



Lutheran Marriage Encounter



“A Time To Grow”

This is a series of six topics and outlines for a love circle or a love spiral. It is sometimes called a “Six Weeks Series”. It is often used when starting new circles, or renewing older ones. It gives the group a chance to grow in their love for each other and for others. The topics are as follows:

1. “Dialogue”
2. The many faces of me -- “Encounter with self”
3. “Our marriage”
4. Our first community -- Our family
5. “Community”
6. “God -- Spirituality”

Enjoy each other and enjoy the revitalization that God wants for all of us. Then go out and spread your love and His love around! Invite others to the Weekend!

Love,

Wanne & Ada Horn
😊 😊

GENERAL HINTS FOR COUPLES PRESENTING

CHOOSING A TOPIC & PREPARING FOR WRITING

Choose a topic that you have not given before. If you do get stuck with a subject you have presented before, re-write it so that it is fresh.

Prepare your talk at least one week before you are to give it. One suggested method of preparing your Talk is to think about it for a few days before you start writing. As an item comes to mind which you want to include, jot it down. By the time you are ready to write, you should have a list of topics. Another suggestion is to read a book for inspiration. There are many books on Self, Family, Community, etc., which may stimulate an experience you have had.

DIALOGUE ON THE TOPIC YOU ARE TO PRESENT WRITING AND PRACTICING YOUR TALK

Organize your Talk well -- don't skip around. For instance, if you are following a chronology of events, stick to it. When you relate an incident that exemplifies your attitude, life style, or mannerisms, describe the incident briefly and then tell how you felt about it. If you are trying to make a point, relate two or three examples. Draw your audience into your "time machine" so they can see the real you.

Once drafted, practice giving your Talk to your spouse. Your spouse may have some helpful hints. For instance, you may have presented only the negative side of yourself and not realized it. Your spouse may help you present some positive aspects so that you may end up with a more balanced presentation.

You and your spouse should present your Talks to another couple. This will give you practice in presentation techniques, and a chance to measure the audience reaction. Your reviewers should not tell you how to write your Talk, but should tell you what they heard. If that is what you were trying to say, then you have achieved your goal.

PROBLEMS OF DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP

The Presenting Couple for the evening is responsible for conducting the entire evening in regards to the flow and the content of the experience. Normally if there is a different host couple, they are responsible for the house and the refreshments. The Presenting Couple has the responsibility for keeping the discussion moving, and guarantees that the evening ends on time. This is a difficult task as some people tend to talk too much and stray from the subject while others are quiet and reluctant to speak up. The leadership for an open discussion is very subtle. Some general rules may help:

1. If the discussion gets out of hand, do not be afraid to step in and correct the situation.
2. Gently end the discussion when the time is up. Suggest you use some non-verbal signals like sitting up, or start to say something, or even squirm in your chair. If all else fails, then step in and announce the next subject or event.

Week 1

THE FIRST SESSION

1. Start with a prayer.
2. Each couple should introduce themselves, including:
 - A. Name.
 - B. Number of years married.
 - C. Number of children and their ages and names.
 - D. The nicest thing that their spouse did for them today.

Postpone until later the date and experience of their Weekend. Avoid references to job or status-oriented activities.
3. Explain the purpose of the Six Week Series, i.e., that it is a continuation of the Weekend . . . it is an effort to reinforce some of the wonderful things learned on the Weekend . . . it is a chance to introduce the couple to the continuing ME Community and a way to renew their dialogue.
4. Introduce the six topics that will be covered, and give a short description of each one.
5. In the general case of it being given to an existing Spiral, and ESPECIALLY to Spiral Leaders, get each couple to volunteer to give one of the presentations. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.
6. Explain that they have made a commitment for six weeks, and that everyone is depending upon them to show up on time. Explain that we will budget our time efficiently, and that they can expect to be finished within two hours.
7. Outline the sequence of events as described in the "Sequence of Events" on Page 2. Give a brief description of the homework, mini-sharing, readings, and the major presentation.
- B. BEGIN ACTUAL PROGRAM: The First Session is on DIALOGUE.

Week 1

"DIALOGUE"

PURPOSE:

1. To see the value of dialogue.
2. To stress the joy and goodness of dialogue.
3. Motto of the evening: "Aren't you glad you use dialogue? Don't you wish everybody did?"

