



Learning Together

How to Strengthen the Family

- A Participant's Book for Family Ministry



Anna-Kaarina and Matti Palmu

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Family Ministry

Prepared by Anna-Kaarina Palmu and Matti Palmu



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Tel. +251 11 550 7846

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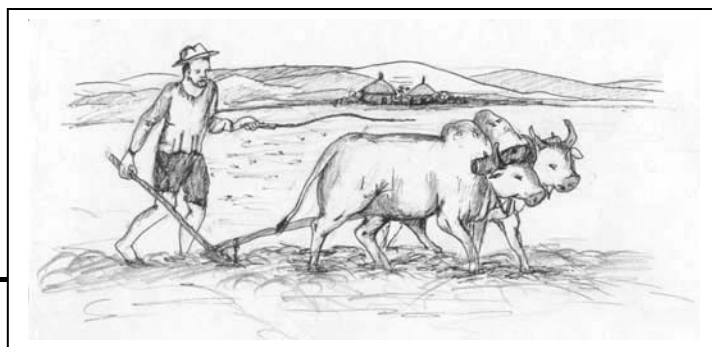
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(If not otherwise mentioned:) All the drawings made by Ato Assefa Guta



The Long Journey from Vision to Practical Work:

A story about waiting for the right time of God

Northern start

Anna-Kaarina and I were born in Finland, in Northern Europe. When we met each other during our University studies in Helsinki, one of the first things to make clear was: Do we share the call for Mission work? We did, so in 1974, at the age of 25, we arrived in Ethiopia. We were a young, small family with a daughter. Now it is our 38th year of marriage and our 34th year since we started serving in Ethiopia.

As time passed we were blessed with three more children in Ethiopia. All four of our children are now married and we have six grandchildren in our family.

The young marriage

We married when we were only 21-22 years old and spent the majority of our working years and our married life living in Africa. The first years in Ethiopia were not always sunny for us. Nevertheless, we felt that we had a happy, good marriage and family life. Then a friend of ours invited us for a Marriage course. Having lived 14 years in marriage we thought that we had no special reason to join such a course, but finally we decided "why not join."

Marriage Course in 1985, an eye opening experience for us!

The weeklong course opened our eyes. We saw, that we did not need to be satisfied with a "good" marriage only, since it could be improved! We learned that our marriage needed to be tended and nurtured. Since God has given us the great gift of marriage, we should care for this marvellous gift.

Very soon we also started to think that this eye-opening experience is something we would like to share with others. We attended the course while on a short furlough in Finland, planning to return to Africa for our service within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

Is marriage teaching needed in our church?

After the return to our place of service (Hossana, one of the Synods) we started asking our Ethiopian co-workers this question. Is there a need for marriage teaching in the area we are serving, or maybe in our own congregation? All the replies were more or less hesitant: "Well, yes, of course it could be ... but ..." We started thinking that this idea about marriage teaching was our own enthusiasm, but *not* a vision from God. So we decided to keep quiet, to wait and see God's plan.

Later, we were transferred to Addis Abeba for service in the Central Office of the Church. We served there from 1988 to 1993. Sister Anna-Kaarina started the EECMY AIDS Prevention and Control Program; Pastor Matti was the Theological Advisor of the Church. The issues related to marriage quite naturally came up in the AIDS Program, which at that time carried the name "Preventing AIDS etc through strengthening Christian family life."

We kept on wondering, whether God wanted us to do something together, as a couple, in the field of marriage teaching in our church. We got an appointment from Mr. Francis Stephanos, the EECMY President that time. We asked openly, whether he thought it possible or suitable, that we, foreign missionaries would start teaching on Christian marriage in this church. The President took time, considered our question and replied:

Green light from the Church President

"Well, obviously there are some negative points in your being foreigners. As foreigners you cannot know the culture as an Ethiopian would. But we should remember that there is no such a thing called "Ethiopian Culture" because there are a number of Ethiopian cultures. I must admit that I, as an Ethiopian, may know only my own original local culture, it is impossible for me to know all the dozens of Ethiopian cultures! You as foreigners are a stranger to all local cultures, and I am a stranger to all but one - my own local culture."

"But," the President went on saying, "quite obviously there are also some positive points in your being a foreigner. You are free of some taboos, which might bind me. As a foreigner you also may find an audience, which might not be ready to listen to me, an Ethiopian."

The Church President concluded: "So then, as the Gospel knows no boundaries, why should marriage teaching have such limitations? Go ahead, try, whether or not you find ways to teach on marriage - the need certainly is there!"

Marriage Courses in 1988-1993 in different Church Units

Under the umbrella of the AIDS Program we started a series of so-called "AIDS - Marriage Courses". We ran the courses as a team, the two of us, sometimes teaching together with Rev. Teshome Wege and Mrs. Berhane Jirata. We had courses in different parts of the Church: Dembi Dollo, Ijaji, Fiche, Ambo, Woliso, Hossana, Lideta in Addis Abeba, etc.

Everywhere we got the same kind of feed back: "This teaching is really needed. This is something we have been waiting for. Please arrange more teaching like this..." But our main duties were elsewhere, we could arrange only a very limited number of courses during that time.

In 1993, while preparing to leave Ethiopia and spend several years in Finland, we presented our written report on our Marriage teaching during the past five years. We appealed to the Church Officers: "Please appoint somebody to take responsibility on arranging the teaching in the field of Christian Marriage and Family Life!"

Receiving Training for Family Ministry in Finland.

We stayed in Finland for more than six years, until the higher education of our younger sons was complete. While in Finland, we received training for Family Ministry. We especially focused our training in the field of Preventive or Supportive Family Life Education available through the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Courses included: "Special training for Family Ministry;" "Couple communication;" "Marriage enrichment;" "Expressing emotions;" "Sexuality in marriage;" and "Marriage Encounter;" etc.

It is well known that there are great marriage-related problems in Western countries. Thus, we thought that we could utilize that training regardless of whether the Lord guided us to stay in Finland, or opened the way back to Africa again. Sr. Anna-Kaarina even got a permanent job as a Family Ministry Secretary.

Work in Ethiopia?

While in Finland, we kept asking the incoming missionaries from Ethiopia, whether they had heard about any ongoing, organized Marriage teaching within the EECMY. The replies were quite hesitant. When our younger sons were about to leave home for further studies, we sent a letter to EECMY leaders requesting information about whether Marriage teaching was being given or whether the church would possibly desire our input in that matter. The time passed. Since there was no reply we concluded once again, that this idea about marriage teaching was our own enthusiasm and perhaps *not* a vision from God. Yet, we decided to keep quiet and wait and see.

Then, to our astonishment, our Mission (the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, FELM) Counsellor brought from Ethiopia us a ready made job description for Family Ministry! We wondered, after all the hesitations, could it be, that this vision *is* from God. We applied for leave of absence from our permanent jobs in the Church of Finland and returned to the FELM in August 1999, in order to leave for Ethiopia in September 1999.

But the visas were not granted. We were told: "There is a problem in getting work permits in Addis Abeba." Our two congregations had already employed new people in our positions, so we served the Mission temporarily in Finland. We wondered, whether the inability to get visas was now the final stop for our enthusiasm, an enthusiasm *not* founded on the call from God?

The Mission started the process of sending us to Southern Africa, since the chance to enter Ethiopia seemed to be blocked. Should we go to Botswana, Namibia or even to Portuguese-speaking Angola?! That was a hard time. It really challenged our vision. But we decided to leave the decision to the Mission - or actually to God! - since we had left our Church jobs for two years.

Finally, we got permission from EECMY to enter Ethiopia with Business visas hoping that the work permits would come later, which is what eventually happened. So we arrived in Addis Abeba in January 2000.

The start of EECMY Family Life Education Program

According to the original plan we were to work within the Gospel Ministry Department (GMD; the name was later on changed to be Department for Mission and Theology, DMT) of the EECMY Central Office in Addis Abeba. Quite soon, though, it became clear that there was no chance to get a Work Permit for work in Addis Abeba. Another solution was to be found. There were negotiations between the Church President, Rev. Yadesa Daba, the FELM Area Coordinator and the leaders of the Synod and Hossana Mekane Yesus Seminary. Then we gradually prepared an alternative plan with the GMD Director, Rev. Itessa Gobena. We were to join the staff of Hossana Mekane Yesus Seminary and start the work based there. From the very beginning, however, it was

made very clear, that this Program would serve the whole Mekane Yesus Church, and that the Program was based in Hossana only temporarily, until it would be possible to get the Work Permit for Addis Abeba. The Program Description of the "EECMY Christian Family Life Education Program" (FLEP) was approved by the Seminary Board in June, 2000.

What is "Family Life Education?" How to begin, who is to teach, how, where, whom ... ?

There were plenty of open questions at the beginning of the program. However, we did receive very good help and support from Rev. Itessa and the Seminary staff. So, we simply started the program without knowing where it would lead us!

Basic Marriage Courses

First, we decided to arrange a Basic Marriage Course (for couples only) in each and every Church Unit. There have been multiple aims for these courses:

1) To help the participants to find some useful improvements for their own marriage and family life, 2) Through that, to help them serve better in their respective duties in the church; 3) To encourage the participants to teach on marriage issues in their localities, 4) To find possible candidates for future Training of Trainers (TOT) courses for Family Ministry. In addition to these, quite obviously our aim has also been 5) To raise awareness for Family Ministry amongst Church Units' leadership, pastors, evangelists etc.

Within five years we arranged a four-day Basic Marriage Course in all 20 Church Units. The acceptance everywhere has been overwhelmingly positive, open, and hearty. By 2005 there were close to 400 couples (i.e. about 800 persons) participating in these courses. Amongst them c 60% are pastors' couples. One third of all the Synod presidents, several other members of the Synod Officers and most of the Gospel Ministry Directors have participated.

In many places we have been requested: "When do you come for the next time because there are more people who need this course!" Our reply has been strict: We do NOT come for the second round. Instead we'll train other instructors for you! And really, now we have instructors in each and every Church Unit. Also, there have been Basic Courses for the EECMY Central Office staff. We were namely challenged by Central Office staff: "You have been teaching all over the Church Units, when will you teach us?" In response, a Basic Course for the top leaders of the Church was made part of the program. After that, finally, we can say that Family Ministry has gained its due place in the basic structure of the Church.

Teaching in the Theological Institutions and Bible Schools of EECMY

The Church has four Theological institutions, namely in Addis Abeba, Hossana, Nekemte and Aira. For the past years we have been teaching in these seminaries in such a way that each and every student gets an intensive course in Family Ministry during the diploma or degree level studies. Thus, we have had a good opportunity to screen future church leaders in order to find new Family Ministry instructors. Family Life Education has also been included in the Curriculum of the Theological institutions of the Church.

There are more than 30 Bible Schools in the EECMY. Certainly there is a need to teach Family Ministry there, too. Family Life Education needs to be specifically included in the Curriculum of the Bible Schools. Then of course we need to train enough Bible School teachers to teach this subject.

Pre-marital teaching!

One of the really big challenges is how to arrange pre-marital teaching. There is a burning need for teaching the youth, but many questions exist. Questions like how to start, who is to teach, what methods, where, and to whom? How can we include Family life teaching in youth work activities? Could there be teaching in Junior Secondary and Secondary Schools, perhaps even in government run schools? What about materials for this? - Since 2005 there has been a good start in this field of teaching the youth within EECMY.

Training the Trainers

The responsibility for giving basic teaching on Family Ministry has already been transferred to the local level instructors. By August 2008 there are about 360 people who have participated in the two weeks Training of Trainers' Courses. Reports on their activities have come from most Church Units.

On activity of the Family Ministry trained instructors in Church Units

The local instructors in the Units take care of basic level teaching. It is encouraging to see how they have taught many courses and a variety of different teachings.

The trained Family Ministry instructors have taught the following target groups:

- Pre-marital teaching for young people,
- Pre-marital teaching for engaged couples,
- Teaching in connection to Confirmation class,
- Marriage courses for couples,
- Women's courses and meetings,
- Teaching for Congregational and Parish leaders,
- Marriage teaching / sermon at a Wedding,
- Repeated Pre-Sunday-service teaching in local Congregations,
- Teaching Youth groups, Choir groups, Prayer groups, etc
- Teaching at a Bible School,
- Teaching the Bible School students with their wives,
- Marriage courses for Pastors, Evangelists etc with their wives,
- Teaching at Vocational school, at High School; Etc.

Some quotations from letters of trained Family Ministry instructors:

"We have started giving emphasis on Family Ministry in our congregation. It is amazing how many people are now recommending that we (the Evangelist and his wife) would concentrate more on this area. We are grateful that our congregation has accepted our suggestion to make Family ministry, which has been neglected and forgotten, as one area of our service."

"After we came back from TOT Course we tried much to get pastors, evangelists and church administrators to arrange this teaching for concerned church servants, and we succeeded. Now we are getting many reports that the teaching is helping the affected Christian families."

"We have lived in marriage for 27 years by now. We took part in the Basic Marriage Course some three years ago. Actually we consider our real married life to have started from that remarkable course. We praise the Lord for that - and also the people around us can witness that our life has been changed!"

"We have lived in marriage for more than 35 years. After all these years we first thought we wouldn't need to have 'a Marriage Course' at this stage. But now quite astonished we realize how many things we still have to learn. Marriage obviously is a life-long process of learning!"

Follow up and continuous training

We have started to train trainers of trainers, which means people who can run the Training of Trainers' courses in various parts of the Church. This seems to be the only way to fulfil the tremendous challenge in strengthening the Family Ministry. The trained ones also need ongoing help, encouragement and further training for their service. Therefore TOT Refresher courses need to be arranged regularly.

THE VISION OF THE EECMY FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION PROGRAM IS:

- to support Church members to live in happy and healthy marriages and families;
- to encourage church workers who are happy in their marriages to spread the Good News through their example and teaching;
- to improve the status of girls and women through strengthening the Christian family model;
- to help in the frightening situation of the AIDS pandemic through stressing the significance of faithfulness in the life of couples.

WHAT IS "FAMILY MINISTRY"?

In many African societies it is common to think that everybody gets married sooner or later. The idea of single adults is strange. This is why Family Ministry in this context is naturally thought to be related to marriage in one way or another. It is also good to remember that in Africa 'family' normally means the extended family, which is much larger unit than the 'nuclear family' of western countries.

Teaching on marriage and various family related issues is needed for a large variety of target groups:

- **youth** (most of whom will get married, the only question is when),
- **engaged couples,**
- **newly married couples,**
- **couples of different ages,**
- **parents,**
- **grandparents** (out of whom many might be widows).
- One additional target group is **workers in the different fields of education, child raising, health etc**, in addition to the church workers.

Family Ministry

"Family Life Education" includes many different features of Church work. It means education in the sense of teaching or instructing, but is also related to the field of Counseling, whether pre-marital or marriage and family counseling. Thus, **"Family Ministry"** is an appropriate overall title for this work.

Christian Family Ministry is bringing hope to Africa which is suffering an AIDS pandemic. Educational work always takes time, but it is worth doing. The churches could well share their experiences and put in practice each other's findings and working methods.

Aim, goal

The aim of the EECMY Family Life Education Program is to help church people live in happy marriages and families. The happier their married lives are, the better service the church servants can give in their respective duties.

Finally, **the goal is to have Christian Family Life Education as an essential part of ordinary teaching in all levels of Church work.**

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE CHURCH' FAMILY MINISTRY

There is a great need to give Family ministry a strong focus in the work of the Church. When Christian family life is strengthened, the status of girls and women is also improving. As the AIDS pandemic is still worsening, the teaching on Christian family life and faithful partnership with one spouse only is an important part of fight against AIDS.

Continuous training

1) The plan is to **expand the Training of Trainers courses** in order to have enough instructors in all the Church Units.

2) Obviously there is also a need for **Training of Trainers of Trainers!** The training structure should produce area or sector based trainers for TOT Courses. There is a need for TOT courses in each and every Synod or Work Area!

Follow up

3) Those who are already trained need ongoing help, encouragement, and further training for their service. Thus, a **series of TOT Refresher courses** has been going on.

Material production

4) Material Production has been under process for years. **The Trainer's Handbook** has been translated to Amharic and Oromo languages. Then there has been a clear need for Participant's Book, i.e. for this book in your hand.

5) There is also a need for **handouts for the course participants.**

6) There is a need for suitable Family Ministry textbooks for Theological Seminaries and Bible Schools. Hopefully this Participant's Book could serve as such teaching material.

Pre-marital teaching

7) One area of urgent need is **Pre-marital Teaching for the Youth.** In 2005 there was an expansion of the Family Life Education activities when a Missionary couple started work. They will serve by focusing especially on pre-marital teaching.

Marriage Counselling

8) Marriage Counseling is an area of crying need. There is an obvious need for a **Counseling Center model in local Congregations.** - Furthermore, there is an urgent need for **Training of Marriage & Family Counselors.**

ABOUT THIS PARTICIPANT'S BOOK FOR FAMILY MINISTRY

The "Strengthening the Family - A Trainer's Handbook for Family Ministry" was published in 2006. This **"Learning Together How to Strengthen the Family - A Participant's Book for Family Ministry"** is based on the previous book, including the materials for the same 30 lessons and 15 Bible Studies as the Trainer's Book. Both books have been prepared by us, two foreign missionaries, who have served in Africa about twenty years.

The material of the two books has been developed from input of various Marriage Courses and Training of Trainers (TOT) Courses in Ethiopia. The versions ready at the time of each TOT Course during 2002-2005 were given to the trainees for use and further comments. The improved versions were then given to the next TOT Course participants, etc. Thus, we may say that this Participant's Book is not only prepared by the two European missionaries, but by various Ethiopian trainees, who have used the material for their teaching work in different parts of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). We thank all of them!

Comment

A Reader of the Handbook for Family Ministry, Mrs. Tseganesh Ayele (Secretary for Women's work and Family issues at the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, ECFE), wrote her comment as follows: *"Before I started to read the book I thought it would be the European way of life and teaching. However, after I finished my reading I found that it is well conceptualized from Ethiopian Christian Family Life. The teaching is more based on Biblical teachings."*

Thanks

We are grateful for *all* those various people who have contributed to the Handbook, and this Participant's Book, which is based on the Handbook, including the artist, Mr. Assefa Guta. At the final stage we received valuable comments in writing from Mrs. Tseganesh Ayele, Rev. Jalata Negeri and Mrs. Aberash Tolossa with her husband, Rev. Geneti Wayessa. Their hints for amendments or improvements have made the Handbook much better; more contextualized, in one word, more African! We also thank Rev. Iteffa Gobena, the EECMY President, and Rev. Alemu Shetta, The previous EECMY DMT Director, for their help and support. We thank Rev. Michael Weller for the English language checking of the entire text of the Handbook. Finally, we want to thank our Mission, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM). The FELM has financed the Family Life Education Program of the EECMY, and the printing of the Handbook and this Participant's Book.

What about our future plans in the field of Family Ministry?

Much of the work we have done in 2000-2008 can be and is being done better by the local, Ethiopian instructors in various areas. The Evangelical Church in Ethiopia has grown dramatically. When the EECMY was founded (1959) the membership figure was 20.000. The statistics of 2007 tell that now there are about 5 million members! We are now asking the Lord, whether we would be further needed, or wanted, for Family Ministry service, and if we are, where, how, and for what kind of service?

In addition to the service in Ethiopia, we have been involved in the Marriage Courses for Missionaries during summer times in Finland for the last fourteen years, starting 1995. The aim of those courses has been

to support the missionary couples and families in their family-related issues.

Starting from 2002, we have also been involved in training missionaries for Family Ministry. During these years there have been a couple of Training of Trainers' (TOT) courses in Family Ministry for Missionaries coming from various countries, where Finnish Missions are working. There have been missionary participants from 20 countries: Bangladesh, Botswana, Croatia, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Senegal, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela, etc. There will be, God willing, similar courses in future, too.

Where does God want us to serve in future? We are very open concerning answers to this question and are praying for the Lord's guidance in this matter. Family Ministry certainly needs to be strengthened in various Churches, in different parts of the world. Please join us in prayer for the Family Ministry of the various Churches worldwide!

Let us join hands in helping church people to live in happy marriages and families. The happier their married lives are, the better the service the Church servants can give in their respective duties. This will help to reach our final goal that His kingdom would come!

Gratefully submitted in September 2008,
(in the last days of the Ethiopian Millennium year of 2000)

Sr. Anna-Kaarina Palmu,
Rev. Matti Palmu

WHAT IS FAMILY MINISTRY?

What does "Family Life Education" mean?

"*Family Life Education*" includes a vast area of different teaching tasks within the Church. It is part of "*Family Ministry*," which also includes other supportive tasks of the Church.

Family Ministry is an important ministry of a teaching church. It is rooted in the needs of people living together and it arises out of the concern that the Gospel be lived in our homes and marriages. Within our marriages it also includes our parent-child relationships and our decisions about sexuality in so far as they reflect the Christian faith. (Leonard, *Family Ministry*, p. 11)

The Church wants to *serve the whole person*. One essential task to achieve this goal is to help people strengthen their family relationships, so that, they live together as Christian family.

Family Ministry also includes supportive tasks and guidance like "*Marriage counselling*," (e.g. supporting the married couple in their marital problems) and "*Family counselling*" (e.g. helping the grieving members of a family after the death of a loved one, or helping family members in the midst of serious difficulties; especially, the family that breaks up for some reason or other). Some of these ministries can actually be counted also as part of the Diakonia Ministry of the Church.

In this book we use the phrase "Family Life Education" to mean many different kinds of teachings, whether marital or pre-marital. There is no limit as to where, when, how, and to whom these teachings can and should be addressed.



Why is Family Life Education needed?

The Family is the foundation of society. A congregation is made up of family units; thus, Christian families are the basic units of the church. The church is an assembly of family members. Strengthening the marriage means strengthening the family, the church, and the society.

If church members are happy in their marriages and families, then they are free to worship in the congregation. Likewise, if the salaried and volunteer church workers live in joyful, healthy marriages and families, then they have a good starting point for their service in the church. The opposite is also true. If people are troubled in their marriages and families, then this will affect their worship and service in a negative way.

A healthy relationship between a husband and wife contributes to their relationship to God in positive ways, while marital problems very often lead to spiritual problems. Thus we can say that family life education and spiritual education are closely inter-related!

It is obvious that happiness at home contributes to one's work, whether they work in a church vocation or in a secular context. The fountain of a happy home is a happy marriage. When supporting our church people in their married life, we are, at the same time, supporting their daily work and ministries.

God instituted the gift of marriage. Marriage is a great gift from God. Therefore, we should earnestly take care of the gift God has given us. The fundamental question we need to ask ourselves is, *"What does it mean to take care of one's marriage?"*

Reasons Why the Care of Marriage Is Important:

We should help our members to live the Christian life; especially, in their homes. True, healthy Christian life starts in the home! Happy marriages produce happy families!

Every Christian should care for his/her marriage because it is a God-given gift. There are many Christians who never think of "caring for" their marriages because they somehow think that marriage is "automatically" taken care of simply because they are Christians. This is why some Christians are missing many tremendous and joyful components, which God intends them to have, in their marriages.

Christian marriages also need care because Christians are human beings and subject to temptation and sin like the rest of humanity. Marriage has both spiritual and earthly aspects and we need to care for both aspects. As Christians we should take especially good care of our marriages, since we are seen as examples of Christian family life in our society.

Our responsibility is to teach people and help them realise, that since we are human beings and sinners, our Christian marriages, like secular marriages, are targets of many dangers. For example, there is much unnecessary quarrelling and even fighting in Christian marriages, simply because people never received instructions on how to live with their spouses, how to communicate, or how to show love, etc. Marriage is also a place for spiritual warfare, where we can clearly see how Satan has an interest to harm and even destroy the marriages of Christians.

Furthermore, since we are living in the midst of an AIDS-pandemic in today's world, we can without hesitation say that marriage is a functioning weapon against HIV/AIDS! The more people live faithfully "one-to-one" in their Christian marriages, the less HIV/AIDS has ways to spread. Thus, Christian Family Life Education, marital and pre-marital, is also an answer to the burning question on how to stop AIDS.

Reasons to Care for Our Marriages:

1. *Any marriage needs care! No marriage is so good that it could not be better!*
2. We need to safeguard our homes for our children. Happily married parents provide the best and safest "home" for their children!
3. A truly Christian marriage helps to stop HIV/AIDS.
4. Strengthening the Christian family model improves the status of girls and women in our communities.
5. True Christian marriage reduces the amount of violence against women.

How to Care for Marriage? How to Teach about Marriage and to Whom It Should Be Taught.

Caring for of one's marriage starts with an eye-opening experience. When a person realises that a marriage can be improved, it is an eye opening experience! One basic aim for Christian Family Life Education is to provide such experiences for Church people.

There are many different ways to care for marriage. Generally speaking, the best way to start is with small, everyday-life steps. Small steps, followed by other small steps will bring forth big changes. In this book you will find a variety of small and big steps, which will help to improve the quality of married life.

Learning about marriage is much needed, not only for married couples, but especially for the "to-be-married" youth! Thus many parts of this book are useful for youth, too.

WHAT IS "FAMILY MINISTRY?"

In an African society it is common to think that everybody gets married sooner or later. The idea of adults remaining single is strange here. This is why, in this context, *Family Ministry is always thought to be related to marriage* in one way or another. It is also good to remember that in Africa "family" normally means the extended family, which is a much larger unit than the nuclear family of Western countries.

Teaching on marriage and various family related issues is needed for a large variety of target groups: youth, all of whom will most likely, eventually, get married; engaged couples, newly married couples, couples of different ages, parents, grandparents (many of whom may be widows/widowers). One other target group includes workers in the different fields of education, child raising, health, and church workers.

"Family Life Education" includes many different features of church work as a whole. It involves education in the sense of teaching or instructing, but it also includes the fields of pre-marital and marriage counseling. Thus, "Family Ministry" is an appropriate overall title for this work.

MORE ABOUT FAMILY MINISTRY TRAINING

Christian Family Ministry is bringing hope to Africa which is, amongst other hardships, suffering an AIDS pandemic. Educational work always takes time, but it is worth doing. The Churches could well share their experiences and put in practice each other's findings and working methods.

The aim of the Family Life Education is to help Church people to live in happy marriages and families. The happier the married lives and families are, the better service they can give in their respective duties.

1. LEARNING PERIOD

Introduction:

Why Is It Important to Learn How to Care for Marriage?



Prov. 5:18 *"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth."*

**ANY MARRIAGE NEEDS CARE.
NO MARRIAGE IS SO GOOD
THAT IT COULD NOT BE BETTER.**

In this teaching we have two basic aims:

A) The first aim is to give you some helpful hints about your own marriage and provide information that will enable you to improve your own married life.

B) The second aim is to give you tools on how to be an example in your married life and how to help people in your community and congregation to improve their marriages.

Marriage needs care, like a seedling needs care, in order to become a blossoming flower!



If you have a seedling and you want to get fruit, what should you do? Give the seedling water, make the soil soft, weed out the harmful plants, and care for your seedling! This requires your time and trouble, but it also rewards or repays you. The reward comes as the plant becomes beautiful and gives you good fruit!

Some basic reasons for providing care for marriage:

1. **Family is the foundation of the Society.** The family is a basic unit in any congregation. Strengthening the marriage means strengthening the family, the church and the society.
2. **Marriage is** a very valuable **gift** that deserves to be taken care of.
3. **Any marriage, including a Christian one, needs care.** No marriage is so good that it could not be better!
4. Marriage has both **spiritual and earthly aspects**, and all of it needs care.
5. **You don't need to have a special "problem"** before you start taking care of your marriage.
6. **Any marriage can have problems**, but the problems can be solved in a positive and constructive way.
7. Nobody is born prepared to be a married person; **we have to learn how to live in the marriage.**
8. Marriage is not based on temporary love! **Marriage is not based on a feeling of love**, rather, marriage is based on the promise of love, on covenant, and on the firm will of both partners.
9. The **guard against outside dangers like HIV/AIDS** is healthy, meaningful, happy marriage.
10. A happy marriage of the parents is the **best and safest "home" for their children.**
11. Strengthening the Christian family model **improves the status of girls and women.** In such an improved situation the boys also have the right kind of status in their families.
12. Our joyful, healthy, marriage and family life helps us **to serve better in the church.**

There are various possibilities to express the **MAIN POINTS IN MARRIED LIFE.**

Dr. Alemu Biftu has listed the main points in his book (Ye Tedar Mistir, The Secret of Marriage), pages 60-84.

(Make here your own list!)

The main points in married life:

The Main Points in Married Life

1. Know your responsibility
2. Sharing
3. Understand the needs
4. Know the signs of love
5. Communication skills
6. Goal, objective
7. Skill in economy
8. Respect
9. Spiritual life
10. Service
11. Sex
12. Understand the purpose of marriage

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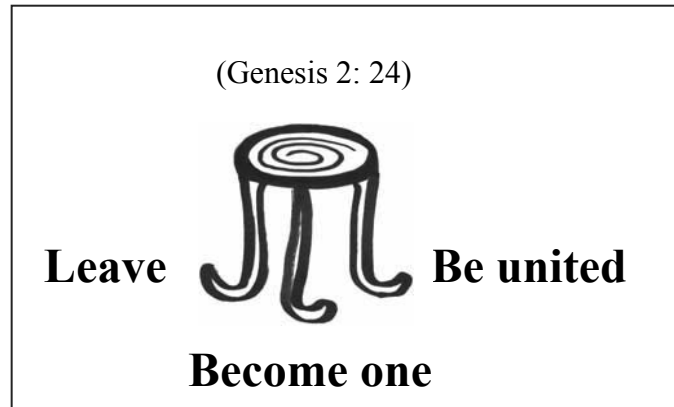
2. LEARNING PERIOD

The Foundation of Marriage



Gen 1:27 *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."*

Gen. 2:24 *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."*



This foundational text, **Genesis 2:24**, suggests three dimensions of the marriage covenant. Each of the three: 1) *leaving*, 2) *being united*, 3) becoming *one flesh*, are crucial to a complete or full marriage!

- **"Leaving"** (public marriage and the emotional leaving of parents by *both* wife and husband);
- **"Cleaving"** (personal friendship and companionship as the way to fill the marriage covenant with love), and
- **"One flesh"** (the private and repeated consummation and deepening of the marriage covenant through sexual intercourse).

Note carefully: the Bible nowhere separates sexual unity from the marriage covenant!

Points to consider concerning the three main factors of marriage:

Whom did Adam leave? What is "leaving"? - Public marriage and the emotional leaving of parents by BOTH wife and husband. - What about problems when the PARENTS are not ready to (emotionally) let go of their child?

"Leaving" means for example: a) Self-reliance, b) Decision making, c) Economy, d) Social life, e) New love for the spouse, etc.

"Being united" "cleaving" means union with regard to: a) thoughts, b) plans, c) physical relationship d) Economics, e) Property, f) Decision making, g) Love, h) Work, i) difficulties, j) helping each other, k) being friends, etc. - Do we see this 'cleaving' as personal friendship and companionship? Do we understand "cleaving" as the way to fill the marriage covenant with love?

The Greek term for cleave, "Kollao," means "I join fast together," "I glue or cement together with such a force that the bond cannot be broken."

What does "Becoming one" mean? When you think of physical union, sexual intercourse, what is included there? Is "Becoming one" in practice the private and repeated consummation, fulfilment and deepening of the marriage covenant through sexual intercourse?

When you think of marriages in your area, what are some of the problems you find in these points?

"When a couple gets married they must leave their parent's home and set up a new home of their own. When you get married, whatever happens, stick together as though you were one person." (Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Church)

Genesis 2:24 does NOT mention the words "marriage" or "covenant". Still we can say it talks directly about marriage and covenant. See how Jesus quoted this biblical text in (Matt 19:4-6a; Mk 10:6-9) and how the Apostle Paul uses it in (1Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31) to comment on marriage and sex.

**The Foundation of marriage
can be seen or expressed from different points of view:**

- Foundation of marriage is:
 - 1) The Word of God, 2) Love.
- The love of God is the basis for the love between husband and wife.
- Marriage is based on Covenant (Mal 2:14).
- Prayer is the foundation of marriage.
- God is the foundation and planner of the marriage.
- See the Bible's directives for both men and women: (Eph 5).
- **Christian marriage is based on forgiveness:** asking for forgiveness and receiving forgiveness.
This is needed for BOTH husband AND wife!
- As forgiveness is the crucial basis for our spiritual life, it is also the basis for our Christian marriage.
- Marriage is based on oneness of heart.
- The first desire of both should be the well-being of the other - not mine.
- **Our goal is a real Christian marriage** - not only by name but also in everyday life.
- Readiness to take responsibility is one part of the foundation of marriage.
- Mutual help belongs to the desired features in a Christian marriage.



The foundation of marriage: Covenant, Love, Forgiveness, Giving, Grace, Mercy, Growth (Change), Prayer, Equality, Oneness of heart.

- Marriage is a union created by God between a man and woman.
- Christian marriage reflects God's glory.
- Marriage is an interesting gift of God, given as a means for a husband and wife to live together.



A) Couple Discussion, (or)

B) Pair Group Discussion:

The topic to be discussed: **"What is the Foundation of Marriage?"**

3. LEARNING PERIOD

What Do I Expect of Marriage?



Col 3: 18-21 *"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."*

Introduction

- It is very useful for young people to discuss what they expect of marriage before they get married. This discussion is needed for every engaged couple well in advance of their wedding day.
- Sometimes it is also good for married couples to stop and think 'what do I expect of marriage?' Not only what I expected when we first married, but specifically, what do I expect today?
- Our suggestion is that every married couple takes time to discuss these points, starting from their present everyday life situation.
- The spouses also need to discuss their expectations together.
- For some people it is more difficult to express their expectations than for others. It might be either the wife or the husband who feels it is too difficult to express 'MY expectations'.
- Also, our family background can make a difference in our willingness to share. For example, the firstborn and the last child of the family are not in the same position with regard to when they should express their expectations.
- Cultural background, too, can influence one's sense of appropriateness in expressing real feelings and expectations.
- Many people have the false impression that expressing one's expectation is somehow not good for a Christian. But remember what the Bible requires of us, namely, that loving yourself does not mean selfishness!
- For husbands and wives it is very essential to learn to know each other by asking about the other's:
 - expectations
 - wishes
 - dreams, visions
 - desires
- We have spiritual expectations, but there are also other kinds of expectations like the following:
 - practical
 - psychological
 - emotional
 - sexual, etc
- There are also *Cultural expectations* of marriage. What would they be in your area?



- What are the *Christian expectations* of marriage?
- When young people dream about marriage, they might not quite know the reality (dreaming about a rich man, big house, high education, clever children, etc.).
- The expectations change as the years pass. Young couples and older couples will have different expectations of marriage.

The **expectations are also bound to our cultural background**. We should be brave enough to stop and think about whether some of our thinking patterns are linked, not to the Bible, but to a traditional cultural practice that might NOT be in agreement with the Bible!

