

## **WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR FEBRUARY**

### **Resources/Ideas for a Service on the Theme of Marriage As God's Gift**

---

#### **Publicity**

---

It is important to encourage everyone to come, whether married, never married, separated, divorced or widowed. Many churches fail to say anything about marriage because of fear of offending those who are not married but that needs changing. Everyone needs to know how to have a good marriage, not only the married. Any person who is not married may marry at some time but, in the meantime, all should wish (as most do) that those who are married should be helped in their marriages. Happy marriages are of great benefit to the church, society and the nation in many ways.

#### **Flowers**

---

It would be good to have a large display of white flowers, whatever other local traditions there may be.

1) Theme

Marriage As God's Gift

Ideas for opening

Welcome all - married, never married, separated, divorced, widowed.

Invite them each to think for one minute of a married couple who have been a help to them, whether relatives or not, and how the couples have been of help. The service leader ends the minute with prayer, e.g. Thank you, Lord, for all you have given us through the lives and words of those of whom we have been thinking. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Then invite them each to think of one single person who has been a help to them, whether a relation or not, and how the person has been of help. The leader to end the minute with a similar prayer.

2) Hymns

The hymns associated with marriage are usually traditional ones. Even couples who know a wide range of songs often choose traditional hymns for their wedding, partly for the sake of those who are coming who do not often go to church.

Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven

Love Divine, all loves excelling

The Lord's my Shepherd

Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead us

Guide me, O Thou Great Redeemer

Lord of all hopefulness

Now thank we all our God

3) Songs

Jesus stand among us at the meeting of our lives

4) Praise and Prayer Activities

Prayers

(These prayers can be used as written or adapted as desired)

Marriage Growth

We praise You heavenly Father that You have made mankind, and because it was not good for man to be alone, You created woman, and in marriage You join man and woman as one flesh, teaching us that those whom You have united should never be divided. We pray for all husbands and wives here today. Grant that each husband may love his wife as Christ loves His bride the Church, giving himself up for it, and grant that each wife may love and submit to her husband, as the Church should submit to Christ. May each be to the other a strength in need, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. May their marriage grow and deepen with the years and be an example of what you intend a marriage to be. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Love in action, and help to others married

God our Father, Giver of all that is good, we thank You for all the ways in which married couples grow in their understanding of each other, and thus in their marriage. We pray that they may continue to love each other in their thoughts, their words and their actions, and in what they refrain from thinking, saying and doing. Give them grace also we pray to be channels of your Holy Spirit's help to any who confide in them about difficulties in their marriage. We ask this in the name of Him who promised the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Children

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the children You have entrusted to those present to bring up for You. Continue, we pray, to protect them from all harm. Keep husbands and wives faithful in prayer for them. Enable each child to come to a living faith in You, and to find the good works You have prepared for them to do and to rejoice in doing them. We ask this in your Son's name. Amen.

As we grow older

Lord of our whole lives, You provide for all our needs from Your riches. Grant us Your help as we grow older. Help us to care for each other, whatever our latter years bring, to recognise when it is time to move home, and to accept when we should seek help from others. Above all, enable us to be ready for our passing through repentance and through faith in Your Son, and in His death on the Cross bearing our sins. So, help us to be eagerly longing to meet You face to face. We ask this in our Saviour's name.

Single people (including widow/ers)

Thank you Heavenly Father that Your grace is sufficient for all our needs. Grant that those who are living singly may find Your help in every circumstance. May they have fulfilling friendships and know your guidance as to whether they are to marry or remarry. We ask this through One Who, for Your sake, remained single, Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Divorcees

O God, Who has known the sadness of Your Son's death on the cross, have mercy we pray on those who have experienced the sadness of divorce. Give them the grace of forgiveness for their former spouse. Whenever it is possible, enable them to hope and pray and work for the restoration of their marriage. Assure all of them of Your love for them and guide them into Your paths for their life ahead. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

5) Bible Readings

Genesis 1 v 26 - 31 and 2 v 18 - 24

John 2 v 1 - 11

John 15 v 9 - 17

1 Corinthians 13

Ephesians 3 v 14 -21

Ephesians 5 v 22 - 33

1 John 4 v 7 - 12

1 Corinthians 13 Dialogue

(To be read by two people – one reading the straight words and one the italics. Readers need to practice well so the end result is smooth and meaningful.)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels,  
but have not love,  
I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.  
*And all my elegant words come back to me, empty and hollow.*

