



Marriage Plus International

Equipping couples for Kingdom impact



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The full Table of Contents for the notebook
is given at the first meeting.

Introduction – USA

Thanks for your interest in the Marriage Plus (M+) course. You will be invited to an “Information Meeting” so that we can get to know you better, and so that you can get to know the course better.

As we proceed through these first steps, we hope you feel free to ask questions, because only after you have a clear understanding of the course can you consider the possible benefits and costs to you as a couple if you participate in a Marriage Plus group.

If the explanations you receive at the informational meeting, and your reading of pages 8-24 lead you both to the conclusion that this course would benefit you, then please complete the applications on pages 25-26a and give them to the Marriage Plus leaders. They will read them, and if they have any questions, they will contact you. It is a good idea to try to have your applications to the group leaders within a few weeks (the group leaders will let you know the date) because often there are many couples interested in taking the course, and 5 or 6 couples make a full group.

In about a month from this first meeting, the leader couple will host a second meeting we call the “Organizational Meeting.” At that meeting there will be some fun, food and a discussion of pages 8-24 (Team Ministry) plus plenty of time for last-minute questions and answers.

The purpose of the Organizational Meeting is to confirm how God has orchestrated the formation of the new group. In addition, the leaders will discuss details like the best day of the week for meetings and distribute a calendar with proposed meeting dates. It is important to consider these details because we ask for a minimum of 90% attendance at meetings, as mentioned on page 7 (100% is preferred).

Speaking of meetings, a typical group meets two or three times a month for about 12-15 months. That’s a lot of meetings, however, the meeting times fly by because you are actively involved in learning and practicing marriage and ministry skills. At the end of each meeting, assignments are given to be completed at home. We ask that couples complete 100% of assigned homework. Again, that’s a lot of commitment, but we believe your marriage and ministry will be strengthened for life, and virtually every couple completing the course says it was a great help and lots of fun. So consider carefully the work involved, but don’t let it discourage you.

If there are too many couples currently desiring to be in a group, then it may be possible to form two groups (the second would have a different leader couple). If not, then a maximum of six couples will be invited to be in the current group based on applications and discussions. Of course, we will keep all applications until the next group forms.

We know that God will lead all of us as we pray and seek Him for the direction of the group. The group leaders will keep you informed as the process continues, and will let you know well in advance of the first M+ group meeting.

God bless you!

Course Overview

Not every young, Christian couple will become fruitful. Paul said concerning many he knew, "...they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:21). And he warned Timothy that, "No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:4). Many couples today are entangled, so they are not free to serve Jesus Christ.

However, the Holy Spirit is wonderfully at work, and His daily work is to turn the hearts of believers toward God and the kingdom of His Son. We are blessed to know many couples who are saying, "Yes" to the Spirit's prompting. They have chosen the path of fruitfulness, and their desire is to be available to God.

Fruitfulness requires planning. So we teach couples to plan their days. We teach them to meet together as a couple regularly for this purpose. We explain planning meetings, demonstrate them, assign them as weekly homework, then observe each couple's planning as part of a Marriage Plus meeting. This is our pattern for all the skills we teach.

And when they plan, they need principles from the Bible to guide their decisions. So we teach them spiritual expediency whereby they give God first consideration in every decision about how they will spend time. We explain how to avoid letting pressure, guilt and fear lead us into wrong decisions

Of course, God's design for marriage is that two become one. So we also teach couples the necessity of listening to one another's hearts, especially during planning times. Couples spend hours practicing essential skills for listening with empathy. This kind of listening is essential for an intimate marriage, but it is also a vital tool in ministry, friendship and parenting.

Oneness in marriage is expressed sexually, so we discuss God's ideal for sexual love in marriage. We lead two extended times in question-and-answer format in the hope of steering couples away from the world's fantasy and toward God's ideal. We reinforce our discussion by having them study key passages from the New Testament showing God's design for married couples and considering the consequences if God's Word is not followed.

With schedules under control and couples learning to become more intimate, we turn to the subject of ministry. We challenge the idea that ministry is only done Sunday mornings in church buildings by professionals. We show couples how to minister in their homes. We host, then assign them to host, a fellowship evening with other believers with a time of spiritual focus. To strengthen their conviction that time spent with other Christians should include a spiritual focus, we have them do an inductive Bible study showing the difference between Christian friendship and biblical fellowship.

While we are doing this Bible study, we also study also God's desire for faithfulness in what we do in His name. Then we have couples complete a fourth Bible study on the Kingdom of God. By the time of this study they understand that the purpose for all of history, and for their lives, is to join with Jesus Christ as He builds his heavenly kingdom on earth before His return in glory.

