

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 help for marriages in difficulties 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. Likewise **"The Highway Code for Marriage"** by Michael and Hilary Perrott is an easy and practical read.

The "Marriage Book" by Nicky and Sila Lee is a deservedly helpful book by the authors of the much-used Holy Trinity Brompton Marriage Course (of which more below). J. John has written **"Marriage Works"**.

Mark Gungor's **Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage** is American but fun. 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. **"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.

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 DVD or video on some aspect of marriage. Secondly, they each separately answer questions on that aspect, on a sheet or in a workbook. Thirdly, they share their answers with each other and discuss them.

It is good to have an extra option if possible: a couple with whom they can discuss anything they wish, either a slightly older couple they know, or a couple from the church, or a couple from another church, with whom they may feel more ready to share confidences than with someone they know.

DVD and Workbook Courses for a couple in their home

For over twenty years Rob Parsons has helped thousands of couples build stronger marriages. Now Care for the Family have produced **21st Century Marriage**. The eight sessions cover: Knowing we matter, Acceptance, When everything screams out It's over! Time for love, When sparks fly, Dealing with debt, The affair, Love in the real world. In this DVD, through short talks, Rob lifts the lid on what can make and break marriages. The DVD comes with an accompanying workbook, full of discussion starters. See their website www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Another course is **Keeping Marriages Healthy** provided by Intimate Life Ministries. An eight session DVD and workbook course which can be used by a couple on their own or in couple to couple mentoring. The sessions each last just under 30 minutes. The course helps couples to identify relational needs and principles in order better to express their love. It helps them to discover secrets of healing hurts, building trust and deepening communication, and to experience God's plan for an "intimate" marriage - spiritually, emotionally and physically. It has drawn on research from many different sources.

The DVD comes with two workbooks, and can be purchased from www.relationaltraining.co.uk or Centre for Relational Care, Cressida Close, Heathcote, Warwick, CV34 6DZ, Tel: 01926 430901. 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.

The book **Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage** by Mark Gungor has also been turned into a DVD set of seven sessions - very American, but they address serious issues in an enjoyable way. www.laughyourway.com

Questionnaires

Another helpful method of marriage enhancement is to do an **ENRICH Inventory (Questionnaire)** with a PREPARE/ENRICH Facilitator. Each spouse fills in their own questionnaire 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 Facilitator in one or more further sessions. See the PREPARE/ENRICH website www.prepare-enrich.co.uk for further details. PREPARE/ENRICH have a special Inventory for the Over 50s called MATE. These inventories are all based on considerable research.

PREPARE/ENRICH can provide leaflets which encourage couples to use a questionnaire.

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

There is also a shorter PREPARE/ENRICH Questionnaire which can be done by a couple on their own, without a Facilitator. It is called Couple Check-up, and can be accessed through www.couplecheckup.co.uk There are three versions - dating, engaged, married. It is designed for those geographically remote, or those who initially find the prospect of meeting with a Facilitator too daunting. There are detailed guidance notes for the couple, and there is an option of contacting a Facilitator. It takes a few minutes to set-up and then about 15 minutes to complete.

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 Facilitator 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 at least 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 is 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 help with the recruiting.

There are three types of venue for a marriage enhancement course: a large 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.

Holy Trinity Brompton publishes "**The Marriage Course**". Each session begins with a meal together, followed by a presentation on DVD by Nicky and Sila Lee, during which there are exercises for couples in which they discuss their answers with each other (not in a group). Alternatively a local leader can give the presentations, including clips from a DVD (but the presentation by the Lees is so good we doubt that many would think they could improve on it). The course is held over eight evenings and offers any 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 material has been produced to help Christian leaders to run the course in their home, church or community.

Introducing you to the course –

The Marriage Preparation Course & The Marriage Course Introduction for Leaders
- This short booklet introduces the courses to people who may be interested in running either or both. It outlines the topics covered, includes testimonials from those who have run the courses, and provides tips for getting started.

Running The Marriage Course for the first time – the starter pack consists of - Course DVD, Leaders' Guide, Leaders' Toolkit, 10 Guest Manuals, The Marriage Book

The Marriage Course DVD Set – This is an updated and revised version of the course. Nicky and Sila's talk are interspersed with thoughts from those who have been on the course, as well as street interviews from around the world. The contents are -

- A brief introduction to The Marriage Course on DVD
- Building Strong Foundations
- The Art of Communication
- Resolving Conflict
- The Power of Forgiveness
- The Impact of Family – past and present
- Good Sex
- Love in Action

- The Marriage Course Party – What Makes a Marriage Work?
- Coping with Times of Separation (Optional session for those in the armed forces or others who spend long times apart).

The DVD contains a Leaders' Guide.

The Leaders' Toolkit contains –

- A DVDF with - filmed training session on how to run the course
- Filmed clips for experienced leaders if they wish to give live talks
- Promotional films for potential guests and leaders
- A CD-Rom with - training notes, talk transcripts and presentation slides for live speakers
- Helpful information and documents for course administrators.

For participants –

The Marriage Course Introductory Guide (for Guests) –

This booklet lets people know what the course involves, and contains testimonials from couples who have been on the course.

