

# Unit 2: Premarital Counseling

## *Marriage - A Divine Covenant & a Lifelong Commitment*

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# Unit 2: Premarital Counseling

- 1. Marriage - A Divine Covenant & a Lifelong Commitment*
- 2. Preparing for the Wedding Day*
- 3. Pure Intimacy*

# *“Marriage: A Divine Covenant & a Lifelong Commitment”*

## Lesson #1 Outline

- An Introduction to Premarital Counseling
- Marriage - Ordained by God
- Marriage - A Divine Covenant
- Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment
- Why marry in the first place?
- Importance of Premarital Counseling
- Developments in Premarital Counseling
- Q & A

# *"Preparing for the Wedding Day"*

## Lesson #2 Outline

- The Premarital Counseling Process
- Goals of Premarital Counseling
- The Dynamic Relationship History (DRH)
- Exploring the Family of Origin (FOO)
- Premarital Counseling Inventory
- Preparing for the Wedding Day
- Q & A

# "Pure Intimacy"

## Lesson #3 Outline

- Three Basic Purposes of Marriage
- Basic Differences between the Sexes
- A Biblical View of Sexuality
- Preparing for Sexual Intimacy
- Intimacy and Sexuality in Premarital Counseling
- Summary
- Q & A

# An Introduction to Premarital Counseling

- Premarital Counseling is *the counseling given to a couple who intends to be married in the near future with the objective of preparing the couple for their marriage.*
- The choice to marry or commit to a partner is one of the most important developmental tasks in an adult's life.
- Yet many invest more time and psychic energy in creating the *"event"* rather than building the relationship.
- Couples typically spend more time (6-12 months) preparing for the ceremony than building skills for a lasting marriage.
- The best resource for marriage for a Christian Premarital Counselor is the Word of God.

# Marriage - Ordained by God

- The First Marriage – conceived by God (Gen 1:27)
- Adam had dominion but no companionship (Gen. 2:18)
- God 'built' Eve from one of Adam's ribs – *"a helper as his counterpart"*
- Mathew Henry's theory about rib taken from Adam's side
- Jesus' teaching on marriage (Matthew 19:5, 6) – God's plan – become one flesh – no separation.
- Sanctity of marriage – moral fidelity
- Purpose of marriage – mutual helpfulness & propagation
- Permanence of marriage – only God or death can break

# Marriage - A Divine Covenant

- The word 'family' in the Old Testament (over 275 times) – Genesis 1:26, 27; Malachi 4:6
- The word 'family' in the New Testament (only 1 time) – Ephesians 3:14, 15
- Genealogical records are meaningless without family – put together they make the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest book of the Bible
- Genealogical records show that Jesus came to earth through family (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38)
- The family retains its importance even in imperfection (e.g. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary)
- Many OT institutions are founded on the family (Passover, Inheritance, Priesthood, Kingship)



# Marriage - A Divine Covenant

- Each of God's Covenants was in relation to the family
  1. The Edenic Covenant (Genesis 1:26-30)
  2. The Adamic Covenant (Genesis 3:15)
  3. The Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9:8-17)
  4. The Abrahamic Covenant was a covenant with family
    - A. Call of Abraham: Genesis 12:1-3
    - B. Abraham's altar at Moreh: Genesis 12:6-7
    - C. Abraham's separation from Lot: Genesis 13:14-18
    - D. God's promise of a son: Gen. 15:1-21
    - E. God's Covenant with Abraham's seed: Gen. 17:1-19

# Marriage - A Divine Covenant

5. The Mosaic Covenant was a covenant with family
  - A. The Passover (Exodus 12:24-28)
  - B. The Dedication of the Firstborn (Exodus 13:14-16)
  - C. The Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 6:4-25)
6. The Palestinian Covenant was a covenant with family
  1. God's Covenant at Horeb (Deut. 29:1-29)
  2. The Sabbatical Year (Deut. 31:9-13)
7. The Davidic Covenant was a covenant with family (2 Samuel 7:11-17)
8. The New Covenant is a covenant with family (Heb. 8:6-13)
9. Marriage – emulates God's covenants – divine covenant

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- *“The key to a healthy marriage is to keep your eyes open before you wed and half-closed thereafter.”*
- **Mate Selection:** One of the most important decisions made in life – choose wisely – use godly principles.
- **Ways of Mate Selection:** arranged/referred, love, dating, online, advertisements through internet/print media, meeting at social clubs, schools, colleges, community, religious gatherings/conferences, social networking, courtship, etc.
- Multiple processes can be reinforced in parallel.

