

Preparing for Marriage



Congratulations on your decision to get married. This is the greatest commitment at the human level that you will ever make.

Marriage is a gift of God and a state of life which God has provided for mankind. Jesus honoured it by his presence at a marriage in Cana in Galilee. Throughout the Bible, marriage is an honoured relationship and in the New Testament, the bond of marriage is seen as a sign of the loyalty and the love that exists between Jesus and his church.

Marriage is not to be entered into lightly or carelessly but with reverent and serious consideration of the purposes for which it has been given. It was given:

- a. so that husband and wife might always enjoy each other's companionship, help and support,
- b. for the proper expression of human sexuality,
- c. so that family life might continue and that children might be brought up in the love and security of a stable and happy home, and
- d. so that human society might be healthy and have a firm foundation.

It is important that you prepare, not just for the wedding day but for the life that you will spend together. A lifelong commitment calls for worthwhile preparation. We are educated for most aspects of life. So let's learn to make the most of marriage.

The preparation we will do is more than a brief visit to sign forms, set the date, choose the hymns, etc. Also, it is more than a brief rehearsal a day or so before the wedding. While we will do those things, there are five sessions of discussion about various aspects of married life.

It is not always easy to discuss marriage frankly. Some are embarrassed, some will not treat the subject as seriously as we might wish. What we want to do is to provide whatever means we can to enable your marriage to be a success.

There are many aspects of marriage. We will consider the following:

CONTEXT - The basis of our study.

READINESS - motives, expectations.

PURPOSES - why marry?

COMMUNICATION - interests, reaction to pressure.

COMMITMENT - promises.

Consideration of each of these aspects will be important.

Please note: Preparation is not a matter of prying into your personal affairs, but a sharing of truth and experience. All marriages have rocky moments; if we can learn how to ride the bumps, we will be much happier throughout the journey.

Now or for Homework: complete your 'Initial Thoughts on Marriage' questions (Appendix 1).

STUDY ONE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

Discuss initial thoughts on marriage if you haven't already.

God has revealed to us the foundation and context for marriage in the first pages of the Bible. Marriage is actually a very good part of God's creation of the world and is very much tied up in who we are and what we were made for.

(a) God's perfect design

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Being made in the image of God is important. It tells us that:

- we're not God
- we're a special part of God's creation distinct from the animals (v26)
- both male and female are equal in value, dignity and worth (v27)
- we're made for relationship with God & each other (v28a)
- we have roles/responsibilities to fulfil before God (v28).

God's design for marriage and the point from which it should always be viewed is found in Genesis 2:15-25. For the first time God declares something in his creation to be "**not good**"- Adam being alone.

Genesis 2:15-25

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." ¹⁸ The LORD God said, "**It is not good** for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would

name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 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." ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Question

i) What sorts of things does this passage tell us about God's design for marriage (especially v24)?

These verses clearly tell us:

- The man and woman were designed to complement one another (v18).
- The marriage relationship takes priority over every other relationship (v24a).
- The man and woman are bound together as husband and wife in a permanent union (v24b).
- Marriage is an exclusive relationship (v24)
- The nature of the union is such that a breach of it can hardly be contemplated ('one flesh').

Jesus endorses the authority of these verses when he quotes them in response to a challenge from the religious teachers of his day about divorce.

Matthew 19:3-6

³ Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" ⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Questions

- i) What do you think it means to become “one flesh”? How’s this different from the relationship between best friends, or between a parent and a child?
- ii) Are you willing to make your marriage relationship the number one priority over all other relationships?
- iii) Have a go at arranging the following relationships in order of priority:
work, parents, marriage, friends, kids, God
- iv) Do either of you have any relationships you will find hard to re-prioritise?
- v) Do you need your ‘spouse-to-be’ (i.e. “You’re my life” or “I’d be lost without you”)? How might that fit in with God’s perfect design for marriage?

(b) The distortion of God’s perfect design

When Adam and Eve first rebelled against God in the garden of Eden it caused a fracture that splintered right through God’s very good creation. Human sin resulted in a break down and distortion of the good pattern of all relationships.

Read Genesis 3:8-19

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

*14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; **he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.**"*

16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

- i) How do you see a break down in relationships between:
-People and God (v8, 10-11)?

-People and the created world (v13, 15, 17-19)?

-People and each other (v12, 16; to help understand the word ‘desire’ check out Genesis 4:7)?

- ii) How have you seen this play out in relationships even today?

The reality is, we now live in a world that is distorted by sin. We can see God’s perfect design for our relationships, but by nature we’re inclined to stray away from these. Even in marriage our default setting for relating to each other is far from God’s perfect design. For this reason it’s even more important for us to keep coming back to examine what God has to say about marriage and to seek his help to live it out.

