How and why have you been isolated in your difficult marriage?
2. Read James 5:13-16. Why and how do you think God uses our sharing with others to heal us? (page 24)
3. Who have you reached out to prior to this study group? Family? Friends? People in the church? Counselors? Support groups? What has been your experience? (pages 24-29)
4. What is the impact on your life of reaching out to this study group?
5. How have your husband, family, and friends responded to your getting help? If your husband disapproves, how do you justify getting help anyway? (page 29)
6. Review “The Differences Between Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships” on pages 29-30. What describes your difficult relationship?
7. There are many common relationship difficulties: general dysfunction, mental illness, addictions, workaholicism and other excesses, abuse, anger, and physical problems. If you haven’t already shared about this, explain which of these difficulties affects your marriage. (pages 30-34)

8. Difficult marriages are often referred to as a roller coaster because of the ups and downs and quick changes. The “ups” are a relief, but the “downs” often catch you off guard. How does the image of a roller coaster describe your marriage? How does knowing that both the ups and downs will come affect you? (pages 34-35)

Lifesaving Principle 3

Change Yourself, Not Him

Women in difficult marriages try to force their husbands to change by nagging, explaining, pleading, getting angry, and threatening. They cope with “the problem” by understanding it, fixing it, coping with it, and covering it up. They worry and obsess about their husbands and the problems. This obsession keeps them from living and enjoying their own lives and may prompt them to ignore things they are doing that are damaging to themselves and others. The most important thing they can do is to realize they are completely powerless to force their husbands to change and instead begin to change themselves.

1. Read 2 Cor. 5:10 and Matt. 12:36; 25:14-30. How does the statement, “You will stand before the Lord and give an account of your life, not your husband’s life,” affect you? Do your actions support that truth? Why or why not? (page 37)
2. Even though you are negatively affected by the wrong behavior of others, you still have choices. When you see yourself as a victim or martyr, you give away your power to choose. How have you given away your power to change your life and yourself to your husband? (pages 39-40)
3. Read 1 Cor. 6:12, 2 Cor. 10:5, and Phil. 4:8-9. When you are obsessed with your husband, you are controlled by your thoughts. God doesn’t want us to be controlled by anything. How does your obsession of your husband and the problems rob you of the ability to live your own life? How can you begin to let go of your obsession? (pages 40-41)
4. God gives each of us freedom to choose how we live our lives. He does not force us to choose His way, even when it hurts Him or us when we do not. What does it mean to you when you read, “You are 100 percent powerless concerning your husband’s choices, behaviors, feelings, reactions, attitudes, decisions, thoughts, and addictions”? How do you try to exert power over him? How does that affect your life? (pages 41-43)
5. Regardless of your husband’s problems, you have a part in the relationship difficulties. You need to look at your personality, your childhood, and your past and current relationships to identify patterns in how you react. What parts of your personality affect your difficult relationship? What roles did you play in your childhood that you are replicating in your current relationship? What patterns existed in your prior relationships that you are repeating in your current relationship? (pages 43-44)

6. Read Eph. 4:26 and Ps. 42:5-6. You can be angry and yet not sin. David was depressed but chose to trust God in his despair. Like David, God gave us the ability to feel a variety of emotions. It is important to feel them because they are an important indicator of how you are affected by your circumstances and a key to why you act as you do. Which feelings are difficult for you to feel? Which are easy? Do you struggle with wondering whether your feelings are sinful or normal? Read Rom. 7. Paul understood we have trouble doing what we know is right. How do your feelings get in the way of your ability to choose what is right? (pages 45-47)
7. Read Gen. 3:11-13 and Matt. 7:1-3. Blaming others for our actions is part of our fallen nature, but God wants us to take responsibility for our choices, regardless of what others do. Do you blame others for your feelings, actions, and reactions? If so, how can you begin to take ownership of your feelings, actions, and reactions? (pages 47-49)
8. God cares about what we do *and* why we do it. Read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7 and identify the number of times Jesus refers to the inner heart or motives. Review the list of “right motives” and “wrong motives” on pages 50-51. Which ones guide most of your actions? (pages 49-52)
9. Read Prov. 13:12 and Phil. 4:11-12. How do unrealistic expectations affect you? How does accepting circumstances as they are, realizing that you cannot force change, bring you peace? (pages 52-53)
10. Read Prov. 18:16. Everyone needs to be loved, appreciated, acknowledged, and approved—even your difficult husband. Name something positive that you could acknowledge him for. How would it help for you to tell him? (pages 53-54)
11. Read Prov. 11:22 and 14:1. Even though you are dealing with difficult and trying circumstances, you have the power to change your home. How can you change yourself to build your house rather than tear it down? (page 54)

Lifesaving Principle 4

Detach with Love

Women in difficult relationships are entangled with their husbands. These women feel responsible for their husbands' choices, cover-up for them, fix their mistakes, and keep them from suffering the consequences of their choices. These actions "enable" their husbands to continue the destructive behavior and can keep their husbands from having to face the consequences of their choices.

