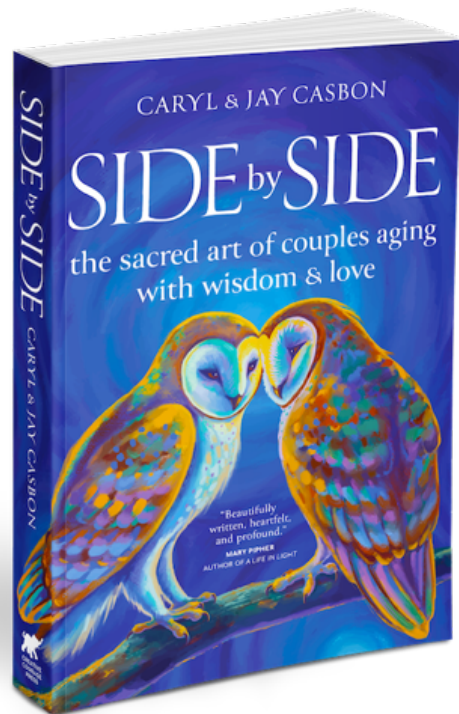


Side by Side Soup & Story Supper Clubs



A Table Talk Program for Couples



**SIDE BY SIDE SOUP & STORY SUPPER CLUBS
FOR COUPLES AGING WITH LOVE & WISDOM**



*There is something profoundly satisfying about sharing a meal.
Eating together, and breaking bread together, is one of the oldest
and most fundamentally unifying of human experiences.*

—Barbara Coloros

A Side by Side Supper Club is designed for couples in committed relationships, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, living into the autumn/winter of their lives, and who are interested in joining together with a few other couples to engage with the teaching stories and themes in ***Side by Side: The Sacred Art of Couples Aging with Wisdom & Love***. Three to four couples meet in each other's homes to share a simple soup meal and to “welcome the stranger” that is this time of life we share.

Aging couples face changing conditions with their status, health, relationships, and spiritual development; these groups are designed to create a safe, sacred container where we can get to know and support others while discussing these many changes and opportunities. Within the safety of a trustworthy community, questions like, “How do we make the most of our time left together? How are we changing from within? How can we best love and support one another and our families as we age?” will be addressed. If you long for these conversations, this program is for you!

WHY STORIES?

Since ancient times, people have gathered around the hearth, on front porches, next to water coolers, and of course, around the table to tell stories. When we share our stories, we are offering each other a radical gift of hospitality. Story employs the language of experience. When we recount a story, it is like when we share a dream, where we reveal many layers of meaning that even the

storyteller doesn't entirely comprehend. Through stories, we teach each other lessons and realize we are not alone on our journeys. We get to know each other, pass along history and wisdom, and sometimes, if we are lucky, we even hear ourselves and learn the deeper meaning of our experiences. You are invited to engage in some "table talk" that will consist of storytelling as we break bread together in this program.

When we are generous in welcoming people and sharing something with them—some food, a place in our homes, our time—not only do we no longer remain poor: we are enriched.

—Pope Francis

HOW DOES IT WORK?

When three to four couples gather, they begin with enjoying a lunch or supper and then sharing relationship stories around the table, based on the "Table Talk Story Suggestions" below. When the meal is concluded, the group then will move to the living room to explore the intersection of three themes: committed relationships, aging, and spirituality, using the questions, practices, and interview clips in the Readers' Guide in *Side by Side*, and posted on the website: www.sidebysideaging.com

- **Length of each session:** 2.5 to 3 hours (depending on how long you wish to dine)
- **Size of group:** 3-4 couples, or as many as you have room for around your tables
- **Group meeting times:** The time of day and frequency of meetings are determined at your first meeting. We suggest you begin by meeting weekly as you get to know each other, if possible. If some of your members can't drive at night, choose to meet for lunch. The group can start with five or six meetings and extend them to more if they are still engaged and learning. You may read the entire book (13 chapters) several chapters, or just one over a season or year, and plan accordingly.
- **Suggested meal plan structure:** To keep it simple, the host provides soup and table settings, one couple brings bread & butter, and one couple brings cookies or another favorite dessert. Everyone contributes to what they want

to drink with the meal. (Of course, you can alter this in any way you wish...and even create a gourmet group if the Spirit moves you!)

- **Table Talk:** The meal is informal and a time for sharing stories. See the attached “Table Talk” design with suggested invitations for storytelling.
- **The leadership of the book-focused Circle of Trust:** See the Readers’ Guide at the back of *Side by Side* for guidelines for leading the second half of your meeting. One couple should agree to provide the leadership for this part of the program for the entire time you convene; while the dinners are hosted by all, the Circle of Trust leadership is not passed around. The leaders will be responsible for making sure the meeting times, chapter assignments, and home site locations are clear through email reminders, etc.
- **How to open the circle for sharing stories:** When people arrive and the food is served, the evening supper host will light a candle, invite a brief time for silence, and then begin the meal by reading a grace, a poem, or a blessing to be used each time you gather. Here is one you are welcome to use. You can choose to write or find your own, use a poem, song, or a quote:

A Soup & Story Blessing

As we gather around this table
in the Spirit of kinship
and in the grace of one another's company,
we give thanks for this simple, delicious meal,
as we remember those who will go without.