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains,  
but have not love,  
I am nothing.  
*And all my brilliance is wasted, because I never took the time to care for others.*

If I give all I possess to the poor, and surrender my body to the flames,  
but have not love,  
I gain nothing.  
*And everything I have sacrificed has been just a shallow show.*

Love is patient  
even when someone takes a long time to respond to God's love

Love is kind  
and loves gently, even when others do unlovable things

Love does not envy  
and is happy to take a servant role when the lead is given to someone else

Love does not boast  
*Instead of putting self forward, love looks for ways to show encouragement to those who are struggling*

Love is not rude  
*It shows respect for others even when they have very different ways of doing things*

Love is not self-seeking  
*Love puts aside its own needs for a while so it can freely meet the needs of others*

Love is not easily angered  
It calmly looks for peaceful solutions

Love keeps no record of wrongs  
*but has a very short memory of the times when it has been hurt or rejected*

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth

**Love keeps on looking for the good in everyone and everything**

Love always protects

**And so it helps others to feel safe**

Love always trusts

**love takes risks and believes the best in everyone**

Love always hopes

## **knowing that the future can hold many miracles**

Love always perseveres  
*and keeps on working at the relationship, even when it would be so easy to give up*

Love never fails  
But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away  
*But a bond of love can bind hearts together forever*

For we know in part and we prophesy in part,  
But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears  
*Because something better has been discovered*

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.  
But when I became a man, I put childish ways behind me  
*Because I had found better ways to talk and think and reason*

Now we see but a poor reflection,  
then we shall see face to face  
*Because we will be ushered into the very presence of our loving God*

Now I know in part,  
then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known  
*And at last I will be able to comprehend the full height and depth and breadth of God's eternal love for me*

And now these three remain, faith, hope and love.  
But the greatest of these is love  
*So receive God's love for you, fill every corner of your heart with His love, and then let it overflow, freely and joyfully, on everyone you meet*

### 6) Teen Time

Based on Genesis 2 v 4b –9, 15-25

### **Start up Question: Which has been your best birthday so far?**

---

Answers will perhaps include a really good party with friends, a birthday present that was just what was longed for, a great family time.

A really good birthday will almost certainly involve other people. Someone knowing you well enough to buy the right gift; being encouraged by family or friends to feel this is your special day; being thought of by others who sent cards.

It does not feel quite so good to celebrate a birthday alone. Choosing, buying and paying for something yourself does not have quite the same effect as being given that same thing as a gift. Posting a card to yourself does not have the same effect as receiving happy birthday greetings from someone else.

Read Genesis 2 v 4b – 9, 15-25

At the beginning of creation God provided for all our needs.

Put yourself in Adam's place

You are living in a perfect world

You possess everything

You are number 1

You are in a perfect relationship with God

There is no sin

Despite all that is good, God says to Adam that it is not good that he is alone.

When have you been alone and what did it feel like?

Answers may range from deeply hurtful times of being alone to more common experiences such as the first day at a new school/job. We can feel alone even when, or perhaps especially when, we are surrounded by other people if we don't feel they care about us. Using whatever means is best for you (words, pictures, stick figures, feeling faces) describe to one other person a time of being alone.

### *Some questions to discuss*

---

Does God care when we are lonely or left out?

Throughout the Bible we hear about God's love for His people and his longing for His people to love one another. God's care for Adam included not only noticing that Adam was missing out without human companionship, but also providing that human companionship for him. God provided Adam with a wife, Eve. Adam is no longer alone. How do you think he feels now?

Why are relationships so important?

Only relationships will remove aloneness. Marriage is the first relationship that God created. He also gave us the relationships of the family and the church. Each is a gift from God that we might not only know His love but also care for another. It is not His plan for everyone to marry, our families may not always be there for us in the way we need, but additionally God gives His church to provide friendship and care.

Why does God care about marriage?

Marriage offers lifelong commitment and companionship, enabling two people to share what life brings. Marriage lived the way God intended means we are not alone. If that commitment is broken we may find ourselves alone in the most difficult times of our lives.

