

Missionary Families of Christ
MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

The Marriage Enrichment Retreat II (MER 2) is part of the formation program available in MFC. It is available to all member-couples starting from their second year in MFC. It is an optional program for the general membership and for household leaders, but is required for unit leaders and up.

The talks in MER 2 are the following:

1. What makes a Christian marriage work
2. Unity in marriage
3. Communication
4. Sex in marriage
5. Christian parenting
6. Empowering our marriage

The content of MER 2 does not duplicate what has already been given in the first MER. However, certain principles and points would inevitably be touched upon again.

MER 2 is recommended for all MFC member-couples, even for those who might see some topics as of limited relevance for them (e.g., those with no children). The retreat should be seen as a good way for the couple (1) to have time off by themselves to strengthen their personal relationship, and (2) to gain wisdom on marriage and family life, especially for those in leadership in MFC.

The retreat would normally start on the evening of the first day and end by noon of the third day. Alternatively, it may be held over two days, beginning early morning of the first day and ending in the afternoon of the second day. The retreat schedules, not necessarily on a weekend, do not provide for a Mass.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

SCHEDULE A

Day 1

7:00 PM	Arrival/Registration
8:00	Introduction/Administrative announcements
8:30	Worship
9:00	Talk #1 "What makes a Christian marriage work"
9:45	Couple discussion
10:30	Lights out

Day 2

6:30 AM	Wake-up call
7:30	Breakfast
8:30	Worship
9:00	Talk #2 "Unity in marriage"
9:45	Couple discussion
10:15	Snacks
10:45	Talk #3 "Communication"
11:30	Couple discussion
12:00 NN	Lunch
1:00 PM	Rest/Recreation
2:30	Praise time
3:00	Talk #4 "Sex in marriage"
3:45	Couple discussion
4:15	Snacks
4:45	Talk #5 "Christian Parenting"
5:30	Couple discussion
6:00	Break
6:30	Dinner
7:30	Games/Fellowship
10:30	Lights out

Day 3

6:30 AM	Wake-up call
7:30	Breakfast
8:30	Worship
9:00	Talk #6 "Empowering our marriage"
10:30	Snacks
11:00	Open forum/Sharing
12:00 NN	Lunch
1:00	Departure

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

SCHEDULE B

Day 1

8:30 AM	Arrival/Registration
9:45	Introduction/Administrative announcements
10:15	Worship
10:45	Talk #1
11:30	Couple discussion
12:00 NN	Lunch
1:00 PM	Rest
2:30	Praise time
3:00	Talk #2
3:45	Couple discussion
4:15	Snacks
4:45	Talk #3
5:30	Couple discussion
6:00	Break
6:30	Dinner
7:30	Games/Fellowship
10:30	Lights out

Day 2

6:30 AM	Wake up call
7:30	Breakfast
8:30	Worship
9:00	Talk #4
9:45	Couple discussion
10:15	Snacks
10:45	Talk #5
11:30	Couple discussion
12:00 NN	Lunch
1:00 PM	Rest
2:00	Praise time
2:30	Talk #6
4:00	Open forum/Sharing (with snacks)
5:00	Departure

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

TALK # 1 : WHAT MAKES A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE WORK

Expanded outline

A. Introduction.

1. Most couples who get married today have no adequate preparation and training.
 - a) Unlike for professions such as a lawyer or doctor.
 - b) For some there are pre-marriage seminars, but these are very inadequate.
 - c) This is a serious mistake on the part of the Church and of society. Just consider the number of divorces, separations and bad marriages.
2. Another mistake is that most couples do not seek help to enrich and improve their marriages. When they do, it is often when there is already serious trouble.
3. So what is it that makes Christian marriages work?

B. Five essential factors.

1. A proper understanding of Christian marriage.
 - a) Wrong understanding or wrong reasons for getting married:
 - * Legitimizing a wrong relationship.
 - * Search for self-gratification.
 - * Escape from boredom or loneliness.
 - b) Correct understanding:
 - * It is a participation in God's plan.
 - The family is God's plan. Gn 2:18-24.
 - It can only work well if done according to God's plan.
 - * It is a covenant of love.
 - A covenant before God. Thus indissoluble.
 - Based on love. Not romance, but a commitment.

- * It is a life of committed service.
 - Involves a constant laying down of one's life for the other.

