

Renewing marriages across the globe

Barrie and Eileen Jones are passionate about helping married couples to strengthen their relationships

GOD created men and women to be equal, and men shouldn't oppress women. That might not sound controversial to us, but it is radical Christian teaching in some places.

Barrie and Eileen Jones have devoted much of the past 33 years to teaching Christians how to base their marriage relationships on the Bible. It's taken them across the world, from the USA to Pakistan, and from Uganda to Outer Mongolia.

They've challenged the domination that some Christian men believe is their God-given right over their wives, inviting them to look again at what the Bible really says.

"When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees about marriage, he invited them to look again at Genesis," said Barrie. "So that's what we do. There are principles

in Adam and Eve's originally sinless relationship that are upheld throughout the rest of the Bible, which we think are God's model for marriage.

"We believe that God gives the husband responsibility to care for his wife, but not authority over her. That does come as something of a shock to people we speak to in places like Pakistan, because the culture there is very different. But because we are always speaking to Christians, we find they are open to hearing what the Bible says and are ready to change."

The couple, from Church of the Good Shepherd in Crookhorn, have been married for 52 years. Barrie, who is now 83, was in the Royal Navy and saw one of the hydrogen bomb tests in the south Pacific in the late 1950s. When he was stationed in Malta, he joined the military Christian fellowship. He was asked to contribute to a

series on the Ten Commandments and was given 'You shall not commit adultery' to speak on.

"I had resisted the idea of marriage until then, as it did seem to be an unfair and unequal relationship," he said. "I didn't want to get into it. But as I read the Bible to research this talk, I realised that God doesn't believe in male domination either. It suggested that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church – in other words, with a sacrificial attitude.

"A week after I delivered this talk, Eileen arrived in Malta with the Wrens. It was almost as if God had prepared me for the idea of marriage beforehand!"

The couple married in 1965 and had four children – they now have 12 grandchildren as well. Eileen was in the WRNS for eight years and Barrie in the navy for

23 years. Barrie then worked as a secondary school teacher in Horndean and Crookhorn.

In 1985, they went on a marriage renewal weekend with Time for Marriage, an organisation that gives couples a chance to strengthen their relationships by spending time together, hearing some Biblical principles and discussing how to improve things.

"It transformed our understanding of marriage," said Eileen. "We hadn't had any major crises in our marriage, but it helped us to understand that a marriage relationship wasn't just for us, but could also be a witness to others of God's love."

They became part of the team leading such weekends, and helped couples all over the UK to think about issues such as good communication, praying together, resolving conflict and intimacy.

In 2007, an English woman asked if they could run a weekend in Pakistan, where she had lived for 30 years. It was beyond the remit of Time for Marriage, but they decided to go under their own steam, having already planned to visit a friend in India.

A successful Time for Marriage weekend was set up in Islamabad for 10 Christian couples, and they taught the eight Genesis principles of marriage to a seminar of Pakistani Christian leaders.

Almost as soon as they returned to the UK, another friend asked if a Pentecostal Ugandan pastor could come and stay with them, as he wanted to learn about marriage and parenting. They explained their thinking to Pastor Elijah, who asked them to come to Uganda.

"We would have happily given him our notes and suggested that



Eileen and Barrie in a church in Lahore, Pakistan

he used them, but he said 'I can't, because I haven't lived it,'" said Eileen. "So we went to Uganda in 2008 and it was an amazing experience. There were 700 people waiting to hear us when we first arrived.

"Eighty per cent of the population live in rural Uganda with very little, and Elijah has a real heart for the rural church. He is now a Pentecostal bishop with 300 churches associated with him. He now insists on taking a day off each week to be with his wife and children, which is very unusual in Uganda. Bishop Elijah and his wife Ruth set a lovely example of marriage as God intended it.

'Marriage can be a witness to others of God's love'

"Christianity there exists alongside idol worship, polygamy and witchcraft, and even Christian pastors aren't always married to the women they are living with, or they have extra wives. So there is a challenge, but through this Biblical teaching we have seen transformation in the church and in the lives of many couples.

"It's also not in their culture to talk about sex. When we mention it, there are shrieks of laughter from the women. And when we talk

about men not having authority over women, there are cheers."

The couple have been to Uganda and to Pakistan eight times each, led two weekends in the USA, visited Croatia and India to lead weekends – and even found themselves in Outer Mongolia. The country only had a handful of Christians when Communism was overthrown in 1990, but now there are up to 60,000 believers, mostly under 30.

Barrie and Eileen had met a Mongolia pastor who came to the UK to study English. Through him they were invited to lead a weekend for pastor couples in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, and they've also visited Austria and the Czech Republic to teach in Mongolian church plants.

"We tell people we're opposites," said Eileen. "I like the big picture, but Barrie has an eye for detail. Barrie is more cautious and might rein me in, but sometimes I spur him on. Lots of marriage relationships are like that, and those differences can become irritating. But we like people to see that different gifts can actually complement each other and it make you into a good team!"

Barrie and Eileen are also available to speak at churches locally. Contact them via barrie.jones2@ntlworld.com. Find out more about Time for Marriage on www.timeformarriage.org.uk