

Committment in Marriage

Written by admin

Sunday, 25 September 2011 11:36 - Last Updated Tuesday, 04 October 2011 13:03

By Naomi Cassata

Living Out your Wedding Vows

Materials needed:

Bible

Glue stick

Two pieces of paper (construction or printer)

Lesson Objective:

For couples to realize the importance of enduring through the hardships of marriage with a tender heart towards their spouse.

Introduction:

Marriage was God's idea from the very beginning. It is important by the end of this lesson that couples understand that marriage is for life and we must practice love towards each other if we want it to be lasting. Secular society has devalued the commitment made between couples and unfortunately the church has followed in succession.

Marriage is two-fold. There are times of joy and times of unhappiness. As in any relationship, we must accept the good with the bad. It's how we handle the bad times that will determine the outcome of our relationships. Enduring through those times is essential for a successful marriage.

In our Christian community it's not uncommon for divorced couples to make up a significant percentage of those present. Because of this, many leaders are hesitant to touch upon the subject of the sacredness of marriage. However, it is a subject that must be addressed in a loving, and yet truthful way.

Let's Talk

We will touch upon four main topics: God's Blueprint, The Heart of Man, New Creation in Christ and Walking it Out. Spend time discussing each subject and answering the questions, with the students, found in each topic. Allow them to respond first and then discuss the answers given after each question.

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Start the class off by asking how long each couple has been married. If it is a small class, ask couples to share how they met their spouse and what qualities attracted them to each other.

God's Blueprint

Begin by bringing out God's design for marriage. We too often forget what God has to say about marriage or that He initiated the whole thing. To understand, we must start at the very beginning. Read Genesis 2:24, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." The word joined carries a notion of a lasting or permanent union. The term "one flesh" denotes two separate parts meshing together into one. They are so intertwined that pulling the two apart would cause substantial damage.

Illustration:

To drive in this point, create an imagery by gluing two pieces of paper together (use a glue stick because it dries quickly) in front of the class. Then place it aside. After twenty minutes try pulling them apart. Denote that the two pieces of paper represent two people and the glue represents marriage. Separating the two cannot be done without a degree of damage.

Although this is an Old Testament verse, Jesus drove home the same principle when he was questioned by the Pharisees on the subject. He even went a step further. Read aloud Matthew 19:6, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." Bring out the later point of the scripture that once marriage is sealed it is never meant to be separated. The idea we gather from this pointed scripture is that the institution of marriage is indeed ordained by God and anything that comes between it is opposed to God's original plan for marriage.

Ask your students the following questions:

What things can wiggle their way between you and your spouse? Every marriage is unique, so each answer will be unique to each individual. However, a few common things may be: work, entertainments, hobbies, relationships (in-laws, friends, etc.) and negative emotions (anger, selfishness, apathy, insecurity, etc.). Many people don't think of negative emotions as being an obstacle in their marriage, because it is a hidden issueOne of the heart. However, the heart is the source of our outward behavior. Our responses towards our spouses are simply a reflection of the state of our own heart. If our heart is hard and unloving, so will our actions; and if our heart is tender and loving, so will our actions be. It's important that the couples identify verbally or mentally, the things they see in their own marriage. Bringing the little foxes out in the open will

Why do you think it's important that we keep our marriage vows? It's important to us because it's important to God. Our commitment to our spouse reflects our commitment to God's word, and through our obedience to His word, we bring glory to His name.

The Heart of Man

The Pharisees were testing Jesus when they asked about divorce. The answer Jesus gave was not what they wanted to hear. Moses commanded a certificate of divorce to "put her away" they argued. But Jesus had gone straight to the root of the matter. It had everything to do with

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the state of their hearts, he pointed out. Their hearts were spiritually hard; therefore, divorce was tolerable. What it boiled down to was their stubbornness and their unwillingness to yield. The Israelites were stiff necked people. They were willing to obey God ceremonially, but not from the heart. They didn't care about pleasing God with their actions, but rather doing only what was required of them to get by. Consequently their own will got in the way.

The hearts of men presently are not much different from those of ancient Israel. Sadly, even those who claim to be Christians have gone after their own way. Their happiness has come before obeying God's word. The rate of divorce among the church is just the tip of the iceberg. There is definitely a heart issue that needs to be dealt with.

(It is understood that some divorces cannot be avoided, specially when the other party is unwilling to reconcile. However, in more cases than none, this is not the case. Try to be sensitive, but also be willing to stress the truth of God's word.)

Ask the following questions:

Ask the students what they think it means to have a hard heart? More specifically, it's a heart that is not willing to listen and obey God's word concerning love.

And why might that effect their marriage commitments? A hard heart is going to be unwilling to yield to the needs of the other. His/her heart will solely be concerned for its own needs and happiness, while the concern for their spouse doesn't even come on the radar. Usually people like this use the word "I" a lot. Its how they feel or what they want.

New Creation in Christ

As Christians we are called to be different. The feel of our hearts should be tender and yielding towards God so that it can overflow towards others.

Society has taught us that if things become unpleasant, it's not worth fighting for. Many a time we hear the phrase "I'm just not happy anymore" when someone is contemplating divorce. Shortly thereafter they are in a relationship with someone who does make them happyat least for now. It's the easy way out.

