

# PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singleness, & Relationships Study Guide

## **EPISODE 1: HEALTHY COMMUNICATION WITH AGAM IHEANYI-IGWE**

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

### **Episode Summary**

Healthy communication is one of the most important skills for building strong marriages and healthy relationships. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry and co-host Agam Iheanyi-Igwe discuss how communication is not simply a personality trait but a skill that can be learned and practiced. Agam introduces two foundational communication skills: assertiveness (clearly expressing what you need) and active listening (making sure another person feels heard before responding).

The conversation also explores practical ways to deepen relationships by creating love maps—intentionally learning about another person's experiences, struggles, hopes and daily life. Agam emphasizes that healthy relationships require grace, curiosity, and continual investment. Rather than assuming bad motives, Christians are called to extend grace, choose one another daily, and remember that healthy communication reflects Christ's love in our relationships.

### **Scripture Reading**

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- James 1:19–20 — Being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.
- Ephesians 4:29–32 — Speaking words that build others up and practicing kindness and forgiveness.
- Proverbs 18:13 — The importance of listening before answering.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. James 1:19 teaches believers to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Which part of this verse is most difficult for you to practice, and why?
2. Agam describes two communication skills: assertiveness and active listening. Which of these comes more naturally to you? Which one would strengthen your relationships if you practiced it more intentionally?

3. The episode introduces the idea of building love maps by intentionally learning about another person's world. What are some practical ways spouses, family members, or close friends can continue learning about one another instead of assuming they already know everything?
4. The discussion emphasizes extending grace and assuming good intentions instead of immediately judging another person's motives. Think about a recent disagreement. How might the conversation have changed if both people had assumed good intent?
5. Agam says that healthy marriages are built through daily choices and continual investment rather than perfect compatibility. After reading Ephesians 4:29–32, what is one specific communication habit you want to practice this week that reflects Christ's love toward someone in your life?

## **EPISODE 2: WHY CAN'T WE AGREE? WITH SARAH HALSTEAD**

Series: *PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singles, and Relationships*

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

Guest: Sarah Halstead, Licensed Professional Counselor, Christians as Family Advocates (CAFA) and Bushnell University

### **Episode Summary**

Conflict is an inevitable part of every close relationship, but it does not have to destroy relationships. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry, Agam Iheanyi-Igwe, and licensed counselor Sarah Halstead explore why disagreements often have less to do with the issue itself and more to do with the beliefs, values, and experiences we bring from our family of origin. Sarah explains that every person enters marriage and relationships with assumptions about communication, money, faith, parenting, traditions, emotions, and countless everyday decisions. These differences often create conflict because each person assumes their way is simply normal.

Rather than viewing conflict as a sign that a relationship is failing, Sarah encourages couples to see it as an opportunity to better understand one another. She introduces practical tools for healthy conflict resolution, including identifying the real issue beneath the disagreement, taking turns as speaker and listener, asking thoughtful questions, and listening without preparing a rebuttal. Throughout the conversation, the speakers emphasize that healthy relationships require curiosity, humility, compromise, and a shared commitment to honoring one another above winning an argument. While our past shapes us, it does not define us. Through God's grace, intentional communication, and mutual commitment, couples can build a new family culture that reflects Christ's love.

## Scripture Reading

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- Genesis 2:24 — A man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife.
- Ephesians 4:1–3, 25–32 — Humility, patience, truthfulness, and forgiveness in relationships.
- James 1:19–20 — Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.
- Philippians 2:1–5 — Considering others above ourselves.
- Colossians 3:12–15 — Compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love.

