



Marriage Preparation



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Part One: What is Christian Marriage?

Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important relationships in life. God ordained and established marriage at the beginning of human history to provide completeness, companionship and intimacy. We trust that this marriage preparation course will contribute towards the establishment of good, healthy marriages.

In the society in which we live, marriage is frequently devalued to such an extent that it is viewed merely as a legal contract - a contract which may be broken at any time when the parties involved no longer find it meaningful! The Christian view of marriage, however, is that marriage is much more than merely a binding legal and social contract. The Christian understands marriage as a covenant made under God and in the presence of fellow members of the Christian family. Such a pledge endures, not because of the force of law or fear of its sanctions, but because an unconditional covenant has been made - a covenant more solemn, more binding, more permanent than any legal contract.

Christian marriage is actually a three-person affair

When Jesus presides in a marriage, then and only then is it a Christian marriage, and the third person, Jesus Christ, gives meaning, guidance and direction to the relationship. A Christian marriage involves:

1. Commitment - A commitment to stay married no matter what.
2. Communion - A willingness to communicate openly and honestly with one another - an intimate sharing of your lives together; at a very deep level sharing together what you think and feel.
3. Consummation - This is the healthy and natural sexual response a couple shares as a result of commitment and communion.

Biblical perspectives on marriage

The whole concept of marriage is being challenged today, so what does the Bible have to say?

Surely the real basis is found in the Trinity: God is a family in Himself. Family terms like Father and Son are used, expressing the importance of close relationship. God made us for relationships - primarily with Himself, and secondly with one another.

The concept of marriage goes back to creation (Genesis 2:24). The marriage covenant is therefore clearly an integral part of God's purposes for His creation. Indeed, God gives away the first woman in marriage! The promotion and preservation of godly marriages is very important to God. One has the example of Abraham and Sarah, and we see God involved in leading and guiding in the meeting of Isaac and Rebecca - indeed, such a marriage was integral to God's purposes.

God regards the marriage covenant very highly. Indeed, the New Testament uses the picture of the relationship between husband and wife to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the Church. Marriage is regarded as a lasting commitment, never to be broken (Malachi 2:13-16). And in Matthew 19:4-6 we see Jesus declaring God's intentions for marriage to be:

1. permanent, never to be broken
2. valued above even family and parental relationships
3. unique in its unity of persons
4. unique in its sexual union - "one flesh"

Roles within the Marriage Relationship

Despite the many books written on the subject of the roles of husbands and wives, the Bible actually says very little about this subject. The Bible in fact largely addresses attitudes in the relationship, and leaves us to formulate the roles. Unfortunately, we have looked to society for most of our cues in this regard, and in a society where terms like "male chauvinism" and "women's lib" are bandied about; there may often be confusion as to Biblical perspectives on how husband and wife should relate to one another in marriage.

With regard to the relationship between husband and wife, the Bible does address 'concepts such as "submission" and "headship" - terms which can be highly emotive.

So what does the Bible say? With regard to men and women, the Bible firstly affirms the fundamental of the sexes. Genesis 1:26-28 shows that both men and women are equal beneficiaries of the divine image and of earthly rule. This was subsequently distorted by the Fall (Genesis 3: 16, for example, refers to a degeneration into male domination).

Sexual equality is recovered by the redemption that is in Christ. In the New Testament we see that Jesus' attitude to women accorded them dignity, and in Galatians 3:28 Paul's great charter of Christian freedom affirms fundamental sexual equality.

Secondly, while equality of worth is not to be confused with identity of role (e.g. childbearing, protecting, providing) between the sexes, the Bible shows that a complementarity is intended (Genesis 2:18), and asserts that men and women are mutually interdependent (1 Corinthians 11:11-12).

Thirdly, the Bible touches on the concept of headship (Ephesians 5:22-23 & 1 Corinthians 11:3). This concept in no way lends support to male domination, but points to the need for a voluntary submission in the husband-wife relationship in order for the relationship to function efficiently. After all, we see this also in the Godhead: the three persons of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal, but in terms of functioning, the Son submits to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. This is a voluntary submission, which allows the work of salvation to be accomplished, but in this submission there is no lack of equality in essence within the Godhead.

In reading through Ephesians 5, perhaps the word "responsibility" most accurately conveys the sense of the kind of headship, which Paul envisages. Paul likens this headship to Christ's attitude to his Body, the Church, and our personal concern for the welfare of our own bodies. Thus it is a headship more of care than of control, more of responsibility than of authority. For, male headship is not intended to suppress, but to serve. And submission to headship neither implies inferiority nor negates equality of worth.

Part Two: Communication

Introduction

In today's society there are two top problems that hit families - finance and lack of communication.

Communication is undoubtedly the key to understanding another individual. No relationship can develop and grow without meaningful communication - especially not a marital relationship. When intimate communication dies, the relationship dies - and when the relationship dies, we also die, as individuals.

When courting, a couple often talks endlessly about everything under the sun. After marriage the tempo of talking gradually decreases and becomes more difficult until it becomes a problem.

Two Modes of Communication – Non-Verbal & Verbal

Non-Verbal communication - refers to body movements, facial expressions etc., and can be very important in building relationships. Some examples: raised eyebrows, the frown, the clenched fist, fidgeting, constantly looking at the watch, looking down at the floor, tapping with fingers or foot, sighing, blushing.

These actions often communicate what we are feeling about ourselves, the topic, and our relationship with another person. We communicate non-verbally what we are feeling about the message we are conveying verbally. Non-verbal communication is a commentary about our word message (i.e. verbal communication and relationships.)

Non-verbal communication is precise in communicating feelings but is unfortunately open to a wide variety of interpretations. Your partner notices nonverbal messages and it is possible that these will affect what he/she is saying and how he/she is saying it.

Verbal communication

This can be divided into five levels.

Cliché Conversation

This is a superficial level of communication in which there is no personal sharing, often not meaning what we say and remaining safely behind our masks (e.g. small talk, telling jokes, funny stories).

