

The Marriage Course

# 7 Best Practices

Physically and Digitally

The  
Marriage  
Course



# Welcome

## A note from Nicky & Sila

Over our many years of running The Marriage Course, in many different environments, we've discovered some key practices that help contribute to a successful experience for everyone involved.

This guide is a compilation of seven best practices for running The Marriage Course and The Pre-Marriage Course. We've included tips for both physical and digital courses, as more and more people are now choosing to run their courses online.

To discover all of the latest episodes and resources, please register and plan your course on **The Marriage Course Builder**.



One of the foundational values of running Alpha and The Marriage and Pre-Marriage Courses is to be reliant on God, and prayer is the greatest expression of that value. Pray that guests will connect with their partners and with God and experience His love in a life-changing way.



## Physically

- The presenters pray a short prayer at the end of each session.
- Guests are given the opportunity to pray for their partner from Session 3 of The Marriage Course if they feel comfortable doing so.
- Guests sometimes request prayer for their relationship after/outside the sessions, prepare your team for that possibility.
- Encourage The Marriage and Pre-Marriage Courses helpers to meet before the start of each session or at a separate time to pray together.
- Form a prayer team or use your church's existing prayer network to pray for your team and your guests throughout each course. You can pray over chat groups, email chains or in-person.



## Digitally

- The presenters pray a short prayer at the end of each online session.
- Guests are given the opportunity to pray for their partner from Session 3 of The Marriage Course if they feel comfortable doing so.
- Guests sometimes request prayer for their relationship after/outside the sessions. Keep online communication platforms (emails, WhatsApp, online chat box) available for them to reach out.
- Encourage The Marriage and Pre-Marriage Courses helpers to meet online before the start of each session or at a separate time to pray together.
- Form a prayer team or use your church's existing prayer network to pray for your team and your guests throughout each course. You can pray over chat groups, email chains or in-person.

## 2.

# Community connection

If Alpha is like the front porch of the church, The Marriage and Pre-Marriage Courses are like the steps leading up to the porch.

### The courses are applicable to all couples:

- The Pre-Marriage Course is for couples who are engaged and couples who are wanting to explore marriage.
- The Marriage Course is for married couples and those who are co-habiting but are not currently considering marriage.



#### Physically

- Couples come on The Marriage or Pre-Marriage Course either before or after Alpha. It is often an easier invite than church.
- How to talk about the courses:
  - \* Normalise going on a course
  - \* Emphasise privacy for each couple's conversations
  - \* Share stories
  - \* Make invitations available
- Couples talk about their positive experience to others in the wider community.
- Encourage your church and previous guests to extend invitations to couples in your community. Promote your courses via community connections and through social media.



#### Digitally

- The online course is even easier to attend and invite other couples to attend. Simply post about it on social media and couples who normally may not want – or have the capacity – to join physically have an easier time joining online.
- How to talk about the courses:
  - \* Normalise going on a course
  - \* Emphasise privacy
  - \* Share stories
  - \* Make invitations available
- Encourage your church and previous guests to extend invitations to couples in your community. Promote your courses via community connections and through social media.

# 3.

## Equipping a team

The Marriage and Pre-Marriage Courses are best run with a team. It's a great opportunity for people to get involved, regardless of their life stage or relationship status. Depending on the size of your course, you will need to fill all or some of the following roles below. To familiarise your team with the course, run a pilot course for them first or encourage them to attend a course online or nearby.



### Physically

#### Course hosts

Course hosts open and close the evening and make announcements. They don't need to worry about giving talks as we recommend you use the filmed episodes to deliver all the course content.

#### Administrator

The administrator will manage registration details, collect payments (if you are charging guests to help cover your costs) and ensure that resources you need are available for each session.

#### Room stylist

This person will use their skills to transform the venue into a special date night experience for the guests - where couples feel relaxed and can enjoy the evening together.

#### Technical team

The technical team runs the videos, plays background music and displays any slides. When this goes well, no one even notices there is an operator; but when it doesn't, everyone notices!



### Digitally

#### Course hosts

Course hosts open and close the evening and make announcements. They don't need to worry about giving talks as we recommend you use the filmed episodes to deliver all the course content.

#### Administrator

The administrator will manage registration details, collect payments (if you are charging guests to help cover your costs) and ensure that resources you need are available for each session.

#### Hospitality team

Consider asking a few volunteers to think of imaginative ways to create a hospitable vibe for the course, whether that is sending a welcome basket for your guests including the course journal or running a date night giveaway campaign each week of the course.

#### Technical team

For the online course, they should know how to use the online platform used to host your course (Zoom for introductions, uploading the films to your church website, etc)



Physically

### Caterer

Do you know someone who loves preparing food and may be willing to help with your course? If you're running a larger course, you could arrange an outside caterer to supply an affordable meal. You will need a team to serve the food and drink and to clear it away afterwards.

### Welcomers and additional hosts

Making people feel welcome and relaxed as they arrive is essential. The welcomers will be the first people that guests meet, so try and think of the friendliest people you know and ask them to be part of the team. For a larger course it's helpful to have additional host couples to help with welcoming, serving drinks and being available to guests who may seek further support or advice.

### Counselling support

Our experience is that around 10% of the couples on each course ask for additional support, some of whom need ongoing specialist help. Prepare for this with a referrals handout of local professional counselors.

### Set up and pack down team

Depending on the size of your course, you might want to identify people who can help set up the venue for each session and pack it down afterwards.

### For all roles

Gather your team physically or online and show the training films – available online on **The Marriage Course Builder** – to equip and inspire them for your course.



Digitally

### Online host and support couples

Making people feel relaxed and welcome as they arrive is essential. The support couples can be friendly welcomers that reach out either via email or the chat box to a few of the couples and be on standby should a guest couple need any additional support.