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- Role of matchmakers, community, family members and religious leaders are getting severely curtailed.
- **Arranged Marriages: Old (O)-New (N) Ways**
  - O: Parents, extended family members played a key role.
  - O: Factors considered in matchmaking: family history, character, values, status in society, wealth, caste, religion, mental health, physical features, fairness, boy's ability as bread-winner, etc.
  - N: Parents suggest, but children decide.
  - N: No undue pressure on children to accept parent's choice.
  - N: Extensive background research done before moving forward.

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- **Love Marriages:** *"Love is blind; Marriage is an eye-opener."*
- **Virtual Love through online relationships.**
- **God's Will: Divine Perspective**
  - Seek God's will through specific prayer early in life.
  - Be plugged in the Scriptures to understand God's will.
  - Seek counsel from godly & trustworthy men and women.
  - Discern circumstantial evidences – positive reinforcements.
  - Ideally, both partners have similar views in ALL the major areas.
  - Wedding is a one-day event – marriage is a lifetime journey.
  - *"Marriages are made in heaven. So are thunder and lightning!"*
  - *"Having a successful marriage is more than FINDING the right person, it is BEING the right person".*

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- A proper understanding of self and marriage is the first step in preparing for a lasting marriage.
- Take away the unrealistic expectations from marriage.
- Before marriage, each of the partners shows the best behavior. Even Agur, the wise man from Proverbs could not understand ... *"the way of a man with a virgin"* (Prov 30:19)
- Marriage is for life – due to increasing divorce rates, Christians must *"work at"* making the marriage lifelong.
- Family disintegration and divorce is a major issue today.
- In the US, 1 out of every 4 marriages is ending with divorce = 400% increase in the past 50 years.

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- As a Pre-marital Counselor, you should make aware:
  - What the Bible says about the seriousness & tragedy of divorce.
  - Give practical guidance to make each marriage successful.
  - Motivate married couples to put more effort in resolving their difference.
- THE PROBLEM:
  - A. What the Bible says about divorce:
    - *"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house" (Deut. 24:1)*
    - *They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. (Matt. 19:7-8)*

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- *And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (Matt. 19:9)*
- Bible scholars think that Israelites became familiar of divorce in Egypt.
- Divorce became so rooted in the culture that Moses could not overrule it.
- This will happen if God's people will look to imitate the trends & customs of the world than sticking to God's standards through His Word.
- Jesus has made no provision for divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty, incompatibility, drunkenness, insanity or neglect.
- B. The Growing Problem of Divorce:
  - Divorce has become a popular evil...we are having greater difficulty in building happy marriages.
  - Lax marriage laws encourage divorce (billboards-no-contest divorce-\$500)
  - Divorce is not regarded as a sin by society and state.
  - Both parents and children are victimized through divorce.
  - Think of children from broken marriages who suffer from insecurity, lack of love or, a real sense of belonging.



# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

## ■ C. The Responsibility of Christian Partners:

- *"Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife." (1 Cor. 7:10-11)*
- Each partner must attempt the utmost to make marriage successful.
- It will take hard work, understanding & agape love to work out God's plan within the marriage.

## ■ IMPORTANT FACTORS:

- Marriage is a partnership. Husband and wives are co-workers with God, fulfilling His plan for them. A similar background in the following *three* areas provides a more solid basis for marital success.

### 1. SOCIAL:

- Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, *"...I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."* (Gen 24:2-4)

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- Similar backgrounds provide similar interests, living standards, and customs.
- It is usually very difficult to change ourselves or change the other partner.

## 2. EDUCATIONAL:

- Best compatibility is possible between persons of similar educational background.

## 3. SPIRITUAL:

- *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?"* (2 Cor. 6:14)
- Christian young people who ignore this command step into a marriage with a weak foundation (e.g. house built upon sand than rock).
- It is better to be unmarried in the will of God than to be married outside God's will and be miserable.

- **BIBLE PRINCIPLES:**

A. Make Christ the Head of the House.

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- *"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence."* (Col. 1:18)
- A mutual aim to please Christ unifies the Christian Home.
- When Christ has pre-eminence, daily time will be spent in prayer and Bible reading within the home.
- Solutions to problem are reached through prayer.
- For Christ to be the head of the home, He must be the Lord & Savior of the couple...thereby the king of their lives.