Reporting facts about others

Here we are content to tell others what someone else has said, but we offer no personal, self-revelatory commentary on these facts. We report the facts, share gossip, talk about things that have happened but we do not commit ourselves as to how we feel about it. This style is not wrong in itself but may be a way of avoiding communication at a deeper level.

Expressing ideas and judgements

This is where some really deep communication begins. The person is willing to risk telling some of their ideas, decisions, opinions, and views. When we communicate our beliefs about things, we are sharing something of who we are.

The person begins to reveal what he thinks about a variety of subjects, but is still very cautious and could retreat if he senses that what he is saying is not being accepted. What really happens is: "If you disagree with my beliefs, I will feel that you are rejecting me." Most people's self-concepts are too brittle to allow this. If I perceive the slightest glimmer of rejection in a facial expression or gesture while I am communicating a belief or an opinion, I will retreat to Level 2. "I believe..." will quickly

become "They say that..." or "I have heard that..." Acceptance of me and my beliefs is, on the other hand, a "welcome" mat into the realm of self-disclosure.

Sharing emotions

Sharing feelings involves revealing some of your innermost being, e.g. your hopes, joys, indifferences, passions, fears, frustrations, and ambitions. You feel safe enough with someone to tell them how you feel about something. Your sentences will probably begin with; "I feel..." etc., and will continue with a word that describes the internal sensation associated with a particular emotion - tender, sad, happy, etc.

At this point you are running the risk of rejection that you could perceive as devaluing you as a person. Rejection can take many forms - be it ridicule, facial expressions of shock, embarrassment or cynicism, or quite commonly the other person getting me to explain or justify my feelings, thereby taking me back to Level 3, e.g. "What on earth do you feel like that far'?" "Give me three reasons why you feel like that. "

If you love merely who you see on the surface, self-doubt in the relationship remains. The only way to know real interpersonal acceptance, warts and all, is to take the risk of letting each other see beneath the constructed, rational exterior. This becomes possible as you have faith in each other and you trust each other with your mutual self-disclosure.

Peak level

This is the kind of communication that knows no fear of rejection. You have no need to edit or even think about the way you communicate about your feelings. You can share openly about who you are and what you think and feel. You go beyond the level of talking about your feelings to the expression of your emotions with freedom and transparency.

Feeling sad and insecure is translated into tears, joy finds expression in laughter and the true tenderness of romantic love leads to secure, intimate sexual expression. A caring, accepting spouse who allows you to express your emotions without having to verbalize it perfectly, enables this healing level of communication to take place

Statistics show that 90-95 % of all communication in marriage remains on levels 1 and 2. This does not mean that 90-95 % of marriages never produce intimacy, but that only 5-10% of the time we spend together as married people has a chance of producing it. Level 3 is the crossover point, while levels 4 and 5 are the only ones that create true intimacy.

Reasons for Gradual Decrease in Communication

Differing perspectives

Before marriage, the couple shared a common dream, their future marriage and the setting up of their home. After marriage the couple is faced with new responsibilities, getting married is no longer the centre of focus. Now they need to concentrate, on their roles as husband and wife.

The husband, can tend to concentrate on his job and financial solvency. When asked to account for what he did at work, he will probably give, if he is feeling up to it, a very short summary of the day's events in about one to five minutes.

The wife may eventually become domesticated in her thinking - meals, housework, clothes, and children. She, too, has a new world of her own in which she circulates and because of this she may also sum up a whole day's activities in a few minutes.

Different Interests and Involvements

If all a couple shares is the same name, house, bed and children they will grow apart. But if they try to do everything and share everything together, the tensions created will also break down the relationship. The key word is "balance". The partners should learn as much as possible about each other's different interests (e.g. sport, hobbies, etc.). Cultivate mutual interests and friends to add flavour to the relationship.

Opposite Temperaments affect communication

Conversation is influenced by our temperaments. The challenge to each partner is to try and see life as his or her partner does.

Familiarity

We assume that we know our partners – and that there is nothing left to discover. So we no longer make any effort to explore further. But we will never know all that there is to know about our partners. We are all changing and growing constantly. We need to share this with one another.

Lack of Time

During courtship most people have fewer responsibilities and so have time to talk. As we get older, responsibilities increase and we have less time available for meaningful communication. Intimate sharing requires lots of time. We should make every effort to create this time.

Conflict

If conflict is handled incorrectly a decline in communication can result (see notes on Handling Conflict).

Actions and Attitudes that Block Communication

There are many actions and attitudes that block communication and these have to be dealt with to achieve a mature level of communication.

Actions blocking communication

- **Explosion** - Very effective self-defence tool - used in most homes. Tells our partner that that's the limit to which we will be pushed and marks the automatic shutdown of communications in that area.
- **Tears** - Effective psychological weapon. Puts an end to conversation. Communication lines are broken and topic has changed to "see how you make me cry."
- **Criticism** - Effective weapon in stifling conversation. It is a natural inclination to criticize others. Not only breaks down communication but also breaks down love.
- **Silence** - A form of retreat into a self-protective shell. Usually an act of resentment which is effective in getting the other person to keep quiet. Silence kills communication.
- **Chatterbox** - A sign of an insecure person, afraid of exposing their weaknesses. Will chatter endlessly about nothing and so kill off communication.

Attitudes blocking communication

- **Pride** - A major barrier to gut-level communication. When we share our feelings we invariably expose some of our own weaknesses, so our pride often prevents us from doing so. Yet it is when we acknowledge our own shortcomings that we open the way for the other person to share his/her innermost being.
- **Vulnerability** - When we share our deepest feelings, we make ourselves very vulnerable. If the person with whom we are communicating reacts insensitively we may feel hurt and next time we may be far more reluctant to share.
- **Fear of upsetting my partner** - Sometimes we refrain from communicating what we really feel because we're afraid it may hurt or upset our partner. Eph.4: 15, however, tells us clearly to "speak the truth in love". Keeping silent for fear of upsetting our partners can be very harmful. Suppressed emotions can lead to bitterness or self-pity, which in turn will have a negative effect on the marriage relationship. The answer is not to keep quiet but to learn together how to cope with comments that might possibly upset or hurt our partners.
- **Self-centeredness** - Focusing almost exclusively on our own interests or needs, can be a major barrier to intimate communication. We can be so concerned about ourselves that we have nothing left to give to our partner. The more emotional energy we spend on our own moods, ideas, plans, the less we have to spend on others.

