

Aim of lesson

To get the young people to think through this subject in the light of Scripture, and to consider some of the practical issues.

Bible background

Genesis 2-3, Proverbs 31.

Preparation required

Think through what has happened in your experience, and in families you have known. What were the impacts of the decisions that were made? Be prepared to give the young people examples that they can discuss - you may need to be careful not to gossip. As in the previous lesson, don't be afraid to tell them of mistakes you may have made, or to describe to them difficult situations you have been in and ask them to discuss them.

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduction

Begin by asking the class what they think about this subject. If there are girls in the class you could ask them what career aspirations they may have, what is the attitude of their friends, and what they have been taught at school.

Scriptural Principles

This lesson is not really about marriage, and it is important to keep this early part in perspective. But it is worth beginning by reminding the class that God in the beginning had in mind different roles for men and women.

- Look at Genesis 2.18-21; Genesis 3.16; 1 Timothy 2.9-14
- The main points of these passages are that
- God intended that a wife should have a supporting role to her husband: Eve was made as a help for Adam. If you are using the AV, note that 'help' and 'meet' are separate words, and that 'meet' is an old word meaning suitable. There is no such thing as a helpmeet!
- This is reinforced after Eve was the first to eat the fruit.
- Paul confirms, in writing to Timothy, that these principles still apply, and 1 Peter 3.1-7 is in the same vein (so the common view that Paul was a woman-hater does not apply)

Women in Authority

Get the class to think of any women in Scripture who were queens, judges or business women.

The Queen of Sheba and Esther are obvious examples, though it is worth, in passing, making the point that there are no examples where a queen ruled over her husband.

Deborah was a judge, in considerable authority. It is worth looking at Judges 4:4-9 and noting that Barak should have taken responsibility for the situation and because he would not the glory was given to Jael the wife of Heber.

So far as business women are concerned, look at Proverbs 31, and read verses 10 - 31.

- Her position at home: she is responsible for the home (v22); It is 'her household' (v 21, 27), and 'her servant girls (v15)'.
- Her occupation and status: she buys a field, plants a vineyard (v16), and trades (v18); she makes clothes and sells them. She is respected and praised by her husband (v28) and in public (v31), and acknowledged as a person in her own right, not just her husband's wife.
- Her relationship with her husband: she seeks his good (v11,12), and because of her, her husband is respected (v23).

Lydia (Acts 16.14) was a dealer in purple cloth. Priscilla (Acts 18.3) and Aquila were both tentmakers.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Scripture is full of maids and maidservants, from Hagar to the maid of the high priest who questioned Peter.

Sum up this part of the lesson by making clear that:

- there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that a woman should not work, and several examples of women who did.
- the New Testament confirms that God's intention regarding the relationship between a husband and wife still applies.

What risks are associated with a woman working?

If a woman is single

Choice of career is a difficult judgment for a young woman to make. If her aspirations are to marry and raise a family she may feel that she will want to develop the skills necessary for that difficult and most important role. On the other hand she may not marry and may then regret that she did not become a brain surgeon.

What about both husband and wife going out to work?

If they have no children:

- because they are both working hard, other things may well suffer
- their marriage may suffer because they are both under stress, and both return home not to a warm welcome and a meal but to more work
- their work in the ecclesia, their responsibilities to their parents, and their care for others, may suffer because they have no time to attend to anything outside their own home. This in turn may damage their marriage because they have no common interests outside their home; awareness of others' problems always puts one's own difficulties into perspective.
- because they both mix a lot with people outside their common circle of friends, the temptation to be unfaithful is increased.

If they have children:

- the children may be neglected because they have to come home to an empty house.
- the children may feel uncared for
- they may misuse the time until a parent comes home: there may be no control of what they are watching on television/video/computer, where they are or what they are doing.
- their parents, when they do get home from work, may be too tired to attend to the needs of the children.

What about a wife working instead of her husband?

If a wife can earn more than her husband, what issues are associated with her going out to work and her husband staying at home? Or what if her husband cannot find work?

This situation can bring problems. For example, both husband and wife may feel guilty that they are not following the pattern for marriage that God has prescribed. It can be lonely for the husband, who will not be able to meet sociably during the day with other men, as his wife could have with other women. The man may feel inadequate, and the wife's position as the bread-winner may tend to encourage her to 'take over' at home. Having said all that, there are situations where there is little alternative. In that case it is important that friends, and members of the ecclesia, are supportive rather than critical. And try to help practically with the difficulties. Try to ensure that all these points are raised, and make it clear that there is nothing wrong with a wife taking the lead when there is a good reason.

You could consider the example of Abigail in 1 Sam 25.14-19.

Working relationships

Finally, you could discuss the topic of working relationships between men and women. It is important for men always to treat women with respect, even if some women regard such courtesy as 'sexist'.

But the relationship must be at arm's length. Most infidelity to a husband or wife arises from a working relationship, and a friendly association may quickly become too intimate.

Relevance to our lives

It is very important that girls and boys have a balanced view of the role of women in the workplace, know what the Bible says and know how to cope with pressure from the world when it conflicts with what they believe to be right.

Prayer

Get the young people to write their own prayer asking for guidance regarding their future (or present) work situation.

Other suggestions for activities

Role-play an interview for a job where the young people ask each other what their priorities would be in certain situations.