

Marriage

The short word, "marriage," describes man's oldest and most honourable institution. You will probably deal with the marriage institution on three levels: 1) As a Bible teacher and student, (2) as a married person, (3) as an ordained minister responsible for counselling couples and solemnizing marriages.

As a student and teacher of the Bible, you must understand the Biblical roots of marriage. As a married person, or one eligible for marriage you'll face the Joys and struggles of married life. As an ordained minister, you must conduct pre-marital counselling and solemnize marriages.

Each of your roles in life provides another viewpoint of this cherished and misunderstood institution. Because of the confusion in the world that swirls around the subject of marriage, a clear, Bible-based foundation is vital for your own marriage and ministry. This section examines the marriage institution, the minister's marriage, and marriage ordinances.

The Institution of Marriage

Webster's Dictionary defines institution as "the act of instituting or establishing; an established law, custom, or public occasion." There is a strong implication that the depth or extent of any institution is directly proportional to the depth or power of the institutor and the longevity of the institution.

God established or instituted marriage at the same time he created man. In Genesis 2:18, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him an help meet for him." From the description of Eve's creation that follows, it is clear that Adam had all the elements of the human race resident in him-the full complement of DNA and genes, and all the best attributes of what we now know as the masculine and feminine. But he was alone, and God Almighty said it was not good. Thus the institution of marriage was created.

Since the first earthly son of God contributed part of his being to the creation of Eve, he was incomplete without her from that day forth. It is no different for us today. Marriage is a divine provision for a human need. Its "institutor" is God the Creator; its date of origin coincides with the creation of our race. It was ordained of God in Eden before man sinned. Even the Sabbath, the blood covenant, and the tithe were to follow after this first holy institution

The Nature of The Help Meet

Notice that God didn't say helpmeet or helpmate. He used two words meaning "a help meet for him." The word meet means fit or suitable for. In original Hebrew, it meant a front, a part opposite, a counterpart, or mate." Man's companion was to correspond to and complement him.

Genesis 2:21-22 says, "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."

God did not make man after the order of the lower animals but "in His own image." Neither did He choose to make man's companion or "help meet" from some other order of beings, but made her from man--of the same substance.

Why The Rib?

God took this substance, not from man's feet that man might have an excuse to degrade, enslave or trample upon woman; nor from man's head that woman might assume authority over man; but from man's rib near his heart and the seat of his affections, that woman might stand at his side as man's equal. They were to work out their God-ordained purpose and destiny side by side.

The Mystery And Purpose of Marriage

There is a mystery about marriage that began with Adam. He described it in Genesis 2:23:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." (NIV)

After Adam spoke these words, the scriptures add: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." (NIV)

As the marriage vows are pronounced in faith, the power of God goes into operation. There is an actual miracle that takes place as the two believers release their own faith. God honours their faith and unites them by His power. Their union is four-fold. They are joined together spiritually by God, legally by the contract they enter into, and physically when the marriage is consummated. The last and most difficult union is the union of the soul, where the minds, wills and emotions of the married couple blend and intermingle in unity. This last union takes place over a lifetime of trial and error, give and take.

Marriage was-ordained to-perpetuate the human race, promote social order and human happiness, to prevent irregular affection, and to transmit stability and order from age to age.

But the Christian marriage is ordained to be much more. The Apostle Paul compared the Christian marriage relationship to that of Christ and the Church.

God chose to build His Kingdom upon the family. From Adam's family to yours today, the family is God's primary building block for church and society. As the family goes, so goes the quality of life.

The Christ-centered marriage displays the grace of God openly to a lost and disillusioned world. For this reason, Satan targeted Christian marriages for attack and harassment. He knows that the home, the "dwelling place" of the marriage, is the heart of Christian life. It is here that we come for comfort, healing, refreshment, love, and nurturing. It is from this base that tomorrow's mighty men and women arise from childhood to adulthood.

Marriage Ordinances

One of the privileges and responsibilities of ordained ministers is to conduct or "solemnize" marriages.

As a "set-apart one," you represent God's Kingdom in earthly affairs. You are a priest of God in the marriage ceremony. You are the guardian of the spiritual values in the ceremony.

Premarital Counselling

SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND FAITH

Aim: To get to know the couple and encourage them to centre their marriage on Jesus Christ.

Procedure:

1. Ask the couple to share with you the story of their courtship:

How did you meet?

Why are you coming to get married at this time?

2. What has been the reaction of your family and friends to your plans to marry?

3. Explain to the couple the plan of salvation urging them to come to personal relationship with Christ. If both are believers, encourage them to grow in their faith and centre their marriage on Christ.

4. Address any issues that arise in the above points. Let the couple know if you will not be able to perform their marriage. If you have reservations, now the time to speak up.

Homework: Opposites List (Compile a list of ways you and your partner are different. "He is a night owl, while she is a morning person," etc.)

SESSION TWO: PERSONALITY ISSUES, EXPECTATIONS, AND ROLES

Aim: To lead the couple to a greater understanding of how differing personalities can add strength as well as create difficulty and to facilitate further discussion of expectations and roles.

