

# discipleship essentials

## Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Leader's Guide

### FAMILY LIFE

### LESSON 2: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Family Life. This series of lessons looks at Spiritual Leadership in the home as it pertains to building a healthy Christian family. It begins with a framework for understanding the Biblical basis for family and moves on to some challenges faced by families such as preparation for marriage, managing finances, leading one's children, and building good communication with your spouse. This series of lessons takes the view that spiritual leadership begins in the home – and both men and women have specific roles in this regard. These lessons present God's best design for families, while recognizing that in today's world families can come in many forms. The lessons will benefit those who are married, those who have the role of a parent, as well as young people who desire healthy relationships in the future.

#### INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God sincerely. The lessons will also benefit church leaders who teach the foundations for marriage and family, and how to develop strong relationships within them.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).

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# FAMILY LIFE

## LESSON 2: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

### PURPOSE

To explore the purpose of marriage, and to see how Christians should prepare for the marriage relationship.

### LEADER'S NOTE

Strong marriages are the foundation for raising children well, building strong communities, and producing fruitful churches. But marriage requires two people to become one, and it can be difficult work. This is why all Christians should be well prepared before they are married. This lesson covers the purpose of marriage, and explores marriage as a covenant relationship. It also gives practical advice regarding pre-marital counseling and important issues that need to be discussed prior to a marriage union. It does not discuss how to conduct a Christian wedding ceremony, as that practice differs between cultures, nationalities and church denominations. If you are teaching content to spiritual leaders and pastors, you may wish to focus on the theoretical content in the first half of the lesson. If you are teaching young people, you may wish to focus on the practical content located towards the end of the lesson.

## INTRODUCTION

*Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.*

- ❖ What was your parents' marriage like? What other marriage relationships influence your concept of an ideal marriage?
- ❖ What do people typically look for in a marriage partner? What were/are some of your desires for a marriage partner?
- ❖ For those who are married, were you helped by any pastor, mentor, or parent in preparing you for a successful marriage? If so, what was most helpful?
- ❖ What regular activities require your preparation? Meals? Taking a trip? Work projects? What considerations need to be made to prepare well? How do you prepare for them?

## STUDY

*Instruct the group on the following points.*

### TEACH:

- ❖ **Why Marriage?** By God's design, most men and women will enter into a marriage relationship in their adult years. A young person may be eager to find a husband or wife, and may be



wondering what God says about marriage. While God gives some people the calling or gift of singleness, most of us have both the desire and opportunity to marry.

- **A Powerful Image:** God's design for us is that we glorify Him and bear His image to the world. A good marriage can portray this to those around us:
  - When husbands are men of integrity, hardworking, and loving toward their wives, the world will take notice.
  - When women honour and remain faithful to their husbands, it is a visible testimony.
  - Marital love doesn't demand servitude, but is willing to put their spouse first. This kind of love is a picture of God's unchanging, sacrificial love for us, which is the foundation of the Gospel.
  - Marital love is a picture of Christ and the Church; it is also intended to be fruitful. Just as the relationship between Christ and the Church produces new life, so does the relationship between a husband and wife.
  
- ❖ **Difficult Circumstances:** Sometimes, life situations prevent us from attaining God's ideal for us. However, we can still obey Him and bear His image as we honour Him. Some examples of difficult circumstances are:
  - **Marriage to an Unbeliever:** If you find yourself betrothed to an individual who is not a Christian and you are not able to reject the betrothal, OR if you are currently in a marriage with an unbeliever, the Bible has clear advice for you:
    - It is a challenging circumstance to be married to an unbeliever, but we should remain with them, pray for them, and look for opportunities to share our faith with them and with our children (1 Corinthians 7:17, 12-14).
    - We should be an example and image bearer of God to the unbelieving spouse in the hopes that they may be 'won over' to faith in Christ. Our conduct must be what God desires for every marriage relationship (1 Peter 3:1).
  - **Past Sins:** In a world that sometimes takes sexual conduct lightly, many people fall into sexual sin. Even if you have a past you are not proud of, you can still please God in your future by repenting of your sin, asking for and receiving His forgiveness. We should also forgive our spouses for past sins (1 John 1:9, Colossians 3:13, Psalm 103:10-14).
  - **Singleness:** Some people will remain single. Either they do not have the desire to marry, or they are not able to find a suitable partner, or God has other plans for their life. It is important to know that remaining single is not a sin, and can in fact be God-honouring (1 Corinthians 7: 32-38). A single person must abstain from sexual relations, and should be an example to others in their commitment to God.
  