See the book THE SECRET OF STAYING IN LOVE by John Powell, page 189. The lead couple should talk briefly to the group about the purpose of the evening.

MINI SHARING: Each couple is to tell when they went on their Weekend and its value to them, etc.

MAJOR PRESENTATION:

1. Concentrate on the general condition of your marriage before dialogue, and how dialogue has helped your marriage.
2. Have there been any crisis situations which dialogue has helped you get through?
3. How have you reacted when you quit dialoguing for a time and then took it up again?
4. Stress the joy and goodness rather than any guilt or sinfulness if you miss your dialogue. Stress that dialogue is a giving of yourself. Read the above book, pages 122-149 (Chapter 5).

Recommendation: Feel free to add to the above mini-outline whatever you are comfortable with. The main thing is to share your own experiences rather than an intellectual dissertation on dialogue.

10/10: Question: "How has the warmth of our home increased since Marriage Encounter, and how do I feel about that?"

GROUP SHARING: This might start out a little slow since it is the first meeting. Don't rush it. It may be helpful for the Presenting Couple to read their letters. Give people time to respond, but make it clear that this is optional and no one is required to do this. Some might read their letters, others might talk about what they have written, others might only comment on what was said.

HOMEWORK:

1. Suggested dialogue questions for the following week:
 - A. Read over your notebook from your Initial Weekend and dialogue on the question, "How Do I Feel After Reading It?"
 - B. "What are the qualities, skills, and talents I like about myself and how do they I feel about that?"
2. Read the poem, "THE WALL", and share how you feel when you read it.
3. Bring a school picture of yourself, and share with the group what kind of person is in the picture.
4. Read the 23rd Psalm, and share with the group.

Note: See Page 5 for additional details regarding the homework. Each couple is to have the same homework; and the homework assignments are to be evenly distributed, i.e., if six couples, each assignment is done by two couples. Use volunteers. All couples are to have an assignment.

5. Arrange where to meet the next week.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Week 1

HOMEWORK

THE WALL

Their wedding picture mocked them from the table, these two, whose minds no longer touched each other.

They lived with such a heavy barricade between them that neither battering ram of words nor artilleries of touch could break it down.

Somewhere, between the oldest child's first tooth and the youngest daughter's graduation, they lost each other.

Throughout the years, each slowly unraveled that tangled ball of string called self, and as they tugged at stubborn knots each hid his searching from the other.

Sometimes she cried at night and begged the whispering darkness to tell her who she was.

He lay beside her, snoring like a hibernating bear, unaware of her winter. Once, after they had made love, he wanted to tell her how afraid he was of dying, but, fearing to show his naked soul, he spoke instead about the beauty of her breasts.

She took a course in modern art, trying to find herself in colors splashed upon a canvas, and complained to other women about men who were insensitive.

He climbed into a tomb called "the office", wrapped his mind in a shroud of paper figures and buried himself in customers. Slowly, the wall between them rose, cemented by the mortar of indifference.

One day, reaching out to touch each other, they found a barrier they could not penetrate, and recoiling from the coldness of the stone, each retreated from the stranger on the other side.

For when love dies, it is not in a moment of angry battle, nor when fiery bodies lose their heat.

It lies panting, exhausted, expiring at the bottom of a wall it could not scale.

SCHOOL PICTURE

Each of you:

1. Find a picture of yourself in elementary or high school. Think of that person in the picture as you would your own child -- with affection, humor, well aware of the strengths and weaknesses.

Write about that child. Describe his/her feelings as a student, athlete, leader, friend, member of groups and clubs. Tell about hobbies and interests, religious values, personality traits, and self-confidence. (This description is for your own focus and not to be shared with the group, so write freely and honestly.)

2. Bring your picture to share. Explain your assignment. Tell about any similarities or changes you noticed about your self-image then and now -- for instance, your patterns of reacting to new situations, accepting compliments, enjoying free time alone, etc.

PSALM 23 -- The Good Shepherd

1. Read and ponder the psalm.
2. How does the psalm relate to the idea "God Does Not Make Junk"? and to the Idea that we already have all the goodness within us and the help from God and others that we need.
3. Read the psalm to each other. Share your thoughts, and one or two personal examples of a strength or quality you recently discovered about yourself, or some unexpected help that came to you just at the right time.