God cares for you. God offers you His friendship and promises to be with you whatever you face in life. In addition he has made us so that we cannot survive entirely on our own – we need others. God gives us other people to share in His caring. Sometimes we prefer to think we can manage on our own.

When do you need other people (friends or family) most? When do you find it hard to admit to needing others?

Conclusion

God's creation is good. He provides everything for our good. Marriage is one of God's good things. How might we better value and look after His gift?

## 7) For Adults - Group Discussion/Activity

Obtain and discuss in a group the Marriage Resource leaflet "20 Steps to Happy Marriage" (the first ten steps are pre-wedding, the second ten for marriage couples). 20p including p & p, discount for quantity.

For couples preparing for marriage, obtain and discuss the Marriage Resource leaflet "Why Pay the Earth for Your Wedding?" price as above.

Obtain and discuss any of the following Marriage Resource leaflets supplied by the Christian Publicity Organisation. "Four Keys to a Lasting Marriage" (CPO1701) £1 for ten plus postage, "Living Together Successfully" (CPO1808) £3.10 for 25 plus postage, "Marriage Under Pressure" (ZX252) £3.50 for 25 plus postage, Marriage Milestones leaflets: "The First Child" (CPO1942), "Early Disillusionment" (CPO1939), "Redundancy" (CPO1938), "Role Reversal" (CPO1937), "When the Last Child Leaves Home (CPO1940), "Retirement" (CPO1941) each supplied in packs of ten for £1.50 plus postage.

Obtain and discuss a Marriage First Aid booklet (on how to respond to someone who confides their marriage problems to you). £1 including postage from Marriage Resource.

Obtain and discuss the Marriage Resource paper "Chastity - The Teaching of the Bible" for £1.50 including p & p.

Hold a Marriage Thanksgiving and Rededication Service. Details of how to do this can be found on the Marriage Resource website [www.marriageresource.org](http://www.marriageresource.org) or in a paper from Marriage Resource (£3.00 including p & p).

## 9) Sermon: Ideas for Structure and Content

Genesis 1: God made man and woman -

- i) to increase in number until the earth is full
- ii) to rule over the rest of His creation
- iii) to eat of seed-bearing plants and trees

Male and female are equal in importance. Together they reflect God's image. All God had made was very good.

Genesis 2: God made woman to be man's helper/companion. They complement each other.

Man and woman leave their parental homes. Their new relationship must now come first. They "unite" (literally in the Hebrew are stuck/glued together) into a life-long partnership - marriage. Then they become "one flesh". Flesh means the whole of the person. Husband and wife are united in all respects. Sexual intercourse should not begin until marriage, then it expresses that unity.

The Lord Jesus said: "So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together let man not separate" (except for unrepentant marital unfaithfulness). (Matthew 19)

How can we make best use of God's good gift of marriage?

- 1) By preparing well for it. If people spent as long preparing for their marriage as they do for their wedding, there would be many more happy marriages. Engaged couples need to find a good course of marriage preparation, preferably including a pre-marriage questionnaire (inventory) - PREPARE or FOCCUS. They should also find an older couple to be their confidential mentors, with whom they meet at first every six months and later yearly, to share the ups and downs of their marriage.
- 2) By giving their marriage a service from time to time. For example, read and discuss a book about marriage, or watch and discuss a video about marriage; go on a week-night marriage course, or a marriage enhancement weekend.
- 3) By asking for confidential help with any difficulties before the difficulties begin to threaten the marriage.

Marriage has been describe as having four Rs and the last two are alternatives. Marriage begins with Romance, with rose-tinted spectacles. Marriage then moves into Reality and the spectacles come off. Later marriage moves into the third stage, either Resignation (which can lead to disaster) or Reconstruction.

Marriage needs five Cs - Commitment, nothing is going to break us apart. Confession, the ability to say sorry. Communication, listening carefully and considering our spouse's point of view. Conflict solving, using all possible solutions and trying the one which seems best. Companionship, sharing at least some common interests and activities as well as having fun together.