## B. Keep the Marriage Vows:

- *"When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed."* (Eccl. 5:4)
- Marriage is a promise, a pledge to each other and to God.
- The marriage vow has to be kept until *"Death do us part"*.

## C. Put an effort into the marriage:

- Many marriages fail because of little things that develop into bigger things.

# Marriage - A Lifelong Commitment

- Marriage is not wrecked by a blowout, but rather by a slow leak.
- God has a remedy for every marriage malady. These admonitions from the Bible will help to make a marriage permanent:
  1. Go the second mile in the home as long as it takes (Matt. 5:41)
  2. Return good for evil (Matt. 5:43-47)
  3. Turn the other cheek in the home (Matt. 5:38-39)
  4. Take it to the Lord and leave it there (Matt. 11:28-30).
  5. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Never go to bed angry with your spouse (Eph. 4:26)
  6. Strive to adjust and accept things you cannot change, and get the joy out of it (James 1:2-3). Make this your prayer: *"Lord, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; give me the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference"*.
- According to *Life* magazine, marriage in the United States is breaking in four tragic phases, which are (1) the increase of divorce, (2) the revolt against motherhood, (3) the fading of moral principles, and (4) the decline of respect for parental authority. *We should make every couple aware of this.*

# Why marry in the first place?

- What people believe determines what they see, and what they see determines what they do.
- We will discuss...the forces that bring a man and a woman towards marriage.
- Illusions About Marriage:
  - *Mate Selection and Marriage are accidental.* It is a proven fact that mate selection is one of the most accurate choosing process in which human beings engage. The partner chosen through the mate selection process reflects the person's needs at that time.
  - *Marriage is a one-sided or lopsided relationship.* This is clearly visible when people discuss a couple having marital problems. One partner is portrayed as bad/wrong and the other as good/right. However, the couple is usually evenly balanced underneath. Either both win or both lose.

# Why marry in the first place?

- People marry for some purpose – either to “get” or, to “give” or, to do something for themselves (to grow, to leave home, to take shelter from problems or, for a better future).

## MOTIVATING FORCES FOR MARRIAGE:

*Marriage is purposeful, and an individual chooses another on the basis of the partner's ability to initiate or continue the individual's personal growth. Couples are driven towards marriage to further growth & health.*

### 1. Emotional Immaturity:

Immature individuals who still want to be cared for, who still need parents to take responsibility, will enter a marital relationship seeking to fulfill those unresolved dependency needs.

### 2. “I will be different after this marriage”:

These are people whose past experiences have made their relationships with other people painful. They have been bruised before & marriage become an escape route.

# Why marry in the first place?

## 3. "Everybody ought to be married":

Our society expects people to marry, and in some subtle ways discriminate against those who do not. Some people move into marriage to meet that societal expectations. They seek the approval of parents, friends and peers who think favorable about marriage and are usually married themselves.

## 4. "Marriage makes me an adult":

Marriage often becomes a rite of passage - an act that sons and daughters engage in to separate from their family of origin who have difficulty in letting them go. The bid to adulthood can be a powerful force that will propel people towards marriage if they are trying to separate from controlling parents.

## 5. Sexual Urges:

- As infants we receive both physical attention and emotional attention (affection).
- As we enter puberty, we are less comfortable with physical closeness due to natural process resulting from bodily changes that takes place during puberty.
- With the production of hormones and development of secondary sexual characteristics, we experience sexual desire and drive during adolescence.
- We feel uncomfortable being both emotionally & physically close to parents.

# Why marry in the first place?

- This is nature's way of pushing the child out of the family towards a peer who will ultimately duplicate the original nurturing formula that was present at birth.
- Adolescents and young adults look for a person that they can be both physically and emotionally close.
- This drive to experience intimacy in both the physical and emotional areas is a powerful force that draws people towards marriage.

## 6. Emotional Maturity:

- Families either help or hinder young people as they grow up.
- For those families that help their children mature and take responsibility, the children separate from their parents in a healthy way and develop their sense of individuality and adequacy.
- These young people are ready to find a peer with whom they can become both physically and emotionally close, and share the companionship of marriage.
- Such emotional maturity draws couples to the intensifying experience of intimacy.

## ■ Impact of Bonding:

- Bonding is the closeness of the couple – their positive view of their relationship.
- It increases dependency & self-esteem in the couple – leading to marriage.