STUDY TWO READINESS FOR MARRIAGE

Can any of us be quite sure we are ready for marriage? Whether we are sure or not, there are some things we need to realise about ourselves as we enter into it.

We all have:

- (a) unique **experiences** of family life and relationships
- (b) differing **motives** for wanting to get married
- (c) our own **expectations** of what marriage will be like
- (d) independent lives and **changing circumstances**

(a) Experience

Our past affects our present and future. Our cultural background, upbringing and past relationships affect our ideas and what we think it means to be a man, woman, husband and wife. For this reason it's been said that every marriage is a "cross cultural experience".

In terms of our upbringing, the way our parents treated each other and us will shape who we now are. We may feel that we let our parents down in some way in our performance at school, job choice or choice of friends. Perhaps you are from a broken home and you carry with you feelings of responsibility for this breakdown. And then, of course, there's the other extreme. Maybe you have been the apple of your parents' eyes. If so, you may find it very hard to accept even the most positive criticism.

Your parents may have been publically affectionate and close, or they may have been reserved and distant. They may have been spontaneously generous, or they may have counted their pennies. They may have been strict with you or let you get away with murder. We carry all of these experiences of our upbringing into our marriage with us.

We may also have had unique experiences of our own past relationships. These may have been as small as a crush or as serious as a previous marriage. They may have been a wonderful experience or a particularly painful one. All these experiences shape who we are now and will stay with us as fond memories, helpful lessons, past hurts, regrets or even fears.

All of these sorts of experiences and feelings will indirectly impact our spouse and can be potential sore spots that can flare up under the pressures of married life.

Questions

i) Do you see anything in your past experience that could provide some awkward/difficult moments in your marriage?

ii) Do you have any past experiences that you don't think your partner will ever fully understand?

(b) Motives

Some people marry because their friends are married and they are afraid of missing out. Others marry because they want to get away from home. Others marry because they are in love. Some have been living together and want to make it 'official'.

Question

What are your individual motives in getting married? (i.e. Why do you want to get married?)

(c) Expectations

What we expect of each other can have a significant effect on our marriage. We may not even realise what we expect – we may simply have taken on the patterns of the families in which we grew up, or the patterns of our particular group of friends.

When you go on a trip you take luggage with you, and marriage can be likened to going on a permanent trip. Are you going to take *everything* with you, or will you be more discerning about what you take into your marriage relationship. Think about 'packing a suitcase' for your marriage. Take into your marriage the patterns from your families of origin that were good and helpful for building up your parents' marriage, while leaving behind those patterns that were either outright harmful, or not so helpful. If you do not deliberately make these discerning decisions then you are most likely to make similar mistakes to your parents.

Questions (feel free to discuss any number of these questions that will be helpful)

i) What sort of things do you want to pack into your 'marriage suitcase'? What things do you want to leave behind?

ii) What do you expect of one another socially? (i.e. Do you expect to do everything together? Will you have all the same friends?)

iii) What do you expect of each other domestically? (i.e. Who does what around the home?)

iv) What do you expect of one another emotionally? (i.e. Who do you expect to pick you up when you are down? Will you come home and expect your spouse to listen to a summary of your day?)

v) Do you expect the feeling of "love" to fade/change over time? Why or Why not?

vi) Where do your expectations about how you manage money come from?

vii) Where do your sexual expectations come from?

viii) Are there any marriages that you admire? What do you admire about them?

(d) Effect of changing circumstances

A central promise in the traditional words of the marriage ceremony is that you will take each other 'for better, for worse for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health'.

Question

Do you believe this is a realistic promise?

Note, in view of what you might expect of each other it is a good idea to have a medical check-up. Some couples find that unexpected physical difficulties or illnesses can arise very early in their marriage that hinder their physical relationship.

Homework: Complete the 'Necessary or Not' form and prepare a monthly budget (Appendix 2).

STUDY THREE
PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

Discuss homework on finances.

There are two perspectives in looking at the purposes of marriage: God's and ours. Since marriage is a good gift from God, he has lots to say about the purposes for which he designed it and gave it to us. Then from a human point of view, we can also see some basic purposes for marriage.

(a) From God's point of view

In the Biblical account of creation God reveals that through marriage, human beings will have certain basic needs met:

- i) the need for help (Gen 2:18, 20)
- ii) the fulfilment of God's purposes (Gen 1:27-28; 2:24)
- iii) the overcoming of loneliness (Gen 2:18, 20)
- iv) the need for enjoyment (note Adam's delight in his wife; 2:23).

