

GROWING *Sally* SALLY MARRIAGES



GROWING
Godly
MARRIAGES

INTRODUCTION

The institution of marriage originated in the Garden of Eden and continues to present day. However, many changes have taken place. Even the definition of marriage has changed. Older dictionaries define marriage as a union between a man and a woman while some newer dictionaries define marriage simply as the union between two people. What caused everything to change?

All problems can be traced back to sin. When sin entered the lives of Adam and Eve all creation suffered—even the institution of marriage. God intended one man to be with one woman for life, and yet we see marriages crumbling to ruins all around us. Even Christian marriages aren't spared the destructiveness of sin. What can be done?

The solution to all of life's problems is God. We must return to God's Word for instruction. We must commit to knowing and applying what His Word says to our lives—including our marriages. This study is a good place to start.

We will look at God's design for marriage from what our personal foundation must be to our individual responsibilities as husbands and wives. Think of this study as a seed to be planted in your hearts. With proper nourishment and care that seed will grow and blossom into the marriage God intended. Are you ready to start planting?

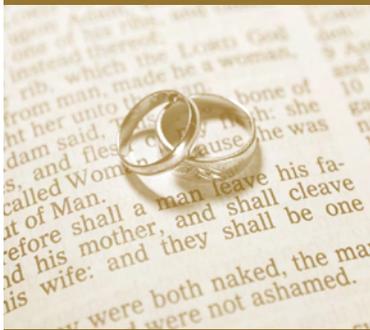
It is very important to get the word out for this study in every way possible. The following lessons titles and objectives are structured for use in church bulletins and newsletters, emails, text messages or Facebook groups.

Rooted in God: Group members will understand that a personal relationship with God is important and necessary for a successful marriage.

Growing in God: Group members will be able to list the biblical reasons for marriage and describe the characteristics of a godly marriage.

Loving like Jesus: Group members will understand the duties or responsibilities of husbands as given in Scripture.

Submitting like Jesus: Group members will understand the duties or responsibilities of wives as given in Scripture.



The philodendron plant is a common, easy to grow, houseplant that can be found in most garden centers. Ivy plants could also be used if philodendron plants cannot be found.

SESSION 1 *Rooted in God*

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Two philodendron plants—one variegated and one solid green
- Flowerpot large enough to hold both plants
- Bag of rich potting soil
- Samples of poor soil—rocky, clay, dry, etc.
- Student Handouts
- Pens and pencils
- Dry-erase board, chalkboard, or large notepad

LESSON OBJECTIVE

Group members will understand that a personal relationship with God is important and necessary for a successful marriage.

CONNECT

Begin this session by showing group members the two plants. Explain that the individual plants need to be replanted into a larger pot to allow better growth. Show the various kinds of soil and ask the following question: *Which kind of soil would be the best for our plants?* (They should decide the potting soil is the best.)

After the potting soil is selected, carefully pour enough soil into the large pot to fill it halfway. Remove the individual plants from their store bought containers and place the plants side-by-side in the larger pot. Fill the larger pot with more potting soil. Ask the following question: *Will our plants need anything else to grow well?* (Lead members to name things like sunlight, water, fertilizers, pruning, etc.)

Explain that the two plants represent two people entering marriage. They are leaving their former homes to be “planted” together and make a new home. The success of a marriage is very much like that of the two plants. If the marriage has a good foundation and is given the proper care and nourishment, it will thrive. However, if the marriage has been started with a poor foundation or has suffered from neglect and hurtful experiences, the chances of survival are slim. Explain that in this session the group will be discussing the importance of making and *keeping* God the foundation of marriage.

Jesus gave us the perfect example of how to have healthy relationships with others. It was Jesus' perfect love that made Him willing to die for us. The sacrificial love of Jesus teaches us how to love others. Jesus also left us an example of how to forgive others. Even though we don't deserve forgiveness, Jesus freely offers it to all who ask. Shouldn't we do the same? We also learn what true compassion and service is when we study Jesus' life. Jesus lived the life of a servant. He was not too proud to touch the unclean, talk to the rejected, eat with sinners, and wash the dirty feet of His disciples. Jesus left all the wonders of heaven to come to earth and live an exemplary life. By knowing Him personally and patterning our life after His, we have the ability to love, forgive, serve, and show compassion to our spouses.