2. Right development of Christian character and values.

a) Certain character traits are appropriate for the spouses, corresponding to roles of men and women.

- * Men - take responsibility; be aggressive.
- * Women - be supportive; have a peaceful and gentle spirit.
- * There should be no confusion of roles.

b) Right Christian conduct. Eph 4:22-32.

- * These are appropriate for all Christians. But very helpful for married couples.
- * V. 22 Fresh thinking = God's outlook.
 - 25 Truth = no deceit in relationship.
 - 26 Anger = can have fights but handle in a good way, and settle finally.
 - 28 Not steal = no unjust taking advantage of other.
 - 29 Speech = not to tear down but to build up.
 - 31 No bitterness, anger, etc.
 - 32 Kindness, compassion, forgiveness.
- The key: follow God's example.

c) Right attitude towards material resources. 1 Tm 6:7-10

- * Most marriages are geared toward the accumulation of more and more material resources. Importance of status.
- * We need to learn detachment, stewardship, investing in the afterlife.
- * Of course, good things are there for us to enjoy. But we ought to have the proper attitude.

d) Service to God is a Christian priority.

- * Serve God, spouse, others.

3. Right relationship between spouses.

a) A Christian way of selecting a spouse. 1 Thes 4:3-5.

- * No longer for us, but for the benefit of our children.

b) Mutual love and respect. Eph 5:21 and 33.

* Tempers any possible misinterpretation of the teaching on headship.

c) In sexual relationship, holiness and service. 1 Cor 7:3-5.

4. Properly managing our time and resources.

a) Our job should allow time for family and community.

b) Should the wife need to work, have common agreement on this.

* Not an ideal situation, but at times necessary for economic reasons.

* Do not take on the mentality of pursuance of career for women.

* Need to examine motive. Review every so often.

c) We should not be slaves to business or money.

5. The power of the Holy Spirit.

a) Psalm 127:1.

b) Marriage and family life are God's idea. We are merely His servants. We need to let Him take charge.

C. Conclusion.

1. God's ideal for Christian marriage is a high one.

a) We enter into a covenant of love for the rest of our lives.

b) We witness to the very life of God and the unity in the Trinity.

2. It is difficult, but God is committed to help and empower us.

3. Let us learn more during this retreat. And let us continue to trust in the One Who brought us together in Christian marriage.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

TALK # 2 : UNITY IN MARRIAGE

Expanded outline

A. Introduction.

1. The trend in the world today is not unity but individualism. “Do your own thing.”
2. Jesus calls us to unity. John 17:21. Our relationships are to reflect the unity in the Trinity.

B. Unity in marriage.

1. The call to unity is especially for married people.
 - a) Two individuals become one flesh.
 - b) Even for reproduction, man and woman must unite to produce new life.
 - c) The biblical teaching. Genesis 2.
 - * God created man (2:7).
 - * God was not satisfied (2:18).
 - * God created woman from man's rib (2:21-22).
 - “Rib” = very close; share genuine bond of unity; made of same substance; share same life.
 - * Adam recognizes this same life and substance (2:23).
 - * Husband and wife become a new social entity, a unity that works as one (2:24).
2. But the original unity and harmony did not last.
 - a) When men and women disrupted their relationship with God, they also disrupted the harmony between themselves.
 - b) Fallen humanity never fully recovered the ideal of married unity that God offered the first man and woman.
 - c) Thus even among God's chosen people, divorce—the mark of a final breaking of unity—was a common occurrence.

3. Jesus' teaching. Mt 19:3-6.

- a) Jesus affirms God's plan for unity.
- b) There can be no compromise (19:9).

* Note: We do not concern ourselves here with the seeming qualification or exception.

4. God wants unity.

- a) The book of Genesis tells us of God's original intention.
- b) Jesus affirms this in the gospels.
- c) Paul's teaching. Eph 5:32. This unity in marriage refers to Christ and the church. The fidelity of husband and wife is a sign of God's unbroken covenant love for His people. Marriage reflects God's love and life.

C. Supports to unity.

1. A personal relationship with the Lord.

- a) Mt 19:10. The disciples found the ideal of lifelong unity too difficult.

- * This unity is impossible for fallen man.
- * Yet unity is God's design.
- * We need God's power. Jesus is the source of all unity.