But the Bible shows us that God has other purposes for marriage too:

- i) our growth in godliness (Eph 5:25-27)
- ii) to help us be self controlled (1 Cor 7:8-9)
- iii) to reflect to the world something of the relationship between Jesus and his bride- the church (Eph 5:25-33)

(b) From the human point of view

Here are four suggested purposes for marriage from a human perspective:

- Companionship
- Physical intimacy
- Having children
- Community well-being

Questions

i) Do you believe that all of these stated purposes (b) are very important?

ii) Are there any other purposes for marriage?

iii) Try to list the purposes of marriage from a human perspective in order of importance (feel free to add any other purposes you listed).

Now, let's look at the suggested purposes more closely.

(a) Companionship

As humans we all long for relationship. We long to share life's experiences together, our thoughts, our feelings, our joys, our fears. We want to know and be known, to love and be loved. We long for, we're made for companionship. That's the great blessing of marriage. It provides the ideal environment for this mutual companionship. As we've already seen, God designed it this way. He created marriage and he tells us that it's primarily for the purpose of companionship... lifelong companionship. The promise 'to death do us part' comes first and foremost from him.

Consider the following statements from the Bible:

Genesis 2:24 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh.'	Matthew 19:6 'So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together let not man separate.'
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Questions

i) There are good reasons for committing ourselves to a permanent relationship. Can you suggest any?

ii) How do you feel about this commitment? And do you see any disadvantages in this lifelong commitment?

- iii) How might these disadvantages be overcome by:
- thorough preparation?
 - prayerfulness?
 - establishment of good communication from the start?
 - recognition that marriage is not just for one partner's pleasure?
 - asking for help?

(b) Physical Intimacy

What a privilege! Physical intimacy between a husband and a wife is a great blessing. It was designed by God and is a good gift that is to be enjoyed.

The Bible encourages the **full** expression of love within marriage; it does so because marriage is the appropriate place for sexual intercourse. There is no scope for it anywhere else. For example, Exodus 20:14 says 'You shall not commit adultery'. Jesus takes this further by saying, 'You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:27-28).

Questions

- i) Do you accept these as good standards for your marriage?

- ii) What are the implications of what Jesus said? How else might we breach God's standards of sexual purity? (i.e. 'look but don't touch')

- iii) Are there any situations in which you feel that it would be very hard to live up to these standards?

- iv) Do you believe that an intended partner needs to be aware of any breach of these standards
 - before marriage?

 - within marriage? What if it is a potential breach?

- v) How would you view unfaithfulness within marriage? What would you do about it?

Note. *There may be times when it is more helpful (or considerate) to speak to a friend of the same sex, who is trusted (and pre-selected) by your spouse, if you are struggling in this area.*

What does God have to say about how sex should be enjoyed within marriage?

The Bible speaks quite a bit about sex and the place it has within the marriage relationship. In **1 Corinthians 7:1-9** we read:

¹*Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. ²But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.*

⁵*Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁸Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. ⁹But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

From this passage we can see that sex within marriage is:

1. Good and pleasing to God
 - it's a great gift from God. He encourages it and says it shouldn't stop unless by agreement and even then, only for a season (v5)

2. Intended for pleasure (Just read Song of Songs)
 - the 'rights' to one's own body are given to the other (v4)
 - each should seek to give pleasure to the other (Acts 20:35 says, "It's more blessed to give than to receive")

3. To be an integral part of married life (v3-4)
 - frequency is a personal matter, but the principle is that each should seek to satisfy the other's need. In this way temptation to find satisfaction elsewhere is avoided (verse 5b)

4. To be subject to self-control
 - like all of God's good gifts, sex in marriage is to be subject to our self control so it doesn't become something we idolise or develop an unbalanced appetite for. Uncontrolled sexual desire can snowball until it can't be fully satisfied; the result is hurt, frustration and sometimes immorality.

5. Not to be used as a reward or a weapon...it's a mutual responsibility (v3).
- there should be no bargaining: 'I will if you ...'
6. To be equal and reciprocal (v2,4)
- neither partner has superior rights (you belong to each other). Mutual initiation of sex and mutual stimulation are legitimate, appropriate and healthy.
7. To be acceptable to both
- neither should demand what is distasteful to the other, but both should be flexible while still consistent with No. 4 above.

Question:

- i) God's standards for sex are the same for husbands and wives. How does this compare to our culture's ideas or to what you thought the Bible taught?

Question to ask yourselves privately:

- i) Am I expressing affection to my partner or am I using him/her for my own pleasure?

Further Reading: *One Flesh* by Amelia and Greg Clarke.

(c) Children

Question: What do you think the purpose of having children is?

There are many other reasons we might consider (some good, some not so good):

- to further the human race
- to fulfil our relationship
- to continue our family line
- to fulfil a natural desire God built into us
- to obey God's instruction
- to make our parents stop asking for grandkids
- to fit in with our friends who have kids
- to have someone to look after us in our old age
- well we've already got a dog, so it's the next logical step
- to fix our marriage problems

So what if you can't?

