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MFT 509 Premarital Counseling
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PRE-MARITAL STRATEGY

For couples seeking marriage, premarital counseling will help them learn the expectations of marriage and establish a general foundation for their long-term commitment. They will also address any significant differences between them to increase awareness and understanding for each other. The sessions will provide marital education and perspective, as well as practical application to strengthen their relationship.

- *Number of Sessions Required* - The number of sessions required will be 10 sessions to cover all topics of focus. Each session will take 1 hour. Couples will take a standard Prepare-Enrich assessment prior to the first session. Each partner will receive a login code by email, answer background questions, and complete the assessment.
- *Sexual Purity Pledge* - Couples may participate in an optional sexual purity pledge during premarital counseling. Sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed in the context of marriage. Physical intimacy is an important aspect of marriage, but it is not the foundation of marriage. In this unique season, the physical intimacy could influence and distort a couple's perspective when exploring each building block towards a healthy marriage. The purpose of this pledge is to help couples focus on each building block with clarity and openness.
- *Expectations of Pre-Marital Counseling Sessions* - The sessions will require willingness from each partner to identify their strengths and address growth areas, both as individuals and as a couple. The therapist will direct each person to share, so that both partners

receive time to hear and share their thoughts. Couples will be encouraged to share openly and honestly. They may also receive homework to do further exploration outside of the sessions.

Termination Policy (adapted from lecture slides) - During the initial session, the therapist will ask the couple to share their reasons for marrying their fiancé. If there are any unhealthy reasons for marriage, the therapist will discuss these areas further with the couple. Some couples seek marriage to fill a need, react to their circumstance, or focus on one aspect of marriage to justify personal readiness. The following reasons cannot predict a healthy, successful marriage, and the therapist will need to assess and discern whether to move forward or discontinue therapy:

- *Love at first sight* - Couples may have strong feelings of attraction, but these feelings may be too shallow to establish a foundation and predict a long-term commitment.
- *Rebounding* - When a relationship starts too soon after a break-up, it may indicate a person's coping mechanism for loss more than "real love" for their new partner. People need time to properly grieve and find closure from the previous relationship.
- *Rebellion* - Similar to rebounding, couples might choose marriage to spite their parents who disapprove of one partner.
- *Loneliness* - Some partners may seek marriage to fill a loneliness, but they might believe that marital status would absolve their loneliness, rather than pursuing a relationship for connection.
- *Obligation* - The amount of time does not mirror the depth of connection in a relationship. However, some people marry because they feel too guilty to break off the

engagement. It will require honesty to evaluate their relationship and make the appropriate decision.

- *Financial advancement* - Finances are important to work on before and after marriage, but money is not a stable foundation and basis for marriage.
- *Sexual attraction & guilt over sexual involvement* - Physical intimacy is also important for couples to explore and develop, but it may distract the couple from other important aspects of their relationship.
- *Premarital pregnancy* - Premarital pregnancy may lead to couples marrying out of obligation to their child. The couple might decide on marriage too hastily, without assessing their strengths and growth areas, experiencing the reality of financial strains of raising a child, or considering whether or not they actually want to get married.
- *Escape* - Marriage cannot relieve a person of their unhappiness. Running away from one's issues does not resolve anything, but it only affirms that the issues exist.
- *Pressure* - Men and women experience both direct and indirect pressure from their immediate circles of family, friends, and society to marry as soon as possible. However, every person has a unique narrative, and marriage will align with the timeline that God ordains.

Rationale for "Content" Selection and Goals for Each Session

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO PREMARITAL COUNSELING

As part of introduction, the couple may share any initial expectations of marriage and address marriage myths. They will also discuss their relationship in a safe, guided way by reviewing the couple typology, and working on "Goals" and "Sharing Strength and Growth Areas" exercises

found in the Prepare/Enrich workbook. The main goal for this session is to bring more awareness of the couple's identity, as well as establish a collaborative space to explore their goals as a couple.

- *Prepare/Enrich*: Sharing Strength & Growth Areas, Goals
- *Further Exploration*: Take MBTI (if couple hasn't taken it before)

SESSION 2: INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT

Before the couple came together, they existed as two separate individuals. In this session, the therapist will utilize the SCOPE Personality Scales and MBTI (if they've taken it) to guide discussion of the couple's similarities and differences in personality. The goal of this session is to equip the couple with strengths and growth areas, found in their similarities and differences in personality, and teach them how to deal with personality differences.