Practical suggestions for improving communication

Listen to each other

The key to listening is not your ability to do so but rather your determination to do so effectively.

Listening attentively is a basic communication skill that is essential in marriage. Real listening is receiving and accepting the message as it is sent – seeking to understand what the other person really means. Sensitive listening is reaching out to the other person actively caring about what he says and what he wants to say. One of the keys to a successful marriage is waiting to hear your spouse out – not interrupting, not finishing the sentence off, not second-guessing. A real effort to hear your spouse will result in true listening.

Report emotions immediately

Our emotional problems don't stem from the fact that we experience them but from the fact that we act on them. When we act on emotions, especially negative ones, it can be very detrimental to marriage. The answer lies in reporting emotions the time you are experiencing them, or at the best possible opportunity. The more you report your feelings the less likely you are to act on them or to suppress them thus avoiding unpleasant consequences.

One of the most helpful phrases is to say something like this; "I feel like..." In starting this way you're acknowledging and reporting on a felt emotion, and you are giving your spouse an opportunity to speak into that feeling you have had – often this will lead to a common understanding that there has been a misunderstanding and the basis for the feeling dissipates.

Be honest

Say what you feel. Let your partner know where and why it hurts. Don't reply with "Nothings the matter" when there is obviously something wrong. Always report emotions in love using "I" messages to avoid hurting or condemning your partner.

State your motives

Explain yourself fully. State reasons for asking. More marital arguments are caused by misunderstanding our partner's motives than by any other factor. Don't hint at the way you feel or what you would like to happen – say it directly.

Be specific – avoid generalisations

Don't use words like "never" and "always" - they are usually not true. Avoid using abstract words that mean different things to different people e.g. Loving, tolerant, understanding. Rather use action words that are specific e.g. don't say, "I wish you would be more loving." Rather say "Put your arms around me more frequently." It is important to say what you mean but it is just as important to mean what you say. This can only be done non-verbally.

Don't attack your partner

Condemning, blaming, criticism, faultfinding is counter-productive, break down the relationship and always reduce the level of communication. Use "I" messages to avoid conflict e.g. "I feel upset when you behave that way" and not "You upset me when you behave that way". Don't judge your partner.

Don't defend yourself

Defensiveness reduces the level of communication. Don't justify your behaviour, rather attempt to find out why your partner misunderstood it in the first place and discuss how such misunderstandings can be avoided in the future.

Fight for time together

One of the most critical times of the day is the few minutes after arriving home from work. How one partner greets the other can set the tone for the rest of the evening. Make time to share. Watching a movie, T.V. or video can be fun but it doesn't provide much of an opportunity to communicate.

Praying Together

We cannot tell you how to pray but here are some guidelines to help you develop a healthy, profitable prayer time together.

1. When is a good time? Experiment – do not set a time that you stick to even if the time is unprofitable – be flexible, but be disciplined.
2. What do we do when we have found the right time - Maybe try reading a passage, discussing together, praying about the passage and then setting yourselves application goals.
3. Learn to pray spontaneously - as and when things happen in the home or when you are together. Take time off and pray about it - be spontaneous - and do not be embarrassed or scared to initiate things - either of you!
4. Do not feel guilty or get into bondage when distractions come - these times will come - for example, when you have small children! Or you move house, have a sleepless night, sickness, tiredness. Do not let these distractions rule you but start again as soon as you can.

Handling conflict

Introduction - From Courtship to Marriage

Most couples enter marriage determined to avoid the problems they see in many other marriages. They want the romantic excitement of their courtship to last. But as they settle down their relationship changes and they become aware of friction. They get annoyed with each other and argue about issues over which they thought they would never disagree.

Conflict – A natural Part of Marriage

Every couple experiences conflict and has to deal with problems that threaten the closeness of the relationship. Such conflict is a natural part of marriage. Whenever two people have to make decisions together there will always be differences of opinion because each is different. Conflict in marriage is NOT bad or evil - it is a common ingredient in every marriage. When couples say they never have differences, they are either being untruthful or the spirit of one has been crushed by the other.

Differences of opinion can and do create an element of competitiveness. There can be a noticeable shift from seeking to please one's partner to focusing on one's own interests. This reduces the level of intimate communication because the spouse now becomes an opponent rather than a partner. The important issue is not whether there is conflict in a marriage but it is rather how to handle the conflict with which one is confronted. A couple who have happy relationships that bring out the best in both partners are couples who have learned to handle their conflict successfully.

Some reasons for conflict

There are many reasons for conflict arising in a marriage. Interpersonal friction is common between people who are constantly in close proximity to each other, such as husband and wife. A successful marriage is not necessarily friction-free, but is rather a relationship where irritations and tensions are resolved quickly and constructively.

There are five main causes of interpersonal friction:

1. Differences in thinking perspectives.
2. Differences in temperament.
3. Poor communication patterns.
4. Poor domestic habits.
5. Joint decision-making.

Ways of coping with conflict (or “How to fight fairly”)

1. Don't avoid conflict – it leads to one partner taking control.
2. Don't always give in to partner (this does not equal submission)
3. Don't bargain in order to resolve conflict – “I'll get you a microwave oven if you let me play golf every Saturday!”
4. Don't fight to win.
5. Have a win-win approach.

Things to avoid when in conflict...