Not all couples can have children of course. One in seven in our generation have some degree of difficulty in bearing children. Where there can be no children by natural means, the church believes that God is able and willing to bless the marriage in ways that are no less fruitful.

Questions

- i) Do you want to have children? If so, how many? How long are you expecting to wait until you have them?
- ii) What are the advantages of having children?
- iii) Are there any disadvantages? What challenges would having kids bring to your marriage?
- iv) How important will your wider family be in the lives of your children?
- v) Are any of your parents likely to want great influence in your family?

Further Thoughts on Raising Children

There are factors to consider in regards to the place of children in the home and how they should be disciplined.

The Bible says a number of things about how we should bring up our children:

Hebrews 12:7 *'Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what child is not disciplined by his father?'*

Ephesians 6:1 *'Children, obey your parents in the Lord.'*

Ephesians 6:4 *'Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.'*

Deuteronomy 5:16 *'Honour your father and your mother.'*

Questions

- i) How was discipline carried out when you were growing up?
- ii) Have you talked about how you'll discipline your children?

iii) What do you see to be the responsibility of children towards their parents?

iv) Do a father and mother have different roles in bringing up the children?

v) What moral standards will you apply to your children? (ie. where will your standards come from?)

Further Reading: -*Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp
 -*Point Man*, Steve Farrar (for husbands)

(d) Community well-being

"Intact and fully functional families constitute the least costly social welfare system yet devised by mankind."

- John Howard (former Australian Prime Minister)

The Bible teaches (and history shows) that society cannot be truly healthy unless the marriage bond is respected and upheld. The marriage unit is the basic building block of society. It is the smallest of communities; many of which make up the communities we live in. For millennia, marriage has served prosperous societies. When the marriages are healthy, societies flourish. When marriage relationships break down and when God's design for marriage is devalued, it has detrimental effects on community well-being.

Marriage secures a brighter and more cohesive future for all societies by providing the best environment in which society's next generation can be raised and nurtured. Children are stronger across the spectrum of social indicators and virtues for being raised by their married, biological mother and father. Research also shows that due to the complementary strengths of men and women with respect to each other, married men **and** women have better psychological and physical health and live longer.

Questions

i) How can a happy marriage benefit the community?

ii) How have you seen the break down in marriage negatively affect community? (i.e. in the work place, at school, in friendships)

Note, marriage is not a private event; it is subject to an Act of Parliament. Christian marriage, furthermore, is performed within a service of worship, a public event.

Homework: Write down the roles and responsibilities you will have within your marriage; write down what you believe the roles and responsibilities of your partner will be. Be specific and detailed. Do not discuss your responses prior to our next meeting together.

STUDY FOUR COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

Discuss roles and responsibilities.

"I just want to connect with you. Why won't you talk to me about how you're feeling?!" She said.

"I'm watching the footy." He said.

Men and women can have very different communication styles, needs and interests. When you're dating, it's easy to talk, to want to get to know each other more and to enjoy whatever you're doing together. Under the pressures of everyday married life, our differences in these areas can become more obvious and frustrating. Being aware of these things and applying God's principles for communication can help us to build a strong marriage.

(a) Interests

Questions

- i) What interests do you have in common?
- ii) Are there any interests of your 'spouse-to-be' that you feel you:
 - can't or don't want to share in?
 - are excluded from?

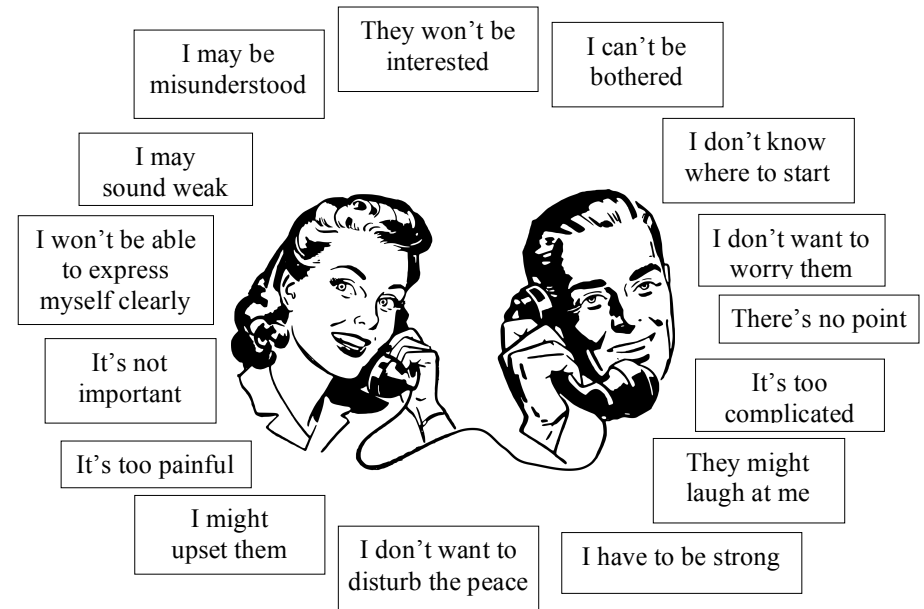
(b) Openness

The nakedness spoken of in Genesis 2:25 didn't just refer to Adam and Eve having no clothes on; it referred also to the state of their relationship- there was nothing between them and God, and between themselves. It was an open relationship.

