

Resources by P-J Smyth

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INTRO 1

WHAT IS THIS COURSE ABOUT?

Did you say we should do this course *before* getting engaged?

If possible, yes. Here's the thing: in our experience two out of ten couples who do this course end up deciding to actually not get married, or to delay their plans. It is much easier to do this without the additional pain having to break off an engagement.

No wise person would commit himself to living in a strange land without knowing something about what to expect and the difficulties he would inevitably face. No one commits himself to building a house without checking he has the resources to complete it. Yet loads of young men and women take these same unbelievable risks when it comes to engagement and marriage.

Although the thought of a poor or disastrous marriage is the furthest thing from your mind right now, the tragedy is that many marriages that started out just as yours will, have ended in divorce courts or grown slowly cold until the marriage is nothing more than two strangers living together in the same house. Although even the 'perfect match' will need a lot of hard work to make their marriage a success, if you choose to marry someone to whom you not reasonably well suited then a successful marriage will be a major challenge.

It's about making a huge decision...

I wonder how many decisions we make every day. What clothes shall I wear? What shall I have for breakfast? What time shall I leave the house? And on it goes all day. I reckon we make hundreds of decisions every day. But some decisions are bigger than others – think of the person who gets paid a huge salary just to make the right decision every now and again for the future of the corporation, because one decision can win or lose a million dollars. And here's the punch line: choosing a marriage partner is a massive decision that can make or break two lives. Choosing a marriage partner is a titanic decision. Marriage is for life. It affects every day emotions and happiness, your career, and your children and their children. Are you getting it? The stakes of marriage are really, really high. And if you choose wrong, the bible says that divorce is not an option.

It's about choosing right...

It is possible to make the right choice. But it is wise to draw God into the decision-making process as he not only knows both of you intimately, but he is eager to share with you his will for your lives: *"Therefore do not be*

vague and thoughtless and foolish, but understand and firmly grasp what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5v17 Amplified version).

It’s about underpinning your relationship...

This course scores high marks in deepening your love for each other. Many couples testify that they got to know each other more doing this course than they had in all of their previous time together. I guarantee you won’t fail to learn something new about your partner.

Without doing a course such as this, one usually goes into engagement and marriage knowing very little about the other’s assumptions and expectations of marriage and you naturally assume that you are both expecting the same thing! But the word ‘covenant’ comes from the word ‘agreement’, so it is important to get to a place of *agreement* if you are going to be able to walk together, and unless you know what to expect then you will probably find yourselves crashing around in the dark.

During this short course we take a look at what you each feel is the meaning of marriage, your respective expectations, your unique roles, and a few other specifics that are often flash-points for difficulty. The aim is to help you address as many things as possible up front, and to set you up for a great engagement and marriage. You will also form a friendship and trust with the couple that are mentoring you through the course which will also be useful once you are into your marriage.

It’s about maximizing the romance...

We are yet to meet a couple who have done this course who have felt that it stole the thunder from the actual moment of getting engaged. In fact, you get *two-for-the-price-of-one* because he needs to ask you if you would be willing to do this course with him (which is a pretty swoony moment), and then, when you are least expecting it, sometime during or after the course, he actually asks you to marry him! Double the romance. And trust me, because this course will give you confidence about the rightness of you being together forever, when you do get engaged you will experience much greater and deeper excitement and joy. You will know nothing of those nagging fears and doubts that can follow hard on the heels of getting engaged!

But what if we are already engaged?

No worries. Just do this course as an engaged couple. But please do keep an open mind in case you have made a wrong decision.

7 biblical reasons to do this course

1. *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, checking whether he has enough to finish it (Lk 14v28).* This course will assist you in assessing whether you are making the correct decision to get engaged, and highlight some of the costs (not just financial) that will be incurred on the journey to a successful godly marriage.
2. *Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established (Pr 24v3).* This course will feed you with wisdom and understanding.
3. *People who isolate themselves seek their own desires; they rage against wise judgement (Pr 18v1).* This course will prevent you from isolating yourself and draws in the perspective of others.
4. *Where there is no counsel the people fall; but in a multitude of counsellors there is safety (Pr 11v14).* This course will provide you with the counsel of others.
5. *The simple believe every word. But the prudent man considers well his steps (Ps 14v15).* This course will destroy some of the myths of marriage, and help you to carefully consider your steps to the altar.
6. *Jesus spoke of building a life on either rock or sand (Mt 7v24).* This course will help you build on a solid foundation.
7. *Unless the Lord builds the house those who labour do so in vain (Ps 127v1-2).* God is the creator of marriage. This course presents godly ways of building a relationship.

INTRO 2

HOW DOES THE COURSE WORK?

The ingredients of this course

For a cake to rise and be tasty, it needs the right ingredients. For a relationship to rise into a tasty marriage, it also needs the right ingredients....like these ones:

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \textit{The Couple (considering engagement / marriage)} \\
 + \\
 \textit{The Mentor Couple (older, wiser married couple)} \\
 + \\
 \textit{This booklet and a weekly meeting together} \\
 = \\
 \textit{Clarity on whether the couple should get engaged / married} \\
 \& \\
 \textit{A maturing and strengthening relationship}
 \end{array}$$

What is the role of your mentor couple?

Their aim is to become your trusted friends on this journey, to guide you through the course, listen to your answers and sometimes offer some advice. But the emphasis is on you doing most of the talking. They are also on the look-out for potential flash-points which if left unresolved may cause problems. If they feel that you should either delay getting married or not get married, then they must have the freedom to tell you that. Please read Appendix B which will help you better understand their role.

Your commitment to the course

You will get out of the sessions what you are prepared to put into them. Do your homework diligently. Some homework is done together and some separately, and then you review your answers at the next session.

Concurrently reading another marriage book

We suggest that the mentor couple set you the task of reading together a respected book on marriage, such as *The Marriage Book* (by Nicky and Sila Lee, HTB Publications, 2000). Each should purchase the book so that you each have your own book) and read several chapters per week discussing each chapter together.

Length of the course

The course involves about 6 sessions depending on the pace that the material is covered.

INTRO 3

REALITY CHECK: THE DEVIL HATES MARRIAGE

Satanic conspiracy against marriage

The scary thing is that no one gets married thinking that it will not work, but statistics in most parts of the world state that 50% of marriages end in divorce, and out of the remaining 50% many marriages are not satisfying. What's going on? How on earth can most people on earth be making such a mess of things? I mean, the incompetence of mankind with marriage is massive! Are we just a bunch of imbeciles or is something else going on that we might not know about? There sure is. Satan has set his sights on destroying marriage.