CONSIDER

Distribute the handout, "The Best Soil Ever," and divide into small groups. Have each group look up the given references and answer the questions that follow. When everyone seems to be finished, gather together again to discuss the following questions:

- *What did you conclude is the most important thing we should do in life? (Lead the group to the conclusion that a strong relationship with Christ is the greatest thing we can have.)*
- *How could a strong relationship with Christ affect other relationships, especially the relationship with our spouses? (Help group members see how loving Christ spills over into our other relationships. Two persons fully committed to Christ is the best soil in which to plant a marriage.)*

Use a dry-erase board, chalk board, or large notepad to make a list of the many effects of a Christ centered marriage. After the list is complete, discuss the following possible answers by having a volunteer read aloud the given Scriptures:

- John 3:16, Romans 5:8, and Ephesians 3:17-19. *We can love more deeply because Jesus loves us.*
- Psalm 86:5. *We can forgive one another because we have been forgiven.*
- Philippians 2:3-8. *We can serve and humbly submit to one another as we imitate the humility of Jesus.*
- Matthew 9:36 and Matthew 14:14. *We can be more compassionate toward one another because Jesus showed compassion.*

COMMIT

Realizing the importance of making God the center of our lives is the first step toward healthier marriages. But realization without application does little good.

Most likely, the members of your group will have many different circumstances surrounding their marriages. Some might be considering marriage for the first time and are interested in getting a good start. Others might be in marriages where both are already Christians and desire to grow closer to one another. Some might be in marriages where only one is a Christian and struggle with the many differences they have with their spouse. Yet some might be in marriages where neither one is a Christian. In this case one spouse might desire to know God personally, yet feel they need to wait until their spouse is ready to commit to Christ also. Keep in mind that some couples in your group might even be considering divorce. If that is the case, God is already working behind the scenes to heal their marriage by leading them to this study. Pray that as you continue, hearts will be touched. Be sensitive to the many emotions that might be present and offer encouragement through God's Word.

Use the following questions to help those in the study apply this lesson to their own lives and marriages.

- *If you are already a Christian, how can knowing the importance of these verses help your marriage? (Lead members to the conclusion that our actions reflect our relationship to the Lord. Anytime we draw closer to the Lord our actions will improve and our spouses will benefit.)*

After some discussion on the previous questions, you might read aloud 1 Peter 3:1-2, which addresses how a Christian wife can win her husband to the Lord by her life. This would also apply to a Christian husband winning an unsaved wife.

- *If you are not a Christian, what needs to take place in your life before you can even focus on your marriage? (Help members to conclude that accepting Christ needs to be the first priority of our lives. This just needs to be stated. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead hearts to accept Christ.)*
- *If you are in a marriage where only one spouse is a Christian, how can the verses discussed help you? (Lead members to see the benefit of godly actions toward the unsaved. The loving, nurturing, and forgiving nature of a devoted Christian draws others to Him.)*

After the discussion is ended, refocus the class on the plants from the beginning of the session. Remind the group that just like the plants need good soil to be healthy, our marriages need God to be healthy. Ask each person to think about what is the most important thing in his or her life. Explain: *Sometimes it is hard for us to see what is most important in our lives. However, our actions tend to tell it all. Other people we come in contact with can easily tell what is most important to us—by our actions and words.* Challenge your group with the following exercise to complete sometime before your next session: *This week ask a friend, co-worker, family member, or spouse what they perceive as being the most important thing in your life.* Remind the group to be prepared for what they hear. If they hear anything other than God, have them re-evaluate their relationship with God and make appropriate changes in their life.

SAMPLE

Session 1

STUDENT HANDOUT *The Best Soil Ever*

Read the following passages and answers the questions.

1. Read Matthew 22:35-40.

- What is the greatest commandment given to us in God's Word?

- What is the second greatest?

- Why do you think these would be the two greatest commandments?

2. Read 1 Timothy 4:8.

- What does this verse say is profitable, or beneficial, to all things?

- Do you believe that is true or are there some things to which this verse does not apply?

3. Based on the passages that you read, how important is a close relationship to God?

4. How could a close relationship with God affect your marriage?