Questions

- i) Are there any subjects that you find it hard to discuss together or that cause conflict between you? (eg. you get into arguments when you talk about money or family)
- iii) How do you go at expressing yourself?

Talking is really important, but being fallen human beings there are barriers to us talking, and listening and understanding. Look through the following and share if any of the **Barriers to Talking** apply to you:



One partner can talk but it doesn't mean the other listens or understands correctly. Filters can also hinder us listening well, things such as: a lack of interest, the physical environment, prejudices, attitudes or memories (see Nicky & Sila Lee, *The Marriage Book*, p23-25)

(c) Handling of conflict/pressure

The Bible doesn't gloss over the fact that people have differences. Conflict will arise in the very best of marriages- whether it's about money, parenting, sex, in-laws...or who should get up to turn off the light once you're both in bed. But it's how we respond to conflict that really matters. This is what will influence the success and happiness of a marriage in the long-term.

Some people try to resolve conflict by:

- a) Avoiding it
- b) Surrendering and giving-in or getting emotional and upset, so the issue is never dealt with
- c) Persuading the other by going on the aggressive in words, raised voices, or actions/ body language

A more helpful way of resolving conflict is by communication which comes to a compromise. But the best outcome is one where communication brings collaboration, in which both parties are 100% happy with the outcome.

Question

- i) Which of the above (a-c) do you lean towards in times of conflict?

Here are some potential situations that could cause conflict or pressure:

-The wife has had an eventful and enjoyable day and can't wait to be asked about it. The husband comes home tired and grumpy and after not giving much of a response to questioning about his day, he doesn't even ask how his wife's day was.

-The husband wants to take his wife to the party of a really good friend but she won't know anyone. She goes but makes it very clear that she doesn't want to be there.

-A couple can't decide what type of car to purchase. His family has always bought new cars and bought on finance. Her family has always bought used cars and been sure they could pay for them outright.

Questions

- i) Did any of the situations above resonate with you?

- ii) How do you react when you're under pressure in life? What does your 'stressed' look like?

- iii) How do you react when your fiancé behaves in a way that seems inappropriate to you?

In his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul calls on people to 'bear one another's burdens' (6:2). This is important even when we feel worn out or that we've been wronged...we still have to be sensitive to our partner's needs. **Ephesians 4:25-32** provides an excellent basis for good communication in a relationship:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Question

- i) What can you learn about a healthy way to communicate from this passage (think about attitudes as well as actions)?

Some helpful principles for communication from these verses:

- Be honest* (v25). Don't exaggerate or fabricate.
- Keep 'short accounts'* (v26). Don't brood over your differences or let issues fester. Deal with things sooner rather than later. You might need to agree to seek help if you can't resolve your conflicts alone.
- Attack the issue, not your partner* (v29). Remember that you're a team trying to work this out together.
- Don't react, but act out of love* (31-32a)
- No hurt is too terrible to forgive* (v32b)

Some helpful tips for resolving conflict together:

- Sleep on it- there's no point carrying on when you're tired and emotional.
- Plan it- make a time when you can discuss things properly.
- Work with each other, not against each other. Whatever the issue- you can only solve together as a team.
- Always sleep in the same bed. This is a very tangible way of showing each other that your marriage is safe even though you're facing conflict. No one's going anywhere.
- Say sorry **AND** ask for forgiveness (there is a responsibility on both parties- apologising and forgiving)

Some helpful tips for dealing with in-laws:

- Don't discuss your spouse's faults with your family. It's none of their business.
- Treat your in-laws with the same consideration and respect that you would give to your friends who are not your in-laws.
- When in-laws take an interest and give advice, take it for what it is, an expression of interest. If it's good advice, follow it; if it's bad advice, take it graciously and then ignore it.
- Make short visits, and decide together what the appropriate length of visit will be.
- Don't take them, their kindness or their hospitality for granted.
- Give advice to your in-laws only if they ask for it.

Final Words of Advice

- Listen to your partner now because it will save you from much greater problems later. It may take all you have, but it will be worth the effort.
- Your partner's problems may seem smaller than yours, but the chances are they are just as big. If you take time to care, you may well halve each other's problems.
- Remember to encourage and compliment your partner. Say you love him/her. Do something special as often as you can- go out together, give flowers, etc. Then you always have a firm, safe and loving foundation from which to deal with conflict when it arises.

