

# Marriage: Good, Better, and Best

God designed marriage between men and women to reflect the kind of relationships He has with His people, based on love, faithfulness, and mutual submission.

## LIFE NEED

If there's one thing teens know about, it's dreams. And when they dream, they dream big. One common dream is about a "special someone" who will be their future spouse. Unfortunately, reality doesn't always treat such romantic dreams favorably. Teens are surrounded by a culture that puts very little importance on the intimacy and commitment of marriage, emphasizing instead shallow communication and instant gratification. In addition, many have seen their parents' or other significant adults' marriages fail.

Even though your students may not be seriously looking at marriage as an immediate option for them, they are forming important ideas about what's good and bad about marriage. Some teens may already be in romances that will eventually lead to marriage. Others may be entering serious relationships in the next few years. It's never too early to consider the basis of those relationships. Use this lesson to help your students glimpse God's kind of commitment as a model for their own commitments. What they learn now will stand them in terrific stead in the months and years ahead.

## RESOURCES

- Copies of *The Best: Discovering Scripture Treasure* handout
- Large sheet of butcher paper or poster board
- Markers
- Tape
- Pencils
- Index cards

## BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Genesis 2:18-25; Exodus 24:3-8; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ephesians 5:21-25

In **Genesis 2:18-25** the first man and woman were united, and this became the example for future marriages. A man would leave his parents and be united with his wife (v. 24). They were to be united in a covenantal relationship with each other. This relationship binds them to each other more than to their parents.

This reflects the covenantal relationship God established with his people (**Exodus 24:3-8**). In **Jeremiah 31:31-34** God declared that He was committed to being there for them even if they weren't there for Him. Although the people of Israel broke the covenant, God fulfilled His part in the covenant by being "a husband to them" (v. 32).

**Ephesians 5:21-25** builds on the metaphor comparing the divine-human relationship with the husband-wife relationship. The wife is to submit to her husband like the Church submits to Christ, and the husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church. But this must be understood in light of what has already been said by Paul in this chapter. Speaking to all Christians, Paul says to "live a life of love" (v. 2) and "submit to one another" (v. 21). All Christians should submit to and love one another. This mutual submission is a rejection of self-centeredness so we can work for the good of each other. Thus, submission is actually part of the concept of love. Submission puts emphasis on the relative worth of another.

Within the marital relationship, Paul puts equal emphasis on the submission of the wife and the love of the husband. Christian marriage occurs when the husband really loves his wife as Christ unconditionally loves the Church—giving himself up for her—and when the wife similarly respects her husband (v. 33).

## PREPARING THE TEACHER

We all want to be perfectly loved, to have our faults overlooked, our hidden talents recognized, our dreams encouraged. We hope someone—someone we've yet to meet or someone we know now—will live up to the ideal. For many of us, the one we envision as loving us perfectly is our future spouse.

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***A young man prayed, "Lord, give me a wife that loves Thee—for then I know she will love me."***

—*The Complete Book of Zingers*

are no divided loyalties, no ulterior motives, no chances of abandonment. You can do nothing to lose this love, and you need do nothing to earn it; in fact, you can do nothing to deserve it. You are loved by One who respects your unique talents and wants to see your potential fulfilled.

Of course, that One is God. In giving His perfect love, He has set the gold standard, created the pattern for human

love in marriage. It seems so simple, yet so complex, that God presents the ideal for marriage as two interrelated concepts: unconditional love and mutual submission.

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***The knowledge that God knows us intimately yet loves us unconditionally provides the security we need for building intimacy.***

—*Intimacy Through Communication*

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***Someone asked me to name the time  
Our friendship stopped and love began.  
Oh, my darling, that's the secret  
Our friendship never stopped.***

—Lois Wyse

It's not easy to choose with whom you will share this journey. To continue on this journey with your spouse is a day-by-day endeavor. However, when God is also part of the marriage relationship, He can bring about the attitude changes that are necessary to make our perfect ideal become a reality.

Developing a healthy human relationship is a noble quest. But even now, you are perfectly loved. You are loved by One who is perfectly committed to you. There

Marriage is a complicated jumble of hope and disappointment, emotion and practicality, dependence and independence.

### Think about God:

- ✎ How would you describe God's unconditional love for you?
- ✎ What specific incident in your life has made you sure of this love?

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### Think about when you were a teenager:

- ✎ Recall your longing for true friendships and love.
- ✎ How did you feel when your friendships or relationships fell short?
- ✎ What was your attitude toward marriage?

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### Think about your students:

- ✎ What view of marriage are you aware your students get at home?
- ✎ In what ways have you observed your students' desire for meaningful relationships?
- ✎ Think about the individual students in your class. Pray specifically for the choices they make in dating relationships and friendships.

## TEACHING THE LESSON

### NOTES

### LIFE

*Student Goal: Evaluate personal attitudes and ideals about marriage.*

#### **Good and Better** ⌚10

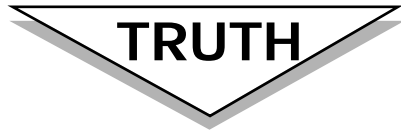
Most teenagers are probably not seriously looking at marriage as an immediate option for their lives, but they're forming important ideas about what's good and bad about marriage. By examining fictitious TV marriages, they can identify and articulate their current ideas of what marriage should be.

Present several examples of TV marriages your students are familiar with. To capture your students' attention, consider videotaping 30-second segments of these couples interacting, and bring them to class to show. You can also ask students for examples.