"In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them" (Prov. 22:5). Detachment is about women separating themselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally from situations that have a negative effect on them. It helps them to be responsible for themselves and allows them to let their husbands be responsible for their own choices. Loving detachment allows these women to understand their husbands' struggles and pain and treat them with compassion and respect.

1. Detachment is a powerful and necessary tool when dealing with difficult relationships. How would you describe "detachment?" Does the statement, "It is possible for you to have a good life regardless of what your husband does," seem impossible? (pages 55-56)
2. How does God detach from us? How did Jesus demonstrate detachment when He interacted with the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11? (page 56)
3. Understanding that your husband has a problem that is difficult for him to overcome is important, but what does the concept, "A reason is not an excuse" mean to you? (pages 56-57)
4. Read Gal. 6:7-8, Lam. 3:33, and Prov. 26:27. Enablers prevent others from suffering the consequences of their actions. Does God enable us? How do you enable your husband? How can you stop? (pages 57-58)
5. Difficult people typically blame others for their choices. Read Prov. 19:3. Does your husband blame you? How do you respond to that blame? How can you detach yourself from it? (pages 58-59)
6. How do you respond to anger, bad moods, accusations, threats, and "button-pushing" from your husband? How do Prov. 15:1; 17:12; 20:3; 22:24-25 support the concept of detachment? (pages 60-67)

7. Read Prov. 19:19. Crises happen in difficult relationships because consequences eventually result from wrong choices. While we don't purposefully cause a crisis to happen, we should not intervene and stop it from happening either. What are some of the crises you have gone through? What are some of the things you fear happening? How could the concept of loving detachment help you manage in the next crisis? (pages 61-62)
8. It takes time to learn detachment. Read 1 Cor. 9:24-27. Paul talks about choosing to make his body do what he knows is right. How does this idea correlate with the concept of "acting as if." How would that help you in dealing with your husband? (page 67)
9. Detachment is not abandonment. Read 1 Pet. 3:9 and Rom. 12:17-21. How can you treat your difficult husband with love and still allow him to bear the consequences of his choices? (pages 67-68)

Lifesaving Principle 5

Nurture Yourself

Women in difficult relationships ignore their own needs because they focus so intently on their husbands' needs and problems. It is important that women in these situations learn to take care of themselves because doing so strengthens them to meet the many additional demands and stresses of their difficult marriages. It also teaches them to live their lives fully by developing and utilizing their talents and enjoying the good things; otherwise their lives are on hold while they wait for their husbands to change.

When they begin to take care of themselves, their husbands may accuse them of being selfish, but doing so is not selfish: it is essential. Women in difficult marriages can take care of themselves through taking care of their emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental needs, learning to say yes and no, making good decisions, watching priorities, respecting themselves, keeping journals, and keeping things as simple as possible.

1. Has anyone ever accused you of being selfish when you do something for yourself? Read the list of excuses at the top of page 69. Do you use any of these excuses for not taking care of yourself? How do Eph. 5:29, Matt. 14:13,23; 22:39 and Phil. 2:4 support the premise that you should take care of yourself? (pages 69-70)
2. Answer the questions on the top of page 70. Do they give you any ideas of how you can begin to nurture yourself by developing your own life? (page 70)
3. What emotional needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your emotional needs? (page 71)
4. What physical needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your physical needs? (pages 71-72)
5. What spiritual needs have you neglected? Have your feelings of guilt and unworthiness kept you from pursuing a relationship with God? How? What can you do to take care of your spiritual needs? (pages 72-73)
6. What mental needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your mental needs? (page 74)
7. Women in difficult marriages often put their lives on hold until their husbands change. Matthew 25:14-30 is the Parable of the Talents. It is talking about money but can also figuratively include our life, time, money, abilities, experiences, relationships, gifts, knowl-

edge, and opportunities. Even though you may feel overwhelmed, developing your talents is good for you. What can you do today to use your talents? (pages 74-75)