Week 2

THE MANY FACES OF ME -- "ENCOUNTER WITH SELF"

OPENING PRAYER

PURPOSE: To increase my awareness of:

1. Who I am.
2. Who I can be.
3. Getting to know myself better and feeling more comfortable with who I am.

MINI SHARING: (5 minute sharing -- no discussion)

1. "The Wall".
2. School picture.
3. Psalm 23 -- The Good Shepherd.

MAJOR-SHARING AND DISCUSSION: (30 minutes) (Song: The Other Side of Me)

Share your ideas and personal experiences of these key points:

1. Difficulties in discovering my true self.
2. How I keep others from knowing me.
3. Good qualities I've discovered about me.

Recommendation: Do all the mini-sharing assignments as a couple as an aid to preparation. Do not share them during the mini-sharing time. Suggested reading: "Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?" (John Powell, S.J.).

10/10.: (See Page 12 of John Powell's Book and read "Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?")

Reading: "I am afraid to tell you who I am because if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and it's all that I have".

Question: "I am afraid to tell you who I am, but what gives me the confidence to do it? How do I feel about my answer?"

GROUP SHARING: Optional discussion questions (if there is time or there is minimum sharing):

1. What are some likable qualities about a person you know?
2. What have you done recently that you feel good about?
3. How do you feel about your qualities and about sharing them?
4. How can we support the good in each other?
5. How do you feel about accepting compliments?

Week 2

HOMEWORK:

1. Watch a TV Program that depicts modern married life, and tell how this relates to your married life.
2. Read the poem, "Why Do I Love You" and share how you feel.
3. Bring a picture of your wedding day, and share the qualities of this wonderful person you just married.
4. Arrange where to meet the next week.

CLOSING PRAYER:

"THE OTHER SIDE OF ME"

You think you know me pretty well
But how can you tell?
You never get inside my head
The times we talk.
We never speak.
We play hide and seek.
So many things are left unsaid.

Why can't you see
What's on the other side of me . . .
The side of me that reaches out to you
Sweet thoughts and dreams
Like drops of rain on rippling streams
That wind and bend . . .
Rivers with no end
Flowing on the other side of me.

It seems I always get unstrung.
I trip on my tongue
With words that come out something else.
I'm so afraid the things I say
Might chase you away.
I have to hide behind myself.
Why can't you see
What's on the other side of me?
The side of me that reaches out to you.
Why must I hide
These feelings that have been denied?
Only you can set me free.
See what's on the other side of me.
La La La La La La La La
La La La La La
La La La La La La La

Why can't you see
What's on the other side of me . . .
The side of me that reaches out to you?
Why must I hide
These feelings that have been denied?
Only you can set me free.
See what's on the other side of me.

On the other side of me . . .
On the other side of me . . .

Neil Sedaka

Week 2

"WHY DO I LOVE YOU"

I love you not only for what you are, But for what I am when I am with you.

I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, But for what you are making of me.

I love you for the part of me that you bring out.

I love you for putting your hand into my heaped up heart
And passing over all the foolish weak things
That you can't help dimly seeing there,
And for drawing out into the light all the beautiful belongings
That no one else had looked quite far enough to find.

I love you because you are helping to make of the lumber of my
Life not a tavern, but a temple out of the works of my every Day -- not a reproach but a song.

I love you because you have done
More than any creed could have done to make me good
And more than any fate could have done to make me happy.

You have done it without a word, without a sign, without a touch, You have done it by being yourself.
Perhaps that is what being a friend means, after all.

Week 3

“OUR MARRIAGE”

OPENING PRAYER:

PURPOSE:

1. To look at our marriage and see how it is affected by current attitudes and ideas of today's world.
2. We would like you to share your attitudes about marriage and contrast them with the values of the modern world, and with our understanding of God's Plan.

