

Aim of lesson

To help the students understand how God's principles apply in practice to building a godly and happy marriage.

Bible background

1 Corinthians 7; Ephesians 5:22-33; Genesis 2:24; Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 24:5; Psalm 128; Proverbs 31:10-31; Mark 10:2-12; 2 Corinthians 6:14-15

Preparation required

Obviously to a certain extent how you approach this subject will be determined by your own marital status and experiences. You may not feel comfortable making the discussion really personal, but bear in mind that this might be the most helpful to the students.

Decide the most tactful way to lead the discussion if any of your students have parents who are split up, remarried, or who are not Christadelphians. Also take into consideration any people in the meeting with marriage problems. However if it can be done sensitively the immediacy of these situations may help the students in any decisions that they come to. Have answers ready on your own views about marrying out of our community and about divorce and remarriage but be prepared to explain that there are other points of view. (There are lessons in Part 3 of 'The way of Life' which deal with these specific problems.)

Suggested outline of lesson

Examples

Ask the students to think of some people they know who have a successful marriage (they need not name them). 'Successful' is not a very good word to use because it implies a) there is one right and wrong way to do things b) once achieved you can sit back and do nothing and c) it seems to leave God out of the equation. Perhaps you could discuss this with the students.

What do you mean by a 'successful' marriage?

It's important to get the young people thinking along the right lines, and to understand what God wants of our marriages rather than the images portrayed in glossy magazines. A successful marriage is not necessarily one where there is plenty of money and 'the sex is great'.

What things will help to make a marriage successful? Why?

See if you can come up with a list of criteria for a 'good' marriage. Here are just a few suggestions, not in any order of priority: being good parents, clear roles, faith, forgiveness, friendship, God, listening to each other, love, making a home (how important are material things?), passion, physical affection, prayer, reliability, respect, selflessness, sex, shared activities, shared faith, striving for the same goals, support, thoughtfulness, time. As you discuss each aspect, get the young people to make a list in their books with a brief note as to why it is important. Some reasons may be obvious but it is still a good idea to write something to help clarify thoughts and distinguish between some apparently similar qualities. Other aspects may need more explanation if for instance there was disagreement in the group, or if it is a subject that had not occurred to the young people before.

All these things are connected

Get the young people to think about whether these things are connected. ONE way would be to draw a chart (there's a blank in the students' notes) with the things you have identified written across the top and repeated down the side. If the entries on the left hand side start at the top and work down, they should be repeated at the top starting at the right and working right to left.

Then consider whether there is a connection between each pair of criteria. If there are few connections, then it could be that the criteria are different from each other. However, if the exercise is done properly the students

will see that these are not really separate topics, but that underlying a successful marriage are a few core values. The result could look something like this:

	Having fun together	Spending money wisely	Having clear roles	Sharing the same faith	Having the same goals	Being forgiving	Spending time together	Helping each other	Being faithful	Loyalty	Commitment	Loving each other	Talking about things
Talking about things		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Loving each other	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Commitment		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Loyalty		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				
Being faithful	✓	✓					✓	✓					
Helping each other			✓		✓		✓						
Spending time together	✓	✓		✓	✓								
Being forgiving				✓									
Having the same goals	✓	✓	✓	✓									
Sharing the same faith		✓											
Having clear roles													
Spending money wisely	✓												
Having fun together													

This is only an example, of course, but it does illustrate some interesting points. It would be reasonable to conclude that the criteria with the most ticks - 'loving each other', 'commitment', 'talking about things' - are more important than those with few, like 'having clear roles'.

These references may help with some of the topics.

Shared faith; 1 Kings 11:1-5, Exodus 34:15-16, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15, 1 Corinthians 7:12-16.

Care for each other; Ephesians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, 13:4-6, Colossians 3:19, Proverbs 31:12, 1 Peter 3:1-9

- Loyalty: Genesis 2:23-24.
- Physical affection: 1 Corinthians 7:5.

End the lesson on a positive note.

It is very important to stress in the discussion that marriage is a good thing ordained by God and that it can and does work if you follow Godly principles. Although we are not given many direct instructions about marriage we are given lots of examples and instructions about relationships, which if we follow will help us to make marriage work.

During the discussion don't forget that marriage, as a relationship between two imperfect human beings, is bound to have its good and bad points. However if the basic components are right then you should be able to see that overall marriage is a good thing. Marriage gets a very bad press these days, and although Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:1 that it is better not to be married, he means to be celibate in mind and body, whereas today's worldly view is often that it is better not to marry because it is going to fail anyway.

Relevance to our lives

As the young people go looking for a partner (and at this stage it is unlikely to be a permanent one) they should remember God's principles about marriage, and use those to help them make wise decisions.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to follow the good examples that we have thought about today. Give us the courage to make sensible decisions about relationships that are in accordance with your principles. Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

- Planning. You might like to ask the young people how much of this they ought to discuss with a partner whom they plan to marry. We hope they will decide that so far as possible all aspects should be discussed and put into practice before marriage starts e.g. reading the Bible, praying together.
- Changing roles. You might also like to discuss role-reversal - if a husband was out of work, for example, or incapacitated in some way. Is it a good idea? Is it wrong? Would it work? For you? For others? If it was necessary?