8. One of the ways you take care of yourself is to “simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” (Matt. 5:37). How is allowing yourself to say yes and no when you really mean it taking care of yourself? Do you have difficulty with this concept? How can you begin to make changes in this area? (page 75)
9. Read Col. 3:8-13. Difficult marriages are full of anger, resentment, and bitterness. Do you struggle with forgiveness? Is it hard for you to understand that forgiveness does not mean you have to tolerate mistreatment in the future? (pages 75-76)
10. It is natural to have many regrets in difficult marriages. Do you struggle with forgiving yourself for the things you wish you had done differently? Read 2 Cor. 7:10 and Ps. 38:4. What is the difference between guilt and shame? (pages 76-79)
11. Life can easily become overwhelming, even without a difficult marriage. How can you simplify your life and keep your priorities straight? (pages 79-81)

Lifesaving Principle 6

Face Your Fears

Women in difficult marriages have many fears—some real and some projected. These fears can keep them paralyzed from making changes, speaking the truth, taking care of themselves, and setting boundaries. It is important that they identify the fears they have, talk about them, do whatever they can to appropriately take care of the situation, and then let the rest go by trusting in God.

Talking about the fears with other people is especially important because it helps them know they are not alone and that others also feel many of the same fears.

1. Fear is an emotion. Some mistakenly believe that feeling fear is a sin; it is not. Read the following verses: Matt. 14:22-32, John 6:16-21, Luke 8:22-25, and Phil. 4:6. How do these verses help you see that having fear is not wrong but that you have a choice to turn that fear into worry and anxiety or into faith by trusting God? What do you typically do with your fear? (page 84)
2. Read Isa. 51:7, Prov. 29:25, and 1 John 4:18. How are you afraid of your husband's reaction? What about the reactions of others? How does this fear affect your choices? (pages 84-85)
3. Read Ps. 112:7, Prov. 3:25-26, and James 4:13-16. What changes are you afraid of? How does God want you to view change and the unknown? (pages 85, 94)
4. Which losses do you fear most: financial, relational, material, physical, or spiritual? Read Prov. 15:16-17, Matt. 6:25-34, and Phil. 3:8. How does God want you to view loss? If it is necessary to allow your husband to hit bottom, can you view it in a different way? (pages 85-87)
5. God hates divorce, but He also hates other sin. There is disagreement in the Church over justifiable reasons for divorce. Some say only adultery justifies divorce (Matt. 5:31-32); others say abuse and emotional abandonment are also grounds, partially based on 1 Cor. 7:10-16, in which Paul was explaining that a Christian should not leave an unbelieving spouse simply because he or she was unsaved. What do you believe constitutes justifiable grounds for divorce? How does this view affect your choices and actions in your difficult marriage? Are there times when sin prevents people from fulfilling God's best for their marriage and divorce is a necessary option? (pages 87-88)

6. The fear of being alone is common for women in difficult marriages. How can you conquer this fear? Read Isa. 54:4-6. How does knowing God is there for you help? How can you reach out to other people to keep you from feeling and being alone? Do you succumb to the thinking that the only way to combat loneliness is to be with a man in a romantic relationship? How does that way of thinking hinder you? (pages 88-89)
7. Fear of disappointment is another common fear. How does it affect you? Read Ps. 39:7. What should your hope be in—God or circumstances? (page 89)
8. Finding God’s will for our lives is important; yet, we are sometimes confused and unnecessarily fearful. Read Prov. 20:18, 2 Cor. 2:12, Prov. 3:5-6, and Rom. 8:28. How do these verses present differing ways to find God’s will? Has this been an area of confusion and/or disillusionment for you? Do you need to be afraid of being out of God’s will or turn over your decisions to Him and trust Him to guide you? (pages 91-92)
9. The fear of staying the same can be a positive fear, helping you to realize that unless you do something differently your marriage may either not change or get worse. When you see your marriage in the past, now, and the future, do you see any patterns? Do you have regrets about the past? Will you have those same regrets in the future if nothing changes? (pages 94-95)
10. It is important to identify and analyze your fears so you can see how they affect your decisions. Second Timothy 1:7 tells us that God has not given “us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline” or a “sound mind” (KJV). Read the questions on the bottom of page 95 and top of page 96 that help you evaluate your fears. How will that process help you to say, “So what?” to your fears and allow you to do the right thing anyway? (pages 95-98)

Lifesaving Principle 7

Speak the Truth in Love

Poor communication is a part of all difficult relationships. Denial is also a common part of dysfunctional relationships, keeping people from dealing with issues until they are ready to face them and preventing the truth from being spoken. It is essential that the truth be faced because women in difficult marriages come to doubt their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings because their husbands often lie, deny, twist, and manipulate. They need validation of their feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Being in a group with other people that have had similar experiences helps them see things more clearly.