Homework: Complete the 'Communication and Conflict Resolution' questions on your own (Appendix 3) and do the 'Open Communication' home exercise together (Appendix 4).

Further Reading: *Conflict: A Redemptive Opportunity (CCEF Minibook)*
Timothy S. Lane.

STUDY FIVE COMMITMENT IN MARRIAGE

Discuss 'Communication and Conflict Resolution.'

A Serious Business

Vows (or promises), especially the ones made deliberately 'in the presence of God and these witnesses' in a public ceremony, are very serious. They are a contract or covenant you make with each other- one that you'll even sign off on before witnesses. God's intention is that the vows of marriage are to be enduring, broken only by death. In a very real sense, you are locking yourselves together and throwing away the key. That's why marriage is 'not to be entered into lightly or carelessly but with reverent and serious consideration.'

A Reflection of God

All through the Bible, God speaks about his relationship with His people as a covenant relationship. He commits himself to a covenant (bond) in a ceremony with Abraham and later repeats such covenants with others of His people. All are designed to bind Him to His people and them to Him.

In the final book of the Bible (Revelation 21:2), the church is seen as a bride dressed for her husband, who is Jesus Christ.

So Christian marriage is the best illustration of the relationship between God and His people.

Your vows are no light thing! (God is faithful to his people even through hardship and unfaithfulness; see Hosea 3:1)

The Wording

Traditional: Today in the presence of God and these witnesses, I, _____, take you _____ to be my husband/wife, according to God's holy ordinance: to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish (or respect/honour/submit) until we are parted by death. And to this I pledge you my word. (This is my solemn vow and promise.)

Option #2

Today in the presence of God and these witnesses, I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband/wife, according to God's good design: I promise to love you always, and in all circumstances, whether in health or sickness, riches or poverty, in times of happiness and in times of hardship. I will cherish you and respect you. I promise to serve you and look to your best interests above my own, To harbour neither grief nor grudge against you, To forgive you as God forgives. I promise to honour you in faithfulness – forsaking all others. And I will uphold these vows until death parts us, with all the strength God gives me.

Note. A sample of a full order of service for marriage can be found in Appendix 5.

Question

- i) Do you have any reservations about the suggested vows?
- ii) Your vows are a reminder that you will promise to love each other whatever the circumstances you are in. What do you think it means to say that you love someone? Is love a feeling, a choice, or an action?
- iii) What do you think of arranged marriages? Could they ever work?

In order to clarify your thinking on this latter question, read the following:

1 Corinthians 13:1-8a

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails.

1 John 4:7-12,19

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

...¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

- i) That fluttery feeling in your tummy when you catch a glimpse of your fiancé is lovely...but that's not love! What do these passages teach you about love as God defines it?
- ii) What is significant about these characteristics? Are they predominately feelings?
- iii) What difference would this kind of love make to your marriage?
- iv) What would you need to change about yourself to show this kind of love?

Note 1: Love is commitment (choice)

In your vows, you vow and promise to 'love and cherish' one another; this forms the very foundation of your marriage. But today; who knows what 'love' is? The world in which we live has so confused the issue that nobody really knows what it means any more. To some, love means 'getting a good time' or 'romance' or 'sex' or a 'tingly feeling'. But after being married for even a little while, you soon realise that love is made-up of ingredients of a much more complex nature. The love of God is the type of love that makes a marriage work. It is unconditional. It is love regardless of the circumstances or of change. It is love that loves even the unlovely. It does not say, 'I will love you if...', but it says, 'I will love you even though...' - it knows no conditions whatsoever.

Your vows are a reminder that you promise to love each other independent of circumstances.

Questions

- i) How do the things you are promising in your vows relate to the love God has for us?
- ii) How would you describe God's love for us (particularly from 1 John 4)?

Stop and look through '2 Ways to Live' to explore further how God's shown his love for us.

Note 2: Commitment to each other is vital

Why do so many marriages break up?

There are many reasons such as:

- financial difficulties
- work pressure
- family pressure

More often than not, however, you hear of break-ups because one or both parties 'don't feel in love any more' and so the marriage is ended the "easy way" – in divorce. Once you understand that love is not so much a feeling as a commitment, you can take the rough and smooth together.

Marriage vows are meant to be kept-

not 'for as long as we both shall **love**';

but 'for as long as we both shall **live**'.

Note 3: Commitment is inadequate without God

The best context for your marriage commitment to be made is in the context of committed relationships with God. You'll both need God's help daily to be able to love, serve, forgive, encourage and mature together in your marriage. You'll need His help and strength to be faithful to your marriage vows and responsibilities. The best way to become the kind of loving husband/wife God's designed you to be is by getting to know and experience the love and kindness and forgiveness God has shown you in Jesus.

