

CALIANA PRESS

A Six-Week Small Group Guide

CLEAVE: Temperament, Sex, Betrayal, and What Christ Asks of Us
— Appendix B, for leaders

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This is Appendix B of CLEAVE, set for printing, and leaders may print it, copy it for a group, and mark it up freely.

It carries the corrections made in the latest printing, so a few lines here read differently from the Appendix B in earlier copies. The changes are small and they all run one way, toward protecting people in the room: Week Two's exercise now says what to do if comparing temperaments with your spouse would not be safe, Week Four no longer describes a betrayed spouse's unfinished forgiveness as something withheld, Week Two's second question cites the right chapter, and the crisis lines at the back have gained two numbers. Where this guide and your copy differ, use this one.

Page references are to CLEAVE: Temperament, Sex, Betrayal, and What Christ Asks of Us by Martin Balome. Caliana Press, 2026. ISBN 978-1-971311-05-0 (paperback).

This guide adapts *CLEAVE* for use by a small group of couples meeting once a week for six weeks. It can also be used by a group of mixed readers, including the engaged, the single, and those rebuilding after a marriage has ended, with the discussion adjusted to the room. Each session points back to a Part of the book that participants will have read during the week, so the meeting is a conversation about reading already done rather than a lecture delivered cold.

The six weeks are arranged as follows. Week One opens the study and takes up Part One. Weeks Two through Five move through Parts Two, Three, Four, and Five in turn. Week Six is a closing session built on the Conclusion. Participants should read the assigned Part before the session that discusses it, beginning with Part One before Week One.

For the Leader

A few things will help this study go well, and one of them matters more than all the rest.

Confidentiality is the foundation

Before anything else, the group agrees together that what is said in the room stays in the room. Marriage is the most intimate subject most people will ever discuss in a group setting, and no one will speak honestly without the assurance that their words will not travel. Open the first session by establishing this aloud and securing everyone's agreement to it.

No one is required to disclose

This is the second rule, and it protects the first. A good marriage study does not pressure couples to confess private things in front of others. Many of the most important conversations this book provokes are meant to happen between spouses, privately, not in the group, and several sessions below include a “For the week” exercise designed for exactly that. A participant who chooses to share something personal is welcome to; a participant who keeps their marriage’s particulars private is equally welcome to, and the leader should make that plain so no one feels exposed.

Not everyone in the room is married

This guide is written for couples, but the room may also hold the single, the engaged, the widowed, the divorced, and the separated. Where a gathering question or a discussion question assumes a spouse, those participants answer it about any close relationship, or pass. Where a session’s For the week exercise is addressed to each couple, they do the same work alone, or with a trusted friend.

Two sessions need extra care

Week Three takes up the body and sexual integrity, and Week Four takes up betrayal and repair. Both touch tender places. For these two weeks especially, keep the discussion at the level of the book’s ideas rather than the group’s private histories, consider offering an option for spouses to discuss the harder material privately rather than in the room, and in some groups consider splitting into a men’s circle and a women’s circle for part of the conversation. Read the room, and protect the vulnerable in it.

Where there is danger, the group is not the venue

If, in the course of this study, the leader becomes aware that a participant is being abused or is in physical danger, the small group is not the place to address it. The right response is private, immediate, and directed toward pastoral help and, where needed, professional and legal protection. Appendix C, “When to Seek a Counselor,” speaks to this directly, and the leader should be familiar with it before the study begins. If a child may be at risk, the leader follows the law on reporting, which in many states binds clergy and church volunteers. Nothing in this guide, and nothing in this book, asks anyone to remain in harm.

The crisis lines are printed on the last page of this guide. Have them to hand before the first session rather than looking for them in the moment.

Each session follows the same shape: a brief gathering question, a focus drawn from the week’s Part, a passage to read together, a set of discussion questions, a private exercise for couples to do during the

coming week, and a closing prayer. Plan for about ninety minutes, and protect the closing prayer from being crowded out by a discussion that runs long.

Week One — The Architecture of Two

Read before this session: the Introduction and Part One (Chapters 1–4).

Gather. Go around the room and have each person say their name, how long they have been married or what brought them to the study, and one thing they hope to take from the next six weeks.

Focus. Part One argues that marriage is an architecture built before culture got hold of it: a covenant rather than a contract, a one-flesh union that joins two people without erasing either, designed by God and patterned after Christ's own faithfulness to his church. The week's central claim is that what a marriage is determines how a marriage should be lived, and that most marriage trouble begins with a wrong idea of what marriage is for.