# Importance of Premarital Counseling

- Current State of Marriages:
  - We are living in a changing society - changes in the way we live, eat, dress, commute, engage in leisure activities, and even in our relationships.
  - The concept or belief that *'marriage is for life'* is becoming old-fashioned and nearly obsolete in our culture today.
  - Recent statistics: *in USA only 54% of all weddings conducted are first marriages for both partners* while 46% are marriages in which at least one partner has been married previously.
  - There is an increasing number of remarriages today than in the previous years
  - Western society serves as a trendsetter for all the other societies around the world.

# Importance of Premarital Counseling

- A Historical Perspective on Marriages:
  - Early part of the 20th century, marriages used to be decided by the parents and elders.
  - Bride and groom would usually even see other only on the day of their marriage.
  - Their perception about their marriage partner would be looking at his/her photograph.
  - Roles of the marriage partners were well defined: wives=homemakers & husbands=breadwinners.
  - As time progressed, shift towards the groom who will personally meet and select his bride through various selection processes (relatives, friends, Pastor, church or even through classified advertisements in Christian periodicals).
  - Selection based on just a few hours of cross examination and close scrutiny of the bride by the groom for most part.
  - Now both the groom and the bride are playing almost equal roles in making their marriage selection, since both are comparably educated and there is a vast difference in perception of women within today's society.

# Importance of Premarital Counseling

## ■ A Historical Perspective on Marriages:

- The bonding process between a man and a woman begins when each of the partners feel that the other person is for them.
- They internalize their relationship, and this moves to the next interactional step when both partners begins to indicate, verbally and nonverbally, that they hold the other person in special regard.
- This finally ends in both partners announcing publicly to their parents and others what happened to them privately.
- However, many such marriages are turning weak due to internal conflicts that are erupting between the marriage partners, and alarming divorce rates are affecting both society and the church equally.

## ■ A Biblical Approach to Marriage:

- God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden, when God made the woman from the Adam's rib and brought her to Adam as a helper and for companionship (Genesis 2:21-23).
- This would be an intimate relationship due to which the man would sever his intimate and only ties with his parents and join with his wife in a lifelong intimate relationship.

# Importance of Premarital Counseling

- A Biblical Approach to Marriage:
  - Throughout the Old Testament we see that this marriage relationship would be initiated and consummated through a sexual union that is described by the word *'knew'* (see Genesis 4:1, 17, 25).
  - In all the episodes recorded in the Bible about how a marriage relationship was initiated, only the case of Abraham's servant choosing Rebecca for Isaac in Genesis chapter 24 stands as a unique case of someone else deciding their marriage partner.
  - In the New Testament, the marriage institution is alive as the first miracle of Jesus Christ takes place at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where the wine runs out during the feasting celebrations (John 2:1-12).
  - However, from the beginning God hates divorce and He has expressed this categorically in both the Old and New Testament (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:4-6).
  - There are many other scriptural references to support lifelong marriage bonding in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11; Amos 3:3; Proverbs 31:10-11; Eph. 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:7).
  - Biblical approach is – marriage is for life – for keeps – a covenantal relationship!

# Importance of Premarital Counseling

- If the marriage relationship has to last a lifetime, the marriage partners will have to count the cost of this union well in advance and enter into this relationship that will last a lifetime.
- Our Lord Jesus describes a couple of scenarios of the dire need to count the cost: before we start a building project and before we initiate war against another country (Luke 14:28-32).
- How can we count the cost of our future marriage unless we clearly weigh our relationship and ensure that we are fully aware about our future marriage partner?
- This is where Premarital Counseling will help the couple greatly. *"Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety"* (Proverbs 11:14).
- Today great attention and care is given to the planning of the wedding ceremony, but little to no preparation is sought or given toward the couple who has made the vow to remain together *"until death do us part"*.
- The fact is that these days' multitudes of couples are not emotionally prepared to live life together in a marriage relationship.

# Importance of Premarital Counseling

- Cohabitation (as a trial before marriage) is a gross sin which finds no place in the life of a Christian believer, and statistics have revealed that less than 12% of those who live together before marriage make it into marriage at all.
- Premarital Counseling will help to clarify self, clarify the partner, bind anxiety, build adventure, help the communication process between the couple, and help to overcome pre-existing inhibitions.
- Premarital Counseling is thus a valuable means to deal with potential divorce causing factors before the couple says "I do".