God adores marriage

Anything that God likes the devil hates...and God loves marriage. Think about it: God invented marriage and gave it the prime position in the opening chapters of the bible. God established marriage on the earth long before establishing governments, or even the Church. Furthermore, history not only begins with a marriage, but it will end with the Great Marriage of Jesus to his Church. And the clincher – Jesus chose to do his first miracle at a wedding in Cana - remember, the one where he turned water into wine just to save the bridegroom embarrassment on his wedding day? That is how serious God is about marriage. Here are four reasons to account for God's passion for and Satan's loathing of marriage:

1. Because marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph 5v25). The Church is the collective name for all the Christians on earth now, and that have ever lived, and who will live in the future before Jesus returns. And remember, God's ultimate purpose of creation is to reveal himself to all people that they might repent of their sin and join God's family – the Church. Because this is God's ultimate goal, *God invented marriage to act as an advert, a visual aid, a kind of mirror to reflect and reveal something of the marriage-like relationship that he desires with every person.*

When I was eighteen years old, I had some friends called Pete and Caroline who had recently got married....and I envied their amazing relationship. I was chatting this through with an older pastor called John saying, "...they are so lucky that they can be with each other 24/7 as best friends!" And John replied, "Yes. Isn't marriage amazing? But it is not as amazing as the relationship that you and Jesus have. He is not only with you 24/7, but he is the perfect partner and friend, loving you unconditionally forever!" Now, many years later, I can remember this conversation like it was yesterday

because a good marriage had taught me something about Jesus' amazing love for me. What a great advert marriage can be for Christianity!

Now then, please put on your fake horns and pretend that you are the devil: you exist to prevent people from becoming Christians, so this marriage business is a major problem for you. You want to do everything in your power to mess-up the advertising campaign of the opposition, don't you? So, you try to turn it around so marriage actually becomes a bad advert for a relationship with God.

2. Because marriage reflects something of the character of God (Gen 1v27). Male and female are both made in the image of God, and children in a good marriage experience firsthand the beauty and benefits of manly and womanly parenting. Therefore, good Mums and Dads teach us something of the parental nature of God.

Back on with those horns again: you are not well pleased, are you? I remember the scene in the James Bond film *The Man with the Golden Gun* when the bad guy is in a Hall of Mirrors, and in every mirror he sees the image of his archenemy 007. In a psychotic frenzy he opens fire on every mirror he can see. And Satan is just like that: he maintains a constant barrage of bullets against every *marriage mirror* that he can see.

3. Because marriage is the basic building block of society (Gen 1v28). God instructed Adam and Eve to fill the earth through having children and to rule over the earth. God set up marriage and *children from marriage* as the means to a stable, godly rule in the earth. Marriage is the basic building block of a structured and peaceful society. When marriage breaks down, raising of children breaks down, and disobedience, disrespect, disorder, destruction all increase as godless anarchy ensues.

And if you are the devil your favourite three hobbies are stealing, killing and destroying (Jn 10v10), so you like the thought of an anarchist society very much indeed, don't you? If you can disrupt marriage, then you can disrupt society, and a world in anarchy is not a good environment for people to submit to God and become Christians.

4. Because God intends marriage to be a Christian Producing Machine.

Malachi 2v14-15 says that God's specific intent for marriage is "to produce godly off-spring". Healthy, God-centred marriages are the best environment to produce children that adore God and his ways.

So if you are the devil, a new generation of God-following kids is a complete nightmare for you. The very thing that you want to stop is happening via marriage!

Oh no! Red Alert! Defcon 5! Instruct your demons to put most other jobs on hold and to direct the bulk of their fiendish energies to the destruction of marriages and the perversion of male and female sexuality!

How does all this affect you?

Do not fear – God is infinitely more powerful than the devil and in God's strength, with godly preparation, you can have a great marriage. But, it does underline the seriousness of marriage, doesn't it? And the huge importance of checking out as thoroughly as possible whether you are compatible enough to get married.

INTRO 4

THE THREE FOUNDATIONS OF MARRIAGE

Key verse: Genesis 2v24: *For this reason a man will **leave** his father and mother and **cleave** to his wife, and they will **become one flesh**.*

These are the three pillars on which a healthy marriage is based.

Leave

Definition: to relinquish all attachments and let go. Your partner needs no rival or threat. He/she must be your priority.

- Physically: you will need your own home and 'space'.
- Emotionally: up until now, it is likely that your parents have been your prime source of emotional affirmation. Once married, after God the prime source of affirmation should be your spouse.
- Spiritually: you need to see your new family as a spiritually unit under God, with the husband providing leadership for his wife.

Cleave

Definition: to be united or joined to. (No guys, I didn't say *cleavage* I said *cleave*).

- There is a physical, emotional and spiritual joining that happens in marriage.
- God joins together and only death should separate. 'Uniting' is not just a 'one-off' on the wedding day, but rather a permanent connection.

Become One Flesh

- The oneness of marriage is referred to by Paul in Ephesians 5 as a spiritual mystery – how exciting! 'One' is how God views a married couple, but day-to-day oneness is a process. The glory and humility of the wife and husband is that they can only be complete with their spouse. Fulfilment depends on the other.
- However, it is a mistake to look to your spouse for all your needs. God is the ultimate source of our identity and security, and no matter how good your spouse is, they will not be able to provide all your needs.
- Also, friends will continue to play a vital role in your lives once you are married. Compatibility will not mean that each of you have to share the identical interests to the other. For example, if one of the wife's passions is sky-diving, but her husband is scared of heights, then she needs to have friends to share this interest with. And so, her friends are providing 'fulfilment' to her in an area that her husband can't. No problem.

SESSION 1

WHY AM I GETTING MARRIED?

The chapter to check you are in the zone...

Please answer the following questions **on your own** and do not share your answers with each other before the first session. Take your time to answer the questions thoroughly. Please come to the first session with your answers written down in paragraph or point form to help you share your answers verbally.

1. How would you define marriage?
2. What will you get out of marriage that you would not get by remaining unmarried?
3. Why do you want to marry your partner and not somebody else?
4. What are you bringing into this marriage that will help it work?
5. What goals do you have for your marriage? Please write them under the following headings:

Family: How many kids do you want to have and when? What kind of 'atmosphere' do you hope to have in your family? How is your relationship with the potential in-laws? Is anyone opposed to your relationship?

Career and study: What career path are you pursuing? Are you looking to continue your education? What will happen when you have children?

Education: What type of schools would you like to send your children to? Co-ed? Private? Government? Boarding?

Material possessions and finance: What is your expectation of houses and cars? Is one of you more extravagant than the other? Is one of you more naturally generous than the other?

Spiritual: Do you share the same absolute values about God? Do you have similar expression of Christianity? What church will you attend? Will you both be happy there?

SESSION 2

WHO DOES WHAT?

The chapter about headship and submission...

In a society where terms like "male chauvinism" and "women's lib" are bandied about, there is often confusion and emotion that accompanies phrases like "husbands are the head of their wives" and "wives submit to your husbands". With acknowledgements to Wayne Grudem for much of the following, here are four truths from the bible regarding this issue:

1. Men and women are equal: Genesis 1v26-28 declares men and women as equal beneficiaries of divine image and earthly rule. In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit was poured out on *all flesh*. 1 Corinthians 12v7 stresses the giving of gifts to *each*. Galatians 3v28 says there is neither male nor female in Christ.

2. But men and women have different roles: Equality and identity must not be confused. We are equal but we have different roles. Having different roles does not mean we are not equal. The trinity is a beautiful example of being equal in personhood and importance, but different in role and authority.

