

MARRIAGE ENHANCEMENT



The Lord calls some to remain single but most to marriage. It has been said that the health of a local church is directly related to the health of its marriages. Good marriages lead to happy and stable families, a vital foundation for any church yet, sadly, the malaise that is affecting marriage in Britain has reached churches too.

So despite all the competing pressures of church life, **every** church with young or middle-aged members needs to have a marriage ministry. It is at least as important as young people's work, for example. Not only marriage preparation but marriage enhancement and marriage support need to be on offer, with warm encouragement to Christians to make use of them and to invite their non-Christian friends to do so too.

This page describes ways in which marriage enhancement can be offered.

Books

Marriages can be enhanced firstly simply by reading, especially if one spouse is unwilling to do more or anything at all. Every Christian bookshop should have several books on marriage and so should any church bookstall.

Space permits mention of only a few books here. Rob Parsons' book "**Sixty Minute Marriage**" is not too demanding for those who read little.

James Dobson's "**Man to Man About Woman**" has helped men and women to much greater understanding, as has "**I Married You**" by Walter Trobisch. "**The Act of Marriage**" by Tim and Beverly La Haye is good on sex, and "**Praying Together**" by Mike and Katy Morris is helpful on the important subject of a couple praying together. "**Love Must Be Tough**", another book by James Dobson, is for marriages in difficulties.

On the secular front, John Gray's "**Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus**" is an excellent read (ignore the unhelpful publisher's sub-title on the cover, if it is still there). "**Fighting for Your Marriage**" by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley and Susan Blumberg is a good book on the skills of communication, conflict solving, commitment and other practical matters. It is published in America but can be obtained from Marriage Care, Clitheroe House, 1 Blythe Mews, Blythe Road, London W14 0MW Tel: 020 7371 1341. These and other books could be reviewed by church leaders, as could books on singleness.

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Activities as a couple

However, more can be achieved when couples are willing to work together to enhance their marriage.

Broadly speaking, there are three types of venue for such marriage enhancement: couples' own homes, church premises, and pleasant premises some distance away e.g. hotel or small conference centre.

The essentials are usually three-fold. First, the couple hear a talk or watch a video on some aspect of marriage. Secondly, they each separately answer questions on that aspect, say on a sheet or in a workbook. Thirdly, they share their answers with each other and discuss them.

It is good to have a fourth optional stage if possible: someone available with whom they can discuss anything they wish, either their Mentors, or if they have not got Mentors then preferably someone from another church, with whom they may feel more ready to share confidences than with someone they know.

Video and/or Workbook Courses for a couple in their home

Our own video and workbook series, "**Time for Each Other**", is presented by Eric Bird with Sally Magnusson. For details see the Christian Publicity Organisation website, www.cpo.org.uk It costs £25.00 for the videos and a pair of workbooks. Extra workbooks are £5 per pair (ref CPO 1716). There are two extra sheets for Christian couples and one for retired couples if desired (75p each).

Care for the Family have produced "**Connect2**" specifically for couples in the first five years of marriage. It has been designed to be conducted in churches and community groups over five sessions. It contains a Presenter's Manual and a CD ROM containing handouts which can be printed off as needed, and PowerPoint and OHP presentations. It costs £32.49 including p & p. Presenters need no special training, as everything to run "Connect2" is included in the pack. See their website: www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Care for the Family earlier produced two marriage enhancement videos, presented by Rob Parsons. One video is "**Marriage Matters**" (£14.99), which is divided into six talks, one of which is given by Rob's wife, Dianne. Workbooks to use with this are 50p each. The other video is "**Sixty Minute Marriage**": two talks (each of approaching 60 minutes) on video for £12.99 (or on audio cassette for £6.99) with a leaflet (20p each) with questions to answer

for each talk. It is also available on DVD for £15.00, with a workbook costing £5.00, available together for £18.00. Ten workbooks cost £40.00. See their website as above.

A simple course is provided in a series of five workbooks beginning with "**Communication in our Marriage**" price £2.60 including post and packing for two sets of five from Light House, 1a Argyll Street, Coventry CV2 4PJ.