- b) Effect of Jesus' lordship:

- * When we take him as teacher, then we learn the same approach to life as he has.
- * Jesus is the one to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is power to change lives.

- c) There is a need for daily personal prayer, praying together, studying Scripture, opening our lives to the action of the Holy Spirit.

2. A relationship to each other as Christian brother and sister.

- a) Before even being husband and wife, we are brother and sister in the Lord.

- * Marriage is between two of the Lord's disciples.

- * Remarkably few marriage problems really involve marriage itself. But rather it is failure in acting as Christian brother and sister.

- * If we learn to live as brethren, then we can live well as husband and wife.

b) We need to go to Scripture for wisdom.

- * Most basic commandment -- John 15:12.

- * Love is unilateral. It does not depend on the other's response or the lack of it. Our love does not depend on emotional support or rewards received, but simply on our decision to obey Jesus' command.

- * Love is based on commitment, not feeling. Our love endures through good times or bad, for better or for worse.

- * God can put His own love into our hearts as we obey His command.

c) Practically, committed love means being ready to serve one another. Phil 2:5-7. Rom 12:10.

3. Principle of Christian governmental authority.

a) In the world, there are two extremes: authority as a means of oppression; and doing away with all authority.

- * Neither extreme can maintain unity.

- * God wants to establish authority in social units because He wants to have unity and to take united action.

b) Our model is the life in the Trinity.

- * There is total equality, but also governmental order. Jesus obeys the Father.

c) Jesus wants the life of his people to mirror this relationship in the Godhead.

- * Husbands have authority over their wives.

- * Parents have authority over their children.

D. Headship and submission.

1. Definition: This refers to governmental roles in the family, with husband as the head of the family and the wife as a support to him.

2. Scriptural basis:

- a) 1 Cor 11:3. Directly linked to the Father's authority in the Godhead.
- b) Eph 5:22-23. Directly linked to Christ's authority in the Church.

3. Some important aspects:

- a) No judgment is made on the value of husband or wife. There is equality of worth, yet distinction of roles.
- b) Headship enables husband and wife to move forward as one. Not his or her own way, but the Lord's way.
- c) How headship functions at a given point in a couple's marriage varies according to each spouse's maturity. There is a need for flexibility.
 - * Ordinarily, both share the responsibility for family life.
 - * If the husband is more mature, he takes more responsibility for their life together. He delegates to the wife as she is able to handle.
 - * If the wife is more mature, the husband should draw on his wife's wisdom and experience. The wife should support her husband, not take over his role as head. The husband can mature only if he functions as the head, including being allowed to make mistakes.
- d) Regarding decisions affecting the life of the whole family, the husband and wife should normally discuss these.
 - * If they cannot agree, then the husband decides on how to settle it. He either (1) waits until they both agree, or (2) he follows his own opinion, or (3) he follows his wife, or (4) he seeks outside counsel. In any case, he decides.
- e) Headship involves real authority. Submission involves real obedience, and not just being favorably disposed to the husband's requests.
 - * There is no need to obey an order to sin.
 - * If not sin, the wife should obey even if she disagrees.
- f) Headship is not to be applied legalistically. It is basically a function of a love relationship. And it is only one aspect of a much larger relationship.

4. Headship is a gift of God to His people. It is an important source of unity and peace.

E. Conclusion.

1. God calls us as husband and wife to be perfectly one.
2. God gives us the means to grow into that unity.
3. We must learn to make these means a practical part of our married life.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

TALK # 3 : COMMUNICATION

Expanded outline

A. Introduction.

1. There is much to talk about in marriage—appreciating God’s plan for us and discussing how our relationships within the home can be truly in the Lord.
2. As we go through our married life, there will be disagreements. Even as we talk about our life in the Lord, there will be disagreements.
 - a) Periodic disagreement is an inevitable and normal part of marriage.
 - b) The resolution of such disagreements has to take place verbally. We need to communicate.
3. How we communicate will determine in large measure how our marriage will be.
 - a) Arguments and confrontations, no matter how slight, involve factors of stress and tension. In such an environment, uncontrolled words can wound in a devastating way. Prv 18:21a.
 - b) On the other hand, if we learn to communicate well, we have the foundation with which to discuss anything, and thus have the means to move on in the Lord.