## Discussion Questions

1. Sarah explains that many disagreements are rooted in our family of origin rather than the issue itself. After reading Genesis 2:24, what do you think it means to leave your family of origin while still honoring your parents? How does a married couple begin building a new family culture together?
2. The episode uses simple examples such as peanut butter, Christmas traditions, and baptism to illustrate how deeply our upbringing shapes our expectations. What are some family traditions, habits, or assumptions that have influenced your own relationships? Which have been helpful, and which have been more challenging?
3. Read James 1:19–20. Sarah recommends that one person serve as the speaker while the other simply listens and reflects back what they heard before responding. Why is genuine listening often more difficult than speaking? How could practicing this approach change the way conflicts are handled in your relationships?
4. The speakers emphasize that healthy conflict begins by recognizing, We have a problem, rather than You are the problem. After reading Philippians 2:1–5 and Colossians 3:12–15, how does humility help transform disagreements from competitions into opportunities for understanding and growth?
5. Sarah concludes by reminding listeners that our past influences us but does not define us. What is one lesson, habit, or perspective from your family of origin that you would like to intentionally keep? What is one that you would like Christ to help transform as you build healthier relationships?

## EPISODE 3: ATTACHMENT STYLES WITH SARAH HALSTEAD

Series: *PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singles, and Relationships*

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

Guest: Sarah Halstead, Licensed Professional Counselor, Christians as Family Advocates (CAFA) and Bushnell University

## **Episode Summary**

Our earliest relationships shape how we connect with others throughout life, but they do not determine our future. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry, Agam Iheanyi-Igwe, and licensed counselor Sarah Halstead explore attachment theory and how four primary attachment styles—secure, anxious (preoccupied), dismissive avoidant, and fearful avoidant—affect friendships, dating, marriage, and family relationships. Sarah explains that attachment styles develop early in life through our experiences with caregivers, yet they continue to influence how we respond to conflict, vulnerability, trust, and emotional intimacy.

The conversation also offers hope. Sarah emphasizes that attachment styles are not permanent because God created people for connection and the human brain has the capacity to grow and change. Through healthy relationships, Christian community, gratitude, intentional bids for connection, and God's transforming work, believers can move toward more secure and healthy relationships. Rather than feeling trapped by past experiences, listeners are encouraged to pursue healing through Christ, practice healthy communication, and intentionally invest in relationships that reflect God's design for community.

## **Scripture Reading**

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- Genesis 2:18 — It is not good for man to be alone.
- Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 — Two are better than one.
- Romans 12:9–18 — Living in genuine love and harmony with one another.
- Ephesians 4:31–32 — Kindness, compassion, and forgiveness in relationships.
- 1 John 4:18–19 — Perfect love drives out fear because God first loved us.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Sarah explains that our attachment style influences how we respond to closeness, conflict, and vulnerability. After reading Genesis 2:18 and Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, why do you think God created people for relationships rather than isolation?
2. The episode describes four attachment styles: secure, anxious, dismissive avoidant, and fearful avoidant. Which characteristics stood out to you most, and how might understanding these patterns increase compassion for yourself or someone close to you?
3. Sarah emphasizes that attachment styles are not permanent because God designed our brains to grow and because healthy relationships can foster healing. Read 1 John 4:18–19. How does experiencing God's love help us move from fear toward trust in our relationships with others?
4. One practical suggestion from the episode is making bids for connection—small invitations to engage with another person—and intentionally responding when others reach out. Think about your closest relationships. What are some simple, everyday ways you can make or respond to bids for connection this week?

5. The speakers also encourage practicing gratitude, removing distractions such as phones during conversations, and intentionally listening to one another. After reading Romans 12:9–18 and Ephesians 4:31–32, what is one practical change you could make this week to strengthen one of your relationships and reflect Christ's love more clearly?

## **EPISODE 4: SPIRITUAL FORMATION TOGETHER WITH JULIE WHITE**

Series: *PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singles, and Relationships*

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

Guest: Julie White, Pastor, Teacher, Spiritual Director, and Executive Director of The Unfolding Soul

### **Episode Summary**

Spiritual growth does not happen by accident. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry, Agam Iheanyi-Igwe, and spiritual director Julie White discuss how every person is continually being formed—either intentionally by Christ or unintentionally by the culture around them. Julie explains that spiritual formation is the lifelong process of becoming more like Christ through practices such as prayer, Scripture reading, worship, and intentional reflection. Rather than viewing these practices as religious obligations, she encourages believers to see them as opportunities to invite God to transform their hearts and relationships.

