

Enjoying being a married missionary!

Marriage on the mission field – part 1

Primary purpose for our sessions: to help prepare you to serve Christ as a married couple wherever He places you on the foreign mission field.

Some of the issues include ...

- How can you keep a healthy balance between growing your marriage and developing your missionary work?
- Which do you view as a higher value or priority and why: Our marriage or mission work?
- What are some beliefs that you may be carrying with you that could have a detrimental effect upon the effectiveness and health of both your marriage and the witness of your marriage to the world around?
- How can we keep changing and growing through the highs and lows of life as marries on the mission field?

PRIORITIES FOR OUR MARRIAGE & MINISTRY

Introduction:

Early in our married lives God brought people into our lives who taught us to live by the following order of priorities:

- Our prior responsibility is to nurture our relationship with God
- Our next responsibility is to love and serve life's partner
- Our next responsibility is to love and care for our children/family
- Our next responsibility is to carry out our work and ministry duties

Another Christian leader once expressed these priorities in another way:

- God
- self (not implying a negative form of self-love but rather taking seriously our responsibility to keep growing as a person according to God's will, eg through study and reading etc.)
- marriage
- children/family (this indicates that we should never neglect our prior marriage relationship after we have children – though this does NOT mean that we will devote more time to our husbands/wives than to our children – rather a matter of establishing and keeping to godly, biblical priorities)
- work/ministry

Ordering our relationships, lives and ministries based on this order of priorities has saved us from falling into the trap of Christian ministry, ie seeing ourselves as the “saviours” of the people we are ministering to, so that we give them all our energies and attention leaving precious little time and energy to nurture our marriage relationship. This false order of priorities can lead to husband and wife growing apart on the mission field, starving each other of the affection and love that God has commanded us to show to one another.

Discussion questions:

- What have you set down together as your life priorities (as a couple)?
- If prioritising ministry above marriage is a potential problem, how can you withstand the equally serious threat of turning both your marriage (and your children) into an idol?
- Situation: When you (husband) have pencilled in a special evening together with your wife (eg for your wedding anniversary) and half an hour before you are to leave, someone drops by and seems set to spend the next few hours with you (you aren't so clear on why he has come), what would you do?
- How do you understand Jesus' words: Luke 18:29-30?

OUR BELIEF SYSTEMS AND OUR MARRIAGE

Introduction:

We live our lives and our relationships based on our personal belief systems. These beliefs are often not conscious beliefs but rather convictions that we have picked up and taken on over the years, all of which have a very powerful impact upon our thinking and behaviour.

Our belief systems are strongly influenced by cultural mores and values – both our national culture and also our Christian sub-culture. Many of these beliefs are in conflict with God’s Word in one way or another.

None of us can say that our lives and relationships are devoid or free totally from the false beliefs we’ve picked up from our past.

Two questions:

1. What false beliefs lie behind the following statements? and
2. How might each of these false beliefs seriously harm both our married lives and also our service for God?
 - I’m not very beautiful or attractive. Not so interesting to be around. Too quiet. Too fat. Too ... whatever. I would be more attractive to my wife or husband if How does such a belief (which you may be convinced is “not a lie”!!) affect the way you act in relationships?
 - Sex is closely connected with the fall. As we mature in Christ and become more spiritual, our need for and our interest in this part of our married lives will become increasingly less significant and necessary.

Couples’ discussion:

- What are a couple of false beliefs that have sometimes weakened or hurt your marriage relationship (ie some “baggage” that you brought with you into your marriage relationship)?
- What are some biblical truths that you could use to destroy the lies of the enemy?

As Christians we can change these false beliefs into true beliefs through the enlightening work of the Spirit and the Word. See Rom.12:2.

This is a life-long process and a process that we need to help each other in.

OUR ATTITUDES AND THEIR IMPACT UPON OUR MARRIED LIFE AND MINISTRY

The main issue is to understand the inseparable connection between our attitudes and our actions and how both affect our witness.

Personal & group discussion questions:

Discuss together your personal attitudes towards the following scenarios:

- Culturally defined roles in marriage? (What is your attitude towards differences in marriage roles in different cultures? Are you strongly “egalitarian” in your own views about marriage roles? How would you handle significant, even what you perceive to be unbiblical marriage roles in your new culture?)
- Privacy? (What is your attitude towards being private or alone? How do you look upon your private space? And what attitude will you have towards the nationals who ask you private, nosy questions, eg what contraceptives do you use?)
- Entertainment / leisure activities? (What is your attitude towards entertainment, eg movies & videos? If this would be offensive to the believers in your local church, how would you respond?)
- Special celebrations? (What is your attitude towards taking time to celebrate wedding anniversaries & birthdays? How will you cope if you can’t find a suitable place to go out for a date?)

Question: What can we do as marrieds to pinpoint wrong attitudes in our mate’s thinking, and help them to put on right and godly attitudes?

CHANGING & GROWING IN YOUR MARRIAGE & MINISTRY

Introduction:

Our hearts are deceitful and wicked according to the Scriptures. In our hearts lie buried sins that we have been able to keep under careful check in our own environment but which will be uncovered as we are hit by sudden stressful situations.

Questions:

- How will you respond when you find your mate / partner passing through some deep waters as a result of unexpected stresses and struggles? (Example: Unable to really get hold of the language and beginning to withdraw from you, less affectionate, more under stress, beginning to talk very negatively)
- What will you do when one of these hidden “nasties” suddenly erupts and begins to rock the boat of your previously very stable and happy marriage? (Example: Jealousy – you discover some single girls or even some national women being overly friendly with your husband)
- What Gospel truths can bring us hope in such difficult situations?

Sometimes one partner will have the bigger stress over an issue and the struggling one often feels as if they’re so “unspiritual”, so weak when compared with their partner. At other times the seemingly “more spiritual” partner is the one going through the rough spin though may be tempted to cover up his/her struggles with a self-righteous, pseudo-spiritual, I’m okay stance.

It is most dangerous if we deny our struggles or spiritualise them. We need to know that all missionary couples will experience conflicts and struggles like any normal couple, and that such conflicts are NOT a sign that they are “unspiritual” or not able to be used of God. However, we cannot just push these conflicts including marital conflicts under the table and pretend that they don’t exist.

If we respond to them positively, our learning and growing through our struggles will be a powerful tool in God’s hands for the blessing of our fellow-missionaries and the national believers. But if we don’t, our lives will be a living denial of the very Gospel we have come to share, ie the Gospel that sets us free to walk in the light and slowly to be changed into the image of Christ.

Take seriously the iceberg of *PUS* growing within like a hidden cancer:

- Pride (racial superiority; more spiritual or mature)
- Unbelief (not truly trusting in God to do miracles or to help us come through difficult situations; thinking very negatively about ourselves – failure complex)
- Self-righteousness (we have no problem – the other person(s) has the problem)

Confess your sin to one another; keep daily confessing your sins, forgiving one another, and also bearing with each other’s weaknesses in love. See Col.3:12-14.

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS:

Try to find some quiet moments to discuss the following questions together:

- Is our marriage right now where we want it to be or believe it should be in light of God’s calling upon us to go forth as a light to the nations?
- What area of our marriage do we want to work on before we leave for the field?
- What are several specific and measurable goals that we can set together for your marriage for this year? And what specific steps can we plan to ensure that we reach these goals?

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