The selfish-man kind of marriage:

The man commands the wife:

"Respect me!"

(He thinks that being the boss means he should not be her friend: rather, he acts above her and in this way he will get her respect.)

The obeying wife:
"My master."



The two way-selfish kind of marriage:



Man: *"I am the man. You must respect me!"*

Wife: *"No! We are equal!"*

God's plan for marriage:



Man:

*"I want to be close to you.
I want to be your friend.'
I want to care for you,
and for your needs!"*

Man and wife together:

*"We are created
to serve God together!"*

Wife:

*"I want to respect you
and satisfy your needs.
I want to do everything I can
to make you happy!"*



Group Discussion (Women / Men in separate groups)

The topic to be discussed: ***"What Do I Expect from Marriage?"***

4. LEARNING PERIOD

Why Marriage?



Prov. 18:22 *"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord."*

Prov. 19:14 *"Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD."*

1Cor 7:2 *"But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."*

"In every society on earth, men and women get married. But what the Christian church has established, wherever it has been given the opportunity, is the requirement of *consent*. Both the bride and groom must be able to say something like "I take you." Whether their marriage is arranged by parents or arranged by the couple themselves, they cannot be forced to make a covenant against their wills.

Covenant is that binding personal agreement to belong to one another unconditionally and is the heart of marriage. The freedom of spirit is crucial to covenant-making. In the marriage of Adam and Eve, God brings this couple together by a symphony of wills and hearts - his and theirs. The Genesis account takes us beyond culture into the paradise of God; it, therefore, more than any other passage in the Bible, tells us what God intended for this relationship. Marriage is not merely a cultural invention, but God's perfect design for companionship." (Stevens, "Marriage, Learning from Couples in Scripture", p. 13)

"In Old Testament tradition every Jewish male was expected to marry in order to fulfil God's command to multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28) and it was unthinkable that a pious young man would remain single." "Marriage was also compulsory in Roman law." (Instone-Brewer, Divorce and Remarriage in the Church, p. 60-61)

Similarly, in Ethiopian cultures, traditionally everybody was supposed to get married. A Young man is considered to be a full member of the society only after he marries.

Why get married?

- Why do people normally want to get married?
- What are the **purposes** of getting married?
- What are the **reasons**?
- What are the **goals**?
- What kinds of **benefits** are there?
- What are the **advantages / disadvantages** in getting married?
- Is there an **alternative for marriage**? What would it be?
- **Why did YOU get married?** (or:)
- **Why would YOU like to get married?**



"Marriage is a friendship, not just an ordinary friendship, but the deepest human friendship."
(Britten)



Group Discussion



The topic to be discussed: ***"Why Marriage?"***

The goals of marriage can be seen or expressed from different points of view.
You could make your own priority list!

What are the Goals of Marriage

1. Blessing, receive God's gifts
2. Unity, friendship
3. Mutual help
4. Joy (Prov. 5:18: "... may you rejoice in the wife of your youth".)
5. Respect
6. Faithfulness
7. Satisfaction
8. Guard against immorality and diseases (HIV/AIDS)
9. Independency from family
10. Children

My own priority list:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

5. LEARNING PERIOD

Marriage and the Extended Family

"To build a God-fearing nation, the starting point is to have a strong and a united family whose members positively impact their relatives and the nation at large. God chose to reach the world through an individual and through a family." (Daniel Bitrus)

"Family" in Africa normally means the Extended Family. There is not only a husband and wife with their children, but there are a variety of relatives and even other people living in the same household, family. - How are Christians to see the Extended Family? What are the best ways for Africans to be true Africans and true Christians at the same time? Without compromising Christian principles our people should maintain the good parts of the cultural practices that make them who they are.



Gen 2:24 " ... a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. "

Ex 20:12 "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

Acts 10:2 "He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly."

1 Tim 5: 3-4, 8 "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. [4] But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. ... [8] If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

James 1:27 "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Factors that Strengthen Extended Family Relationships

- Giving names to new members of the family (grandparents suggesting a name, etc).
- Wedding ceremonies drawing the members of the extended family happily together.
- Funerals, opportunities for reunion and encouragement at the time of sorrow.
- Sharing material blessings with others.
- Witnessing (to those who are not yet Christians).
- Offering advice and counselling.
- Assisting in finding employment opportunities.
- Helping in getting education.
- Giving help for medical expenses.
- Caring for the old of the extended family.



Factors that Weaken Extended Family Relationships

- Urbanization, living far away from the original family area.
- Moving to new areas, mixing with people of other cultures.
- Modern means of communication: radio, TV, magazines etc. - negative influence on people.
- Secular education.

In the Bible there are many examples of extended family relationships, starting from Abraham and Lot (Gen. 12), Moses and Jethro (Ex. 18), Ruth; further on Mordecai and Esther (Esth 2) etc. Again in the New Testament we find, for example, Peter and his mother-in-law (Matt 8), Cornelius (Acts 10), Paul and his nephew (Acts 23), etc.

Advantages and disadvantages of the extended family

Advantages:

- Support for the Nuclear Family.
- Help for the ones in trouble.
- Care for the old and children.
- Providing and sustaining the sense of community and belonging - no loneliness!

Disadvantages

- More chances for conflict in a larger family community.
- Encouragement of laziness.
- Too much responsibility on too few people.



Group Discussion

The topics to be discussed:

- Which kind of a family describes your family? Extended? Nuclear?
- What are the good points of Extended Family? What about problems?
- Which weigh more, the advantages or the disadvantages?

Conflicts in extended family relationships

- Wrong application of Traditional Practices (like the status of women, violence against women and children, inequality in economy, bride price, etc.).
- Lack of concern for a Spouse (like his parents not accepting her into the family, etc.).
- Favouring particular relatives (only his or her relatives, etc.) - openly or hidden.
- Parents and other In-laws (many times caused by the fact, that the young couple never properly 'left' and 'cleaved').
- Disobedience of the Bible.

Sharing in the extended family

It is wrong for us to refuse to share our material blessings with members of our extended family simply because they cause us sorrow. But on the other hand, there is a limit to what we can do and we need to prioritize those we can assist depending on the availability of our resources. There is also a need for home economics education.

Obstacles to Sharing

- High cost of living
- Selfishness
- Too many people: Limited resources
- Living beyond one's means
- Inability to manage one's resources well
- Wasting resources outside the family
- Health problems



Eph 6:11-13a "Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. [12] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. [13] Therefore put on the full armor of God..."

6. LEARNING PERIOD

About the Need of Speaking and Listening



Ps 19:14 *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."*

Song of Songs 2:14 *"... let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."*

- One of the foundations of marriage is **the will and ability to speak and to listen**.
- **Nobody is an inborn speaker or listener**; that is something we have to learn and get used to.
- It might be either the husband or the wife who is more able and/or more used to discussing matters.
- **Both husband and wife** need to get the chance to speak and listen in marriage.

Communication begins with the self. We communicate our different selves to others: our feelings, our emotions and knowledge, our abilities and beliefs, our attitudes and needs as well as our goals and expectations for the future. Only when we understand ourselves does communication become a possibility.

Many small irritants in relationships become big and develop into misunderstandings because the persons involved are either unaware of what they need for the moment or are confused about their feelings.

Feelings can be an obstacle to communication

Good communication can weaken at times for various reasons while poor communication can be improved. Much depends upon personal feelings.

Feelings simply are. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. But feelings can be an obstacle or a wall to communication. For example if you are irritated about something you might not be able to listen to what your spouse is trying to explain to you. We can learn to avoid destructive expressions of negative feelings since those expressions affect the couple's communication.

If you have a difficult marriage and feel that bitterness is growing in you, you should not simply let this happen. What to do with the bitterness?

a) Talk openly with your spouse about your concerns.

b) If that doesn't seem possible, find a counsellor whom you can really trust and talk with that person.



c) Study **Eph. 4: 29-32**:

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

d) Pray to God asking God to help you in your married life.

Communication - A way to love

Communication is the normal way of love. Because we love our parents, brothers and sisters, we share our feelings with them through communication. Does this work also with our spouses?! - When I am open with my family, I free my spouse, my child or whoever is in the family, to do the same!

The basis of community life is God's call to love. When we love, we can trust and keep the lines open to each other. When we love, we become whole as individuals and as a family.



Couple Discussion (at peaceful, separate places)

[NOTE: When discussing, LOOK AT EACH OTHER!]

The topics to be discussed:

1. Are we discussing in our marriage?
2. What kinds of things are we discussing?
3. What is easy to talk about? What is difficult?
4. Are there matters we never talk about?

What if one of us is a quiet kind of person?

The quiet one; regardless of the reason for this quietness, will need to work at communication. Many times we hear how the wife desires verbal communion and companionship. God made her that way. The good news is that God can help a husband improve in this area! Whether or not he ever becomes a great talker, he can learn to be a good listener. The wife needs him to listen with undivided attention, not one ear on a book and the other on her, but both ears aimed in her direction and wide open. That may be all she is really asking for!

There may be some cases where the problem is reversed. The husband may like to talk and the wife finds it difficult to communicate. Whatever situation exists in your home, you can make it easier for your mate to talk by remembering a few simple principles: Don't push; let him/her choose the time to talk.

Show acceptance without judgment when your spouse is expressing feelings and frustrations to you. When you disagree, do it kindly and respectfully, not mockingly or condemningly. Try to understand the other person instead of only trying to be understood. Don't jump to conclusions, be patient and don't nag! Nagging destroys the real communication!

About speaking:

- It is important to know what the other thinks - this is why it is important to speak.
- Only **by speaking** (and acting in line with our words) can we express **our wishes** to our spouse.
- It matters **how** we speak, not only **what** we speak.
- The **spoken language** and the **body language** must give the same kind of information.
- Mostly **what we do** for each other confirms our words.

About listening:

- Note: **hearing and listening are not the same!**
- It is **important to concentrate** on listening.
- **By listening you can show care and love** to your spouse.
- Show **in body language** that you are listening.



7. LEARNING PERIOD

Speaking and Listening



Proverbs 19:20 *"Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise."*

Proverbs 18:13 *"He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame."*

Ecclesiastes 9:17 - 10:1 *"The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. [18] Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. [10:1] As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour."*

Speaking and Listening are important to learn, nobody becomes "fully educated" in this field! Many times the wife and husband communicate differently, but it is possible to learn to cope with these differences. The crucial point is whether the spouses are *willing* to learn!

Some men tell themselves, "A real man doesn't need to communicate with his wife." But the fact is: A man will enjoy life more when he begins to realise, "It's good for me to talk freely with my wife. As I communicate with her, we understand each other and our home grows more loving."

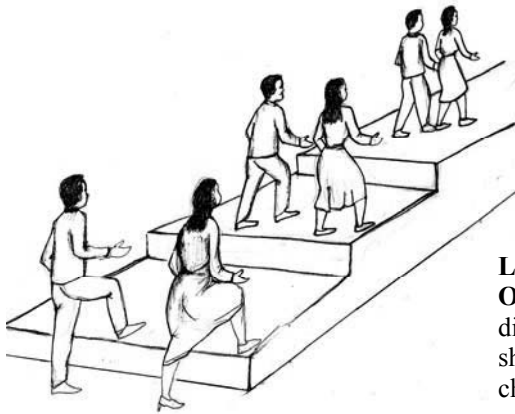
Really, every husband and wife needs to communicate. - Let us think about the benefits of communicating with each other by discussing what we gain when we speak and listen openly with each other!

Before using the word "**you**" in an argument, think of using the word "**I**". Try to speak about yourself instead of accusing the other! Instead of saying: "You are not paying attention to me," one could, for example, say: "I feel tired. Say something nice to me!" The tone is different and the message is clear.



The three levels of communication

There are three levels of communication. Perhaps right now the communication in your marriage is zero. Don't worry. You and your husband/wife can step up to Levels 1-2-3.



LEVEL 3: Talk about our feelings.

Finally you can proceed to the most difficult level, talking about each other's feelings: How did you feel when hearing the sad news? I was happy when you helped me yesterday! I was hurt when you shouted at me in the morning.

LEVEL 2: Talk about us: Our money, Our children, Our relatives, Our future plans. When you get more experience, go on with discussions on "our common matters": What should we buy? What should we do for our house? How will we arrange the schooling of our children?

LEVEL 1: Talk about what happened. If you are not in the habit of discussing things with your spouse, then start with everyday life occasions by telling about your day. You can talk about where you were and what happened there, what you did, saw, or heard. You should also ask about your spouse's day.

Obstacles of communication

What then *hinders the discussion*? If one spouse *talks nonstop*, focused only on his/her own needs, it is very difficult to have a discussion. Another hindrance to good dialogue is *pride*. If we think we are always right, then there is no basis for healthy discussion. If we are convinced that we are always right, our spouses will sense that attitude. Our pride will make it hard for them to speak freely even when we try to listen. - Another hindrance to conversation is *assuming that we know everything our spouse is going to say* about the subject before we discuss it. Remember: you never completely know the other! If you think that you do, this only hinders your true listening and keeps you from knowing your spouse.

In some cases husbands have an *attitude* that keeps wives from speaking freely. *If the man thinks he is the lord and she is more like a servant*, it is obvious that they are not discussing openly. God meant the husband-wife relationship to be a relationship of protector and completer, not one of lord and servant!

Even in a good marriage, there are times when love seems to have disappeared. If we could accept this fact we could concentrate on finding solutions for our problems instead of weeping for the impossible perfect marriage.



Pair Group Discussion

The topics to be discussed:

1. What makes it easy to discuss? 2. What are the obstacles for discussion?
3. What can we do in order to have discussions in the future?

There are various benefits to be found when a couple develops their level of communication. When you succeed in reaching the higher level of communication, you also have better chances to find the joy of romantic friendship and satisfying sex.

Communication and sexual life are clearly and closely inter-related! This is a fact we should remember especially if we are disappointed in our marital sex life.

The link between communication and the marital sex: Deep communication leads to deepening love in the marital sex!



If you are communicating with your spouse in a way that is satisfying to both of you, you will see that you will also get deeper joy in your sex life.



The lack of communication, or poor communication, contributes to various troubles, including a poor or unsatisfying sex life!

8. LEARNING PERIOD

Decision-Making



1Peter 3:8 *"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."*

Phil 2:2 *"make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."*

The Bible is quite revolutionary concerning the equality of men and women. There was no equality in Jesus' time, but he and the apostles presented a new concept of women being equal to men (and labourer being equal to landowner, slave to the lord etc).

The **question of equality is bound to the question of decision-making**. If one person is thought to be above another person, then only that one makes decisions. But if two persons are equal, they should decide together, or?

Decision-making and peace in the family are interrelated. If the decision-making is not in order, there might be continuous quarrelling. What can be done? Stop quarrelling and keep quiet - or change the way of decision-making?

- Traditionally *the man decides*. Is this still the case in our families? *What is the wife's role?*
- *How is the general atmosphere of discussion in the family*. Is there discussion?
- Basically, *who makes plans, decides or resolves* the possible disagreements in the family?
- *Do the children have any place in the decision-making?* Should they?

⇒ Example on the board:

- Imagine that there is 100 birr in hand to be spent. How shall the family use this money?
- a) The wife presents the detailed list of the expenses.
- b) Then the husband makes a list of how he wants to spend the money, without negotiating with his wife.
- c) Now, the two lists concern the same family and the total exceeds 100 birr. How shall we decide which items are to be bought and which items will be excluded?



General Discussion

The topics to be discussed:

- How are these kind of situations handled in ordinary families?
- How should they be handled?
- What kinds of decisions are made in ordinary families?
- Which decisions are normally difficult to make or discuss about? (For example: Money matters, Different plans of the family, Size of the family / Birth control, Fulfilling sexual needs, Boys'/Girls' duties, Helping relatives, Whose relatives are to be helped ...)

There are **many hard decisions to be made**.

Think about a family whose eldest child is starting 7th or 9th grade. Some parents must discuss this kind of situation: "Shall we keep the child at home and take the risk that she/he might not get job after the school?"

Or shall we send the child far away from home, to the Regional town or even to the Capital, with the hope of securing her/him a better education, and possibly, a better chance to get good employment?

Which choice do we want and which choice can we afford?"



When we say that in marriage the two are one – does it apply to finances, too?

We read in Genesis 2:24 that a man and woman “will become one flesh”. As we know there are various aspects in this ‘becoming one’. Does it apply to finances, too? Or in other words, when thinking about finances, what does it mean that the couple is ‘one’? Is the union of a man and woman evident in their everyday life when it concerns money?

"Becoming One" - also when speaking about finances?

Man

Woman

Work with salary

Work at home, no salary

Wealth of the both

9. LEARNING PERIOD

Constructive Disagreement in Marriage



Eph. 4: 26-27 " 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

Introduction

It is good to know that ALL couples quarrel sometimes. The forms of quarrel may vary and it may be that the couple does not call their disagreements a "quarrel". For some people a quarrel means shouting and breaking household items. For others even a slightly hard word or the raising of the voice may seem like quarrelling. In many cases, *silence*, a deliberate and determined non-speaking situation, is actually quarrelling, even if there is no sign or sound of disagreement to be observed.

Whatever we call it, there are disputes in each and every marriage. If you have had disagreements with your spouse, you are not an exception!

Most often the quarrelling between husband and wife starts from tiny everyday life topics. All of us can remember times when the wife or the husband gets suddenly angry at the spouse for various reasons:

- An angry word to a tired spouse;
- an expression that hurts even though there was no intention to hurt;
- reminders that are perceived as nagging;
- forgetting something that the other sees as important;
- displacing household or office items;
- impatient waiting for one or the other when leaving for someplace;
- some conflict with a child or relative in a small matter; etc.



"To get angry" does not necessarily mean, "to hate." Jesus also got angry, and yet, free from sin! Anger is a feeling. Feelings come and go; we cannot control their comings and goings.

"To hate" is something we can decide to do or not to do. Thus it is an action, not a feeling. The Bible distinctly forbids us from hating, an act that is based on our will. It is a sin to decide to hate. A quarrel starts many times because of anger. It is not necessarily a bad thing to get angry. However, the crucial question is whether we are able to process the conflict situations in a constructive way or not.

General Discussion

The topics:

List some common reasons for quarrels or heated discussions in families.

- How are those situations normally treated?
- What happens if there is a quarrel when a visitor is present?
- How can one cool down the discussion?



Php. 4: 5 "Let your gentleness be evident to all."



Is it always good to hide one's anger? How did Jesus react when he got really angry? What can happen if we repeatedly get angry but cannot show it outwardly?

There are people who get headaches when they get angry. A headache is one clear sign that something is wrong. Many times the "problem" is not of medical origin, but of mental origin (in our thoughts). To always hide what is inside your mind may cause a variety of symptoms that resemble an illness. Therefore, people may take medications that are not really needed. For example, taking painkillers for symptoms not caused by a real physical problem is the totally wrong solution!

FOUR DESTRUCTIVE PATTERNS

If you want to safeguard your marriage, learn *how to handle difficult situations and disagreements in a constructive way!* All couples have problems. Those who handle their problem situations in the best possible way are the ones who act together, not against each other. Hasty decisions, when one of the spouses is not involved, seldom bring any lasting solutions.

A) Sharp words

When there is a dispute, one or the other might knowingly use sharp words in such a way that the other, either: a) gets even more angry, or, b) gets wounded. *"I would have imagined an adult could behave as an adult"*, etc. This may lead to rebuttals of sharp wording, and there we are, the anger intensifies.

Thinking of our married relationships, it is very important to *stop the dispute before it grows too big*. In the book of Proverbs we read: *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"* (Prov 15:1). An angry person may say something he or she would never say aloud when calm. In our anger we may determine to hurt the other by our words. The worst thing in such an occasion is to touch some issues which are normally expressed only in our moments of closeness. This may badly affect future moments of closeness!

B) Understatements

To underestimate the other's thoughts, feelings or personality is really destructive to the relationship. We may disagree in opinions, but we should never push down the other as a person. This might be shown in mocking statements, or sometimes, by not-giving appreciation for something good the other has done. We should always see the other as a valuable creature of God!

C) Avoidance

Sometimes people avoid confrontations so much that they avoid any contact with the person concerned. They might even think this is the proper, advisable, Christian behaviour - but it is not!

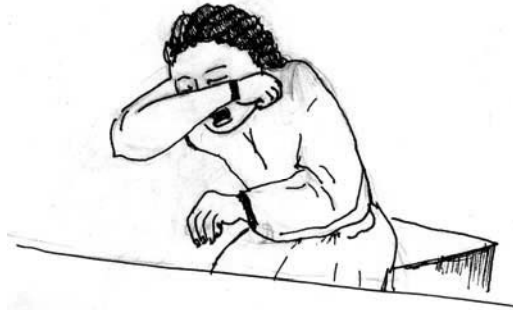
Some people leave the room rather than take the risk of confrontation and leave their spouse alone, feeling as if they have been hit. It seems that men more often avoid the handling the problem situations, since women seem to be more ready for discussions or negotiations. However, this sometimes goes the other way round.

Of course it is better to avoid the situations where there is a danger of physical violence. Research shows that in many cases the violence is rooted in being unable to handle the problems in a constructive way through negotiation.

We need to learn constructive means for our problem situations. But we must be firm in saying that *physical violence in a couple's relationship is never, never acceptable in any form!*

D) Negative attitude

Taking everything worse than it really is. Sometimes, one of the spouses always believes the worse about their husband or wife. This conduct is really destructive. Constant negative interpretations and attitudes may lead to a loss of hope and even depression. This kind of attitude also makes it more difficult to use the constructive way of handling problems in the marriage.



Are There Choices for Handling The Disputes?

It is common for couples to have disputes. All of us, at times, experience negative feelings: anger, hostile thoughts, distrust, fear and sorrow. When living in a close relationship like marriage, we should learn how to handle our negative feelings constructively, in ways that do not make problems worse and do not make the spouse feel abandoned.

It might be good to agree on certain rules for conflict situations. The word "rule" here may sound strange, but the rules might help us to feel closer and growing positively together.

A) Speaker - Listener

In order to recover from difficult disputes, we can agree on the following rules:

- a) One of you starts talking and the other does not interfere;
- b) Change turns, so that now the other one talks and the first one keeps quiet;
- c) Continue exchanging turns until both of you feels you have had a chance to say what is on your mind.

The speaker: Speak for yourself only using "I" statements; do not try to guess the other's thoughts. Talk about "me", not about "you". Don't talk too long.

The listener: a) Do not object, you are now simply reflecting on what you heard your partner saying, you are still listening! b) When the other has finished the turn, give a short summary of what you have just heard.

B) Solving problems

Now you are to make choices. The course of action might be as follows:

1) Discussion on the problem; this is important. Even if you don't see way out, the discussion helps you to feel togetherness and respect for each other. In most cases the discussion itself is the solution, so that nothing else is needed!

2) Solving the problem: What points need to be solved? How do we see the situation? Reach an agreement on the solution, and then follow-up. - It happens many times that the quarrelling people do not actually know

what they are quarrelling about! -It is good to first decide when to discuss the problem; sometimes you might prefer to make an appointment instead of discussing here and now. **How do we understand the problem?** Simply bring forth ideas freely. No objections, but free conversation. **Agreement and follow-up:** Agree together, in detail, in cooperation, respecting each other's viewpoint. Sometimes it wise to make a compromise. The follow-up is sometimes needed, sometimes not. If you have agreed and it functions, that's it.

C) Some basics about solving the disputes

People are different just as wives and husbands are different. One spouse may not like "rules," but in many cases they are useful. Having clear rules may help control the problems, instead of the problems controlling you.

1) When difficulties seem to explode on you, create a pause. Suggest, "Let's start again" and use the Speaker-Listener method. Note: It is of no use to go on if one of you has lost their temper.

2) Use the Speaker-Listener method. Stick firmly to the speaking turns!

3) Maintain the difference between "Discussion" and "Solving the problem". First, make sure that both of you know what you are dealing with.

4) Delay! If there is no agreement on discussing the matter right away, then don't do it now. Make an appointment and keep it! Discuss the matter later on, maybe within one or two days, but after the initial anger has gone.

5) Why not try a regular discussion time for a couple? You might be short of time, but isn't maintaining a healthy relationship worth reserving time! If you really value your marriage, then you will find time for taking care of it. Make an appointment for discussion with your spouse, for example, once a week and keep the appointment just as you would any "important" appointment!

6) It is important to take time for problem solving. But it is also important to take time for moments of closeness. These times allow you to discuss freely about anything, to have fun together. Sometimes it is good to go out together as if you were friends, which you actually are!



Couple Discussion

The topics:

- Where does our quarrel start from?
 - How does the dispute affect our couple relationship?
 - How do I react when I see there is a dispute? How do you feel about it?
 - When is it that we must *not* quarrel?
- How to solve disputes? How to make peace?

10. LEARNING PERIOD

About Emotions



Romans 12:15 *"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."*

BASIC INFORMATION ON EMOTIONS / FEELINGS

The word "Emotion" or "Feeling" has several different meanings. Therefore, feelings can be listed in several different groups. - **There are feelings of:** a) hunger, thirst, cold, hot, sickness, etc, b) Psychological nature and c) Sexual nature.

Emotional reactions exist in us all the time. They are our body's way of reacting to different things that happen around us. When we are in different situations, we always know whether the situation is good or not so good. At the same time there can be different emotions in us. I may feel happy about the beautiful flowers planted at the church compound, but I may also get angry at all the rubbish thrown in them. Or, I may feel happy that my spouse finally comes home, but I am angry with him for not sending a message that he would be late.

It is **not always easy to be aware of one's feelings and where they come from.** Sometimes it can take a long time before we recognize them. For example, I may get up in the middle of the night realising that I am angry about something that happened during the day. Or, the feeling of fear may come later, a long time after something dangerous has happened. - We need to know that people are very different in their ability to recognise and speak about their feelings.

It is also important to understand that **emotions as such are not right or wrong.** Emotional reactions, what we do with our feelings, are often something we have learned and therefore can be changed. Sometimes my reaction can be wrong because I have interpreted something wrongly. "I was disappointed when you did not answer me. I thought my words were not important to you." But my emotional reaction will be changed if I understand that you did not hear what I said.

Many times we express our feelings without words. How do you know if somebody is uncertain or satisfied, happy or sad? We can make mistakes when trying to guess how/what the other person is feeling. If we want the other person to know exactly how we feel, then we need to tell it.

Recognize your feelings

We cannot communicate well without responding to our feelings as well as to the feelings of others.

To respond to another's feelings we must **first** observe the behaviour of the other person. We must pay attention to his presentation, his tone of voice, his gestures and his facial expression. They are all valuable clues to his inner feelings. **Next**, we must carefully listen to the words. We should ask ourselves: "What is he feeling to make him say these things in this way?"

BASIC FEELINGS:

1. Joy

2. Sorrow

3. Fear

4. Anger

LOVE IS A MATTER OF DECISION!
FEELINGS COME AND GO, BUT
WE CAN DECIDE TO LOVE!

Feelings in the Bible:

Feelings are part of normal life. Even Jesus had the four basic feelings.
Let's see a biblical text for each of the four basic feelings:

1. **JOY: Luke 10:21** At that time Jesus, *full of joy* through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father ..."
2. **SORROW: Mark 14:34** "My soul is *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*," he said to them.
3. **FEAR: Mark 14:32-33** They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be *deeply distressed and troubled*.
4. **ANGER, HATRED: Mark 3:5** He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said ... **Eph. 4:26-27** "In your *anger* do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still *angry*.



How should we see the issue of emotions / feelings? - Are we allowed to express our feelings to other people? - Do we understand our feelings?

- **Are there prohibited feelings?** - Remember: **definitely NOT!** Since feelings as such are not 'good' or 'bad,' then there are no prohibited feelings. Feelings come and go. Many times we are not in the position to 'allow' or 'prevent' them from coming to us. However, we are responsible for our actions. We are responsible for **what we do with our feelings**, but we are not responsible for having such feelings in us.
- The **feelings of women** are often related to **their menstruation periods or pregnancy**. During these times there are certain hormonal changes happening in their body. And these changes influence the emotions. Many women **get easily angry or upset when they are pregnant** etc.
- But remember: **men have feelings, too.**
- Feelings have influence on our behaviour; therefore: It is good for everybody to recognise one's own feelings.
- It is good for couples to discuss their feelings. It helps them to understand each other better.



FINALLY: WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Is love not a feeling? Why has it not been mentioned among the basic feelings? -

Love is much more than just a feeling. Love is a decision. While we can decide to love, we cannot decide to have feelings of love. Love is a choice. Love is expressed or revealed through different feelings (through joy, sorrow, fear, anger etc), BUT **love is not (only) a feeling!**

1.Cor. 13; 1. John 4: 7-10

"God is love."

11. LEARNING PERIOD

Daily Life in Marriage; Signs of Love

What helps the love to grow?



Gal 6:2 *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."*

Gal. 5:15 *"If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."*

1Peter 3:1-2 *"Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives."*

1Peter 3:7 *"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."*

1Peter 4:8 *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."*

We should work hard in order to improve our marriages. It is good to start from "small" everyday occasions. Don't think you should change everything at once! - There is no reason to give up hope. Marriage is full of chances. Any marriage can be improved or enriched - it only needs the positive attitude and action of the husband and wife.

What if you decided to improve your marriage? You could start with three things:

Improve your Marriage!

1. Say words of appreciation
2. Do something kind
3. Complain less!

Appreciation helps a person to improve. Kindness brings a positive attitude to your marriage. Saying more positive things and less negative ones improves the climate at home.



A respected teacher of marriage, Mrs. Ingrid Trobisch, has said:

"Love is like a small tree, which can grow only if planted firmly into the ground of marriage. Like a tree, love is a living thing which cannot remain motionless."

An Ethiopian proverb about hospitality states:

"The smiling face is more important than the food served!"



Group Discussion

(Women / Men in separate groups)



The topics to be discussed:

"How can women / men show love to their husbands/wives?"

Here are some examples that different couples have proposed: *"How to show love?"*

Receiving him/her back home with a smiling face;
 Helping one another;
 Giving time to each other;
 The husband giving time to children, too;
 Sharing the child raising responsibilities;
 Discussing relevant matters together;
 Expressing the feelings, wishes, desires;
 Discussing also about sexual matters;
 Admiring and respecting one another;
 Thanking for help etc.
 The wife receiving guests with hospitality;
 Treating the relatives of each side equally;
 Eating together;
 Giving presents;
 Going together out for tea or walk;
 Being open in family economics;
 Telling each other all the income of the family;
 Not telling the weaknesses of the spouse to outsiders
 Asking for forgiveness; Forgiving;
 Using nice words;
 Telling about mistakes kindly, not harshly;
 Not using violence!
 Taking care of personal hygiene; etc. etc.



Couple Discussion

(to be held at another time, maybe at home)

The topics to be discussed:

- What should my spouse do to make me happy?
- Which kind of spouse makes me happy?
- How would my spouse make me happy by helping me?

12. LEARNING PERIOD

Woman and Man - Different but Equal



Genesis 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

God created human beings to be male or female. Man and woman are different; they have different gifts and different responsibilities. In marriage the husband and wife are one.

A respected teacher of marriage has said:

"The husband is likened to the head of the marriage person, while the wife is likened to the heart".
(Bovet)

Thinking of the differences and similarities of the husband and wife in a marriage, it is good to see some examples of advice the Bible gives to the spouses.

How to live in Christian Marriage?

Advice (order) for wives:

Eph. 5:22-24

Col. 3:18

1. Peter 3: 1

Advice (order) for husbands:

Eph. 5:25-26

Col 3:19

1. Peter 3: 7

Advice (order) for BOTH husbands AND wives:

Eph. 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."



Eph. 5:22-24 "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. [24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything."

Eph. 5:25-26 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [26] to make her holy, cleansing* her by the washing with water through the word"

Col 3:18-19 "Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

Col 3:19 "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them."

Pet 3:1 "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives."

1Pet 3:7-8 "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."

Eph. 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."





General Discussion

(in the Class room)

The topics to be discussed:

- "Are men and women equal?"
 - "What does it mean, when the Apostle Paul advises (Eph. 5:21) *"Submit to one another"*?"
-



1Cor 7:1-5 *"Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does*

not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

13. LEARNING PERIOD

Woman in Marriage - Man in Marriage



Genesis 2:25: *"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."*

Song of Songs 5:16: *"His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."*

Sexuality is created by God and is also a gift from God!

Sexuality is created by God. Sexuality is a gift from God and as such it is good, beautiful! In the Bible there is a book called "Song of Songs" which clearly describes the divinely created beauty of sexual love. It shows no embarrassment about lovers enjoying each other's bodies, and talking about it.

God's design for human relationships included sexual relations from the beginning. Why?

- a) Sex unites a husband and wife, and gives them pleasure. (Gen 2:24)
- b) Sex can also give them children. (Gen. 9.1)

Some people have doubts about the first reason "a" mentioned above. They think that "b" is the *only* reason for sex. They even say that a husband and wife should not enjoy sexual pleasure. But this is NOT what the Bible teaches us. A Christian husband and wife are 100% free to give each other sexual pleasures.

The five facts on sex:

(according to Britten, "Answers for your Marriage")

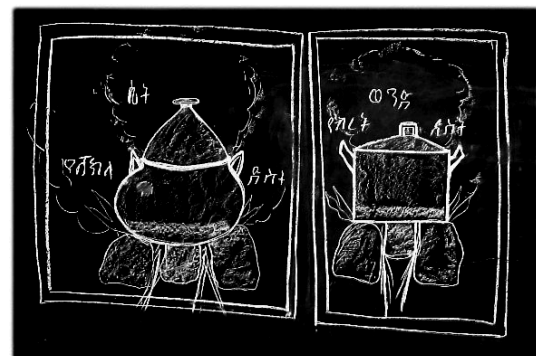
1. **Both** husband **and** wife have sexual needs.
2. Husband and wife should not stop having sex, unless it is for just a brief time.
3. **Both** husband **and** wife should enjoy sex.
4. Sex outside of marriage is sin.
5. Sex is also for reproduction.

Ingrid Trobisch says the following: **How do the sexual experiences of a man and a woman differ?**

"A man's (sexual) experience is like a fire of dry leaves, easily kindled, flaring up suddenly and dying down just as quickly. The experience of a woman is, on the other hand, like a fire of glowing charcoal. Her husband has to blow on the coals with loving patience. Once the blaze is burning brightly, it will keep on glowing and radiating warmth for a long time." (Ingrid Trobisch, "The Joy of Being A Woman" p. 10)

There is another example about the difference in sexual experience:

*"Man is like
a metal pot,
getting hot quickly and also cooling
down quickly.
Whereas woman is like
a clay pot,
warming up slowly
but keeping the warmth
for a long time."*



(Drawing by Rev. Tilahun Mamo)



Group Session and Discussion
(Women / Men in separate groups)

The topics:

A) Women: "Woman in Marriage"

Points to be handled in the beginning of the session:

- Accepting oneself as a woman: What is the best thing in my being a woman?
- Woman's life cycle: menstruation, pregnancy, motherhood, menopause
- Woman's different roles: woman, wife, mother, work role etc.?
- Taking care of oneself; personal hygiene
- Woman and sexuality
- Frigidity?
- Female Genital Mutilation ('circumcision')

The topics to be discussed:

"Joys and problems in being a woman and wife"

B) Men: Man in Marriage

Points to be handled in the beginning of the session:

- Finding oneself as a man
- Man's life cycle: puberty, fertility time before marriage, fertility in marriage etc.