MINI SHARING: (5 minutes maximum for each sharing)

1. TV Program.
2. Poem, "Why Do I Love You".
3. Wedding Picture.

Major Sharing: "Our Marriage" (30 minutes) (Optional -- play Song, "Song From Ruth")

1. Our courtship: Slowly introduce yourselves by telling how you met your spouse. Share interesting stories about your beliefs and attitudes about marriage. For instance: Were you a teenager or an adult? Let them in on the real you during this very important time in your life.
2. Early marriage: They know a little about your thoughts about marriage. Tell them what happened during those early years when you were young and full of love.
3. Settled years of Marriage: Why were these years different than the early years? What changed you? Were there any crises? Were there difficulties? Now is the time to open UP!!
4. Our Marriage Now: Has your marriage changed? How? What is different? What are you doing to keep it that way or to change it? How do you feel about it?
5. Closing Scripture: Corinthians 13: 4-8.

10/10: "How does our marriage differ from the modern world and how do I feel about that?"

GROUP SHARING:

HOMEWORK:

1. Bring a picture of your children, and share the special qualities of each child.
2. Plan for one night of the coming week to be a family night where you will do an activity together as a family (games, reading, Scripture reading, crafts, music, etc.). Share with the group how this night turned out. Is it something you would like to do on a regular basis?
3. Plan a special dinner -- perhaps with candles or a special dessert. Tell each child what you see as their special qualities. Share with the group how this evening turned out.
4. Arrange where to meet next week.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Week 4

OUR FIRST COMMUNITY -- OUR FAMILY

OPENING PRAYER:

1. Play recording, "Sunrise, Sunset" from Fiddler on the Roof. Distribute the words so the couples can follow them.
2. Explain that our children are our first community. The love and relationship we have between us as a couple and God must first extend to and encompass our children; and then reach out to the other members of our family and the community.
3. The years of childhood go only too fast for parents. We must make the most of them and treasure these precious moments.

MINI SHARING:

1. Share pictures.
2. Share one night of family joint activities. How did it turn out?
3. How did the special dinner turn out?

MAJOR SHARING:

1. Our children are probably the most important responsibility we will ever have in our lifetime.
2. Our children are God's gift to us, and it is through us that they will come to know God in everyday living. Read Mark 10: 14-16.
3. Importance of sharing relationship: Of what benefit is it to us and our children if we share our joy, love, and relationship with everyone else except our children? Do we find ourselves too busy for them because we are reaching out to others?
4. Ways to share our relationship:
 - A. Familogue.
 - B. Sharing at meals.
 - C. Writing a letter to each child about his/her special qualities.
 - D. Scripture reading and discussion.
 - E. Routines of daily life with patience, understanding, and love.
 - F. Applying what we learned on the Weekend to the sharing of and judging of feelings.
5. Reaching out to others in our family, such as brothers, In-Laws, etc.

Note: Remember this is just an outline. Feel free to add or subtract depending on your own experiences. Tell the personal things you do in your family that add joy to your lives.

"What do I want to be sure to do now for our family and How do I feel about that?"

GROUP SHARING:

HOMEWORK:

1. Relate a recent instance in which someone has reached out to you. Relate to the group the instance and your feelings about it.

Week 4

2. Reach out to a neighbor, friend, or relative with a letter, phone call, or invitation that you have been putting off. Relate your experience to the group.
3. Share with the group your reaction to "Love Is All" by J. and L. Bird.
4. Arrange where to meet next week.

CLOSING PRAYER:

SUNRISE, SUNSET

Is this the little girl I carried? Is this the little boy at play?
I can't remember growing older. When did they?
When did she get to be a beauty? When did he grow to be so tall?
Wasn't it yesterday when they were small?

SUNRISE, SUNSET . . . SUNRISE, SUNSET.

Swiftly go the days
Seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers
Blossoming even as we gaze.

SUNRISE, SUNSET . . . SUNRISE, SUNSET.

Swiftly fly the years
One season following another
Laden with happiness and tears.

What words of wisdom can I give them?
How can I help to ease their way?
Now they must learn from one another.

Day by Day

They look so natural together
Just like two newlyweds should be.
Is there a canopy in store for me?

SUNRISE, SUNSET . . . SUNRISE, SUNSET.

Swiftly fly the years
One season following the other
Laden with happiness and tears

Week 5

"COMMUNITY"

OPENING PRAYER:

PURPOSE:

1. Identify the topic by showing the natural progression from self to couple to the immediate family, and finally to a larger group -- to your community. .
2. Trace the progress of the series through these same topics.
3. You might try to define community as a sense of belonging based on love or giving -- not self-interest. Explain it in terms of the groups or people you interact with out of support for one another. Perhaps you can even carry this out to the hope of renewing the world through more concern for one another.