3. The problem with society today: Imagine a man striving to gain identity, self-worth and honour by achieving things. He would need to learn that his worth does not come from *doing* but from *being*. Similarly, pressured by the same fallen society, and confusing identity with role, some women strive to attain equality - *which they already have* - by aspiring to male roles sometimes saying, "I can do anything a man can do". God has not created men to do everything that women can do. And he has not created women to do everything men can do. But he has created us both 100% equal.

4. Headship - a role unique to men: Eve sinned, yet God came to Adam. The bible speaks of the "sin of Adam". This was not because woman bore no responsibility, but that man bore primary responsibility for all things in the garden, including sin. Ephesians 5 speaks of the husband as the head of the family.

Read this passage of scripture then answer the questions. Please do this next section separately, but once done, please share and discuss together before meeting with your mentors.

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Eph 5v21-33)

1. Drawing your answer from V21, what is the reason and context for submission?
2. Would you agree that the primary instruction to the wife is to submit, and the husband to love?
3. What principles of submission can the wife learn from how the church submits to Christ?
4. What principles of love can the husband learn from how Christ loves the church?
5. For the woman to answer: what things could your husband do to make submission difficult? What things could your husband do to make submission a joy?
6. For the man to answer: what things could your wife do to make leading her difficult? What things could your wife do to make leading her a joy?
7. Thinking in terms of the husbands headship and the wife's submission, write down some practical roles and responsibilities that you imagine each of you will have within the marriage.

SESSION 3

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME...I MEAN YOU?

The chapter about needs and expectations...

Take 4 separate sheets of paper and title them:

1. Social
2. Emotional
3. Physical
4. Spiritual

Now draw a line down the centre dividing each piece of paper into two columns. On the left hand side, write down as many needs or expectations that you feel you will have of your partner when you are married (please be specific). They can be simple or elaborate. For example:

A husband might expect his wife to:

- Always be at the door when he arrives home
- Not get a job
- Have sex with him whenever he wants it
- Let him play touch-rugby with his mates every Saturday

A wife might expect her husband to:

- Always accompany her to her parent's house
- Have Christmas at her parent's house every year
- To be the spiritual leader in the home
- To stay late at parties rather than always trying to sneak home at 10.30pm to avoid the dancing

Once you have done this, switch papers with your partner. Then, on the right-hand side of the paper, write E or D or I in response to each expectation that your partner has of your (E stands for easy, D for difficult and I for impossible).

When you have done this, return your papers to each other and discuss together. Then, bring your papers along to the next session where you will feedback to your mentors, and discuss any D's or I's.

SESSION 4

WALKING THE TALK

The chapter about communication and conflict resolution...

Communication

Communication is the art of expressing your thoughts and feelings, to hear and be heard, to understand and be understood and to know and be known. It is a vital skill for a healthy marriage.

Before meeting with your mentors, consider and discuss the following questions with your partner:

- Is your strength talking or listening?
- Does your partner agree with your answer?
- Is this the same strength as your partner?
- How does this affect the communication dynamic of your relationship?
- In what ways can you become a better listener and communicator?
- How can you create space for each other to talk and be heard on the issues that matter to you both?
- Which topics do you avoid talking about? Why?

Resolving conflict

The fact that you will have conflicts is undisputed - even serious ones. The issue is how you will manage your conflict. If you can get good at resolving them, then you will have built a strong foundation for your relationship. Marriages break down because of irreconcilable differences. Therefore, the ability to resolve differences and compromising appropriately is an essential skill to a joyful and effective marriage.

Most people react in one of two ways in a conflict situation. **Are you a rhino or a porcupine?** When you've been wronged or hurt in some way, do you mount an aggressive charge or roll into a defensive ball? Maybe you react some other way?

Before meeting with your mentors, consider and discuss the following questions with your partner:

1. What sort of things do you conflict over?
2. How do you work through these conflicts?
3. Look up these scriptures and write down any points that apply to resolving conflict:
 - Luke 6v37-42
 - Ephesians 4v26-29
 - Proverbs 15v1 and 29v11
 - 1 Corinthians 13v1-13

Three simple steps to resolving conflict

1. Identify the point of difference and commit to work to an agreement. Choose to make 'the difference' smaller than the relationship.
2. Take it in turns to listen to and appreciate each others point of view. **Don't** interrupt when your partner is speaking. **Do** then repeat back to them what you feel they are trying to communicate.
3. Assess the size and importance of the disagreement and work towards a compromise if necessary. Remember, not all conflicts are as important to resolve as they may appear at first.

Action points

1. What is the one main thing you can each do to communicate better?
2. Read Appendix C and D for further information on communication and conflict.

SESSION 5

LOVING OUR DIFFERENCES

The chapter about appreciating our differences...

Love languages

Generally speaking, people are not very **skilled** in loving. All too often we express our love to others in the way that we think is meaningful because it is the way that we ourselves love to be loved. However, this expression of love does not always work for the other person. By understanding each others 'love language', you will become more skilled in loving each other in a way that actually makes your partner feel loved.

It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of love in marriage. Those who feel loved in turn feel secure, confident, and able to give love. We are convinced that the best love manual in the world is the bible because God is love - he is the expert.

In this session, we are going to explore the art of communicating love. We will begin to answer the questions:

- What does loving someone really look like?
- How can we be assured that our love is actually being *felt* by the other person?

There seem to be five primary ways of showing love, and everyone seems to develop a leaning towards one or two of these five ways of giving and receiving love. These are *words of encouragement, acts of service, gift giving, quality time and physical touch*.

Read about these five love languages on the next page, and then take the short Love Language Questionnaire. The following concepts have been taken from *The Five Love Languages*, an excellent book by Gary Chapman (Northfield Publishing, 1995).

1. Words of Encouragement

If your love language is words of encouragement, it means you *feel loved* when someone speaks words of encouragement to you. You will also tend to think that others feel loved when you speak words of encouragement to them. But remember that if this is not their love language then they may not feel as loved as you would expect. You need to learn to speak their 'language'.

2. Acts of Service

If this is your love language, you feel loved when someone does an act of kindness for you, such as tidying the house or doing a job for you. Conversely, you will feel unloved and let down if someone does not complete a job for you. You will tend to assume that others feel loved by you when you do an act of service for them.

3. Gift Giving

You will feel especially loved when you receive a small gift, or a card. Also, you will tend to express your love by giving things to others. If the wife's language is gift giving, husbands make sure you remember the flowers on the anniversary. But if her language is quality time, you had better take the day off work because flowers alone will not do the trick!

4. Quality Time

You will feel loved by a person spending time with you, and listening attentively to you. It is not really just watching the TV together, but rather about investing yourself in the other person and giving them your full attention.

5. Physical Touch and Closeness

You will feel loved through holding hands, hugging, standing close and so on. This love language is not primarily about sexual fulfilment, rather physical affection.

Love Language Questionnaire

Rate the sentences 1 to 5 according to what would make you feel most appreciated and loved by your future spouse (FS). 5 represents what you most appreciate and 1 represents what you least appreciate in each group. No individual grouping can have a number repeated.