- Man's different roles: man, husband, father, work role etc.?
- Taking care of oneself; personal hygiene
- Man and sexuality
- Impotence?
- Female Genital Mutilation ('circumcision'), it's affect on man

The topics to be discussed:

- "Joys and problems in being a man and husband"

A+B) Other possible topics to be discussed:

- Sexual intercourse during pregnancy and breast feeding
- The behaviour of the man during the day, before intercourse
- Never use violence/force in sex! No physical or mental force!
- How to help the spouse "to wake up" for sex and then to get satisfaction?
- What about if he/she doesn't want to have sex?

**How to enjoy sex more**

(from Britten, "Answers for your Marriage", p. 72)

People in Europe, Africa, America and Asia were asked:

"How could your husband/wife make sex more enjoyable for you?"

Husbands said:

I would enjoy sex more if my wife would:

- * stop saying, "Christian women shouldn't enjoy sex"
- * come to bed naked, or wearing something sexy.
- * invite me to have sex (instead of me always being the one to invite her).
- * not think, "My husband made me angry today, so I will punish him by being half-hearted in bed"
- * talk to me during love play, telling me what she likes.

Wives said:

I would enjoy sex more if my husband would:

- * be a friend to me, so that I will feel free to talk with him about everything ... including sex.

- * spend more time in love play.
- * let me show him what I like him to do to me during love play.
- * be kind to me during the day (before bed-time). When we are in bed, it's hard for me to feel romantic if I remember, "This morning he was so selfish"
- * be a better father to our kids. I can't feel sexy when he shows little interest in our kids.
- * communicate with me - so that we discuss all our ideas and emotions.
- * invite me to pray with him each morning. When we pray together, I feel close to God and to my husband.

- * tell me that he loves me, and tell me this at any time, not just in bed.

- * never have sex with anyone except me. I hate the thought of sharing my husband with any other woman or girl!

14. LEARNING PERIOD

The Obstacles of Marriage: What are they?



Proverbs 19:13-14 *A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping. Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.*

The troubles of Marriage:

It is important to be aware of the troubles that can harm or destroy marriages.

- Difficulties are often times based on disagreements or lack of mutual respect.
- Husbands and wives need to have a common goal in their marriages - and talk about it together.



Proverbs 21:9 *"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."*

Proverbs 6:23-29 *"For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life, keeping you from the immoral woman, from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife. Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished."*

Proverbs 5:15-21 *"Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths."*

Malachi 2:13-16 *"Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, 'Why?' It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith."*





General Discussion:

Write on the blackboard the list of troubles given by the participants.



15. LEARNING PERIOD

What Can We Do About The Obstacles of Marriage?



Proverbs 18:22 *"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord."*

Some common reasons for marriage troubles are:

- Lack of communication on: Family life, Sex life, Children, Finances, Personal needs etc.;
- The Husband or wife has not "left their parents"; when a problem occurs, they turn to their parents;
- Grandparents or other relatives interfering in the couple's/family's matters;
- Helping the relatives unevenly;
- Disagreements on child raising;
- Creating parties in the family; one promising, another prohibiting the children etc.;
- The wife's unwillingness in sex / Female Genital Mutilation ('circumcision');
- Unfaithfulness;
- The number of children; childlessness;
- Living in separation for long periods of time (because of studies, work etc);
- Using force and violence;
- Polygamy or sex relations outside marriage.

Dealing with the troubles of Marriage.

Where to get help?

- Speaking and listening!
- Openness and straightness;
- Repentance and forgiveness;
- Mutual respect;
- Faithfulness; It is good to think about the source of unfaithfulness. What is the outcome of unfaithfulness and bad disagreements?
- Common spiritual life of the spouses and of the family.





Col 3:12-14 *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."*

Ways of improving family bonds

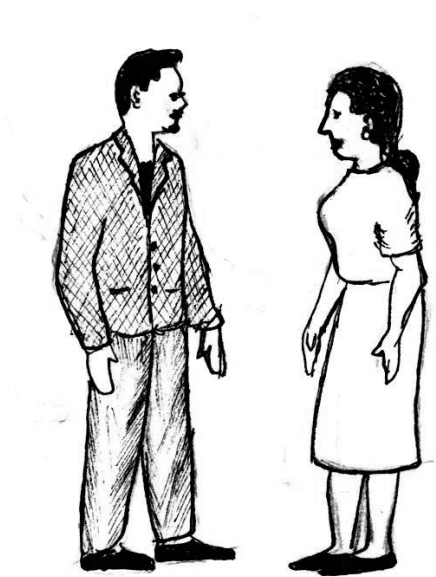
- Avoid separating the spouses, if ever possible! For the sake of the marriage and the family, planned separation should be discouraged by all means. Churches should set examples in keeping the families together - no work assignments of husband and wife for separate areas!
- Development of regular teaching on family issues in all congregations
- Regular Bible teaching: The church should take care to teach couples what the Word of God says about the family and the role of individual members in the family. Family life classes should be a permanent feature of the programme of any congregation!
- Providing family counselling, given by trained counsellors, for the troubled ones
- Well planned, organized home visitation
- Making available good literature on family matters
- Effective prayer



General Discussion

The topics:

- What can we do to help people who have problems in their marriages?
- **Are there Marriage Counselling services available in congregations?**
- What is the role of the Church? (This is to be discussed also at the end of the course.)



16. LEARNING PERIOD

The Role of Forgiveness in Marriage



Mark 11:25 *"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."*

Lk 11:4 (From Lord's Prayer:) *"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us."*

Col. 3: 13-15 *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."*

Introduction - When husband and wife live together, it is NOT possible for them to always agree in everything. There are differences in the visible and audible forms of disagreements. Some people might never raise their voice or otherwise outwardly show their anger. - Husband and wife *do* occasionally hurt each other no matter how Christian or spiritual they may be. The crucial point is how the couple process the hurting issue. Many married couples do not try to process the conflict issues at all. Instead, they imagine that time will cure the hurting wounds. But we should note that this is not how God the Creator intended creatures to act. He set up the holy way of forgiveness for us!

Sometimes it's just the little slights and daily agitations, the occasional sharp word or angry accusation, that needs forgiveness. Yet, rather than deal with it through forgiveness, we maintain it, building up bitterness and anger that wears down our relationship. - Big wounds often take longer to heal. They come back to our minds. There is no way to avoid it. However, every time they reappear in our thoughts, we must first remind ourselves that we really did forgive, then we should study how much God has forgiven us and ask him to take the destructive, unforgiving, thoughts out of our minds. - Since all of us are sinners, both husband and wife do occasionally offend each other. This is a very basic and fundamental truth concerning marriage. Doesn't this fact lead us to the conclusion that BOTH husbands AND wives are sometimes in a situation where they need to ASK for forgiveness?

Forgive - and suffer in silence? - Forgiveness does not necessarily mean that we must suffer in silence. The need for open and honest communication demands that we share what we think, how we feel, what the hurt has done to us, and how our mates can help us to get over it. God tells us how much our sin grieves him. When we talk about these things we should speak lovingly and kindly, but we should share what is on our hearts.

Forgiveness is stating truthfully that what the person did was wrong, it hurt, and it should not happen again. The hurt does matter, but love matters more and therefore forgiveness is possible. One can be reconciled and the marriage relationship can be restored in the practice of forgiveness, accepting the person with love, but making clear that the behaviour that created the problem remains unacceptable.

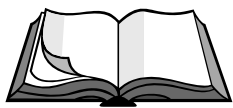
- However, forgiveness does mean that even though we suffer because of the other person's offences, we will refuse to hit back to make the guilty person pay. We will forgive our spouse of all guilt.

God can use that forgiving love to melt hardened hearts. We should not misunderstand God's forgiveness. God hates sin. He cannot ignore it. His perfect righteousness and justice demand that he deal with it. But he still loves sinners and carefully seeks them out, offering his loving forgiveness.

The pressure of some local Cultures - There are local cultures in which it is taken for granted that a MAN never asks for forgiveness. "A proper man never admits he has been wrong" is the kind of statement that is fixed firmly in many men's and boys' minds. But this is not a proper way of thinking in the Christian's life! - As Christians, we should be very careful NOT to attack the local cultures in matters that are *conditional*. There are many issues where the Bible does *not* offer us everyday life instructions. BUT we should be brave enough to firmly object to such features in any culture that contradict the Bible! - Note that both men and women find asking for forgiveness difficult.



The link between forgiveness in our marital life and our spiritual life - We should carefully note that the issue of forgiveness in marriage is not only a question of peace and harmony in our couple communication, but is also a matter involving the utmost centre of our spiritual life.



Mt 6: 14-15 *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*

Eph. 4: 32 *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

These verses relate the issue of forgiveness in marriage to nothing less than our salvation! To ask for and to receive forgiveness goes together in a way that we cannot live without either of them. We are forced to decide whether the local culture or the Bible carries the final authority.

We can examine the issue in the context of a family's everyday situations. If a child offends her parents we will of course guide her to apologize. If the wife offends her husband we think she should apologize. But then, if the man offends his wife in one way or another, isn't it equally important, as with the children and the wife, for him to ask for forgiveness!



Whoever is the offender in the family, she or he should apologize. What happens, if the offender does not apologize? The Bible tells us the first and most dangerous consequence: God cannot forgive that person! But this also endangers our family life. If the conflicts are not openly settled by forgiveness, then we may get used to the life style where unsettled matters are always present. This destroys little by little the confidence, peace, and joy amongst the couple and the family.



Couple Discussion - The instructions:

1. Start with the prayer. 2. Discuss the need for forgiveness and then **ask for forgiveness**, both wife and husband. 3. Tenderly tell each other **how you feel about this matter** now. 4. Are there **hidden, forgotten or non-forgiven matters** between the two of you? What could you do about

them? Is there something you could settle in a short time right now? 5. If there are big matters, can you **make a future appointment for settling** them? 6. If there are matters too big for the two of you, agree *now* on how to deal with them. Could you ask somebody for a **counselling appointment**?



Group Discussion - The topics:

- What do you think are the major causes for the problems that drive husbands and wives apart? - What interests do you both share in common? What else could you do together to strengthen your bond of oneness? - Can you think of wrongs you have suffered from your mate

that may be keeping you from freely expressing your love? Admit them to your mate and express your full forgiveness. - How can you keep the wrongs for which you have forgiven others from creeping back into your mind and destroying your peace? - What positive steps can you and your mate take to keep certain sins from repeating themselves in your lives?

Home Work - Husbands and wives are not always aware of each other's love. Take some peaceful time at home, and finish the following statements:

- "I feel loved when you..."
- "I mean to say that I love you when..."



17. LEARNING PERIOD

Marriage and Harmful Traditions



Ge 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Ge 1:31 "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

Ps 119: 73 "Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands."

Ps 139: 13-14 "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

1 Co 6: 19-20: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body."

There are many troubles or obstacles that can harm or destroy marriage. There are some matters that we simply have to bear and learn how to cope with. But there are other dangers that we have to be aware of and intentionally oppose. Some of the dangers are based on local cultures and this presents us with a deep and many-sided problem. As Christians we quite naturally need to support and protect our culture as long as it is constructive and helpful. HOWEVER, we must also have courage to object to any destructive phenomena in any culture! One dangerous cultural practice in some areas is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). During this Learning period we concentrate mainly on this practice, which is a great problem in various countries.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) - Background

Female Genital Mutilation is practised in 28 African nations and in some other countries. An estimated 100-130 million women have undergone the procedure with 2 more million added yearly. This harmful tradition is reported to occur in all regions of Ethiopia except Gambella (Survey of 1997). It is more common in urban areas (88%) than in rural areas (67%).

[Prevalence rates (%) in Ethiopia a) **by region:** Afar 94, Harari 81, Amhara 81, Oromo 80, Somalia 70, Southern peoples 46, Gambella as the only one with 0%; b) **by religion:** Muslim 80, Orthodox 69, Protestant 36, Traditional 21 %. - In the survey there were 65 ethnic groups studied. Out of these 65, 29 of the ethnic groups reported the prevalence for FGM was 0-20%, mainly in the south and southwest.]

NOTE: There is no doctrinal basis for Female Genital Mutilation in either Islam or Christianity!

Group Work:



Make a list of reasons for (a) and (b) below.

- Why is "Female Circumcision" practised?
- Why should this practice be opposed?

"Female circumcision" is practised for a variety of reasons, most of them based on culture and tradition. In areas where it is common, the people have commonly accepted it. It is often openly celebrated in the local community in spite of the fact that the government has, for a long time, opposed this practice as harmful. Many people still seem to be unaware of its destructive consequences.

Female Genital Mutilation does not stop a woman's need for love and companionship or have an affect on her moral behaviour. But it does interfere with her normal body functions, and can harm her relationship with her husband. It also causes health problems that can lead to lasting harm, even death.



The consequences of the Female Genital Mutilation:

- Immediate:** Pain, bleeding, damage to nearby organs, infection, risk of HIV transmission, tetanus, damage to urethra, dysuria (difficulty of urinating).
- Continuing and even life-long:** Scar formation, dysuria, tear during labour, prolonged labour, loss of elasticity; problems with monthly bleeding, problems with sex, problems during and after childbirth, leaking urine and stool, being unable to get pregnant (infertility), lasting pain, mental health problems.

Problems with sexual relations and sexual health

If a circumcised woman has none of the health problems mentioned, she may be able to enjoy sex fairly well. But many women who have been circumcised, especially those who have been infibulated (the outside genitals cut away and the opening to the vagina sewn almost closed) find sex difficult.

During sex, a woman may find it difficult to become aroused, since the clitoris has been cut off. What to do? The wife should talk with her husband about finding ways to become more sexually aroused, and explain that she may need more time to feel aroused. She can talk about ways to make sex less painful. Having enough wetness (lubrication) can make sex safer, more enjoyable and hurt less.

What to do for Female Genital Mutilation?

If you are uncertain how to see this practice, you should weigh the risks to help you to decide. Are the "benefits" of being circumcised worth the health problems and the problems that arise for couple relationship? Culture is always changing to meet new community needs. Can this practice also be changed?

If you do not agree with this practice, there are many ways you can help girls in your community:

- Openly discuss this issue with your spouse, try to find a common understanding in this matter;
- Help your daughters feel valued and loved, whether circumcised or not;
- Encourage your daughters to get education and to learn enough to make their own decisions about their lives and their futures;
- Share the information about the health problems caused by Female Genital Mutilation with other women and men in your community. Work with them for change.
- Encourage your congregation pastor or evangelist to teach against this tradition;
- Find ways to discourage circumcision ceremonies in your community. With other people close to you, try to find other rituals that can mark a girl's passage from childhood to adulthood.
- Finally - or first of all - reach a decision in your family that this harmful tradition will be stopped in our family right now!



Female Genital Mutilation, Human Rights, and the Law

This practice causes various health problems. But even if no health problems occur, a circumcised girl has still been harmed and her human rights to bodily integrity (honour), safety, and health have been violated in the name of tradition. "Female circumcision" also violates the right to privacy and choice because it is done mainly to girl children who are not old enough to agree to the practice.

Some people are calling for a law to make Female Genital Mutilation illegal and punish those who practice it. These laws need to be written carefully so that in communities where this practice is common it will not continue in secrecy, which would be even more dangerous. Also, girls and women who have gone through this should not feel afraid to seek medical or other help if they have problems.

"Female Circumcision" seen from Bible point of view

- There is no support in the Bible for this practice!
- God created the man and the woman! He proclaimed his work to be good.
- Being subordinate to God we have no right to alter the outcome of creation work of God.
- God ordered us to control and protect, not to destroy what He has created
- When establishing marriage, God also established marital sex. As a gift from God the sexual relationship between husband and wife is for joy and satisfaction.
- Sex, being part of the creation of God, is good, pure, wanted, and holy!

Female Genital Mutilation

(so called 'female circumcision') is

- Unnecessary
- Harmful
- A Sin
- A Crime
- A Violation against human rights
- An Act of oppression against women

18. LEARNING PERIOD

Domestic Violence



James 2: 8-10: "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' you are doing right. [9] But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. [10] For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

Matth. 7:12 "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you".

We are living in the world of violence. In the news we hear about various acts of violence all the time. Yet there is a lot of violence we do not hear about. This violence is the various forms of **Domestic Violence that happen in our communities**.

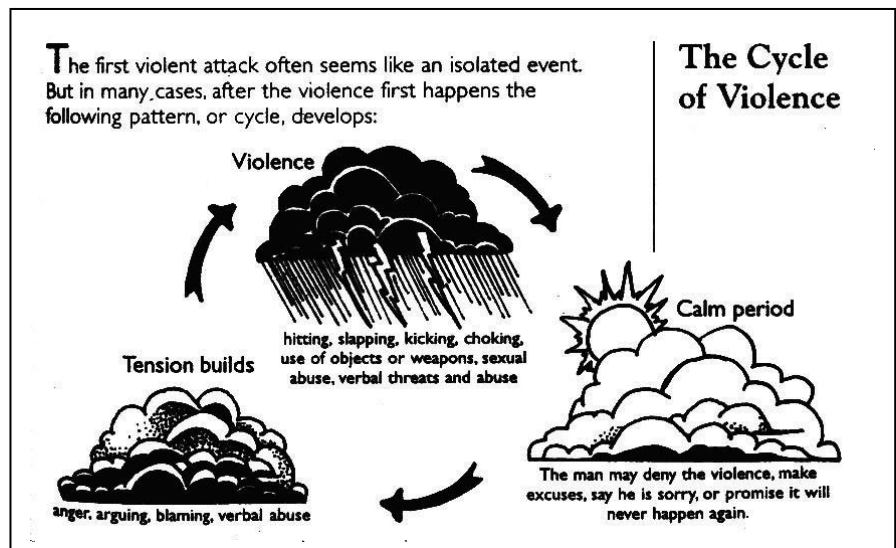
We are speaking mainly about *violence between a woman and a man* in this period. However, violence can happen in any close relationship. For example, violence can occur between a mother-in-law and her son's new wife, between parents and their children, between an older and younger child, between family members and an older person living the home, and so on. House girls or house helpers are the most abused and exploited people in the domestic setting. Whatever forms of violence there are, we should be determined: Domestic violence in any form, in any place is NOT acceptable for a Christian!

How does the violence start and develop?

In most cases, the abuse (mistreatment) starts in the first year of marriage. It has usually **three main phases** to it: 1) The **mistreatment starts being provoked by little things** and sometimes by nothing at all! The woman tries in all ways to please her husband but the more she tries, the more she is mistreated. 2) The **abuse involving physical violence**. The woman feels unable to end the violence. 3) **Regret**. After the violence the man may feel regretful and may make promises about not repeating what he has done. But soon the tension begins to build up again and the circle continues.

African Tradition and Wife-Beating

Traditionally, violence in the family has been silenced, overlooked, and in some communities, even accepted as a way of keeping women disciplined and under the men's control. In some communities it is even considered to be a sign of expressing love to the wife! In such a way of thinking the woman belongs to her husband who can do anything to her. In some communities a husband will beat his wife because he has paid the bride price for her and feels that she is his property; he feels she is 'owned' by him.



(Picture from the book "Where women have no doctor", TALC)

Group Discussion

The topic: What are the main reasons (root causes) for domestic violence?

The crucial question for us is: *Is there domestic violence in our Christian homes today?* If so, what can we do to stop this shameful thing from occurring in the homes of our congregational members?

The Bible asks the women to be submissive to their husbands. This biblical teaching has been misused to the disadvantage of women. It is often forgotten that the Apostle Paul, in the same text, tells men to love their wives as Christ loves the Church and gave Himself up for it. This point of view does not support any kind of violence - Christ never uses force or violence!



Eph. 5: 22: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. "

Eph. 5: 25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Eph. 5: 21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Victims of domestic violence can be found everywhere in the world, against all age groups, among all ethnic groups, in all socio-economic situations and at all levels of education. In recent years domestic violence has significantly increased.

Why does this problem go on?

- The abused women fear to leave because their husbands might try to get revenge;
- Many women remain in abusive relationships because they have nowhere to go;
- Many wives fear to be marked as 'divorcees' or as 'wives abused by husbands';
- Many housewives stay at home with their children and are not aware of any help;
- Some women have developed a low self-esteem, they might even think that they themselves are not victims but responsible for the violence;
- In many cases the abused women go on because the pastors (evangelists, elders or other counsellors) tell them that it is their Christian duty to stay;
- Many women remain in a violent relationship for the sake of children;
- In some cases the offender may threaten to hurt other members of the family;
- Some women may lack support from their parents and relatives, and finally
- Some women, despite the abuse, still love their husbands and they keep praying and hoping that the violence will come to a stop, but not their relationship.



Who are the offenders of domestic violence? They come from all ethnic groups, from all races and cultures. They could be young or old, poor, middle class or rich. They often lack self-esteem, communication skills, are unwilling to acknowledge their emotions, do not trust the others, are jealous of their partners and do not want anybody else to influence their wives. In many cases the offenders are people who have themselves been abused as children.

Some offenders explode over minor things; for example the food is not hot enough, etc. Offenders may refuse to take any responsibility for their abusive actions even in cases where there has been a serious criminal physical attack. They blame the woman and say she deserves it, or, they may blame it on alcohol, unemployment, stress, or a hard day of work.

Causes for Domestic Violence

The main cause of domestic violence is that women and men do not enjoy equal power and status in the society. Many men believe they own their wives and have a right to control them. In many cases the communities have failed to recognize and admit that domestic violence is a problem that exists. We must accept domestic violence as a community problem for without this acceptance the crime will be allowed to continue!

Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Children are also affected by domestic violence. Either they are victims and directly beaten or they are indirectly affected when they watch their mother being beaten. Many children living in violent households are victims. The physical abuse of children is not limited to beatings; their fathers or other relatives sexually abuse some. In all cases, whether as a witness to their mother being beaten, being beaten themselves, or being sexually abused, the children are emotionally abused. -

Children in violent homes come to accept violence as normal. They see violence as a way to cope with stress and pressure. The boys develop disrespect for women and the girls develop an inferiority complex.

What is the role of the Church concerning Domestic Violence?

Women just like men were created in God's image. They are fully human beings. They are called by God to be responsible persons, accountable to God. Women's dignity and worth means they have a right to personal integrity with regard to their mind and body. Human rights have to be exercised in the context of a small and large community, at home and in the congregations. We should also get people to talk about domestic violence in order to create an awareness and awakening to it.

The Apostle Paul says: *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."* (Eph. 5:21). Therefore, wife-beating (or husband-beating!) is against God's will. The husband and wife are called by God to submit to each other in mutuality, partnership, and equality. - The Church as a healing community should reach out to battered women, their children, and their husbands. The mission of Church is *not* to encourage battered women simply to remain, but rather to rescue them from their abusive relationship and seek to bring a rebirth to a healthy relationship. In a violent relationship, separation in some instances may lead to healing in both the abused and the abuser. The Church's mission is the proclamation of Good News, which provides healing love and diakonia. When this happens, all the persons involved are called to salvation in all its dimensions.

We should support women and children who are victims of domestic violence, but we should also remember that both the abused and abuser need help. The Church can help providing a way for respectful dialogue to happen in order to lead them to Christ. The Church also should dare to ask herself the painful question: Should the Church, without encouraging divorce, allow marriages that cannot be reconciled to die? Christ never sanctified suffering; rather he lessened it whenever and wherever he encountered it.

Reference for this Learning Period:

Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Domestic Violence against Women: A Cry for Life in Wholeness (pages 120-136 in the book *"Pastoral Care in African Christianity"*, Acton Publishers, 2000, Nairobi, Kenya, ISBN 9966-888-12-8

19. LEARNING PERIOD

Living According to One's Means



1 Timothy 6:6-10 *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."*

Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Limited resources - how to cope?

We all know the financial condition of our country. Many people are in financial problems. What to do? How are the families coping with the limited resources? - An old saying states as follows: "It's not the big income, but the small expenses, that matter!" We see in our areas how true this is. People with sufficient income might always keep asking for financial help.

Openness is the way to peace in family; especially, when it comes to finances!

There are couples, where one might not know what the other earns. This leads to unending suspicion and distrust - and results in disagreements with quarrelling. As you are one, you should be one also in finances.

Men must learn to trust their wives with the use of money. Many men are very strict and want an account of every cent spent by their wives. Shouldn't the husband likewise report his spending to the wife? The word "we are one" should not only be spiritual words, but true in everyday life! Note: In a marriage, it's *not my money*, but *our money*.

It is a matter of agreement concerning which one of you takes care of the daily life finances. Openness is the key word. Some Ethiopian pastors have told how they always hand over their salary to their wives: "She knows better than me how to use the money wisely, so why should I keep the money?"

What about loans?

It is really alarming how common it is to take loans. It is understandable in cases of sudden accidents. But taking loans for ordinary every day life is destroying the economy of many, not only the poor!

The problem starts with the wedding arrangements. Young people sometimes take huge loans for their marriage preparations and wedding expenses. In many cases, the young family is struggling for years trying to pay back the debt. This is something we simply should stop at once! We should start with our own family economy and teach healthy practices for economy to the younger generation. We should strictly decide that our family does not live depending on loans.

It is good to remember an Ethiopian saying: "Light when receiving, heavy when settling".



Make your family decision:

We do not take loans!

We pay for everyday life expenses
with the money we have.

We try to save beforehand,
and we only buy what we can pay
with our money in hand!

What about tithes?

Proverbs 3:9 *"Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops."*

The Lord our God does not force us to obey his Word. The tithes are not a must or commandment, but they are an offer from God. It is not a *must* for us to pay the tithes, but the Lord has made an offer:

Malachi 3:8-10 *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."*

To repeat it in short: **It is not a *must* for you to pay the tithes, but you have the chance to get the blessing** of God through paying! Many Christians have experienced how tremendously God may bless them when giving to the Lord. God has his ways to get his work done, if we are not willingly following him. But *we* desperately need God and his blessing!

"But what if I am too poor to pay anything?" - The Lord asks us to give from what we have, not from what we don't have! Actually everybody has *something*. Let's be faithful in giving from what we have, whatever little we have. The poor are not to pay as much as the rich, but everybody has something to give to God. Put the Lord to the test: see whether you will get into trouble because of paying your tithes!



Group Work

(Man and Wife as a group)

The topics:

- How do we see our family's resources? How can we improve our financial status?
- How can we be more open in our family economy? How can we negotiate about future purchases more openly than we currently discuss these things?
- Seeing our financial situation, how much can we give to the Lord?

20. LEARNING PERIOD

Family Budgeting



Luke 14:28-30 *"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'"*

The Bible clearly advises us to plan for our economy. It is, however, not very common amongst the African Christians to do that. Many people are living with repeated loans. There are even many regular family expenses, which seem to come as "sudden, unforeseen" expenses - every year! For example, how many people take loans to pay expenses for annual feasts (like Christmas, Easter, etc.)? How many farmers take a loan every year to pay for their seed-grain?

Of course we know that the country is poor and poor people do not have extra money to put aside. But we should realize that it is the poor who especially need to plan and make a budget for their living! As responsible Christians we should learn to live with what we have, and NOT live with the money we dream to have!

Make your own Family Budget!

Sit down with your spouse and make a plan that shows how to spend your money each month. Somebody has said: "As we are careful to be unselfish and to spend within our budget, our money lasts until the end of the month, and we quarrel less."



Start with writing down all the income you will probably have during the month. No hiding! First, make a list of all permanent expenses you have. Then make estimations of other expenses since you cannot know for sure all the changing expenses. Then, the two of you together (!), make a plan how best to use the possible remaining money.

What to do if there is not enough money?

After you have finished the first round plan, then do an evaluation. *What if there is nothing leftover?* Realizing this reality together helps both of you to accept the sad fact that you must postpone any plans that you don't have money for now. *What if the budget shows deficit?* There you should be very careful indeed! If you see that the expenses are exceeding the income, then you should, out of necessity, decide together what expenses you are going to leave out. Never make a deficit-based budget for your family!

Getting into debt might be easy, but paying back is always harder. It can ruin the peace of the family. **Make a firm family decision: We do not take loans!** Instead, make long-term plans, try to save the money that is needed and buy only when you have the money needed in hand. (Here we are not talking about long-term loans like house-loans, which in some cases is the only choice. Rather, we are talking about ordinary every day life expenses of the family.)

You could also discuss together any possible means to increase the income of the family. Where can we get additional income? Or, shall we cut some of the expenses we now have?

Openness in economy is strengthening the peace in the family!

Whatever the financial situation of your family, it is good for the husband and wife to discuss it openly and together. Hiding economical facts is always a danger!

If you have schoolchildren or even older children in your family, it might be a good idea to let them participate when you discuss about family money. The young members of the family should not only use the money, but also learn how easy or difficult it is to find the income for everything!



Group Work

(Man and Wife as a group)

The topics:

Make (possibly using the prepared form on the next page) a draft of your Family Budget.

Prepare:

- a) A Monthly Book-keeping (list of income and expenses),
- b) A Monthly Budget (an estimated plan for income and expenses), and
- c) A rough Yearly Budget.

-
- *On the following pages you'll find two simple forms for Family Budget, one for Monthly Expenses, another for Monthly or Annual Budget Planning.*
 - *You may copy the model in your notebook.*
 - *Try with your spouse whether this budgeting method would be something for you and your family!*

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21. LEARNING PERIOD

The Church Worker's Family Life

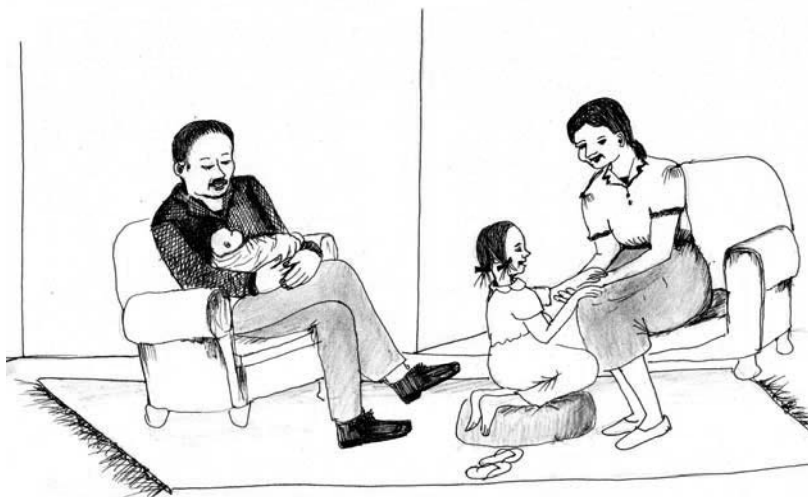
Many of the people, who have been given responsibilities in church, are struggling with the question of how to combine the Gospel work and Christian family life. Basically the question is the same for any Christian: How to give proper attention to both work and family life? Which one is to be put first?



1Timothy 3:1-5; 11-13 *"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. **He must manage his own family well** and see that his children obey him with proper respect. **(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)** ... (3:11-13) In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus."*

Joshua 24:15 *"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But **as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.**"*

Psalm 78:2-6 *"I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old-- what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children."*



As Servants of the Gospel we are clearly examined by other people. We should be examples as couples and as families. What kind of an example are we giving - not only for outsiders but also for our children?

Luther teaches: *We serve the Lord by working* (not only the Gospel work). Men: respect your wives' workload at home; do not only talk about yourself as "worker". She is also serving the Lord in her place.

We have received our Gospel Ministry as a call from God. Similarly, we have received our spouse and family as a call from God. How does one combine these calls? Is one to be neglected for the other? No! When Lord gives us both calls, there must be a possible way to take care of both.

The Priorities of Christian Life:

1. God

2. Marriage and Family

3. Work

(including the Gospel Work)

*Many Christians have the MISTAKEN priority list reading as 1 - 3 - 2 (instead of 1-2-3)! They think they should put the work (Gospel work or any other work of theirs) first and then take care of the family **if** there is time or strength left. Many times the family is completely forgotten! The 1 - 3 - 2 prioritisation mentioned above is done many times with good, spiritual intention. However, we as Christians should see how un-biblical and wrong that way of thinking is!*



1Tim. 3: 5 "If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?"

This text shows us that we **first** provide care for our Marriage and Family, **after that** we can be free to serve the Church!

The dangers are great when a husband and wife have only a few interests in common. Sometimes he goes his way and she goes hers. A husband's preoccupation with his work may be the major contributing factor to the feeling of remoteness experienced by couples. Or it may be a wife's growing involvement in outside activities and neglect of the home. Husbands and wives need to *do things together* and take an *interest in each other's activities*.

Often child raising is seen as the main responsibility of the mother. But it is good to realise that children need their father's advice and time as well. There is a saying "pastor's children are the worst". It is sad to say that many times the saying is correct! This might be because they grow without the support and care of their father. What can be done to change this situation? How can Gospel Servants be helped so that they can give more time to their family?

How to take care of your family?

- Spend time with your kids!
- Tell them Bible stories.
- Have fun with them.
- Hug them.
- Talk with them.
- Listen to their problems and joys.
- Pray with them. (Psalm 78:3-6)
- Also, love each other as husband and wife. (Eph. 5:25-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7)
- Your kids will be happy to see that, "Dad and Mom love each other, and us!"

(Britten, "Answers for your Marriage", p. 75)



Group Discussion

(Women / men separately, if needed):

The topics:

- (For women:) What does it mean to be a Church Worker's wife? What is her role?
- (For men:) How to combine the Gospel work (or other work) and the responsibilities at home?



22. LEARNING PERIOD

The Day of Rest - Strengthening the Family



Genesis 2:2-3 *"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."*

About the Day of Rest:

The church teaches about many important aspects of Christian life including the 10 commandments. This raises the question about our own obedience to the commandments. Let's examine our daily life and observe: Have I, (have we), really obeyed the Lord's 3rd Commandment: *"The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work"*. This is NOT a question on the number of the weekday, so let's not start arguing on Saturday, Sunday, or Wednesday! The question is: do we take ONE DAY PER WEEK for rest, or do we not. Whether it is Sunday, Tuesday or any other day, is not the main issue.

Many church workers feel that it is impossible to have a weekly day of rest. Church workers often fear that: "The Church elders and the congregation members will not understand if they see the pastor/evangelist resting!" - Let's stop and think! Whom should we fear - the church people or God? The Lord our God took the day of rest. When the Lord commanded us to take the day of rest, he knew the kind of life we face and the necessity of rest. Therefore we ought to consider the commandment as a gift from God and understand that it is possible to obey the Word of God! Why wouldn't we seek the solution to this very common problem? Let's create ways and means in order to have the rest!