As couples mature in ministry, God will develop them into leaders. So we teach principles for leading others in ministry, including how to recruit to a vision, delegate effectively and deal redemptively with failure. These skills are generally employed as couples help in structured, church ministries. However, we also teach couples what we call "micro ministry" in which they seize unplanned times to listen for God's work in another's life, then encourage or challenge the person to take the next step of faith or obedience.

Since we emphasize couples working together as a ministry team, we talk about the roles each prefers to play in the six parts of designing and developing a ministry. We help them discern areas in which they might experience competition with one another. And we help them develop a model they would like to have reflect their ministry as a couple and a family. Evangelism is an essential part of ministry, so couples learn the Bridge illustration of the Gospel and memorize all the Scriptures needed to explain the Gospel to an unbeliever.

According to our calculations, married couples will spend nearly 150,000 hours together in their lifetime. Thus, we spend two weeks discussing non-sexual intimacy in marriage. Couples discuss their expectations of each other. They discuss forgiveness, friendship, love languages, etc. And they pray that God will make each of them sensitive to their differences.

Part of our theme for the final stage of Marriage Plus training is discovering and marrying our differences. Only in this way can we serve Christ together for life. Couples also discover their individual temperaments and spiritual gifts, and they discuss how God's unique design of each of them will compliment their ministry. Also, they discuss how to avoid conflicts because of their differences. This part of Marriage Plus training ends with each person writing a composite picture of his or her mate.

The last skill we teach is leading a home Bible study. Most Bible studies eventually falter for lack of preparation on the part of the leaders. We teach couples how to work together in leading and hosting a home Bible study. We teach them how to prepare a lesson using only the Bible (that is, no prepared study booklets). They select a topic, find important verses that address it, interpret these verses accurately, consider what parts of their study might be helpful to the whole group, then focus on one or two verses and design a presentation.

Each couple hosts a Bible study evening with the other Marriage Plus couples as guests. At the end of the meeting, as in all parts of the curriculum, an evaluation is given to the host couple. Strengths are pointed out and any omissions are discussed too.

In our final meetings as a group, after couples have hosted Bible study evenings, we dream with them. Using the composites their mates have written and presented to the group, we add our own observations and encouragements based upon our nearly 18 months together in the group. By the conclusion of training, couples should be well on their way to being fruitful believers, able to enjoy and protect intimacy in their marriage as they serve Christ together, day by day, in their homes and churches.

Philosophy and Goals

Marriage Plus emphasizes four Scriptural teachings:

1. That all believers are to possess a kingdom mentality (Phil. 3:10-16)
2. That every believer is to be equipped for service in the local church (Eph. 4:12ff.)
3. That the work and skill of burden-bearing is essential in relationships and ministry (Gal. 6:2)
4. That oneness in Christian marriage describes intimacy of mind, heart and body (Eph. 5:31-33)

We operate with three practical considerations:

1. That couples who minister together can enjoy a special sense of enduring intimacy
2. That many Christian couples feel under-challenged and that they are doing little of eternal significance
3. That training in practical ministry must allow for individual differences

Marriage Plus exists to train leadership for the local church. Its distinctives are:

1. Intimacy in marriage as a foundation for ministry
2. Training in a broad spectrum of church and small group ministry skills
3. Personalized approach to ministry as a couple

With the help of the Holy Spirit, couples who have completed Marriage Plus are faithfully achieving the following goals:

1. Meeting as a couple regularly for planning
2. Bearing one another's burdens in quality communication
3. Structuring family life around the goal of spiritual fruitfulness
4. Working toward greater emotional and physical intimacy
5. Practicing micro-ministry consistently when the church is gathered
6. Using their home as a base for ministry
7. Serving in a leadership position in a community/ministry within their local church
8. Developing biblical convictions relating to the kingdom of God
9. Seeking opportunities to evangelize and follow-up with new believers
10. Encouraging each other in the use of their unique spiritual giftedness
11. Leading small group Bible study evenings as God leads
12. Implementing their personal vision for team ministry

Dynamics of the course:

1. All of us will be expected to contribute to a learning climate characterized by love and encouragement
2. All of us will be expected to continue in what has been learned
3. All of us will be evaluated for competency in every area studied
4. All of us are expected to multiply what is being learned by passing it on to others

What is expected of students:

1. A desire to minister as a couple
2. Attendance at an orientation meeting
3. Completion of an application form and personal interview
4. 100% completion of all assignments (approx 1-2 hours/wk)
5. 90% attendance at scheduled meetings (approx 2 hours/wk)
6. A voluntary financial contribution to cover expenses of the course