

Lutheran Marriage Encounter
POST WEEKEND RESOURCE

INTRODUCTION TO SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE

There are a number of difficulties faced by most couples approaching Scripture dialogue for the first time ... a fear stemming from an unfamiliarity with Scripture ... a background of regarding Scripture as an historical work ... for other people and other times, or as something that was mainly the province of others, particularly priests and nuns. So, approaching Scripture with the aim of dialoguing on it is like a journey into the unknown. We think many couples have had the thought or question, "How can we dialogue on Scripture?" "We're not Biblical experts. We don't know anything about the Holy Land, or the way people lived then. We're also afraid we'll interpret passages wrong."

We need to accept that the Scriptures are love letters ... written to us and for us ... to reveal Jesus and ourselves in relationship with Him. The books of the Bible are our books. We can respond to love letters, and our response, our feelings are neither right nor wrong. Our hope in writing this is to provide encouragement and support, and some help from our experiences to couples who've put off dialoguing on Scripture because of these fears that hold us back. We have gained so much from our dialogues on Scripture, that we'd like everyone to experience the growing closeness that we've experienced with Jesus and Our Father. Scripture dialogue is a tool, a means of responding to the love letters of Our Father; it allows us to focus on our relationship with one another and the Lord, by focusing on our feelings in that relationship.

The basics of Scripture dialogue are:

1. Select a passage from Scripture that is meaningful to you as a couple.
2. Read enough before and after that particular passage to be able to "place" your passage as far as chronological sequence of events in Jesus' life, and the physical setting.
3. With one another, try to set the scene ... from the outside in.
 - a. physical setting, time of day, indoors, outdoors
 - b. emotional climate of the passage . . . the atmosphere
 - c. zero in on Jesus and yourself ... what does He look like, sound like?
Where are you this scene?
4. Reread your particular passage.
5. Write your love letter immediately after setting the scene. The basic question for Scripture dialogue is "What are my feelings hearing Jesus say these words to us as a couple?" Focus on your feelings.
6. Follow dialogue technique for writing, exchange, dialogue, and select. In your dialogue, focus on responding to one another's love letter.
7. Discussion later could focus on: "What did His words mean to me?" Don't worry about being right. Where to start? For us, the start is in our prayer . . . to draw on the graces and the love Our Lord has promised us ... to strengthen us when we feel afraid, to give us the courage to make the decisions we make in opening ourselves to one another.

Then, we select a passage ... one involving Jesus, with Him speaking, and in a scene that is easier for us to see ourselves. The Last Supper is a good starter. The Gospel of John, Chapters 13 through 16, are a sharing of the Last Supper, and these are a rich treasure house just waiting for us to enter in. We recommend starting here.

The next step is to set the scene, and an important thing that we have to remember is that no two people perceive the same event the same way. When we as a couple set the scene together, we share with one another how we see it ... neither one is right or wrong. There is no one right way! Since we are setting the scene for us as a couple, the way in which we individually see the scene becomes a blend. One of our difficulties was (and still is, at times) not spending enough time setting the scene. Setting the scene helps us to come alive ... to feel and respond. If we skimp on setting the scene, we're really skimping on ourselves.

We've found it very beneficial to draw on our own life experiences in setting the scene for Scripture dialogue . . . sharing a meal with close friends, a friend dropping in for coffee and sitting and talking intimately with us, walking along a beach or country road with close friends, or sailing in a boat with loved ones. All that we have experienced in our life is a rich source to help Jesus' love letter come alive for us, and helps us to respond to Him. We don't have to be experts on the lifestyle of Jesus' time ... His love letters were written for all times and all people. We don't have to be fishermen, or tax collectors, or Romans or Jews ... just ourselves.

Using a selection from John, at the Last Supper, we start with the physical facts ... it's supper time, the sun has gone down ... it's dusk. Jesus and the apostles are sitting around a table; they have finished eating.

From this point, we draw out of ourselves ... how does this scene appear to us ... to set the physical and emotional climate as we see it, recreating the atmosphere.

We call to mind how we are at the close of a dinner with loved friends ... we've shared a meal together. How are we? relaxed? at ease? stuffed? Do we have a lazy feeling? Do we have to strain to see someone across the table because of the dim light, and we don't want to move to light the lamp? Is it an effort to hear Jesus speak to us? Do we have to exert ourselves just to listen? How does He look to us? What is the expression on his face? Is He intent? sad? angry? determined? desperate? How does His intensity affect us? Are we disturbed? puzzled? thrown out of our comfortable, after-dinner mood? Where are we in the room? Are we observing from outside? or do we see ourselves at the table? Are we confused, "Why is He so intense?" Does His voice draw us? Is it compelling? What does it sound like? Did our father ever talk to us like this before he went away on a business trip, or before he went into the service, perhaps? How did we react then?

What particular words that Jesus is saying really touch us as a couple? Zero in on those words. In this atmosphere, He is saying those words to us as a couple ... He is looking directly at us ... at you and me. He is not only revealing something of Himself, He is also revealing something of us to us . . . how He sees us . . . how He feels about us ...

Let's read the brief passage again, and select our question ... How do I feel, hearing Jesus say these words to us as a couple? We separate and write our love letters immediately. Our feelings are alive and throbbing within us ... if we wait to write tomorrow, they'll recede and we'll be grasping, trying to recreate them in ourselves, so we write now.

Focus on feelings ... How do I feel? How do I feel about my spouse? Our relationship? How do I feel about Jesus? What feelings has He stirred up in me? As we write, we allow ourselves to feel the atmosphere that we've just brought alive, and respond to it. One of the difficulties we've experienced in writing our love letters on Scripture is when we focus on the meaning of Jesus' words, rather than on our feelings. When we intellectualize or analyze, rather than respond with our feelings.

When we come together to exchange and dialogue, we pray that we will respond to one another, we pray that we won't be distracted into a discussion of the Scripture, or into analyzing it. We pray that we will respond to Our Lord's love for us as a couple by focusing on our relationship.

We read each other's love letter twice, and then respond to one another's love letter and try to zero in on one response feeling to reach out for. After the ten minutes of our dialogue, we select our question for the next day, preferably from our dialogue.

A good topic for later discussion is what His words meant to us . . . how His words make me think about our life, and how I would like to live them ... how His words affect my attitudes with you and with Him.

What have we gained from our Scripture dialogues? a greater awareness of the depth of love that Jesus has for us ... truly seeing and feeling how precious we are to Him, how very much He cares about us. We've experienced a greater closeness to Him and Our Father, and a greater commitment to our relationship. When we see and experience the love He has for us, how can we turn and walk away from one another, even in those small areas where we would like to be private? We've become aware of His presence with us ... now ... and His words, His caring and concern for us have become alive in our hearts.

Try of these passages ... and ENJOY!

John 13, 34-35
John 14, 1-7
John 14, 9-14
John 14, 15-17
John 14, 18-20
John 14, 21
John 14, 23-24
John 14, 27
John 15, 1-4
John 15, 5
John 15, 8
John 15, 9-10
John 15, 11
John 15, 12
John 15, 13-15
John 15, 16-17
John 17, 6-9
John 17, 20-23