

A COMMUNITY OF LOVE, GRACE and MARRIAGE?

Weddings and marriage are images that are used throughout the Bible. God used couples to achieve and explain things in the Old Testament, weddings are used as images through which Jesus teaches, and marriages something on which he and St. Paul both seem to teach. But what are these passages really telling us, and what might God be expecting us to do if we are to take their message seriously?

Introduction - setting some ground rules

Opening Prayer

"Marriage is a gift of God in creation, through which husband and wife may know the grace of God."

(Common Worship Marriage Service)

In Genesis 2:18-25 God creates man and woman to be together, before sin enters into the world. This is the gift of God in creation.

1. What is the task God sets Adam in Genesis 2:15 and in which the woman joins him?

Despite their sin, the sin of Cain their son (Genesis 4:8), and the mistakes of the generations that follow, God creates a people he calls his own through married couples, e.g. Abram and Sarai.

Read Hosea 1:2 and Hosea 3:1-5

2. Hosea's marriage to Gomar is a living image of God's relationship with Israel. What characteristics of God does Hosea have to show towards Gomar?

"Anyone looking for undeniable proof of the existence of God need look no further - the fact that any marriage makes it is a miracle of the first order."

(Jon and Stasi Eldredge in 'Families First' Mothers' Union March/April 2010)

③ Can you think of an example from your own or a friend's marriage relationship where God's grace has been visible? Celebrate this by sharing it with someone near you.

Read Ephesians 5:22-28

4. Why did Christ give himself up for the church?

5. This teaching of St. Paul may seem to be suggesting that there should be a hierarchical framework of men above women in marriage, but for what purpose is he using the image of submission in both men and women?

6. Take a few moments to consider any instance where the marriage of friends or relatives has been example of what you think of as Christ-likeness. Talk to one or two people sitting near you about this.

Read John 2:1-11

7. Weddings were a community event. Jesus, his mother and his disciples were invited to the wedding. Weddings remain public services that take place in our community. Which people usually attend the weddings that your church hosts?

8. How could we get to meet wedding couples and their families?

9. Through whose actions and how does Jesus 'reveal his glory' so that his disciples "put their faith in him"?

The leaders of the Church of England ask that couples who wish to get married in church should be "Properly prepared.... by a process of reflection and discussion about the life of faith" (House of Bishops 1999)

Today there are several Qualifying Connections that mean that couples may get married in church with little knowledge of

- the God in front of whom they wish to make their vows
- the community among which those vows are being witnessed.

⑩ How can this church community prepare couples for not only the relationship skills that are needed in marriage, but also for God's grace and love to be revealed through their marriage?

Before closing in prayer, discuss how the ideas highlighted in this study might be put into action in this church, and what materials might be available to help these plans happen.



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