



## Be loving

### Aim of lesson

The aim of this lesson is to demonstrate the spiritual significance of the divine institution of marriage.

### Bible background

Genesis 2:18-25. Song of Solomon

### Preparation required

Think through the family situation of the class. It may be necessary to handle certain aspects very sensitively if any of the students are experiencing the breakdown of marriage in the family. The CSSU have a leaflet for teenagers call 'Sex and Relationships', which it may be worth discussing with them.

### Outline

The reason for doing this lesson now is that the class will have looked at Song of Solomon in lesson 24 and learned that it is an allegory of the love of God for his people. It isn't intended that any more detail about the Song of Solomon is discussed here but this lesson shows that the allegory is begun in the Garden of Eden and carries through into the New Testament.

Remind the class what was said about Song of Solomon in lesson 24 and ask the young people to 'brainstorm' what they understand about why marriage was ordained by God. Was it just to give Adam a companion or to establish a secure family unit in which to bring up children? Many students may not appreciate that God established marriage as a spiritual illustration for us as well as a practical lifestyle.

Explain to the young people that this lesson is about the spiritual aspects of marriage not the practical aspects although there will be applications for their own relationships. As much as possible the students should discuss the passages concerned and come up with their own conclusions so the students' books contains a selection of some of the relevant passages which they could have in front of them whilst discussing.

### In the Old Testament

God instituted marriage at the very beginning of his creation. It was not an afterthought. God knew that ultimately the perfect bride would be found for the perfect bridegroom.

Ask the students what they can learn about marriage from the human point of view from Genesis 2:18-25. They may suggest some of the following aspects -

- The two become one flesh so they cannot ever be parted
- The man leaves his parents to join his wife
- They were both naked and felt no shame – no barriers
- Woman was created from the man, not the dust of the earth so symbolically they were one flesh.

Get the students to see from Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-9, that Jesus fully accepted this description of the institution of marriage.

Get the students to look at Isaiah 54:5-8. Ask them who is speaking and who the wife is. Explain that God viewed Israel as his wife throughout the Old Testament. It wasn't so much that he thought 'that's how I feel about my people' but that he instigated marriage so that his people could understand how he felt.

Get the class to describe from verses 6-8, how God feels about Israel and how he treats her. Despite Israel's sin and their rejection of God, he is her husband who will forgive her and have compassion on her. Jeremiah 3:6-14 and Hosea 2:16-23 show the same thing.

Use the passages above and discuss with the class or, if they are mature enough get them to discuss in groups, how spiritual unfaithfulness is like adultery. The following aspects could be noted:

- Both are against God's law
- Both begin with a dissatisfaction in the relationship
- Attention is then given to someone or something else
- This is usually a gradual process and the individual is often unaware of it initially

- The new object of love does not bring satisfaction and happiness
- God is always ready to forgive and take back

## **In the New Testament**

Get the students to look at 2 Corinthians 11:2

Get them to explain the analogy here. Now the husband/wife relationship is between Jesus and his church but the process is still the same. God designated marriage so that we can understand the relationship we can have with our Lord.

Once again get the class to discuss the implications this passage and Ephesians 5:22-33

They may come up with the following points

- If they become part of the church through baptism, they are transformed into the bride of Christ.
- This will have a profound effect on the way they should conduct themselves.
- The church today is not perfect but it should live with this ideal in mind.

It is also important to show the young people that the rules about no sex before marriage are not just some ancient Victorian hypocritical convention. The ideal was established by God to show his people how important they were and how they could – through Christ's sacrifice – become a virgin bride.

## **Relevance to our lives**

An understanding of why God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden should influence the lives of the young people in two ways.

- Spiritually – we can see God's love and care for his people despite their faults and we should want to associate ourselves with the Lord Jesus and be a part of his bride.
- Practically – we should understand how God views marriage and make sure that we uphold its sanctity.

## **Extension activities**

- Get the class to read Hosea chapters 1-3 and see how the prophet was required by God to live a parable to show the people his love and compassion on Israel.
- The students could look at Revelation 19:7, Revelation 21:2,9 and Revelation 22:17 and talk about the future glory as Christ's bride. Imagining how happy a bride in love is on her wedding day in this flawed society and then thinking how wonderful it will be for us as the bride of the perfect bridegroom forever.
- The students may want to discuss their relationships in the light of the lesson. 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 emphasises the underlying principle that sex outside marriage is wrong.
- What constitutes marriage? Is the ceremony necessary? Does it have to be in church? Genesis 24 :67 cuts to the essentials when Isaac and Rebekah are married. It is a public agreement between two people before God – the rest is just trimmings. It may be good to discuss with the young people whether a lavish wedding contributes to the marriage or detracts from it.
- You could go into more detail about how the type of Adam and Eve and Christ and the church works. What is represented by Adam, Adam's deep sleep, the rib removed, Eve created, one flesh, no shame?

## **Preparation for the next lesson**

In preparing for the following lesson, you should if possible ask the students each to research one of the principal characters: Alexander the Great, Cleopatra, Antiochus Epiphanes, Judas Maccabaeus, Julius Caesar or Herod the Great. Otherwise you will have to spend the next lesson talking, and the students may lose interest.