STUDY GUIDE

Chapters 1-4

CHAPTER 1: BASIC FAMILY CONCEPTS
  Lesson 1: The Social Unit .................................................. 1-8
  Lesson 2: Heritage — Blessing or Curse? .......................... 9-18
  Lesson 3: Cultural Pressures .............................................. 18-26

CHAPTER 2: LEAVING CHILDHOOD
  Lesson 4: Adolescent Changes ......................................... 29-44
  Lesson 5: Adolescent Purity ............................................. 44-53

CHAPTER 3: DATING AND ENGAGEMENT
  Lesson 6: Preparations for Dating .................................... 57-70
  Lesson 7: Dating Practices ............................................. 70-94
  Lesson 8: Engagement .................................................... 94-99

CHAPTER 4: SINGLEHOOD
  Lesson 9: Understanding Singlehood ............................... 103-118
  Lesson 10: Utilizing Singlehood ...................................... 118-139

JOHN COBLENZ
Lesson 1

The Social Unit
(Chapter 1, pp.1-8)

Scriptural Background
- Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-25
- Psalm 78:1-8
- Proverbs 10:5
- Ephesians 6:1-4

Key Concepts
1. God planned that the family be the basic social unit of society.
2. Much family interaction in work, conversation, worship, play, and instruction is necessary to accomplish the teaching-training responsibilities of parents.
3. The values and the pace of life in Western society make healthy family interaction increasingly difficult.

Study Guide
1. Find social in a dictionary. What definition best fits the social interaction in a family?
2. What is the basic point of Deuteronomy 6:7? What are some ways parents today can follow this instruction in practical ways?
3. On p. 4 there is a reference to “quality time” with children. What is generally meant by this term? How does this relate to Deuteronomy 6:7?
4. What are some of the benefits of a family working together? What are some ways the modern family can work together?
5. What should be normal characteristics of a family mealtime? What are some things which are destructive or unhealthy for family mealtimes?
6. On p. 5 a difference is made between “service activities” and “self-serving activities.” What is the difference? What are some examples of both? Is the difference always in the activity itself, or in the motivation for it?
7. What should be included in family worship? What are common distractions to family worship, and how can they be avoided? How might family worship practices change according to the ages of children?
8. What kinds of play are healthy for the family? What kinds are unhealthy? What are the benefits of the whole family interacting in play? How can we know when a family emphasizes recreation too much? too little?
9. On p. 8 the following statement is made: “Unfortunately, the expertise of man generally moves away from the fear of the Lord, and thus, often at the ‘best’ of educational opportunities, there is least of that wisdom which matters most.” Can you give examples of how the fear of the Lord departs when the focus of education is on the expertise of man? How do we determine what is “the best” in the education of our children? What should be our motivations in educating our children?
10. Ephesians 6:4 gives instruction to fathers in particular. In what ways do fathers provoke their children to wrath? This problem is not common only to fathers, but why do you think it is directed specifically to fathers?

11. Do some word study on “nurture and admonition.” How does the first part of this verse relate to the latter part? How is healthy family interaction important for effective discipline and instruction?

**Discussion Guide**

1. The focus of this lesson is the family as a social unit. In what kinds of activities did God intend for the family to interact? Beware of getting bogged down on sideline issues—such as allowing the discussion on the family working together to move into principles of finance.

2. What are the objectives of the family's social interaction? The goal of work is not limited to getting something done and getting paid; the goal of play is not limited to having a fun time; the goal of eating is not limited to sharing a good meal. Consider the background Scriptures in determining objectives for family interaction beyond immediate considerations. (Good interaction, in other words, provides a setting for teaching and training in skills, values, and character. The social interaction meets needs on the emotional and spiritual level—love, security, understanding, companionship, values, etc.)

