Explore: How Are Religion and Marriage Connected?

At a Glance:



This activity introduces the New Church idea that there is a connection between religion and happiness in marriage. When Jacob left home, his parents told him to go to relatives to find a wife. Families in the Word embody ideas and loving actions that are similar or related. When married partners believe in and act from shared religious principles, they are able to receive conjugial love, God's greatest gift. The book Conjugial Love outlines various marital situations that make it difficult or impossible for couples to experience this love. Differences in religion are at the top of this list.

Students will read and discuss the student page. The teacher will choose a discussion statement to aloud. Students will discuss the statement with a partner. Each pair will express their agreement or disagreement with the statement by positioning one person on a value continuum line. Students will then discuss their choice with the larger group. Continue the activity with the next statement.

Supplies Needed:

- *How Are Religion and Marriage Connected?* page for each student
- "Value Continuum" line (see *Teacher Preparation* below)

Teacher Preparation

- Set up a "Value Continuum" on the floor using tape, yarn or paper strips. Your finished line should look be long enough for a group of students to stand on. Text slips are included to label points on the line if you wish.
  Agree_____Neutral_____Disagree

Directions:

1. Distribute *How are Religion and Marriage Connected?* student page. Read aloud as a group and discuss.
2. Divide students into pairs.
3. Tell the students: I will read a series of statements. You will discuss each statement with your partner, and decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement. Partners may need to compromise, but will have an opportunity to clarify their choice.
4. One person from each pair will place themselves on the "Value Continuum" to show how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement.

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Explore: How Are Religion and Marriage...continued

5. Each person will be given the opportunity to explain their choice.
6. Students will be given the opportunity to respond and discuss various opinions.
7. Continue to choose statements that you think will work well for your group.
8. Wrap up the session with following thoughts:

   The Lord loves and brings blessing to all people. We receive His blessing more and more when we learn about the Lord and walk in His path. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you." (John 14:2). No matter what path we take, the Lord will bless our marriage to the extent that we let Him do this.

Statements for Discussion:

1. Marriage love doesn't really have to do with what people believe—it has to do with how people treat each other.
2. Religion doesn't make any difference in a marriage—couples who go to church together get divorced at the same rate as people who never attend church.
3. If a Hindu and a Christian marry they can experience the gift of conjugial love if each practices their religion and treats their partner well.
4. Conjugial love is only for religious people. There are other kinds of happiness that are just as good for people who don't believe in God.
5. If I marry someone who believes what I do marriage would be boring. I could have a lot more fun in a marriage with someone I can debate and argue with.
6. If I marry someone from a different religion our marriage will be stronger because we will each think for ourselves.
7. Conjugial love is really a marriage between knowing and loving true ideas as an individual. So regardless of whether my partner is religious or not—if I practice what my religion teachers, I will experience conjugial love.
8. Conjugial love is so rare that I don't think it's possible for me to experience it, given how many marriages don't last today.
9. I can increase my chances of being blessed with conjugial love if I marry someone who believes what I do.
10. The Lord is most interested in the love in our hearts. If we love what is good, the Lord will bless us with conjugial love, regardless of what we each believe.

How Are Religion and Marriage Connected?

When Jacob left home his parents, knew that he would soon choose a wife. They advised Jacob not to marry one of the "daughters of Canaan," but to go to his uncle in Haran, and take "a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother" (Genesis 28:1,2). There is an interesting spiritual reason for this.

Each person in the Word stands for a spiritual quality in us. People in same family—brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives—embody relationships between similar true ideas and good loves, or false ideas and evil loves. People from different nations represent unrelated spiritual ideas or loves. Here are a few examples:

Ideas in the same "spiritual family"	Ideas from different "nations"
• There is one God. • God loves me. • God cares for me. • I can know and love God.	• The Lord God Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth. • God exists in three persons. • There is no God.

A husband and wife in the Word picture a partnership between a true idea and a good love in our minds (e.g. Jacob and Rachel) or the partnership between a false idea and an evil love (e.g. Ahab and Jezebel).

How Are People Connected Spiritually through Marriage?

Many people believe that marriage is simply a couple's agreement to love and care for each other. The New Church teaches that genuine marriage love (*conjugial love*) is more than this. It is a marriage love that springs from our connection with God. It depends on each partner having a concept of God as loving and wise and involves each partner leading a life of useful service. Together a couple grows in God's love, in time becoming wiser and more spiritual. It is more than a partnership between two people: it also involves a couple's living connection with God.

Is Genuine Marriage Love Possible without Religion?

Many things can make people happy, e.g. having a successful career, being liked, making money or making a difference. Happiness that comes from this kind of success is not necessarily spiritual happiness. If God is not in the picture our happiness comes not from Him, but from the selfish satisfaction of achieving our own goals. If this kind of love motivates a marriage, the marriage does not have spiritual warmth at its center but the coldness of self-love (see *Conjugial Love* 239).

The book *Conjugial Love* explains conditions which cause cold feelings to develop between married couples (*Conjugial Love* 234-270). Significant religious differences are at the top of this list, e.g. one partner is religious and the other is not, one partner is one religion and the other is a different religion. Religion is at the heart of everything we do, e.g. making a snack for another person. A loving person may serve a snack out of consideration for their friend's wellbeing; a person who is selfish may serve a snack hoping their friend will do a bigger favor in return; another person may do it to merit heaven. If partners have different fundamental goals it will impact each action they take.

Jacob's parents wanted him to marry a relative—someone with similar spiritual ideals. Our Heavenly Father offers us His greatest blessing, conjugial love, if we make a similar choice. "All the states of blessedness, happiness, delight, pleasantness, and pleasure which, by the Lord the Creator, could ever be conferred on man, are gathered into this his love" (*Conjugial Love* 68).

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AGREE

NEUTRAL

DISAGREE

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