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# Developments in Premarital Counseling

## A Historical Perspective:

- Three main groups provide the most premarital counseling from the start to even today: *clergy, mental health workers and physicians.*
- First documented premarital intervention was in 1924 when Ernest Groves taught the *first course* in preparation for family life at Boston University.
- Earlier writers saw premarital counseling as primarily an educational and informational service.
- In his book *'Planning for Marriage'* Butterfield (1956) pointed out that *just as persons developed skills in social life, so they must develop skills in family life and functioning well in the marital relationship.*
- Albert Ellis (1961) in his book *'Creative Marriage'* argued that *one of the main causes of marital failure was an ignorance about the nature of marriage itself.*

# Developments in Premarital Counseling

- Later, Rutledge (1966) in his book *'Premarital Counseling'* postulated that *although marriage itself could be a maturing process, the couple must have a reasonable amount of adult growth to carry their share of the various responsibilities of marriage.*
- Rutledge identified *three basic factors in preparing for marriage: discovery of selfhood, continued growth as an individual, and possession of communication and problem-solving skills.* Premarital Counseling opens up these three areas of life for the young couple.
- David Mace (1972) in his book *'We can have better marriages if we really want them'* challenged marriage counselors to move out of their remedial routine and focus their energies on marriage preparation and marriage enrichment.



# Developments in Premarital Counseling

## The Healthy Premarital Couple:

- Premarital Counseling is typically done with relatively functional and psychologically healthy couples.
- It is designed *primarily to enhance and enrich growing relationships* and *secondarily to treat pathological ones*.
- Robert Lewis and Gaham Spanier, family researchers in 1979, identified *premarital predictors* of two important marital dimensions: *quality* and *stability*.
- *Marital Quality* is the *subjective evaluation* of the marital relationship (for e.g. satisfaction, happiness, etc.)
- *Marital Stability* is whether the marriage is intact legally (for e.g. the couple has not separated or divorced).

# Developments in Premarital Counseling

## The Healthy Premarital Couple:

- Lewis and Spanier have identified *four categories* of premarital variables as influencing the later quality and stability of marriage:
  1. Premarital Homogamy: The marital quality increases with the *similarity in social and demographic factors* (racial background, socioeconomic background, religious denominational affiliation, intelligence level, age and social status).
  2. Similarity of Personal and Emotional Premarital Resources and Life Experiences: These resources include a high level of interpersonal skill functioning, good emotional health, a positive self-concept, high educational level, an older age at marriage, a high social class, a high degree of acquaintance between the partners before marriage, and good physical health.

# Developments in Premarital Counseling

## The Healthy Premarital Couple:

3. Positive Parental Models: These include the influence of high marital quality in the family of origin, a high level of happiness in childhood, and positive relationship between the person and his or her parents.
  4. Support from Significant Others: Predictive variables include parental approval of the future mate, the person's liking for the future in-laws, and the support of significant friends for the proposed marriage.
- Other variables influencing marital quality & stability include the following: *level of conventionality, premarital sexual behavior being consistent with the value system (scriptures), no premarital sex or pregnancy before marriage, internal motivation to marry, current social context for marriage & the couple's interactional communication.*

# Research—The Evidence for Premarital Counseling

- Premarital preparation can reduce divorce rate by 30%. (Stanley, Amato, Johnson & Markman, 2006)
- A recent meta-analysis of 11 experimental studies found significant differences favoring couples who received premarital counseling (Carroll & Doherty, 2003)
  - *The overall effect size was very large (.80), representing a 79% improvement in all marital outcomes compared to couples who did not receive premarital education.*
- Premarital counseling can thus help identify weaknesses that could become bigger problems during marriage.



# Developments in Premarital Counseling

## A Final Word About Premarital Counseling:

- Couples who benefit *most* from premarital counseling must *voluntarily seek it* rather than be forced into it.
- This is a *developmental process* designed to assist the couple in *enhancing their relationship* rather than being a screening process.
- This is most beneficial if obtained *early in the relationship* and *several months before the wedding*.
- Persons requesting premarital counseling should expect to learn about themselves to some extent, but *primarily about their relationship and each other*.
- Premarital counseling is more effective through *conjoint sessions* over individual sessions.
- Finally, *assessment instruments* (to be discussed later) will contribute to the premarital counseling process.

# Q & A



# CONTACT INFORMATION

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