Isa 48:17-18 *"This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea."*

The pastors, evangelists, and other responsible servants of the church should really take one day off every week - take seriously the 3rd Commandment! This would enable them to not only have rest for themselves but also give time to their wives and children.

Observe and take seriously the chain, the interrelated factors:

(in the Bible: Ex. 20: 8-11 - Eph. 5: 25 - Eph. 6: 4)

1. The day for rest,
2. marriage,
3. children





Exodus 20:8-11 *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien*

within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Eph. 5:25 *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"*

Eph. 6:4 *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

We should see to it that there really is *"training and instruction"* in our congregations in order to help the parents to bring children up as the Bible advises!

About Family Prayers:

It is important to remember that
"The Family who prays together stays together".

Think about this: An Ethiopian pastor shares the following: "In our work we are driving out evil spirits. When coming home, I sometimes wonder, whether those spirits have come here!"



Group Discussion

(Women / men
separately, if needed):

The topics:

(For women:)

- How can I support my husband so that he can really to take the Day of Rest weekly?
- What kind of support do I expect from my husband?
- Who is to take care of Family Prayers?
-

(For men:)

- How could I support my wife so that she can really take the Day of Rest weekly?
- What kind of support do I expect from my wife?
- Who is to take care of Family Prayers?

23. LEARNING PERIOD

Marriage, Family and Spiritual life

The first priorities of Christian life are: 1) God, 2) Marriage and Family, and 3) Work (including the Gospel work). Thus, when talking about the spiritual life of married people, we are to start from our private, individual relationship with God:



John 11: 25-26 *"Jesus said ... 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; [26] and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' "*

1) Care of our private spiritual life: Pray, Read the Bible, Join the Congregation

The very basis of our spiritual life is our personal faith in Jesus the Savior. He has forgiven our sins, thus we are saved! There is no other hope for us.

In order to grow in faith we shall regularly: a) pray, b) read the Bible, Word of God, and c) participate in a local congregation, family of God. What breathing is for our body, praying is for our spiritual life. And what eating is for our body, reading the Bible is for our spiritual life! Further on, in order to grow in faith we necessarily need the Worship (communion) fellowship of a congregation of the Church.

To be a Christian, to be a Christian husband or wife, and to be a Christian parent, it is necessary to keep your prayer life active. What about reading the Bible? Isn't it enough to hear the sermons on Sundays? - No, it is not! As protestant Christians we are convinced, that studying the Bible is a foundation for our growing in faith. Be aware: Satan wants you to read the Bible as little as possible - let's fight him!



Some old Christians have had the regular custom to **read the Bible through once every year**. That is a custom we should revive amongst our people now! For example in Ethiopia, where the Bible is commonly used amongst evangelical Christians, not so many have the custom of reading the WHOLE Bible. It seems that even many of the pastors and evangelists have not read the Bible as a whole, really reading from the beginning to the end. Let's pray for *Bible Revival* amongst African Christians!

Let us show a good example in this matter! Let's start NOW - if not yet started already - using the "Bible Through" leaflet! (*The leaflet is included in this material in the Appendices.*) Of course, the main idea is that you read the Bible no matter what "system" you use. But the habit of **reading the Bible daily** certainly will help you to grow in your spiritual life. It gives you strength to cope with different problems of life, spiritual and other problems.

Remember: it is very **important to attend regularly in your own congregation**. Try to find a place to serve there, too!

If you haven't yet been appointed for any service, approach your pastor or evangelist, or the elders.



Group Discussion

The topics to be discussed:

- What experiences have you about prayer?
- Why is it so necessary to read the Bible?
- Have you read your Bible through?



2) Care of the spiritual life of the couple:

Pray together! Read the Bible together! Go to Church together!

Pray and read the Bible together as a couple!

When living together as husband and wife, it is important to take care of your common faith. Pray together with your spouse, not only the family together! There are various prayer concerns that you might prefer to pray when the children or other relatives are not present. Try to create a custom for the two of you: a certain regular time to pray together.

When praying together, why not read a bit of the Bible during this time! You need to study your Bible privately, but in addition to this private study, take time to read the Bible as a couple. If you create this habit and keep it firmly, then you will certainly find it to be a tremendous advantage for your marriage!

Spouses who sincerely pray together live close together. Common prayer is a visible and audible sign of the reality of spiritual life in our everyday life. Jesus the Saviour is really with us in our marriage! He is interested in our matters and us; he cares for us. *"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Praying together protects you also from prolonged disagreements! Since it is impossible to pray sincerely while having a disagreement, knowing that you will have common prayer together with your spouse, helps you to speed up the reconciliation process.



Go to Church together! It has not been the custom of many African Christians to go to church together. However, it would strengthen the unity of your marriage if you started going to church together as a couple at the same time! Especially try to go to Holy Communion as a couple. Even if it is not the custom of your area, why not proclaim the good news of a happy marriage life through such simple signs as walking and sitting side by side! Or going and staying together in worship would also be a good Christian life witness to the different generations in the congregations - and to the world!



Couple Discussion

The topics to be discussed:

- Can we agree on a regular time for couple prayer now?
- Would it be possible for us to go together to church, communion, funerals, etc.?
- Could we find some good spiritual books that we could read at home?
- *Before you finish the discussion time:* Pray together now!



Col 3:16 *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."*

3) Care of the spiritual life of the family:

Pray, study the Bible, and go to Church as a family!

The Family Prayer seems to be common in African Christian families. But we cannot assume it is a custom in every home. Let's show a good example here, too! Let us have Family Prayers regularly and let us rotate the turns of leading it: Father, mother, big enough children, etc. The family members could have their independent tasks in it. NOTE, however, that the parents' example in everyday life is a much stronger "sermon" than any words during Family Prayer!



Group Discussion

The topics to be discussed:

- What kinds of Family Prayers do you have in your families?
- Could you find some useful, new choices for your Family Prayers?
- What about singing some good spiritual songs at our Family Prayers?
- (If there are several grown-ups in your household:) Could you start a Bible Study group in your home?

24. LEARNING PERIOD

Children as Gift of God



Ps. 127:3-4 *"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth."*

Prov. 23: 24-25 *"The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. [25] May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice!"*

- To become a parent is the start of a marvellous new chapter in our life. But being a parent also means having a great responsibility. It is a joy and a heavy burden of responsibility.
- When we receive children as gift from God, we need to take good care of these children. As parents, we are responsible to raise our children in a proper way. We should give them a good foundation for their future life - and for their future marriage!
- Note: The raising of a child is the responsibility of **both** the mother **and** father!



Eph. 6:1-4 *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'--which is the first commandment with a promise-- 'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

- Children are to honour and obey their parents. The parents have the responsibility as Christian parents to live in such a way that the children can respect them.
- Parents are to appreciate and encourage their children.



2Timothy 3:14-15 *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*

- A man, who wants to serve the Lord, should be a loving husband to his wife - and a loving father to his children.
- Some children have a chance to listen to the sermons of their father or mother. The strongest sermon for them is the everyday life "sermon" of their parents at home. Which kind of testimony are we giving to our children in our everyday life?
- What about **eating together as a family**? Traditionally the men eat separately - as a Christian family you could start a Christian tradition when eating as a family!
- Wives and mothers note: It is very important that you eat together and at the same time with your husband and children!



- Create a **"Family Committee"** where everybody has a vote and chance to talk equally! It is important that the children learn to discuss openly at home. This will help them in their future life - and in their future marriage!



Lk 2:51-52 *"Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."*

2 Tim 1:5 *"I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."*

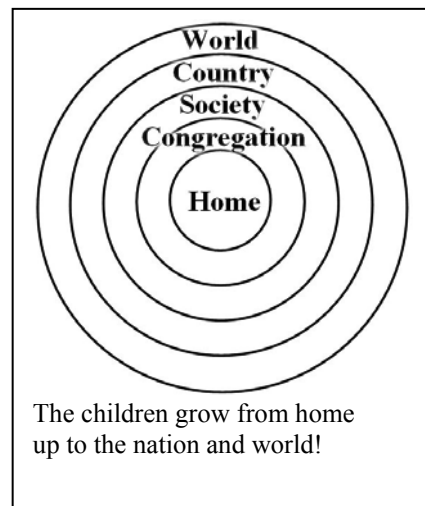


- Prepare the **family devotions** with care! Do not make the program the same every time. You could for example rotate the turns of leading the prayer: first father, then mother, and then turn by turn the children who are mature enough to participate, etc. You could also give the family members some independent tasks in the family prayer (singing, reading the Bible text, etc.).
- **Pray with your children.** Teach them how to pray. **Pray also for your children.** The children of prayer will not get lost! - **Pray also for the future marriage of your children.** Marriage is such a big issue in one's life that it is never too early to start praying for it!



Group Discussion

The Value of Child Raising:



The topics:

- What should we do to help us feel that children really are "our" children? How can we improve the sense of shared responsibility as Christian parents in our home?
- What changes are needed to make it possible so that we regularly eat the family meals together?
- How can the parents and children create a "Family Committee" together?
- What can help parents to sense the interests or gifts of their children better in order to encourage them?
- How should our Family Prayers be developed?



25. LEARNING PERIOD

Child Raising



1 Timothy 3: 1,2,4,5 *"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, ... He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)"*

1 Tim. 3:12 *"A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

Titus 1:6 *"An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."*

- **Spend time with your children!** Have fun with them. Talk with them.

- Hug your children!

- **Listen to their problems and joys.**

- **To the fathers: PRAISE more often than you punish!**

Every day carefully notice the things your child does well. Praise him/her often for those things. *Children need ten times more praise than punishment!*

- Take your child with you when you do your everyday duties at home.
- **Give time to each child** separately, not only as group of children.
- The children need education. When they go to school it is good to show interest to their schoolwork. Do not ask only for their marks; be interested in their everyday school life.
- **Take time for children's homework** - not only for boys, but also for the girls!
- **Teach all your children to take responsibility of household duties.** The mother should also teach the boys to work at home! No men's - women's work at home! Father: be a good example in this!

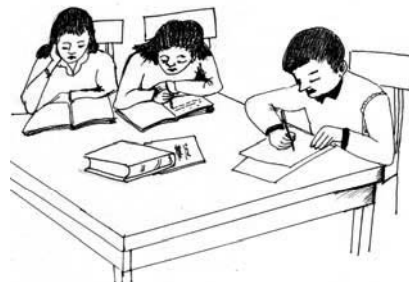


What about partiality in a family?

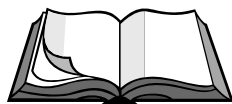
- Don't allow parties within the family! Equality starts at home. Do not have any of your children as the favourite one. The parent's responsibility is to handle the matters of each and every child equally.
- Teach your children to understand, that **every child - whether boy or girl - is of equal value.** Cut the destructive tradition of putting the male children in a higher place. Because of traditions it may be necessary to especially encourage your daughters in order to show them that they are equally valuable to you - and to the Lord!



- Take time and agree (the husband and wife together) about the child raising policies. Never change the order given by the other in front of children! If you disagree with what your spouse has spoken to a child, then discuss the matter in private between the two of you - NOT in front of children.
- Don't tell a bad-behaving child that 'father will beat you when he returns home!' The parent who is present when something happens is to settle the matter, in one way or another.



About punishing children:



1 Sam. 3:13 *"For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them."*

Prov. 13:24 *"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."*

Prov. 19:27 *"Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge."*

A punishment given by man is many times a kind of revenge. But God punishes in order to return the mistaken to the right way. - When thinking about punishing a child you should first consider the following: 1) Is punishment needed for children? 2) If it is, then what punishment is appropriate, and 3) Who (father / mother) is to punish?



Col. 3:20-21 *"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."*

- **Never beat your child!** Repeated violence may really embitter your child in the long run!
- **Do NOT punish your child in anger.** Try to cool down first in order to be able to consider the case.
- Punish a child only when he / she has decided not to obey - not when the child is mistaken.
- **"Children need love and limits!"**



Group Discussion
(or:)

General Discussion



The topics:

(Choose some of the topics, most suitable for this group.)

- What does Child Raising look like in our country?
- What is most important in Child Raising?
- What does one do if the child does not obey after all our trials?
- Why do we sometimes punish a child?
- What are the main challenges in Child Raising?
- How can you find a common understanding about a Child Raising Policy in your family?
- How should we teach about sexual issues?
- Are the children of church servants getting appropriate care?

26. LEARNING PERIOD

Family Planning



Genesis 1:28 *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"*

Ps 127:3 *"Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him."*

Ethiopia, as are many African countries, is faced with a serious problem of her population growing more rapidly than her ability to feed, clothe, house, educate and employ people. In response to this problem of an exploding population, there has been a growing emphasis in Government, educational circles, and the church, on Family Planning.

Reasons for believing that the Bible does not oppose Family planning:

(from "A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa", p. 144-)

1. God's design for Marriage in Genesis 2:18-24 does not mention children. The primary purpose of a wife is not to bear children but to be a companion and a "suitable helper".
2. Children are a gift from God and marriage is valid without children. A marriage can be a complete and fulfilled marriage, with or without children.
3. The creation mandate is primarily to control the earth but included producing children.
4. Man has a primary responsibility as husband - father. A man with too many children may find it difficult to provide each one with individual love, care and attention. Spacing children allows the parents to have time to love and care for each one.
5. A married couple must consider God's will and call for their lives. A smaller family may free them to devote more time for ministry. This is a personal matter, which must be decided by the couple themselves before Lord. But limiting the size of the family for the sake of the Gospel is a valid reason for Family Planning. A multitude of children is NOT always a blessing according to the Scriptures.
6. A husband and wife have mutual responsibility in sexual relationships. This has application to Family Planning. Intercourse is entered into with mutual consent and with mutual understanding. There needs to be discussion and acceptance of one another.





The Bible nowhere commands us to plan the number of children in our family. For children are gifts from God. They come from Him and not from man's creativity. But the Bible nowhere forbids a married couple from seeking to plan their family. Producing may have been a primary purpose in traditional African marriage, but it is NOT the primary purpose according to the Bible.

God has provided man with medical knowledge of how to plan and manage his family under the will of God. When a couple has difficulty in conceiving, they do not sin by going to the doctor for a medical examination and advice to assist in conception of a child. Neither does a couple sin when they seek wise counsel and advice to manage and control the fertility of the wife. In fact they are acting as God's helpers to rule over earth (and themselves).

Family Planning Methods

- Natural family planning (counting the days of month)

Mechanical Methods

- Diaphragm
- Condom
- I.U.D.

Hormonal Methods

- Pills
- Capsules (Norplant)
- Injections

Chemical Methods

- Jellies and creams, which prevent conception

Permanent Method

Sterilization (surgical cutting and tying of the tubes, male or female)



27. LEARNING PERIOD

Youth, Parents and the Marriage Preparations

In the Book of Proverbs there are many texts that tell about the importance of parents teaching their children. This also involves the teaching on marriage and family life.



Deuteronomy 6:6-7 *"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up".*

Proverbs 6:20-21 *"My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck."*

Proverbs 22:6 *"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."*

- How do we understand the idea of 'training a child'? What is training in a family environment?
- Traditionally young people were not allowed to spend time together with the opposite sex. Times are changing - how is it today in Christian families? Is there a big difference between towns and countryside?
- What form of "dating" is appropriate in today's world?
- Where should the youth get their information about sex and marriage? Shouldn't the parents teach them? How can the parents get the necessary basic training in order to train their youth?
- If talking about sex issues is more or less a taboo for parents, who will be responsible to teach the Christian youth? What is the role of the congregation in providing sex and marriage education for the youth?
- Earlier, the uncle or aunt used to give the instructions concerning married life. What about now?
- What is the impact of the kind of 'sex-instructor' (instructing the young man on sex before wedding); which has been the local tradition somewhere? What about a practice, where a man has regularly secret sex with somebody else's wife?
- Is it enough simply to warn the youth like speaking generally "Don't fall in sin!" etc.? Shouldn't the youth need more precise information, instructions, etc.?



Group Discussion

The topics:

- Who should teach the youth about marriage?
- What should actually be taught?
- Where should the teaching be given? Family, school, congregation?
- How should the teaching be arranged?
- At what age should the children be taught?
- Who taught us before we got married?

Topics for general discussion:

- Dowry (bride-price) customs?
- Wedding arrangements?
- Gifts for the Family?
- The delay of the Marriage?
- Kidnapping the girl for wife?
- Tribal differences?
- The Best Man's matters
- The 'modern' way of marriage?



What to teach to youth who plan for their Marriage:

A very useful book on this topic: Britten, "Questions Young People Ask". We recommend this book to youth and their parents.

About the need to reconsider the 'modern' type of weddings

It is obvious that many young people are forced to delay their marriages simply because they cannot afford the demanded expenses. It is obvious that delaying a marriage sometimes involves a great risk. There is an urgent need to reconsider the 'modern' type of weddings and to teach the youth AND the parents on these issues. But who will teach them?

What is really needed for Wedding / Marriage of Christians today?

- Payments for the relatives of the girl?
- Gifts for her relatives?
- Foreign type of wedding dress?
- Fancy dresses / sets of clothes for the bride's / bridegroom's friends?
- Various (double or even triple) dresses, shoes etc for the bride?
- Wedding day feast in two or three places?
- Wedding feast with full meals for many people?
- Video?
- Own house before the wedding?

Could the wedding arrangements be made more moderate?

- Getting rid of the bride-price (sometimes interpreted in a dangerous way as "buying the wife")
- Only nominal, very reasonable gifts to the relatives?
- Using national dresses as wedding dresses?
- Leaving out the sets of clothes for the friends of bride and bridegroom?
- Buying only practical, needed clothes, utensils etc. for the bride?
- Having good, but simple food at the wedding?
- Even serving only the "cocktail feast" for most wedding visitors?
- Taking a few ordinary photographs instead of videoing?
- Starting the married life in a rented house instead of building house before wedding?

When talking about the wedding arrangements and wedding cost we should remember, what is the ultimate goal in all of this. The main goal should NOT be pleasing the many relatives, friends etc. **The goal is to have a good start for a Christian marriage!** For such a goal the Marriage ceremony in the Church and a simple cocktail feast with joyful program would be enough!

We should warn any young people about taking loan for their wedding arrangements!

Marriage Teaching for Youth: See Appendices for the full text.



28. LEARNING PERIOD

Youth before Marriage

The decision on marriage is one of the very biggest decisions we will ever make in our life. The Church should be able to help the youngsters in this vital issue.



2 Timothy 2:22 *"Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."*

Proverbs 5:18-19 *"... rejoice in the wife of your youth. ... may you ever be captivated by her love."*

Who is the right spouse for me - how do I know the will of God?

1) Keep praying for your future marriage!

This is good advice for any child or youth, even years before your wedding day. (The parents should also be advised to pray for the marriage of their child, actually from the very birth of their child!)

2) Get to know the youth of your age!

Get friends freely, not necessarily thinking of marriage from the very beginning! It is useful if you get to know various people of your own and opposite sex.

3) Go through the eight tests of true love along with what follows on the next page.

Do not jump to marriage without knowing your future spouse! Ask your relatives and friends about him/her. Find time (dating?) together with him/her. Discuss any matters, freely, openly with him/her. If you don't do it before the wedding, it might be that you never learn to do it!

4) After all, dare to make your decision!

Remember that God guides those who pray for His guidance. Do NOT demand from God "special signs" etc, He is speaking to you in the Bible! Do NOT be misled by people who come to you expressing their "visions" that they declare are sent by God!

5) Before you make a decision there are countless choices - after the wedding the ONE choice is made, done for life!

You are free to choose your spouse. Nobody should ever force another person into marriage. There are certainly many people who could be good spouses for you, but be very sure that after your wedding you stick to the choice you have made and stop thinking of the others because those who WERE possible choices before your marriage are NO LONGER an option for you.



6) Try to be "suitable for him/her"

Many times young people are looking for the person, "who is best suited to serve my purposes." Remember the advice of the Bible: you get when you give (Luke 6:38). Thus, try to be suitable for your future spouse instead of only looking for your criteria in him/her. Also, try to continue throughout your married life in the practice of giving more than receiving.

How to choose?

Many young people are desperately wondering how they will know whom they should marry. The tests described below may be helpful for those who are trying to make a decision about marriage.

Eight tests of True Love (See Appendices for the full text.) **Remember: Sex is NOT a test of love!**

The basic requirements of marriage:

- 1) Spiritual unity
 - *We share the same faith.*
 - *We are members of the same congregation/church.*
 - *If not, we have openly discussed the consequences.*
- 2) Mental similarity
 - *We have enough common interests.*
 - *We do have enough to discuss with each other even after years of marriage.*
 - *We are similar enough and fit together even if we are different.*
 - *We have similar cultural (tribe, clan etc.) background; if not, we have openly discussed the possible consequences of the differences.*
- 3) Realistic planning and agreement on financial matters (economy).
 - *We have discussed and agreed on how we shall budget our income(s).*
 - *We do have sufficient income for the two (or more?) of us.*
 - *We agree on basic questions concerning economy.*

Friendship amongst the youth

It has not been the culture in Africa to "go together" with youth of the opposite sex. But the times have changed and are still changing. There is an urgent need in the church to create good, appropriate, and accepted ways for the youth to get to know each other. To have a "boyfriend" or a "girlfriend" does not need to mean that one has a sex partner!

It is good not to violate the local cultural practices that are still good and useful today. But Christians should be ready to consider new ways, which could be better and more suitable for today. Can congregations arrange possibilities for youth to spend time together "safely?" Or develop "new ways and means" to help youth pave the way for better, healthier, happier marriages in the future?

Are there possibilities for, and a readiness within congregations to provide a *new kind of family life education for youth*?



There is an obvious need for pre-marital teaching, counselling, and guidance in our congregations on at least three levels:

- 1) **Family life education for youth** on a general level, and
- 2) **"Marriage Schools"** for those who are actively planning for their marriage. In the future it might be possible to require such a course from all couples who come seek a Christian wedding ceremony in the church? But first, we should be ready and able to arrange for such courses to be available in all congregations!
- 3) In addition to this, the church needs to train **counsellors for pre-marital counselling**, as well as, Marriage and Family Counselling. These counsellors should be guided and instructed by the congregational pastor or evangelist, who also needs training for this duty!

Pre-marital teaching, counselling, and guidance are responsibilities of local congregations. If the responsibility is taken seriously, then young Christians will be properly equipped for their future marriages. Thus, many of the future problems most likely to occur in marriages will be avoided.



Group Discussion

The topic:

How can young Christians prepare themselves for marriage?



29. LEARNING PERIOD

Traditional, 'Modern' and Christian Marriage



Genesis 27:46 - 28:1 *"Then Rebecca said to Isaac, 'I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.' So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: 'Do not marry a Canaanite woman.'"*

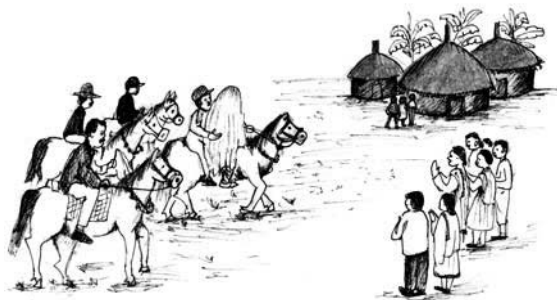
Proverbs 31:10-11 *"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. 31:28-31 'Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 'Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.' Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."*

A) Traditional (Customary) Marriage

"In order to understand Christian marriage in an African context, we need first to understand African traditional marriage. In Africa, Christian marriage customs should not be borrowed from the West, it cannot be.

Without exception, marriage in Africa has been considered normal, natural, and fully expected. Everyone is expected to marry. It is a part of a person's duty to his/her family and clan to marry. This is especially true for the male who marries in order to raise children and carry on his name and family."

- Many traditions have changed recently. It is useful to know the traditions of the local area.
- To know the local traditions does not automatically mean that you agree with them.
- What are the Marriage Traditions of your own tribe / living area / working area / congregation area? It would be very useful for a church worker to write down such traditions!
- How does a Traditional Marriage begin? What ceremonies are practiced? What legal aspects are taken into consideration?
- Who is responsible to make decisions about the marriage? Is it the Father, other relatives, the youth concerned, or who?
- Are young people allowed to meet with the opposite sex?
- Is it possible for the engaged to get to know each other? Discuss together?
- What is the role of the wife in marriage?
- What about polygamy?
- Are there "fatherless" children in the traditional system? Who takes care of them?
- What is the church's attitude to traditional marriage?
- Are there many church members whose marriage has started as Traditional Marriage (no Ceremony by the Congregation)?



The wedding ceremonies are being changed,
even in countryside! This is how it used to be in Ethiopia.



B) So called 'Modern' Marriage

- What do you think the phrase 'Modern Marriage' means?
- What kind of 'modern' marriages are found in your area?
- How does a "modern" marriage begin? Are there any Ceremonies? What about legal aspects?
- Who decides about the Marriage? Is it the Father, other relatives, the youth concerned, or who?
- Is there any engagement period? Are there restrictions concerning sexual activity?
- What about 'fatherless' children?
- What is the church's attitude to 'modern' marriage?
- What is the role of the local congregation to provide guidance for the Christian wedding ceremony?
- What is the role of the congregational pastor or evangelist in this matter?



C) Christian Marriage

- What do you think the phrase "Christian Marriage" means?
- What makes a marriage a Christian Marriage?
- Is it possible to call a marriage that started as a traditional marriage a "Christian Marriage?" Here, we are referring to a traditional marriage as one in which no blessing from the church was given,
- If a "traditional couple" wants to get a "Christian Marriage", what should they do?
- Does the ceremony in the church automatically make the marriage a "Christian Marriage"?
- What are the main differences between the "Christian Marriage" and other type of marriages?

30. LEARNING PERIOD

Christian Family Life



Ps. 128:1-4 *"Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD."*

Col 3: 18-21 *"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged."*

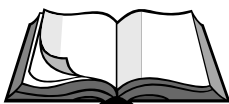


- The Bible gives very good and practical advice for our everyday living. Can we recognize this in the passage below?



Eph. 5:21-33 *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church-- for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."*

- Both spouses receive instruction: a) the wives are to "submit to their husbands", b) the husbands are to "love their wives," and c) both are to "submit to one another!"
- Marriage is really a mystery and a really marvellous gift from God!



Eph. 6:1-4 *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother"--which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

- God created man and woman; this is the starting point for a family.
- Family is the foundation of a society.
- It is also the foundation of the congregation.
- God's intention is that a family grows in faith, lives according to His Word, and is an example.

- **Forgiveness is one of the FUNDAMENTAL aspects of the marriage and family!** The children learn this, if they learn this at all, in the home.



Eph 4: 32 *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

Acts 16: 30-34 *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household." ... he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God - - he and his whole family."*



John 13:34-35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

- Faith in Jesus brings joy with it. It is a joy that embraces the whole family!
- Jesus gives advice to the congregation in this text. But this advice works very well in marriage, at home, and in our work places, too! A marriage filled with love is a great witness about the Lord!
- When children see that their parents love each other, they feel secure at home and it gives them a good starting point for their life and future marriage!

What Does Christian Family Life Look Like?

- Many times we are running to serve the family of the Lord and we forget to serve our own family. It is good to remember that "our" family is a gift and responsibility from the Lord.
- Love starts in the family, 1 John 2: 7-10: *"If somebody does not love his brother, how could he love God?"* If there is no love in our family, then how can we love God?
- A Man shall love his wife. If he does not, then he is lying when he says he loves other people.
- The wives expect love and shelter from their husbands. Can or could a man say "I love you" in our culture?
- The husbands expect love and respect from their wives. Can or could a wife to express her love by words?
- The family prayer is very important. The family members can have their independent tasks in it.
- Note: The parents' example in everyday life is always a much stronger "sermon" than one that is spoken. So, let your prayers be reflected in the way you live your life.
- The household work is also serving the Lord!
- A Christian husband helps his wife with the household tasks. There should be really no "women's" or "men's" duties, but our common family duties. How is our "everyday life sermon" in this field?
- What about the equality of our sons / daughters? Do your sons also have duties at home? Or do we bring up our sons in a traditional, unequal, way that in our speeches we might even denounce?
- The "power" (authority and responsibilities) in a Christian family should be shared and not exclusively held by the man. Being the head of a family does NOT mean being the One and Only Ruler.
- Spouses should by all means avoid living apart for long periods of time!
- Our motto (slogan) could be: *"I serve my wife." - "I respect my husband."*
- **In Marriage there should be:**
 - mutual expressions of giving thanks,
 - mutual expressions of respect, and
 - mutual expressions that encourage.
- In many cases, it is true that the women emphasize the feelings and men emphasize rational thought.
- An Ethiopian pastor told: "Somebody was having financial troubles. A Christian brother suggested prayer for a solution. 'I have no problem in prayer life, my problem is money', the troubled one replied."
- Let us show our faith in deeds, not only in words. Let's pray first and then take action without hiding behind spiritual phrasing. The Lord wants to bless us with our families in our everyday life!



1 John 3:18 *"Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*

"The best marriages and families are found in Christian homes whose members actively attend churches that teach biblical principles for family living. The young people from such homes are the leadership hope for tomorrow."

(LaHaye, Spirit Controlled Family, p. 15.)



"BASED ON THE BIBLE"

ABOUT BIBLE STUDIES AS PART OF FAMILY MINISTRY

These Bible studies are part of Family Ministry teaching materials. The aim of the program and of these Bible Studies is to help Christians to strengthen the foundation of their marriage.

As God himself has founded marriage, we find the foundation of marriage in the Holy Bible. This is why it is important to study the Bible when learning about marriage and family life. It is very important to any Christian to take part in a Bible Study Group. You may of course study these Bible Studies alone, but even better it would be, if you can do it in a group in your own congregation.



References for the Bible Studies in this book:

When preparing these Bible Studies we have gratefully used the following books:

- The New Student Bible, New International Version (NIV), 1986, 1992, Notes by Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, ISBN 0-310-92665-3
- Ruthann Ridley, *Every Marriage is Different*, The Tapestry Collection, 1993, Victor Books, A Division of SP Publications, Wheaton, Illinois, ISBN 1-56476-051-0
- R. Paul & Gail Stevens, *Marriage, Learning from Couples in Scripture*, A Fisherman Bible Study Guide, 1991, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, ISBN 0-87788-533-8
- Richard L. Strauss, *Famous Couples of the Bible*, Secrets from Bible Marriages, Living Studies, 1983, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, ISBN 0-8423-0836-9

All the **Drawings of these Bible Studies** are by Ato Assefa Guta.

Read Your Bible Through!

It is important to have Bible study as the starting point and essential part of any learning related to marriage and family. But where do you get your spiritual food? Of course from the Bible, you say. So let's stop and think a bit about how you read the Bible.

The main idea is of course that you read, no matter what "system" you use. But there might be need to re-think the habits of reading the Bible. God wants to talk to us. When you want to know the will of God in your life, try to listen to His voice.

Since the Bible is the main channel to hear God's voice, it is good and necessary to read all of it! Too many Christians read a bit from here, another bit from there, and there might be various Bible portions which they never happen to read. Make a permanent decision for yourself, *read your Bible thoroughly, book by book, the whole Bible, each part of it*, not only your favourite texts.

Read praying that the Holy Spirit helps you to understand what you read. When talking about new Bible readers, it is good to advise them to start with the New Testament, but encourage them to systematically read the whole Bible later!



When to read the Bible?

It is a valuable foundation for your spiritual life to read the Bible often. This means it is better to read every day. This is not a "law" for good Christians; this is simply a way to stay alive spiritually! If you decide to read when you feel like reading, Satan will certainly take care that you feel like that less and less frequently.

You are wise if you make a rule or habit for yourself to read every day, whether you feel like it or not, whether it suits your daily program or not. The habit of reading the Bible daily will certainly help you to grow in your spiritual life.

Read the Bible without any exceptions every day. If you read five (5) chapters each Sunday and three (3) chapters each weekday, you will read your Bible through within one year. You may of course make up your own program on how long you will take to finish one round.

After you finish the first round, start the next round right away. The Bible is an endless source of advice and encouragement for a Christian. We will never "finish" the study of the Bible!

You'll find a "Bible Through" leaflet in the Appendices of this book. When using the leaflet, cross out the read chapters on the list, and continue next time from where you stopped.

Do not fill in the original leaflet of this book. You may photocopy it for your own use as well as for the ones whom you encourage to start this reading program.

God bless you through His living Word!

SOME HINTS FOR A BIBLE STUDY GROUP MEMBER

Learn and apply the following basic rules for effective Bible study.

1. Stick to the topic of the day!

Remember that your goal is to learn all that you can *from the Bible passage being studied*. Let it speak for itself without first using Bible commentaries or other Bible passages. Sticking to the assigned passage saves the group from insecurity and confusion.

2. Do not bring other topics!

Avoid the temptation to bring up any other thoughts that don't really grow out of the passage you are discussing. If the topic is of common interest, you can bring it up later in informal conversation following the Bible study. Meanwhile, help each other stick to the passage!

3. Encourage everybody to talk!

Encourage each other to participate. People remember best what they discover and put into words for themselves. Some people are naturally shyer or quieter than others, or they may be afraid of making a mistake. If your discussion is free and friendly and you show real interest in what other group members think and feel, they will be more likely to speak up.

Remember, the more people are involved in a discussion, the richer it will be. Never condemn or criticize another's opinion. Suggest an alternative view in a spirit of love, if you can back it up from the Bible passage under discussion.

4. Do not talk too much!

Guard yourself from answering too many questions or talking too much. Give others a chance to express themselves. If you are one who participates easily, discipline yourself by counting to ten before you open your mouth!

5. Let God talk to yourself!

Make personal, honest applications and commit yourself to letting God's Word change you.

6. Never, never criticize your wife or husband in public!

It is very important to maintain supportive attitudes toward your wife or husband. It might be that some couples need counselling, but do not raise sensitive "secrets-of-the-couple" issues in the group.

WHEN DID THE COUPLES LIVE IN THE BIBLICAL HISTORY?

The Couple of the Bible Study	The time in Biblical History	The Era
1. Adam and Eve Genesis 2-		The Creation
2. Abraham and Sarah Genesis 12-	1900 B.C.	
3. Isaac and Rebekah Genesis 24-		Patriarchs
4. Jacob and Leah Genesis 29-		
5. Jacob and Rachel Genesis 29-		
6. Manoah and his wife Judges 13	1200 B.C.	Judges
7. Samson and the Philistine woman Judges 14		
8. Hannah and Elkanah 1 Samuel 1		
9. Nabal and Abigail 1 Samuel 25		
10. Shullamite and the Shepherd Song of Songs 2-		Kings
	900 B.C. Judah (South), Israel (North)	Divided Kingdom
12. Hosea and Gomer Hosea 1-3	750 B.C	Assyrian Captivity of Israel
11. Priest and Mrs. Ezekiel Ezekiel 24	600 B.C.	Babylonian Captivity of Judah
	450 B.C.	Restored Kingdom
13. Mary and Joseph Luke 1; Matthew 1-2	B.C. / A.D.	The Birth of Christ
14. Ananias and Sapphira Acts 5		The Early Church
15. Priscilla and Aquila Acts 18; Romans 16		

1. BIBLE STUDY

The Very First Marriage - Adam and Eve's Perfect Marriage

Genesis 2:18-25; 3:1-13

Take some time and remember when you were first married. Wasn't it marvellous in the beginning! Maybe you have also some unhappy memories? But when looking back now, you may feel that everything was bright and beautiful that time?