- ❖ **The Covenant of Marriage:** Marriage is not a temporary agreement to be entered into lightly – rather, the Bible calls it a covenant. To help us understand it better, we should explore the meaning of the word 'covenant'.



- **God’s Covenant Relationships with Us:** God binds Himself to us by His covenants, which He will keep by His power. They are solemn vows that are accompanied by signs, promises and conditions. They bind two parties together in a kinship relationship – something even stronger than blood. Covenants between people are oaths sworn to God. Consider these covenants:
  - o God made a covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:9-16).
  - o God made a covenant with Abram (Genesis 15, 17:1-14, James 2:22-23).
  - o God made a covenant with Israel through Moses (Exodus 24:1-8).
  - o David and Jonathan made a covenant to put one another before all others (1 Samuel 18:1-5, 2 Samuel 21:7).
  - o Jesus Christ announced a new covenant, of which He would be the sacrifice (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Mark 14:22-24, Hebrews 8).
  
- **Signs of a Covenant:** Long ago when people made a covenant with one another, there were ceremonies that surrounded the oath.
  - o They made promises and swore by God’s name.
  - o There was a sign or memorial of the covenant.
  - o Two became one, a friend and ally closer than a brother.
  - o They agreed to defend one another for life.
  - o There was sacrifice, or blood to symbolize sacrifice.
  
- **The Importance of Covenants:** God initiated covenants as a way of communicating His unbreakable promises to us. Even when we disobey, God's covenants are kept because of His faithfulness. In a marriage, we make a covenant with our spouse before God. It is intended to be unbreakable, unchanging and not undertaken lightly. When marriages come apart, something that was one is now split in two. Something that was created for God and by God is destroyed. Consider what these verses tell us about the marriage covenant:
  - o Galatians 3:15
  - o Malachi 2:14-16
  - o Luke 16:18

❖ **Biblical Understanding of Marriage:** The Bible has much to say about marriage and our choice of spouse. Though many of the following verses relate to men, the principles taught are for both spouses. Consider the following:

<b>Biblical Commands for Marriage</b>	
We should marry another believer if we have the choice.	2 Corinthians 6:14
We should love and delight in our spouse.	Song of Solomon 1:2, 4:10, Proverbs 5:18-19, Ephesians 5:25
We should put our marriage partner first above all other relationships.	Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31
We should remain sexually pure, abstaining from sex	1 Corinthians 6:13, 2 Corinthians



outside of marriage.	12:21, Colossians 3:5
We should honour our spouse, and seek to be our best for them.	Proverbs 12:4, Proverbs 18:22, Proverbs 20:6-7
We should desire our marriage partner only, not looking at or thinking lustfully about others.	Matthew 5:28, James 1:14-15, 1 Corinthians 7:1-5
We should remain living with, supportive of, and faithful to our spouse all the days of our life.	1 Corinthians 7:10, Ephesians 5:25-28, Deuteronomy 24:5, 1 Peter 3:7

**ASK:**

*How is the Biblical ideal for marriage different from the one your society has?*

*How can a Christian couple demonstrate their faith and obedience to God in their marriage?*