Once they know the truth, they can begin to speak the truth in love by being honest, direct, respectful, humble, persistent, willing to listen, reasonable, and discerning.

Even if only one person begins to speak the truth, it changes the dynamics of the relationship.

1. Denial is common in difficult relationships. How have you been in denial about yourself, your husband, and your marriage? How has your husband's denial affected you? Jesus said that truth produces freedom (John 8:32). How would letting go of denial set you free? (pages 99-101)
2. Self-doubt is another common characteristic of a difficult relationship. When your husband disagrees with you or denies much of what you believe, feel, and see, you begin to doubt yourself. It is essential that you begin to trust yourself to know your truth, not looking to your husband or others to tell you what it is. How have you let your husband make you doubt yourself? How can you learn to trust yourself more? How does what James 1:5-8 says about doubt relate to your life? (pages 101-102)
3. It is essential that you are willing to confront when necessary. Read the examples on page 103 of things Jesus said to the scribes, Pharisees, and disciples and the things Paul said to the Church. What do their words teach you about confronting? "Tough love says, 'I love you enough to be willing to cause you discomfort or pain in the hope of helping you better your life and mine'" (page 104). Are there times that you are willing to use tough love? Why or why not? (pages 102-104)
4. Dysfunctional relationships have dysfunctional communication. For example, indirect communication causes the other person to guess at what is meant. Does your relation-

ship have indirect communication? How can you begin to communicate in short, factual, and direct statements? What would be difficult about that? How would it change your relationship? (pages 105-106)

5. Speaking the truth in love involves speaking to others respectfully, courteously, and kindly. Do you currently speak the truth in love? What do your body language and tone of voice communicate? Read Col. 3:12, Titus 3:4-5, and 2 Pet. 1:5-7. How can you speak truth that has those components? (page 106)
6. Read Gal. 6:1 and Matt. 7:1-2. How do these verses remind you to speak your truth from a humble heart? Do you do that now, or do you feel that your husband is “worse” than you and therefore deserves harsher judgment? (pages 106-107)
7. Sometimes, truth has to be spoken more than once. You may have to say it, let your husband react, walk away, and then say it again, not nagging, just not backing down from your truth if it isn’t accepted right away. Can you state your truth and then let it go, or do you need your husband to agree with you right away? How does detachment help you with this principle of persistence? (page 107)
8. Your husband has a different perspective and some of his truth, too. Can you be open-minded enough to let him speak, or is it difficult for you to hear what he says? How would your being a better listener change your relationship? (pages 107-108)
9. It is important to be reasonable. “The balance to speaking the truth in love is learning that there are times that ‘love covers a multitude of sins’ (1 Pet. 4:8) and ‘is not easily angered’ (1 Cor. 13:5)” (page 109). Some of the things that bother you are small and don’t need to be brought up. Read the questions in italics on page 109 and discuss how asking yourself those questions would help you get a different perspective about the many irritations you have. (pages 108-109)
10. Proverbs 17:28 says, “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.” Proverbs 26:4 says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.” James 1:19 says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” Proverbs 15:28 says, “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.” When do you need to be silent or slow to speak? (pages 108-110)

Lifesaving Principle 8

Set Boundaries

Boundaries are not about controlling the other person; they are limits on what each of us will and will not do. As was already discussed, we are powerless to make someone else change. The only power we have is over our own lives. Therefore, boundaries utilize the power we have to decide how we will live. Our boundaries also set a standard for others, as we define what is acceptable for us.

“Jesus set boundaries in His interactions with others. He chose when and how to respond, always in full control of himself and what He allowed others to do to Him. He willingly went to the Cross at the appointed time but withdrew himself from dangerous situations before that time. He held people responsible for their actions while consistently demonstrating authority and integrity” (Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32) (page 111) and a love that enabled Him to die on the Cross.