CWR of Waverley Abbey House, Waverley Lane, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8EP have produced a video, audio and workbook seminar for Christians, by Selwyn Hughes. This consists of two videos containing four sessions of about 40 minutes each. The sessions cover the Biblical foundation for marriage. The workbooks summarise the sessions and points for review and discussion. The audio tape contains the main points from the sessions and is designed to use as a refresher at a later date. The complete pack costs £40 and is called "**Marriage God's Way**". See their website: www.cwr.org.uk

Questionnaires

Another helpful method of marriage enhancement is to do an **ENRICH Inventory** (Questionnaire) with a PREPARE/ENRICH Practitioner, or a **REFOCCUS Inventory** with a FOCCUS Facilitator. Each spouse does their own and these are then analysed to find the couple's strengths and the areas in which they need to grow. These are discussed with the Practitioner/Facilitator in one or more further sessions. See the PREPARE/ENRICH website www.prepare-enrich.co.uk and the FOCCUS website www.affinities.org.uk for further details. PREPARE have a special Inventory for the Over 50s called MATE. These inventories are all based on considerable research.

The inventories are applicable to people of any cultural background and are therefore relevant for those in cross-cultural marriages.

The **Growing Together Programme** allows practitioners to use PREPARE (ENRICH) Inventories for groups of couples, in pre-marriage or marriage enhancement.

The programme is supported by a special report called the Couple Report which consolidates a couple's answers to the questions in the inventories into key areas such as Communication and Finances. This information is then presented in a form which the couple can use as the basis for discussion when particular topics, and related exercises, are introduced by the practitioner. The report does not include many of the statistics that guide the practitioner and which might be distracting for the couple. These statistics can be made available to the practitioner through a copy of the Practitioner report.

The programme has also been used for mixed groups of pre-marriage, recently married and enhancement couples, which adds wider opportunity for experience sharing. The ground rules for this sharing include confidentiality, voluntary participation, and agreement by the couple on what they are happy to share.

The programme runs over a period of 10 hours and is therefore suitable for a weekend or a number of evening sessions. For more details see the website as above.

Running your own course for a number of couples

We recommend that a Marriage Enhancement course be offered to all church members once a year. They should be encouraged to invite their non-churchgoing friends as well.

It can be hardly be said too often that the course is for any marriage, however good it is. We suggest you help them take part by using the illustration of giving a marriage "a service" each year, just as one does for a car.

In many churches it will not enough to announce the first course. Couples will need personal encouragement to sign up for it. For the second course onwards those who have done a course should do the recruiting.

There are three types of venue for a marriage enhancement course: a larger home, church premises, or pleasant premises some distance away, e.g. hotel or small conference centre.

A key consideration is privacy for the couple's personal discussions. In a home each need a separate room. (One course borrowed caravans for a weekend to make more rooms!) In a church couples should be well spaced out and suitable music played to prevent other conversations being heard.

Couples invited to an enhancement course will need assuring that marriage enhancement does **not** involve discussing their marriage with other couples.

Any evening course can be made more attractive by having a meal together before each session.

We recommend using different courses from time to time, so as to encourage those who have done one to do another course a few years later.

A church can run its own enhancement course by using a video and workbook series such as "**Time for Each Other**" described above. CPO can supply leaders' notes, publicity leaflets, and optional small group discussion questions, or Bible study questions for Christians, as well as the items mentioned earlier. The advantages of putting "Time for Each Other" on as a church course are firstly that only one set of videos will be needed (though each couple will need a set of workbooks) and secondly, couples will benefit from the discipline of coming once a week over five weeks. (It is all too easy to put it off if you are doing it on your own!).

Another course is "**Keeping Marriages Healthy**" provided by Intimate Life Ministries over eight weeks. These are presented by those trained for the purpose; the training includes doing the course yourself with your spouse. There may be some such person near you, or you could be trained yourself. Contact Alister and Christine Mort, Centre for Relational Care, Warwick Gates Community, Heathcote, Warwick CV34 6DZ Email: ILMInUK@aol.com This course goes the most deeply into the couple's meeting of each other's emotional needs and has drawn on research from many different sources. The videos cost £40 for a two part set of the eight sessions, each lasting just under 30 minutes. There is also a leader's guide available which includes a section on how to use the materials as a Mentor Couple working one to one with a couple. This costs £25.

Holy Trinity Brompton publish "**The Marriage Course**" on Alpha lines, i.e. a meal together, a talk on video or audio cassette or by a leader, coffee; couples answer workbook questions and discuss their answers with each other (not in a group). The course is held over eight evenings and offers any married couple the tools to build a strong and healthy marriage that lasts a lifetime. During each evening couples talk about important issues that can get swept under the carpet in the rush of daily life. While the course is based on Christian principles it is designed to couples with or without a church background.

The following material has been produced to help Christian leaders to run the course in their home, church or community. The video set is designed to be used with the Leaders' Guide and The Marriage Course Manual.