B. Seven ways of keeping communication under control, especially in difficult discussions.

1. Decide right from the start to be open to what your spouse says, with a willingness to admit legitimate errors on your part. Let your motive be to discover the truth, not win the argument.
2. Decide to hear your spouse out without interrupting or losing your temper when he or she hits a sensitive nerve.
3. Pray and put on your spiritual armor. Remember that the devil is the one who is fanning the flames and instigating disharmony.
4. Decide not to hurt your spouse.

* You know all the vulnerable, tender spots. Decide not to take any bit of information your spouse has shared with you and use it as a weapon against him/her.

5. Be willing to be a dumping ground for your spouse. Realize that there are times when you just need to let him/her dump out the garbage and hurt that has accumulated. Do this without retaliation, correction or pat “spiritual” answers.
6. Stick with the main issue and only handle one issue at a time. Don’t be sidetracked into minor points or something that is past history.
7. Avoid sarcasm and joking. Sarcasm does little except inflame the discussion. And while there could be rare occasions when joking can break the tension and relieve some pressure, be prudent.

C. Seven things not to say.

1. “You never do what I tell you,” Avoid using the word “never.”
 - a) Firstly, it is inaccurate. It is probably not true that your spouse has not once done what was required.
 - * Your spouse’s reaction will be defensiveness and self-justification, which will ultimately blind him/her to any truth in the point you were trying to communicate.
 - b) Also, it is discouraging.
 - * What you are saying to your spouse is “You’re an absolute failure; you haven’t done one thing right.”
 - * It also communicates that any attempt your spouse has made to comply with you has been meaningless to you, counting for nothing.
2. “You’re just like your mother (or father)!”
 - a) This is a subtle way of being critical of your spouse’s parents.
 - b) It is a low blow because your spouse did not choose his/her parents or the negative input they gave him/her, which he/she is probably struggling to overcome. It is never wise to make someone feel responsible for something he/she did not do or cannot alter.
3. “You are misunderstanding what I’m saying.”
 - a) This is a subtle way of implying that you are communicating clearly and so the fault must be with your spouse. You need to realize that none of us is a perfect communicator.
 - b) It is better for you to take the responsibility by saying, “Maybe I’m not saying it clearly enough.”

4. “I can’t take any more!”

- a) In moments of crisis, melodramatic statements like this are common. Such statements are often an escape from the responsibility to face difficulties squarely.
- b) God calls on us to endure. Acts 14:22.

5. “It’s all your fault. You’re to blame.”

- a) If, through verbal manipulation and domination, you come away from every disagreement absolutely blameless, then only one other person is to blame—your spouse. Your spouse then comes under an often unbearable burden of guilt. Thus nobody ultimately wins.
- b) James 5:16. Admitting your faults allows healing to come to both parties and releases your spouse from the guilt you would otherwise put on him/her.
- c) Also, when things go wrong, often it is nobody's fault. So no blame should be accepted or assigned.

6. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

- a) This is a very dangerous stage. When communication ceases, the avenue for reconciliation is blocked.
- b) The silent treatment is never a solution. Resignation to silence is an invitation for bitterness to take root, to just nurse your wounds and think of all the evidence against your spouse.

7. “I’m leaving.”

- a) Stay and talk things out, no matter how difficult.

D. Seven foundation stones for good communication.

1. Trust. “I promise not to hurt you.”

- a) Realize that our spouse is the last person we would want to hurt. Follow this through with keeping our promise not to hurt our spouse. The fruit should be greater trust for each other.
- b) Trust is also an act of faith. It means making yourself vulnerable to one another. It is sharing with your spouse that precious secret, hope or desire or those deepest inner fears and weaknesses, believing that the information will never be used against you as a weapon.