Group One

- A ___ Your FS says, "You did a great job on that. I appreciate it."
- B ___ Your FS unexpectedly fixes something of yours that is broken
- C ___ Your FS brings you a treat from the shop
- D ___ Your FS invites you to go on a leisurely walk just to chat
- E ___ Your FS makes a point of hugging you before you leave the house

Group Two

- A ___ Your FS tells you how much he/she appreciates you
- B ___ Your FS volunteers to do the dishes telling you to relax
- C ___ Your FS brings you flowers / chocolates, just because they care
- D ___ Your FS invites you to sit down and talk about your day
- E ___ Your FS often tousles your hair

Group Three

- A ___ Your FS tells others about a recent success you had
- B ___ Your FS cleans out your car
- C ___ Your FS surprises you with an unexpected gift
- D ___ Your FS surprises you with a special afternoon trip somewhere
- E ___ Your FS holds your hand as you walk around the shops

Group Four

- A ___ Your FS praises you about one of your special qualities
- B ___ Your FS makes lunch for you
- C ___ Your FS surprises you by buying you your favourite magazine
- D ___ Your FS plans a special night out for the two of you
- E ___ Your FS often stands by your side with their arm around you

Group Five

- A ___ Your FS tells you how much his or her friends appreciate you
- B ___ Your FS fills out your tedious tax return for you
- C ___ Your FS sends you something special through the mail
- D ___ Your FS unexpectedly kidnaps you for lunch
- E ___ Your FS is physically affectionate to you in public

Transfer your scores from above to this table below:

	Encouraging words	Acts of service	Gift giving	Quality time	Touch
Group 1	A	B	C	D	E
Group 2	A	B	C	D	E
Group 3	A	B	C	D	E
Group 4	A	B	C	D	E
Group 5	A	B	C	D	E
Totals					

Bring your score sheets to the session ready to discuss the exercise, the results, and the questions below.

1. Do you agree with the top two as being your primary love languages?
2. Which ways have you been expressing love to your partner?
3. How can you better love your partner in line with their primary love languages?

Appreciating our differences

Separately, please complete the questionnaire on the next page. Mark the line with your own preferences first, then add your partners at the end. Then share your answers with each other.

Are there any surprises?

Discuss how these differences can be used for good in a relationship and also consider where there may be weakness in the relationship if you are too different or too similar in some areas.

Place initials on the line at the point that you feel represents how you both are:

For example: (P = PJ, A = Ashleigh)

Relaxation	Go out	AP	Stay in
Planning	Stick to plan	A	P Be spontaneous

Relaxation	Go out		Stay in
Planning	Stick to plan		Be spontaneous
Clothes	Casual		Formal
Disagreements	Thrash it out		Keep the peace
Holidays	Seek adventure		Seek rest
Money	Spend		Save
People	Time with others		Time alone
Punctuality	Have time in hand		Cut it fine
Sleeping	Go to bed early		Go to bed late
Sport	Enthusiast		Uninterested
Tidiness	Tidy		Untidy
Telephone	Talk at length		Talk briefly
T.V.	Watch a lot		Watch a little
Other Issues			

SESSION 6

FLASH POINTS: FINANCE, IN LAWS, AND SEX

The chapter about the Big Three...

These are three areas that if not handled well can cause tension in marriage. Please discuss and answer the questions, or comment on statements together, ready to share your answers and comments with your mentor couple.

Finance

1Tim 6v10 says, *'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 grief's'*.

Did you see it? If not handled well, money can bring grief on your relationship.

Who should handle the money?

Ultimately with the God-given role of headship within the family, the husband needs to have the final say with finance, but a wise husband will 'team it' with his wife as much as possible. One or other of the spouses may 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 you.

Questions

1. Are you a saver or a spender?
2. How does this affect your relationship?
3. Do either of you have any major financial goals? (e.g. purchase a flat next year, pay off debts)
4. Who will run the finances?
5. Will you do a monthly budget?
6. Will you have a joint account or separate accounts? What are the pros and cons of your approach?
7. Who will sign the cheques?
8. What about savings?
9. What about giving?

In laws

Whether you like it or not, your perception of marriage will have been influenced by the relationships in your family. No family is perfect and all families express their values differently. One of the most exciting things about marriage is choosing which of these values to bring into your own new family, and which to leave out.

1. How good is your relationship with your family and your partner's family?
2. Has there been any resistance to your relationship?
3. Are either of you 'too close' to your existing family in a way that may intrude on your future marriage?
4. What aspects of your parents or other marriages do you most admire and would want to copy and not copy?

Some hints on relating to in-laws

- Take a positive view of your in-law relationships. Try to move beyond any stereotypes of in-law relationships. Treat your in-laws with the same consideration and respect that you give your parents.
- Recognize the importance of your partner's family early in your marriage. Look for ways of communicating appreciation for them.
- Consider the needs of your in-laws at this time in their lives. They are losing a child, or at least feel like they are! 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 advice and support can be a wonderful blessing.
- 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, thank them for their concern and heed it. 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.
- Be wary of discussing your disagreements and your spouse's faults with either of your families.
- Present a united front to any attempts by parents or in-laws to interfere. Be respectful yet firm.

Sex

Sex has to be one of God's greatest inventions. God's plan is for sex to be a phenomenal part of a marriage, providing the couple with emotional and physical highs, loads of fun, and a deep sense of love and oneness.

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 (Prov 5v18-19 GNB).

Of course, the devil is out to distort and corrupt any good thing that God has made, and sex is no exception. Because God says that sex is designed only for the context of marriage, the devil's plan is to get you having sex outside of marriage, and then to minimize the amount of sex that you have inside marriage.

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 is permissible during engagement?

People tend to either have little or no self control (unfortunately this is usually 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 correct attitude is not 'how much can we get away with' but 'how can we best glorify God & honour my future spouse?' 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.

A good motto is 'clothes on, hands off'. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you as he will not lead you to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Galatians 5v16).

Scripture also speaks of the fact that there is a proper time for sexual passion to be aroused, and that time is not before marriage (Song of Songs 2v7). By sexually arousing each other, you've taken each other to a point where you can no longer fulfill the desires you've awakened - is this a loving thing to do? 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 later on.

Therefore:

- Discuss candidly with one another what physical activities you believe God wants you to reserve for marriage.
- 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).
- Avoid situations which promote over stimulation. 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.
- Share with each other the things you enjoy which can be positive substitutions for too much physical intimacy.
- Keep reminding each other that the best is yet to come!

Questions

Most couples find themselves in one of these situations. Which one best describes you?

1. We have not and do not have a sexual relationship with each other, but we can't wait to get married and start one!
2. We were in a sexual relationship in the past with each other, but are now pursuing purity (a) successfully, or (b) unsuccessfully.
3. We are currently in a sexual relationship together and (a) have no problem with it, or (b) feel guilty about it.

Someone once said the devil does all that he can to get you into bed before you get married, and then all he can to keep you out of bed once you are married!

How do you feel about the following reasons to refrain from sex before marriage?