**TEACH:**

- ❖ **Preparation for Marriage:** Taking on a new job requires training, and undertaking a new project requires careful planning. In order to produce a harvest, a field must first be prepared. Marriage is no different. In order to have a good marriage we must prepare for it. Part of this preparation is personal, but some must be done together with our future marriage partner. Unrealistic dreams, unmet expectations and inability to communicate can destroy a marriage before it starts, and create pain and frustration for both parties.
  - **The Role of Spiritual Leaders:** Pastors and those in spiritual leadership (Bible study leader, mentor, or mature Christian couple) should provide couples with pre-marital counselling. Many couples who are engaged will plan the marriage ceremony with a pastor, but this should be the last stage of preparation!
  - Preparation for Marriage can take the form of counselling sessions. It is up to each individual leader how they want to conduct these sessions, but the following points should be included.
- ❖ **Personal Preparation:** Each person who is anticipating marriage should carefully prepare themselves. Realize that you will never be perfect, and neither will your spouse. But the following points will help you prepare prior to marriage.
  - **Cultivate your relationship with God:** Our first and eternal responsibility as a Christian is to God. The stronger our relationship with God, the more we will be able to love and be loved. Consider your walk with God. What spiritual disciplines do you need to work on?
  - **Pursue Purity:** Unmarried men and women should practise purity. They should dress modestly so as not to tempt others. They should treat one another with honour and respect. They should practise purity in their behaviour and their thoughts (Psalm 119:9, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5).
  - **Consider your Readiness:** Sometimes marriages are arranged by family, and circumstances do not always allow people to choose the timing of their marriage.



However, in anticipation of it, each person should ask themselves the following questions:

Men Should Ask	Women Should Ask
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I able to provide for the needs of a wife and family?</li> <li>• Am I willing to love and serve this person for the rest of my life, being faithful only to her?</li> <li>• Am I ready to lead my wife as Jesus Christ leads me, and to be responsible for our new family?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Am I able to care for my home and become a mother?</li> <li>• Am I willing to honour and respect this man the rest of my life, being faithful only to him?</li> <li>• Am I ready to follow my husband’s leadership, and to be an encouraging and godly influence on him?</li> </ul>

❖ **Preparation Together:** Many marriages begin poorly, and cause much hurt and disappointment because of unmet expectations and poor communication. Honest, careful discussion of important topics before marriage, especially with the help of a caring mentor, can help considerably. The following topics should be dealt with thoroughly. The mentor should watch for potential areas of miscommunication, misunderstanding and conflict, and then help both parties to work towards understanding and compromise.