2. Respect and approval. “You're important to me.”
 - a) It is possible to love someone without showing respect for him/her. The evidence of respect is your behavior and speech toward your spouse. It is your way of acting, in terms of honoring, simple courtesy, thoughtfulness, deference and attentiveness.
 - b) Approval is the verbal expression of respect. Marriage should be replete with statements like, “You did a great job,” “I'm proud of what you did.”
3. Love. “I love you just the way you are.”
 - a) Love entails acceptance and redemption. The nature of God's love for us is that He loves and accepts us just as we are. Yet His love draws us redemptively out of sin into salvation.
 - b) You need to love unconditionally.
 - c) Unconditional love helps motivate a person to overcome his/her faults and weaknesses. This is the redemptive quality of love.
4. Self-sacrifice. “Your needs come before mine.”
5. Forgiveness. “The slate is clean.”
 - a) Forgive mistakes, forget them and never bring them up again.
6. Honesty (with moderation). “This is exactly how I feel.”
 - a) Two extremes: Hide your emotions, or let fly with a brutal barrage of unbridled words inflamed with fierce emotions.
 - b) We need to learn to be truthful without hedging, nor being insensitive or unnecessarily blunt. Honesty, with balance and prudence.
7. Covenant. “Whatever it takes.”
 - a) Covenant means unconditional commitment.

E. Conclusion.

1. Regular communication is a very important element in establishing harmony between husband and wife.
2. God desires peace and unity for our marriage. God will reward our efforts to establish life-giving communication.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II
TALK # 4 : SEX IN MARRIAGE

Expanded outline

A. Truths about sex:

1. Sex is part of God's design for human life. Gn 1:27. Thus sex is basically good.
2. God has a purpose for sex. Sex is not ours to use in any way we please. His purposes are:
 - a) Expression of love and affection between husband and wife.
 - b) Conception and birth of children. Gn 1:28.
3. Sex is important for husband and wife to become truly one flesh. Sex establishes the bond of unity between spouses.

B. Two wrong attitudes:

1. Negative attitudes that create guilt or fear about sex.
 - a) The reality is that sexuality is intrinsically good.
 - b) We need to be able to distinguish between desire and lust, between temptations and sin.
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2. Hedonistic attitudes that exalt sexual pleasure to an importance beyond its created purpose.
 - a) Sexual pleasure for its own sake.
 - b) Leads to practices such as sado-masochism, bi-sexuality, anal intercourse, group sex. All are perversions of God's purpose.
 - c) When this is the focus, there is an increase in the risk that the marriage will fail.

C. Four qualities of Christian sexual relationships:

1. Joyful.
 - a) Sexual intercourse as a source of great physical and emotional pleasure.
 - b) Sexual intercourse is to be approached with a real spirit of enjoyment.
2. Committed.
 - a) Husband and wife need to be available to one another. 1 Cor 7:3-5.
 - * Does not depend on emotion or moods.
 - * Balanced by genuine concern and love.
 - * Is expressed joyfully, not in a begrudging or purely dutiful spirit.
 - b) Sex is not to be used to manipulate the other person.
 - c) This type of commitment and availability can help resolve sexual problems like masturbation, pornography, lust for others.
3. Chaste.
 - a) Does not refer to being "celibate." Also does not refer to false modesty.
 - b) Means freedom from any kind of immoral or lustful behavior.
 - c) Does not mean that if one is married, anything goes. 1 Thes 4:3-5.
 - d) Does allow for variety in sexual expression.
 - * Have enough freedom for a reasonable degree of variety. E.g., different positions; manual or oral stimulation as part of foreplay.
 - * The sexual act must end in genital intercourse.

4. Centered on Christ.

- a) Marriage depends on the love of Christ which has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

D. Establishing the sexual relationship.

1. One very important element is communication. The spouses need to discuss sexual feelings honestly and freely.

2. The spouses need to learn about each other.

- a) Feelings and attitude about sex. What does one find stimulating? What does one dislike?
- b) General difference in the sexual response of men and women.

3. Frequency.

- a) What is the right frequency?

* The Babylonian Talmud prescribed sexual intercourse according to professions: for unemployed laborers, daily; for students, twice a week; for camel drivers, once every two weeks; for sailors, once a month.

- b) There is no general rule, but regular intercourse is important. 1 Cor 7:5. This is necessary to satisfy sexual needs. If not, one is more susceptible to sexual temptation.

- c) The important question to ask: Do we have intercourse often enough to maintain a satisfying sexual relationship?

- d) Scheduling when to have intercourse may be necessary.

E. Key to unity and happiness in the sexual relationship:

1. Be glad God made man and woman in the way He did.
2. Discover how God intends our differences to work toward our corporate good.
3. Have faith and patience as we work toward the goal of sexual unity and fulfillment.