1. Because it is against God's will, and it is not possible to violate God's laws without regretful consequences.
2. Because it promotes guilt.
3. Because by abstaining you build muscles of self-control that will be useful in tempting situations even when you are married.
4. Because it reduces the excitement of the wedding night, and dishonours the unique institution of marriage.
5. Because it means that you will not have a strong testimony when you want to advise others (like your kids) to abstain until they are married.

What do you feel about these reasons to have lots of sex once you are married?

1. It communicates your love and interest in each other. Everyone loves to be pursued, especially wives.
2. It satisfies your sexual desires, and eliminates any 'need' for either to seek sexual satisfaction elsewhere.
3. It is biblical! The only reason given for not having lots of sex, is to devote yourselves to prayer for a time. See 1 Corinthians 7v5.

HIV Status

We encourage each couple to know their HIV status as this may effect contraception and other considerations.

Soul-Ties

Any significant past romantic relationships, if not 'cut off' may cause a strain on a marriage – either through jealousy, or through what we call a soul tie. Please read Appendix F on Soul Ties, and then talk things through together, and with your mentors.

Read Appendix E and F for further information on these matters.

APPENDIX A

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

Well done! You have now completed the course. Hopefully by now you will be clearer on whether marriage is the best next step for your relationship at this time, and will have grown in your love and understanding of each other.

Please provide your mentors with written or verbal answers to the following questions:

1. What were the most useful aspects of the course?
2. Are there any areas of the course that you think should be changed?
3. What were the most useful aspects of meeting with your mentor couple?
4. When will you meet again with your mentor couple? We recommend keeping in touch during the engagement, and then getting together a couple of months into the marriage to find out how everything is going.

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE MENTOR COUPLE

What is your job?

Your job is to mentor the couple through the course which will help them be clear on whether they should actually get married. It is also to help strengthen their relationship and up-skill them for the years ahead. Your job is *not* to take responsibility for their future marriage. Invariably you will become good friends with them and your relationship will hopefully continue into the years ahead.

Sharing testimony

One of the best ways to build trust and friendship is to share testimony (1 Thess 2v8) from your own marriage...especially about disagreements and on-going issues that you still have to work on! Do not present your marriage as perfect, firstly because it isn't (!) and more importantly because you will set them up with an unrealistic expectation of what their marriage should be like.

The basic template of the course

The pattern is that they do homework before each session, and then their sessions with you revolve around them taking you through their answers. Your job is to encourage them, and to help them work through any major issues that emerge. These issues may emerge directly out of the homework, or they might be issues that you gradually detect through your interaction with them.

Daily or weekly?

The standard pattern is to do a session per week, as this gives them time to do homework and keep 'doing life' between sessions. However, the course must fit both of your schedules, and it is possible to even do one session per day if there is a time constraint. Alternatively, you could ask them to prepare two sessions at a time, but then the time you spend together will probably need to be longer.

Daytime or evening?

Again, when you meet should fit both of your schedules. Most couples immediately say that their lives are too busy to do it during the day, but they are almost always wrong about this, and if you can only do it during the day then they must find a way to wangle it at work, just as they would if they had to go and see a psychologist or doctor for an appointment each week.

Additional homework and extra sessions

As things emerge, feel free to set them additional homework for the next session e.g. 'please talk through issue X and report back to us at the start of next week's time together'. If a major issue emerges, it is usually best to add a special session with special home-work rather than letting that issue dominate one of the existing sessions.

Developing your own style

Be free to adjust things to suit your own style. Some mentor couples prefer to meet over meals and others in a more formal setting. Some develop their own questions that work best for them.

What if you feel out of your depth?

If you hit an issue that you are not sure on, rather than make up an answer, defer and suggest that you return to that issue next week. In the meantime you can seek advice.

What if you think that they should not get married?

As you approach the end of the course, in the unlikely but possible event of you feeling that they should either delay or not get married, you must, must, must explain this to them, giving them clear reasons. But do discuss this with one of your church pastors before taking this action, as it may be a difficult conversation and it needs to be handled in a way that protects both you and them.

On-going friendship and mentoring

Try to stay in close touch with them throughout their engagement, and it is a great idea to get together with them 1-3 months into their marriage to find out how everything is going.

Some specific tips for each session

Before the first session

- Ensure that all four of you have your own booklet.
- Make sure that you, as the mentor couple, prepare in prayer.
- Ask the couple to read the Intro chapters together, and to prepare Session 1 for the first time that you meet together.
- Set a time to meet up to do Session 1. You will need at least 1 ½ hours.

Session 1

- After making them feel at home, ask if they have any questions arising out of Intro chapters.
- Then move to Session 1. Ask each in turn to read out / tell their answers. Encourage them. Remember that there are no right and wrong answers, so the purpose of the exercise from your point of view is to get a view into where they are at regarding their understanding of marriage. It is usually quite a moving time as they hear the wonderful things that the other is saying.
- When you get to hearing about their goals, you are really on the lookout for major discrepancies that you can help them work through.
- Finally, check they understand the homework for Session 2.

Session 2

- Headship and submission is a vital area. Passive husbands and domineering wives are not what we want!
- Listen to their answers and chat as necessary.
- Set the homework for Session 3.

Session 3

- Listen to their answers and chat as necessary.
- You are especially interested in any I's and D's. Most areas will just need some selfless and mature compromise on both sides.
- Set homework for Session 4.

Session 4

- Listen to their answers and discuss as necessary.
- Encourage them for their positive behaviours.
- Discuss how they can improve their listening and communicating skills.
- Help them establish healthy ways of working through conflict.

Session 5

- Listen to their answers on love languages and their differences and discuss as necessary. This doesn't usually take too long.
- Share testimony from your own lives. Give illustrations of lessons you've learnt and differences you've come to appreciate in each other.

Session 6

- These are three hot topics, but hopefully by now you have a good trust relationship so that talking about them will be possible. The aim is to reveal any possible 'danger hot spots'.
- **Finance:** they may not want to share the precise details of their finances with you, which is fine. Your goal is to make sure that they can see their differences and know how to work things through together.
- **Family:** try to tease out the best and worst of their family experiences. Are there any behavioural patterns that they display already, as individuals and as a couple? Are they healthy? Help them to see the unhealthy ones and suggest positive ways to change.
- **Soul Ties:** this is a sensitive one, and the major thing to avoid is them telling each other in detail about past conquests. Please read the appendix on Soul Ties thoroughly, and take action from there.
- **HIV test:** yes, it is scary, but it is vital in this day and age. And remember, it is possible to get HIV without inappropriate sexual behaviour so they must not infer that your advice to them implies doubt as to their sexual history. And as the mentors, have a test done yourself so that you feel the fear of having it done, and so that you have a compelling testimony.

APPENDIX C COMMUNICATION

This material is adapted from the Marriage Preparation Course from Jubilee Church, Cape Town, and used with their permission.

A. Reasons for a gradual decrease in communications

Different interests and involvements: Life is busy and because much of the time you are apart at work, it is important to keep communicating about each others 'worlds' rather than becoming isolated. If all you share is the same name, house, bed and children you will grow apart. But if you try to share too much then things can get somewhat claustrophobic! The key word is "balance". You should learn as much as possible about each other's interests and cultivate mutual interests and friends to add flavour to your relationship.