1. Silence

Withdrawing into silence can be for two reasons:

- When the partner pretends to be the offended party – they feel they have been hurt and are “deeply grieved”, but actually they are upset because they couldn’t get their own way, so silence is used to get even, often accompanied by crossed arms.
- “Silence is golden” – but also can be YELLOW when it is used to avoid conflict.

2. Quick reasoning

- By quick reasoning can win an argument by out-arguing the other partner by means of logical, quick reasoning in an overpowering manner. The quick thinker needs to help the other to think and reason.

3. Storing up for a rainy day

- Storing every little injury, hurt and offence in an imaginary kit bag – usually suffering in silence until the kit bag is full, which results in an explosion! Feelings must be expressed and shouldn’t be accumulated.

4. Blaming

- By blaming one’s partner for things that go wrong or for faults in one’s behaviour, one can usually get one’s own way – “if it wasn’t for you ...”
- By blaming one’s parents, background and temperament for attitudes etc., one can avoid taking responsibility, claiming one is helpless. It is difficult to counter such reasoning.

5. Criticism (or fault-finding)

Criticism is often linked to blaming.

a) When criticising we tend to generalise, for example:

“You ALWAYS come home late”

“ALL women are emotional”

“ALL men are like that”

“EVERYONE thinks that ...”

Such generalisations are seldom true and can be disproved. Always back up accusations with facts. Ephesians 4:15 – Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. People who are dissatisfied themselves tend to find fault with others – especially those closest to them. They try to counter feelings of inferiority by constantly criticising partners and keeping them at bay.

b) Offer solutions with criticism, e.g. instead of merely blurting out that the untidy bedroom “looks like a pigsty”, one might add: “Would it help keep the room tidier if I moved the laundry basket into the bedroom so we wouldn’t have to walk so far?” – no sarcasm though!

c) Never try to be funny by criticising your partner – use humour with care. Before using humour ask yourself: “Will this increase tension or relieve it?” and “Can I laugh at myself or am I just poking fun at my partner?”

d) No criticism about in-laws or relatives, or mate’s appearance (e.g. fat, sloppy, clothes, hair).

6. Dramatics

a) Getting highly emotional is out – no tantrums, throwing things, stamping, banging doors, hitting, and no tears (they can be manipulative – “You don’t love me anymore”), no threats, and suggestions of suicide are OUT.

b) Turn down the volume – shouting puts the partner on the defence. It can convey that we’ve lost control.

Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

- c) Don't exaggerate – if you feel aren't impressive enough, don't dress them up.
- d) No violence – slapping faces, or any physical abuse is always ungodly!

The Win/Win Style

This is the approach where full value is placed on both partners' interests, views and desires. Both partners strive for consensus, both agree fully (or at least partially) on the particular course of action to be taken. The conflict is resolved in such a way that both partners feel satisfied and their relationship is strengthened.

It is only when couples learn to handle conflict in this manner, that the relationship becomes an enriching one. It is only in this kind of relationship that they can find marital happiness – where each individual can grow and develop as a person. Seek to UNDERSTAND rather than be UNDERSTOOD.

Techniques for the win-win approach

To overcome interpersonal friction

When one partner irritates the other, it is important to resolve the situation in an atmosphere that encourages growth so that the relationship will be strengthened. This means that the irritation must be expressed, but how?

Prepare partner for criticism or “speaking out”

Don't attack out of blue because this provokes a defensive attitude causing both partners to lash out. Ask permission to share – this will put the defending partner in a different frame of mind as he/she has agreed to listen and gives him/her time to get hold of self. E.g. “Can I share something with you?”

Don't attack the partner but the problem

Use “I-messages” to express emotions and feelings not “you-messages” which are accusing. If we accuse our partner of a misdemeanour, it will put him/her on the defensive, which will lead an argument. Soften the criticism. E.g. “When you did... I felt...” “I'm probably being oversensitive, but when you... I felt...” “I know you didn't mean it, but when you... I felt...”

Remember it is “We versus the problem” not “You versus me” so take sides against the problem not against the partner.

Recognize your partner's right to views, opinions and desires. Don't require your partner to change, but allow freedom to change.

Don't defend yourself

It doesn't matter what you say your motives were but how your partner perceived it, therefore listen to each other and think before you speak.

How we react to what our partners do and say is the key to a happy marriage relationship.

When tensions are running high

Take time out and cool down. This is not an excuse to avoid the issue. After cooling down:

Analyse the discussion – “why did it lead to an argument?”, follow steps of win/win approach.

To overcome conflict in decision making

Step one – Declare your wishes

Decisions always lead to some sort of outcome, therefore it's important that each partner express their opinions and desires about what they'd like to happen or do i.e. They declare their wishes in the first person singular (I-messages). The wishes must be expressed in terms of action rather than feelings e.g. "I would like to ..." Not "I feel ..."

They must also be expressed without any pressure on the partner e.g. "You spend more time with your friends than with me".

Step two – Resolve the differences

Having expressed their wishes, the partners can now discuss any differences.

To ensure the win/win approach, the partners must stick to the "we versus it" approach and not the "you versus me" approach. This implies that they face the problem from the same side not facing each other on opposite sides.

They need to identify the problem and ask "how are going to solve this problem?"

Reading the differences in order to solve the problem involves 3 basis steps:

1. Obtain relevant data – Relevant data means factual information as well as reasons and insights that should all be written down. Data is impersonal and enables both to view the situation more objectively, thus reducing the emotional content of the discussion.
2. List alternatives – Having obtained the relevant information, each partner should list possible alternative ways of resolving the situation. While listing the alternatives there should be no discussion or comments; it is just a time for devising alternatives.
3. Evaluate the alternatives – After listing the alternatives the couple can weigh up the alternative solutions by writing down pros and cons of each alternative. Sometimes a problem may not have an ideal solution but the couple can then select the one with the least disadvantages.

REMEMBER – Strive for consensus of opinion – not victory!