Have volunteers read the following passages concerning our behavior to one another:

Colossians 3:12-14

Philippians 2:3-5

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Ephesians 5:33

Through the reading of these scriptures, students will come to understand the importance of walking in love. It is an attribute of God that each of us is required to function inespecially towards those closest to us. Love is not a holiday in February, nor is it something that is merely verbalized. These passages make it clear that love is sacrificial. It is putting the needs of others before our own needs. It's sacrificial because, to be honest, it's not always pleasant for the one giving. Stress to your students that life is not primarily about pleasing ourselves. Jesus displayed his own sacrificial love to us. Although the benefits were tremendously wonderful on

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our end, it was not altogether pleasurable for him.

Ask students the following questions:

How can we show love to our spouse? (be specific) Showing love does not have to be something spectacular. It can be as simple as washing the dishes or running a bath for your wife; or maybe greeting your husband with a hug at the front door when he comes home from work.

Ask volunteers to share times that their spouse showed sacrificial love for them and how it made them feel?

Walking it Out

Love is also a mindset. In Colossians 3:12, we are taught to put on "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." We don't always think of love in this sense. But these are fruits that are produced from sacrificial love. When we are driven by love (the kind that considers others before ourselves) the attributes above will be present. Encourage the class to examine their own lives. We need to consider whether our actions back up our words. Anyone can say they love someone, but it's another thing to walk it out.

Most couples that get married in church attend pre-marriage counseling. The topics covered are generally about finances, sex and goals. None of them deal with co-existing with another person, nor the difficulties faced. Couples need to be encouraged to love each other "tenderly" by their deeds and everyday actions.

Read the following scenarios to the class. After each one, let them identify which love attributes they can identify each spouse uses and doesn't use from Colossians 3:12.

Scenario #1

Mark had a long day at work. The demands of the day were especially tough. It was the end of the month, and his department had a deadline to get everything complete. He was glad to finally pull into his driveway. As he came through the front door he almost tripped over his daughter's doll. How many times have I told her to pick her toys up, he thought to himself. As he walked into his bedroom to put his things down, he noticed the bed was unmade and the same pile of dirty laundry that had been laying there since yesterday hadn't been touched. Shaking his head, he could feel he was getting agitated. Am I the only one who works around here, he mumbled to himself. His wife Sarah came around the corner and greeted him warmly. Mark felt upset enough to say something he may regret. The house was definitely not what he wanted to come home to. Holding back a sarcastic remark, he hugged his wife instead. Then Sarah explained how busy her day had been. Leah, their daughter, had forgotten her lunch, and her elderly aunt had a doctor's appointment she had forgotten about. Mark could see the weariness in his wife. He had a different perspective on things now, and was thankful he didn't respond in the way he had previously felt.

Review: Here is a prime example of walking love out. The dilemma Mark was facing is something many couples face daily. He was tired and weary. From his viewpoint he had every reason to get mad with his wife. He had worked hard to take care of his family's needs, so why

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would he expect any less when he arrived home. If Mark had responded angrily or sarcastically, his wife would have been hurt, angry and unappreciated. Through Mark's actions, he displayed love to his wife through compassion for her circumstances, humility by not overreacting and gentleness by embracing his wife. Many fights in marriage can be avoided by responding this way.

Scenario #2

Dawn was on her way to pick her husband John up from work. His truck was in the shop, so they had to make do with one car. She arrived at exactly 5:00 PM. John said he'd be walking out at that time. Dawn turned the music dial on as she waited. Five and then ten minutes passed. Still no sign of John. He knows I have things to do, she impatiently told herself. She picked up her cell phone to see if she could get a hold of him, but he didn't answer. She looked down at the clock 5:17. Her mind began replaying different responses she would say to John when he finally emerged. None of them were pleasant. Suddenly, she saw John making his way towards her. She glared down at the clock: 5:30. He had a big smile on his face as he apologized for taking so long. He explained about an unexpected meeting with his boss and the good news that he received a promotion. As Dawn sat there, she realized that her anger was hasty. John would never intentionally try to anger me, she realized. Things just don't always work out the way we intend them to.

Review: Walking in love does not mean you will never feel impatient or angry. In both Mark and Dawn's situation, they felt unloved by what they perceived as their spouses lack of respect and initiative towards them. In both cases this was not true. When things don't go as we like, our unwanted emotions begin to bubble up. We feel annoyed inside, and our actions become hurtful. Neither do negative feelings mean we no longer love our spouses. Rather, it's how we respond to our impatient or angry feelings that best relay our love to our spouses. It's easy to be kind and gentle when everything is going pleasantly. Shielding our spouse from our critical reactions will make for an enduring marriage.

Closing

We can all agree that marriage is tough. It definitely has its ups and downs. The downs have the potential to bring division between us and our spouses. The world says our "own" happiness determines a good marriage. This is a self centered focus. Marriage is a coming together of two committed individuals who have chosen to spend "all" their intimate moments together. Consider the other person's needs. It won't always be pleasant and sometimes you just won't feel like it, but for a lasting marriage this is something to consider. Remind your students that marriage is definitely good and designed by our Creator, and when they walk in the God kind of love, they not only honor their spouse but they are honoring Him too.

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