

Advice for Married Couples (Matt. 5:31-32)

A Small Group Outline



1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
 - Sing a few songs of praise to God

2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

• **Notes for the facilitator**

- Read *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings (MB)*, pp. 63-65
- Christ values marriage and even used the symbol of marriage to express His relationship with His people, a relationship of love, faithfulness and permanence (see Jer. 3:14, Isa. 54:5-6, 2 Cor. 11:2)
- The passage closely related to Matt. 5:31-32 is Matt. 19:1-9. In the latter portion of Scripture we find that:
 - Marriage was **designed by God** at the beginning of time (19:4). Satan has sadly perverted it to appear as a mere social contract, or even to bypass it completely
 - It is **heterosexual**, between a male and a female (19:4)
 - It is **exclusive** (only a husband and wife are to share this) – see 19:5. This rules out polygamy or any other forms of close romantic contact.
 - It is **permanent** (19:6). This means that couples should work through their issues, instead of merely exiting when things go tough.
- In our promiscuous society, marriage has been devalued and looked upon as out-dated. There is even what is termed 'non-monogamy'. This is a modern form of consensual unfaithfulness. One such variety is an **open relationship** in which consenting partners invite outsiders into the relationship within certain agreed upon parameters, depending on the preferences of the couple.
- Shacking up with someone before marriage ('a trial run' for marriage) is also another form of diluting marriage. "When cohabitation became more popular in the early 1970s, social scientists predicted that the practice would strengthen marriage by providing experience in intimacy. However, numerous scientific studies since the late 1970s have yielded consistent and substantive evidence for the opposite effect: premarital cohabitation is correlated with increased marital instability, higher risk of future divorce, and lower marital adjustment. Compared to those who married,

- cohabitators are statistically less happy with their relationship, less faithful to their partners, and less committed to and stable in their relationship. Cohabiting women are particularly vulnerable, with greater risk of physical abuse than in marriage. Children born to cohabiting parents are also more likely to suffer from physical abuse as well as general neglect.” (*Richard Davidson, Does Marriage Still Matter?*)
- According to Eph. 5:24-28, wives are to submit to their husbands. This word is used in terms of a **loving relationship** devoid of dominance and brutal authority. It does not imply inferiority of the wife. Husbands are to rule through self-sacrificing (vs 25), purifying (vs 26), caring (vs 28) and permanent love (vs 31).
 - “The grace of Christ, and this alone, can make this institution [marriage] what God designed it should be—an agent for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. And thus the families of earth, in their unity and peace and love, may represent the family of heaven” (MB 65)
 - Matt. 19:8 says that because of the hardness of their hearts, Moses **allowed** them to put away their wives, but that it was not so from the beginning.
 - Scripture recognises marital unfaithfulness (Matt. 5:32 – which includes things such as adultery, polygamy, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, paedophilia, etc.), as well as the abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-15) as grounds for divorce. In Matt. 19:9 it implies the remarriage of the one who remained faithful to the marriage vow.
 - “Among the Jews a man was permitted to put away his wife for the most trivial offenses, and the woman was then at liberty to marry again. This practice led to great wretchedness and sin. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow.” (MB 63)
 - Mal. 2:16 says that God hates divorce. Therefore churches and individuals should try everything in their power to keep families together. But there are instances where marriages do fail. There may be action from the church in dealing officially with such cases, but such members still need our support. We need to avoid stigmatising divorcees as if it were the unpardonable sin.
 - For those who have had challenges in marriage take heart from the following quotation: “Through the revelation of His grace, hearts that were once indifferent or estranged may be united in bonds that are firmer and more enduring than those of earth—the golden bonds of a love that will bear the test of trial.” (MB 65)
 - “Hearts that are filled with the love of Christ can never get very far apart” (*Adventist Home, p. 94*)
 - About 50% of all couples who marry make it, but only about 10% of those couples truly enjoy superior marital happiness Thus a successful marriage needs to be worked on. Issues such as understanding each other’s needs, acceptance, communication, support, sexuality, spirituality, etc. – all need to be worked through in order to attain a healthy marriage (*Nancy van Pelt, Highly Effective Marriage*). There are times when special professional counsel may even be required.
 - One great website for couples is: <https://family.adventist.org/couples/>
 - Not everyone feels the burden to get married. Such ones should not be stigmatised. Celibacy is a special gift that God gives to some members of the body of Christ to remain single and enjoy it; to be unmarried and not suffer undue sexual temptations. Paul is an example of this gift. Being unmarried is not necessarily the same as having this gift. Those who have this gift remain single because they feel they can serve the Lord better that way. See 1 Cor. 7:7; Matt 19:12
- *Read Matt. 5:31-32. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*

- **Discussion Questions** (*use only a few*). *The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
 - Why do you think God designed marriage, instead of creating us as mere single people?
 - What are some principles of a healthy marriage?
 - How has marriage been devalued, and trampled on by modern society?
 - Is there anything wrong with merely staying with someone first, in order to ensure you don't marry the 'incorrect' person?
 - What are some of the reasons people get divorced?
 - What can a person do when his/her marriage is in trouble?
 - What do you think it means for a wife to submit to her husband (cf. Eph.5:24-28)? Are there ways in which people have misunderstood this submission? What counsel is given to husbands? (*ask one question at a time*)
- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
 - *To married couples:* In what way can **you** strengthen your marriage?
 - *To singles:* What are some practices you can now put into place now that can help you to be a better spouse one day?
 - Are there ways you can help someone who is going through marital problems? If so, in what way?
 - **I WILL STATEMENT:** Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I will create a weekly platform, starting this Thursday, for my spouse and I to work through various aspects of a healthy marriage (either through a marriage enrichment book or by going through some DVDs). Some of my goals are to discuss ways to constructively work through conflict, how we can be better parents, how we can spend more time in prayer as couples, etc."

6. Share (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

7. Closing prayer

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