Opposite temperaments: Conversation is influenced by our temperaments. The challenge is to try and see life as your partner does.

Familiarity: Never assume that you know all there is to know about our partner. Keep exploring.

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: Poorly handled conflict usually results in a decline in communication.

B. Actions that block communication

Explosion: an effective self-defence tool that usually shuts down communication.

Tears: another effective psychological weapon that can put an end to conversation, as the topic has to change to "see how you made me cry." But non-manipulative tears are of course fine!

Criticism: an effective weapon in stifling conversation. It is a natural inclination to criticize others, but this not only breaks down communication but also breaks down love.

Silence: a form of retreat into a self-protective shell. It is usually an act of resentment which is effective in getting the other person to keep quiet. Silence kills communication.

Chatterbox: usually a sign of an insecure person who is afraid of exposing their weaknesses – kills off two-way communication.

C. Attitudes that block communication

Pride: communication is about sharing your own feelings and often admitting your own shortcomings, that both require humility.

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. But Eph 4v15 tells us to "speak the truth in love". Keeping silent for fear of upsetting our partners can be 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 rather to speak the truth in a *loving* way.

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.

D. Practical suggestions for improving communication

Listen to each other: 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 and 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, and not second-guessing.

Report emotions immediately: acting on emotions, especially negative ones, can be detrimental to marriage. The answer lies in reporting emotions at 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 what you are feeling and how they have hurt you, if they have. Don't reply with "Nothing is the matter" when there is obviously something wrong. Try to report emotions in love using "I feel like..." messages to avoid hurting or condemning your partner.

Be clear: explain yourself as fully as possible. 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" when they are usually not true. Avoid using abstract words that mean different things to different people. Rather use action words that are specific. For example, don't say, "I wish you would be more loving." Rather say "I wish you could put your arms around me more frequently."

Don't attack your partner: condemning, blaming, criticism, faultfinding is counter-productive, and breaks down the relationship and always reduces the level of communication. For example, rather say "I feel upset when you behave that way" than "You upset me when you behave that way".

Don't defend yourself: defensiveness reduces the level of communication. Don't justify your behavior, 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 T.V. can be fun but it doesn't provide much of an opportunity to communicate.

Praying together: praying together is a powerful way to build strength into a marriage. Prayer times together can be planned or spontaneous. It is a great idea to set aside a few minutes a day to pray for each other and the day ahead. Don't be embarrassed to initiate prayer.

APPENDIX D

HANDLING CONFLICT

This material is adapted from the Marriage Preparation Course from Jubilee Church, Cape Town, and used with their permission.

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. Couples with happy relationships that bring out the best in both parties are couples who have learned to handle their conflict successfully.

A. Some reasons for conflict

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

1. Differences in thinking perspectives.
2. Differences in temperament.
3. Poor communication patterns.

B. Things to avoid when in conflict

Silence: 'time outs' involving silence can of course be helpful, and certainly thinking before speaking is a good thing, but keeping silent in order to control, manipulate or shut down communication is never a good thing.

Over-quick thinking: if one partner is a much quicker thinker and speaker than the other, then the quicker one needs to go slower so as not to steam-roll the other one.

Bringing up past hurts: deal with things as they come up, and then forgive and forget. Do not use things from the past as ammo for the present. Keep the current issue the only issue.

Dramatics: getting highly emotional is out! No tantrums, throwing things, shouting, stamping, banging doors, or hitting allowed. Crying is of course allowed...so long as it is not manipulative. Threats or suggestions of divorce and suicide are completely out. Avoid exaggeration.

C. Tips to handling conflict in a healthy manner

Don't attack out of the blue: this can provoke a defensive attitude. Ask permission to share which puts your partner in a different frame of mind as he/she has agreed to listen and gives them a chance to collect themselves. A good introductory line might be, "Can I share something with you?"

Attack the problem not your partner: accusing our partners of misdemeanours can put them on the defensive. Rather soften the criticism by saying, "I'm probably being oversensitive, but when you did that I felt..." or "I know you didn't mean it, but when you said that I felt..."

Recognize your partner's right to views and opinions

Don't bargain in order to resolve conflict: for example, don't go the route of "I'll buy you a new microwave oven if you let me play golf every Saturday".

Don't fight to win: rather have a win-win approach.

Use the 'timeout' rule: when tensions are running high either partner is allowed to call a 'time out' to cool down before returning to the issue...which usually doesn't seem so serious after the time out!

What when nothing seems to work? Call a truce and return to the discussion later when you have both cooled down. If you are still unable to agree on a decision, then the bible tells the wife to submit to her husband and the husband to love his wife. So, 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. Also, in tough situations it can be wise to invite some close mutual friends to help mediate.

APPENDIX E

GETTING PHYSICAL

This material is adapted from the Marriage Preparation Course from Jubilee Church, Cape Town, and used with their permission.

One of the most striking passages in the New Testament concerning lovemaking is 1 Corinthians 7v2-5. The central principles in this passage are:

- a) Sex is approved by God.
- b) Both husband and wife have sexual needs that should be fulfilled in marriage.
- c) In marriage, you forfeit control of your body to your spouse. Neither husband nor wife has “full rights” over their own person, but share themselves with their spouse. Their bodies belong to each other.
- d) Partners should not refuse to meet the sexual needs of the other.

From this passage, we see that we should not condemn our spouse to suffer in a state of unrelieved sexual frustration. If you do this you are asking for sustained love and loyalty whilst withholding a key experience of unity in which love and loyalty is continually generated.

Sex is not merely for reproduction, but for also for pleasure. It is a profound and meaningful communication of love. 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”.

Sex in marriage is a gift of God to us for pleasure, unity, and a means of fulfillment for our God-given sex drives.

Wrong attitudes to sex

Sex is gross: reasons for this mistaken view of sex can include (a) a bad sexual experience, possibly even abuse earlier in life (b) fear of the unknown, or (c) bad role-models or teaching from your parents. For example, some women teach their daughters that sex is ‘dull, dirty and only to be done out of a sense of duty’.

Sex without marriage relationship: sex-for-sex’s-sake was never God’s intention. Sex is not an end in itself put rather a celebration of a life-long marriage relationship. Remove the marriage relationship dimension and sex becomes a hollow act.

Guidelines for developing a good sexual relationship

- a) Be knowledgeable. Read as much from healthy sources as you can to learn about how the body functions, birth control, male and female sexuality, and sexual technique.
- b) As in all things in your marriage relationship, seek your spouse's fulfillment and pleasure above your own, trusting that they in turn will be doing the same for you.
- c) Openly discuss any details of your sexual relationship, communicating to your partner what you do and do not find pleasurable.
- d) Solve your problems before entering the bedroom.

Variety is the spice of life

Occasionally the quickie can be a very meaningful expression of love, but too often is allowed to become the norm. An unimaginative approach to sex can result in boredom. It is important to make room for variation and discovery. Essential criteria are:

- a) Do you both enjoy it?
- b) Does it add to your sense of fun and pleasure?
- c) Does it refresh your relationship?