- *Prepare/Enrich*: SCOPE Out Your Personality
- *Further Exploration*: Closeness/Flexibility exercises

SESSION 3: INTERGENERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The couple will bring into the marriage two family backgrounds. Our upbringing and family history shape our beliefs and values. As they begin a "new" family, the couple will explore how their two families could influence future family dynamics. They will decide on what to bring and leave behind from their families into the current relationship. The goal of this session is to develop more understanding of closeness and flexibility in their relationship.

- *Prepare-Enrich*: Mapping Your Relationship, Couple and Family Map

SESSION 4: COMMUNICATION

This session will focus on communication, assertiveness and active listening, and creating a wish list. The “Communication on Five Different Levels” handout gives examples of the depth of communication that can happen between people. The “Healthy Communication” handout also provides examples of healthy communication for the couple to reflect on areas of strength and growth in communication. “Rules for Successful Communication” in SYMBIS also provides more specific directions (Parrott, p. 98). The goal of this session is to result in greater appreciation for and understanding of the value of communication.

- *Prepare-Enrich*: Assertiveness & Active Listening, Creating A Wish List
- *Further Exploration*: Daily Dialogue and Daily Compliments

SESSION 5: STRESS & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Couples need to use healthy communication to process stress and work out conflict in their relationship. Using the Prepare-Enrich couple report and workbook, the couple will identify their most critical issues. Healthy couples do not avoid conflicts, but they choose to confront them together, which strengthens and builds their relationship. Forgiveness is a beautiful way for couples to resolve and move forward from their conflicts, which allows them to grow in compassion and wisdom. The main goal of this session is to evaluate the couple’s stress management and conflict resolution skills.

- *Prepare-Enrich*: Identifying Most Critical Issues, Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict, How to Take a Time-Out, Seeking & Granting Forgiveness
- *Further Exploration*: Balancing Your Priorities

SESSION 6: EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

This session will assess emotional intimacy for marriage, using the handout “Emotional Intimacy in Marriage.” We will learn about love languages, and the couple will share their preferences with each other. The “Validation” handout will teach the couple how to communicate feelings to one another. There will also be a review of the feelings chart, vocabulary of emotions, and soul words. Emotions deepen connection in marriage. The goal of this session is for the couple to reflect on their emotional intimacy, as well as equip them with more language to express their feelings.

SESSION 7: PHYSICAL/SEXUAL INTIMACY

Couples can also deepen and express their connection through physical and sexual intimacy. In “Sex and Affection” of the Prepare-Enrich workbook, “emotional intimacy and physical intimacy are closely related,” so the prior session naturally segues into this one. The couple will examine their experiences with affection from their upbringing, sexual history, and views on pornography. The session will also cover “dating” in marriage in the “Leisure Activities” exercise. The goal of this session is to address expectations about sex in marriage, and ease any anxieties about discussing sexual intimacy.

- *Prepare-Enrich*: Sex and Affection, Leisure Activities
- *Further Exploration*: “Sexual Intimacy in Marriage” handout (Dr. Mercurio)

SESSION 8: SPIRITUAL INTIMACY & MARRIAGE EXPECTATIONS

The couple’s spiritual journey may influence their values and behaviors in marriage. When two people share faith, they may experience greater unity and connection. As the couple approaches

the end of premarital counseling, the focus will become more practical and envisioning the roles each partner will take. This session will evaluate the couple's spiritual beliefs, as well as begin the discussion of marital expectations.

- *Prepare-Enrich*: Spiritual Beliefs, Marriage Expectations, Children and Parenting
- *Further Exploration*: Relationship Roles

SESSION 9: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Financial Management is a practical area for couples to prepare before marriage. The Prepare-Enrich workbook includes several exercises to help the couple understand their differences regarding money, from its meaning to priorities, and budgeting. The main goal of this session is to assess the couple's understanding of finances, address any differences in goals, and highlight similarities in values.

- *Prepare-Enrich*: The Challenges of Money, The Meaning of Money, Importance of Financial Goals, Priorities: Put Your Money Where Your Heart Is
- *Further Exploration*: Budget Worksheet

SESSION 10: FEEDBACK & EVALUATION

In this final session, the couple will share any feedback on the overall experience, reflect on any new insights gained from premarital counseling, and finalize goals that they'd like to continue pursuing. The therapist will affirm the couple's strengths and encourage the pursuit to grow in marriage, developing into the "M-frame relationship" (Parrott, p. 35). The goal of this session is to evaluate the overall premarital counseling experience and address any miscellaneous concerns.