The conversation also explores how spiritual formation strengthens marriages and families. Julie shares practical ways couples can pray together, read Scripture together, and regularly reflect on their own hearts before God. She reminds listeners that healthy marriages are formed not by perfection but by humility, grace, repentance, and a willingness to allow God to refine both husband and wife over time. The episode concludes with a demonstration of *Lectio Divina*, showing how individuals, couples, families, and small groups can prayerfully meditate on Scripture and listen for God's invitation in their daily lives.

### **Scripture Reading**

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- Proverbs 4:23 — Guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.
- John 7:38 — Rivers of living water flowing from those who believe.
- Philippians 4:8 — Thinking on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable.
- Romans 12:1–2 — Being transformed by the renewing of your mind.
- Psalm 1:1–3 — Delighting in God's Word and meditating on it day and night.

## Discussion Questions

1. Julie says that the question is not whether we are being formed, but what is forming us. After reading Romans 12:1–2, what influences in today's culture most shape our thinking, and how can Christians intentionally allow Christ to shape their hearts instead?
2. Prayer is presented as an ongoing conversation with God rather than a formal performance. Julie compares prayer to a young child bringing a drawing to a loving parent. How does that image change the way you think about prayer, especially if praying out loud feels intimidating?
3. Read Proverbs 4:23 and Philippians 4:8. Julie encourages believers to regularly examine their hearts, confess pride, bitterness, or selfishness, and invite God to reshape their thinking. Why is this kind of self-examination important for healthy marriages, friendships, and church relationships?
4. The episode includes a demonstration of *Lectio Divina*, reading Scripture slowly while listening for God's invitation. After reading John 7:38 together, spend a few quiet moments reflecting on the passage. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you? What do you think God may be inviting you to do or become through this Scripture?
5. Julie reminds us that marriage is one of God's refining tools, not simply a source of happiness. She also emphasizes that spiritual practices such as prayer, Scripture reading, and honest conversation help couples grow together over time. What is one spiritual practice you could begin this week—either individually, with your spouse, or with a close Christian friend—that would help you intentionally grow closer to Christ?

## EPISODE 5: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNITY WITH DR. MELISA ORTIZ BERRY

Series: *PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singles, and Relationships*

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

### Episode Summary

Christian community is not an optional part of the Christian life—it is one of the primary ways God forms His people. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry shares how intentional Christian community has shaped her own marriage, family, and spiritual growth. Through stories of Bible studies, small groups, church friendships, and family gatherings, she explains that healthy relationships with other believers have strengthened both her individual faith and her marriage with James. Rather than viewing small groups as another church program, she encourages Christians to see them as places where authentic friendships, accountability, encouragement, and spiritual growth naturally develop.

The conversation also addresses the loneliness many people experience today and offers practical encouragement for taking the first step toward meaningful Christian relationships. Dr. Berry explains that building community often requires courage, patience, and intentionality. Whether joining a church group, inviting others into your home, volunteering, or simply accepting an invitation, believers grow as they practice fellowship together. Community also provides healthy examples of Christian marriage and family life, supports believers through difficult seasons, and models authentic faith for the next generation.