Guest Manual – highlights all the key points from the talks, contains all the exercises and 'homework', with plenty of room for making notes.

For promoting The Marriage Course –

Promotional DVD – includes –

Two minute film to attract participants

Introductory film describing to leaders how and why the course works

The Marriage Course Party talk – a 38 minute introduction to the course for potential guests.

The Marriage Course Invitation Postcards -

including a list of the course sessions, space for your course details and for a personal message. Pack of 25.

The Marriage Course Party Invitation Cards –

Similar to the Postcards.

Posters – with blank space for your course details – A3 and A4 sizes

All these are available from www.relationshipcentral.org/marriage-course 0845 758 1278

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

Freedom in Christ have a course - **Setting your Marriage Free**. The principles are described in a book "Experiencing Christ Together", and there is a Leader's Guide and a Participant's Guide. www.ficm.org.uk

Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage - Mark Gungor's DVD set of seven sessions, mentioned above, can also be used as a course for a group. www.laughyourway.com

The **21st Century Marriage** course from Care for the Family described above is ideal for use in a group. The eight talks by Rob Parsons are sure to get the conversation going. Those who have never led a small group before will find the 'Leading small groups' guide on their website www.careforthefamily.org.uk particularly helpful, and there are also hints and tips on getting a 21st Century group up and running where you live. For experienced leaders, the DVD and accompanying notes that come with it (also available in packs of 10

to give out) is probably all you need. Publicity materials are also available. Email them at 21cfamily@cff.org.uk if you would like more help or advice.

Family Life (Agape) have a nine-session small group course - DVD, Workbook and leader's Guide - www.agape.org.uk/ResourceCentre

The Intimate Life Ministries course **Keeping Marriages Healthy** described above, can also be used with a group.

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) admin@cguidelines.org.uk

Tel: 028 9146 8846

Family Life (Agape) Tel: 0121 765 4404 www.agape.org.uk

info@agape.org.uk

Time for Marriage admin@timeformarriage.org.uk 01 798 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.

The following Marriage Resource Branches and Area Representatives can also help in or near their areas:

Greater London South East Barry & Chrissy Turner, 135 Gates Green Road, Coney Hall, West Wickham, Kent BR4 9EG Tel: 020 8249 8685
Website: www.MarriageResourceSELondon.org.uk

London South West Tricia Colby, 4 Parkgate Close, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey KT2 7LU Tel: 020 8546 0683 Website: www.marriageresourceswLondon.co.uk

Dorset Edward Pratt, 7 Bay Close, Swanage, Dorset BH19 1RE 01929 427229

East Yorkshire (excluding Hull) Jim and Rosemary Gillespie, 18 St James Road, Bridlington, E Yorks YO15 3PF Tel: 01262 401560 Email: DrJimGillespie@bopenworld.com

Hampshire John Deagle, Tel: 02380 216003 Email: info@scft.org.uk Website: www.scft.org.uk

West Midlands www.foundations-westmidlands.org.uk

Courses run at other venues

If a 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.

Christian Guidelines (Northern Ireland), PREPARE-ENRICH, and Time for Marriage, all mentioned above, run marriage enhancement weekends for members of different churches at pleasant locations, as do the following other organisations:

Marriage Encounter (Anglican): www.marriageencounter.org.uk

Marriage Encounter (Baptist): www.beofme.org.uk

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

Freedom in Christ run a two-day residential in a hotel for leaders. www.ficm.org.uk

This is an opportunity for couples in leadership to fine-tune their marriage and (optionally) to be equipped to run a similar event in their own church where it works really well after the Freedom In Christ Discipleship Course.

Compassionate instruction and direction will help you make sure that Christ is right at the centre of your relationship. You will be given the opportunity to go through the Steps To Setting Your Marriage Free, a process that will help you deal with footholds of the enemy that may have held your marriage back, and then to renew your marriage vows. There will be time and space for each couple to work privately and confidentially, prompted by the Holy Spirit. It's a life-changing experience!

Topics covered include:

- Establishing God's priority for marriage
- Balancing rights and responsibilities
- Releasing old hurts
- Breaking cycles of abuse
- Breaking sexual bondage
- Unmasking Satan's deception

By going through the material, you will also be equipped to run retreats for people in your church who have already been through The Freedom In Christ Discipleship Course.

Money Habitudes

Short for Money Habits and Attitudes, this pack of cards is a fun way of examining and discussing issues about money, the number one subject that couples argue about! It is not cheap, but is worth the money. Available from www.moneyhabitudes.com One third of the cost is shipping from USA, which could be cut if someone bought a supply and marketed them in UK ...

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.

Some may think that inviting cohabiting couples to marriage enhancement events gives an unhelpful recognition to cohabitation as an acceptable status. On the other hand it could be 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 separately. 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; details of how to arrange this can be found on this Marriage Resource website, as can plenty of other ideas for the Week. See also the Marriage Week website www.marriage-week.org.uk

Twenty One Words

Here is a twenty-one word answer to the question: "What makes a marriage happy?" - **"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 husbands and wives to do this.

Edward Pratt