Procedure:

- 1 Ask partners to separately list ten reasons why they love their partner. Have them share their list verbally by turning toward their partner and saying, "I love you because..."

2. Review the Opposites List. Ask them to identify five areas where their differences might cause conflict as well as five areas where differences might be a source of strength.

3. Ask partners to separately list expectations they have of their partner in marriage. Have them exchange sheets and mark with a "+" those that will be easy to live up to, a "-" those that will be difficult, and a "?" for those they are not sure about.

4. "Which of the following descriptions most closely describes the relationship in the home you grew up in? Which do you hope will describe your own home?" Explain that regardless of our best plans we often revert to conduct that is like that of the home we grew up in:

Dominant husband with submissive wife: He led. She followed.

Dominant wife with acquiescing husband: She just let him think he was in charge.

Leadership by husband with willing wife: She had input, but he had the final say.

Equal roles: Decisions were made together or not at all.

SESSION THREE: FAMILY OF ORIGIN AND FAMILY ISSUES

Aim: To lead the couple to a greater understanding of how family of origin is likely to effect the way they relate to each other and to get them off to a good start in handling extended family relationships.

Procedure:

1. Read Genesis 2:24. Ask each one to explain their understanding of what it means to "leave" and to "cleave."
2. Ask her to describe his relationship with his parents. Ask him to describe her relationship with her parents. Ask him, "How might her relationship with her father affect your relationship?" Ask her, "How might his relationship with his mother affect your relationship?"
3. Ask each partner to indicate which of the following statements best describes their family of origin:

"In our house mom or dad had dinner ready most days and we usually ate together as a family."

"In our house mom served dinner at the same time everyday and everyone was expected to be there."

"In our house we sometimes ate together and sometimes didn't."

"In our house everyone fended for himself or herself when it came to dinnertime."

4. "How might the family you grew up in affect your own manner of relating to one another?"

Homework: Start Off Right ("Before the next session, write a letter thanking your future in-laws for helping to make your finance or fiancée the person he or she is today. Tell them why you look forward to having them as in-laws. Mail it before the next session.")

SESSION FOUR: COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION.

Aim: To lead the couple to establish guidelines for good communication as well as a strategy for handling conflict.

Procedure:

1. Keep a model you have built with children's building blocks hidden while you have the couple take seats back to back. Give the man the item you built and the woman the appropriate pieces to replicate the model. The woman is not allowed to see the model or to speak while the man gives her instructions on replicating it. Allow five minutes for building. Reposition the chairs and discuss the futility of one-way communication.
2. Ask the couple to read James 4:1-3. What is the root cause of most marital conflict? (selfish desires) What instruction does James 1:19 give for resolving and avoiding conflict?
3. Share the following five principles for resolving conflict in marriage:
 - a. Listen: Instead of demanding that you be heard, listen carefully to the other person (see Proverbs 18:13 and James 1:19).
 - b. Select: Select an appropriate time (Eph. 4:26).
 - c. Define: How do you define the problem? How does your partner define the problem?
 - d. Discuss: Define the areas of agreement and disagreement in the conflict.
 - e. Identify; Identify your own contribution to the problem. Acknowledging your own contribution will lead to prompter resolution.

Homework: You Can Have It All ("Imagine you have charged \$1,000.00 for your new household on a credit card on at an annual interest rate of 18%. How long will it take you to pay it off if you make the minimum payment of about \$20.00 each month?" The formula is monthly balance + 1.5% each month - \$20.00 and then repeat for each subsequent month.")

Household Budget (Prepare a household budget for review in the next session.)

SESSION FIVE: FINANCES

Aim: To lead the couple to understand scriptural principles for financial management as well as to develop and implement a household budget.

Procedure:

1. Review basic principles for financial management:

Psalm 24:1-It all belongs to God.

Luke 21:1-4- Generosity toward God is expected.

Romans 13:8--Pay your debts, especially the debt of love.

2. Ask partners to separately list, in order of priority, the top ten financial priorities for their household (tithing, food, insurance, house payment, car payment, etc.). Review and compare differences in list.

3. Review the proposed household budget.

SESSION SIX: THE SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

The couple should take advantage of one of the excellent manuals to guide Christian couples in developing a healthy sexual relationship.

Aim: To lead the couple to understand the scriptural foundation of the sexual relationship as well as to initiate healthy and open conversation about the sexual relationship.

Procedure:

1. Ask couple to answer these questions:

Where did you get your ideas regarding sex?

What was the attitude toward sex in your home?

How might the attitude toward sex in your home affect your sexual relationship in marriage?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-11.

Why is marriage a good thing? (vv. 1, 2)

What responsibility does each partner have toward the other? (vv. 3, 4)

Why should such abstinence be only for an agreed upon period? (vv. 4,5)

3. Suggestions for a healthy sexual adjustment:

Men are visually stimulated while women need tenderness.

The drive of one may surpass that of the other, so giving to one another is appropriate.

Talk about what you like and don't like.

Guard the relationship and keep it private.

4. Offer any additional advice, or address any additional issues and close in prayer.