F. Conclusion.

1. Sex is God's gift to married couples.
2. Through our sexual intimacy, let us look forward to growing in greater unity and love.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

TALK # 5 : CHRISTIAN PARENTING

Expanded outline

A. Introduction.

1. Our children are not ours to do with as we please. They belong to God. God has a plan for raising His children.
2. The basic goal of parenting: Eph 6:4b. To bring them up with the training and instruction befitting the Lord.
3. Thus we must diligently seek out God's purpose for them and raise them according to it. Our primary goal is to raise children who know the Lord and follow His ways.

B. Principles for raising children in the Lord.

1. Parents have been given the responsibility by God to take an active and vigorous role in raising their children in His ways.
 - a) This responsibility rests in a special way upon the father (Eph 6:4). The mother shares the responsibility.
2. Together with this responsibility, we have been given authority over our children.
 - a) God expects children to obey their parents. Eph 6:1-3. Col 3:20.
 - b) Parental authority should be exercised with firmness yet lovingly, so as to lead children to the Lord. Col 3:21. Eph 6:4a.
 - c) Do not use our authority to relieve our own frustrations, cover up our laziness and mistakes, protect our self-esteem, excuse our failure to listen.
3. Children left to conduct their own lives when they are not yet ready will be trained by the world, the flesh and the devil.
4. Parents should provide a Christian environment for their children, because by themselves it is very difficult to raise children for the Lord. The powers and forces in the world are too strong.
 - a) Thus bring them into our MFC Sections (Kids, Youth, Singles).

C. Goals of Christian parenting.

1. Aim at raising children who love and serve the Lord.

a) To relate to the one true God as their Creator and Father.

b) Develop the characteristics of Christ.

2. Children must also learn to love other Christians as their brothers and sisters.

a) Learn to show respect and honor for other people. Rom 13:7.

* Especially respect due to parents. Eph 6:2-3. Dt 5:16. Sir 3:2-6,12-14.

b) Learn to serve.

3. Train children to deal with secular life, how to relate to the world around them.

a) Learn the practical skills they will need in daily life. Everything from brushing their teeth to driving a car.

b) Learn to work and earn a living, one suited to the child.

* This should not focus on status and society's values. We should not subject children to the kind of pressure to succeed that the world imposes.

c) Learn to be in the world but not of it. Learn how to maintain Christian beliefs and standards in a world that is becoming increasingly pagan.

d) Handle their emotions and relationships in a way that will develop their Christian character and personality.

D. The means of training children.

1. Three elements: example, teaching and discipline. All three are necessary.

2. Crucial: unity of mother and father.

3. Example

a) Parents must live what they teach.

b) We should communicate joy and excitement in our Christian life and service.

c) We need to submit ourselves fully to the Lord, letting Him train and teach us as we try to train our children.

* Thus we need to be part of a Christian community (MFC) and be faithful to our covenant, because it is in MFC that we receive formation, direction and support.

4. Teaching.

- a) Teach basic Christian truths.
- b) Explain what we are doing and why, to testify to things God has done for us personally.
- c) Give information and perspective to help them form Christian attitudes and values, based on the day-to-day events of life.
 - * Day-to-day events will afford us many opportunities, as we read the newspaper, watch TV, observe other people, etc.

5. Discipline.

- a) God wants that there be consequences for children not receiving or responding to parental authoritative training.
- b) Discipline includes instruction, training, correction, chastisement.
 - * Here we're focusing on physical discipline. Often means spanking.
- c) Biblical wisdom regarding discipline.
 - * Parents provide discipline for their children. Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21. It must be done in the right way, not provoking the child to anger.
 - * Discipline is a sign of sonship. Prv 13:24; Prv 23:13,14.
 - * Physical discipline is necessary. Prv 22:15; Prv 23:13-14; Prv 29:15,17; Sir 30:12.
- d) Discipline must be done in the right spirit. Not harsh and cruel. Not so rigid that the child turns away from God. Must take place in the context of a loving personal relationship.
- e) Discipline must be done not on the basis of feelings, but according to consistent established rules. Parents need to be united behind consistent policies for discipline.
- f) Other forms of discipline:
 - * Consequential discipline – “If you don't do this, then this will follow.”
 - * Verbal correction - most appropriate when dealing with an occasional lapse by a usually responsible child or when dealing with older children who have a basically good relationship with the parents.