Difficult people don't necessarily welcome their loved ones setting boundaries. It isn't God's first choice that any relationship have a breach, but one may result from making a stand for the higher good of following Christ and standing for righteousness.

1. Difficult relationships weaken and challenge boundaries. Are your boundaries weaker than you would like them to be? Look at the bulleted list at the top of page 112 and share about the reasons that apply to you. (pages 111-113)
2. Read the bulleted list in the middle of page 113 that says, “The following are examples of boundaries to consider.” Think about Christ's life. How did He demonstrate boundaries?
3. Next, read the bulleted list beginning on the bottom of page 113 and continuing onto page 114 of why you need strong boundaries. Which ones strike you as reasons that you should work on strengthening your boundaries? (pages 113-114)
4. Think of an area in which you need stronger boundaries. Look at the bulleted questions near the top of page 114 following the sentence: “Answering the following questions will help you decide what boundaries you want to set.” Answer those questions as they pertain to that area.
5. Are there any family members or close friends who disagree with the boundaries you want to set regarding your husband? If so, you will have to set boundaries with them regarding your decisions and risk their disapproval. Talk about this with your group.

6. What are your past and present experiences with abuse? Have you been in a verbally, emotionally, or physically abusive relationship? How can you set boundaries with abuse? (pages 122-123)
7. Read the bulleted questions under “Relationship Boundaries” on page 124. Answer several of the questions posed. (pages 123-124)
8. Separation is sometimes a necessary boundary in a difficult marriage. Read 1 Cor. 7:10-11. Is this a scriptural justification for separation? What legal, emotional, physical, and relationship protections do you have to consider if you separate? What situations would change the separation into a need to get a divorce? (pages 124-126)
9. Setting boundaries is a process that takes time. This process often comes after you have worked the other principles because it takes clarity of mind, a willingness to face your fears and speak the truth, the ability to nurture and focus on yourself, and the ability to detach so you know what is clearly your responsibility. When you set your boundaries, you have to do so in a clear and calm way. When your difficult loved one doesn’t like your boundaries, you have to be prepared to stand firm. What has been your experience with setting boundaries? Have you backed down, argued, explained, begged, threatened, gotten angry, cried, or negotiated? What has and hasn’t worked for you in the past? What can you change today? (pages 127-128)

Lifesaving Principle 9

Make Your Children a Priority

The same dynamics that make the marriage dysfunctional typically make the family dysfunctional. Children are affected by the problems in a difficult marriage. “They experience the tension, insecurity, and turmoil. They live with broken promises and plans that are changed at the last minute. Spontaneity, fun, and laughter are scarce, and their punishment is usually administered in anger or frustration” (page 129).

The woman in a difficult marriage is faced with many dilemmas in her roles as both wife and mother. It is vital that she make her children a priority in order to minimize the effects of the dysfunction. Listening to them validates their perceptions and feelings. Talking to them involves giving them age-appropriate truth. Even though they experience negative things, they still need to be disciplined. However, disciplining them is often made more difficult by the lack of agreement between her and her husband. When abuse by her husband occurs, she needs to draw firm boundaries to protect her children. She also needs to be careful not to abuse them herself.

In addition, finding ways to meet her own needs, rather than relying on her children to meet them, is essential. Modeling how to cope in healthy ways gives her children hope. Even though her husband brings instability, she can provide security for her children by following through on promises, being consistent, and exposing them to healthy people. Responding to each child’s individual needs prevents damage from neglect. Finally, when she makes mistakes, she needs to apologize to them.

1. Read Ps. 10:17. How do you respond to your children’s emotions? Do you validate their feelings and perceptions? Is it difficult for you to separate disrespect from the sharing of negative feelings? (pages 129-131)
2. Read Prov. 11:13. What guidelines can you use to decide whether or not to share with your husband the things your children tell you? What are the positive and negative outcomes of sharing and not sharing? (pages 129-131)
3. Read Eph. 4:29. How can you decide what is beneficial for you to tell your children? Do you feel you are betraying or criticizing their father when you tell them the truth? Why and when is speaking the truth the right thing to do? (pages 131-134)

