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For Better or for Worse:

Marriage was meant to be one of the most uplifting and edifying aspects of human existence.

In his will, German poet Heinrich Heine offered his estate to the man who married his widow. The reason, he said, was that this way he'd be sure that there would be at least one person who mourned his death.

Of all the devastating effects of sin, one of the worst has to be what it has done to marriage. From what we can gather from

Scripture (and the wonderful insights from the Spirit of Prophecy), marriage was meant to be one of the most uplifting and edifying aspects of human existence. It was designed to reveal our humanity in ways that nothing else could. As if God, after the earth came forth from His creative word, hadn't already done enough for the race. In His love for us He gave us more, perhaps what was to be even the best blessing of all—marriage.

Of course, from the first bite of the forbidden fruit, things went from bad to worse. In the Bible account, right after the first couple sinned, the first thing we see is how sin immediately impacted their relationship. "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (*Gen. 3:7*). Nothing between men and women, husbands and wives, has been the same ever since.

What should have been a source of joy, freedom, and fulfillment has become, too often, a source of misery, oppression, and despair. Not always (indeed, in many cases marriages are wonderful expressions of spiritual and physical unity that helps complete a human being) but still far too often.

This quarter we're going to look at married couples in the Old Testament, not so much as a study on the principles of marriage but

Lessons From Old Testament Couples

rather to use married couples (though in many cases the marriages were composed of more than “couples”) as a starting point to learn various lessons—about faith, works, obedience, hope, trust, love, and a host of other aspects of what it means to be a follower of the Lord in a fallen world.

It makes good sense to use marriage as a starting point, simply because marriage is so fundamental to human existence. This relationship forms the foundation of the family, and it’s out of the family that (for the most part) we propagate ourselves. Also, considering how often marriage is used in the Bible as a symbol for various spiritual truths, it seems to be a good starting point.

Of course, not everyone is married; many of the great Bible characters—Daniel, John the Baptist, and even Jesus—weren’t (maybe we ought to do a quarter on the singles in the Bible!). Nevertheless, the principles we can learn from studying these marriages often can be applied to various aspects of our lives, whether married or not.

Thus, for the next few months as we explore the relationships of various couples—Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Boaz, even Ahab and Jezebel, and more—we’ll seek to mine from the Word of God practical truths that we can apply to our daily relationships with one another and with the Lord, who says to His people, “For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (*Isa. 62:5*).

Our two authors this quarter have been happily married for many years. Gordon E. Christo is director of collegiate education of the Southern Asia Division; his wife, Rosenita, works in the division office. They have two grown children.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Practice, and Apply

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, practice, and apply. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Practice); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in the “I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Practice: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Apply: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.