* Use of rewards - may be used to reinforce certain kinds of training, as an incentive.

E. Conclusion.

1. Our children belong to God and God has a plan for them. Our role is to raise them up according to His ways.
2. When we cooperate with God, we can count on His wisdom and strength to raise our children in the right way.
3. As our children choose the path of life that we have chosen, then there is assured the continuity of vibrant Christianity through the generations.

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT II

TALK # 6 : EMPOWERING OUR MARRIAGE

Expanded outline

A. Introduction.

1. God's ideal for marriage is a very high ideal.
 - a) A lifelong commitment, through thick and thin.
 - b) A covenant of love. Unconditional love, just like Jesus.
 - c) A life of committed service.
2. On our own, it would be impossible to attain to this high ideal. In fact, many couples cannot even keep their marriage intact.
3. But God, who brought husband and wife together, is committed to help us. We can call upon the power of God's Holy Spirit.

B. Marriage in perspective.

1. Gn 1:27. God created man and woman in His image.
 - a) Thus family communion is supposed to reflect in human terms what God is like.
 - b) However, this is usually not the case. If we look at the lives of married people, there are lots of struggles, pain, etc. In fact, for some, there is less and less unity through the years.
 - c) Why? Gn 3: the first sin. Rebellion. The fall.
2. The result has been a fourfold disintegration.
 - a) Man and woman are estranged from God. They are thrown out of paradise. They are separated from God and condemned to eventual death.
 - b) They are estranged from the world around them. They are alienated from the earth (Gn 3:17-19). Even the earth would rebel from the lordship of man.
 - c) Their relationship is affected. They are alienated from each other.
 - * Man's headship is not experienced as care and provision, but domination and tyranny.
 - * The woman needs the man but competes with him; she is no longer freely subordinated.

- d) The ultimate picture of sin and its consequences is seen in Gn 11. Tower of Babel. No communion and no communication. No unity and no community.
3. If the story ended here, it would be a very sad situation. Even this retreat would be useless, for there would be no hope for us.
- a) But Jesus came to take care of the sin problem. Jesus won for us grace. We can put to death the old man.
- b) Thus we can again be united. Not through our own strength, but through Jesus. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit, the power that makes the difference.
4. God's intent is to return us to the original state of Adam and Eve. We are to be witness to what God is like.
- a) Now all of us are now living renewed lives.
- * We have already accepted Jesus as Lord. We have turned away from sin, especially sin and insensitivities in marriage.
 - * We have all been baptized in the Holy Spirit. We have seen how the Holy Spirit is our source of power and effectiveness in the Christian life.
 - * But still, we sin. We need to experience even more the power of the Spirit in our marriage.
- b) So now we want to ask the Holy Spirit again to touch our marriage, the areas of our life as husband, as wife, as father, as mother.
- c) God wants to empower us. If we want it too, and if we fervently pray for each other, then we will begin to experience radical changes for the better in our marriage.

C. What do we pray for?

1. Husband and wife will pray for each other.
- a) You know best your own needs and weaknesses, as well as those of your spouse.
- b) A husband's and a wife's prayer for his/her spouse has power. God hears and will act.
2. For the husband
- a) To exercise headship such that he is genuinely the provider, protector and governor, according to the model of God our Father. Not as lord or tyrant, but in love and service.
- * Note to wives: do not pray that your husband will now say yes to everything you

want. Or that he will no longer make any mistakes. But pray for his heart. So you will experience his headship as a source of life, as a help in your growth as a daughter of God.

- b) For God to remove the negatives, such as insecurity, irresponsibility, uncontrolled anger, non-listening attitude, domineering ways, fear of wife.
- c) Positively :
 - * To have the ability to listen.
 - * To give clear direction and to make decisions.
 - * To love and serve.
 - * To be truly a man of God.
 - * To act such that Jesus becomes Lord of the family, in all areas.

3. For the wife

- a) To be the heart of the home. To make the home a center of love, care, warmth. To be truly supportive of your life together.
- b) For God to remove the negatives, such as insecurity, jealousy, having your own way, competitiveness, fear of surrendering to your husband's way, emotional manipulation.
- c) Positively :
 - * To have great love for God and for your husband.
 - * To honor and respect your husband.
 - * For the ability to allow your husband to love you as a husband (provider, protector, governor). To have confidence in him.
 - * To have joy in serving the family. Joy in ruling your home and taking responsibility, together with the husband, for the family and over the children, without competitiveness.
 - * To support your husband fully. To exercise active submission, not passive, not inferior, but working actively with the husband for the good of the family, and yet open to the husband's input and direction.