Introductory Guide

A short introduction to the course

Booklet: Ordering Code: 1.904074.52.9

£1.50

Introductory Video (11 mins)

For those wanting know more about the course

Video: Ordering Code: 1.904074.10.3

£4.99

The Marriage Course Video Set

- Building Strong Foundations (61 mins)
- The Art of Communication (66 mins)
- Resolving Conflict (68 mins)
- The Power of Forgiveness (63 mins)
- Parents and In-Laws (67 mins)
- Good Sex (70 mins)
- Love in Action (62 mins)
- The Marriage Course Party – What Makes a Marriage Work? (44 mins)

Video set :Ordering Code: 1.902750.90.X

£50.00

Subtitled Video Set: Ordering Code: 1.904074.11.1

£50.00

Individual Audio Cassettes each £3.00

Each session of the course, to be given to guests who have missed a session. Can also be used by leaders to prepare their talks. Timings are the same as the videos.

Audio Cassette 1 – Building Strong Foundations

Ordering Code: TMC03A1

Audio Cassette 2 - The Art of Communication

Ordering Code: TMC03A2

Audio Cassette 3 – Resolving Conflict

Ordering Code: TMC03A3

Audio Cassette 4 – The Power of Forgiveness

Ordering Code: TMC03A4

Audio Cassette 5 – Parents and In-Laws

Ordering Code: TMC03A5

Audio Cassette 6 – Good Sex

Ordering Code: TMC03A6

Audio Cassette 7 – Love in Action

Ordering Code: TMC03A7

Audio Cassette 8 – What Makes a Marriage Work?

Ordering Code: TMC03A8

Leaders' Guide

Booklet: Ordering Code: 1.902750.28.4
£2.00

Leaders' Video – How to run The Marriage Course in your home, church or community
Based on The Marriage Conference, this 52-minute video is for anyone thinking of running a Marriage Course and covers essential areas such as:

- The five principles behind the course
- Design and content
- How to set up, publicise and run the course

Video: Ordering Code: MCLVID03 £8.99

Speakers' Notes and Presentation Slides CD-ROM

For those planning to give the talks themselves.

CD-ROM: Ordering Code: 1.904074.28.6 £7.99

The Marriage Course Street Interviews and Testimonies Video

Contains the street interviews and testimonies from each session as shown on The Marriage Course Video set. If you are giving the talks yourselves, you will find this a useful tool for enhancing your presentation.

Video: Ordering Code: MCTVID03 £4.99

Guest Manual

Booklet: Ordering Code: 1.902750.27.6
£2.00

Course Invitations

To be given to potential guests, including a description of the course and a reply slip. There is also a blank space for your course details. A4 folded down to DL envelope size.

Pack of 50: Ordering Code: 1.902750.79.9 £5.00

Party Invitations

These invitations are to invite guests to The Marriage Course Party – What Makes a Marriage Work? They have been left blank for you to add in your party details.

Pack of 20: Ordering Code: TMCPI04
£2.00

Advertising Posters

A3: Ordering Code: AI TMC 02
£0.75

A4: Ordering Code: AI TMC 01
£0.50

The Marriage Book, for any married or engaged couple, costs £5.99 (Ordering Code: 1.904074.55.3) and covers the course material and much more. All these are available from Christian bookshops, or from the Alpha Hotline on 0845 758 1278.

Holy Trinity also run day conferences to equip people to run their courses.

The Care for the Family videos described above can also be used for a church course. However, if the group viewing either of those is over twenty, Care for the Family ask for a copyright fee of £50 for 21 to 80 people, £100 for 81 to 160 people, or £150 for 161 or more. This is to contribute to high cost of making the videos.

The CWR course "**Marriage God's Way**" described above, can also be used with a group.

Marriage Ministries International also train leaders to run their 14 week courses "**Married for Life**" for churches. This Pentecostal course is used by other churches too and has been the means of a number of non-Christian spouses finding Christ. For more details email MMIntUK@compuserve.com

Courses for a church to run

The other courses described above which a couple can use on their own can also be used for a church course, i.e. **Marriage Matters, Sixty Minute Marriage, Communication in our Marriage, Marriage God's Way.**

Courses run by others for you

Several marriage enhancement organisations can supply couples to take enhancement days or weekends for churches, either in or near the church or in another venue. Some of these are:

Christian Guidelines (Northern Ireland only) Mrs Ruth McBurney, 7 Queen Street, Belfast BT1 6EA Tel: 02890 230005

Family Life (Agape) Anthony & Kerrie Bargioni, 9 Latchmoor Avenue, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL9 8LJ Tel: 01753 882536

One Accord Market Square, Petworth, West Sussex GU28 0AH Tel: 01798 345222 They have many long term testimonies to the effectiveness of their material, some of which is taken from the "Keeping Marriages Healthy" course described above.

