

# discipleship essentials

## Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

### FAMILY LIFE

### LESSON 2: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Family Life. The series of lessons looks at spiritual leadership in the home as it pertains to building a healthy Christian family. It begins with an understanding of the Biblical basis for family, and moves on to topics such as preparing for marriage, building good communication between spouses, managing finances, and leading one's children. This series takes the view that spiritual leadership begins in the home, and that both men and women have specific roles in this regard. The lessons present God's best design for families, recognizing that in today's world families can come in many forms. The lessons will benefit those in marriage, those who have the role of a parent, as well as young people looking to create healthy relationships in the future.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on [www.discipleshipessentials.org](http://www.discipleshipessentials.org).



# FAMILY LIFE

## LESSON 2: PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

### WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson explores the purpose of marriage, and considers some important topics that should be discussed in preparation for a successful marriage relationship.

### JUST SO YOU KNOW...

Strong marriages are the foundation for raising children well, building strong communities, and producing fruitful churches. When any two people work together there can be stress and conflict. But marriage requires two people to become one, and it can be difficult work. That is why all Christians should be well prepared before they are married. This lesson covers the purpose of marriage, and also gives practical advice regarding pre-marital counseling and important issues that need to be discussed prior to a marriage union. If you are preparing for marriage, these activities can be self-administered. If you are helping someone else prepare for marriage as their mentor or spiritual leader, this content will be helpful in knowing what to discuss with the future couple.

## GETTING STARTED

1. What was your parents' marriage like? What other marriage relationships influence your concept of an ideal marriage?

2. What do people typically look for in a marriage partner? What were/are some of your desires for a marriage partner?



## STUDY

- ❖ **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.
  - What are the results of a strong marriage? What would happen to a community if it was filled with couples who had strong and happy marriages like the one described above?

- ❖ **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 the covenants below. Who were they between? What was the relationship like?



Genesis 9:9-16	
Genesis 15, James 2:22-23	
Exodus 24:1-8	
1 Samuel 18:1-5	
Jeremiah 31:31-34, Mark 14:22-24	

- **Signs of a Covenant:** Long ago when people made a covenant with one another, there were ceremonies that surrounded the oath.
  - They made promises and swore by God’s name.
  - There was a sign or memorial of the covenant.
  - Two became one, a friend and ally closer than a brother.
  - They agreed to defend one another for life.
  - 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:

Galatians 2:15	
Malachi 2:14-16	
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:

Biblical Commands for Marriage	
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 outside of marriage.	1 Corinthians 6:13, 2 Corinthians 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

- 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?

- ❖ **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.

- **Finding Help:** Ideally, an engaged couple can get help or counselling from a pastor, mentor, elder or other spiritual leader to help them prepare. A couple may wish to



meet with a pastor to plan the details of the marriage ceremony, but this should actually be the last step in the preparation process!

- **Without Help:** If you plan to be married and have no spiritual leader to help you prepare, you can use the materials attached to help. If an engagement has been arranged for you by your family to someone who is not a believer and you must go through with the marriage, the materials will still be of help.
- The following charts will help you prepare as an individual for marriage. The questions can be used to discuss important topics together with your future spouse.

❖ **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, ask yourself the following questions (choose the applicable box).

Men 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>	



Women Should Ask	
<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. You and your partner should answer each question honestly. A mentor or spiritual leader who is with you during the discussion can help monitor areas of concern which may require further discussion.

EXPECTATIONS
<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 lists should be shared with each other by reading aloud or brought to the counselling session and shared while discussing with a counsellor if available. If either person is alarmed or surprised by expectations, time should be given to explain. Each person should also answer this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you want to be married?</li> </ul>

FINANCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where will our income come from? Will it all be shared or will some be designated for each person?</li> <li>• Should we accept financial help from family or others?</li> <li>• Will both people 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</li> </ul>



them?

- Who is better at dealing with money? Who should handle family finances?
- What debt is brought into the marriage? What is the payment plan?
- What does our monthly budget look like? (What are our necessary expenses, what are our optional expenses, and do we agree on them?)
- How much money will be given to God's work?
- How much money will we give to help others? To whom will it be given?

In addition, a couple should create a budget for spending, giving and saving. In order to do this, they must have a clear understanding of their income.

### FAMILY

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.

- Where will we live? Will we own a home, rent, live with parents, and in what location?
- How many children should we have, and when?
- Who will primarily care for children?
- What are our ideas on child discipline/training? Who will be responsible?
- How and where will children be educated?
- How do we feel about caring for aging parents? Do we object to caring for our spouse's parents in their old age?
- How much time should be spent with our parents? When and where do we see them? How are holidays observed?
- What household tasks will I be responsible for? What will my spouse do?
- Who will prepare, serve, and clean up after meals?
- How would we like our new family to be different than our families of origin? In what ways should it be the same?
- What did our parents do right in raising us? What will we do differently?
- How will we share our faith with our children, and worship God as family?

**COMMUNICATION**

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.

- How long have you known one another?
- What do you like about one another?
- Have you ever had an argument? How was it handled?
- What are your temperaments like?
- How do you handle obstacles in your life? What causes you great stress?
- How can your spouse help you when you are facing obstacles and stress?
- Is your spouse a good listener or can they improve?
- What will happen when you face disagreements in the future?
- Are you a tidy or disorganized person? Responsible or rebellious in nature?
- What are your beliefs about the importance of God in your life?
- Where do you plan to attend church and worship? How often? How involved will you be?
- How will you encourage your spouse in their faith?
- Are you in good physical health? Do you have any disease or disorder?
- Do you have any addictions or self-destructive habits?
- Is there anything about your past of which your spouse is not aware?
- Have you had a previous marriage, sexual partners or children?
- How much time is acceptable to spend with friends and co-workers outside the home?
- Is it ever acceptable to be alone with a member of the opposite sex?
- What would happen if you found your spouse unfaithful to you?
- How do you like to spend time together? What would be your ideal evening at home together?
- What hobbies and activities do you participate in that would take you away from the home?
- What can your spouse do that will help you feel loved? What do you intend to do for them to



demonstrate your love?

- ❖ **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.

## SUMMARY

- ❖ By God's design, many of us will marry. Marriage is a powerful image of God's love for us and can help to proclaim the Gospel.
- ❖ Marriage is a covenant, which is a solemn and binding agreement between a man and a woman creating kinship – a new family.
- ❖ The Bible has guidelines and commands for what our priorities must be in marriage.
- ❖ We should take time to prepare well prior to marriage, seek the help of a pastor or mentor, and discuss important issues such as finances and family.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1.

What do you think is the best thing a couple could do to prepare well for marriage?

2.

How can you be a part of honouring the marriages in your church and community, and helping young people prepare well for marriage?