May we be nourished in body, hearts, and souls
in the sharing of this food and in gratitude for this bounty.

May our stories be inspired by humor,
truth, humility, and surprise,
and our listening, clear, generous, and kind.

And may we extend to one another a beneficial presence
as we reveal our histories, questions, suffering, and insights,
and celebrate, together, the gifts of age, the gifts of relationship,
and this gift of life.

Amen

After the blessing, the supper host will read aloud a quote and an invitation to tell a story.

On the following pages are Table Talk quotes and questions (invitations) that you can print and cut up to use. For instance, you can use one question per supper event so that all couples are answering the same question (as a way of getting to know each other deeply over time). Or you can have questions cut out and laying on the table so that each couple picks one to answer.

Before you are done eating, every couple should have had a chance to share a brief (approximately 3-5 minutes) response to the invitation. However, sharing is always voluntary. It is fine if a couple wants to pass. When someone is talking, listen respectfully and in silence; don't interrupt their sharing. Thank them when they are through. One person should act as timekeeper for these sessions to ensure that everyone gets a turn.

Table Talk Quotes and Story Invitations



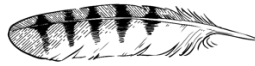
1. “When the heart is ready for a fresh beginning, unforeseen things can emerge. And in a sense, this is exactly what a beginning does. It is an opening for surprises. Such beginnings have their own mind, and they invite and unveil new gifts and arrivals in one's life.”
— John O’Donohue

Story Invitation: As we begin our time together as a new community, recount the story of how you two first met: What brought you together, and what has kept you together?



2. “Food, in the end, in our tradition, is something holy. It’s not about nutrients and calories. It’s about sharing. It’s about honesty. It’s about identity.”
— Louise Fresco

Story Invitation: Share a story that captures your family of origin’s relationship with and traditions around food, dining, meals, and, or cooking. Discuss how it may have differed from your partner’s customs. What have you created together in terms of preparing and sharing food?



3. “The ultimate touchstone of friendship is not improvement, neither of the other nor of the self: the ultimate touchstone is witness, the privilege of having been seen by someone and the equal privilege of being granted the sight of the essence of another, to have walked with them and to have believed in them, and sometimes just to have accompanied them for however brief a span, on a journey impossible to accomplish alone.”

— David Whyte

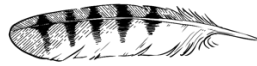
Story Invitation: Share an account of when you “caught your partner in the act” of doing something radically thoughtful, kind, and loving for you, when you felt deeply understood and appreciated. If you wish, witness and name the qualities in your partner that you are grateful for.



4. “Love is something we have to learn...a skill, imagination, forbearance, many things. Resist the idea that true love is smooth. It is rocky and bumpy at the best of times. It is about being human. You can’t avoid it.”

— Allain de Botton

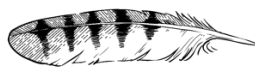
Story Invitation: Share a story of when you knew your relationship had grown past the honeymoon stage



5. “Furthermore, we have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes/heroines of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; and where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.”

— Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*

Story Invitation: Share a story about when you underwent an adventure together, i.e., a volunteer project, a memorable vacation, or a pilgrimage. Include what you thought the journey would be and what it became, including detours, losing your way, surprising discoveries, hidden treasures, etc.



6. “...as we age, we have not only to readdress earlier developmental crises but also somehow to find the way to three affirmations that may seem in conflict...We have to affirm our own life. We have to affirm our own death. And we have to affirm love, both given and received.”

— Mary Catherine Bateson

Story Invitation: Share a story that captures how aging together is impacting you and your relationship... a story that reflects what your age is asking of you at this time as a couple?



7. “I want to stand as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all the kinds of things you can’t see from the center.”
—Kurt Vonnegut

Story Invitation: Tell a story about an edge you find yourselves negotiating as a couple.



8. “My story is important not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours...it is precisely through these stories in all their particularity, as I have long believed and often said, that God makes himself known to each of us...”
— Frederic Beuchner

Story Invitation: Share a story about something you do, practice together, or share that represents a core value to you as a couple. Consider how you create “home” for each other.



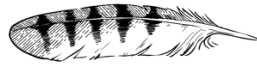
9. “Our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant, and to face the challenge of change.”
— Martin Luther King Jr.

Story Invitation: Share a story of when a challenge brought you closer together.



10. “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”
— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Story Invitation: Share a sacred story: A moment of grace, as a couple, when you experienced something larger than yourselves intervening in your lives.



11. “The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for.”
— Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Story Invitation: Tell a story that captures how you find meaning and purpose. What brings you most alive at this time of life?



12. “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.”
— J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

Story Invitation: Share a story about how, as a couple, you had to draw on your courage to face one another, or other challenging relationships in your life.



13. “Creativity is intelligence having fun.”
— Albert Einstein

Story Invitation: Share a story about how the two of you have a good time together.