3. Many things in modern society interfere with healthy family interaction. What are these things, and how can they be avoided? This part of the discussion should focus primarily on schedule and activities—Lesson 3 deals further with cultural pressures on the family, largely in matters other than schedule.
Lesson 2

Heritage-Blessing or Curse?
(Chapter 1, pp. 9-18)

Scriptural Background
Psalm 16:5, 6; 61:5
Psalm 27:10
Psalm 78:1-8
Exodus 34:7
Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 30:17; Isaiah 45:10
Colossians 3:13

Key Concepts
1. Heritage is a powerful shaping force in everyone's life. Heritage includes all the input of the past from one's family, coupled with one's personal responses to that input. Godly heritage is a tremendous blessing.
2. God commands everyone to honor their parents. There are specific ways the Bible teaches children how to honor their parents.
3. Parents are imperfect. Honoring imperfect parents requires humility and forgiveness.

Study Guide
1. What are some of the blessings of a heritage of godly parents? What are some of the woes of a heritage of ungodly parents?
2. On pp. 9, 10 the presence of the Lord is said to be the “most significant factor in heritage.” What happens to a heritage of godliness when one rebels against the Lord? What happens to a heritage of ungodliness when one receives the presence of the Lord?
3. What is the meaning of the word honor? Find some verses which give instruction as to how children might honor their parents (or dishonor them). Make a list of specific ways to honor parents.
4. What qualities of character are necessary for one to honor imperfect parents? Can you list Biblical examples of those who honored imperfect authorities under very difficult situations? Record any new insights in observing these Biblical characters.
5. On pp. 12 and 14, seven suggestions are given for youths honoring their parents. Which of these do you see as especially important?
6. How does the parental role change as children move out into homes of their own? How can those who have moved out of their childhood home continue to honor their parents?
7. On p.16 the observation is made that “one of the surest ways to pick up your parents' faults is to resent them.” Can you give any Biblical examples of children perpetuating the faults of their parents? Why does this happen?
8. List the reasons given on pp. 15 and 16 why forgiveness of parents is important. Can you list any more reasons?
9. Do you agree that forgiveness is a matter of choice (p.17)? Are there levels of forgiveness? Is it possible to forgive someone intellectually without forgiving them emotionally?

10. What is the tie between forgiveness and faith?

11. What are some of the benefits of forgiving parents for things they have done wrong? What are some of the consequences of not forgiving them?

Discussion Guide

1. Several dangers are inherent in a discussion of heritage. We may begin to compare our heritage to others and either feel superior or inferior, depending on our past. A second danger is that we give such emphasis to the power and effect of one's past that we lose sight of our responsibilities in the present. (That was Freud’s error, and he fathered the practice of digging around in the hurts of childhood for the roots of every adult problem.) There is a proper place for appreciating a heritage of godliness, and there is a proper place for understanding how the roots of present problems reach into the past. But keep the discussion healthy—in balance with other factors.

2. The Bible teaches parental honor. On pages 12 and following, specific suggestions are given for youths honoring their parents. In discussing these, you might also discuss proper parental responses. Furthermore, then, how do we honor parents after establishing homes of our own?

3. Forgiveness is an inescapable part of a Christian home. Christians, therefore, need to understand and practice forgiveness. Various Scriptures could be used for further discussion material. Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35) teaches us to forgive because we all need it so much.
Lesson 3

Cultural Pressures

(Chapter 1, pp.18-26)

Scriptural Background
II Timothy 3:1-5
Daniel 2:4
Luke 12:15-21; I Timothy 6:6-10, 17
Psalms 127, 128