### Counselling support

Our experience is that a few of the couples on each course ask for additional support, some of whom need ongoing specialist help. Prepare for this by having the contact details of local professional counsellors on the website page where guests access the films.

### For all roles

Gather your team physically or online and show the training films – available online on **The Marriage Course Builder** – to equip and inspire them for your course.



Physically and Digitally

### Support Couples for The Pre-Marriage Course

Guests are invited to fill in a 'Couple Survey' prior to the course. (This raises to their minds issues they will be considering on the course and starts helpful conversations.) Following the course, guests are given the opportunity to meet with their Support Couple, to look at the results of their survey.

Creating a romantic, relaxing and intimate atmosphere is an essential part of running these courses.



## Physically

### Choose the right venue

For a smaller course, an ideal venue may be a home. This can be just like hosting friends. In this setting, you might choose to eat together first before sitting separately as couples for the session's episode.

For a bigger course, consider hosting at a church, community centre, or even a local restaurant or café.

Wherever you host your course, you will need to provide: something to eat and drink, a screen to watch the talk, and enough space to allow each couple to have their own private conversations

### Decor and lighting

Provide a relaxed space where guests feel like they're out on a date. Individual tables for two will help provide a feeling of intimacy and privacy. Candles, soft background music, low lighting and flowers on the tables all help to create the right mood.

### Food and drink

Starting with food and drink helps guests unwind from their day and is a chance for each couple to refocus on each other ahead of the talk. Serve dessert, tea and coffee to the couples at their tables while they're having their longest conversation



## Digitally

### Encourage the guests to create the right vibe for themselves

The key here will be to encourage guest couples to create a special atmosphere in their own homes – whether that is a comfortable, casual space where they can lounge around in their pyjamas with popcorn, or a romantic living room dimly-lit with candles and flowers.

### Privacy

The course offers couples the freedom and comfort to be totally private when doing the course in their own home. Give them the option to keep their video off and not to show their face online if you are doing a hosted introduction.

### Welcome pack

Rather than spending the money you might normally use on a venue, you could consider delivering a welcome pack or a goody bag to each guest couple registered for your course. The journals are a lovely resource to send to guest couples (otherwise they'll need to purchase them themselves as they are an essential element of the course) along with some chocolates, tea bags and other creative goodies.

# 5.

## The talks

**'And over all these virtues, put on love...' Colossians 3:14.**

It is best practice not to alter the talks from the video series in any way and to use the talks in the order given. The course is best run week by week to give couples the time to put into practice what they learn each session.

If you would like to contextualise your course for your setting, you can consider interviewing guest couples who have done the course locally before a session to talk about their relationship. You can also consider inviting local counsellors and relationship experts, whose support a guest couple might want to seek, to speak further on that session's main topic.

### The Pre-Marriage Course

- Session 1** Communication
- Session 2** Conflict
- Session 3** Commitment
- Session 4** Connection
- Session 5** Adventure

### The Marriage Course

- Session 1** Strengthening Connection
- Session 2** The Art of Communication
- Session 3** Resolving Conflict
- Session 4** The Power of Forgiveness
- Session 5** The Impact of Family
- Session 6** Good Sex
- Session 7** Love in Action

We also recommend sending a link for the relevant session each week so that couples who may not have had time to finish can resume the series in their own time.

You can find the course links available in our *Run a course online* document on **The Marriage Course Builder**.

# 6.

## Private conversations

### The Pre-Marriage Course:

- 4 or 5 conversations in each session
- Each conversation varies in length from 5 to 15 minutes.
- Total time for conversations in each session is 45 minutes
- Guidelines for the conversations are in their Journals

### The Marriage Course:

- 4 or 5 conversations in each session
- Each conversation varies in length from 5 to 30 minutes, with one 30-minute conversation in each session
- Total time for conversations in each session is 50 minutes
- Guidelines for the conversations are in their Journals



#### Physically

**Reassuring** – It's important to reassure potential guests that their conversations will be private when promoting the courses.

**Empowering** – The private conversations are empowering for each couple as they grow in communicating with their partner during and following the courses.

**Trusting** – Unless a couple asks for help, it's important to trust that the course content will enable the majority of couples to work through their own issues.



#### Digitally

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**Trusting** – Unless a couple asks for help, it's important to trust that the course content will enable the majority of couples to work through their own issues.

Online, the private conversations can easily escalate into conflict. On **The Marriage Course Builder**, you'll find a document designed to help couples de-escalate over-heated conversations. We recommend you share this with your guests before the online course begins.

Attending a Marriage or Pre-Marriage Course offers special time for couples to set aside everything else in their life and focus on one another.



### Physically

Coming to a physical course allows guest couples to set aside one evening per week for 5–7 weeks to come together and focus on each other and their relationship. The physical course is set up in a way that transports guest couples to a special and more romantic place.

After each session of the course, we offer some practical ways to keep the conversations going: 'Continuing the Conversation' is a section in the Journals following each session, which:

- Encourages couples to organise a date night
- Gives ways to continue the conversations they started during the session
- Gives conversation starters for date nights

'Follow-on: Tools, Habits and Conversations', included in The Marriage Course Journal only, will:

- Encourage continuing date nights following the course
- Provide conversation starters to build on the seven sessions of the course



### Digitally

Set up your course so that there is a designated weekly time set apart for couples to do the course online in their own homes alongside other couples doing the course at the same time. This helps facilitate the practice of a weekly date, a fundamental practice encouraged in the courses that allows couples to come together to connect regularly. Send a link to the session for couples who missed it so they can complete it at another time in the week.

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- Encourage continuing date nights following the course
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# We'd love to hear from you

If you have any questions or suggestions, please get in touch:

[hello@themarriagecourse.org](mailto:hello@themarriagecourse.org)