Read together. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:31–32. Let someone read each aloud from their own Bible.

Discuss.

1. Before reading Part One, would you have described marriage more as a covenant or more as a contract? What is the practical difference between the two in daily life?
2. The book says a one-flesh union joins two people without dissolving either. Where is that balance, between union and individuality, easy or hard in a marriage you know?
3. Part Four of the book is named for what happens when trust breaks, but Part One is where the foundation is laid. What foundation, named in these opening chapters, do you most want to strengthen?

For the week. Each couple, privately, has one unhurried conversation about the vows they made, or the vows they would make: what did we promise, and what did we mean by it? Bring no conclusions back to the group unless you wish to.

Close. Pray for the marriages in the room, that the study would strengthen the foundation under each one.

Week Two — Wired Differently

Read before this session: Part Two (Chapters 5–8). Complete the temperament inventory in Appendix A.

Gather. Have each person name one small way they and their spouse are different that used to bother them and now simply makes them smile, and anyone not married can name a difference with someone close to them.

Focus. Part Two takes up the four classical temperaments and how each shows up in married life. Its central argument, made most directly in Chapter 7, is that your spouse is not broken: the differences between two married people are usually not defects to be fixed but wirings to be understood, and the friction between them is the predictable meeting of two temperaments rather than the fault of either.

Read together. Psalm 139:13–14 and 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

Discuss.

1. Without disclosing anything you would rather keep private, what did the temperament inventory in Appendix A help you see about your own wiring?
2. Chapter 5 names a shadow side in every temperament, and Appendix A calls these watch-points: a strength overused becomes the thing a spouse must guard. What is one strength of your own that, pushed too far, becomes something your marriage has to guard against?
3. Where have you mistaken a difference of temperament for a flaw of character, in your spouse or in someone else?

For the week. Each couple completes and compares the Appendix A inventory together, and talks through the four questions printed there. Keep the conversation curious rather than corrective. If naming a difference to your spouse would not feel safe, set this exercise aside: Appendix C speaks to that situation, and no one will be asked to account for work they did not bring back.

Close. Thank God for the particular wiring of each person in the room, and ask for the grace to read one another charitably.

Week Three — The Body in the Covenant

Read before this session: Part Three (Chapters 9–12).

A note before you begin: this session touches the most private part of marriage. Keep the conversation at the level of the book's teaching rather than personal detail, and feel free to reserve the most

personal reflection for the private exercise. Some groups will discuss part of this material in separate men's and women's circles, and that is a good option.

Gather. Have each person name one way the culture's messaging about sex differs from what they understand Scripture to teach.

Focus. Part Three argues that sexual integrity is covenant work for both spouses, not an afterthought and not a subject the church should be too embarrassed to address. It treats the marriage bed as good and God-honored, names the real injury of a cold one, and calls both husband and wife to the same standard of faithfulness and care.

Read together. Hebrews 13:4.

Discuss. *Keep all answers at the level of principle; no one need share anything about their own marriage.*

1. The book argues that the church has often been either silent or shaming about sex, and that both failures do harm. Which have you encountered more, and what would a healthier approach sound like?
2. Chapter 9 frames the marriage bed positively, as something honored rather than merely permitted. Why might that framing be hard for some Christians to receive?
3. Part Three insists that sexual integrity is required of both spouses equally. Where has the church's teaching on this been uneven, and why does the symmetry matter?

For the week. Each couple, privately and gently, has one honest conversation about the health of this part of their marriage, using whatever from Part Three was most useful. This conversation belongs to the couple alone.

Close. Pray for honesty, tenderness, and integrity in the marriages represented, and for grace where this area has carried pain.

Week Four — When Trust Breaks

Read before this session: Part Four (Chapters 13–17).

A note before you begin: this is the heaviest session in the study, and some people in the room may be carrying betrayals the others know nothing about. Keep the discussion focused on the book's framework rather than on anyone's private history, and let no one feel pressed to disclose. If you, as leader, become aware that someone is in danger or in crisis, address it privately and pastorally after

the session, and turn to Appendix C. This session has no gathering question; open instead with the confidentiality reminder and a minute of silence.

Focus. Part Four takes up betrayal and repair: the several shapes betrayal can take, what a real confession contains, what the long work of rebuilding actually looks like, when separation is right, and why retribution never heals the one who reaches for it. Its hardest and most hopeful claim is that a broken marriage can sometimes be rebuilt, though never quickly and never cheaply, when both spouses are willing.

Read together. Malachi 2:14–15 and Romans 12:19–21.