MINI SHARING:

1. Instance when someone reached out to you.
2. Instance when you reached out to someone.
3. "Love Is All", Chapter 39.

MAJOR SHARING:

1. Talk about how you have progressed from identifying yourself to living as a couple, to encompassing your immediate family. Finally, tell how you are progressing to embrace or accept a larger family.
2. Discuss what your particular "community" includes. For example, church, fellow workers, school associates, Marriage Encounter family, etc.
3. Give examples of what this community has done for you. Possibly include some humorous stories about the Community.
4. Give some examples of why we need the support of those around us:
 - A. Practical ways such as baby sitting, house repair, etc.
 - B. Personal ways such as being concerned when I'm on a downer; or giving us a one-ringer to help our dialogue.
 - C. Family ways such as outings, learning to share, feeling a part of Marriage Encounter, too.
5. Tell your feelings about having a stake in other's marriage.

10/10: "The greatest good we can do for others is not to give them our wealth, but to show them theirs" -How do I feel about this?"

BARRINGTON (See pages 14 through 17)

HOMEWORK:

1. Share your thoughts and feelings about a time when you, as a couple, felt closest to God.
2. Find a passage from the Bible that makes you feel especially close to God, or read from the 1st Epistle of John 4: 7-12, and 19-1. Share your thoughts and feelings.
3. Study a picture that relates you to God. Share how you relate and how you feel when you see it.
4. Arrange where to meet next week and arrange for the POT LUCK SUPPER.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Week 5

LOVE IS ALL

The phone rings or I receive a letter, another request for commitment and involvement, Christian involvement, they say, outside my home.

Each time, Lord, I must go through it all again, all the questions, all the answers, all the sorting of duties and desires, all the reasoning and rationalizing.

Each time, all again, every time I am told of Your need for me out there.

Where is my place, Lord? How am I to best serve You?

What am I to answer to these involvements, these organizations, these activities, outside?

Each time I am challenged, I face the same questions.

Is it loving or lack of loving?

Is it responsible or irresponsible? Am I a good parent or an indifferent parent?

Is it my selfishness or my convictions which keep me in my home or draw me outside?

Each time, the same questions. And each time, I must listen for Your answers.

Perhaps this time, Lord, the answers will be different.

Perhaps this time I am wiser or stronger or the need greater or my responsibilities less.

Perhaps this time I can justify (or rationalize) this outside involvement.

Perhaps this time it isn't an escape and a shirking of responsibility.

Perhaps this time it's a Mothers' Club or a parish group

and I can feel that I'm a better parent, and that my family will truly benefit by my involvement.

But it's not this time, is it, Lord? Not this time.

Dear Lord, why do you let me glimpse a family that expands and reaches out to include the whole world when my world seems so small and my part so minor? There's so little that's grand and important in my life.

I won't receive any medals or applause for diapering a baby or loving my husband. But that isn't important to me.

I enjoy my world. I'm not seeking for anything else.

But perhaps that's part of the conflict. Am I being honest?

My enjoyment, the joy I find in my home and family makes me feel somehow slightly guilty when I am told I should become involved outside.

Each time, Lord, I have to find the answers all over again.

Perhaps next time the answers will be different. But not now.

I know what You've given me, Lord, and what You've asked of me.

I have but one vocation, one life to which You've called me.

And I can bring the world to You only with, and through, my husband.

Through our marriage, our oneness, we speak for You.

You've shown us the way. You've let us see that a Christian world is given birth in a Christian home.

Help me to remember this, Lord, when that phone rings or that letter arrives. Sometimes it's hard; and I forget.

LOVE IS ALL

Conversations of a husband & wife with God

Joseph & Lois Bird

Week 5

BARRINGTON

Play the tape after the refreshments instead of having sharing time. Or, after a minimum sharing time . . .

Announce that we are all going to be Barrington Bunnies . . .

First, draw names. Only thing that is important is that no one draws his own name and that no one knows who has whose names.

For the next two weeks (approximately) we are going to give gifts with no strings attached to the person whose name we have. These gifts can be letters, signed by "Barrington", to phone calls made by "assistant" Barringtons (children), to gifts delivered to the door. If you do bring gifts to the door, simply ring the bell and run as fast as you can! Let your imagination run and let your creativity have a day.

