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Marriage is to be honoured by all

As the nations of Europe set about reconstruction after World War 2, a Harvard sociologist published a significant paper.

Carl Zimmerman had examined many ancient civilisations to find reasons for their downfall, and he identified three main phases. The third and final phase of decline concerned what happened in families and was marked by:

- increased easy causeless divorce (i.e. ‘no fault’)
- increase and acceptance of adultery
- increase in disrespect of parents in general
- revolt of youth against authority
- alternative forms of marriage arising
- rise in juvenile delinquency
- feminist movements abound (to such an extent that women lost desire for child-rearing)
- perversions of all kinds arise (especially homosexuality)

All over the Western world, family life is in crisis on every one of those points (and the UK is top of most charts).

So do we wring our hands in horror and accept that the end is nigh? Or do we rise up and take action?

Malachi foretold that John the Baptist would “convince parents to look after their children and children to look up to their parents” (Mal 4:6, *The*

Message) in preparation for Christ’s coming. Within our churches and amongst those we are trying to reach, we find a wide range of ‘family arrangements’; it is incumbent upon us to look to God for ways to equip and support them.

Marriage was the first human relationship ordained by God (Genesis 2:24) and “marriage should be held in honour by ALL” (Hebrews 13:4) – not just by those who are married. It is foundational to society and so should be starting point in family life ministry.

A comprehensive ‘marriage strategy’ could include:

- Helping everyone to value marriage
- Teaching the youth positively
- Preparing the engaged
- Mentoring the newly-weds
- Enriching the married
- Challenging ‘Empty Nesters’
- Helping the divorced ‘move on’

Marriage enrichment

“I wouldn’t want to go on a marriage enrichment course in case we found out that something was wrong.” That woman’s statement has as much sense as saying, “I don’t want to put my car through its annual MoT test in case they find that the brakes don’t work properly.”

There are many enrichment courses available, but *The Marriage Course* (from HTB, the

Marriage Preparation

One pastor complained to me that Marriage Preparation took too much of his time! A rather short-sighted view! Firstly, it involves much less time and pain than trying to repair a troubled marriage and certainly less than walking through a divorce with a couple. Secondly, the pastor doesn’t have to do it – a faithful couple with a few years of marriage under their belt can act as ‘marriage mentors’.



Most couples spend more time preparing for their wedding than for their marriage – but a wedding is for a day; a marriage is for life! Marriage preparation can not guarantee marital success, but it can ensure a good start.

Extensive research shows that the optimum ingredients for successful marriage preparation are to begin 8 – 12 months before the wedding, with a relationship inventory (e.g., FOCCUS), followed by a teaching course of 5 – 8 sessions and support from ‘marriage mentors’ after the wedding.

home of Alpha) is probably the easiest to run because of the available resources. Its seven sessions covers topics such as handling conflict, forgiveness, good sex and expressing love. We have found that it works well for the married, the cohabiting, Christian and non-Christian and many nationalities.

Marriage enrichment courses are not for marriages in trouble, but for those who want to make a good marriage better. However, they can be of tremendous value even for troubled relationships. At the beginning of one course,

With FOCCUS, the couple individually record their responses to 160 statements as ‘agree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘unsure’. These are computer-marked and ‘levels of agreement’ are identified on 13 ‘life areas’ (e.g., communication, marriage covenant, finances, sexuality), providing an excellent basis for the couple to talk together over issues relevant to them, with the help of a facilitator.

When FOCCUS is followed up with a teaching course, the couple are already alerted to issues they need to pay particular attention to.

There are a variety of marriage preparation courses available, including our own *Preparing for Marriage* (with a strong biblical basis, now available in English, Polish and French) and *The Marriage Preparation Course* (from HTB).



- The Marriage Course www.themarriagecourse.org
- FOCCUS www.foccusinc.com
- Preparing for Marriage www.saltlight.org/shop

A lady told us, “This is our last ditch stand. If this doesn’t work, we’re splitting.” At the end of the course, she said, “We love each other again. It’s not like it was at the beginning – it’s better!”

... and then there are ways to support and equip parents, step-parents, single parents ... This all provides a wonderful opportunity to stop the rot, serve the saints and show the community the father-heart of God! What are we waiting for?

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