### **Scripture Reading**

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- Acts 2:42–47 — The early church devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.
- Hebrews 10:24–25 — Encouraging one another and not neglecting to meet together.
- Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 — Two are better than one.
- Proverbs 27:17 — Iron sharpens iron.
- Romans 12:9–13 — Living together in genuine Christian love and hospitality.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Dr. Berry shares that much of her own spiritual growth and the growth of her marriage happened through intentional Christian community. After reading Acts 2:42–47, what characteristics of the early church do you see reflected in healthy small groups today?
2. Loneliness is described as one of the defining struggles of our time. Read Hebrews 10:24–25. Why do you think it can be difficult for people to join or stay committed to Christian community, and what encouragement does this passage offer?
3. The episode emphasizes that healthy friendships develop over time through showing up consistently, even when relationships do not immediately click. Think about a meaningful friendship in your life. What helped that relationship grow, and how can those same principles strengthen Christian community?
4. Read Proverbs 27:17 and Romans 12:9–13. Dr. Berry explains that Christian community provides examples of healthy marriages, authentic faith, and mutual encouragement. How have other believers influenced your own walk with Christ, and how might God use you to encourage someone else?
5. One of the practical challenges from this episode is to take a step toward community—whether joining a small group, inviting others into your home, volunteering, or simply accepting an invitation. What is one specific step you can take this week to build deeper Christian relationships, and what might be keeping you from taking that step?

## **EPISODE 6: LIVING SINGLE? WITH DANI TREWEEK**

Series: *PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singles, and Relationships*

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

Guest: Dani Treweek, Anglican Deacon, theologian, and founder of Single Minded

### **Episode Summary**

Singleness is often viewed in the church as a temporary stage before marriage or as a life that is somehow incomplete. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry, Agam Iheanyi-Igwe, and theologian Dani Treweek challenge these assumptions by examining what Scripture teaches about singleness through the lens of the whole biblical story. Rather than beginning with modern cultural expectations, Dani explores how the Bible presents both marriage and singleness as good gifts that point believers toward God's eternal kingdom.

The discussion emphasizes that the Christian life is not ultimately defined by marital status but by faithful discipleship to Christ. Dani explains that while marriage is a wonderful gift from God, it is not the highest goal of the Christian life. Instead, loving God and loving others is the calling of every believer, whether married or single. The episode also explores the importance of Christian friendship, the church as the family of God, and the hope of eternity, where all believers will live together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Scripture Reading**

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- 1 Corinthians 7:17–35 — Remaining faithful in the situation to which God has called you.
- Matthew 22:23–33 — Jesus teaches about marriage and the resurrection.
- John 15:9–17 — Jesus calls His disciples friends.
- Ephesians 2:19–22 — Believers are members of God's household.
- Mark 12:28–31 — The greatest commandments: loving God and loving others.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Dani argues that both marriage and singleness are good gifts from God that point to different aspects of God's kingdom. After reading Matthew 22:23–33, how does Jesus' teaching about the resurrection reshape the way we think about marriage and singleness?
2. Many Christians grow up believing that marriage is the ultimate goal of adult life. The episode challenges that assumption. According to Mark 12:28–31, what does Jesus identify as the true goal of the Christian life? How might that change the way we encourage both single and married believers?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 7:17–35. Paul encourages believers to remain faithful in the circumstances in which God has called them. What does this passage teach about finding

purpose and contentment in our present season of life rather than waiting for life to begin after a major change?

4. The episode emphasizes that the church is God's family and that deep Christian friendships are essential for both married and single believers. After reading John 15:9–17 and Ephesians 2:19–22, what practical steps can your church or small group take to cultivate meaningful friendships and ensure that no one experiences church life alone?
5. Dani concludes that marriage and singleness should not compete with one another but should complement one another as they both point toward eternity. What is one insight from this episode that challenged or expanded your understanding of God's design for relationships, and how might it influence the way you treat others in your church community?

## **EPISODE 7: THE SCIENCE OF PORNOGRAPHY WITH ANDREW BUCK**

Series: *PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singles, and Relationships*

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

Guest: Andrew Buck, Director of Operations, The Freedom Fight

### **Episode Summary**

Pornography has become one of the greatest challenges facing individuals, marriages, and the church today. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry, Agam Iheanyi-Igwe, and Andrew Buck discuss both the spiritual and neurological effects of pornography. Andrew shares his own testimony of finding freedom after struggling with pornography as a college student and explains why overcoming addiction is usually a process of discipleship rather than an instant event.