4. Read Prov. 23:13-14 and Heb. 12:7-11. Do you have trouble disciplining your children? Is part of the reason that you find disciplining them difficult because you think they are already experiencing negative things in your home? (pages 134-138)
5. Read Eph. 6:1-4 and Prov. 18:13; 26:17. How do you respond to your husband's harsh discipline of your children? When you intervene, what is the outcome? Discuss the bulleted options available to you for discipline disagreements on the bottom of page 135. What are the benefits and negative aspects of each for your particular situation? (pages 134-138)
6. How can you teach your children to respect their father, even though he is doing some things wrong? (pages 134-138)
7. Read Luke 17:1-2, Ps. 82:3-4, 1 Cor. 10:24, and 1 Kings 3:16-27. What is your experience with abuse as an adult and child? Are you or your husband abusive to your children? What should you do to change the situation? (pages 139-141 and 146-147)
8. Read 2 Cor. 12:14. In a difficult marriage, you have unmet needs. Some women expect their children to be their companion, confidante, comforter, or caretaker. These are inappropriate roles for children. Do you expect any of your children to do these things for you? Do you feel guilty when you take time to take care of yourself? (pages 141-142)
9. Read Exod. 20:5 and Titus 2:7. Your example can make a difference in how your children are affected by the problems. What example have you shown your children in how to cope with the difficulties in your home? What would you like to change? (pages 142-143)
10. The turmoil and chaos in dysfunctional homes result in broken promises and changed plans. What can you do to provide more stability and consistency, even when you cannot change your husband's actions? (pages 144)
11. Read 1 Pet. 3:12 and 1 Thess. 2:7-9. Mothers naturally care for their children's needs, but in a difficult marriage, your focus is often on your husband, which can cause you to neglect your children's needs. Which needs have you been diligent in meeting? Which ones have you overlooked? (pages 144-146)
12. James 5:16 tells us that healing comes when we confess our sins to each other. When you make mistakes with your children, do you apologize? (page 147)

Lifesaving Principle 10

Enter God's Rest

After doing everything they can for now by working the previous nine principles to the best of their abilities, it is time to turn their husbands, loved ones, themselves, and their circumstances over to God. They will not work the 10 Principles perfectly and may even find themselves occasionally slipping back into old habits. That is okay. Change takes time and occurs in increments, but God continues to work through all circumstances.

1. Read Matt. 11:28-30. Discuss what it would mean to truly enter God's rest in the situation you are in.
2. Restitution refers to the process of repairing the damage you've done. Regardless of what your husband has done or is doing, you're responsible for the ways you've hurt him and others. How have you hurt your loved ones? Which of these ways represents a reasonable method of making amends or restitution: acknowledging and apologizing directly, repaying debts, doing nice things, or making "living amends" by changing yourself and acting differently now and in the future? (pages 149-150)
3. When you think of making all the changes you are contemplating, what is most frightening? (pages 150-151)
4. One of the hardest things to do is to truly surrender all your hopes and desires to God. If you are struggling with acceptance, it could be that your dreams have not been realized. Read Phil. 4:11-13. What would it mean if you accepted the facts of your life just as they are? How would that acceptance help you enter God's rest? (pages 151-153)
5. Read Matt. 6:34. Living with a difficult husband results in regrets over the past and fears about the future. How would letting go of the mistakes of the past and the fears about the future affect your life? (pages 153-154 "Live for Today" and "Let Your Husband Take Care of Himself")
6. Read the sections "Avoid Major Life Changes" and "Rebuild Trust Slowly." Trust is an essential part of healthy relationships and is often destroyed in difficult marriages. How has your trust been taken advantage of? What would it take to rebuild your trust? Why should you offer trust carefully in the future? Does your husband trust you? Why or why not? (pages 154-155)

7. Healing past wounds is a slow process that involves facing the truth about our pain, discussing it, letting go, forgiving, and building a new relationship. Read Phil. 3:12-13. Some people think that Paul was saying we have to forget the past. Others say we cannot forget, as God gave us a mind that stores memories. But, when those memories come up, we can choose whether we want to allow them to stir up old feelings and thoughts by focusing on them or we can let them go. Resentment means to “re-feel.” What do you think Paul is saying about how we should view our past? (pages 155-157)
8. Even if your husband begins to change, he may not be everything you want, and problems will still occur. How can you deal with disappointment when it comes? (pages 157-158)
9. Read 1 Cor. 1:27, 2 Cor. 1:3-4, and 1 Thess. 5:11. How has God used others to comfort you in your difficult circumstances? How can He use you to comfort others? (page 158)
10. Read Prov. 16:4, Rom. 8:28, Eph. 3:20, and Jer. 29:11. How do those verses change your perspective on your husband’s future and yours? (pages 158-160)
11. Describe the differences in you and your life today as a result of this study.