Many people seem to think, that the when they were first married is the most satisfying time of their marriage. But that's not exactly the way it ought to be. God certainly wants our marriages to get better as time passes. Every new month should be sweeter and more satisfying than the one before.

Everywhere in our world men and women get married. But what the Christian church has established is the requirement of *consent*. Both the bride and groom must be able to say something like "I take you." Whether their marriage is arranged by relatives, or arranged by the couple themselves they cannot be forced to make a covenant against their will, at least not a Christian marriage covenant.

Covenant, that binding personal agreement to belong unconditionally, is the heart of marriage. Freedom of spirit is crucial to covenant making. In the marriage of Adam and Eve, God brings this couple together by a symphony of wills and hearts, his and theirs.

The story of Adam and Eve takes us beyond culture into the paradise of God. It, therefore, more than any other passage in the Bible, tells us what God intended for this relationship. Marriage is not merely a cultural invention, but God's perfect design for companionship.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:**

- To discover God's plan for our marriages both by offering the perfect design and by the process of finding each other.

1. Genesis 2:18-25.

Prior to this passage (verses 4-17) the male is pictured as alone in creation. How does God create a longing in Adam for a creature that would be his equal? The male alone is not God's image (see Gen. 1:27). Who actually is "God's image"?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Remember when you began to desire a companion; compare Adam's experience to yours.

2. Only God knows how many months or years of happy life there are between chapters two and three of Genesis. It was the perfect marriage. It was perfectly planned and perfectly performed by God.

Adam had a will that was in complete harmony with the purposes of his creator. Like Adam, Eve was made in God's image. Her mind, emotions, and will were unaffected by sin.

3. "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Gen. 2:25). It was a relationship of perfect purity and innocence. There was no sin in them. This was paradise.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What ingredients that made Adam and Eve's marriage a "honeymoon" can improve yours?

4. Genesis 3: 1-13.

Here we see the entrance of sin. Satan's first approach was to question the Word of God. After he questioned God's Word, he flatly denied it: "You surely shall not die!"

Instead of fleeing from temptation Eve played with it. Eve did not flee. "She took some and ate it." It might be that Adam watched her do it. We have no idea why he did not try to stop her, or why he did not refuse to follow her in her sin.

Sin is accompanied by disastrous consequences whether or not we are willing to accept the blame for it. Adam blamed his part of the tragedy on Eve and God: "The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (**Gen. 3:12**). Eve said the devil made her do it (**Gen. 3:13**).

In much the same way, we may try to blame our marital problems on someone else. "If she would only stop nagging I could. ..." "If he would only be more caring I could. ..." But God held them both responsible, just as he holds each of us responsible for our part of the blame. And there is usually some blame on both sides. God wants us to face it straight. As a result of sin, conflict entered their home. Sin always brings tension, strife, and conflict.



⇒ **Question for reflection:**

In what ways can Satan use the desire to satisfy physical needs to affect the relationship between a husband and wife today? How about the desire for material things?

5. What indications do you find in the text that while Adam was given dominion over all the lesser creatures (Genesis 1:26-30) the woman will stand in a side-by-side relationship with the man?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- The phrase "a helper suitable for him" (2:18) is often misunderstood. Far from being a term used for a lower, minor position, "helper" is a term used for God himself especially in the Psalms (i.e., **Ps. 10:14; 27:9; 40:17**).

In Genesis 2 it is the man who cannot cope without help, not the woman. Nothing is said of the woman as a child-bearer. She is valued purely for herself as a companion. The simple meaning of rib as something from man's *side* suggests the unity and fellowship that was to constitute their relationship.

6. What initiatives did God take to solve the problem of the man's loneliness? When thinking of your own life, what initiatives do you see that God took in bringing you together as a couple?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- God took the initiative: Adam was put to sleep. It is God's decision, not the invention of humankind, that male and female will live together in partnership.

7. Though neither the word "marriage" nor the word "covenant" is used to describe this model marriage, both Jesus and Paul refer to Genesis 2:24 as God's description of covenant marriage.

8. ⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How has God been involved in the creation and nurture of your marriage?
- In what ways can a wife challenge her husband to higher goals? In what ways is it possible for a wife to weaken and destroy her husband?
- What can husbands and wives do to keep from blaming their problems on each other?
- What can a husband do to meet his wife's need for his attention and affection?

2 . B I B L E S T U D Y

Growing Together - Abraham and Sarah's Marriage

Genesis 12: 1-5, 10-20; 15: 1-6, 16: 1-6; 18: 1-15; 21: 1-7

Abraham and Sarah are called "people of faith" in the Bible. In their story we learn first that **even great men and women of faith have their moments of faithlessness**. We also learn how faith grows best under attack. The person who prays for God to take away his problems may be asking for an unhealthy spiritual life. Sometimes our faith falters under the stress, but if we admit the failure and accept God's forgiveness, even those **failures can contribute to our spiritual growth. The Bible praises Abraham and Sarah for their great faith, but their failures are recorded for our instruction and encouragement.**

Biblically, marriage is a vocation that demands our all. In one sense, we do not choose to be married as we might choose one occupation over another. We are chosen and called. When God calls and commands, he promises to provide all that we need to finish his will successfully.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To realize how even great people of faith have their moments of faithlessness and how God can help them to forgiveness and new start.

1. Read Genesis 12:1-5. Think about (or, if there is an atlas in your Bible, look at) the very long journey Abram, Sarai, and Lot made. What gave them the confidence to leave behind the old securities in Haran to risk making a new life in Canaan hundreds of kilometres away?

2. In what ways would such a move be both a problem and a blessing to Abram and Sarai's marriage?

3. Read Genesis 12:10-20.

4. The first attack to test their faith came shortly after they entered Canaan. There was a famine in the land and Abraham decided to leave the place that God had promised him and flee into Egypt (**Gen. 12:10**). If he had consulted Sarah, then she might have pointed out the foolishness of his decision. But like many men he moved ahead with his plans without considering the hardships he could cause her. Too many men refuse to ask advice from their wives. They think headship gives them the right of doing whatever they please without talking it over with their wives and coming to a mutually acceptable agreement. They do what they think is good and the whole family suffers for it.

5. The second attack came when Abraham asked Sarah to say that she was his sister. She must have wondered if it was the right thing to do. She *was* Abraham's half sister, but she was also his wife. Such marriages were not unusual at that time. But what they told the Pharaoh was only a half-truth, and half-truths are lies in God's economy. He cannot honour sin.

Why did Sarah go along with his sinful scheme? Is not this a case where obedience to God would overcome obedience to one's husband? It is! A wife has no obligation to obey her husband when obedience compromises the clearly revealed will of God (cf. Acts 5:29). Sarah could have justly refused. But it does show how deep her faith and submission really were. Sarah believed God's promise that Abraham would become the father of a great nation. Since there were no children as yet, she was expendable, but Abraham had to live and have children even if it should be by another woman.

What should Abraham have learned about taking matters into his own hands? You would think that he would never compromise his wife again to protect himself. But he did! About twenty years later **he did exactly the same thing again** (with the king of Gerar, Gen. 20:1-13). This shows how weak and faithless the faithful can be. There are probably some sins we think we will never commit again, but we must ever be watchful, for that is exactly where Satan will attack us. The amazing thing is that Sarah submitted again on that later occasion and that God delivered her again. This is additional evidence of her faith and God's faithfulness.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- The story of Abram passing his wife off as his sister to save his own neck gets tragically repeated in the life of Abraham's son Isaac (in Genesis 26:1-11). Here we see how sins, which are only partially renounced, can be passed from father to son for generations.

6. Read Genesis 15:1-6; 16:1-6. It was the legal custom of that time for a barren woman to give her maid as a wife to her husband. But still, why would Abram try to provide himself with offspring by having sex with Sarai's servant-girl Hagar? Here is the **next attack** to test their faith.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Abram gave in to Sarai's suggestion (16:2). This shows how both of them were putting pressure on each other, Abram on Sarai and Sarai on Abram. They were living in a **culture that counted barrenness exclusively as a "fault" of the woman**. Sarai's later blaming of Abram for her painful relationship with Hagar (16:5) is an entirely understandable reaction. Into what bind does Sarai put Abram (16: 2, 5)? The Bible says that Abram "believed God" (15:6) and that this faith was regarded by God as Abram's righteousness. How then do you explain his actions?

7. Read Genesis 18:1-15. What do you now see happening in the relationship of Abraham and Sarah as they struggle to believe the promise of God?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

Why does living by God's promise require not only individual faith but also shared faith and cooperation for Abraham and Sarah?

**8. Read Genesis 21: 1-7.**

We can learn a lot from the names and new names of Abram, Sarai and their son Isaac: Abram = *glorious father, highly praised father*; renamed Abraham = *father of multitude*; Sarai, renamed Sarah = *princess, mother of nations*; Isaac = *he laughs*.

9. When reading further on, we see that there would still be problems for Abraham and Sarah. Hagar and Ishmael were still around to mock at Isaac. - **The life of faith is never free from obstacles.**

10. Which promises of God give you hope that **your marriage can improve** when you grow together?

11. God often wants to use wives to correct their husbands, to advise them, to mature them, to help them solve their problems and give them insight. That's what helpers are for. Some husbands make their wives feel fully ignorant, with ideas that are ridiculous and opinions that are worthless. The husband who does that is the really ignorant! He has missed out on God's best for him. If a wife tells her husband there is a problem in their marriage, God wants him to listen to her, to listen to her evaluation of the situation, to listen to the changes she thinks should be made, to listen when she tries to share her feelings and her needs, then do something constructive about it. One of the prevalent problems in Christian marriages today is that some **husbands are too proud to admit that there is anything wrong and too stubborn to do anything about it**. God may want to enlighten them through their wives!

12. A Christ-centered home will be one where there is a large quantity of **forgiveness** (Eph. 4:32). **When I remind myself of all the things for which God has forgiven me, it softens me toward my spouse.**

13. ⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What have you learned from the story of Abraham and Sarah about living together by the promises of God?
- How did Abraham and Sarah suffer in their marriage?
- Why should a husband seek his wife's advice in decisions that affect her?
- How does God expect a wife to react when her husband is out of the will of God?

3 . B I B L E S T U D Y

Talkative Wife with Her Silent Husband - Isaac and Rebekah's Marriage - Genesis 24: 1-67; 25: 20-28; 27:1 - 28:5.

Many marriages involve a silent husband. In some instances, like Isaac's, it may be difficult for the husband to talk. Maybe he does not have much to say. Maybe he has always been quiet and does not know how to communicate. In other instances, a usually open man may neglect sharing things with his wife because he gets preoccupied with other things and does not realize how important it is to talk to her.

Isaac and Rebekah's marriage is a sad story. They were once a happily loving couple, whose love then in the course of years vanished and turned into bitterness and total silence.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To learn how to deal, and how not to deal, with the situation, in which one of the spouses is talkative and another is silent.

1. **Read Genesis 24: 1-21; 50-67** (The whole story: Genesis 24: 1-67).
2. With Ishmael gone, Isaac was the only child at home and his parents' lives revolved around him. He was free from any duties. Abraham had grown to be fabulously wealthy by this time, and the record reveals that he gave it all to Isaac (Gen. 24:35, 36).
3. It is doubtful that Abraham and Sarah realized they may have been affecting Isaac's personality and making him poor marital material by the way they were raising him. They were enjoying him so much they seemed to forget that he needed a wife if they were to become the progenitors of a great nation. But after Sarah died, Abraham realized that he must take the initiative and make plans to find a mate for his son.
4. Abraham was old; he called for his senior servant for help in Isaac's marriage business. The man prayed that God would bring the right girl to offer water for his camels. It was a very specific request for exactly the proper mate for Isaac.
5. Here is a lesson for us! The best way for our children to find God's choice of a mate is to pray about it. They can begin as children to pray about the one whom God is preparing for them. Praying through those years will help them keep their minds on the one most important factor in their choice, the will of God.
6. It becomes obvious from the outset of this story that God is the real matchmaker in the marriage. When the servant related to Rebekah's family the indications of God's guidance, her brother and her father agreed. "The matter comes from the Lord," they said (Gen. 24:50). Note, that *Rebekah also was asked*, and she agreed, too. No matter what kinds of problems a marriage may encounter, they will be easier to solve if both husband and wife have a settled assurance that God has brought them together.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How would you describe Rebekah's personality? (Verses 24: 18, 20, 24-25, 55, 58.)
- How would you describe Isaac's personality? (Verses 24: 62-67; 26: 18-25).

7. For Isaac and Rebekah, there was a tender beginning for their marriage. But somewhere along the way, this marriage began to sour. We are not certain what the problem was. It certainly was not lack of love, for Isaac truly loved Rebekah, and he openly showed it. They had a good physical relationship, which is important to a marriage. However, a husband and wife must also build a deep and intimate communion of soul and spirit. They must honestly share what is going on inside of them, what they are thinking and feeling.

8. One problem may have been their lack of children. Isaac possibly regretted that, and yet not ever admitted it. Isaac prayed to the Lord, because Rebekah was barren; and the Lord answered him and his wife conceived (Gen. 25:21). Having babies does not solve problems, however. The twins who would soon be born were only going to exacerbate a problem that already existed in their relationship.

9. **It seems to have been a problem of communication.** Rebekah with her bubbling personality loved to talk. Isaac with his retiring personality preferred solitude and silence. He was so hard to talk to. They shared less and less with each other through those years.

As a result, Rebekah's bitterness grew because of that lack of communion and companionship for which every woman longs. Her voice probably took on a biting tone. Her face may have developed lines of hatred and disregard. Her mocking looks and nasty comments only drove Isaac further from her to find his precious peace.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- Why do husbands and wives sometimes keep things from each other?
- What can be done to cure the situation?
- Is what your mate shares with you of importance to you? Do you really listen?
- How can you correct any shortcoming in this area?



10. Read Genesis 25:20-28

11. God spoke to Rebekah: "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23).

There is not one hint in Scripture that she ever shared with her husband this unusual divine prophecy. Why couldn't she tell him even this amazing word from God? Why was it so hard for her to talk to Isaac about anything?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Why do you think Rebekah never told Isaac about God's promise?

12. Evidently, nobody ever taught them couple communication! Their relationship went from bad to worse. **As often happens when a husband and wife have a poor relationship with each other, Isaac and Rebekah each fastened upon one of the children in a substitute relationship** in order to fill the emptiness in their souls. (Gen. 25:28).

13. Psychologists today warn us of the same two problems that were present in this ancient home. They tell us that a dominant mother and a passive father have a tendency to produce problem children, and that favouritism in the family unit tends to cause serious personality defects in the children.

14. Read Genesis 27:1-10; 26-29 and verse 38; Gen 27: 41- 28: 5. (The whole story: 27:1-28:5)

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What does Gen. 27: 5 indicate about the relationship between the spouses?
- What was right about what Rebekah did? What was wrong?

15. This would have been the perfect time for Rebekah to flee to God in prayer and tactfully share with Isaac the promise of God. If ever there was a time to talk it over, this was it. **But instead of prayer and reason, she chose selfishness and cheating.**

16. Keeping one's true thoughts and feelings secret can actually be a form of dishonesty. This had become a way of life for Isaac and Rebekah. They were of very different character. The lack of communication finally led them to very sad and serious consequences!

17. Trust is essential to any loving relationship. Husbands and wives who purposely keep things from each other, who sneak around to hide the truth about finances, the activities they are involved in, the things the children have done, or anything else, can never enjoy the fullness of God's love in their relationship. Love can only grow in an atmosphere of honesty.

18. Isaac had blessed Jacob. Isaac realized that God had overruled his original intentions even though it was by an act of cheating. His willingness to accept it from God was such a significant expression of faith in God's sovereign control of his circumstances that it earned him mention amongst men of faith (Heb. 11:20).

19. Poor Rebekah. She thought she was doing what was right, but **God never asks us to sin in order to accomplish his will.** By her cheating, Rebekah further separated her husband from her; she infuriated and totally estranged her firstborn son; and while she thought her beloved Jacob would be gone a few days, she never saw him again.

20. When God says that a husband is to be the head of the wife, he means that, first and foremost, a husband is to love his wife. The outworking of this love will be that the husband will lead his wife in thoughtful, understanding ways, protecting her, acting on her insights, and taking the initiative to meet her needs because he considers them as important as his own.

Read: Colossians 3:12-13, Hebrews 12:15.

4. BIBLE STUDY

Health and Prosperity but No Love - Jacob and Leah's Marriage Genesis 29: 25-35; 30: 9-24, 43; 31: 3; 32: 22-32

Taking Jacob and Leah's Marriage as a topic for our Bible Study does **not** mean we are supporting polygamy. Actually, this story shows clearly that **there are great problems in a polygamous marriage!** We cannot deny the fact that in the Old Testament there are several men of God who were polygamists. But in the New Testament we don't have even a single text supporting polygamy! Without hesitation we can say that the teaching of the New Testament is a "one-to-one" relationship, a monogamous marriage.

(Naomi Kaiga writes on "Loneliness in a Polygamous Marriage" as follows:)

"There is no real union and companionship in a polygamous marriage. The husband aims, it is believed, to serve everyone equally, but unfortunately he ends up pleasing no one. Instead he is the object of competition among the wives and the result is that suspicion and jealousy is present in all the relationships. The husband does not have an intimate relationship with anyone of his wives and he is, therefore, often more lonely than they are. They will find companionship in their children and sometimes with each other, but in their talks and friendship they do not include the husband who remains for ever a stranger. - In most cases, the wives often hate each other because of their competition for the husband's love. This hatred and jealousy can be transmitted to their children because they grow up hearing what their mothers are saying about the other women." *(Dr. Bryson Arthur, A Theology of Sexuality & Marriage, 2001, Uzima Press, Nairobi.)*

The marriage of Jacob and Leah started as a catastrophe. It was like an accident that gradually grew into a blessing. Jacob worked for years in order to get beautiful Rachel. But the wedding night brought Jacob a terrible surprise. Probably after treating Jacob to plenty of wine, Laban simply changes the bride and gives Jacob his older daughter Leah. Jacob gets Rachel too, in a week's time, after promising to work for another seven years. But Leah is condemned to be Jacob's second choice. She is fertile, healthy, and faithful, but married to a man by mistake. Rachel was called to faith in God through her barrenness. Leah is invited to hear the whispering of God in her large family and the shout of God in her experience of being unloved.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To lead couples to seek God together, not only in times of worry, but also in times of health and prosperity.

1. The parents of Jacob had a poor relationship with each other. Isaac and Rebekah each used favouritism fastened upon one of their children: "Isaac loved Esau ... but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). Rebekah had already cheated Jacob badly. In order to get Isaac to agree to her plan, she had to cheat him again. It was another masterful show. You can almost feel the melodrama as she exclaims, "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" (Gen. 27:46). So Isaac dutifully called Jacob in and instructed him to go to Haran to find a wife. One dishonest action usually demands another, until the life of the liar is a hopeless net of despair.

2. Sometimes you may hear about people who seem to have everything in this life and still regret their marriage. "I married the wrong person," they say. This shows how money or prosperity actually does not fill the deepest needs of a person.

3. Have a look at the story of Jacob's marriage to the two sisters: **Genesis 29:1- 30:8.**

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- Why did Leah's situation seem quite hopeless in her relationship with a) her father, b) her husband, and c) her sister? (See Genesis 29:21-24).
- Leah was in trouble. She could not win anyway! She was in trouble with Jacob, with her sister, and with her father. Real trouble - what could she do?

Note: Laban actually followed the local tradition of the time when marrying Leah, the elder daughter, first! But of course he should have settled that problem earlier.



4. Read Genesis 29: 25-35. What a surprising story! God decided to bless Leah and Jacob in spite of the faulty way they entered marriage. What does this show to you?

Read Genesis 30:43; 31:3; 32:29. - Here is a lesson for us! Isn't this an encouragement to those who regret, who feel or even know that they made a mistake in marrying, or marrying in an inappropriate way?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- We focus here on Leah *and* Jacob because there are several signs of grace in this text for Jacob. God multiplied Jacob's herds, comforted him with his caring presence, and blessed him with an uplifting, transforming experience. Leah knew the Lord had heard her prayer because she was able to give Jacob what he wanted - children.

5. The NIV Bible footnotes are helpful for discovering the meaning of each name. The names Leah gave show her desperate desire for Jacob's love, which apparently he denied her, at least at the beginning. These names also show how Leah little by little started looking towards her Lord. God alone could meet needs that no husband, not even a loving, converted Jacob, could satisfy.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- The name of each of Leah's children is a spoken prayer to God about her marriage. What is apparently more important to Leah than the blessing of having many healthy children?
- How would you describe Leah's relationship with God at this point? Judah's name means "to praise God" (29:35). What seems to be happening in Leah's relationship with God?

6. Read Genesis 30:9-24. "God listened to Leah." (30:17). Why is this especially surprising, when you think of the position and the plan Leah had? What does this reveal about our God?

7. As the story goes on, we see how Rachel is naturally infertile, while Leah is naturally fertile. Let us think: Why is it just as important for Leah to pray to God about her family situation as it is for Rachel?

8. Why is it just as important to pray when everything seems to be fine with a couple, as when they are facing great difficulties?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Leah seems to have been loved in the end. Rachel died earlier and Jacob still had many years together with Leah. Jacob chose to be buried beside Leah, not Rachel (49:29-31) and God chose Leah's son, Judah, to be the ancestor of Jesus.

Leah and Rachel show that practicing the presence of God in continuing prayer is just as important, perhaps more so, in times of health and riches, as it is in times of sickness and poverty. Prayer born of extreme anxiety is one thing, but prayer born of gratitude is a mark of true spirituality.

9. List the most important things you have learned from Leah's long and healthy life with Jacob.

5. BIBLE STUDY

No Children but Love - Jacob and Rachel's Marriage

Genesis 29:1 - 30: 24 (shortened: Gen. 29: 1-6; 9-35; Gen. 30: 1-8; 14-15; 22-24)

In this Bible study we see the first of the God-fearing patriarchs entering into a polygamous relationship. From the very beginning, polygamy was not God's perfect will. God made one woman for one man (Gen. 2:24; compare also: Lev. 18:18; 1 Tim. 3:2). Jacob could have accepted his marriage to Leah as the will of God for his life and learned to love only her. His father Isaac accepted the cost of Jacob's cheating when he misrepresented his brother Esau and stole the family blessing and Isaac was highly praised for it in the New Testament. Jacob was going to have what he wanted in spite of God's will. The events that follow should be evidence enough that polygamy was never part of God's plan for the human race.

Every marriage is like jumping into darkness. One can only know a little bit of a person on the wedding day, even after a long friendship. Of course one never knows whether one's spouse will be well or sick in the long run. So the promises we give in the ceremony prepare us for reality. But they also invite us to view sickness, whether temporary or prolonged, as an opportunity to find God together - precisely when we find ourselves at the limits of our own resources. - We discover sickness (lacking) in this Bible study, and health (having) if we study Jacob and Leah. Thus we will consider Jacob and his relationship with his two wives, Rachel and Leah. While Rachel was the loved wife in this difficult triangle, her continuing childlessness put a great hurt on their marriage and was like a prolonged illness. But it also called forth faith.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To show how difficult experiences like prolonged illness may serve to strengthen both the marriage relationship and personal faith.

1. The story of Jacob and Rachel's marriage takes us back to the period of the patriarchs in Canaan about 1800 B.C. We see here the sad condition of Jacob's two wives. Leah was unchosen and unloved, but fertile. Rachel was chosen and loved, but barren. Jacob's double wedding to two sisters is not just an evil plan by Laban but became an opportunity for the Lord to bless all three: Jacob, Leah, and Rachel.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Think of your own life: Can you remember a situation when illness turned out to be a blessing to your marriage relationship?

2. Read Genesis 29:1-20. Jacob turned his head, took one fateful look, and it was without a doubt *love at first sight*. She was a lovely girl, "lovely in form, and beautiful" (Gen. 29:17). And her eyes, what attractive eyes they were! Since they are contrasted with her older sister Leah's, who had no brightness or sparkle, they must have been dark and shiny, captivatingly beautiful. Jacob was impressed, probably too impressed with outward beauty. We get the idea that he was so fascinated by Rachel's beauty and so enchanted by her charm, that he failed to recognize her shortcomings or even to consider the will of God in his relationship with her. It is clear that a relationship based primarily on physical attraction rests on a shaky foundation. -

Let's continue the story. Jacob had nothing to offer Laban for his daughter, so his labor was promised as a substitute for a dowry. This kind of bride price has also been practised in Ethiopia among some tribes.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What indications are there in the text that Jacob is not only madly in love with the first suitable girl he meets, but is a man who truly loves a woman? - [*"So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her."* (Gen. 29:20).]

Jacob cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright (Gen. 25: 27-34) and blessing (Gen. 27:1-46). Now he agreed to serve his future father-in-law. Jacob had cheated Esau and now, in turn, he himself is cheated.

3. Read Genesis 29:21-31. How does Laban's cruel plan put both daughters in an impossible situation?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Leah would be tolerated but not loved. Rachel was the second, and the childless wife, and this spoilt Rachel's hope of making perfect Jacob's pure love.

4. Read Genesis 30:1-8. In the pressure of that bigamous relationship, Rachel's true character began to surface. When she realized that Leah was bearing Jacob children and she was not, she became intensely jealous of her sister and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" (Gen. 30:1). Here was a woman who had almost everything in life, great physical beauty, all the material things she needed, and the adoring devotion of a loving husband. She was envious, selfish, bad-tempered, nervous, displeased, and demanding.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How to understand Rachel's behaviour? Think about her relationships (to her sister, husband, others, and her God?)
- What about Jacob's response? His anger was not right in God's sight, but his evaluation of the situation surely was.

The sin of dissatisfaction has ruined countless relationships since Jacob's day. Some couples get angry with God for not giving them children, while others who do have children look forward to the day when the kids will be grown and gone and they can have some peace and quiet. - Homemakers want to be working wives and working wives want to be full-time homemakers. There are Christians who are dissatisfied with the places where they live, the jobs they have, the money they make, and the houses they live in. Something else always looks better to them.



Some wives are dissatisfied with their husbands. They complain because the men don't pay enough attention to them, don't spend enough time with the children, won't do little jobs around the house, stay out too late, or think more of their jobs, their friends, etc. than they think of them. - Some husbands are dissatisfied with their wives. They criticize them for the way they dress, the way they fix their hair, the way they cook, the way they keep house, or the way they treat the children. They get upset because they sleep or eat too much, waste too much time, or spend too much money. No matter how hard some wives try, they can never please their husbands.

Some of these things are important and need to be talked out. We should not totally ignore them and suffer in silence. But a spirit of dissatisfaction that causes us to protest, nag, have an argument, quarrel, and complain is a great hindrance to happy marital relationships. - God wants us to be content with what we have. "But godliness with contentment is great gain. (1 Tim. 6:6). Paul could say, "For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (Phil. 4:11). When we can recognize the presence of dissatisfaction in our lives and acknowledge it as sin, we can seek God's grace to overcome it and find new joy in living.

5. Let's return to the story. - In a similar situation Jacob's father prayed to the Lord for his barren wife (Gen. 25:21), a striking contrast to Rachel's and Jacob's attempts to accomplish God's purpose by the flesh. - Rachel's dissatisfaction leads her to the same kind of fleshly plan Sarah tried. She gave her handmaid Bilhah to Jacob so that he could have a son by her.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What might they have done if they truly wanted to seek God's will in their life (30:2)?
- How do you respond when you are confronted with a situation you cannot control?

God finally did give Rachel a son of her own. Now we expect her to be satisfied. But she named him Joseph, which means "may he add." And she said, "May the Lord give me another son" (Gen. 30:24). More, more, more! Rachel was never completely happy with what she had!

We have seen Jacob's love at first sight and his *love under great stress*. Look, finally, at *love through deep sorrow*. God allowed Rachel to have her one last request, to bear another son. Her labor was severe, and she died in childbirth. Years before, she had screamed, "Give me children, or I'll die!" The irony lies in the fact that she died giving birth to her second son. The child lived, but they buried Rachel. You can still visit her tomb today, a lasting monument to the disaster of dissatisfaction or unhappiness.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What have you learned from Jacob and Leah and from Jacob and Rachel?
- What have you learned about the discipline of being faithful to each other in the times of lacking something, or even in times of sickness?

For husbands: Does your wife continually sense your love for her? You might find out by asking her! How can you demonstrate love even in her "bad moments"?

6 . B I B L E S T U D Y

Everybody is Somebody! - Marriage of Manoah and his "Nameless" Wife Judges 13

We believe that God established marriage. He established marriage between a man and a woman, the two of them. When God created Eve He did *not* intend to get an extension, a kind of appendix to Adam, but he created an independent human being. She was also created in God's own image.

A pastor once married a girl, a beautiful, faithful girl, who as a wife was really "a helper suitable for him." But as the years passed, she was so busy with everyday household functions that they never had time together, no chance to share ideas and thoughts. She also did not have the level of education he had, and little by little they became distant to each other. - When she was a member of the congregation youth group she was an eager singer and had many bright visions for her future. But as the mother of several children and as the wife of an always travelling pastor, she was so burdened that she hardly ever had the strength to express her thoughts. She had also learned to be careful in expressing her opinions since the pastor was educated, strong, and quick to get angry.

The wife, being slow to give suggestions, was sometimes hesitantly saying: "Oh, I thought ..." In such situations the ageing pastor, who always wanted quick and straight forward solutions, would get upset with her and dismiss her with sarcasm: "Oh, do *you* really have *thoughts*?"! She felt beaten and abused. As years passed, she became depressed. She had even less to share with him. She was tired and she had no strength to develop her thoughts.

In Judges we find an interesting couple. The husband's name is Manoah, but the wife's name is not even mentioned. Let's have a look at them in order to see whether she was somebody or whether she was only an appendix to her husband!

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To realize the significance of each one of us, the wives and the husbands.

1. Read Judges 13.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What kind of a person does Manoah seem to be? What about his wife?
- How do you see their marriage?

2. Pay attention to the verses where there are references to names or naming.

["A certain man ... named Manoah" (2); "he didn't tell me his name" (6); "What is your name?" (17); "Why do you ask my name?" (18); "The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson." (24)]

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How do you feel when someone fails to call you by name?
- What do you think about the idea (which is the tradition in some Ethiopian cultures) that the wife should never mention the name of her husband at all, anywhere?

3. The story of Manoah and his wife surprises us with the truth that wives were far more than extensions of their husbands even in ancient cultures. They were individuals in their own right. They were valued and used by God. Everyone is someone! Still, all of us experience times when we feel as if we are nobody.

4. ⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How might the concept of submission (*"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."* Eph. 5: 21-22) be twisted and cause a wife of our time to feel like a non-person?
- How did God let Manoah's wife know she was special in His eyes? (13: 3)

Consider the announcements and assurances in Genesis 17: 15-17, 18: 1-3, 8-10 (Sarah-Isaac); 1. Sam. 1: 9-18 (Hannah-Samuel); Luke 1: 8-17 (Elizabeth-John); Luke 1: 26-33 (Mary-Jesus).

5. What can you tell about Manoah's wife's needs and personality? See verses 2, 6, 9-10, 20-24.
 6. Read again verse 6. How do you think the angel looked and how do you think Manoah's wife might have responded to his presence? Imagine how you would respond in her place!

Note how Manoah's wife rushed to tell her husband the amazing news immediately. Compare this to the case of Rebekah, who even at the end did not tell her husband what God had told her concerning Jacob and Esau!

7. What do the following verses tell about Manoah's personality: 13: 8-9, 11-12, 15-17, and 20-22?
 8. The couple worked together. Go again through the chapter 13 and look for places where you find the words 'we' or 'us'. - [*"the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us" (8); "We would like you to stay" (15); "so that we may honour you" (17); "Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground." (20); "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this." (23)]*

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What other hints of unity do you see in the relationship between Manoah and his wife? Read again verses 6-11 and 21-23.

9. We can learn a lot from the story of Manoah and his wife. We should be encouraged to be ourselves, individuals. Our exceptional interests, temperaments, and talents were fashioned by God. In the body of Christ every joint, every muscle, every nerve needs to perform the function for which it was made. If it doesn't, the church will suffer. We need to allow our spouses to be themselves and they need to allow us to be ourselves. If a woman thinks she has to adapt to the point of becoming like her husband, if she gives him back only a reflection of himself, she will not be the kind of helper God intended.

10. Read Eph. 4: 15-16: *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. [16] From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- How might these verses apply to a Christian marriage?



11. Often we see how people in marriage are trying to change each other. The wives want to change their husbands as much as the husbands want to change their wives. We can get so caught up in what they are not that we fail to see the good of who they are! -

In marriage we have a special opportunity to see the spark of uniqueness in another person. Even faults in a spouse's character can have value. Manoah's wife could have blamed her husband for his impulsiveness. She could have told him he should be content with one appearance of the angel. She could have said that to ask God for more was being bold. But she was respectful and supportive. She let Manoah be himself, and they were given a day together that they would never forget. The angel of the Lord appeared again, spent hours with them, and even performed miracles.

12. Manoah and his wife had real differences, but their unity was also real. Manoah was bold; his wife was shy. He was a person of action; she was a person who liked to wait, see and think. Manoah needed his wife's otherness. After the angel ascended, it was his wife who filled in the gaps of his understanding and gave him stability. *They are a lively example of unity in diversity.* Today we can also see how being different may be a source of continuous quarrelling or a source of joy and blessing!

God created us to be different from our partners so that we would fit together to make a smooth functioning unit. Our differences are to be linked like interlocking fingers of your right hand with those of your left. It isn't easy to live with someone who is unemotional when you express emotions freely. It isn't easy to live with a task-oriented spouse if you love to relax and enjoy life. But such differences, discussed and accepted, can be the very strength of a marriage!

Read 1. Peter 4: 10:

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

7. BIBLE STUDY

How *Not* to Marry - Mr. Samson's "marriage" with the Girl of Timnah Judges 14: 1-20; 15: 1-3, 20; 16:1, 4-6, 15-17.

Mr. Samson was one of Israel's judges, the strongest man of his generation. Judges were God-appointed leaders who rescued the twelve tribes at moments of national crisis. (You may read the story of Samson Judges 13.) Samson was completely unable (or unwilling?) to control his lust. When he saw a beautiful woman, he simply wanted her. What positive lesson can we learn of such a person?

Israel really needed a strong leader. The Philistines were oppressing them. Samson was extraordinary amongst the judges. Only Samson was announced by an angel before he was born (13:3). He belonged to Nazirites (see Numbers 6) whose lives were especially devoted to God.