D. How do we now proceed?

1. We will devote a total of approximately 20 minutes to your praying for each other. Please try not to go beyond this as we will still have some closing remarks.
2. Couples can stay where they are, or move to any other place within the immediate vicinity. You may bring your chairs with you.
3. You start by thanking and praising God together. Then one can pray for the other and/or himself/herself. Then the other prays. Each can take his/her turn as the Spirit leads.
4. Ask Jesus to baptize with his Holy Spirit in specific ways.

- * To accept His lordship over you.
- * To live out the high calling of marriage.
- * With the fire of his love, to burn out all the negatives and to strengthen the positives. (note: you don't need to remember to itemize all).
- * To remove any source of division.
- * To have the courage to walk as sons and daughters of God and to mirror the unity of Christ and his Church.
- * To be witnesses of God's love to others.

5. Praying in this way is praying according to God's will.

a) Have faith. Expectant faith. God will grant whatever you need to strengthen your marriage.

b) Be open to the Spirit's work in you. Do not put restrictions on God's action.

6. Let us start now.

E. COUPLE-PRAYERS FOR EMPOWERMENT.

F. Five important things we need to take with us and live out.

1. Faith.

a) A nagging question: Can we really have a better marriage? Can the Holy Spirit really work wonders?

b) Ezekiel 37:1-14. Vision of the dry bones.

- * Situation was hopeless. Needed divine intervention. But God's Spirit worked, and suddenly there was life.

- * Our situation may be similar. On our own, it is hopeless.

c) But when you asked the Lord for His Spirit, the Holy Spirit has actually entered into your marriage and family in a new way. Believe that! Take that faith with you and go home a different couple, because the Holy Spirit is in you in a new way.

- * Of course, transformation could be over time. Do not always look for immediate outward manifestations. But trust that God's Spirit is present and working in power.

d) A spiritual principle: God never shows a new, deeper way to live, and then turns His face away from you. So go with great confidence, and look forward to a richer relationship.

2. Prayer.

- a) Nothing much will happen if we don't pray.
- b) Live ACTS, in relation to your marriage.
 - * Adoration. Have an attitude of praise for God, no matter how difficult your present situation might be.
 - * Contrition. Confess to God your weaknesses, shortcomings, unyielded areas, etc. Ask for His Holy Spirit to work. If you have done wrong to your spouse, go and repent and be reconciled.
 - * Thanksgiving. Be thankful for your spouse, for all his/her good qualities. Continue to add to Psalm 136. This gives you a positive direction; it prevents a narrow focus on your spouse's faults.
 - * Supplication. Intercede daily for your spouse and for the life of the family.

3. Expressed love.

- a) Anecdote of old couple.
- b) How? By word and by action.
 - * Tell him/her.
 - * Sexual relationship.
 - * Words of endearment.
 - * Giving of gifts.
 - * Acts of service and sacrifice. Go the extra mile.

4. Forgiveness.

- a) Because of your intense life together, you can expect to offend or frustrate each other at times.
- b) God's gift to you: forgiveness. Our key way of showing love: forbearance and forgiveness.
- c) Ask and give forgiveness:
 - * Daily. Do not allow resentment to pile up.
 - * Eagerly. This needs humility.
 - * Without limitation.
 - * "As Christ has forgiven you."

5. Communion with each other.

a) Communication and family time.

- * Pastoral dialogue regularly (weekly is suggested). Consider this as a top priority and take time to prepare for it.
- * Make time to talk with your children.
- * Family recreation and vacation.

b) Unity can only be built if you take time for it.

G. Conclusion.

1. Believe that God has done something this weekend in your marriage—through the talks, the couple discussions, the prayers for empowerment. Take that with you.
2. Live out what you have learned. If you do, each week will bring peace and joy. Your whole marriage will change for the better.
3. Is it easy? No.
 - * You will need to fight the world's values and ways.
 - * You need commitment and perseverance.
 - * Call upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

(SG. Oct 7, 2019)