Conclusion

Marriage is a wonderful, God-given relationship to enter into. It won't always be easy, in fact it will require commitment and hard work on behalf of both husband and wife to maintain the covenant relationship you're about to enter into on your wedding day.

The Bible teaches us that we're all are still prone to sin against God and each other. But thankfully, God has demonstrated His selfless love and forgiveness to us while **we** were sinners, so we have a wonderful model (and reason) to show this same kind of love and forgiveness to one another when we sin against each other.

As you enter into married life together, remember that it's God who has brought you together. If you make Him the centre of your marriage and seek His help and guidance in your marriage, you'll know the great joy that he designed marriage to be. As you do, know that God has promised to be with you always. May He continue to bless and guide you as you commit to one another in marriage.

Resources

Andrews, Kevin. *Maybe I do: Modern Marriage and the pursuit of happiness*

Chapman, Gary. *Five Love Languages*

Clarke, Amelia and Greg. *One Flesh*

Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love and Respect*

Farrar, Steve. *Point Man*

Keller, Timothy. *The Meaning of Marriage*

Kostenberger, Andreas. *God, Marriage and Family*

La Haye, Tim. *The Act of Marriage*

Lane, Timothy S. *Conflict: A Redemptive Opportunity* (CCEF Minibook)

Lee, Nicky & Sila. *The Marriage Book*

Mack, Wayne. *Strengthening Your Marriage*

Smith, Winston T. *Who Does the Dishes?- Decision Making in Marriage* (CCEF Minibook)

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Marriage*

Tripp, Paul. *What Did You Expect?*

Tripp, Tedd. *Shepherding a Child's Heart*

Fireproof (DVD)



Appendix 1

Initial Thoughts on Marriage

Each person is to answer these questions separately and come prepared to discuss them at the first session. Please do not discuss your responses with each other prior to arrival. It is important to see how you have individually responded to these questions.

1. How did the two of you meet?
2. What attracts you to your fiancé? What do you think attracts your fiancé to you?
3. Why have you decided to get married?
4. What do you think is the greatest strength in your relationship?
5. Does your family completely approve of your engagement?
6. What is your definition of marriage? What is the purpose of marriage?
7. How are your families different from each other? What about in the way family members treat each other?
8. How were feelings of love, warmth, tenderness and closeness shown in your family as you were growing up (between parents and from parents to kids)?
9. As a couple, at what times do you most fully experience feelings of love, warmth, tenderness and closeness in your relationship?
10. How do you like these feelings to be expressed in public and at home?
11. What do you think is the most important issue currently requiring attention in your relationship?
12. What fears and concerns do you have about your relationship now? What about for when you are married?
13. What are your personal goals in life? What are your fiancé's?
14. What might change in your lives because you are married?

Appendix 2

Necessary or Not

Circle the response that best describes your opinion on the following:

U -unnecessary

W -want

N -necessary

Answer these questions separately and come prepared to discuss them next time.

Please do not discuss your responses with each other prior to arrival.

Life insurance	U	W	N
Television	U	W	N
DVD player	U	W	N
New furniture	U	W	N
Stereo	U	W	N
A second car	U	W	N
Owning a boat	U	W	N
Planning a budget	U	W	N
Owning a home	U	W	N
Dishwasher	U	W	N
Gym membership	U	W	N
Blender	U	W	N
Microwave	U	W	N
Washing machine	U	W	N
Dryer	U	W	N
Pets	U	W	N
Matching set of crockery	U	W	N
Donations to charity	U	W	N
Having two incomes	U	W	N
Holidays every Year	U	W	N
Central heating	U	W	N
Air conditioning	U	W	N
Continued education after marriage	U	W	N
Long term savings plan	U	W	N
Private medical insurance	U	W	N
Credit card	U	W	N
Internet access	U	W	N
New clothes every season	U	W	N
Newspaper or magazine subscriptions	U	W	N
Buying brand names	U	W	N
iPad	U	W	N

Sample Budget

Fill in the following *monthly* budget for your first year of marriage. Be as realistic and accurate as possible and bring this to the next session.

Category	Amount
Income A	+
Income B	+
Bills- gas	-
electricity	-
water	-
phones	-
internet	-
Car insurance	-
Car maintenance	-
Car Registration	-
Petrol	-
Food and groceries	-
Rent	-
Clothes	-
Entertainment/movies/holidays/camps	-
Eating out	-
Health	-
Gifts (birthdays, weddings, etc)	-
Medical	-
House items	-
Home insurance	-
Giving	-
Paying for things for other people	-
other	-
	-
Net income	

Appendix 4

Open Communication Home Exercise

7 Step Process to working through conflict together

Pick an issue that is currently upsetting, unresolved or bothering you (you may have discussed it before or not).