When this approach doesn't work

The win/win approach, which requires an objective approach, cannot be tackled when emotions are running high in the heat of an argument. Then the couple must agree to call for a truce until they have both calmed down. Refuse to continue the discussion then but make a point of discussing the problem when things have cooled down.

If the couple are still unable to agree on a decision, then the bible gives clear answers: Colossians 3:18,19 – Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. The wife must accept and support the husband's decision fully but the husband must make the final decision in loving consideration of his wife.

Conclusion

The win/win approach requires self-discipline and concentrated effort but the rewards are so much greater than the consequences of all the other approaches to handling conflict. This approach can be useful in resolving conflict with children in the family, too.

Part 3: Dealing with in-laws

There is a sense in which, when we marry, we marry not just the man or woman we see an adult, but also the “child of the past”, who acts according to his or her family background. In fact, marriage involves not only the husband and wife, but all four parents of the bride and groom as well. For we do, in many ways, marry not just the individual but his or her whole family as well!

While it takes a lifetime to understand the complexities of all these relationships, one can do much during engagement to build healthy patterns for relating to each other's family. One place to begin is informing one another about your families. Play the game “What do you remember when you were five years old? In Std 1? /In High school?” All these stories with their innuendoes lead to understanding where we came from and where we are going. Here are some questions that you can ask each other.

1. As a child, what things did you enjoy most about your family?
2. Describe your relationship with some of your family now. Is it close? Is it happy? Is there conflict?
3. What do you know about your partner's childhood and family background?
4. What is your view of your partner's family? Are you looking forward to becoming part of it? What fears do you have?
5. As a couple, how do you see yourselves relating to the wife's family? To the husbands family? How often do you hope to see your parents? How close do you want to live with them?

Norman Wright states that one of the major reasons why married couples come for counselling is because of conflict with their in-laws. Often one partner feels caught in the middle between their parents and their spouse. Sometimes one or both spouses have not left home psychologically.

After marriage, however, a couple's primary allegiance is to each other and not to his/her parents!

Some factors affecting the relationship with in-laws

- The ages of the couple in comparison with the ages of the parents are a possible source of conflict. A very young couple who had not made a break from home before marriage by living elsewhere may be faced with this adjustment, while at the same time being faced with the adjustment of learning to relate to another person in a marriage relationship.
- Most parents of young couples are middle-aged and still involved in their own careers and achievements. They have interests and rewards apart from their married children. If they have assisted their children into adulthood, they may be looking forward to responding to their children now as adults on an equal basis. But some parents demand attention from their children, such as those with a declining income, few outside interests, chronic illness, or very old age. If the parents divorce, their relationship with their grown children may also be affected.
- What about the life-style and goals of the couple and their parents? Highly affluent, work orientated parents often have a difficult time restraining themselves from exerting pressure on their married children who may have a different standard of living. The problem is intensified if the couple consistently criticizes their parent's standards. What differences and similarities do you see in your life-style and goals and those of your parents and in-laws?

Some hints on relating to in-laws

- Take a positive, optimistic view of your in-law relationships. There are many stereotypes about in-laws but we need to move beyond these (In fact, men are not more frequently annoyed by their in-laws. There are actually more conflicts between the husband's wife and his mother)
- Recognize the importance of your partner's family early in your marriage.
- Evaluate which customs from your family background you want and what new ones you would like to try or to establish. Then communicate these to your parents or in-laws.
- Consider the needs of your in-laws at this time in their lives (they are losing a child, or at least feel like it!)
- Treat your in-laws with the same consideration and respect that you give your parents.
- Accept the fact that parents cannot automatically stop being interested in, and concerned about, their children just because the latter got married, and that parental help can sometimes be a wonderful thing to have.
- When your in-laws show an interest in some area of your life and give advice, respond just as you would if a friend was giving you some advice. If it is good advice, follow it and thank them for their concern. If it is not what you want to do, thank them for their suggestion but continue what you had planned to do in the first place.
- Remember the difference between a suggestion and manipulation. A suggestion allows the receiver to decide what to do with the suggestion while manipulation requires a certain response.
- Look for positive qualities in your in-laws.
- Don't discuss your disagreements and your spouse's faults with your family.
- Present a UNITED FRONT to any attempts by parents or in-laws to interfere; firmness is more effective than hostility.

Here are some questions to answer:

1. What have you done in the past to let both your own parents and your in-laws know they are important to you?
2. During the past two weeks, what have you done to express your positive feelings toward your parents and your in-laws?
3. What additional things could you say or do that would let your parents and in-laws know that they are important to you?
4. What have you learnt about the kind of relationship your parents or in-laws expect from you and your spouse? (Such as how often to visit or phone etc.) What should you do about their expectations in the future?

Finances

Introduction

1Tim 6:10 says “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many a pang.”

It is also true that the misuse of money is often the beginning of many a person’s downfall. Marriage does not depend on money; it depends on emotional relationship between husband and wife. But, financial problems can put pressure on the relationship resulting in hostility, bitterness and ultimately, for some, divorce.

Complaints about money may emerge later but their origins are to be found in the way the foundations are laid in the early stages of a marriage. Money is necessary and a part of God’s plan for his people. It is only the love of money and the misuse of it that are destructive. The bible has much to say concerning money and how to manage it. Therefore we need to see that good stewardship, especially of money is an essential part of our Christian Life.

Our attitude towards money: The principle of stewardship

Ps. 24:1 says “The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains. The world and all those who dwell in it.”

Job 41:11 says “Who has given to me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.”

Do you accept that your money is God’s money? Most of the world believes in ownership. But for the person who believes in God stewardship is the key.

Stewardship means that we own nothing! We don’t even own our life. We are just caretakers of God’s possessions. A good steward receives gratefully anything his Lord gives to him, but he must account for it and use it wisely.

Therefore it is not really how much you have, but whether or not you are using it as a steward of God. How to use or take care of God’s possessions is the responsibility of both husband and wife, it is a joint effort and it is therefore a very bad idea to talk about “my” money and “your” money. After all, you are one flesh aren’t you? The key to successful handling of financial matters in marriage depends on the maturity, emotional as well as spiritual, of the two partners.