Key Concepts
1. The family faces many anti-Christian pressures, so that those who would order their families for God will need to do so against the grain of Western culture.
2. Understanding these pressures is helpful in overcoming them.
3. The Bible provides guidance for every age, and godly parents should not be intimidated by modern scholarship when it counters or rejects the counsel of Scripture.
4. Parents need to set up and follow specific guidelines to avoid dangers such as materialism. Study Guide
5. Read II Timothy 3:1-5, list the descriptions of the last days, and try to give a specific example of each one from Western culture.
6. What are some of the things society accepts today which were introduced by the hip counterculture of the 1960's? What values in that era needed to be challenged?
7. How have the changing authority concepts in society affected the church? Freedom may mean quite different things to different people. Write some of the different concepts of freedom in society and in the church. (For example, how would freedom be defined by the following people: typical eighteen-year-old in society? a disgruntled church member? the President of the U.S.? a religious advocate of social peace and justice? a godly parent of teenagers?)
8. Do you think the pressure to separate according to age levels has affected your family? Are there specific concerns you could list? Do you have any suggestions for more mingling of age levels in specific activities?
9. How do parents acquaint themselves with the wisdom necessary to guide their children and grandchildren? What guidelines from the older generation do you think are being lost in favor of “new and improved” opinions?
10. In what ways do you face pressure to value material things? What are some of the dangers of riches, according to the Scriptures and your own experience? From the list of pointers to counteract materialism (pp. 23, 24), list those you think you have most need of. Are there pointers you would add to the list?
11. In what specific ways have society’s attitudes about husband-wife roles affected the church? What are some of the ways a wife can demonstrate character, creativity, talent, intelligence, and commitment in the home? What are some of the most common ways husbands in our day are unfaithful in their role? Under what circumstances would it be proper for a wife to work away from home?

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.
12. What Biblical principles guide you in the way you view the issue of family size? (How, in other words, do you view a planned two-child family vs. a ten-child family and what basis do you have for your view?)

Discussion Guide

1. The issues presented in this lesson need to be discussed with both boldness and caution. Boldness is necessary because we easily become comfortable with accommodation to society and we need to be challenged. Caution is necessary because sometimes in our zeal to follow God, we may overreact to ungodly society; furthermore, Christians sometimes zealously oppose worldliness in one form while protecting it in another form in their own lives. (For example, a man may strongly oppose wives working outside the home, but be very un submissive and troublesome in the church, disrespectful of church leaders.)

2. Probably each of the six areas of cultural pressure discussed in the book could be the subject of one lesson. Determine which should have priority and allot suitable time accordingly. Be willing to discuss not only the problems, but possible safeguards against them—as is done on pp. 23, 24 for materialism. Keep in mind that this is a study on Christian family living. These pressures certainly affect the church, but beware of allowing the discussion to shift to church problems and away from how these cultural pressures affect the family.

3. The six issues discussed in this lesson certainly are not all the ways in which society has pressured and mangled the family. While there is more than enough to discuss in the issues presented, don’t feel limited to these six issues if the families in your setting are facing other pressures as well. At the same time, keep in view that the discussion is not cultural ills, but those things in our culture which affect the family. One cultural issue not discussed in the text which has direct bearing on the family is the emphasis on sex and sexual perversions. Discussion of this would require discretion, of course. The implications for the family include unrealistic expectations in marriage (sexual fantasy vs. enduring love), changing husband-wife roles (unisex influences), and abuse of children (including sexual abuse in the family and unhealthy sexual awareness from general society).
Lesson 4

ADOLESCENT CHANGES
(Chapter 2, pp. 29-44)

Scriptural Background
Mark 10:13-16
Luke 7:31, 32
Matthew 18:1-6, 10, 14
I Corinthians 14:20
II Timothy 3:15 (cf. Acts 8:30-38)

Key Concepts
1. Adolescence is the time of change from childhood to adulthood; changes occur physically, emotionally, intellectually, behaviorally, and spiritually.
2. A clear understanding of the characteristics of childhood is helpful in guiding a person through adolescence to adulthood.
3. As children enter the time of puberty, they are often entering a time of greater spiritual awareness the awareness which is necessary for repentance and faith and being received into the body of believers through baptism.

Study Guide
1. List the characteristics of children given on pp. 31, 32 and then try to describe adults in contrast to each point. Can you add any differences?
2. List some of the ways the childhood of children is damaged. What are some things parents ought to do to avoid this occurring in their children.
3. Who is responsible to guide adolescents through the changes of puberty? What are some important dos and don’ts in this guidance? What are the dangers of sex education occurring outside the home?
4. Make a list of the emotional and behavioral changes in girls and boys during adolescence. Why is it important to understand the emotional framework of an adolescent?
5. Why do some parents begin to feel threatened by adolescents? What are some signs of feeling threatened? How does parental ridicule or harshness affect an adolescent?
6. What three things are necessary in a person’s awareness for true conversion? Try to describe each of these in one sentence. What is meant on p. 41 by “a delayed form of infant baptism”?
7. What prerequisites did the Ethiopian eunuch need to meet before he was baptized (see Acts 8:30-38)?
8. How should parents respond when a young child comes and says, “I want to become a Christian”? What are the effects of “leading children to Christ” before they clearly understand repentance and faith? What are some of the signs of true conviction of sin?
9. Read the story of Ted on p. 43. What was he confused about and what caused his confusion? Do you think his problem is fairly common or relatively rare?
10. How can “altar calls” present a clear invitation to adults to receive Christ without affecting children wrongly?