"You are mine and I am yours" is the joy of the covenant, both God with his people and that of a human husband and wife. But "to have" somebody by itself could be nothing more than the mutual possession of each other's bodies. As such it is nothing more than married lust, desire. Unfortunately Mr. Samson, one of God's appointed spiritual leaders, is our example of wilful misunderstanding of God's design for marriage.

Mr. Samson first wanted a woman from the Philistine village Timnah. Later on, Delilah was at least the third woman for Samson to play with. In reality, this was not even a "second marriage" but rather a dangerous affair with a woman who may well have been a prostitute. Thousands of men had been unable to overcome Samson, but this woman succeeded in it. - We start from Samson's first marriage to the Girl of Timnah, an unnamed Philistine woman. It is remarkable not only because it shows us how *not* to marry, but how our gracious God continues in loving people who marry the wrong way and for the wrong reasons.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To show that sex should not be used in marriage in a manipulative way, either by withholding or by giving it for selfish purposes.

1. As a religious leader Samson is a great disappointment. Judges chapter 13 recounts the birth of Samson. The reason given is significant: "he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines" (13:5). The writer's interest here is not to give us a full life story of Samson, or even to list his sexual sins, but to show *what God did* through this extraordinary person. It is a wonderful statement of grace.

2. When God established marriage, he intended to provide men and women with mutual joy and satisfaction. The relationship between the two is, however, often damaged by "lust," a perversion of sensual passion in marriage. - Lust is normally associated with the sexual desire to possess someone who does not belong to you within the marriage covenant. In Hebrews we can read that even in a married relationship love might be replaced by lust (Hebr. 13:4).

3. Married people also need to learn desire control. True love "is never rude" (1 Cor. 13:5). Sex becomes rude when it is demanded, forced or used as a way of gaining power over another person. Song of Songs describes clean sensuality as a positive alternative to Samson's "taking a woman." The Apostle Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians is very often misinterpreted. (*The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.*" 1. Cor. 7: 3-4) Many times this Bible text has been used as means of forcing, even justifying act of raping in marriage. But, in fact, **the Bible never gives us permission to use force, not to speak of violence, in a Christian marriage!** Force in marriage clearly contradicts the Golden law of Jesus (Luke 6:31). Combining the Golden law with "to learn desire control" means to search for solutions that fit both husband and wife and not seeking the will of only one of them.

4. **Read Judges 14:1-7.** The Philistines were a foreign uncircumcised people. Marrying a woman from the enemies of Israel would be especially offensive for a Nazirite like Samson (Judges 13:3-7). But Samson would not listen to his parents. Desire was his only rule. - We should notice the objection of Samson's parents to the thought of getting a wife from among the Philistines. In the end they seem not to have required much persuading to "get her" as a wife for Samson. Samson successfully satisfies his biological lusts but nearly loses his soul.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What indications are there in the text that Samson's relationship with the Philistine woman started in a wrong way?

5. The Hebrew verb for "came upon him in power" (14:6) literally means "penetrated mightily" or "rushed into." In Samson's case this was a supernatural but temporary anointing of the Spirit. Samson must have seen this as a sign that God would enable him to defeat the Philistines.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Samson's divinely given strength enabled him to overpower a lion as he and his parents travelled to arrange the marriage (verses 5-7). In what way would his "gift" of power be both a blessing and a temptation in his intention to get a wife?



6. **Read about Samson's wedding in Judges 14:8-20.** - In the marriage customs of the day the completing point of the wedding would take place the first night but the feast would last for seven days. In this case, the bride provided the groomsmen, who were normally provided by the groom's family. Maybe it was because the wedding was in a foreign country or was disgusting to the Israelites.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

What pressures has this mixed marriage placed on Samson and the Philistine woman?

7.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What kind of pressures have you observed being placed on couples in marriages today where one is a believer and the other a nonbeliever? (See 2 Corinthians 6: 14-18.)

8. **Read 14: 16.** Her question put him in a double bind. In a relationship where "proving one's love" is not required, spouses can assist each other to love through specific feedback and direction.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Why would the accusation, "You don't really love me" be especially painful for Samson? (Note the similar accusation in his "second marriage" with Delilah, see 16:15.)

9. What circumstances in your own marriage could such an accusation be manipulative?

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- In what circumstances could it be helpful for a wife (or husband) to say, "If you really want to love me, I need you to ..."?

10. A person specially anointed may mislead himself into thinking the power of God can be controlled by the recipient. Samson lacked self-control. Self-control, especially in the sexual area, is the fruit of the Spirit (*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law"* Gal. 5: 22-23). This story illustrates the **deep connection of sexuality and spirituality**.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Judges 15:20 summarizes Samson's importance. ("Samson led or judged Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines." What was the "fatal fault" in this great spiritual leader?

11. Samson is included in the list of faith-filled persons (Heb. 11:32) precisely because his "weakness was turned into strength" (11:34) through faith, not because his strength was turned into weakness. Such triumphant grace is no small comfort to those who, like Samson, married for the wrong reason. In the end the marvel is not that God's people are able to exalt the name of God, but that God refuses to separate himself from his own people no matter what they do.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Are there "special sins"? In our days we have seen how **great people of God may fall deep in (sexual) sin**. When looking at ourselves, we have to admit, that no one is without sin (except Jesus). Of course, we should never defend sin in our life or anybody's life, since sin is always a serious matter. But we also should realize that **the Bible does not present the sexual sins as "special" sins above the others**. When looking at Samson, or today's sad examples, we may be encouraged when seeing that the merciful God still is using us and the other sinners for His work!

8 . B I B L E S T U D Y

Trusting God - How Hannah and Elkanah gave their son to the Lord

1 Samuel 1:1 - 2:11

Who is poor? The answer is different depending on where the question is asked. In Africa, poverty means going barefooted, extremely poor clothing, leaking roof or lack of necessary income. But, as many people seem to think, the definitive poverty is to be childless. Some African theological students confronted their teachers with some tough questions: "Teacher, how can you know whether your future wife can have children unless you have a child by her before marriage? And then, if you have only girls, is it really wrong to take a second wife in order to have a son?" What should we reply, based on the Bible?

As many African cultures are fertility-oriented, we could call them "survival cultures:" marriage is for security and combined resources. At the same time in the Western "identity cultures" marriage seems to be for happiness and personal fulfilment. There, people have as few children as possible and they even may destroy the ones they do not want. How should we see these things from the Bible's point of view? The story of Hannah and Elkanah's response to their poverty might help us cope with ours.

This marriage story is set at a turning point in biblical history just at the end of the period of the judges and at the beginning of the kingdom. Samuel, who will be born to Hannah, will become the last judge and will appoint the first king. So it is almost impossible to overestimate the significance of what was happening in this marriage, though this was unknown to the husband and wife.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To discover how times of poverty, suffering, and loss in a marriage can lead us to God.

1. The cultural background of this story is important. Hannah was mourning, even if she was loyal to her husband and he loved her. In the culture of that time, barrenness disgraced a woman. Hannah's disgrace was only sharpened by the mockery of Peninnah, who was the other wife of Elkanah, the fertile one.

In our time the social trends in developing countries are changing this way of thinking: where once children were an asset (the more children, the richer one became), they are now a liability (the more children, the poorer one becomes). The end of this progression appears to be found in the "advanced" cultures of the West. Where some, as the best way to preserve self-interest in the marriage relationship, and to keep oneself from being financially poor, regard determined barrenness (the decision not to have any children at all) as the solution for a better life.

2. Do you possibly have an experience in which poverty and loss led to bitterness against God? We know that not every story has a happy ending like Hannah's.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

Think of your own married life. Recall a time when you found yourselves unable to buy all the necessities. What good thing, if any, came from that experience?

3. Read 1 Samuel 1: 1-8. Why is the annual feast of tithes particularly painful to Hannah?

- It might be that other women envied Hannah. She had, at least, a kind husband who obviously loved her. But still for Hannah, one deep, unfulfilled longing made life miserable. Hannah wanted a child.

The longing for children may be the strongest in life. Many couples use much money trying to get medical help for their barrenness. Hannah, as many women in developing countries, did not have such resources. Her longing was more important than every blessing. Hannah wept, felt bitter, and brought her grief to God. When God answered Hannah's prayer and gave her a son, Samuel, she brought her joy to God as well.

Scripture declares that the marriage relationship is more important than the parenting relationship (Gen. 1:26-27 and 2: 18-25). The strength and joy of the marriage relationship is the greatest treasure of all. **Good parents are first of all good partners.**

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- In what ways does Elkanah try to help his wife in her pain?
- How do you respond both positively and negatively to Elkanah's question: "Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (verse 8)?

4. Read 1 Samuel 1: 9-20.

There are not many vows attached to prayers in the Bible. Hannah's prayer is almost exceptional in this respect. But we can be pretty sure that this vow was divinely inspired. Without Samuel, no doubt Israel's history would have been different.



It seems that people sometimes came to the temple drunk. Perhaps in those troubled times drunkenness was more common than heartfelt prayer. **Hanna** was depressed because she had no children. She is one of several barren women in the Bible whom God helped. Others include **Sarah** (Genesis 11:30), **Rebekah** (Gen. 25:21), **Rachel** (Gen. 29:31) and **Elizabeth** (Luke 1:7).

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How would the priest Eli's reaction deepen Hannah's experience of personal poverty?
- What is admirable about Hannah's approach to her problem (verse 11)?
- What are the dangers of making such vows?

5. Normally, prayer is a response to God's proposal: we seek because we are being found. But Hannah's prayer illustrates that we have a God who invites us to come to him with all our requests, even when there is the taste of self-interest in our motives.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What do we learn about God from his response to Hannah's proposals?
- Is some unfulfilled longing making you miserable? How can you take it to God?

6. ⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Mark out the points of the Lord's answer to Hannah's prayer (verses 17-20). In what way did Hannah need faith at each point?

7. *Samuel* means "lent to the Lord" (verse 20). The name sounds like the Hebrew for "heard of God".

8. Read 1 Samuel 1:21-28. - Parents have more influence than they may think toward their child's spiritual development. To hand over definitive control of a child and to assign that child permanently to the gracious care of God is the best a parent can do.

⇒ **Question to be reflected:**

- What shows that Hannah did not merely "lend" her child to the Lord (while keeping ownership and control), but *gave* him?

9. Read Hannah's song of celebration in 1. Samuel 2:1-11. - God's program of blessing is seen all over in nature. It brings fruit to the fruitless, and shows the emptiness of the proud, rich, and successful. Couples facing poverty *or riches* are wise humbly to honour anything God will bring and, like Hannah, to seek God's viewpoint on their most difficult experiences.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How could we help couples who don't get children?
- It is common in your area to have foster children? Compare the feelings of parents toward their own children and those of foster children.
- There are many children who are orphans for various reasons. Consider the possibility that God might have planned adopted children for barren couples?

* "God whispers to us in our pleasures but shouts to us in our pain." -C.S. Lewis

9. BIBLE STUDY

The Necessity of Listening - The difficult marriage of Nabal and Abigail

1. Samuel 25: 1-39

Loneliness is part of the human condition. Loneliness is always with us until death. But marriage can lessen its strength if the husband and wife listen to one another in a right way. Without good dialogue, a marriage dies because the partners actually live alone. In today's Bible study we find a married couple who lived together, but sadly, in isolation from one another.

Nabal was a very wealthy but foolish man. He owned a thousand goats and three thousand sheep. Abigail, on the contrary, was a wise, clever woman. She thought about how David's group of men had helped guard their herds during the year. Some even said David would be the next king. She was a bit shocked when she realized that Nabal, her husband, was ignoring this great man! Nothing she could say would make any difference. Nabal always laughed at her when she questioned him about how he handled his business. He told her she knew nothing about such matters. Finally she quit trying to reason with him about anything. He went his way and she went hers.

It is clear that Abigail was not a main player in the history of Israel. But as our Bible text shows us, she had a great skill for negotiation and peace making. Abigail was a beautiful woman with sharp intelligence. She had the ability to calm down hot-tempered men.

But Abigail was trapped in a difficult marriage. It is hard to imagine that she would have chosen marriage to Nabal. No, but of course in those days the parents were arranging marriages not the lovers. Maybe the parents of Abigail had chosen this man for her because of his wealth? Anyhow Abigail knew Nabal as a fool. The story about this couple portrays Nabal as a rude drunkard and really stupid man.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To help the participants to see the importance of discussion and help them to improve communication in their marriages

1. Read 1. Samuel 25: 1-39.

David was hiding from King Saul's anger in the caves and hills of the Judean wilderness. He had a group of six hundred followers with him. Instead of robbing from Nabal's flocks to provide for their food David's men helped protect Nabal's flocks from wild beasts and robbers. It is still the custom among nomadic tribes in that part of the world to charge protection money. They get some income and in return they provide protection for life and property in these insecure districts.

Abigail's name means "cause of joy." There was no indication that her husband would have valued her at all. Nabal's name means "fool".

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- Think of the main characteristics of this story. How would you describe them?
- In what ways did Nabal live up to his name?
- What about Abigail?

2. Maybe the marriage of Abigail and Nabal was different in the beginning? Quite often it happens that people try to pretend at first, but then later on the reality breaks through.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What does 1 Samuel 25:19 tell us about Nabal and Abigail's relationship?
- What about 1 Samuel 25:23-25?

3. Let's go back to the very beginning, when God established marriage. The first man was very lonely and thus unhappy, even if he was living in the paradise.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What were God's reasons for establishing marriage? (Genesis 2: 18)
- Does the fact that you are married mean that you never feel alone? Explain!



4. In marriage, people need different things. One of the most important needs is for someone to *listen*. This is the need of both women and men. We need to tell somebody about our everyday life, about our deep thoughts, and our feelings, too.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Think of a time when your husband / wife really listened to you. How did you feel?
- What did it do for your relationship?

5. If Abigail had looked at her marriage from a human standpoint, then she would have become bitter and unforgiving. Instead, she learned when to be quiet and when to act. Her wisdom produced maturity and made her beautiful inside as well as out.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- How can the truths in **Psalm 62:8** help you if your husband or wife is not a good listener?

6. Similar people do not often marry each other. On the contrary, it seems that opposites attract. People who are very different "seek each other" and get married. Thus, it is not surprising if you should feel that you are different from your spouse! The main question is not, how different we are, but how do we cope with our differences.

7. Sometimes we can observe married people who never seem to develop the "we" feeling. In such cases the husband and wife live alone together, just as though they were still single. Abigail and Nabal had this type of marriage. It was difficult for them to even want to listen to one another. They had extremely different values.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- How might things have been different in Nabal's life if he had cultivated the habit of listening to Abigail the way David did?

8. If Nabal had been willing to have conversation with Abigail from the beginning, if he had let her share her being and her truth with him, they may have had a workable marriage. It may never have been ideal, but *if there is discussion, there is always hope*.

9. Psalm 116:1-2: *"I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy."* The Lord hears us. We also need to hear each other or we will not know important things about one another!

10. If you want to work at being a better listener, read **Proverbs 18:13**. How would you like to apply this verse to your life at this time?

11. ⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- List and discuss different ways a woman can respond to a husband who doesn't seem to want to listen. How do you think Abigail responded?
- Compare the way David listened with the way Nabal listened.
- What kind of talking and listening is necessary in a marriage to prevent the partners from feeling alone?

10. BIBLE STUDY

Physical Love Without Shame

Shulammite Maiden and the Shepherd - Song of Songs 2: 14 - 5: 1; 7: 1 - 8:14

The Bible has often been said to be against sensual, physical love. However, this thought is a misinterpretation! The fact is that the Bible highly praises physical love, sex, within the marriage covenant. One whole book of the Bible is devoted to the celebration of pure sensual love within the covenant. In the Song of Songs a beautiful Shulammite woman and an unnamed shepherd give us a fantastic picture of private but holy love. Normally, only God should be witness to such intimacies. But here God has allowed us to join him in this joy because we need to get a holy (and healthy) view of sex. This is the view we get when reading about the pure physical love of the couple in Song of Songs.

Many people are shocked to find a clear love song in the Bible complete with erotic language. But look, Song of Songs is exactly that! It shows no embarrassment about lovers enjoying each other's bodies and talking about it. As a result, every now and then attempts have been made to exclude Song of Songs from the Bible or to make it for "Adults Only." - Song of Songs is a difficult book to interpret. There are some points of controversy: Did Solomon write it? Who is the main character? Should it be taken literally as a straightforward description of physical love? Or figuratively as God's love for the church? Or taken as both literal and figurative? Is it one poem or a collection of poems? Why is it included in the Bible?

Many times Song of Songs has been read as though it had nothing to do with lovers at all. Many have interpreted it as a parable of love shared between God and his people. Some of these interpretations identify every poetic detail with some corresponding side of our relationship to God. For instance, the bride's hair may be interpreted as non-Jewish nations who come to Christ. - In our time very few interpreters follow that kind of interpretation. Most Bible teachers believe that **the poem was intended to celebrate love between newly married couples. God values love between a man and a woman. That's why God placed this song in his holy Bible.**

Naked and unashamed! - These lovers love to look at each other. They love to tell each other what they feel. They enjoy the beauty of nature, the smell of perfumes and spices. They are openly erotic. Their ecstasy in love has nothing even slightly dirty. This love comes from the Garden of Eden, when both man and woman were naked and unashamed. It is tender, filled with delight, natural. You sense no shame or guilt; you feel that God is with the two as they love.

The lovers act as equals. Both the woman and the man make proposals in praise of each other. They don't flirt or play games; rather, they say what they mean. But still they show concern and self-respect in their love. While at the peak of joy, the lovers repeatedly warn others not to awaken love prematurely (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). They recognize the dangerously explosive side of love. (8:6).

In this Bible study we view Song of Songs primarily as a love poem. Although there could be other meanings, we don't have any good reasons not to take this part of the Word of God simply as it is written. It seems to speak most obviously about rich sexual love between man and woman. Reading Song of Songs we can clearly see the intention of God the Creator: sex is to be a beautiful experience that more deeply unites two people who are committed to one another.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To show God's intention for human beings in the field of sensual, physical, sexual love.

1. ⇒ Questions for reflection:

- Why is it that so many Christians avoid speaking about matters related to sex, even in connection with marriage?
- *A bee defends its honey since it is hiding the valuable thing.* Same thing with sex?
- What do you think is good about such reserve? What are the dangers?



2. Read Song of Songs 2:14 - 5:1; 7:1 - 8:14 Read the dialogue between the lover and the beloved all the way through. Especially notice the explanatory quotations: 'lover, bridegroom,' 'the Shepherd' and the 'beloved, bride,' the Shulammitte maiden.' [Note: Some Bible translations may not have these headings.]

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What male features does the shepherd lover express in his relationship with his beloved?
- Which of these features do not fit in the normal pattern of male thoughts?

3. When reading through the book we see a cycle of longing, patience, and reward. The lovers confirm their mutual belonging to each other. They prepare for complete fulfilment of their marriage.

4. Some passages seem to be a presentation of simple anatomical features of each other (chapters 4, 7). Most of the comparisons are not visual, but emotional.

A man reads:	A woman reads:
1) 2: 2	2) 2: 3
3) 1: 15	4) 1: 16
5) 1: 10	6) 1: 2-4, 13
7) 2: 14	8) 2: 16-17; 3: 1
9) 4: 1-7	10) 4: 16
11) 5: 1	12) 5: 10-16; 6: 2-3
13) 6: 4-7	14) 6: 11-12
15) 7: 1-9	16) 7: 10-13; 8: 3-7
17) 8: 13	18) 8: 14

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Imagine yourself in the place of these lovers. What did they feel when they thought of such expressions?

5. The lover is pictured with shepherd-like qualities of strength. The beloved is tender and feminine. Yet, both of them are gentle, which is the mark of true and mature love. She is free to take initiatives with him both verbally (5:3) and physically (3:4). Their mutual invitation, verbalized through the words "come" (4:8, 16) and "I come" (5: 1) are expressions of playful and positive desire that is part of true romance.

- This love song does not fit the normal thought pattern of an aggressive male and an agreeing female, even if the Song clearly praises the maleness of the lover and the femaleness of the beloved.

6. The lover and the beloved well understand that romance is more a matter of atmosphere, more feeling than technique. "Under the apple tree (a beloved tree of the ancient world) I awakened you." (8:5) refers to the right place for *them*. The beloved is perfumed (4:11) and either lightly clothed or unclothed (5:3).

7. The lovers express the declaration of the covenantal nature of sexual fulfilment. They refer to the covenant principle used repeatedly in relation to the covenant of God and his people: "My lover is mine and I am his" (2:16). **Sexual intercourse is to married life what Sabbath (the day of rest) is to work.**

It is a holy, blessed pause that helps us make sense out of our marriage.

8. Patience in lovemaking and a sense of timing is crucial to the progression from longing to fulfilment. Each must call forth in the other a response that comes freely and not under force.

9. ⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What female features does the Shulammitte express in her relationship with her lover?
- Which of these features do not fit in the normal female pattern of thoughts?
- In what way(s) might these descriptions be expressed in spirituality?
- In what ways do the Shepherd and the Shulammitte delight differently in each other?
- Why is speech as important as sight and touch in lovemaking?
- What do you think would help couples enjoy such unashamed sensuality?
- What would make such sensuality unholy or perverse?
- The name of God is not even mentioned in this book. (*It is in some, e.g. in an Amharic translation, but it is not in various other Bible translations.*) What hints are there that beauty and love like this are not a mere human creation?

10. The climax of the book is 8: 5-7, which praises love and absolutely invites the question: "Where does such love come from?" - Even if Song of Songs is primarily about love on the human level, many Christians and Jews have read it as book about God's love. This was probably not the writer's original intent, but it is an inspiring way to look at the book. After all, God made human love and other parts of the Bible suggest its similarity to God's love. Song of Songs never makes this connection, but it does present a love so rich, so full, and so unashamed that it is natural to think of God and his love for us.

11. ⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- Why is the repeated phrase "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) a fitting statement to make to one's spouse under some circumstances?
- What have you learned that will help you say, "I love you" more authentically?

Read again: Song of Songs 4: 7.

11. BIBLE STUDY

Marriage until Death - Priest Ezekiel and his Wife's Last Day Together **Ezekiel 24: 15-27; 1 Corinthians 7: 29-30**

Death of one of the spouses is the end of marriage. This has been clearly stated at many Christian marriage ceremonies throughout the world. "I want to show her / him love in good days and bad days, until death!" Many bridegrooms and brides have publicly expressed words like this, but not many have thought beyond the first part of the promise to the "death" part of it. - One reason of course is that death is normally not to be discussed. People seem to be afraid of talking about it, even Christians. In theory Christians believe death is the door to eternal life and as such a matter of joy for a Christian. But in everyday life death is a taboo for many people. This is why the death of one's spouse is a thing that even Christians simply don't allow to enter into their minds.

In today's world many couples in the West marry for as long as love lasts, rather than as long as life lasts. In such thinking "until death" represents something simply unrealistic. But still we have to admit the fact that the certainty of death is there. Using the Apostle Paul's words we can call death "the last marriage enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26). The lovers may speak dreamily about dying together, but that is more like poetry. The reality is that in most cases one partner will break the marriage covenant through death. -

Our text tells us of priest Ezekiel and his wife's last day together. This is quite an extraordinary story in the Bible. Ezekiel was ordained by God to be a living parable to the nation of Israel. Even the death of Ezekiel's wife was counted in his prophetic ministry. The death of his beloved became a symbol of the coming tragic fall of Jerusalem, the centre of the world for Jews in exile. This is no ordinary loss by death. But it points to a deep truth: Not just love, but the love of God defeats death.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To discuss the relationship of death to the marriage covenant and how faith in God goes beyond death.

The story of Priest Ezekiel and his wife takes us to the land of Babylon. Around the year of 600 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's army captured Jerusalem and took the king and ten thousand people into captivity (2 Kings 24: 14). God's call came to him five years later. Ezekiel, who had been a priest in the temple in Jerusalem (1:2-3) now became a prophet *about* Jerusalem but not *to* it. Ezekiel was talking to his fellow exiles who thought their return to Jerusalem would happen soon. The incident of our Bible study, the death of his wife and the prophetic meaning of his refusal to mourn her publicly, was the turning point in his ministry: the tragic and final fall of Jerusalem. - We know very little of Ezekiel's personal life. Ezekiel was called to do some very strange things. He was to lie on his side outside his house every day for a year with his hands tied. This was to symbolize the burden of punishment that was coming on Jerusalem (4:4-8). Some people considered Ezekiel to be crazy. Some thought he was a holy nuisance. For one short period, when his predictions came true, Ezekiel enjoyed popularity and acceptance (33: 30-32). But Ezekiel's wife never lived to see this day.

1. Ezekiel was a priest in the temple of Jerusalem. He and his wife were taken in 597 B.C. against their wills to live as exiles in Babylonia. We know little about Ezekiel's personal life except the details in 1: 2-3 and the text we are studying now.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Whether in Western or in African societies, death seems to be taboo as a topic of discussion. Why do you think many people find it so hard to talk about this subject?

2. Read Ezekiel 24:15-27.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What does God tell Ezekiel and what must he do about it?
- What phrases in the Lord's message tell us how Ezekiel feels about his wife?
- Describe the thoughts and feelings of Ezekiel until the next morning.
- Thinking of what people normally do when they lose a loved one, we understand that God ordered the prophet to act differently. Why do you think God did this?
- How would Ezekiel's actions draw attention to a tragedy greater than his personal loss?

3. In this text we find five aspects of the mourning customs mentioned: (1) "Sighing" refers to the noisy lamentations customary at funerals; (2) The headdress for a priest like Ezekiel would normally be removed so the head could be covered with dust and ashes; (3) Normally the bereaved would be barefoot. (4) "Covering the lower part of your face" below the nose was a requirement for lepers as well as a mourning custom. (5) "The bread of mourners" was the customary funeral meal.

Verses 19-24 portray Ezekiel's colleagues coming to console him and finding instead a word from the Lord. Just as Ezekiel had lost his precious wife, the nation would soon lose the temple in Jerusalem, the delight of Israel's soul. Just as Ezekiel had not wept openly, no expression of grief would be enough for the loss of the centre of Israel's life.

4. Many Christians face a dilemma when they lose a loved one. On the one hand they are stricken with grief, as is any normal person; yet, they feel they must not express it as "those who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-14).

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How does the text indicate that God was not requiring Ezekiel to become an unfeeling message-maker who was not allowed to grieve?
- How can our handling of the death of a loved one bring glory to God?



5. Christians need to work their way through the stages of grief just as other people do. Failure to do so for "spiritual reasons" often leads to a breakdown or a premature jump into a new marriage. -

What we learn in this study is not a spiritual *alternative* for grieving but a spiritual *approach* to grieving. -

It is apparent from verses 25-27 that the loss of his wife was a turning point in Ezekiel's life and ministry. He is speaking of the death of his wife, the destruction of the temple, and the arrival of a fugitive from Jerusalem as one special event. Ezekiel is now freed from ritual dumbness and is free to speak openly.

While he had been a prophet of fortune for Jerusalem, now he would become a shepherd to the exiles, encouraging them to look to the new Israel. All of this was "so ... they will know that I am the Lord" (v. 27), a phrase that occurs 64 times in the book and summarizes the passion of Ezekiel's life. - True followers of Jesus have the same passion as Ezekiel. They feel loss just as any normal person. But their passion is to know the Lord in it and to bear witness to the uplifting hope in Christ with regard to the resurrection of the body.

6. **Read 1 Corinthians 7:29-30.** - Paul's intention in 1 Corinthians 7 is not to discourage married people from developing their relationship, or to pretend that they are too spiritual to grieve when they lose a loved one. Rather, he is concerned that **God clearly should be first**. Otherwise even a great marriage can become an idol (something to be worshipped). We are pilgrims on this earth and that radically affects our attitude to marriage, possessions, and career.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How does this passage and Ezekiel's experience put bereavement in its proper perspective?
- What fears do you have as you reflect on the possibility of losing your spouse?
- What fears can be relieved by constructive action and preparation?
- What fears must be dealt with by faith in God?

7. Romans 7:2-3 gives a definitive permission for remarriage after one spouse dies: "by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage..."

There has been discussion on whether or not the couples should give each other permission to remarry if one spouse should die. If they did, why would this be a valuable gift? If not, why is such planning dangerous?

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- Some people say you can only make a success of marriage if you can make a success of the single life. What value is there in preparing to be competent alone as preparation for the case when you might lose your spouse?
- What dangers are there in planning for the possibility of singleness again?

12. BIBLE STUDY

Forgiveness as a Foundation - The marriage of Hosea and Gomer

Hosea 1-3

Marriage is founded upon forgiveness! If there is no forgiveness, the marriage will quite soon be in deep trouble. As our spiritual life is based on forgiveness, similarly, our married life should be based on forgiveness. But how many times should a husband or wife forgive? Some say, "If I keep forgiving, then I simply accept his or her pattern of sin. Or "If I keep forgiving, he or she will think they can get away with anything they want." Others say, "If I keep forgiving, then am I not giving approval to my spouse's bad behaviour." Or "I can't take another hurt like that. If he or she does that one more time, then I'm leaving."

Those are human responses, but what would be the response of Jesus. Peter had asked the Lord this same question: *"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"* Jesus answered, *"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times"* (Matt. 18:21, 22). Quite a lot of forgiveness! In fact, Jesus was simply saying in an appealing way that there is no end to forgiveness.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To understand the necessity to ask for forgiveness and forgive each other in married life.

We should not forget that when a marriage fails there is still the covenant, the promise of God! The covenant may be broken but not canceled. It is like a foundation to a house. Even if the house is burned to the ground, the foundation remains as a basis for rebuilding the house. Covenant love rejects sin but loves the sinner. So the first strategy in a very difficult marriage is not to divorce, but in a constructive way to fight within the covenant.

According to the Bible, adultery can be an acceptable reason for divorce. But the story of Hosea and Gomer helps us to see, that adultery does not automatically force the concerned people to divorce. Hosea did forgive. In all kinds of cases the Christian way is first to consider the way of forgiveness!

1. Read Hosea 1:1-2:1. - The people of Israel were enjoying a period of prosperity. As is often the case, with prosperity came moral and spiritual collapse. Secularism and materialism captured the hearts of the people and sin became uncontrolled. The list is just like our times now: bad language, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, drunkenness, perversion, false swearing, dishonesty, etc. But the worst evil for God was the idolatry (Hos. 4:12, 13; 13:2).

Hosea was acting in line with the ministry and message of Jesus by what he said and did. His message was that **sin is primarily a breach of relationship with a loving God**. But Hosea did not simply deliver a word of judgment and grace. When he was delivering his message, he was working through his really hard experiences in his own marriage. He received the Word of God and acted in accordance with it (1:2).

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Why does God call Hosea to the shameful action of marrying someone who is a public adulteress, perhaps even a prostitute? What special problems do you think this would bring to them as a couple since Hosea was known as a prophet of God?

2. Read Hosea 2:14-23. - It is wonderful to see how both God and Hosea seek an ultimate, one could say, eternal solution for the marriage. The only difference was their perspective. Since the Lord viewed Israel as his wife, he viewed her worship of other gods as spiritual adultery. Now God commanded Hosea to marry a woman who had been a prostitute. God intended to use the prophet's personal relationship with his wife as a penetrating object lesson concerning his own relationship with his unfaithful people, Israel.

Regardless of Gomer's past, God directed Hosea to take her as his wife. It may be that Gomer experienced a genuine repentance for her previous life, turning to Jehovah in faith. Perhaps she responded to the Spirit-filled ministry of Hosea and he found his own heart drawn to her in deep and unselfish love. So it was that Gomer became the wife of the promising young preacher.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Hosea learned how to love his wife through his experience of being loved by God. Try to imagine yourself in Hosea and Gomer's place. How would you estimate the "chances" of such a marriage? Does it seem possible to you that Hosea could forgive her past?

3. It was after the birth of Jezreel that Hosea seems to have noticed a change in Gomer. She became restless and unhappy. He went on preaching, but Gomer seemed less and less interested in Hosea's ministry. She probably even accused Hosea of thinking more about his preaching than he did of her. She began to find other interests to occupy herself and spent more and more time away from home.

Hosea was convinced that the second child and the third child were his. He tried to stop her, but she continued to seek her companions in sin. Even so, Hosea still took her back in loving forgiveness and together, they would try again! She went again and again and he longed for her to come home.



In this story, we have a message of Hosea's undying love. Hosea wanted to see Gomer restored to his side as his faithful wife. He believed that God was great enough to do it. God spoke to him: *"Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."* (Hos. 3:1).

Gomer was still the beloved of Hosea, and even though she was an adulteress, God wanted him to seek her out and prove his love to her. How could anyone love that deeply? The answer was right there in God's instructions to Hosea, "even as the Lord loves." Only a person who knows the love and forgiveness of God can ever love this perfectly. One who has experienced his loving forgiveness cannot help but love and forgive others. Christian husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25). Hosea is an outstanding biblical example of that kind of love.

4. **Read Hosea 3.** - It seems possible that Gomer not only went back to her old profession, but also as a final shame she was taken to the slave market because she was no longer attractive enough to work as a prostitute. Hosea's words and actions teach us a lot. He did not simply long for the first times of their love. That was not possible; too much had happened in their marriage. Instead, he decided to love her in response to the Lord's covenant love. *God first called Hosea to marry; only after that did he call Hosea to love!* The sequence is significant for couples struggling with the realities of their married life today.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Compare the calls of Hosea. Isn't God's new call to Hosea (3:1) even more difficult, more demanding, than the first call (1:2)?

God's ancient people Israel kept going back to their sins. Because God never stopped loving them and therefore God never stopped pleading with them: "Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall!" (Hos. 14:1). We need to love like that. We need to forgive like that. We need to pull the hurts we have been keeping in our hearts to the cross of Christ and we must leave them all there. When we receive grace to forgive fully, then our minds will be released from the bondage of bitterness that builds a wall between us. When the wall comes down, then we shall be free to grow in our relationship with each other.

13. BIBLE STUDY

Trust in Marriage – Mary and Joseph’s Submission to God and Each Other **Luke 1: 26-38; Matthew 1: 18-25; 2: 13-23**

The willingness to obey God and trust him with the consequences is a foundation stone in a good marriage. God wants a Christian husband to put his wife above all else except Christ and to love her as Christ loved the Church. Mary decided to be the willing servant of God and this decision is basically a matter of trust. Here we first see *Mary's trust in God*. - However, trust in God is only the beginning of a good marriage. There must also be a deep trust in each other. We can only admire *Joseph's trust in Mary*! When the angel of God appeared to Joseph on different occasions and whereas Mary most probably experienced some hesitations about what to do with the small baby, we see *Mary's trust in Joseph*. - It is Mary, the wife, who first receives God's call. Joseph had to submit himself to his wife's vocation. But then, later on, Mary herself had to trust what God was doing in Joseph's life. So their mutual submission was an act of respect to the Lord because they loved God more than they loved each other. This couple has much to teach us about being married in God's way

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To discover the gift that comes from putting God first in a marriage relationship.