Some questions to answer & things to consider

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

- What have you enjoyed most about your physical relationship so far?
- What fears do you have as your physical relationship progresses toward intercourse in marriage? How can these be overcome?
- 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? If you choose 'the pill' it is usually best to start taking it a few months prior to your wedding date so that the woman's body can adjust.

- If either of you have had previous sexual relationships this should be discussed with the couple who are mentoring you so that they can help you. You would both be encouraged to know your HIV status as this could affect your contraception options and other considerations.

Honeymoon (your first night together)

- 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 anything before!
- Take things slow: take your time to get to know each other physically, have a candlelit bath together, undress one another...
- Don't have too many preconceived ideas of what will happen or should happen, just enjoy one another in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Husbands, right from the first night seek to bless your new wife, think of things she would like, make her pleasure and comfort your No. 1 focus.
- For a virgin, sexual intercourse can be uncomfortable at first. Be gentle and slow and keep talking to each other about what is nice and what isn't. Have a towel or tissues close at hand.

Recommended books that help 'first-timers' include *Intended for Pleasure* (Ed and Gaye Wheat; Fleming H Revell Company), or *The Act of Marriage* (Tim & Beverly LaHaye; Zondervan). Be free to chat to either your mentors or other mature married friends to get a few basic do's and don'ts for the honeymoon. However, please only do this just before the wedding to minimise the pre-marriage temptations!

APPENDIX F

SOUL TIES

Part of the God-given intent of our soul is that it can cleave to another person, especially via a romantic relationship. Some Christians have taken the concept of Soul Ties a bit far, and got rather spooky-spiritual about it. I hope that this article presents a simple biblical teaching complimented by some pastoral experience and advice.

What is your soul?

We are commanded to love God with all our heart and soul and strength¹...so we definitely have a soul! The soul is obviously different from our bodies² which are our temporary 'house' on earth. And then we have a spirit that is the part of us that gets reborn. So by exclusion, your soul must be all the other bits! A well-used definition of a soul is *mind, will and emotions*.

The emotions of a soul: After a recent whiz through all the references to souls in the NIV translation of the bible, it seems that the major element of the soul is the emotional element. Here are just a few references to souls: your soul can love (Dt 6v5), be in anguish (Ps 6v3), be bitter (1 Sam 1v10 NIV and often in Job), be restored (Ps 23), and be downcast or hopeful (Ps 42).

The mind and will of a soul: But the soul is not just this emotional gooey thing, because with it we can either obey or disobey God (Dt 26v16), and praise God (Ps 103).

The joining / cleaving element of a soul

Then there are some instances in the bible that show that the soul is the bit that joins us emotionally to other people. Here are four examples:

Jacob and Joseph: "...his life is bound up in the lad's life and his soul is knit with the lad's soul" (Gen 44v30 Amp). This speaks of a wonderfully close relationship between a father and his son.

Jonathan and David: "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David" (1 Sam 18v1, KJV, Amp, NAS). This refers to a good and godly soul-tie between two friends. God has made our souls with the capacity to cling to others in friendship love.

¹ Dt 6v5. See also Heb 4v12.

² Mt 10v28

Shechem and Dina: *“He seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved her...”* (Gen 34v1-8 ESV). Here we see that the soul can cling to someone in romantic and sexual love. We also see that sexual relations can strengthen a soul tie. This is an example of an ungodly soul-tie.

Godly marriage: God’s intent is that a man and woman *cleave* to each other and actually become one flesh (Mk 10v7).

A bonding weapon for good or harm

In terms of romantic love, *your soul cannot distinguish between good bonding and bad bonding. It is like super-glue – it will cleave to whoever you allow it to cleave to....*and it doesn’t easily let go. Your soul’s tenacity in bonding is actually good news. Isn’t it great that God has given you equipment to love and keep loving your wife or husband all of your days, and to help you love your friends and family unconditionally as well? But your soul can’t distinguish between who is the future marriage partner and who is not! It will stick to whoever you allow it to.

How do soul-ties get formed?

Remember, whether we are talking about good soul ties or bad soul ties – the principles of joining are the same. Two souls get tied through shared experiences and time spent together. So a mother is emotionally tied to her child by nature of the fetus being inside her. Friendships formed on the battlefield or in crisis are often deep and lasting ones.

But let’s talk about romantic and sexual soul ties: apparently innocent relationships even in early teens can form ties that may remain for decades to come. Spending time alone together, talking about personal and emotional things, keeping each other’s secrets, sending and receiving love letters, spending time thinking about each other, kissing, touching, hugging, and sex (most of all) can all deepen soul-ties.

Are you now beginning to see the wisdom in Jesus’ instruction in Mk 10v7 that a man should **ONLY** cleave (develop a romantic soul-tie) with his wife? Your soul is designed to stick to someone and stick forever. So if you go sticking your soul to several partners, don’t be surprised when (a) you have painful break-ups, and (b) you find that you can’t quite let go of them.

Five steps to freedom

If you find yourself trapped in an ungodly soul-tie, I suggest the following action plan:

1. **Repent:** In the tragic instance of a rape where one person is the victim of wicked actions of another person, then repentance by the victim is of course not necessary. But in other relationships where soul-ties have been formed, both parties usually feel that they need to ask God for forgiveness for their contribution.
2. **Get prayed for by others:** Paul taught the Corinthians that we have special God-weapons to deal with things like soul-ties that seem to have an especially strong hold over us, especially in the realm of our minds: *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10v4).* This is seriously good news! You can combine your prayers with others and declare an end to the soul-tie, in the mighty name of Jesus.
3. **Now live a sanctified and disciplined life:** The strong hold that the soul tie had over you has been broken through prayer. Now you need to guard your thoughts and actions so as not to rekindle this soul-tie.
4. **Take appropriate action³:** If applicable and wise, make contact with the person that you had the soul-tie with and say sorry for getting them caught up in that situation with you. A phone call or letter might do, but beware of a lengthy and intimate chat that actually strengthens the very thing you are trying to break. This contact can be a helpful 'signing off' and a sense of closure is the usual result. Another thing is that from now on you will need to avoid time alone with that person. Due to the variations of each situation, I can only give broad principles here, but talk it through with your mentors to work out what is appropriate for your situation.
5. **Keep accountable.** You need someone, maybe a close friend or your mentors, to walk along side you to help you not slip back into the soul-tie.

³ Mt 3v8. Mt 12v33.

How do I handle this issue with my future spouse?

We do not advise you to have a full on confession session together. The likely result of this is to load your future spouse with a whole load of muck from your past life – never a blessing! However, if your partner already knows about your past conquests, then it may be good to have an honest chat. Say a sincere sorry. Offer unconditional and thorough forgiveness. This issue must not remain unresolved or it may pop up later in times of stress.

Individually with your mentor (usually best man-to-man and woman-to-woman), you may like to specifically confess the soul-tie(s), and cut it off in prayer. But when talking to or praying with your future spouse it is best to keep things very general, and not mention names, places or instances. Isn't it wonderful that both of you can go into marriage with a clean slate and a whole-soul! Hallelujah!