The conversation explores how pornography affects the brain, relationships, marriage, spiritual leadership, and authentic Christian community. Andrew explains that lasting freedom involves more than stopping a behavior—it requires renewing the mind, addressing deeper emotional and spiritual roots, practicing accountability, and growing in holiness. The episode concludes with practical tools, including the BRACE method, and encourages believers to pursue healing within Christian community through grace, accountability, and dependence on Christ.

### **Scripture Reading**

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- Romans 12:1–2 — Being transformed by the renewing of your mind.
- 1 Peter 1:13–16 — God's call to holiness.
- Job 31:1 — Making a covenant with our eyes.
- James 5:16 — Confessing sins to one another and praying for one another.

- John 10:10 — Christ came to bring abundant life.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Andrew describes pornography as both a spiritual issue and a pattern that affects the brain. After reading Romans 12:1–2, what does it mean to renew your mind, and how might that apply to overcoming any persistent temptation—not just pornography?
2. One of the major themes of this episode is that freedom is usually a process of discipleship rather than an instant experience. Why do you think God often uses a process of growth, accountability, and community instead of immediate deliverance?
3. Read James 5:16. The speakers emphasize confession, accountability, and small groups as essential parts of healing. Why is honest Christian community often difficult, and what can churches do to become safer places for people seeking freedom?
4. Andrew explains the BRACE tool: Breathe, Remember Truth, Ask God for help, Call an accountability partner, and Escape the situation. Which part of this approach seems most helpful to you, and why might each step work together to interrupt temptation?
5. The episode concludes by reminding believers that Christ came to give abundant life (John 10:10). How does pursuing holiness differ from simply avoiding sin? What positive vision of Christian freedom does this passage—and this episode—present?

## **EPISODE 8: GRIEF WITH BRYAN KANE**

Series: *PodClass: Life Together: Wisdom for Marriage, Singles, and Relationships*

Host: Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry

Co-Host: Agam Iheanyi-Igwe

Guest: Bryan Kane, Lead Chaplain, PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Hospice

### **Episode Summary**

Grief is an unavoidable part of life and, therefore, an unavoidable part of marriage and relationships. In this episode, Dr. Melisa Ortiz Berry, Agam Iheanyi-Igwe, and hospice chaplain Bryan Kane discuss how grief is the natural process of adjusting to significant loss. While grief is often associated with death, it can also arise from losing a job, a dream, a relationship, or any meaningful part of life. The conversation emphasizes that grief is deeply personal, and no two people experience or express it in exactly the same way.

Bryan encourages Christians to resist trying to fix grief with quick answers or simple platitudes. Instead, healthy grieving involves walking with one another, extending grace, seeking support from the church community, and bringing pain honestly before Christ. The episode highlights the importance of memorial services, Christian community, counseling when needed, and

remembering that while grief may never completely disappear, believers grieve with the hope of Christ's resurrection and His presence in the midst of suffering.

### **Scripture Reading**

Before discussing the questions, read together:

- John 11:17–44 (especially verses 33–36) — Jesus weeps at the death of Lazarus.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 — Christians grieve, but not without hope.
- Ecclesiastes 7:2–4 — The wisdom found in the house of mourning.
- Psalm 34:18 — The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Bryan describes grief as a natural process rather than a problem to be solved. After reading John 11:17–44, what does Jesus' response to Lazarus' death teach us about grieving as Christians?
2. The episode reminds us that grief is not limited to the death of a loved one. What other kinds of losses can produce genuine grief, and why is it important for Christians to recognize those losses?
3. Bryan explains that healthy support often means simply being present rather than trying to fix another person's pain. Think about someone who has walked with you through a difficult season. What made their presence helpful?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. How does the Christian hope of the resurrection shape the way we experience grief without minimizing the pain of loss?
5. The speakers emphasize grieving in community through family, church, counseling, memorial services, and Christian friendships. What practical steps can your small group or church take to better support someone who is grieving this year?