11. What wrong methods do some parents use to try to persuade their adolescents to receive Christ? What are the effects of such tactics?

Discussion Guide

1. Understanding the characteristics of children listed on pp. 31 and 32 is basic to discussing this lesson. In addition to the Scriptures given, you might consider some children in the Bible who demonstrate these characteristics—Samuel (I Samuel 3), Naaman’s servant girl (II Kings 5), etc.

2. What are some specific guidelines Christian parents should follow to safeguard the childhood of their children? What are some particularly damaging influences on children? In discussing these questions, guard against the tendency of discussing only those things found in the homes of the ungodly.

3. The changes which take place in adolescents need to be discussed with sensitivity. Parents bear the responsibility to instruct their adolescents about physical changes. What pointers can be given to parents in fulfilling this responsibility—timing, setting, manner, instructional helps, etc.? (Note that this is further discussed on p.49 in the context of helping young people be pure.) The adolescent is often misunderstood by both his peers and by other adolescents. What are some important guidelines for parents relating to 12- to 14-year-olds?

4. Leading children to receive Christ is the desire of every Christian parent. This lesson keeps several things in focus to avoid confusion about salvation. Discussion should include the requirements for salvation, the innocence of children, signs of conviction of sin, and believer’s baptism. Sensitivity should be shown to parents and differences in experience—some testify to quite an early awareness of sin and experience of salvation; others to a relatively later experience.
Lesson 5

Adolescent Purity
(Chapter 2, pp. 44-53)

Scriptural Background
Matthew 18:1-10, 14
Ephesians 5:3, 4; I Thessalonians 4:3-7
I Samuel 2:11-25
Psalm 119:9
Genesis 39:7-12

Key Concepts
1. Physical changes in adolescents open them to temptations in thinking about and relating to the opposite sex.
2. Adolescents need the guidance and wisdom of their parents to help them understand themselves and cope with the temptations they face.
3. Adolescents need to be taught specific ways to avoid temptation and lead a pure life.

Study Guide
1. When should parents be laying the foundation for good parent-teen relationships? How can they do this?
2. What does it mean to respect the personhood of children? How do parents sometimes disrespect the personhood of their children?
3. What are communication opportunities for fathers and mothers with small children, and how is this important for later communication with adolescents?
4. What kinds of boundaries do adolescents need? Why are they important?
5. What simple guide is given for wholesome touch practices? Why is modesty important in the home?
6. What guidelines are given for leading children to a proper understanding of their sexual development? Would you add any guidelines?
7. What guidelines do you think are proper for screening media which comes into the home? What literature have you found which is suitable and upbuilding for children and adolescents?
8. How can parents trust adolescents without being irresponsible?
9. What are some negative effects of teasing adolescents about special boyfriends or girlfriends? Why is pure speech necessary in parents?
10. Eight pointers are given to adolescents to preserve purity. As an adult, which of these do you consider especially important? Which of these do you wish you would have paid more attention to as a young person?
11. What are the benefits of preserving purity in adolescence? What are some of the consequences of impurity?
Discussion Guide

1. We live in a society in which sexual impurity is rampant, and therefore sexual purity is difficult. If adolescents are to survive morally, they need the protection, understanding, and guidance of their parents. This lesson focuses on those things parents and adolescents can do to help young people remain pure. Although such matters as sexual impurity must be discussed with discretion, the lesson is extremely practical. The discussion could be divided into three basic parts: first, the importance of the parent-adolescent relationship; second, the role of the parent in helping adolescents live pure lives; and third, the responsibility of the adolescent for maintaining personal purity.

