



Marriage Growth-Track

Week 12 - Day 2

Gathering Together

by Justin and Amber Paulk

For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.

Matthew 18:20

What a glorious promise from Christ! Come together and He will join you. Whether it's a happy celebration or a mournful meeting (and certainly all the days in between), how comforting to know that whenever we gather together with others, Christ promises to come along, too. This is what we see in this verse:

- God encourages us to gather with others and promises to come alongside our gatherings;
- Whenever God is present, so also are His fruits of the spirit including: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and love

First dates can be extremely nerve wracking! "What should I wear?" "Does my hair look good?" "Did I put on deodorant?" "Brush my teeth?" "Is there something sticking out my nose?" All these questions and more fill our minds when we go on first dates—and with good reason—because sometimes our first dates leave a whole lot to be desired!

This is one FOTP's married couple's account of their awkward first date:

"Even though we have been married for 19 years, my wife still makes fun of what I wore on our first date. I had on a green Germany national team soccer jersey with purple jeans. Naturally, they were tight-rolled. (Google it!) In hindsight, I was literally repulsive to look at just based on my color combination!

I took her to an Italian restaurant where she chose spaghetti as her main entrée. And while she still makes fun of my outfit that night, I still make fun of her eating habits back then! That's because, every time she raised the fork to her mouth, she would use her left hand to cover her mouth so I couldn't see the slurping of noodles and sauce flopping all over her face!"

Somehow, they must have gotten past the purple pants and saucy noodles because lots of dates followed! Still, it's important to realize that first impressions and first dates are filled with a 'shield's up' mentality because we don't want people to know our se-

crets or how very flawed we all are. We want to present ourselves as if we have it all together and so we 'pretty' ourselves up and hide all the things we don't want others to see.

But here's the catch...we all have many of the same issues!

The beauty of life groups is that they provide a safe place—a landing place—where we can put all our hopes and dreams, fears and flaws, hurts and skeletons on the table...and be loved and encouraged and uplifted as we do so. That's because, as sinners, we have many, so very many, of the same doubts and worries and insecurities and fears as everyone else.

Small groups provide sanctuary. And with the presence of God in our midst and barriers removed, community grows deep and strong. Friendships take deep root and our faith grows strong when we meet regularly with a group of trusted believers. Small groups are truly where people do life together. It is also where marriages are strengthened, partners discuss significant issues, and friends help you stay pointed towards Christ.

Don't go this life or your marriage alone. Seek the community of fellow believers on similar life paths. There's absolutely not doubt about it--you, your marriage, and your faith can grow in the company of other Christ-followers better than without fellow travelers.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have other couples that you both enjoy spending time with?
2. Do you describe yourself as a "people person" or more of a private individual?

Action Steps:

Invite another couple you know to dinner or small group. Take time to really to get to know them.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we boldly ask that you place a small group in our lives. We ask that you give us the courage to open up in a raw manner like we never have before. We ask that you challenge us and present us in a community environment that allows us to open up and grow with others in a safe setting. We ask that you start to open communication channels with each other about what it means to have a Christ-centered marriage. We are thankful for this opportunity and ask these things in your name.