1. Identify or Define the Issue and Agree on a time and place to work it through.

This may include some or all of the following:

- Who is included?
- Where can we talk?
- When can we talk?
- How much energy will it take?
- How long will we take?

2. Understand the Issue Completely.

This is a chance for each person to state his/her side of the issue and for each to understand the other.

Each person is to take turns sharing their version of the facts or relevant information, as well as their own thoughts as well as feelings are on the matter.

Helpful tips at this stage:

- a) Person A shares while Person B actively listens.
- b) Don't go on too long
- c) Person A holds a napkin or a ball when it's their turn to talk so you don't get confused whose turn it is.
- d) Only after Person A has shared their thoughts and feelings, should person B have their turn.
- e) Person B reflects back what Person A has said, rephrasing or summarising it and then ask something like, "Have I understood you correctly?"
- f) Person A may then share more and Person B reflects this back again.
- g) Person B asks, "What's the most important aspect of what you're saying?" and "Is there anything you would like me/us to do about what you've said?"

- h) Only after Person A has finished sharing and Person B shows they've understood, may Person B respond with their thoughts/ feelings/ version of events or explanation- and the process of steps a)-g) are repeated.

3. Identify Wants.

It is a good idea to list your wants if there are several that you want to take into consideration. Consider what you want as an outcome. Also, put yourself in your spouse's shoes/ situation and ask, What do I want for them?

4. Generate Options.

Make a list of several different options. Talk about the options and the advantages/disadvantages of each.

5. Choose Actions.

Decide on a plan forward.

6. Test the Action Plan.

Choose one to work through—even theoretically. Give yourselves some time to see how the plan you chose works. It is a good idea to set a specific amount of time in which you will test the plan.

7. Evaluate it, and modify it if necessary.

Appendix 5

A Sample Order of Service for Marriage

Pre-wedding housekeeping announcements -Minister

Processional:

Welcome -Minister

Begin with a reading from Scripture (e.g. Psalm 100) and brief prayer

Song:*

Christian statement of Marriage -Minister

Use full names here- it's necessary to do at least once in the service

The Wedding

Consents (Bride and Groom)**

Man, will you take Woman as your wife,
to live together, as God has ordained,
in the holy state of matrimony?
Will you love her, cherish her,
honour, and protect her,
in sickness and in health;
and forsaking all others,
be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

I will

Woman, will you take Man as your husband
to live together, as God has ordained,
in the holy state of matrimony?
Will you love him, respect him,
honour, and protect him,
in sickness and in health;
and forsaking all others,
be faithful to him as long as you both shall live.

I will

(Parents- the parents consents are optional)

“ _____ and _____ [The parents of the bride], do you willingly support Man and Woman in their marriage?”

“ _____ and _____ [The parents of the groom], do you willingly support Man and Woman in their marriage?”

I do

The Vows**

Traditional: Today in the presence of God and these witnesses,

I, _____, take you _____ to be my husband/wife,

according to God's holy ordinance:

to have and to hold from this day forward,

for better for worse, for richer for poorer,

in sickness and in health,

to love and to cherish (or respect/honour/submit)

until we are parted by death.

And to this I pledge you my word. (This is my solemn vow and promise.)

*[OR I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband/wife,
according to God's good design:*

I promise to love you always, and in all circumstances,

whether in health or sickness, riches or poverty,

in times of happiness and in times of hardship.

I will cherish you and respect you.

I promise to serve you and look to your best interests above my own,

To harbour neither grief nor grudge against you,

To forgive you as God forgives.

I promise to honour you in faithfulness – forsaking all others.

And I will uphold these vows until death parts us,

with all the strength God gives me.]

Exchange of Rings.

I give you this ring as a symbol of the sharing of our whole lives in the commitment of marriage which we have today made to each other.

[OR This ring is a sign of continuing faithfulness and unbroken love. With this ring I wed you. I give it to you as a symbol of the promises we make to each other today in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit]

Declaration of Marriage - Minister**

Prayer* – brief by Minister**

Song [Couple can sit down now]

Bible Reading(s):*

Message:* -Minister**

Song:

Prayers for the couple* -Minister (or a Christian friend)**

Signing of the Register

[Item/music playing]*

Final Reminders: -Minister

-photos/arvo tea/etc

Presentation and Exit -Minister

Recessional:

**You might have lots of people you'd like to be involved in the service. Some ways they could be involved is in Bible readings, prayer, witnessing your signatures, leading music or singing an item.*

***these elements are essential legally and/or in a Presbyterian marriage service.*

****a Christian Minister will include these elements in all Wedding services.*