The significance of money in marriage

Money can be significant in two ways – economically and emotionally.

Economic Significance

There may or may not be enough money to run the home. Reason for this could include; for example, a generous partner married to someone with impossible financial demands, or a partner who expects the other to cope on an allowance, which is clearly insufficient.

Emotional Significance

When a marriage partner is kept short of money, or it is obtained with difficulty, a feeling of being financially ignored amounts to being emotionally neglected. The issues of trust and responsibility come into play when a marriage partner is entrusted with part or all of the financial resources. A marriage partner who is not trusted with financial responsibility in the handling of money and the financial planning for the home would have good reason to question the level of trust that exists in the other areas of the marriage relationship. On the other hand financial responsibility on the part of one marriage partner may be viewed as a betrayal of trust.

Money and your background

The abundance or scarcity of money in our childhood is bound to leave marks. Some of us feel guilty about the money we have or the money we wish we had. Our attitudes to the money are based on many aspects of our experience. Parental attitudes to money can be unconsciously carried into a marriage. Many of the systems our parents developed to cope with their financial situations are outdated. Each couple will have to develop a system that suits their situation.

Many psychologists believe that our reactions to spending money stem from our very early training. Some money is a symbol of power as well as security, many marital arguments about its use have more to do with the deeper question of who is going to make the decisions than with how much is spent on what.

The key word to solving these issues is COMMUNICATION.

Who should handle the money?

Ultimately with the God-given role of headship within the family, the husband is going to have to give an account for stewardship of the finances of the family and this responsibility cannot be delegated away. However, within every couple the aim should be to carry the responsibility together as a team. What should be acknowledged is that one or other of the spouses may well be better skilled at dealing with the day-to-day details of money, accounts... but this should not result in 'control' or an exclusion of the other partner in the decision making process.

NB. There should be no money secrets between them if they are going to have harmony in their marriage.

Activity

- Have a discussion about how you plan to steward the money (income and capital items) God has given you? Do you have a joint bank account? Do you need separate accounts once you're married – if so why?
- Consider how you can set a budget together that will honour God, be specific and realistic.

Legal Stuff: Marriage and the law (in South Africa)

Introduction

There are three types of matrimonial property systems by which a couple can marry. The type of matrimonial regime chosen will affect the manner in which the couple's property (i.e. assets and liabilities) are governed vis-à-vis each other.

The three matrimonial property systems are:

- Marriage in Community of Property (C.O.P.).
- Marriage out of Community of Property including Accrual.
- Marriage out of Community of Property excluding Accrual.

MARRIAGE IN COMMUNITY OF PROPERTY

All marriages in South Africa are automatically in C.O.P. UNLESS before the marriage the couple enter into an ANTENUPTIAL CONTRACT (A.N.C) (Latin for "Before Marriage Contract") excluding Community of Property and Profit and Loss, either with or without the accrual system.

Thus should you simply get married without seeing an attorney to draw up an A.N.C. you will automatically be married in Community of Property.

This means:

- Both spouses share assets and liabilities equally.
- Spouse has equal powers of control over the assets and liabilities and (save for some exceptions) both act independently in dealing with those assets and liabilities.
- Written consent of both spouses for some important transactions such as those relating to fixed property, surety-ship and credit agreements (formally Hire Purchase agreements).
- Consent (not written) of both spouses required for some transactions such as selling of goods of joint household.
- Consent of one spouse not required for transactions not relating to the trade, business or profession of other spouse.
- Act provides protection for spouses in that provision is made for the separation of the joint Estate (that is property belonging to both spouses) should one spouse act to the prejudice of the other.
- Husband exercises no marital power over wife, or vice versa, if marriage entered into after 1 November 1984.

Advantages

- System rests on sound principle namely that marriage is a partnership and as such can be conducive to a harmonious marriage relationship.
- It ensures both legal and equality of the spouses. During the marriage and on its dissolution by death or divorce, both partners are entitled to a half share in the joint estate.
- No need to consult attorney for A.N.C.
- Easy to understand and implement.

Disadvantages

- Insolvency of either spouse will affect the whole of the joint estate.
- Powers of equal administration over joint estate could result in friction with certain spouses.

- As each spouse can deal with entire estate, subject to consent being given in certain circumstances, entire estate can be jeopardized by foolishness, greed, etc. of one spouse. (Is some protection in applying to Court for separation of estate if prejudice occurs).
- On death of one spouse, entire estate wound up which can be inconvenient.

MARRIAGE OUT OF COMMUNITY EXCLUDING ACCRUAL

All marriages out of community are considered to include the Accrual system. Should you decide against the Accrual system applying to your marriage must be expressly EXCLUDED in the A.N.C.

This system means the following:

- Couple must enter into A.N.C. excluding Accrual System.
- Each spouse retains what he/she brought into the marriage and whatever that spouse acquires during the marriage remains his/hers. At no time, before, during or after the marriage are the separate estates of the spouses joined together. (In theory/legally).
- Each spouse has full control over his profits and is solely responsible for his debts.
- Only liable for each other's debts in respect of household necessities.
- Both free to contract in respect of their own estates without reference to the other partner. Both have full legal capacity.

Advantages

- Insolvency only affects the insolvent spouse.
- Free to deal with your property.
- If one spouse dies, the other spouse's estate is not affected.

Disadvantages

- Wife can be gravely prejudiced by staying at home and not building up her estate. On dissolution gets nothing or very little. (Section 7 of New Act does not give Court discretion to intervene).
- On dissolution can be difficult to put into practice the strict division of estate that is theoretically easy to understand.
- Spouse can dispose of his/her assets without consent of other spouse and thereby prejudice other spouse.
- Wife not guaranteed anything on dissolution.