1. Read Luke 1:26-38. - In Mary and Joseph's time, the legal aspect of the marriage was the engagement. Joseph had the right to claim Mary as his bride any time after the betrothal. To enter into an engagement meant making promises to each other that could only be broken by a divorce. This is true even though they would not join together sexually until the wedding feast, a year or so later. According to the marriage design in Genesis 2, they were not yet married. Thus their relationship could be perceived as a pre-sexual marriage. - This story provides a dramatic instance where the wife was the first to hear the call of God. The mention of Elizabeth adds a further dimension of support to the miraculous birth promised by the angel.



⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What thoughts would Mary have on hearing the angel's message?
- What encouragement is given to Mary that helps her welcome the call of God even though it will complicate her future marriage to Joseph?
- What could Joseph, and perhaps all men, learn from Mary's spiritual pilgrimage?

2. Read Matthew 1:18-25. - Most probably there was a conflict in Joseph's heart. Whether he believed Mary's story or not, others would certainly not believe it. But Joseph was both a godly man and a gracious man. Whatever he decided would reflect both godly understanding and loving consideration for Mary. - According to Old Testament law, if a man discovered that his engaged virgin had given herself sexually to another man, she could be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). A private divorce was the alternative to a court case leading to public punishment.

Joseph had two possible choices. He could establish a court case against Mary (Matt. 5:32), or he could dismiss her quietly by handing her a bill of divorce. As a righteous man, he wanted God's name honoured. He also cared too much for Mary to punish her by exposing her to public disgrace.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How was Joseph's original plan for coping with this unplanned pregnancy a sign of respectable behaviour?
- What difference will it make that both Mary and Joseph love God more than each other?

3. Read Matthew 2:13-23.

⇒ Questions for reflection:

- On what basis did Mary trust Joseph's experience of God's leading for their family?
- In what ways were Joseph and Mary mutually submitting and not just acting in accordance with each other's demands or wishes?
- How would their direct submission to God have affected their mutual submission?

4. The Apostle Paul gives fitting advice to married couples in Ephesians 5: 21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." This teaches us that in a mature Christian marriage it is not simply the man mastering his wife, but both the man and wife submitting a) to the Lord, and b) to each other.

Mutual submission is much more than submitting to each other's demands and wants. First of all it involves confirming that each other have submitted to Christ. In our spiritual life, each of us as individuals are responsible for our relationship with God. The wife also belongs to the "royal priesthood" (*"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..."* 1 Pet. 2:9). The wife is not only an assistant!

⇒ Question for reflection:

- What have you learned as a couple about putting God first in your marriage?

5. One of the major reasons for disagreements in marriage is the question of how to deal with the children. We can learn from Joseph and Mary's example in Luke 2: 21-24, 2: 39-40 and 2: 41-52.

⇒ Questions for reflection:

- Why do you think Mary and Joseph seemed so united in their parenting?
- What evidence of oneness do you see in their marriage? (Luke 2: 22, 39-40, 41-42)

6. Mary's decision was to submit to God's will and to trust him with the consequences. Submission to the will of God almost always involves some risk. But God has promised to work out all the details for good. In faith, we have no alternative but to believe this if we want to enjoy God's peace and power.

7. Every marriage is a relationship of trust. The trust we have in each other is another foundation stone in a good marriage and it must grow as the years pass. - Trust is being able to tell our spouses our innermost thoughts and feelings and believing they will never be used against us. Trust is feeling no anger or jealousy when we see our spouses talking to someone of the opposite sex. Trust is believing our spouses when they tell us where they have been or what they are thinking and when they explain what they really meant by what they said. - Without trust there can be no relationship. So we ask God for the grace to keep on trusting. You see, it is not just the Lord asking that question of us. Our mate may also be asking, "Do you really trust me?"

8. Joseph obeyed the angel immediately and Mary again trusted Joseph to do the right thing. As we saw in the lives of Abraham and Sarah, submission for a wife means trusting God to work through her husband to do what is best for her. - Joseph made his decisions in accord with the will of God.

9. Men should know that they have no right to ask their wives to submit to them when they are subjectively expressing their own opinions, declaring their own selfish wills, or doing what is obviously best for themselves alone. However, when the husband has a clear direction from God that is best for all concerned and can share it fully with his wife, then the wife will be able to submit.

10. We can help others build a stronger trust in us by our own deepening commitment to the will of God. When people see that we have submitted our lives to God, they will be able to trust us.

11. ⇒ Questions for reflection:

- Try to put yourself in Mary's place. How would you feel?
- Try to put yourself in Joseph's place. How would you feel?
- Is there distrust in your relationship with each other? Share them with one another honestly. Have you betrayed your mate's trust? What can you do to increase your trust in each other?
- For husbands: Are you ever guilty of expressing your own personal opinions and expecting your wife to submit?

14. BIBLE STUDY

Money, Trust and Spirituality - The falsehood of Ananias and Sapphira Acts 5: 1-11

Congregational life starts with marriage and family. This is one reason why God is so concerned about marriage. This is to say that Christian marriage leads to congregational life.

The married couple is a part of a larger unit called the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23), the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), the household of God (Eph. 2:19). God's family is much broader than any single family unit and we soon learn that our relationship to this larger spiritual family affects our relationship with each other as husbands and wives. This is most obvious in the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

The beginning of Church is described in the Book of Acts. The word "church" appears the very first time in Acts 5:11. In the history of the Church (congregation) the early days were a time of complete honesty and truthfulness. The life of the congregation was really amazing: *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had"* (Acts 4: 32). The number of believers probably totaled five thousand or more by this time and yet, they were of one heart and one soul. They were not only one in Christ, but they were one in experience also. They thought alike, they had deep feelings for each other, and they made decisions that reflected their mutual care and concern.

These first Christians did not simply participate in worship services and then return home to forget others in need. Since the congregation was so large they also gathered in smaller units, in homes, in order to get to know each other, to grow in their love for one another, to care about one another's problems and to help in one another's needs (compare Acts 2:46).

Their loving concern for one another went so far as to touch their pockets and that is something! They believed that all their personal possessions were from God and was given to them not only for their own use, but to be shared with other believers. There was no pressure to share. A Christian was free to own personal property if they desired and no one would complain about it. However, most of them were selling their material possessions and giving the money to the apostles to be distributed to the needy.

The result of this unselfish love was great power and blessing on the entire church. *"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all"* (Acts 4:33). **A caring congregation is a strong congregation**, for there is active power in the true expression of God's love. Jesus said that this kind of love would be the mark of true discipleship (John 13:35). It is clear that where this love is present it attracts people like a resting place on a long walk.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To show the necessity of true and full honesty in marriage and in any Christian's life.

1. Read Acts 5: 1-11.

Sapphira's name means "beautiful" or "pleasant". Ananias means "God is gracious." God really had been good to him. He had given him a good wife, blessed him with wealth, forgiven his sins, and brought him into caring fellowship. What else could a man want?

2. But Ananias and Sapphira *did* want more. They wanted more than acceptance, they wanted praise. They wanted to be more than just members of the Body. They wanted the praise of men and that brings us to *the sin of Ananias and Sapphira*. They heard the praise some dedicated Christians received and they longed for such praise. This is the starting point of their sin. Their desire for praise and their confidence in material things forced them into a difficult situation. In the end, they chose to try and have *both* the praise for being generous *and* keep the money they pretended to give to the congregation!

3. (Read again Acts 5: 1-2.) They planned the trick together. They would not necessarily say they were giving all of the money they received from the sale; they would just let everyone assume that. Thus, they were not lying, were they? Well, here we see how easily any of us can slip onto the path of dishonesty!

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- How could Ananias and Sapphira have avoided the trap of cheating?

4. Ananias and Sapphira were not obliged to hand over any part of the money. But they *were* obliged to be honest. The major sin of Ananias and Sapphira was dishonesty and presenting a false image of themselves to others so as to imply a greater spirituality than they actually possessed. Thus, they let people think more highly of them than what they actually deserved. Peter said, "*You have not lied to men but to God*" (Acts 5:4).

5. We can think about the kind of relationship Ananias and Sapphira had with each other. They co-operated effectively in their act of cheating. It would seem that their hypocrisy would have also affected their marriage! Many times we are careful to keep secret most expressions of sinfulness from others. Yet, safely behind the walls of our own homes, we have a tendency to let it all come out. At home there might be anger, irritation, unkindness, coldness, selfish demands, pride, and childish behavior, etc. But we try to carefully hide all this from outsiders. As a result, many Christian homes are filled with trouble and conflict. However, when someone asks how things are going at home, we deny the problems and quickly reply "Oh, just great, great!" We cheat ourselves by thinking that what goes on in our home is a private matter. In the end, the dishonesty increases our burden of guilt and the guilt leads to further defensiveness and bad temper. The bad temper then produces greater disagreement and conflict in the home. It's one of Satan's favorite traps!

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- Are there matters in your lives on which you both agree, but which you know are not right before God? What does God want you to do about them?

6. Let us be honest! Let us be truthful and open! That is the only way to break Satan's trap. Husbands and wives should begin by being honest with each other. They also need to be honest with God. Only then will they be able to grow spiritually and experience mature love in their marriage.



Ananias and Sapphira may have reached an agreement concerning their plan to deceive the congregation, but evidently, they never admitted the sinful nature of the plan to one another or to God. When a husband and wife become partners in deception, it eventually destroys them.

7. We might wonder why God acted so harshly against this couple. He does not seem to act that way now and we can be grateful for that! But those days were different. They were the formative days of the Church. Such dishonesty had not yet been practiced in the congregation and God hated the day it would invade the Church. From the very beginning, God wanted people to know his strong opposition to acts of hypocrisy. That is why he put this story into his Word. Had God permitted Ananias and Sapphira to continue their deception, it would have severely undermined the witness of the early church. He had to act decisively.

8. It is sad to see how the years have destroyed the purity of the church. We may even find it difficult to recognize our own hypocrisy. We understand hypocrisy to be a deliberate and calculated effort to deceive others, as it was with Ananias and Sapphira, and it may be that we are not consciously doing that. We may simply have fallen into the unconscious habit of protecting our saintly image, covering our sinfulness, keeping people from knowing what is going on in our hearts and in our homes. Our sinful human nature leads us to believe that it is easier to deceive others than commit ourselves totally to Christ and let him live through us to make the changes he wants to make. This form of hypocrisy has become a way of life in our churches today and may be the reason we are not making any greater impact on our society!

9. Having studied the story of Ananias and Sapphira we should ask ourselves a clear-cut question: Which is really more important to us - to maintain the look of spirituality, or truly be what God wants us to be? Enhancing the look alone leads to death, death to further spiritual growth, death to usefulness in the family of God, and death to a growing relationship with each other as husbands and wives. God wants to lead us to an honest openness. God wants to create in us the life of Christ and that means full life, long-lasting joy, and abundant blessing.

10. ⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What are husbands and wives most likely to hide from each other?
- What risks are involved when husbands and wives are open and transparent with each other?
- Have you openly agreed with your spouse concerning your level of financial support for the congregation?

15. BIBLE STUDY

Serving Together - Priscilla and Aquila, a married working team

Acts 18: 1-4; 18-28; Romans 16: 3-5; 1Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

Have you ever heard the expression "coffee cup evangelism"? While the church buildings are of course needed, nothing can replace a home as a centre for evangelism and spiritual nurture in the community. Many faithful Christian women, whom no one calls "evangelists" or who have never preached publicly, practice coffee cup evangelism. They are establishing close friendships with their neighbours and sharing Christ with them during their household duties. In fact the possibilities for using our homes to serve the Lord are unlimited. - What about us? How can we use our home for the Lord's service?

One plus one equals two. But "marriage mathematics" is really a strange thing. When we study God's design for marriage in the example of Adam and Eve, we discover that **one plus one equals one** (Genesis 2:24). "One flesh" represents many different levels of closeness: social, economic, spiritual, and occupational. Actually "becoming one flesh" means the creation of a new social unit. From this point of view **one plus one equals three** because there are now three realities: the husband, the wife, and the marriage relationship. When two Christians become one (or three!) there is a powerful synergy. Synergy is a combining of power that makes the effect of their lives more than the sum of the two. The result is that a couple can serve God better together as a couple than they could as single people.

Probably no couple in the Bible shows this better than Priscilla and Aquila. They were the tent making friends of the Apostle Paul. They also helped him plant churches in at least two cities of the Roman Empire. Adam and Eve show us what God meant marriage to be before sin entered the human family. Priscilla and Aquila show us what marriage can become when two people are a married working team.

⇒ **The purpose of this Bible Study:** To help couples find and develop their gifts, abilities, and opportunities for serving God more effectively as a couple rather than continuing to work separately in the marriage.

1. Most of this study is based on the Acts of the Apostles written by Dr. Luke. Like the Gospel of Luke, Acts shows a special interest in the women who accompanied Jesus and served him after his ascension. So we are not surprised that the woman closest to the ministry of the Apostle Paul should have a well-known place in Acts. Paul himself refers to Priscilla as Prisca, using the familiar form of her name.

Around the year 50 the Roman emperor Claudius issued an announcement expelling all Jews from the city of Rome. All Jews, including Christians of Jewish origin, were forced from their homes and exiled from Rome. This was the time when a Jew named Aquila who had moved to Rome from Pontus, a Roman province in northern Asia Minor on the Black Sea, started for the city of Corinth.

2. Today we would call Priscilla and Aquila two professional missionaries. They served God as church-planting workers in three cities, Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus. But, like Paul, they supported themselves financially through the trade of making tents.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- Why do you think some Christians feel that becoming married has made them less effective in Christian service than they could have been by remaining single?
- What factors can make being married a benefit to service?

3. Read Acts 18:1-4, 18-22, and 1 Corinthians 16:19.

Note: Paul mentions in (1Cor 16:19) that a church meets in their house.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What kinds of pressures would this couple have faced as they lived for Christ while moving from city to city?



4. Aquila and Priscilla moved many times. Moving, working, witnessing, church planting, and hosting a church in your home provide a combination of pressures and opportunities. One hint about the secret of team ministry is found in the reference to “*their* house” in 1 Cor 16:19. It does not state “Mr. Aquila’s house,” but *their* house. This was something radical in a society that emphasized male rights, male leadership, and male ownership in the culture.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What benefits would their special friendship with Paul have brought to both Aquila and Priscilla? Do you see any benefit for Paul?
- What benefits can hosting other ministering people bring to your life as a couple?

5. **Read Romans 16:3-5.** (Apparently Priscilla and Aquila have returned to Rome.) Living and working with the apostle Paul undoubtedly brought many pressures and problems.

⇒ **Question for reflection:**

- What level of commitment did this couple give to a fellow worker and to the church?

6. **Read Acts 18:23-28.**

This couple’s ministry to Apollos is a model of team ministry. There are many levels of intimacy possible to a couple: *emotional* (sharing significant feelings), *intellectual* (sharing ideas), *aesthetic* (sharing beauty), *creative* (sharing acts of creativity), *entertaining* (sharing fun), *work* (sharing a task), *crisis* (sharing pressures), *spiritual* (sharing vital concerns), and *sexual* (sharing physical affection).

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- How did Aquila and Priscilla approach their sensitive task?
- What characteristics could have destroyed their ability to work together in such harmony?

7. In all the references to Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-4, 18-28; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19) one is never mentioned without the other. In four of the six times Priscilla is mentioned first.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What do these texts tell us about the way this couple worked?
- What kinds of things did Priscilla and Aquila do together?

8. Marriage is not at all simple! Every child, relative, and friend complicates matters even more in a marriage. - We need frequent discussion. We need to listen and hear; we need to express in words what is inside us. Unless we learn to talk and listen, we will never be able to discover what works for us. If our basic values are the same, we can get the amount of oneness we need for a good marriage. Much will depend on quality dialogue.

9. Oneness comes through give-and-take. It doesn't come through a husband's orders. A marriage governed by commands and obedience sometimes plays out like the relationship between a parent and a child. At other times it looks like that of a master and a slave. Sometimes it assumes the experience of a sergeant commanding a soldier. None of these are God's design. We are partners, moving along hand in hand. - We see this equality repeatedly in the marriages of the Bible. Manoah's wife was just as important as Manoah. The angel appeared to her, not to her husband. Elizabeth and Zechariah were given equal places of honor in God's sight. Both Mary and Joseph were essential in the parenting of Jesus.

10. Priscilla and Aquila *made their living together*. Not every husband and wife can work together like this. Aquila and Priscilla were not only mates and lovers; they must have been good friends and companions. They had to be able to accept suggestions as readily as they offered them. They enjoyed being together and working together. They were inseparable and they were equals. - They also *grew in Word together*, they grew to love it. Sharing God's Word strengthened their love for each other. Reading the Bible together will allow God to speak to our lives. God's Word is one necessary ingredient for enriching our relationship. We might never be powerful preachers, but we can be faithful students of the Word and our homes can be open to people who want to hear the Word.

11. Priscilla and Aquila *served the Lord together*. They opened their home to the congregation; they were teaching and counselling together. They were not competing, but completing each other.

⇒ **Questions for reflection:**

- What dangers and what benefits have you experienced in trying to serve God together?
- What attitudes could make being married a benefit for service rather than an interruption?
- How could you use your home more effectively to serve the Lord?
- Are you sharing the Word of God with each other? What about a mutual Bible study?
- How can you demonstrate the equality you share in Christ as husband and wife?

APPENDICES

MARRIAGE TEACHING FOR YOUTH

- Why Marriage?
My expectations concerning Marriage? **Gen 2:18** (not good for a man to be alone)
1 Cor 7:2 (Since there is so much immorality...)
- What is Marriage?
The foundation of Marriage **Gen 2:24** (For this reason a man will leave...)
Eph 5: 21-33 (Submit to one another...)
- Preparations for Marriage:
What about Bride-price?
Gifts, Clothes etc.
Wedding Ceremonies **Prov 6: 20-21** (My son, keep your father's commands...)
Jer 2:2 (I remember the devotion of your youth...)
- About sexual relationships before Marriage;
Why should one wait until Marriage?

What does it mean to be faithful to your spouse,
if you are not yet married?
Why do we need to control our body? **Job 31:1** (... not to look lustfully at a girl)
1 Thess 4:3-5 (you should learn to control your body)
- HIV - AIDS;
How to prevent?

Female Genital Mutilation ('circumcision') **1 Cor 3:17** (If anyone destroys God's temple...)
Prov 7:27 (Her house is a highway to the grave)
- Forgiveness?

What if one has not lived a pure life earlier?
Who can start a Christian Marriage? **Luke 12:10** (who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit ...)
John 8:11 (Go now and leave your life of sin)
- Man/woman in Marriage:
Men and women are different

Issue of Equality **Gen 1:27** (male and female he created them...)
1 Cor 11:11 (In the Lord...nor is man independent of woman)
- Taking care of one's Marriage before Marriage:
Spiritual and other aspects of Marriage;

Learn to speak and listen even before Marriage!
Decision-making;
Courtesies; Sharing **Song 2:14** (Let me hear your voice...)
John 15:17 (This is my command: Love each other)

Eight Tests of True Love

(From Britten, "Questions Young People ask", p. 30-36)

1. **The talk-freely test.**
"Can we talk with each other freely?"
2. **The habit test.**
"Do I want to spend my whole life with this person, even if his/her habits never change?"
3. **The no-touching test.**
"Do we really appreciate each other's personality, or do we just enjoy touching each other's body?"
4. **The admiration test.**
"Do we have reasons for admiring each other ... or do we just have a lovely feeling?"
5. **The knowing-each-other test.**
"Do we know each other ... past and present."
6. **The love-for-Christ test.**
*"Are we helping each other to love Christ more? Are **both** of us interested in obeying and serving Christ ... or is just one of us really interested?"*
7. **The giving test.**
"Do I want to give love and happiness to him/her? Is he/she a happy person who wants to give love and happiness to me?"
8. **The forgive-after-quarrel test.**
"After a quarrel, can both of us say 'sorry'? Can we forgive? Are we unselfish enough to listen each other's ideas? Can we reach an agreement?"

Remember: Sex is not a test of love!



(Picture from Britten, "Questions Young People Ask", p. 37)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

(From "A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa", p. 130-134)

The basic biblical teaching on family life given above, based on Ephesians 5, is the foundation of a happy Christian family. The key is for the husband to love his wife as his own body and for the wife to submit to her husband in the Lord. Problems arise when these two basic principles are broken. Based on those biblical principles we may offer the following Ten Commandments which warn couples about possible trouble spots in their marriages.

1. You shall not beat your spouse. For any spouse to beat his marriage partner creates fear and hatred. Usually, this is wife beating (men beating their wives). But some women actually shake or beat their husbands.

2. You shall not nag your spouse. Some wives or husbands are complainers. Complaining demoralizes the other. If the wife prepares delicious food, her husband still complains. The husband may never be satisfied. He never compliments his wife. Wives can also complain about their husbands. In fact, nagging and complaining is the wife's way of beating her husband. While the husband may beat his wife physically, the wife may frequently beat her husband with words.

Complaining and nagging destroys marriage relationships. This is a real problem in Christian homes. Instead of dwelling on the strengths of the other spouse, their faults and failures are emphasized.

The Bible warns against the dangers of nagging. "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife" (Proverbs 21:9). "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife" (Proverbs 21: 19).

3. You shall not be absent or unavailable in the home. Men should be available to their wives and children. Many husbands are strangers in their homes, not only because of a job in the city but because they spend time with men in the village instead of with the family. The husband may come home at night, tired from work. He may read the paper while ignoring his wife and children. Soon after eating he goes to bed.

This problem can also affect working wives. A professional woman with a good job may give her time and priority to her employment instead of to her husband and children. Home responsibilities are neglected by the working wife.

This problem is especially found among pastors and Christian workers. They may be so busy in the ministry that they neglect their wives and children. As a result many children from families of pastors grow up without knowing and loving the Lord

4. You shall not intimidate (frighten) your spouse. Sometimes a wealthy person marries a poor spouse or a highly educated person marries a less educated spouse. When disagreements arise he or she may speak in a condescending (superior) way, making the other person feel inferior. The spouse may express pity or mercy for the other spouse because of his or her inferior status.

This is especially true of women who may be more highly educated or come from a rich family. They use their education or wealthy family as a club to make the husband feel inferior. This threatening attitude eliminates true love. A marriage relationship should be between two partners who value and respect each other.

5. You shall not neglect the needs of your family. Providing for the material needs of the family is most important. Whenever a man fails to provide as he should, the wife complains and quarrels with him. Most quarrels with a husband which are initiated by the wife relate to this neglect-failure to provide food or clothing, failure to care for the animals or failure to maintain the home.

A husband must make every effort to provide for his family according to his ability. Sometimes the reason he fails to do this is because of misuse of money outside the home, including drink or support of another family or woman friend.

6. You shall not make family decisions by yourself alone. Marriage is a partnership with both husband and wife contributing their ideas in discussions which lead to decisions in the home. When the wife dominates the husband, tension arises. When the husband makes a decision without consulting the wife, tension arises.

There needs to be flexibility on the part of both husband and wife. If the husband is rigid, inflexible and always insists that his wife must submit, quarrels will arise. Both need to be adaptable and flexible. Flexibility is especially difficult for the man but is most important. Many times the wife will suggest something and the husband will refuse. Later on he decides to do much the same thing which his wife suggested, but he claims the decision to be his own.

Tension also arises when mothers-in-law or fathers-in-law make decisions for a family. "Many cooks spoil the soup." A husband and wife may seek advice from others of the extended family, but it is the two spouses which must discuss and come to the conclusion. It is also the husband who is responsible to make the final decision. If he fails to do so, after the wife and children offer their contribution, then he has failed, for they look to him to make the final decision.

7. You shall not falsely accuse your spouse. Though women often accuse their husbands of not providing for the family, these accusations are not always genuine. While men are slow to make their wives look bad before others, women are more quick to do this. In one case, a wife brought all kinds of accusations against her husband before her parents in a marital dispute. When his chance came to give his complaints, he kept quiet. In fact, he commented that she was an excellent wife. Eventually, she felt ashamed and gladly decided to return to her husband. When men are unhappy with their wives, many resort to physical beating. A wife is usually unable to beat her husband because she is weaker. But when a wife is unhappy with her husband, she uses false complaints and accusations to beat him. Women often invite physical beating because of their false accusations.

The hearts of the wives and husbands are the same. Both need to be changed so that the husband will love his wife as his own body and so that the wife will submit to her husband with a quiet and gentle spirit.

8. You shall not hide things from your spouse. Communication between husband and wife is essential for a healthy marriage. But it has not been very African for a man to communicate much with his wife. Most members in church feel that a man who shares everything with his wife is a weak person. Many men deliberately hide many things from their wives.

Hiding things from your wife is not good for the following reasons:

- a. Motives are selfish. For a husband to keep money secretly from his wife in a separate bank account is selfish. What will happen to it if he should die? The money may be completely lost for only the husband knows about this. That which should have helped the wife and children is lost because of selfish motives of the husband.
- b. Unity in the home is not promoted. Christian marriage concerns the union of two individuals in an equal partnership. For one spouse to hide possessions, decisions, and thoughts from the other is to create division, not unity. By sharing with your wife the problems at work and other concerns, the wife can encourage the husband. Blessings are lost through lack of communication.
- c. Transparency, honesty, and openness are essential for the development of trust. A marriage will break down if one spouse does not trust the other. But trust cannot be promoted without honest, open communication. If the husband always says, "I have no money," trust is not developed.

9. You shall not be hardhearted and tough with your spouse. Men do not like to be considered weak or soft. They want to be strong and tough. Perhaps this is one reason why so few men become Christians. Because a Christian should be gentle, men may reject the Christian life style because they want to be known as strong men. So they act tough with their wives.

Men fail to understand that being tender-hearted and compassionate is an act of strength. Even men cry when they are grieved over the loss of some friend. Being tough is a front for many men.

However, the Bible teaches that one Christian virtue for all believers is to be tender-hearted. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate (tender-hearted) to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31,32).

Whenever a husband is compassionate to his wife, loving her as his own body, he will seek to understand her, feel with her and walk in her shoes. Instead of being hardhearted and tough toward her, he will be tender and compassionate, helping her instead of dominating her.

Each spouse should learn to accept the other as he or she is, remembering that God is not yet finished with them (nor is He finished with you). A couple does not really know each other before marriage. After marriage each spouse learns many things about the other. Of course, each should be willing to grow but harmony only comes by learning to accept one another as they are. This requires grace, love, compassion and patience.

10. You shall not deny your spouse sexual intercourse. The Bible teaches that the husband should satisfy the personal needs and desires of his wife and the wife should do the same for her husband (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Problems arise when wives become older and begin to reject their husbands. As a result, the husband turns to younger women or takes a second wife.

There needs to be openness between husband and wife about these matters. The issue is not only intercourse but being close to one another in bed. When a spouse thinks only of himself in a selfish manner, he then denies the conjugal (marital) rights of his or her spouse. Young married couples receive no help in these issues. No marital advice on sexual intercourse is offered, either before marriage or during marriage. As a result quarrels and misunderstanding over sexual relationships are a major reason for separation and divorce.

CONCLUSION

Since God is the author and designer of marriage, we would be wise to follow his instructions for a happy marriage. If the husband would love his wife as his own body and the wife would submit to her husband in the Lord; if the father and mother together would rear their children with careful and faithful teaching, living as godly examples, providing wise and loving discipline; if the children would obey their parents in the Lord, then the family would be one that honours Christ and a joy to each member. Arising out of these basic biblical principles there are ten commandments which would enable husbands and wives to live together in harmony and peace.

Guidelines for Handling Parent and In-Law Conflicts

(From Selwyn Hughes, *Marriage as God intended*, pages 104-106)

1. Whenever a conflict arises between you and your parents or in-laws, examine your own heart to see whether in any way you might have contributed to the problem.
2. Listen carefully to an accusation or criticism that is levelled against you. Proverbs 18:13 is of importance here. *"He who answers before listening -- that is his folly and his shame."*
3. Accept the fact that most parental and in-law problems arise from the parents and in-laws being genuinely and sincerely concerned about your welfare. It may not always come across as interest and concern, but look beneath the surface and try to understand their basic intentions.
4. Don't respond to criticism by accusing the one who criticized you of some character or behavioural deficiency. No matter what society says, an attack is not the best form of defence.
5. Accept all criticism as the other person's way of seeing things. From his or her perspective the interpretation may be correct. Try to slip into the skin of the other person, so to speak, and look at the situation through their eyes. This will help you to see things in a different perspective.
6. A woman criticized by her in-laws when her husband is not present should say, 'I think you had better talk to ____ (naming her husband) about that. 'If they persist, she should say, 'I'm sorry you feel that way, but let's leave it there for the moment. You can talk to ____ about it when you next see him.'
7. It is the husband's responsibility to approach his parents or in-laws in order to bring about the resolution of a conflict. As the leader in the home, the man is given special grace by God to handle difficulties. But remember, grace comes only when you need it. You might feel weak and inadequate to deal with issues, but as you fulfil your role, the strength and firmness you need to handle the issue will flow from God to you - providing, of course, that you approach the issue in a spirit of love, not hostility.
8. Look upon all parent or in-law conflicts not as a groaning point but as a growing point. Problems, if handed correctly, serve to deepen not destroy relationships.
9. Rehearse and plan what you are going to say to your parents or in-laws about the problem. Reduce it to a minimum number of words. Remember the story of the prodigal son. He rehearsed what he was going to say until he was clear as to his approach. So must you.
10. Deal with the issue as soon as possible after it has arisen. The longer you allow the problem to fester, the greater the possibility of bitterness and resentment eroding your relationship.
11. Let your parents or in-laws know the aspects of the relationship you are pleased about before sharing the problem that concerns you. It is always better to say, 'I am happy about this', before saying 'I am not happy about that.'
12. Select an appropriate time to deal with conflict issues. See Proverbs 15:23. *"A man finds joy in giving an apt reply -- and how good is a timely word!"* In any case, a face-to-face approach is best.

THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE

(From Harold Taylor, "Tend My Sheep", p. 177-182)

The Church teaches that marriage is important to Christians chiefly because it is part of God's plan. In the Scriptures, marriage is described as one of God's good gifts to men and women: something to be accepted from Him and used in the way He intends. The ideas and rules about marriage, divorce, and sexual relations vary in detail from one part of the Church to another, but the problems and difficulties which Christians experience in marriage and family life are much the same as those experienced by people of other religions and traditions. In some respects their Christian faith and Church membership may cause added problems. In other respects their faith, and the sympathy and support of fellow-Christians, can help them to overcome their difficulties. It will be useful, therefore, to note some of the more important points in the Christian understanding of marriage which are common to Church people of all denominations.

THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP 'IN CHRIST'

(i) Writers in the Old Testament and the New Testament pointed to the marriage bond between husband and wife as a symbol of the deep relationship between God and His people Israel, and between Christ and His new people the Church. This shows that human marriage should reflect God's steadfast love and care for His creation, a love which is itself reflected in Christ's living and dying for the sake of the Church (see Isa. 54.4-8; 62.1-5; Jer.2.1; 31:31,32; 2 Cor. 11.2; Eph. 5: 25-27; Rev.21.2, 9-11).

(j) In many societies, the traditional marriage customs contain some elements which are contrary to Christian ideas. But the gospel promises 'newness'. The gospel does not necessarily destroy cultural and traditional marriage, but can purify it. Wherever the Church seeks to understand and accept all that is good in traditional marriage practices, while at the same time pointing to those that seem to conflict with Christian teaching, the marriage relationship can be made 'new' in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5.17).

(k) Every human society has its particular ways of marking or 'celebrating' the change of status that occurs when a man and a woman join each other in marriage, and so form a new link between their families, clans, or tribes. By these ceremonies the marriage is recognized as 'legal' and valid according to the custom or law of the tribe or nation. Among Christians, marriage is 'solemnized' at a special service, usually in church. The couple make their marriage vows in the presence of a minister or other qualified person and of witnesses, who join in praying for God's blessing on their future life together. But in both traditional and Christian marriage it is the public commitment of the man and woman to each other which makes the marriage valid and binding, not the words or actions of the minister. And it is the faith of the couple and their joint commitment of their lives to Christ which makes the marriage a Christian one, not the particular order of service, or the fact that it takes place in a church.

(l) These various points emphasize the fact that Christian marriage and family life 'in the Lord' are part of the gospel of the Kingdom which God offers, through Christ, to all people. Because Christian Marriages are 'in Christ' they share in the new life of the Kingdom. The advice and instruction about marriage given by New Testament writers is meant to help Christians to understand how their marriages are to be lived 'in Christ', and how they can experience this 'newness' in their marriage relationships.

Also, within Christian marriage thus made new in Christ, the biological act of sex is seen in a new way, not only as the physical means by which human beings (like many other forms of created life) obey God's command to 'be fruitful', but also as a symbol of God's continuing love and care for the world He has made. It is an act in which man and woman share in the creative activity of God. The love within marriage, too, is seen in a new way. As expressed in the relationship between husband and wife, it is to reflect God's love, sharing and compassion; and the relationships between parents and children are likewise to reflect His love, respect, care, and instruction (see Eph. 5:25 - 6:4; Col. 3:18, 19).

This does not mean that all Christian marriages will always show this 'newness' of the gospel. Because we are sinful, we often fail in our marriages and in our family living. Repentance and forgiveness are needed in every marriage and every family, as husband and wife learn to live with each other and with their children (Eph. 4.32). To help people to understand this is one of the chief tasks of the 'marriage and family guidance' counsellor.

Theological Aspects of Sexuality

Dr. Eshetu Abate, December, 1999 (Revised)

Introduction

The word Theology comes from two Greek words ‘theos’ and ‘logos’. It is a study about God, His nature, His will and relationship to his creation and particularly human beings. This will of his has been revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures, (the Bible).

Human sexuality is the creation of God.

According to the Christian faith human beings are the creation of God. God created human beings from the very beginning in a unique way, i.e. in His own image. No other creation, except human being was created in the image of God. To put it in a simple way to be created in the image of God means to be created with sensitivity to what is right, wrong, holy and unholy. As God is Holy and Righteous in His nature so also human being created in his image has the sensitivity to what is holy and right. In the external physical make up, God from the very beginning created human beings as male and female (Genesis 1.27). Therefore on the basis of the creation story in the Scriptures, we can say that sexual difference among human beings is the will of God and derives from Him. It is by divine ordinance and activity that each one of us (human beings) have become male and female. Therefore our sexuality is the creation and gift of God.