There will be one more meeting after the last scheduled formal meeting. This is usually on a night when all can come and it is simply a pot luck meal followed by an agape or Eucharist.

The pot luck supper should be held as soon as possible after the last session.

The Barrington experience continues up until the night of the pot luck, and only then are the names revealed as to who was whose Barrington. We suggest that you hold the pot luck on the following Sunday night.

BARRINGTON BUNNY

Once upon a time in a large forest there lived a very furry bunny. He had one lop ear, a tiny black nose, and unusually shiny eyes. His name was Barrington.

Barrington was not really a very handsome bunny. He was brown and speckled and his ears didn't stand up right. But he could hop, and he was, as I have said, very furry.

In a way, winter is fun for bunnies. After all, it gives them an opportunity to hop in the snow and then turn around to see where they have hopped. So, in a way, winter was fun for Barrington.

But in another way winter made Barrington sad. For, you see, winter marked the time when all of the animal families got together in their cozy homes to celebrate Christmas. He could hop, and he was very furry. But as far as Barrington knew, he was the only bunny in the forest.

When Christmas Eve finally came, Barrington did not feel like going home all by himself. So he decided that he would hop for a while in the clearing in the center of the forest.

Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop. Barrington made tracks in the fresh snow.

Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop. Then he cocked his head and looked back at the wonderful designs he had made.

"Bunnies," he thought to himself, "can hop. And they are very warm, too, because of how furry they are."

(But Barrington didn't really know whether or not this was true of all bunnies, since he had never met another bunny.)

When it got too dark to see the tracks he was making, Barrington made up his mind to go home.

On his way, however, he passed a large oak tree. High in the branches there was a great deal of excited chattering going on. Barrington looked up. It was a squirrel family! What a marvelous time they seemed to be having.

"Hello, up there," called Barrington.

"Hello down there," came the reply.

Week 5

"Having a Christmas party?" asked Barrington.

"Oh, yes!" answered the squirrels. "It's Christmas Eve. Everybody is having a Christmas party!"

"May I come to your party?" said Barrington softly. "Are you a squirrel?"

"No."

"What are you, then?"

"A bunny."

"A bunny?"

"Yes."

"Well, how can you come to the party if you're a bunny? Bunnies can't climb trees."

"That's true," said Barrington thoughtfully. "But I can hop and I'm very furry and warm."

"We're sorry," called the squirrels. "We don't know anything about hopping and being furry, but we do know that in order to come to our house you have to be able to climb trees."

"Oh, well," said Barrington. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," chattered the squirrels.

And the unfortunate bunny hopped off toward his tiny house.

It was beginning to snow when Barrington reached the river. Near the river bank was a wonderfully constructed house of sticks and mud. Inside there was singing.

"It's the beavers," thought Barrington. "Maybe they will let me come to their party."

And so he knocked on the door.

"Who's out there?" called a voice.

"Barrington Bunny," he replied.

There was a long pause and then a shiny beaver head broke the water.

"Hello, Barrington," said the beaver.

"May I come to your Christmas party?" asked Barrington.

The beaver thought for awhile and then he said, "I suppose so. Do

you know how to swim?"

"No," said Barrington, "but I can hop and I am very furry and warm."

"Sorry," said the beaver. "I don't know anything about hopping and being furry, but I do know that in order to come to our house you have to be able to swim."

"Oh, well," Barrington muttered, his eyes filling with tears. "I suppose that's true--Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," called the beaver. And he disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

Even being as furry as he was, Barrington was beginning to get cold. And the snow was falling so hard that his tiny, bunny eyes could scarcely see what was ahead of him.

He was almost home, however, when he heard the excited squeaking of field mice beneath the ground.

"It's a party," thought Barrington. And suddenly he blurted out through his tears, "Hello, field mice. This is Barrington Bunny. May I come to your party?"

Week 5

But the wind was howling so loudly and Barrington was sobbing so much that no one heard him.

And when there was no response at all, Barrington just sat down in the snow and began to cry with all his might.

"Bunnies," he thought, "aren't any good to anyone. What good is it to be furry and to be able to hop if you don't have any family on Christmas Eve?"