2. In the parent-adolescent relationship, discuss the place and importance of mutual respect, communication, and boundaries. How can parents earn respect? How can they keep communication lines open? How can parents restore communication when it has been damaged? What are proper boundaries to set for adolescents?

3. The first step in safeguarding adolescent purity is parental purity. Impure adult minds transfer their thoughts and values even without realizing it. The next step is home purity. Parents need to guard their homes against the world's sensual entertainment. Even “Christian” books, magazines, and music is sometimes laden with shady or connotative humor and romance unfitting for believers.

4. Discussing the responsibility of adolescents for maintaining purity recognizes that parents need the cooperation of their adolescents. Adolescents cannot be forced to do these things, but as parents maintain solid relationship with them, they can be led. The pointers on pp. 51-53 can be helpful for adults who are responsible to lead adolescents. You might discuss how parents can effectively lead young people to follow these safeguards.
Lesson 6

Preparations for Dating

(Chapter 3, pp. 57-70)

Scriptural Background

Genesis 2:18-24
Proverbs 18:22; 19:14; 31:10, 11
Judges 14-16

Key Concepts

1. Dating practices and procedures should be the concern of parents who prepare their young people for responsible, wise decisions about a life companion.

2. Parents and young people need to understand (and sometimes rethink) the purpose of dating—it is to seek a life companion. Where dating becomes something less than or other than this, people easily violate integrity, often without realizing it.

3. There are spiritual, social, and personal qualifications for people who seek marriage; parents are responsible to see that their young people are meeting these qualifications as prerequisites for dating.

Study Guide

1. The method for finding a life companion is different now from what it was in Bible times. What are the most significant differences in method?

2. List the three propositions about motivation for dating. Proposition 2 states in effect that dating should be reserved for finding a life companion. List the four ways this is commonly violated.

3. What are the negative effects of dating to help someone with personal or spiritual problems?

4. What are the effects of young people dating before they are ready for marriage?

5. How can a person redirect the urge for companionship to higher motivations? Are there any Biblical examples of this or Scriptures which address this principle?

6. Why is a healthy relationship with Christ important as a prerequisite for dating? Why is dating a newborn Christian unwise?

7. How do young people face temptations in our day to be lustful and impure? How does a record of impurity affect eligibility for dating? How will impure young people view dating?

8. How does a spirit of rebellion affect moral standards in dating? Beyond the moral effects, why is submission to authority important for those who are dating?

9. List some of the misconceptions about love demonstrated in Samson's life. In what ways is Samson-type love promoted among youths in our society? How is “falling in love” a misconception about the kind of love needed for a strong marriage?

10. Make a list contrasting society's values with Biblical values. What kinds of values in a young person should give parents concern? What are some signs that a young person's values are right?
11. What are some ways parents can teach young people a sense of responsibility? What are ways parents sometimes rob their youths of a sense of responsibility? Why is a sense of responsibility necessary for those who are dating?

12. The prerequisites for dating are not measurable in inches or pounds. How can parents know when their young people are measuring up to these standards? How can parents be objective in evaluating their youths? What are the signs of being too harsh or too lenient in evaluating youths?

Discussion Guide

1. The subject of dating should be of vital interest to parents. The focus in this lesson is not merely youth preparedness for dating, but parental responsibility in preparing youths for dating. Why should parents feel responsible? What are the results of parents leaving the responsibility for dating primarily in the laps of young people?

2. Of the three propositions on pp. 59-63, the one with the most controversial implications is the second. Discuss the effects of allowing dating to be for purposes other than serious pursuit of marriage. What would be the effects if dating were reserved for those serious about marriage? (What would happen, for example, if people would not date until they were at least twenty-years old?) What are some of the unfair and unfortunate effects of teenage dating? What misconceptions do people have who date to help others out of personal or spiritual problems?

3. How do parents cope with differences in dating standards and practices within the same congregation? How do parents handle concerns they have about the readiness or suitability of someone dating their son or daughter? (When a young person wishes to date your son or daughter, for example, but you feel he is lacking in a significant area, such as a sense of responsibility, what is your duty?)