APPENDIX G

TWELVE WAYS TO PREPARE FOR MARRIAGE

First, become whole-souled. Remember, God has made you with the ability to cleave romantically to another. Sadly, many people find themselves stuck or cleaved to several different people whom they cleaved to sometime in the past and have never quite 'got over'. What is going on? Why do you still think about and even pine after them even though it is now many years on and you may now be in love with another person? Here's what is going on: portions of your soul are still emotionally or romantically tied to those people. If you don't get free, it means that when you come to marry 'Mr or Mrs Right' you will not be able to max-out the sticky area of your soul to cleave to your marriage partner. It is like you left little bits of your soul here and there! Our pre-marriage years are the time to stay whole-souled, and repair your soul if it has been shattered.

One of the worst songs ever is one by Lou Bega. It goes "*I got a girl in Paris, and a girl in Rome....*" And he proceeds to boast of having a girl in every port around the world. May I give some advice to any women reading this book: DO NOT MARRY LOU BEGA. His stickability is spread so far and wide that I doubt he has much left for you, girl!

The writer of Proverbs uses the analogy of drinking water from your own well and not letting others drink from you, so that you keep your loving potential maxed-out, and so that your marriage partner satisfies you always, unhindered by memories and longings of past conquests:

Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the street, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer, may her breasts satisfy you always, may you be ever captivated by her love" (Prov 5v15-19).

Second, become complete in Christ. For a marriage to work it needs to have two complete and secure people coming together. The bible teaches that ultimately only Jesus can satisfy us. As wonderful as a spouse is, as friends are, as money and a career can be, none of these people or things can ultimately give you satisfaction and fulfilment. This can only be found in God. So, pin your ears back and develop your own personal, deep and meaningful relationship with Jesus. When an immature Christian (and how much more a non-Christian) enter marriage, they will try to draw things from their spouse that they should be drawing from God...that their spouse cannot obviously not provide. The result is frustration and strain.

Third, build solid character. For a marriage to work, both parties need to have a good level of maturity and strength of character, and the more self-improvement that can be done before 'I do', the better! So if you have a problem with lust, or anger, or jealousy, I promise you that these character weaknesses will not disappear with those magic words 'I do'! On the contrary, in the intimate scenario of a marriage we find that our faults can actually get exaggerated. And now the stakes are raised – before you just got into a rage with your boss or friends, but now it is with your precious spouse! This leads us into the next one....

Fourth, learn self-control. We could talk about self-control in several relevant areas, but allow me to hone in on the realm of sexual self-control. Some time ago I was asked to give a talk to teenagers on 'Coping with hormones'. I cried out to God asking him to help me understand why he has made us to have seriously active hormones and sexual desires for many years before we can get married and find an outlet for satisfaction. I felt God nudge my mind to the phrase, '*so that you can learn self-control whilst the stakes are low*'.

Once again, let me stress that when you say the words 'I do', you are not then exempt from sexual temptation towards other men or women. *The devil does all that he can to get you into bed before you are married, and all he can to keep you out of your marriage bed once you are married.* The devil works hard to get you to fornicate (sex involving an unmarried person) before you are married, and then he tries to get you to adulterate (sex outside marriage involving a married person) once you are married yourself. So learn to control your urges before you get married, because if you fall in this area once you are married then the damage in your life and other lives can be enormous.

Fifth, avoid pornography and fantasy. Avoid books, movies and thought patterns that establish soulish strongholds that will dilute your passion with your future spouse.

Sixth, learn to understand and respect the opposite sex. I think that this point is especially relevant to those who have been brought up in a culture or situation where meaningful contact with the opposite sex was minimal. Going into marriage as a sexist is not good!

Seventh, build many friendships. Once you are married you will both still need lots of friends. If you have isolated yourself in your pre-marriage years through a very clingy and exclusive relationship with a girl/boyfriend then you will have work hard as a couple to make good friends.

Eighth, get skilled in agape love. ‘Eros’ is the Greek word for sexual love, ‘phileo’ the Greek word for friendship love, and ‘agape’ is the Greek word for unconditional love. Without downplaying the importance of the other forms of love, agape is definitely the one that keeps a marriage together for the long haul. So practice loving and serving people whom you don’t actually like very much! Don’t only hang around with a crowd that you easily like, because there will be times in your marriage that you find your spouse not so easy to love. Get some training in now.

Ninth, protect the opposite sex from yourself. For example girls, dress in such a manner that doesn’t easily provoke the guys to temptation. Remember, guys are easily aroused by what they see. And guys, don’t lead girls on and casually throw around phrases such as ‘I love you’. Girls are more fragile than guys are in this regard. A wise man once said, *“Don’t say ‘I love you’ unless the next words out of your mouth will be, ‘Will you marry me?’”*

Tenth, seek first God’s kingdom. Jesus said that if we pursue him and his agenda, then he will organize these other good things to come and find us!⁴ Throw yourself into serving God and trust him to lead you into marriage in due course.

Eleventh, pray and have faith for your marriage partner. Ask God to protect him/her and grow him/her in all these areas we have just mentioned. Trust God to bring you together when the time is right.

Twelfth, stay pure and uncleaved. If you have your hands full with Mr Wrong, it doesn’t leave much room for Mr Right, does it?

⁴ Mt 6v33

APPENDIX H

CHOOSING RIGHT: A HELPFUL CHECKLIST

I want to stress that I am not trying to reduce this exciting process of finding a marriage partner to some checklist or formula. I appreciate that God works uniquely in each situation, and that there may be factors in your situation that are unusual. However, my concern is to help you be wise and cautious in making this massive, life-impacting decision. And I also know that in matters of love we can easily be blind to reality. So here is a bit of a summary checklist of principles drawn mostly from principles that I see in Genesis 24, that describes the bringing together of Isaac and Rebekah.

You will both be ready to leave. You will be at a marriageable place in terms of maturity and finances.

You will be believers. Do not be unequally yoked. You will both have a fear of God and hunger for God.

The situation will line-up with God's word. For example, one of you will not already be married to someone else.

You will enjoy spending time together and be physically attracted to each other.

You will have seen each other's inner character. Dating is trial and error. Dating is about hiding the real me behind make-up and hot dance moves. Courtship is about testing the character of each other and the rightness of the relationship.

Your team of advisors will confirm. This would usually include parents, trusted friends and church leaders.

Common sense will confirm. Are you compatible? Are you financially viable? Are you happy with the other's career path projection?

The inner witness of the Holy Spirit will confirm. You will have a sense that God is joining you.

Doing this course will help you confirm your decision to get married.

APPENDIX J

THINKING AHEAD TO THE WEDDING SERVICE

Advice on the Order of Service

What actually happens during the service needs to be worked out with the pastor who is taking it, but most pastors are happy for you to tailor the service to suit yourselves. Here is a fairly typical order of service:

Bridal March

Welcome and Prayer

Hymn: How Great Thou Art

Marriage Ceremony (including the vows)

Communion &/or Candles &/or Song &/or Prayers

Reading: Eph 5v22-33

Address (5 min preach)

Signing of Register accompanied by music, song or solo

Bridal Procession