



For CanaVox Reading Group Participants

1. Our Recipe of Readings

CanaVox reading groups usually study a short intellectual piece (grounded in reliable research) with a personal story that brings the research to life. We strive to choose short and sweet readings that busy women with busy lives can realistically read in an hour or two.

We read about the problems our marriage culture faces but also strive to study things that provide solutions and *hope*. The goal is to choose high quality readings that educate us and beautiful stories that motivate and inspire us. In so doing, we hope to find information that describes our problems candidly, and to balance this (sometimes sobering) information out with practical, forward-looking solutions.

It should also be noted that some of the readings are chosen because they get us thinking and talking in the right ways, even if some of the ideas may not be universally agreed upon. Like any good university seminar, which presents different angles to an issue, our readings aim to give us the tools to think and learn for ourselves by clarifying our positions through dialogue with others. Participants are under no obligation to agree with all of the ideas in each article; rather, group members are encouraged to read all of the articles critically and to bring their comments and concerns to study group meetings.

2. A Conversational Style of Study

Each CanaVox group leader is a facilitator of conversation. S/he is not a marriage counselor or a relationships or parenting expert. The group leader's main job is to guide the group through fruitful, conversational dialogue that seeks the truth on a particular topic.

This discovery should happen together. The leader is not going to give a long lecture or authoritative advice. The leader seeks to facilitate peer discussion and group study of the readings and offer his/her own thoughtful opinions like everyone else, by exchanging

interpretations and questions about the text, disagreements with the text, personal experiences related to the topic at hand, opinions, and friendly debate.

3. An Open but Discreet Conversation

Some of the subjects we discuss open the door to sharing stories about our own marriages. After the group has established an atmosphere of friendship and trust, it is only natural to share struggles and victories, and on occasion to ask for peer advice. We warmly welcome this friend-to-friend conversation, yet since it can be delicate territory, we ask that reading group members exercise care in their speech.

In particular, we ask that groups abide by our three principles of discretion:

Confidentiality: “What is said in the group, stays in the group.”

Anonymity: When speaking about those not present during a group meeting, please keep their identities and personal situations anonymous.

Level-headedness: Participants should strive to avoid excess drama or emotion; avoid personal attacks on spouses, children, or family members. Aim to describe difficulties in a way that shows respect and compassion to those who suffer and those who inflict suffering. Be open to receiving honest feedback from group members, recognizing that we all have the potential to make mistakes!

The group leader may need to more actively moderate a discussion from time to time in order to serve the common good of the group. For example, the leader may gently stop a conversation that has strayed too far off topic, or a discussion that has become too personal. Group members can aid their facilitators in this regard by remembering the three principles discussed above.

4. Acknowledgement of our Shared Vulnerability

Part of the CanaVox tone involves acknowledgement that we have all made mistakes in our past (and current!) lives, and that while these mistakes may weigh on us, they can give us not only a privileged understanding of the truth, but also more compassion toward others.

In other words, no one in CanaVox has led a squeaky clean life, and no one should feel like a failure for at times not living up to the ideals we study. On the contrary, while we make mistakes, we can learn greatly from them. We believe in second chances and we cheer for each other as we seek lives of greater integrity.

Many women and men involved in CanaVox reading groups have experienced the hook-up culture first hand, or have cohabited prior to marriage, or have gone through divorce, or feel like they are on the verge of divorce. Some of us have used artificial

forms of reproductive technology for less than noble reasons, because at the time we felt these were the right decisions.

Some of us may feel comfortable talking about past mistakes, whereas others of us may not feel comfortable or prefer not to share these things. We respect each person's comfort levels and needs, and most of all, desire to love one another with all of our vulnerabilities. Let's make sure this tone comes across as we talk to one another. Most especially, let's take care not to come off as condescending towards people or authors who share experiences of past mistakes. We are all a work in progress!

5. Cultivate a cheerful, hopeful esprit de corps!

CanaVox is unique among other marriage movements because we have decided to be intentionally cheerful, solution-focused, and forward-thinking, even while we admit the difficulties plaguing our society and our homes.

Occasionally, a topic that we discuss in CanaVox study groups can be upsetting to some readers, especially when some of us are dealing with these problems in our own families (like, pornography, or our children cohabiting, etc.) or when we see our legal culture endorsing them (like laws re-defining and undermining the institution of marriage). While we must not whitewash the truth, we can encourage each other to focus on what is good, and to take the long view of patience and hope so that we move to bring about solutions to our culture's problems.

An image we like to use is that of CanaVox members as field nurses on the battlefield, surrounded by wounded. We are living in the midst of an epic battle for marriage--and for the sexual integrity of our world family. There are many wounded – many suffering and broken hearts in our midst. If there were no medicine available, then we would have reason to despair. But we have medicine! We have truths, and we have the research, ideas, and love available to help heal the wounded. Our optimism is not a naïve or fabricated optimism, but one founded on the conviction that loving conversations that communicate these truths will help to repair our marriage culture one person at a time.

Therefore, we urge CanaVox participants to refrain from saying things like “it's hopeless” or “we are going to lose.” We must lift each other up when we are feeling deflated or discouraged, and remind people that we are fighting for an incredible institution, which makes us humane towards the vulnerable and more fully human ourselves: the institution of marriage. We all need to vent or air our frustrations with the culture from time to time (and we need empathy as we do that) but let us help each other to focus on what is true, good and beautiful, with cheer and a good sense of humor, laughing at ourselves first. This will set the tone so that personal friendships can thrive as we help ourselves and others.

Finally, a manifestation of our hopefulness is the tradition of making a resolution to *do something* in our families or with friends or neighbors about the issue we read about. For example, if we read about the sex ed readings, we make a concrete resolution to talk to our spouses or kids about the subject; if we read about communication in marriage, perhaps we will make an effort to provide a listening ear to our friend who confides in us

her struggles to communicate with her spouse, or to share a website for marriage friendly therapists. Sometimes we begin the next month's reading group meeting by asking whether anyone wishes to share any action they took as a result of the prior meeting.

Thank you for joining CanaVox and for all you will be doing for marriage!

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