Barrington cried and cried. When he stopped crying he began to bite on his bunny's foot, but he did not move from where he was sitting in the snow.

Suddenly, Barrington was aware that he was not alone. He looked up and strained his shiny eyes to see who was there.

To his surprise he saw a great silver wolf. The wolf was large and strong and his eyes flashed fire. He was the most beautiful animal Barrington had ever seen.

For a long time the silver wolf didn't say anything at all. He just stood there and looked at Barrington with those terrible eyes.

Then slowly and deliberately the wolf spoke. "Barrington," he asked in a gentle voice, "why are you sitting in the snow?"

"Because it's Christmas Eve," said Barrington, "and I don't have any family, and bunnies aren't any good to anyone."

"Bunnies are, too, good," said the wolf. "Bunnies can hop and they are very warm."

"What good is that?" Barrington sniffed.

"It is very good indeed," the wolf went on, "because it is a gift that bunnies are given, a free gift with no strings attached. And every gift that is given to anyone is given for a reason. Someday you will see why it is good to hop and to be warm and furry."

"But, it's Christmas," moaned Barrington, "and I'm all alone. don't have any family at all."

"Of course you do," replied the great silver wolf. "All of the animals in the forest are your family."

And then the wolf disappeared. He simply wasn't there. Barrington had only blinked his eyes, and when he looked--the wolf was gone.

"All of the animals in the forest are my family," thought Barrington. "It's good to be a bunny. Bunnies can hop. That's a gift." And then he said it again. "A gift. A free gift."

On into the night Barrington worked. First he found the best stick that he could. (And that was difficult because of the snow.)

Then hop. Hop. Hippity-hop. To beaver's house. He left the stick just outside the door. With a note on it that read: "Here is a good stick for Your house. It is a gift. A free gift. No strings attached. Signed, a member of your family."

"It is a good thing that I can hop," he thought, "because the snow is very deep."

Then Barrington dug and dug. Soon he had gathered together enough dead leaves and grass to make the squirrels' nest warmer. Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop.

He laid the grass and leaves just under the large oak tree and attached this message: "A gift. A free gift. From a member of your family, "

It was late when Barrington finally started home. And what made things worse was that he knew a blizzard was beginning.

Week 5

Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop.

Soon poor Barrington was lost. The wind howled furiously, and it was very, very cold. "It certainly is cold," he said out loud. "It's a good thing I'm so furry. But if I don't find my way home pretty soon even I might freeze!"

Squeak. Squeak

And then he saw it--a baby field mouse lost in the snow. And the little mouse was crying.

"Hello, little mouse," Barrington called.

"Don't cry. I'll be right there." Hippity-hop, and Barrington was beside the tiny mouse.

I'm lost," sobbed the little fellow. I'll never find my way home, and I know I'm going to freeze."

"You won't freeze, " said Barrington. "I'm a bunny and bunnies are very furry and warm. You stay right where you are and I'll cover you up".

Barrington lay on top of the little mouse and hugged him tight. The tiny fellow felt himself surrounded by warm fur. He cried for awhile but soon, snug and warm, he fell asleep.

Barrington had only two thoughts that long, cold night. First he thought, "It's good to be a bunny. Bunnies are very furry and warm." And then, when he felt the heart of the tiny mouse beneath him beating regularly, he thought, "All of the animals in the forest are my family."

Next morning, the field mice found their little boy, asleep in the snow, warm and snug beneath the furry carcass of a dead bunny. Their relief and excitement was so great that they didn't even think to question where the bunny had come from.

And as for the beavers and the squirrels, they still wonder which member of their family left the little gifts for them that Christmas Eve.

After the field mice had left, Barrington's frozen body simply lay in the snow. There was no sound except that of the howling wind. And no one anywhere in the forest noticed the great silver wolf who came to stand beside that brown, lop-eared carcass.

But the wolf did come.

Add he stood there.

Without moving or saying a word.

All Christmas Day.

Until it was night.

And then he disappeared into the forest.

