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What Happy Couples Know - Week 1

QUESTIONS:

What is one topic you and your spouse had different ideas about when you met or got married? *Some of the subjects Andy mentioned: Money, Housework, Living arrangements, Children, Scheduling/free time, Friendships, Extended family relationships, Intimacy, Conflict resolution, Behavior toward each other*

In the message, Andy said, "Most of our hopes, dreams, and desires are responses to what we grew up around." Look back at the list above. How have your thoughts about one of those topics been shaped by what you grew up around? Are you trying to avoid or recreate what you experienced?

In an area other than marriage, when has someone else's hope, dream, or desire felt like an expectation to you? (Example: My college roommate wanted us to do everything together or My child talked for months about wanting a big birthday party.)

Can you recognize a hope, dream, or desire that has (unintentionally) become something you expect of your spouse?

Share your reaction to this statement: "If I owe you, I can't love you."
(Example: If you expect flowers, I can't love you by bringing you flowers.
I'm just meeting the bare minimum.)

CHALLENGE:

Write down two tasks or activities your spouse handles on a regular basis.

Some division of labor is helpful in a relationship. (Example: I'll do the cooking if you'll do the cleaning.) But we can become so accustomed to those arrangements that they become expectations. As Andy said, "We rarely express gratitude for what we've come to expect." How can you thank your spouse this week when they handle the two tasks you listed above?



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What Happy Couples Know - Week 2

QUESTIONS:

How would you describe the happiest couple you know? What about their relationship stands out to you?

Talk about your first reaction to Paul's command for wives to "submit to your husbands as to the Lord."

When you've heard that verse or idea in the past, how has it made you feel?

Did Andy's explanation change your feelings at all?

Andy said: "A great relationship boils down to being a submission competition." When have you seen that to be true in someone else's relationship? Has it ever been true in your own?

Andy paraphrased Paul's instruction to husbands by asking, "What's life to you? Put her before that." What is life-giving to you? *Examples: Success (e.g., a promotion at work or the admiration of friends), A hobby (e.g., running or cooking), A prized possession (e.g., your car or house), Another person (e.g., your child or best friend)*

What would it look like to put your spouse before that? What's your first reaction to that suggestion?

"Happy couples put each other first by going first in an effort to be last." But going first at being last can be scary. Write down one or two things you're afraid might happen if you "put down your side of the rope" first. (Hint - finish this statement: I'm afraid he'll start or she'll stop . . .)

CHALLENGE:

Make time this week to ask your spouse the "I'm all in" question: What's in your box? (Remember Andy's advice to stop talking after you ask the question.)



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What Happy Couples Know - Week 3

QUESTIONS:

What's something you desperately wished for as a child (e.g., a puppy or a certain Christmas gift)? Did you end up getting it?

In an area other than marriage (e.g., at work), how do you typically respond when what you hoped for doesn't happen? *Examples - Ignore it: pretend you didn't really want it - Stay busy: distract yourself with something else - Find someone else: find someone else who can do the job.*

Take a minute to consider how you've responded in romantic relationships when what you hoped for didn't happen

Andy warned that Peter's advice feels pretty religious. What's your first reaction to the idea in 1 Peter 5:7 of "cast[ing] all your anxieties on [God]"?

When (if ever) have you prayed really honest prayers? How did it feel?

Andy said: "God doesn't want polite. He wants you . . . heart wide open." Does that match the view of God (or prayer) you grew up with?

Happy couples know that sometimes you have to first place your hopes, dreams, and desires—or the unfulfilled versions of them—on God, not your spouse. When you do, God will do something extraordinary. But it isn't going to be in the other person.

Which hope, dream, or desire that you've been putting on your spouse should you instead be "casting on God"?

When has God changed your heart or your feelings about something in the past?

CHALLENGE:

Try praying honest (not polite or formal) prayers this week. Use one of these statements if you need help getting started.

- God, I'm so frustrated that . . .
- God, I'm so disappointed that . . .
- God, I'm so angry that . . .



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What Happy Couples Know - Week 4

QUESTIONS:

Are you wired to be more naturally trusting or suspicious?

For someone other than your spouse, think of a recent time when there was a gap between what you expected and what you experienced.

(Example: We made plans to meet for lunch and he canceled at the last minute.)

Was your first reaction to believe the best or assume the worst?

What was (or could have been) your generous explanation for their behavior?

You and your spouse are probably different in some ways (e.g., spender/saver, extrovert/introvert). When has one of those differences tempted you to assume the worst?*(Example: I'm not as tidy as he is, so I thought he was being uptight.)*

Two things can get in the way of choosing to trust your spouse:

- What you experience (*your history with them*)
- Who you are (*your past wounds or baggage*)

On your own, take a minute to consider how those obstacles have shown up in your relationship.

- What you've experienced (*Example: For years, he struggled to leave work on time.*)
- Who you are (*Example: My dad was so "buttoned up" that I didn't know what it looked like to be a loving husband.*)

Even when assuming the worst about your spouse feels almost automatic, you can still choose to believe the best. What's one current tension between you and your spouse?

What's a generous explanation for their behavior or viewpoint?

What's one takeaway from this study that will stick with you?