All what God created is good

Our God is Holy therefore He cannot create something which is contrary to His Holy nature. The Bible tells us that ‘God saw all that he had made, and it was very good’ Gen. 1.31. Therefore in God’s sight to have been sexually created is very good. Whether we are male or female we belong to the creator God. Our sexual origin goes back to Him. There is nothing inherently bad to be either a male person or a female person. Our sexuality is a gift from God and not our own creation. Neither Adam nor Eve chose their respective sexes. It was God who made one male and the other female. Therefore as we receive the totality of our being including our color, height, weight, etc. from God, so also we receive our sex as a gift from God. If we have the totality of our being including our sex as a gift from God, then we have a responsibility to use our whole body and sex in a responsible way. Since we have our body as a gift from God, God and not we are its master. God is the master of our body and sex. Because God is our creator, and because we have our being as a gift from him we should obey Him and use our body in the way He wants us to. Otherwise not knowing the purpose we are created for, we can misuse or harm the body given to us from Him.

The purpose of God in creating human beings male and female

a) Avoid loneliness among men

God created human beings as male and female because he saw such a pair to be very good. First of all as God was the God of fellowship He did not like or promote loneliness. He said ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’ (Gen. 2:18). Our God is the God of togetherness. He likes fellowship and mutuality. The one to one relationship which God created between Adam and Eve is the most suitable relationship one can have on this earth. This is a life led jointly by the pair.

The word ‘helper’ implies that one sex alone cannot handle life’s demand. Male and female (as opposite sexes) living together can tackle life’s problems. The fellowship between male and female sexes in the form of marriage is the most intimate fellowship or unity among all human relationships.

Genesis 2.24 says “for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh”. The strength of the relationship and the depth of the commitment one has

to his wife or her husband is far greater than one has to his parents. The term used to express this unity of the opposite sexes is 'one flesh'. Therefore if the unity of the opposite sexes has such a significant place in the sight of the creator, then such a unity among the opposite sexes should be exercised with a full understanding of its importance and meaning in human communities.

b) Helping each other

Helping each other implies unity and love. Unity does not mean uniformity. It is said that diversity is the spice of life. It should be recognized also that love does not mean only sentimental or emotional love.

True love is unconditional love. True love is sacrificial love. Our Lord said "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The love that should exist between committed opposite sexes should exemplify this kind of love. Many people however confuse an "if" love with this unconditional love. An "if..." love loves the other person because of something one gets. It is a love built on the advantage one gets. Unconditional love on the other hand does not set a condition to love the other person. God created the sexual bond so that it could show such unconditional love.

c) "One flesh"

The expression "one flesh" used to describe the unity (fellowship) between a male and female has also an important point implied in it. A body is healthy when all the parts work well and are coordinated. The unity, once started, between the opposite sexes should not be broken. Breaking will harm the body. That was what our Lord Jesus Christ indicated in the Gospels, when he said that "at the beginning the creator made them 'male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate". (Matt. 19:5) From this we understand that to start a fellowship with the opposite sex and then to break it is not the will of God.

d) Reproduction

In this life long marital fellowship God has placed reproduction. This is an additional purpose why God created human beings as male and female. He said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth..." (Gen 1:28). The children thus look up to their parents for education and example. Definitely parents create their children in their image by being a good example or a bad example. Therefore the kind of commitment between couples has effect also upon their children. Ultimately unfaithfulness in marriage is the problem of the society as the whole. Therefore societies, to be healthy and sound should give the utmost care for the stability of their families.

Christian sexual norms in the Bible

The Scriptures give us norms and directions how to act sexually. As persons inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote the Scriptures, we can say that the norms and directives given concerning sexuality are the will of God for us.

a) Maturity

The Scriptures presuppose maturity before any sexual act, Gen. 2.24. A boy or girl should be mature before they can commit themselves to one another. This involves physical, mental as well as social maturity. According to the scripture boys and girls are under the care of their parents until the time of maturity. Commitment to the opposite sex in sexual relationship is permitted and expected only after the time of maturity.

The time before maturity is the time of learning. The primary responsibility for teaching healthy sexual norms is on the parents and school teachers as they have frequent contact with growing children. Though, the most valuable teaching is not done by word but by being a good example in

everyday life. The community at large can also make a positive contribution by challenging promiscuous and destructive sexual attitudes. For example people who influence the public with arts and media can rework on that part of their presentation, which encourages loose sex. Those who formulate laws for the country can also contribute by forming such laws as would lead the public to response and healthy sexual behaviors. Parents, school teachers and the community at large should teach the growing children not only with words but also in their action and life. In fact teaching the growing children by being a good example in life is more valuable than simple verbal instruction. Therefore parents and school teachers should be trained about Christian sexual norms so that they in turn can teach and be example for their pupils.

The community at large also can make a positive contribution by teaching the right sexual norms. For example people who influence the public with arts, music, drama, literature, radio and television can avoid that part of their presentation which encourage immoral or mixed way of life. Those who formulate laws for the country can contribute by forming such laws as would lead the public to an acceptable and healthy behavior.

b) One to one

Once the time of maturity is reached, the Scriptures endorse one to one relationship between the opposite sexes. This one to one relationship is a life long commitment.

The Scriptures are against extra marital sex. Sex outside the one to one relationship works against the order and well being God has created for man and woman. The scriptures clearly indicate this by using the following words and concepts.

“They are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19:6). The concept which describes marriage as “one body” or “one flesh” is a very important one.

The Scripture openly and clearly states that one of God’s will or command to his people is that they “shall not commit adultery”. Exodus 20:14. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines the word “adultery” as “voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and somebody who is not that person’s husband or wife.” The Scriptures, however, do not limit adultery or sexual immorality to married people. The Old Testament tells us that any intercourse with the opposite sex, if it does not continue in the one to one commitment is detestable in the sight of God. In fact the Old Testament encourages the continuation of the union of the opposite sex even if it is committed with a sudden emotional decision as long as the two sexes do not have earlier commitment (Deut. 22:28-29).

In the New Testament our Lord has made even clearer when he teaches that divorce is permitted only for the single reason of adultery. Our Lord was establishing the one to one commitment between couples. Sexual faithfulness between the two partners is the most important ingredient of their marriage life. The Apostle Paul has also advised both the married and single Christians about their sexual life. He said that single persons who have temptation and cannot control themselves should marry. Those who want to remain single and think they can control themselves can remain single. However they cannot cheat themselves, either they have to remain pure or get married properly. The Bible as a whole knows proper sex only in the context of the one to one relationship. The Apostle Paul as a realist advised both men and women by saying “each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” In his time, as it is today, there was “so much immorality”. (1.Cor. 7:1-6). Therefore God requires that one limits herself or himself to her husband or his wife in matters of sexual intercourse.

The Scriptures prohibit not only committing adultery but also the very thought of it. As everybody knows every evil deed is the result of premeditated thought (James 1:14-15). Therefore in the same list of commands given by God, He says “you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor’s house or land...” (Deut. 5:21). When we see the two verses mentioned above, the root causes for our external acts and behaviors are our internal desires, wishes, thoughts,

attitudes and wills. Our Lord Jesus Christ was stating this truth when He said “Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean’...For from within, out of men’s hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’” (Mark 7.14-23).

c) Self control and change of character

If this is the case it is extremely important for a person to control his/her thoughts or desires. It is only by self-control and by exercising our God given sexuality in the right way that we can live safely. Unless one controls his/her desires and leads them in the proper way he/she will always be at risk of harming his body and others.

Self-control - In theological language exercising one’s desire in an improper and loose way is called 'missing the goal' or 'sin'. One needs to have his/her desires correspond with the desires and will of God. One has to set his/her desire on the will and law of God.

Change of character - As we have seen above the root cause for external behavior and deviance is one’s internal desires and attitudes. In God’s sight no one is free from evil desires and covetousness. Therefore the Scripture says “There is no one righteous, not even one...” (Rom. 3.10-18). The way to have a change of attitude or character is to have a new beginning or a new start in the way of Jesus Christ. Theologically this is called a “new life”. Before one has a new beginning or a new start in his/her life which is demonstrated in change of character the following things need to happen.

- First of all one needs to know and believe that his/her character needs a change. Unless one recognizes and believes that, he/she will continue to do the same old thing. Therefore the first step in attitudinal or character change is the person’s admission of his wrong behaviors. No person likes to continue in what he knows to be wrong unless it is beyond his ability or he is forced. For persons who know that their desires and actions are wrong and sincerely want to change their character, there is something very essential which the Christian faith offers.
- Forgiveness for the wrongs done so far. This is the second step in the process of character change. In theological language God forgives the evil desires and actions of all people through Jesus Christ. The past mistakes and failures are not counted, because God has chosen or willed to forgive all. The old mistakes failures and desires should die and stop. This is what is meant theologically to die with Christ. God forgives because Christ was punished for our sake on the cross. Therefore in the second step the person should know and accept that he will not be made accountable for the past wrongs he has done and that no body will accuse him/her for that, because he has been forgiven.

The third step in character change, after acknowledgment of one’s wrong behaviors followed by the recognition of forgiveness, is a new beginning or a new start. Theologically we associate this with the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him... In the same way count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 6:8-11) After a new beginning or a new start the person thinks about what is good and acceptable. If he was not faithful to his/her partner before he/she gets a new power to control himself because his past accumulated wrong doings and their influence has been nullified with the power of forgiveness. Now he gets a new desire and will to do well and seek what is right. The forgiveness of our sins is not limited to our past sins. He always forgives us when we come to Him in sincere repentance. The Apostle John writes “children do not sin, but if we sin we have an advocate who is Jesus Christ.” (1.John 2:1-2)

EECMY Principles & Doctrines on STD/HIV/AIDS Control

(An extract from the paper “Theological Aspects of Sexuality”
written by Dr. Eshetu Abate, December, 1999, Revised 2002)

The motto of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is *serving the whole person*. The church cares for the spiritual as well as physical needs of people for the following main reason. Human beings are a unity, though made up of body, soul and spirit. (1.Thess. 5:23). The Hebrew word “nephsh” which was translated in the older versions as “soul” is best translated as a “living being”. God created a “living being” that is a unity of all that make up his life or body. Therefore, a human being should be served in his/her whole being.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus as a Church believes in Jesus Christ who is her Head and Foundation. (Eph. 5:23, 1.Cor. 3:11). As a Church the EECMY is also the Body of Jesus Christ (1.Cor. 12:27). As has been stated in her constitution Article II the EECMY declares that she accepts the word of the triune God, the three ecumenical creeds, the unaltered Augsburg confession and Luther’s catechisms as basis of her faith.

It is obvious that the principles and doctrines the EECMY has on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are in line with the spirit of the scripture and the confessional documents she accepts.

Why is EECMY dealing with HIV/AIDS?

First of all our God is a God of wholeness and health. He seeks the well being of his people, physically as well as spiritually. Secondly he wants his followers to care for the sick and those who are in need of help. EECMY wants to reflect these attitudes of God in dealing with HIV/AIDS. In addition as a church she wants to teach God’s will concerning sexual behavior and marriage. She wants to do all these based on God’s will explicitly expressed in the Scriptures.

The Scripture among other things teach the following main points concerning the right relation towards the opposite sex.

A - Abstinence

Abstinence means complete denial of sexual activities. This, however, is for those who are given special grace and self-control from God to remain unmarried. The Apostle Paul advises the Christians of Corinth on this matter as follows: “Now to the unmarried and widows I say: It is good to stay unmarried as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1Cor.7:8-9). Definitely those who have the gift of abstinence will not risk themselves to be infected by sexually transmitted diseases.

Since the gift of abstinence is not found among the majority of people, the Apostle advises on an alternative for abstinence, which is marriage.

Another way of abstinence is expressed by not having sex before marriage. Having a relationship before one is committed to a partner give exposure to sexually transmitted infections. The Church deals with HIV/AIDS problem, so that young people may know God’s will for them and thereby live a healthy life by avoiding the psycho-somatic infections, i.e. soul-body infection.

B - Be faithful

The second point the Scripture teaches, when the abstinence is not possible, is faithfulness to the marriage union. The Apostle Paul states that in the society of his time, as it is today, there is “so much immorality”. The word immorality here refers to loose sex, sexual practice with more than one partner. He disapproves on such kind of loose relationships and gives one-to-one relationship as a divinely approved way of living. He writes:” Each man should have his own wife and each woman her own

husband” (1. Cor. 7:2) There is something inherently bad about relationships outside one-to-one partnership. First of all it breaks the promise of faithfulness that has to remain between the partners. Secondly it risks the partners to different kinds of sexually transmitted diseases.

Marriage is not only physical relationship; it is also mental and psychological. In a marriage there should be a sound relationship between the partners in both aspects. Immorality infects and kills the mutual trust and the sound psychological and physical relationship created. Since HIV/AIDS is for the most part the result of unfaithfulness in a one-to-one relationship, the church wants to teach people regarding God’s will for our marriage, i.e. faithfulness. The will of God for our marriage, expressed in mutual faithfulness, will keep the marriage and the partners healthy psychologically as well as physically.

The EECMY fully supports and teaches the one-to-one relationship as the Scriptures support it. The agreement to live in the one-to-one relationship should be made officially before God and his people. After the marriage vow is made before God and his people it should be kept until death. This is the safest, surest and by God approved way to keep individuals, families and the community at large from HIV/AIDS and STD. In addition such a family will bring about healthy children and with parents that are good examples the children have a great possibility to become good citizens when they grow up.

C - Condom

The Church uses all means available for her to save people from psychological and physical problems. Her primary tools for this are the Word of God and the divine sacraments in her hand. In addition to the spiritual advice and training the church advises people to use medically suggested ways such as condoms to keep themselves from dangers of infection when necessary. By endorsing condom, however, the church does not approve or promote improper sexual behavior outside the marriage fellowship. To do that will be contradict to her own teaching. There are times, however, when condoms can be helpful, for example when one partner in a marriage is infected. The church approves and promotes such use of condoms.

The other reason why EECMY is dealing with HIV/AIDS is to offer a helping hand to those infected with the virus and to those who are ill with AIDS. The help extended can be in the form of counseling as well as practical care.

Information on HIV / AIDS

*(An Extract from EECMY HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Program
Training Manual on HIV/AIDS/STIs Prevention and Control)*

(Participant Handbook 2.8:)

Impacts of HIV/AIDS

An increase in illness and death in a population will inevitably have economic and social consequences. Some of these impacts are:

Demographic impact

AIDS deaths:

AIDS will increase the death rate at all ages. However, the impact will be most severe among young adults 15-49, taking AIDS into account the number of persons dying in this age group has increased rapidly.

Health care impact

Costs of health care:

Today, as much as 42 percent of all hospital beds in the country are estimated to be occupied by AIDS patients. Moreover, the average length of stay of an AIDS patient is considerably longer than for most other diseases, perhaps as long as 40 days. These patients will also require a considerable amount of resourcec from the health system during the course of their illness.

Increasing number of TB cases: Recently, the number of TB cases has been rising rapidly. This is partially due to the spread of HIV infection. HIV infection weakens the immune system of healthy adults; many, and perhaps half of all adults in Ethiopia, carry a latent TB infection, which is suppressed by a healthy immune system. When HIV weakens the immune system, it can no longer control the TB infection and TB can develop.

Since TB can be infectious through casual contact the increased number of TB cases due to HIV can also lead to additional TB cases among those who are not infected with HIV. Also drug-resistant strains of TB are appearing, making it much more difficult and expensive to treat tuberculosis.

Economic impact

AIDS will affect the economic development of Ethiopia in a number of ways. The loss of young adults in their productive years of life will affect the overall economic output. Agriculture is the largest sector of the Ethiopian economy. It accounts for nearly half of all production and 85 percent of employment; hence, a loss of agricultural labor could affect the production of cash crops as well as food crops.

AIDS can have important impact on the industrial sector as well. When skilled laborers are lost, they may be very difficult to replace and there may be a loss of productivity until new workers can gain the necessary experience. Beside this, there is also an increased health care costs, lost work days due to sickness or funeral, which will contribute to a significant reduction in productivity.

A very serious effect is the loss of teachers, polices, health staff and other civil servants. The workload will increase for those who remain and will, for example, result in larger school classes and more patients to treat.

Social impact

Women: AIDS can have a very serious impact on the lives of women when it strikes a family member. In most cases women do not have a secure occupation, which can provide a steady and adequate income. Thus, if the husband dies, the remaining wife and children are particularly vulnerable. Some women may be exploited or may have to resort to commercial sex to provide cash income.

Women may also have a reduced ability to provide for a family if she needs to spend a significant proportion of her time caring for family members who are sick with AIDS. It may reduce the time she has for productive work as well as affect the amount of time she can spend caring for children. Since other tasks, such as food preparation, must still be done, many women have to work even harder than normal to cope with AIDS in the family.

Children: Some of the worst impact of AIDS deaths to young adults is an increase in the number of orphans. School drop-outs will be more common due to children caring for parents and having to work. Some children will lose either their father or mother to AIDS and many more will lose both parents. The number of orphans in Ethiopia would increase from 1.2 million in 2001 to 1.8 million in 2007 and to 2.5 million in 2014.

These children may lack the proper care and supervision they need at this critical period of their lives. There will be a tremendous tension on social system to cope with such a large number of orphans.

Generally: Except at the micro or household level where the effect of AIDS is immediate, the economic impact will only slowly manifest itself as the number of individual illnesses and deaths accumulate over time. It may take even longer to show up in the official figures. But, we can be sure of three things i.e., the impact will be long-term, complex and surprising.

(Participant Handbook 2.9:)

Modes of transmission of HIV and risk factors

HIV can be transmitted from one person to another in a number of ways. In Ethiopia, the three important transmission mechanisms are: Sexual contact, perinatal transmission, blood transfusion and unsafe injections.

How HIV is transmitted

1. Sexual contact (85%)

Semen and vaginal fluids of an HIV positive person are among the body fluids that contain HIV in high concentration. During sexual contact these fluids can enter the blood stream through the skin and pass from one partner to the other transmitting HIV.



The majority of infections are transmitted through heterosexual contact. Although the probability of transmitting HIV in a single act of intercourse can be quite low, a number of factors increase the risk of infection dramatically.

The two most important risk factors involved in the spread of HIV infection are the presence of other sexually transmitted disease and having more than one sexual partner. An untreated STI in either partner increases the risk of this transmission during unprotected sex up ten times. Partners of people who practice multiple partner sexual contact are also at risk. Thus a woman whose husband has multiple partners is at risk even though she may be faithful to her husband.

Intercourse taking place during menstruation increase the risk of HIV infection. Besides this if a woman is forced to sex (rape) and the person is infected this increases the risk of transmission. The more violent the attack is, the greater likelihood that a woman will suffer internal bruising, lacerations and bleeding. This may make it easier for the virus to enter her blood stream.

2. Mother-to-child transmission (10%)

Mother to child transmission (MTCT) of the virus during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding is responsible for more than 90 percent of HIV infection in children. About 30 to 40 percent of infants born to infected mothers are likely to be infected with HIV. Most of these babies will develop AIDS and die within two years. few will survive past the age of five.



Of those infants who are infected through MTCT, it is believed that about two-thirds are infected during pregnancy and around the time of delivery, and about one-third are infected through breastfeeding.

3. Blood transmission (5%)

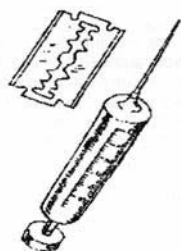
a) Blood transfusion

A person commonly takes blood of other people when he/she is in need of blood transfusion to replace the loss of blood that occurs when there is a heavy bleeding. severe anemia etc. If the blood or blood products a person receives is infected by HIV, the likelihood of the person getting infected by HIV is very high. Fortunately, in Ethiopia, all blood products are tested before transfusion.



b) Unsafe injections

HIV can be transmitted by injection if the same needle is used to inject many people without being sterilized after each use. Proper



health care practice requires sterilization of needles after each use or the use of disposable syringes and needles. However, some non-professional injectors do not follow these practices. These unsafe practices can result in new cases of HIV infection.

c) Other ways of blood transmission

Some cultural practices like piercing the ears, tattooing using a single piercing instrument and traditional surgical practices like removing the uvula, circumcision, genital mutilation etc. could be cited among the mode of transmission of HIV from person to person. In order to avoid the risk of HIV infection through the above ways, it is very important to not share sharp instruments with other people and that they are properly sterilized between each use.

Razor blades, shavers, toothbrushes and other sharp instruments used by an HIV positive person or an AIDS patient can, if blood stained, carry HIV and pass the virus to someone else.

How HIV is NOT transmitted

The AIDS virus is fragile; it survives very poorly and for a very short time outside the body. In order to be infectious, the virus must penetrate inside the body and enter into contact with the blood of the exposed person. Transmission is likely to require a minimal amount of virus or a "threshold" in order to induce infection. Below this threshold, the body is able to get rid of the virus and can prevent its invasion. Family, friends and co-workers should not fear becoming infected with HIV through casual contact with an HIV-infected person at home, at work, or socially.

These activities will NOT transmit the virus:

- Coughing or sneezing
- Working together
- Touching or shaking hands
- Hugging
- Sharing food, eating or drinking utensils
- Using public swimming pools
- Toilet seats
- Kissing

Friendly kissing on the cheek is not dangerous. The possibility of transmission by deep kissing is theoretically possible (the virus has been detected in the saliva). However, in practice, the importance of this transmission, although difficult to evaluate, appears to be very minor. The mucus of the mouth is normally resistant to infection, but transmission of the virus could occur more readily if lesions or cuts are present in the mouth.

- Mosquitoes or insect bites

Certain diseases (malaria, yellow fever) are transmitted by mosquitoes. The micro-organisms responsible for these diseases can grow and become infectious inside the mosquito that they infect. This cycle, essential for the transmission of the disease, does not exist with the AIDS virus. The disease transmitted by mosquitoes affects the entire population (children, adults, elderly) indiscriminately. This is not the case with AIDS which, mainly affects young sexually active subjects and children born to an HIV positive mother.

- Bites of other animals

Domestic animals such as dogs and cats cannot carry HIV virus and do not transmit it.

Risk behaviors and groups at risk of contracting HIV

- All persons with multiple sexual partners;
- Men and women whose jobs force them to be away from their families or regular sexual partners for a long period of time;
- Commercial sex workers and their clients;
- Teenage girls who are sexually active and youth experimenting with sex;
- Raped girls/women;
- Alcohol and drug addicts;
- Children born to sero-positive mothers.

Be aware that it is impossible to detect someone's HIV-infection status simply from his or her physical appearance. Individuals who look perfectly clean and healthy may be infected even if they are unaware of it themselves and hence capable of infecting others.

Information on Kinds of Violence

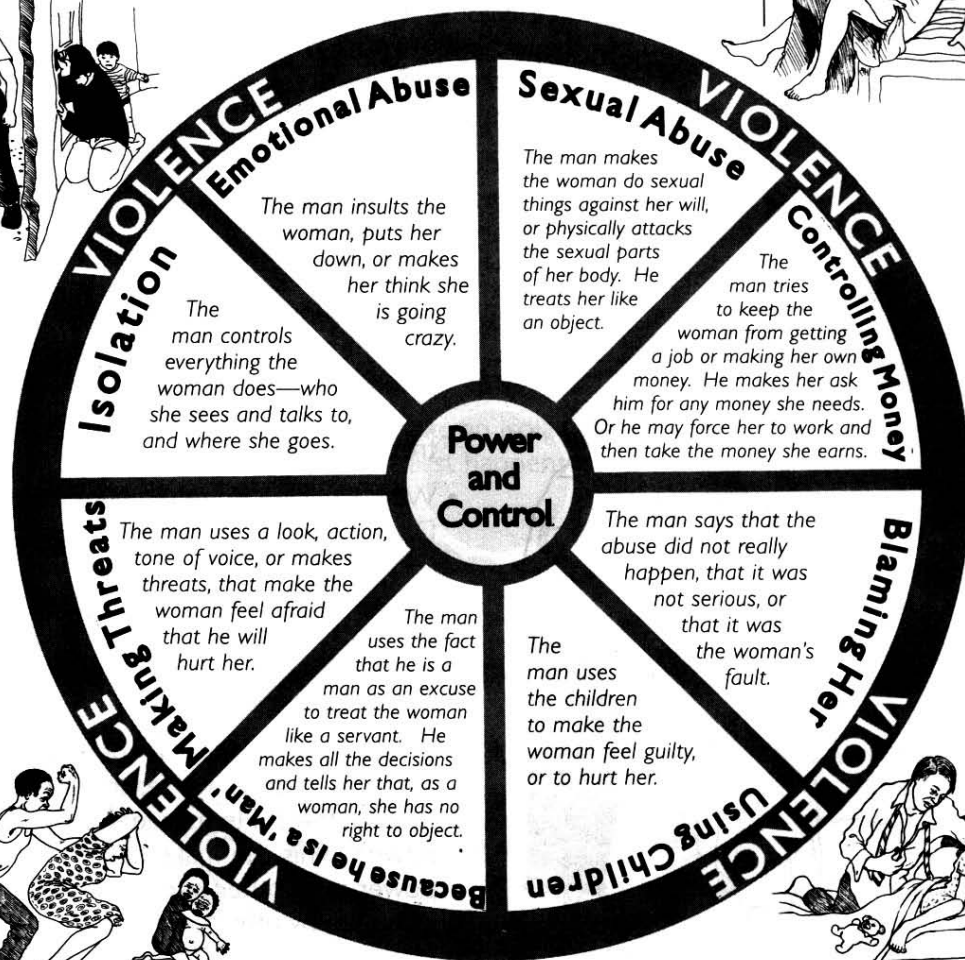
This page is a copy from "Where Women Have No Doctor, A Health Guide for Women", by Burns, Lovich, Maxwell, Shapiro, Macmillan Education Ltd, 1997, ISBN 0-333-64933-8

Kinds of Violence

There are many different ways that a man tries to gain power over a woman. Beating is only one of them. But all of them can hurt a woman.

Imagine that the circle below is a wheel. Power and control are at the center of the wheel because they are the reasons behind all of the actions. Each section of the wheel is a behavior that a violent man may use to control a woman. Violence is the rim of the wheel—what holds it together and gives it strength.

Kinds of Violence



One form of abuse often turns into another

In many cases, verbal abuse becomes physical abuse after a while. It may not seem like it at first, but the man may slowly begin to 'accidentally' push or bump the woman, or begin to sit down in the place the woman usually sits, so that she has to move. If this behavior works for him, it may get worse until he becomes violent. Not all women who suffer other forms of abuse are beaten, but all women who have been beaten have suffered from other forms of abuse.

Read your Bible through!

- God wants to talk to us. If you want to know the will of God in your life, try to listen to His voice.
- Since the Bible is the main channel to hear God's voice, read it thoroughly, not only your favourite texts. Read your Bible one by one, the whole book, each part of it.
- If you are new reader of the Bible, start from the New Testament.
- Read praying that the Holy Spirit helps you to understand, what you read. Ask for a Bible Study group in your Church, and join it!
- Read the Bible without any exceptions every day, not only when you feel like reading.
- If you read five (5) chapters each Sunday, and three (3) chapters each weekday, you will read your Bible through within one year.
- The main idea is that you read, no matter what "system" you use. But the habit of reading the Bible daily will certainly help you to grow in your spiritual life.
- Cross the read chapters on the list, and continue next time from where you stopped.

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- Box 2087, ADDIS ABEBA, Ethiopia

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Old Testament

39 books

929 chapters

The Whole Bible

66 books

1.189 chapters

Old Testament
39 books
929 chapters

The Whole Bible
66 books
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MORE ABOUT FAMILY MINISTRY

Christian Family Ministry is bringing hope to Africa which is suffering an AIDS pandemic. Educational work always takes time, but it is worth doing. The Churches could well share their experiences and put in practice each other's findings and working methods.



Session at a Training of Trainers' Refresher course

The aim of EECMY Family Ministry (Family Life Education Program) is to help Church people to live in happy marriages and families. The happier the married lives are, the better service they can give in their respective duties.

Finally, the goal of the program is to have Family Ministry as an essential part of ordinary teaching and service in all levels of Church work.

YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Family Ministry as a program is fairly new in the Church, all possible resources are welcome to strengthen it. Please, pray for Family Ministry and support it in different ways, let it be practical assistance or any other support. Let us join hands serving the Lord together in this field!

(Updated September 2008)

Contact addresses:

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church
Mekane Yesus (EECMY)

Department for Mission and Theology (DMT)
Family Life Education Program (FLEP)

Mrs. Aberash Tolossa and Rev. Geneti Wayessa
ወ/ሮ አበራሽ ቶሎሳና ዩ.ኤ.ኤ. ወ/ሮ ወይሳ

Sr. Anna-Kaarina and Rev. Matti Palmu
ሲ/ሮ አና ካሪና ፓልሙና ዩ.ኤ.ኤ. ፓልሙ

✉ Box 2087, ADDIS ABEBA, Ethiopia
☎ +251 11 550 7846 (DMT office)

+251 911 693 159 (Geneti)

+251 911 411 272 (Aberash)

+251 911 682 378 (Anna-Kaarina)

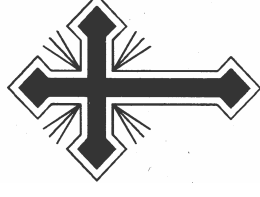
+251 911 411 273 (Matti)

e-mail: genetiab@yahoo.com
(or:) matti.palmu@felm.org

Internet: <http://etiopian.palmu.st>



EECMY Family Ministry team



The Ethiopian
Evangelical Church
Mekane Yesus



FAMILY MINISTRY

Family Life Education
Program (FLEP)

2008

BACKGROUND

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is a rapidly growing African Church. The membership figure (20,000 in 1959 when the Church was founded) reached 4.9 million in 2007. The Church has strongly focused on evangelism, reaching out to new people. But experiencing growth, the Church is also challenged to nurture those who are already members. Field which has clearly been forgotten during previous years is taking care of the welfare of marriages and families.

THE GROWING FAMILY MINISTRY

Since 2000 the EECMY runs a specific program for Family Ministry, now part of Department of Mission and Theology (DMT). The **four main sectors of Family Ministry** are: 1) Pre-marital teaching; 2) Marriage teaching for couples; 3) Teaching various target groups on marriage and family life, and 4) Marriage and family counselling.

The Family Ministry Staff at Central Office are Rev. Geneti Wayessa (the Co-ordinator), Mrs. Aberash Tolessa with an advising missionary couple. Sr. Anna-Kaarina Palmu and Rev. Matti Palmu are sent by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), which has been supporting the program from the very beginning. The Pre-Marital teaching is arranged in four of the Synods (in West) by Sr. Helena Räisänen and Mr. Tapio Räisänen, who are sent by the Finnish Lutheran Mission (FLM).

FOUNDATION, AIMS AND GOALS

The EECMY Family Ministry is **based on the Bible**.

Some of **the aims of the Program** are:

- to raise awareness amongst the leadership on the necessity of Family Ministry;
- to train Church personnel for Family Ministry;
- to arrange Family related courses, Retreats etc.;
- strengthen the structure for Marriage and Family Counselling activities
- to collect and create materials for Family Ministry.

The goal of the Program is to train as many instructors or couples as possible to act as Family Ministry teachers while working in their respective duties.

TARGET AREA: THE WHOLE CHURCH

The target areas of the Family Ministry are all the twenty Church Units (20 Synods and 1 Work Area), 4 theological seminaries and all (more than 30) Bible schools. There are many other potential target groups, like the government-run schools. The crucial point in expanding the activities is the training of local instructors.



Family Ministry course at a Theological Seminary

In the first years the Program **arranged a Basic Marriage Course in all 20 Church Units**, and the Central Office. All students at the EECMY Theological Seminaries are getting a Basics of Family Ministry course during their studies.

The Training of Trainers (TOT) courses for Family Ministry are given in order to get local couples as instructors for basic (congregation) level teaching. By August 2008 there were 374 people who have completed the Family Ministry TOT course. They have arranged teaching, also at Parish and Congregation levels, in local languages. The further plan is to train trainers, who will run Training of Trainers' Courses in each and every Synod. The goal is to have one instructor (couple) for each group of 10 congregations.—The training for Marriage and Family Counsellors as well as trainers for Youth has been started in 2008.

THE VISION OF THE FAMILY MINISTRY:

- to build up a healthy congregation and community growing from a healthy marriage and family;
- to encourage Church workers who are happy in their marriages to spread the Good News through their life example and teachings;
- to improve the status of girls and women through strengthening the Christian family model;
- to help in the frightening situation of the AIDS pandemic through stressing the significance of faithfulness in the life of couples and families;
- on the field of Pre-marital teaching, to give Biblical education concerning sexual behaviour, i.e. abstinence before and faithfulness in marriage; and
- to strengthen the congregational structure for Marriage and Family Counseling activities.

WHAT IS "FAMILY MINISTRY"?

In an Ethiopian society it is common to think that everybody gets married sooner or later, the idea of single adults is new. Thus Family Ministry in this context is normally related to marriage. In Ethiopia "family" often means the extended family, which is much larger unit than the nuclear family of western countries.

Teaching on marriage and various family related issues is **needed for a large variety of target groups**: youth, engaged couples, newly married couples, couples of different ages, parents, grandparents (out of whom many might be widows), the growing group of single adults. One target group is workers in the different fields of education, child raising, health etc, in addition to the workers serving the Church on various fields.

"Family Life Education" includes many different features of Church work. It covers "preventive" education, but it is also related to the "curative" field of Counseling, whether pre-marital or marriage counselling. **"Family Ministry"** well describes the variety of work.

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The inauguration of the Handbook for Family Ministry took place in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia.

The writers of the Handbook and of this Participant's Book, the Palmus, have been working for several years as counterparts of the Ethiopian couple, Mrs. Aberash Tolossa and Rev. Geneti Wayessa.

The "Strengthening the Family - A Trainer's Handbook for Family Ministry" was published in 2006. This **"Learning Together How to Strengthen the Family - A Participant's Book for Family Ministry"** is based on the previous book, including the materials for the same 30 lessons and 15 Bible Studies as the Trainer's Book. Both books have been prepared by two Finnish missionaries, who have since 1974 served in Africa for more than twenty years, and as Family Life Education trainers since 2000. Sr. Anna-Kaarina Palmu is a Public Health Nurse, a Work Counsellor and Sexual Health Adviser. Together with her husband, the Rev. Matti Palmu, she has received training for various fields of Family Ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. They have four grown-up, married children and by 2008 six grandchildren.

The material of the two books has been developed from input of various Marriage Courses and Training of Trainers (TOT) Courses in Ethiopia. The versions ready at the time of each TOT Course during 2002-2005 were given to the trainees for use and further comments. The improved versions were then given to the next TOT Course participants, etc. Thus, we may say that this Participant's Book is not only prepared by the two European missionaries, but by various Ethiopian trainees, who have used the material for their teaching work in different parts of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

A Reader of the Handbook for Family Ministry, Mrs. Tseganesh Ayele (Secretary for Women's work and Family issues at the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, ECFE), wrote her comment as follows: *"Before I started to read the book I thought it would be the European way of life and teaching. However, after I finished my reading I found that it is well conceptualized from Ethiopian Christian Family Life. The teaching is more based on Biblical teachings."* - The Handbook has been translated in Ethiopia into Amharic and Oromo languages. The translation is on the way into Russian and Mandarin-Chinese languages.



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