4. How do parents develop in their youths the kinds of things discussed in this lesson—purity, submission, Biblical love, eternal values, and a sense of responsibility?
Lesson 7

Dating Practices
(Chapter 3, pp. 70-94)

Scriptural Background
Genesis 24:2-4; 26:34, 35
I Corinthians 6:15-20; Ephesians 5:3-6
II Samuel 13:1-22
II Corinthians 6:14-16
Proverbs 24:26; 27:5, 6

Key Concepts
1. In dating, decisions are made which affect one’s entire lifetime; parents should provide objective, experienced counsel to their dating young people.
2. Dating practices should be planned to enhance healthy communication and avoid pitfalls of infatuation.
3. Dating partners need to understand how to evaluate differences—what kinds of differences signal incompatibility and what kinds can be complimentary.
4. Dating partners need to understand proper methods of resolving differences.

Study Guide
1. What reasons are given on p.71 for parental involvement in their young people’s dating experience? Can parents overstep their involvement? Can you list practical ways parents might be involved other than the ways suggested?
2. How can past immorality which is improperly dealt with place snares in a relationship? Explain the balance necessary in dealing with such sensitive issues.
3. Why is communication so important in dating? What are practical ways to enhance communication, and what are some ways good communication is commonly hindered in dating? What should couples talk about?
4. How should the approach to spiritual compatibility be different from the approach to personal compatibility?
5. How does physical intimacy hinder a dating relationship? How is physical intimacy in dating likely to affect marriage? In light of the dangers associated with physical intimacies in dating, what guidelines ought to be observed?
6. What kinds of things ought young people talk about to discern spiritual compatibility? What sorts of spiritual differences ought young people to consider reason for discontinuing their dating relationship?
7. What kinds of personal differences do husbands and wives commonly disagree over? Why are these things commonly overlooked in courtship and commonly overplayed in marriage? How important, for example, should a woman’s housekeeping skills figure into the attempt to discern compatibility?
8. What are the dangers of large intellectual or educational differences between a dating couple?
9. What factors need to be considered when a couple has differences in race or culture? How important are the feelings and thoughts of the extended family? What precautionary steps can such a couple take in determining compatibility?

10. How does a couple know when they have sufficiently grappled with such things as personal differences or emotional scars or cultural differences?

11. What guidelines ought to be followed if a relationship needs to be discontinued? When one feels definitely a relationship needs to be discontinued, what are the effects of putting it off?

12. Under what conditions might it be wise to discontinue dating for a set time? What guidelines ought to be established in such an arrangement?

Discussion Guide

1. Procedures for acquiring a wife are not prescribed in the Bible. Care must be exercised, therefore, that opinions, even Biblically based opinions, are not presented as the Gospel standard. Nor should other opinions be attacked as heresy. There are principles, of course, which must be observed principles such as purity, parental honor, spiritual discernment, and the unequal yoke. But there may be a variety of methods within the framework of those principles. The intent of this lesson is to discuss ways in which those abiding principles can be honored, even to the betterment of accepted practice.

2. What is the value of parental involvement in dating? How might parents become too involved? And what ought young people to do when they feel parents are too involved? How can parents prepare their youths for parental involvement in dating?

3. What is the role of parents in working through past immorality in someone who wants to date their son or daughter? What are the dangers of overreacting? of naively smoothing things over? What is the parents’ responsibility when they observe their young people ignoring the dangers of physical contact-touching, kissing, etc.?

4. How can parents help their young people to focus their dating on wise discernment? How should parents respond when they feel a relationship is incompatible, but the dating couple strongly disagrees?
Lesson 8

Engagement

(Chapter 3, pp. 94-99)

Scriptural Background
Deuteronomy 22:13-21
Matthew 1:18, 19
Song of Solomon 8:6, 7
Ecclesiastes 5:2-6; Matthew 5:33-37

Key Concepts
1. Engagement is a promise to marry which ought to be made and kept with all seriousness and sincerity.
2. The only reasons found in Scripture for breaking engagement are immorality and deceit.
3. Engagement does not give marital privileges; purity should be carefully guarded during the time of engagement.
4. The duration of engagement should be gauged primarily by the time necessary to prepare for the marriage.