MARRIAGE OUT OF COMMUNITY OF PROPERTY INCLUDING ACCRUAL

This system came into being on 1 November 1984. Means the following:

- A.N.C. must be drawn up.
- Is basically the same as old system of marriage out of community in that each spouse has a separate estate over which that spouse has control. Each spouse liable for their own debts (except household necessities).
- The difference is that at the end of the marriage, the amount by which each spouse's estate has increased during the marriage is computed. The spouse with the smaller increase in estate deducts the amount of their increase from the other spouse's increase in estate. The amount obtained is then divided in half and that half amount is given to the spouse with the smaller increase in estate. This means that on dissolution of the marriage, the value of assets obtained during the marriage as a result of the parties' labours will be shared equally. Inheritances etc. do not form part of the accrual and belong to the spouse who received the inheritance etc.
- The parties' assets prior to the marriage (if any) are recorded in the ante nuptial contract.

Advantages

- Insolvency only affect insolvent spouse.
- The system is equitable and does away with the inequitable results that often occurred with the old A.N.C.
- During the marriage, each spouse is competent to deal with their own property.
- If one spouse dies, the other spouse's estate is not affected.

Disadvantages

- Not always easy to understand.
- On dissolution can be possibly difficult to apply.

Conclusion

Since the introduction of the accrual system, it has become a popular way for parties to marry. It is suggested that the accrual system combines the practical advantages of marrying out of community of property with the equitable nature of marrying in community of property.

Being married with A.N.C but with the accrual set at zero gives one the same benefit of being married C.O.P but does provide the couple with protection from insolvency which can easily result in business ventures or financial arrangements. You will however, need to speak to an attorney to draw up a contract like this prior to your wedding day if you want to go this route.

If in doubt, speak to one of your leaders.

Part 4: Getting physical

Introduction

Sexual intercourse between a husband and his wife was God's idea and is beautiful and indeed an essential element of every healthy marriage relationship. Proverbs says:

“Be happy with your wife and find your joy with the girl you married – pretty and graceful as a deer – let her charms keep you happy, let her surround you with her love” (Proverbs 5:18,19 GNB).

As we consider the sexual side of marriage, it is important to realize that sex is not just a physical hunger that needs to be satisfied, but it also represents part of your person, which is deeply spiritual and God-designed. Sex is not just something we have to endure. It is sanctioned and blessed by God and intended for our mutual enjoyment.

The bible comprises the best manual written on human behaviour. It covers all kinds of interpersonal relationships, including sexual love. One of the most striking passages in the New Testament concerning lovemaking is 1 Corinthians 7:2-5. Four central principles we see in this passage are:

- a) Both husband and wife have sexual needs that should be fulfilled in marriage.
- b) When one marries, one forfeits control of one's body to one's partner. Neither husband or wife have “full rights” over their own person, but share with them. Their bodies belong to each other.
- c) Both partners are forbidden to refuse the meeting of their mates sexual needs – they are not to cheat each other of normal sexual intercourse. (Ps. To withhold sexual intercourse is often a form of punishing one's mate for wrongs done to one.)
- d) The act of marriage is approved by God.

From this passage, one sees that it is one's duty not to condemn one's marriage partner to suffer a state of unrelieved sexual frustration. If you do this you are asking for sustained love and loyalty while you are withholding the experience of unity in which love and loyalty of married couples is continually generated. That is unfair. That is, in fact, being a fraud.

In a healthy Christian marriage, sex is a vivid form of deeply profound and meaningful communication. Sex is not primarily concerned with propagation (having children), although that is certainly an important function. Its dominant role is that of communication. It is a way of saying to your mate “Now that we are one, you are not alone. You are a vital part of me. I am a vital part of you. Without you there is something gone from me. You matter. You are not just a number, but a special person.”

Sex then is a gift of God, given to us in marriage, ordained and blessed by Him as a means for releasing the natural sexual pressure (sex drive) He created in us. You and your mate should receive it with thanksgiving and exercise it with joy...for God designed it for your mutual satisfaction.

Wrong attitudes to sex

- Because the scriptures say much about the abuse of sex – fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc. – some people have come to the understanding that sex is not really a good thing. And so many people have been reared with the idea that sex is the biggest no-no of your life. Marriage counsellors in this decade have had to deal with many wives who entered marriage with this sort of misconception concerning sex. They were influenced by their mothers, and other misled women, to understand that sex was “duty, dull and dirty”. Secondly, they have also had to deal with men who have the ridiculous and dishonest belief that instinctively they know all there is to know about the do's and don'ts of sexuality. Both of these misconceptions, apart from causing emotional

disharmony and breakdown of the relationship, also hamper the learning process and limit the potential of the couples sexual experience and fulfilment.

- Another wrong attitude found among many people is sex-for-sex-sake. In today's society where there is an ever increasing emphasis on sex and sexual performance, trial marriages are often based on sexual compatibility. So the emphasis is on the sex act. But the sex act is an empty, meaningless act, devoid of any real purpose (except brief pleasure), unless preceded by a meaningful relationship. This relationship is better than just the sex act. Remove the relationship dimensions, and all that is left is the sex act, which becomes dull, duty and dirty.

There is no doubt from Biblical evidence that the sex act is to play a profoundly important part in Christian marriage, as it mirrors the totality of the marriage relationship and therefore should reflect a fascinating variety, for everything else going on in your marriage will, and rightly so, have an effect upon it.

Illegitimate sexual experiences (extra-marital or pre-marital) have one factor in common. Although they provoke biological release, they do not guarantee lasting enjoyment, because the conscience God has given to every person "accuses" one when one violates divine standards of morality. When sex provides only gratification and is followed by guilt, it makes a mockery of what God intended to be a very satisfying experience. By contrast, that act of sex within marriage is usually followed by physical relaxation based on innocence.

PS. One satisfied husband, when asked if he had ever been tempted to try extra-marital experiences said, "When you have a Cadillac in the garage, how can you be tempted to steal a Volkswagen off the street?"