Discuss. *All answers at the level of the book's teaching; private histories stay private.*

1. Chapter 13 widens the definition of betrayal beyond the physical affair to include emotional and financial forms. Why might naming those forms honestly help a marriage rather than threaten it?
2. Chapter 17 argues that evening the score never produces what the wounded spouse is actually after. Why is retribution such a natural reach, and why does it fail?
3. The book holds two things together: that repair is genuinely possible, and that it is slow and costly. Why does holding both matter, and what goes wrong when a person believes only one of them?

For the week. Each person spends time alone with the question Part Four raises most personally for them, whether about a wound they are carrying, a trust they have broken, or a forgiveness they have not yet been able to give. Bring it to God before bringing it to anyone else.

Close. Pray for the wounded and for the ones who did the wounding, that God would do the slow work of repair where it is wanted and hold every person in the room who is hurting.

Week Five — Marriages That Make It

Read before this session: Part Five (Chapters 18–20).

Gather. Have each person describe one older couple they have admired, and name the quality in that marriage they most want in their own.

Focus. Part Five turns from what breaks marriages to what carries them across decades. It names the unremarkable daily practices that lasting couples actually keep, locates Christ in the ordinary self-giving of marriage rather than only in its peaks, and follows the marriage all the way to the long horizon of growing old together and keeping the vow to the end.

Read together. Colossians 3:12–14 and Song of Solomon 8:6–7.

Discuss.

1. Chapter 18 lists eight daily practices of lasting marriages. Which two does your marriage already keep well, and which one would you most like to begin? (Name only what you are comfortable naming.)
2. Chapter 19 argues that Christ is present in the ordinary cross of married self-giving, not only in the spiritual high points. Where have you been looking for him, and where might he have been present unnoticed?
3. Chapter 20 reframes a marriage that ends in faithful death as one that has been completed rather than defeated. How does the long horizon change the way you want to live the present?

For the week. Each couple chooses one of the eight daily practices from Chapter 18 and begins it this week, starting small and on days the practice is not felt.

Close. Ask God for the perseverance that lasting marriages are made of, and for his presence at every ordinary table in the room.

Week Six — Cleave Until the Last Breath

Read before this session: the Conclusion.

Gather. Have each person name one thing the study has given them that they did not expect when it began.

Focus. The closing session gathers the whole book. *CLEAVE* took its name from the old word at the heart of Genesis 2:24, the call to hold fast so closely that the years cannot pry two people apart. The Conclusion sends every reader back into their own marriage, or their own situation, to do the holding, on the strength not of their own resolve but of the One who joined them.

Read together. Genesis 2:24 once more, the verse the study began with.

Discuss.

1. Looking back across the six weeks, which Part of the book met you most where you actually live?
2. The Conclusion offers a word of grace to readers whose marriages did not survive, or who are in the hardest places. Why does a marriage book need to speak to them too, and how did that land with you?
3. What is one specific thing you are taking from this study into the next year of your marriage or your life?

For the week, and beyond. Each couple, privately, names one commitment they are making as a result of this study, writes it down, and sets a time a few months out to return to it together. Couples who wish to may share the existence of a commitment with the group without sharing its content.

Close. Send the group out with the book's final charge as the prayer: that each person would cleave, and hold fast, on the strength of the God who first spoke the word over marriage and has not stopped speaking it.

Crisis and Help Lines

These are United States national services, free and confidential. Readers outside the United States can find free, confidential helplines for their own country at findahelpline.com, and should use their local emergency number in any immediate danger.

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org. Free, confidential, 24/7 support for suicidal crisis, mental-health distress, and substance-use crisis. Veterans may press 1.

National Domestic Violence Hotline. Call 1-800-799-7233 (1-800-799-SAFE), text START to 88788, or chat at thehotline.org. Free, confidential, 24/7 support, available in more than two hundred languages and open to all callers regardless of immigration status.

National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN). Call 1-800-656-4673 (1-800-656-HOPE), text HOPE to 64673, or chat at rainn.org. Free, confidential, 24/7 support for anyone affected by sexual violence.

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline. Call or text 1-800-422-4453. Free, confidential, 24/7 support for children, parents, and anyone concerned that a child is being abused.

SAMHSA National Helpline. Call 1-800-662-4357 (1-800-662-HELP). Free, confidential, 24/7 treatment referral and information for substance use and mental-health concerns. Treatment locator at findtreatment.gov.

If someone in your group is being abused or is in danger, Appendix C of the book speaks directly to that situation. Seeking help is not a failure of faith.