Study Guide
1. According to Deuteronomy 22:13-21, what was the expected moral standard of those who marry? What were the consequences of deceit about past immorality?
2. According to Matthew 1:18, 19, what was Joseph planning to do to Mary? Why was he planning to do this? What words are used to describe Joseph and Mary's relationship?
3. Why, according to Ecclesiastes 5, should God's people be careful about the promises they make? What New Testament verses give further instruction about the seriousness of our words?
4. To consider the engagement binding with rare exceptions, how must we view dating?
5. On pp. 95 and 96 four points are given about engagement which are necessary to preserve it as a serious, binding agreement. List these four points. What is the value of viewing a prospective wife as subject to her parents? What is the danger of seeing engagement as the final stage of discernment? What is the danger of a prolonged engagement? What is the value of a pure engagement?
6. What might be the advantages of a written proposal and a written response? What might be some disadvantages?
7. According to p. 97, which is proper sequence-asking the parents of the young woman for their approval first or proposing to the young woman first? Which is the customary order in your setting?
8. What reasons are given for sealing engagement with prayer?
9. What is the benefit of expressing a commitment to moral purity during engagement? Would there be benefit in including this in a written proposal?
10. Why should young people discuss their wedding plans with their parents? What is the value of gauging the length of engagement primarily by the time necessary for preparing for the marriage?
11. Why should young people discuss their wedding plans with their ministers? What are ministers responsible for in preparation for the marriage?

Discussion Guide

1. As with dating, the methods and procedures for engagement are not prescribed in the Bible. Where there are differences of ideas within the framework of Biblical principles, these should be honored. Basic Biblical principles guiding engagement include purity, integrity, parental honor, wisdom, and honor of church leadership.

2. Do you feel engagement is treated too lightly today? What in your mind would be valid reasons for breaking engagement?

3. The procedures given for engagement on pp. 97 and 98 are aimed at keeping it healthy and at honoring Biblical principles. Discuss the pointers given. Which are especially important? Would there be other important steps? What are the effects of not honoring parents in engagement? of proposing or accepting a proposal without serious thought? of letting down in courtship standards following engagement?
Lesson 9

Understanding Singlehood
(Chapter 4, pp.103-118)

Background Scriptures
I Corinthians 7:25-34
Isaiah 54:1-5
Matthew 12:46-50
Romans 8:28

Key Concepts
1. Singlehood needs to be understood both by those who are single and by those who are not, for healthy interaction in the body of Christ.
2. Misunderstandings about singlehood are damaging not only to single people, but to the church.
3. Reasons for singlehood are numerous. Understanding why one is single, however, is not as important as knowing how to live productively for God as a single person.
4. Single people face special temptations and pitfalls as well as certain advantages and opportunities specifically because they are single.

Study Guide
1. What three reasons are given on p. 104 for understanding single people? Considering each of these reasons, what would be consequences of not understanding single people?
2. What three reasons are given why some people are single? Tell how both of the first two reasons are sometimes misunderstood. God’s sovereignty is discussed at length. Write a sentence or find one from the text which summarizes the view presented.
3. What is the primary way Christians know God’s will? How should Christians face decisions? Finish this sentence from the text: “Since he has taken each step in his singlehood according to the principles of God’s Word.” How can this statement be applied to married people?
4. Why is it unwise to take circumstances as the primary means of knowing God’s will? According to Job’s testimony, what is important in a time of confusing circumstances?
5. List four kinds of circumstances which may require singlehood.
6. Describe the stigma attached to single men and single women in the past. What is the present image of singlehood in society?
7. List the seven negative factors in singlehood. In the single people you know, which of these has seemed most significant?
8. List the seven positive factors in singlehood. ‘can you think of single people, either from the Bible or from history, who demonstrate each of these positive factors?
9. Isaiah 54 likely refers to the people of God and to the bringing in of the Gentiles. How might its principles be applied, however, to single people? You might try paraphrasing verses 1-5, making this application.