Mission to Marriage Dr Tony & Mrs Anne Hobbs, Allt Goch, Penegoes, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8UW Email: ChMarrMin@aol.com (including Northern Ireland)

New Life (Midlands & North) Brian & Sheila Keel, 83 Nettleham Road, Lincoln LN2 1RU Tel: 01522 881233 Fax: 01522 545860 Email: brian@matt6-33.freeserve.co.uk They use PREPARE/ENRICH and "Keeping Marriages Healthy" (Intimate Life Ministries) both described above.

Radiant Life Ministries (within roughly 100 miles of Manchester) Rev Walter & Mrs Lyn Crick, Radiant Life Ministries, 47 Gloucester Road, Alkington, Manchester M24 1HT Tel: 0161 653 3040

The following Marriage Resource Branches also offer marriage enhancement in their areas or nearby:-

London South-West: Contact: Dennis Colby, 4 Parkgate Close, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT2 7LU Tel: 020 8546 0683

Sussex: Contact: Michael Kimble, Lynton, Brookers Road, Billingshurst, W Sussex RH14 9QB Tel: 01403 784718 They use a Marriage Review course.

West Midlands: Contact: Bob Edge, 33 Blakebrook, Kidderminster, Worcs DY11 6RG Tel: 01562 862281

Courses run at other venues

Christian Guidelines (Northern Ireland), Family Life, Making the Most of Marriage, Marriage Agenda, Marriage Review, Mission to Marriage and Release Foundation also run marriage enhancement weekends for members of different churches at pleasant locations around the country, as do the following other organisations:

CWR: Contact: Sean Gubb, Waverley Abbey House, Waverley Lane, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8EP Tel: 01252 784700

Marriage Encounter (Anglican): Contact: Ray and Val Humby, 39 Mayfield Avenue, Orpington, Kent BR6 0AJ Tel: 01689 820466

Marriage Encounter (Baptist): Contact: Bill Reynolds, 26 Bellingdon Road, Chesham, Bucks HP5 2HA Tel: 01494 782466

Despite the organisations' names, participants in Marriage Encounter Anglican and Baptist weekends need not be Christians.

If the couple can get away from distractions at home, they will reap the benefits. Some couples arrange to look after friends' children to free those friends to go away for such a weekend, then later the second couple do the same for the first.

Care for the Family are willing to put on for you a film presentation of The Sixty Minute Marriage, They would lead the evening and provide equipment and publicity materials. You would arrange the venue and purchase 85 tickets in advance at £3 each to cover Care's costs. Proceeds of all other tickets sold would go to you for venue costs, etc. More details from Care for the Family, PO Box 488, Cardiff CF1 1RE Tel: 02920 810800.

Persuasion

A vital part of preparation for any marriage enhancement event is persuading couples that marriage enhancement is for those with good marriages, not for those in difficulties. (One organiser made the point by saying, "If you've got problems, don't come".) Secondly, it is most important to follow up general announcements about forthcoming enhancement events with personal spoken invitations. Once you have had one event, couples who have been on it can then encourage others to come.

Cohabitation

In a marriage enhancement course, it is good to use "spouse" at least as much as "partner", so as to make clear that the course is about marriage. Cohabitation is a thoroughly bad idea, as much secular research is now showing, and we need to discourage it in every way possible.

Also, to invite cohabiting couples to marriage enhancement events gives an unhelpful recognition to cohabitation as an acceptable status. An exception might be made if the purpose is clearly stated that it is to encourage them to consider marriage.

Praying Together

It has been well said that a couple who pray together stay together. Any marriage enhancement event or course for Christians should include something on the subject of praying together, with illustrations of various ways of doing so.

Marriage Week

National Marriage Week was begun by Marriage Resource in 1997 and is now run by Richard Kane as part of a separate but related charity. See the website [www:nmw.org.uk](http://www.nmw.org.uk) The Week always includes 14th February. An increasing number of churches are doing something special for marriage in the Week. One popular event is a Marriage Thanksgiving and Rededication Service. This, including suggestions for the Service and plenty of other ideas for the Week, can be found on their website. Further ideas are on the website www.nmw.org.uk

Twenty One Words

Here is a twenty-one word answer to the question: "What is the secret of a happy marriage?" -

"The key to happiness in marriage is to help your spouse enjoy being married to you, and to do so continually." May the Lord enable you to encourage couples to do this.

Edward Pratt