For each example ask, **Do you think this is a good marriage? What is good about this marriage?**

For each response from your students, ask a clarifying question to help them put concepts with the examples. You might ask, **Are you saying that you think a good marriage is one with mutual respect for one another's careers?**

Next ask your class for any other characteristics of a good marriage that haven't been introduced by the TV examples. Your students should realize they may already have strong ideas about what a good marriage is based on. Lead into the next phase of the lesson by saying the following in your own words: **The interesting thing about TV marriages is that they last only 30 to 60 minutes. So TV couples can be witty and wisecracking and still be together next week. Real marriages need something to make it through the day-to-day living, and for that guidance we need to look to God.**



*Student Goals: Explore God's idea of the basis of a good marriage; understand God's commitment to each of us; see how commitment is lived out.*

## NOTES

### ***The Best: Discovering Scripture Treasures*** ⌚15

Distribute to your students copies of the handout *The Best*, which is designed to help them discover God's ideals for a good marriage relationship. Work through this handout as a group, according to the following directions.

Ask a student to read Genesis 2:18-25. Then ask these questions:

- **Why did God think Adam needed a mate?**
- **What does it mean when it says, "they will become one flesh" (v. 24)?**

Now ask the students to find the Genesis passage on their sheet. Ask them to write down what kind of person they could be united to and feel no shame.

Have a student read Exodus 24:3-8. Explain that the Lord was making a covenant with the Israelites. A covenant entailed mutual obligation. In other words, both parties were responsible to ensure that the other party was cared for. Ask:

- **Why do you think God made a covenant with the Israelites?**
- **Why was it important to make this covenant?**

Have your students find the Exodus passage and write down what obligations they feel they would need to fulfill in order to establish a covenant with a mate.

Now have a student read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here God makes certain promises to the people. Ask:

- **Why was it necessary for God to make these promises?**
- **How would you have felt if God had made these promises to you?**

Ask them to find the Jeremiah scripture on their sheet and to write down several promises that they would want to make to their future mate.

Lastly, read Ephesians 5:21-25. Ask:

- **What does Paul mean when he says to "submit"?**
- **What difference is there between "love" and "submit"?**
- **In what ways should our relationship to our spouse imitate God's relationship with us?**

# NOTES

Have your students once again look at their sheets, find the Ephesians passage, and write down ways that they could show love by submitting to their spouses.

Say, **Once we understand the love that God has for His people and the incredible lengths He will go to share that love, we see that we have a huge responsibility to love our future spouse in the same way. Let's decide now.**



*Student Goals: Incorporate God's ideal for marriage into a picture of a "perfect" mate; commit to being the kind of person that keeps commitments.*

## ***When I Dream . . .*** ⌚8

"The Good and Better" discussion about good marriages and "The Best" exercise on attributes of a biblical marriage will lay the foundation for this exercise. Now the students turn their attention toward their own dreams for the future and desires for meaningful relationships.

Give each student four index cards with a vertical line on each card to divide it in half. For this part of the lesson, instruct them to write only on the left side of each card and to write a number on each card in the upper left corner, 1 to 4. Direct them to think about the attributes discussed in the lesson by giving these directions:

- On card 1, write a word or phrase that describes the attitude you hope your future spouse will have toward God.
- On card 2, write a word or phrase that describes how you hope your future spouse will treat you.
- On card 3, write a word or phrase that describes how your future spouse would view your dreams or career goals.
- On card 4, write a word or phrase that describes how you hope your future spouse will respond if (and when!) you disappoint him or her.

Give students a chance to talk about the words they choose. Ask them how their lists might change in light of exploring God's plan for marriage.

## ***The Tables Turned*** ⌚7

Close this lesson by repeating the list above but with your students as the object of the sentence. This time have them write their responses on the right side of each card.

- On card 1, write a word or phrase that describes the attitude you hope you will have toward God.

- On card 2, write a word or phrase that describes how you hope you will treat your future spouse.
- On card 3, write a word or phrase that describes how you would view your future spouse's dreams or career goals.
- On card 4, write a word or phrase that describes how you hope you will respond when your future spouse disappoints you.

Allow your students some time to look at their own cards and see how similar or how different their responses were based on what they wanted their spouse to commit to and what they were willing to commit to. Ask your students to pray and ask God to help them become the kind of people who commit to relationships that honor God. Allow them to pray silently for a few moments, and then close by praying for all of your students. Ask God to help them discover together in the next few weeks the treasures that marriage can hold for a person who views marriage as a sacred covenant relationship. Consider keeping the cards and displaying them as a reminder during the remaining lessons in this unit.

## NOTES

## CREATIVE OPTIONS

### *Music 1*

Consider using the following song during this lesson:

“Five Candles” by Jars of Clay on *Much Afraid*

### *Music 2*

In the TRUTH section, ask, **How are these concepts different from what we hear about love in our popular culture?** Break the class into two groups and have them think of popular song titles or lyrics that contradict the biblical treasures. Have each group act out one song title for the other group to guess. Discuss why students believe pop culture rejects or ignores these attributes of good relationships.

### *Group Singing*

“Step by Step,” “Cry of My Heart,” “Knowing You,” and “You Alone,” all from the *Guitar Praise!* chorus book (Lillenas Publishing, MB-901) available at [www.barefootministries.com](http://www.barefootministries.com).

### *Video*

Videotape an interview with several couples, asking them to share what it means to submit in love. Show this during the TRUTH section.

### *Discussions*

For either the LIFE or VISION phase of the lesson, invite one or two young married couples (married one to three years), and let the students play reporter, asking questions such as, **How did you know your spouse was the person you wanted to marry? Based on your dreams of whom you wanted to marry, is your partner what you expected? How is he or she different from what you envisioned?**

### *Covenant Writing*

Since this lesson compares the love God has for us with the type of love we should have for our spouses, allow your students an opportunity to practice writing a covenant that they would commit to for a future spouse.

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