Copyrighted material. May not be reproduced without permission from the publisher.
Discussion Guide

1. Although this lesson is about singlehood, it is important to approach the discussion as applying to all. Avoid putting single people on the spot by asking them personal questions. Those who are married need to understand the principles of this lesson, not only because they need to relate to singles, but because they may at any time become single again. While this lesson speaks specifically about those who have never married, it has application to those single people who once were married.

2. The discussion about why some people are single needs to be addressed because it is a common concern and because it is often misunderstood. But it can be overhashed. There are more significant things to consider than why one is single, such as, have I accepted my singlehood, am I growing in Christ, and am I contributing to God’s kingdom? The section on God’s will has many applications outside of singlehood. It is fine to discuss some of these applications, but beware of getting sidetracked altogether.

3. The section on negative factors needs to be discussed with understanding and sensitivity. Married people need to consider how they have contributed at times to the difficulties of those who are single, and further, how they can work together in healthy cooperation with single people. (More on this last point is given in the next lesson.)

4. Consider the material in the next lesson in order to avoid undue overlap. It focuses more on proper responses to the negative and positive factors in singlehood. The focus in this lesson is on understanding singlehood.
Lesson 10

Utilizing Singlehood
(Chapter 4, pp.118-139)

Scriptural Background
Matthew 19:10-12
1 Corinthians 7:8, 32; 9:5
Daniel 1; 6:3, 4
Genesis 39

Key Concepts
1. There are specific traps single people need to avoid, and there are specific things which can be done to avoid them.
2. Single adults need interaction with families, and families can benefit from interaction with single adults.
3. There is some work in the kingdom of God which is done best by those who are unmarried, and the church should be utilizing the potential of single people.
4. Respect for single adults is necessary both in the families from which they come and in the church, to keep relationships wholesome and upbuilding.

Study Guide
1. What is meant by “aloneness” (p.118)? What are specific ways for single people to avoid aloneness?
2. What is meant by “practical self-centeredness” (p.119)? What are specific ways for single people to avoid becoming self-absorbed?
3. How do some single people express resentment about their singlehood? How do other people sometimes stir resentment in single people? List some specific ways to avoid resentment.
4. What is meant by a “waiting-around mentality” (p.122)? List some specific ways single people can avoid the trap of purposelessness. Give an example of a short-term goal and a long-term goal.
5. Why do people who feel deprived often fantasize? What is the effect of living in fantasy? What are specific ways to avoid this trap?
6. Why do people sometimes deny their true feelings? How can this trap be avoided?
7. Why does chasing a partner usually backfire? A person who chases another partner is usually not aware of it. How can single people guard against this pitfall?
8. In what ways can single people use their friends as “surrogate companions”? What are specific ways to avoid this?
9. List some ways single people can serve the Lord in ways their married counterparts would be limited. Give some examples from the Bible or from history of single people who have made outstanding contributions to the people of God.
10. What are some questions single people face in relating to their parental home? What are some specific ways parents can respect the adulthood of their single children? Why do adult children sometimes need
“space”? In what ways do parents sometimes wrongly presume upon their adult children? How do adult children sometimes wrongly presume upon their parents?

11. What are some specific ways the church can show respect for single people? In what kinds of activities does the church sometimes fail to include single people?

**Discussion Guide**

1. Sometimes it is easy to give advice to other people’s problems. Beware of discussing the problems of single people presumptuously. Especially beware of assuming that all single people have all these problems.

2. The positive suggestions can be applied to all people, not just to singles. Be sure to include these suggestions in the discussion, lest the discussion focuses only on the problems single people may have.

3. Discuss service opportunities for single people. Service for singles, however, will be viewed as opportunities only in the context of a serving congregation. No congregation, in other words, should assume a higher standard of devotion from single people than from anyone else. In the family also, as the whole family demonstrates humble, sacrificial attitudes, the adult single children can be expected to serve gladly and effectively.

4. Single adult children sometimes face struggles relating properly in their parental home. Discuss the attitudes necessary for constructive relationships. What are some specific ways adult children and their parents can show respect to one another? What are some wrong assumptions they commonly make about one another? How can the whole church community respect the adulthood of singles?