Area	How to Conduct a Counselling Session
<b>Expectations</b>	<p>Everyone comes into a marriage with expectations of their spouse; these should be discussed before marriage. Have each person make a private list of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 expectations they have of the other person in marriage.</li> <li>• 10 expectations they believe the other person has of them in marriage.</li> </ul> <p>These should be shared with each other, or brought to the counselling session, and read aloud. If either person is alarmed or surprised by expectations, time should be given to explain. Counsel them on unrealistic expectations, and about expectations that change with time. Participants should also answer the question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you want to be married?</li> </ul>
<b>Finances</b>	<p>When a man and woman marry, they begin a new family unit. While some may still be reliant on parents, their ultimate goal must be financial independence. The couple should discuss and decide upon the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where will our income come from? Will it all be shared?</li> <li>• Should we accept financial help from family or others?</li> <li>• Will both parties work outside the home, or just one? Will this change when children are born?</li> <li>• What are our desired professions or fields of employment? What is necessary for us to achieve them?</li> <li>• Who is better at dealing with money? Who should handle family finances?</li> <li>• What debt is brought into the marriage? What is the payment plan?</li> <li>• What does our monthly budget look like? (What are our necessary expenses, what are our optional expenses, and do we agree on them?)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much money will be given to God's work? Ten percent is a helpful goal or guideline.</li> <li>• How much money will we give to help others? How generous are we?</li> </ul> <p>In addition, help the couple to create a budget for spending, giving and saving. (Giving can include Christian ministry and other charities, and saving should have a goal in mind.)</p>
<b>Family</b>	<p>Our own family experiences and cultural expectations shape our ideas of family. It is important for a new couple to agree about what their new family will look like.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where will we live? Will we own a home, rent, live with parents, and in what location?</li> <li>• How many children should we have, and when?</li> <li>• Who will primarily care for children?</li> <li>• What are our ideas on child discipline/training? Who will be responsible?</li> <li>• How and where will children be educated?</li> <li>• How do we feel about caring for aging parents? Do we object to caring for our spouse's parents in their old age?</li> <li>• How much time should be spent with our parents? When and where do we see them? How are holidays observed?</li> <li>• What household tasks will I be responsible for? What will my spouse do?</li> <li>• Who will prepare, serve, and clean up after meals?</li> <li>• How would we like our new family, created by this marriage, to be different than our families of origin? How should it be the same?</li> <li>• What did our parents do right in raising us? What will we do differently?</li> <li>• How will we share our faith with our children, and worship God as family?</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<p>The ability to resolve conflict, communicate with and generally cooperate with your spouse will greatly improve the quality of your marriage. These are some general questions that should be discussed prior to marriage. Laying out a plan for dealing with conflict ahead of time is important. The mentor can help both parties listen carefully to one another and come to agreement where possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long have you known one another?</li> <li>• What do you like about one another?</li> <li>• Have you ever had an argument? How was it handled?</li> <li>• What are your temperaments like?</li> <li>• How do you handle obstacles in your life? What causes you great stress?</li> <li>• How can your spouse help you when you are facing obstacles and stress?</li> <li>• Is your spouse a good listener or can they improve?</li> <li>• What will happen when you face disagreements in the future?</li> <li>• Are you a tidy or disorganized person? Responsible or rebellious in nature?</li> <li>• What are your beliefs about the importance of God in your life?</li> <li>• Where do you plan to attend church and worship? How often? How involved in the church will you be?</li> <li>• How will you encourage your spouse in their faith?</li> <li>• Are you in good physical health? Do you have any disease or disorder?</li> <li>• Do you have any addictions or self-destructive habits?</li> <li>• Is there anything about your past of which your spouse is not aware?</li> <li>• Have you had a previous marriage, sexual partners or children?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How much time is acceptable to spend with friends and co-workers outside the home?</li><li>• Is it ever acceptable to be alone with a member of the opposite sex?</li><li>• What would happen if you found your spouse unfaithful to you?</li><li>• How do you like to spend time together? What would be your ideal evening at home together?</li><li>• What hobbies and activities do you participate in that would take you away from the home?</li><li>• What can your spouse do that will help you feel loved? What do you intend to do for them to demonstrate your love?</li></ul>
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❖ **Preparing to Glorify God:** Both prior to and throughout marriage, couples should keep their sights set on the purpose of marriage – to glorify God and bear His image to the world. When husbands and wives agree, it is a beautiful picture of the oneness of marriage. Because marriage consists of two imperfect people, there may be conflict, difficulty in communication, and discord. But by helping a couple learn good communication skills and work through these differences, the marriage counsellor or mentor will enable them to successfully fulfill God's purposes for their life and their marriage, and bring them joy as well.



## DISCUSSION

- ❖ If you are already married, what do you wish you and your spouse had discussed before marriage?
- ❖ What do you think is the best thing a couple could do to prepare well for marriage?
- ❖ What are some signs that two people are not ready to be married, or would not make good marriage partners? Is there such a thing as two people being incompatible?
- ❖ How would you counsel someone who found themselves in a marriage with an unbeliever?
- ❖ How can you be a part of honouring the marriages in your church and community, and helping young people prepare well for marriage?

## PRAYER

*Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would understand God's vision for the marriage partnership, and pursue Godly marriages. Pray that they would exercise spiritual leadership in their community, and prepare young people for marriage, bringing glory to God through holy, careful unions. Pray that marriages in your church and community would be protected from evil and destructive forces. Pray that men would take their place as Godly leaders, and women as joyful companions. Pray that your participants would find joy and contentment in their status— whether single or married.*