#### 10) Sermon Illustrations

Adam and Eve had an ideal marriage. He didn't have to hear about all the men she could have married and she didn't have to hear about the way his mother cooked. (Anon)

An advertisement in a lonely hearts column: "Ugly, boring, penniless middle-aged male seeks beautiful, witty, rich young lady - because opposites get on well." (Anon)

In the days of steam trains a trainee (excuse pun) was travelling on the footplate of a locomotive on the way to London. As the train approached Brixton the driver, who was nearing retirement but who was known as a splendid time-keeper, handed over the controls to his fireman, got out an oil-lamp, lit it and leaned out of the footplate, waving it slowly up and down. Then he blew it out, put it away and took over the engine again. The fireman explained to the trainee: "Always does that, it's for his wife. He's done that for nearly forty years". (The Great Days of the Express Trains)

"Marriage remains a basic building block of any society and the surest foundation of secure family life. It is God's gift to humanity, designed both for human happiness and the nurture of children, a conviction which Christians share with those of many

other faiths." (Archbishop George Carey at the Golden Wedding of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness Prince Philip)

Various researchers in recent years have shown marriage to be best for people's physical health, mental health, earning power, safety from violence in the home, sexual satisfaction, freedom from addictions, faithfulness, longevity and happiness. They have also shown that the average children of a married couple have better physical and mental health, do better at school, get better jobs, are less likely to be involved in drug taking, truancy or crime and have a better chance of a happy marriage themselves. Two sources for such research are: "Marriage Lite" by Patricia Morgan, The Institute for Civil Society and "The Case for Marriage" by Linda J Waite and Maggie Gallagher, Doubleday New York.

In the 1930s older men regarded the motor car with some suspicion and misgivings. How it worked was beyond their comprehension. Of one old man it was said: "What went on under his car's bonnet was as much of a mystery to him as what went on under his wife's bonnet". (From "The Lost Village" by Ralph Whitlock)

A Vicar was showing a guest around a church when they met a man and woman putting up Christmas decorations. Afterwards the guest asked: "What relationship are that couple to each other?" "Oh", said the Vicar, "didn't you realise they are husband and wife?" "No," the guest replied, "they were so polite to each other." (Edward Pratt)

"The key to happiness in marriage is to help your spouse enjoy being married to you and to do so continually." (Edward Pratt)

#### 11) Ending

Heavenly Father, Who created marriage for the good of mankind and Who calls the Church to be the Heavenly Bride of Your Son, unite us in endeavour to help marriages fulfil what You desire for each one, and may Your Presence, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with each of us, married or single, day by day. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

#### 12) Questions and Points for Prayer

Questions for married couples on their own at a time which is good for both of them. Each spouse to ask the other each question, one question at a time.

- 1) How can I help you enjoy being married to me more than you are? Only one answer is to be given to this question at any one time. On receiving the answer, the questioner is not to make any immediate response, except to ask for any clarification or elaboration by the answerer. The questioner is then to reflect on the answer in his or her own time and take appropriate action in due course.

The couple can each ask the other the same question a week later, again giving only one answer, with the same "rules" as above.

- 2) What would you like us to do together - either something we do not do at present, or more of something we only do a little?
- 3) Is there any problem in our marriage which we need to discuss with another couple in confidence? If so, with whom?

#### Questions for a group

- 1) How could our church do more for marriages? You might like to obtain a copy of "Taking Marriage Seriously in Your Church" from Marriage Resource, £12.50 including p & p.
- 2) If a Christian wishes to find somebody to marry, would it be right to use an agency which sought to introduce such Christian people (not just a dating agency)? What else might he/she do?
- 3) How would you advise an engaged couple to find marriage preparation?
- 4) If someone confided in you that their marriage was in difficulties, what would you do?
- 5) The preacher said "....." (anything a group member wishes to discuss). Does the group agree?

#### Points for prayer.

- 1) Your church's present marriage ministries.
- 2) Guidance for your minister and church leaders as to how to develop them further.
- 3) Couples from your church to offer to help with marriage work, even if it involves them giving up some other tasks in the church.
- 4) Couples preparing for marriage and those recently married.
- 5) For teaching about marriage in schools and young people's organisations.

Many more suggestions for prayer can be found in the Marriage Resource Prayer Diary, available from Marriage Resource at 24 West Street, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 1JS.

Material supplied by Edward Pratt, Karen Holford, Christine Mort and Zillah Chester of Marriage Resource.