Guidelines for developing a good sexual relationship

- Be knowledgeable in this area. Read as much from healthy sources as you can. There are so many good books on the market that give one detailed information about how one's body functions, birth control, male and female sexuality, and sexual technique.
- As in all things in your marriage relationship, seek your spouse's fulfilment and pleasure above your own, trusting that they in turn will be doing the same for you.
- Openly discuss any details of your sexual relationship, communicating to your partner what you do and what you do not find pleasurable.
- Solve your problems before entering the bedroom.
- Variety is the spice of life. Your mate is the one and only person on this planet you can touch (anywhere on his/her person) with sexual intention. Within that marriage bond, there should be perfect freedom ...freedom to explore, to play, to grow, to discover, to enjoy, to...well, there simply is no limit to the sexual pleasure that the husband and wife can enjoy by mutual consent! Nothing destroys ones sexual pleasure more than the "10 minute quickie" which allows little time for enjoyment or communication. Occasionally the quickie can be a very meaningful expression of love, but too often is allowed to become the norm.

An unimaginative approach to the sexual encounter can produce boredom. The same-old-routine of "approach and response" generates a dull sex act. If one can anticipate (from habit) the next response or move your mate is going to make in the sex act, then this is evidence of staleness. The most common setting for sexual encounter is.

- At night
- In bed. It is the time and place that seems most convenient and natural for most couples.

Slight changes in this 'routine' can enhance the sexual encounter massively!

It is important to make room for variation and discovery... The essential criteria are:

- a) Do both husband and wife enjoy it?
- b) Does it add to their sense of fun and pleasure?
- c) Does it refresh the relationship?
- d) It is important not to leave the sexual relationship in marriage to “just happen”, for this will result in frustration, disappointment and dissatisfaction. The high pleasure of sex is as much of an achievement as it is a discovery.

PS. A great lover is someone who can satisfy one women/man all his/her life long and who can be satisfied by one women/man all his/her life long.

The physical relationship before marriage

Scripture tells us that the commitment of marriage is the prerequisite for sex. In terms of the physical side of the relationship, what then is permissible during engagement?

This is an area in which it is easy to end up on one of the two ends of the continuum! People tend to either have little or no self control (unfortunately this is the norm probably in our cultural context) and can end up with major regret or they are bound up in a rigid legalistic approach to purity based on do's and don'ts and the corresponding guilt and condemnation associated with failure.

I believe that the key question to getting it right in this area is to ask; **‘how can I glorify God and honour my future spouse?’** If you are serious about asking this question, you are likely at least to have your motive right.

All too often what people actually want to know when they get onto this question is; ‘how much can I get away with?’ This reveals their true motive, which is not how can I honour and glorify God or serve and honour my future spouse. The true motive is how can I be most satisfied personally?

But, rather than asking, “What can we get away with?” we should ask, “How can we use our engagement to prepare us for the best experience of sex in marriage?” Waiting does, as many will testify. After all your purpose is to keep the spirit of God's word and not just the letter of the law!

I once heard it said at a youth camp (and I see no reason why it would be different for an engaged couple); ‘Our motto is clothes on, hands off!’ Ask the Holy Spirit to help you (Galatians 5:16), He will not lead to gratify the desires of the sinful nature scripture says.

Scripture elsewhere speaks of the fact that there is a proper time for love and passion to be aroused (that time is not now if you're engaged) and awakened (Song of Songs 2:7). When in doubt, leave it out! You'll have plenty of time once married to awaken, arouse and enjoy one another – don't step outside of God's plans now only to regret it.

Therefore:

Discuss candidly with one another what physical activities you believe God wants you to reserve for marriage

1. Confess, privately or together, any area in which you have sinned (you may want to share this with the couple who are leading you through this course so that they can help you)
2. Avoid situations which promote over stimulation – that is do not allow yourself to be in any situation which may be too intimate for you to handle during your engagement. In other words, stay within the by-waters of sexual affection and avoid the strong current of sexual arousal. Many get swept over by the falls because either they underestimate

the power of the current, or they overestimate their own swimming skills. Communicate this.

3. Share with each other the things you enjoy which can be positive substitutions for too much physical intimacy.
4. Keep reminding each other that the best is yet to come!

Some questions to answer & things to consider

Here are some questions that you need to discuss regarding the physical relationship during engagement.

- a) What have you enjoyed most about your physical relationship so far?
- b) What fears do you have as your physical relationship progresses toward intercourse in marriage? How can these be overcome?
- c) What is your view of contraception? Do you believe it is primarily the responsibility of the husband or the wife? Is there one method with which you would feel most comfortable? Do you want to combine methods of contraception? You may want to start with 'the pill' a few months prior to your wedding date so that the woman's body can adjust to this method of contraception if this is a chosen method of yours for the future.
- d) If either of you have had previous sexual relationships this should be discussed with the couple who are leading you so that they can help you. You would both be encouraged to know your HIV status, as this should affect your contraception options amongst other considerations.

Honeymoon (your first night together)

I remember being well prepared for our first night together. I was being disciplined by a married man and his words to me as a new husband were well timed and well received. Here I want to share some of those insights with you (especially the future husband) so that you will be a blessing to each other.

- a) One of the benefits of having abstained from sexual arousal during courtship is that on your first night together, anything more than a casual kiss goodnight will be better than ever before!
- b) I would encourage that you have low expectations of your first night together, what I mean by this is take your time to get to know each other, have a candlelit bath together, undress one another...
- c) Don't have too many preconceived ideas of what will happen or should happen, just enjoy one another in a low-pressure fashion.
- d) Husband, right from the first night seek to apply the wisdom from this study, seek to bless your new wife, think of things she would like, make her pleasure and comfort your number one focus and you too will not be disappointed.
- e) For a virgin, penetrative sexual intercourse can be uncomfortable at first. Be very gentle, keep talking to each other all the time. Have a towel or tissues close at hand.