Week 6

"GOD -- SPIRITUALITY"

OPENING PRAYER:

PURPOSE:

1. This is the last session and a very important one. We have talked about dialogue, self, marriage, family, and community. A theme of all these talks was love and unity. We said that communication was the art of love -- to love someone you must know them, and that dialogue was one way to communicate your deepest self. We discussed knowing and accepting ourselves. A person's idea of himself is said to determine how he tends to see his environment, his relationship with other people, and even God. We talked about marriage in the modern world, and the focus of what our marriage can be in light of God's Plan. We discussed the intimate community of our family, and ways to communicate with our children. We discussed reaching out to the community, getting involved with others like we have gotten involved with each other in this short six weeks by sharing our love, fears, hopes, accomplishments, failures, and sorrows.
2. Tonight we talk about God, and His place in our lives.

MINI SHARING:

1. When you felt closest to God.
2. Bible passage that brings you close to God.
3. Picture that relates to God.

MAJOR SHARING:

1. Tell about your overall relationship with God as a child and now. Share any doubts, examples, feelings.
2. When have you felt closest to God? There may have been some instances in your life when you felt close to God. Tell about it.
3. How do you relate to the word of God? Are you turned off by God's word? Consider the Bible or sermons you have heard.
4. How do you communicate with God? How do you pray to God? Think back to your childhood. Does God hear you? Do you listen to God? How?
5. How has marriage brought you closer to God? Do you think you are closer to God now that you are married? Has Marriage Encounter changed your relationship with God?

10/10: "How has my idea of God changed as a result of our relationship and how do I feel about that?"

GROUP SHARING:

1. Read poem attached and discuss how have we been blessed by God and how do I feel about that.
2. Play tape, "God's Rag Tag Army". Discuss
3. FIRM UP THE POT LUCK DINNER ARRANGEMENTS.

SING "THERE'S A NEW WORLD SOMEWHERE"

Week 6

RAG-TAG ARMY

I THINK God must be very old and very tired. Maybe he used to look splendid and fine in his general's uniform, but no more. He's been on the march a long time, you know. And look at his rag-tag little army! All he has for soldiers are you and me. Dumb little army. Listen! The drum beat isn't even regular. Everyone is out of step. And there! You see" God keeps stopping along the way to pick up one of his tinier soldiers who decided to wander off and play with a frog, or run in a field, or whose foot got tangled in the underbrush. He'll never get anywhere that way. And yet, the march goes on.

Do you see how the marchers have broken up into little groups? Look at that group up near the front. Now, there's a snappy outfit. They all look pretty much alike--at least they're in step with each other. That's something! Only they're not wearing their shoes. They're carrying them in their hands. Silly little band. They won't get far before God will have to stop again.

Or how about that other group over there? They're all holding hands as they march. The only trouble with this is the men on each end of the line. Pretty soon they realize that one of their hands isn't holding onto anything--one hand is reaching, empty, alone. And so they hold hands with each other, and everybody marches around in circles. The more people hold hands, the bigger the circle. And, of course, a bigger circle is deceptive because as we march along it looks like we're going someplace, but we're not. And so God must stop again. You see what I mean? He'll never get anywhere that way!

If God were more sensible he'd take his little army and shape them up. Why, whoever heard of a soldier stopping to romp in a field? It's ridiculous. But even more absurd is a general who will stop the march of eternity to go and bring him back. But that's God for you. His is no endless, empty marching. He is going somewhere. His steps are deliberate and purposive. He may be old, and he may be tired. But he knows where he's going. And he means to take every last one of his tiny soldiers with him. Only there aren't going to be any forced marches. And, after all, there are frogs and flowers, and thorns and underbrush along the way. And even though our foreheads have been signed with the sign of the cross, we are only human. And most of us are afraid and lonely and would like to hold hands or cry or run away. And we don't know where we are going, and we can't seem to trust God--especially when it's dark out and we can't see him! And he won't go on without us. And that's why it's taking so long.

Listen! The drum beat isn't even regular. Everyone is out of step. And there! You see? God keeps stopping along the way to pick up one of his tinier soldiers who decided to wander off and play with a frog, or run in a field, or whose foot got tangled in the underbrush. He'll never get anywhere that way!

And yet, the march goes on. . .

FROM: The Way Of The Wolf
BY: Martin Bell

REFLECTIONS

I asked for health, that I might do greater things,
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things

I asked for riches, that I might be happy,
I was given poverty, that I might be wise

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things

I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for, Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

I am among all people most richly blessed.

Anonymous.