

Singleness, Dating and Courtship: Avoiding the Hurt

I. Introduction.

- A. Marriage is designed by God to be a blessing. Pr. 18:22
- B. Is a bad marriage worse than no marriage? Pr. 21:9 19:13 27:15
- C. Don't be conformed to the world. Rom. 12:2

II. God designed marriage. Genesis 2:18-25

- A. It is not good to be alone. v. 18-23
 - 1. Are some people better off single? I Co. 7:1,7-8 Mt. 19:12
 - 2. How should you decide whether to be married? I Co. 7:9,33
 - 3. Why does God have Adam name the animals before making Eve? v. 19-20
 - 4. Why does God choose such an unusual method for building Eve? v. 21-22
 - 5. What is Adam's response to what God has done? v. 23

- B. God gives directives for marriage. v. 24 Eph. 5:31 Mt. 19:5 Mark 10:7 I Co. 6:16
 - 1. What does it mean to leave father and mother?
 - a. Marriage creates a new family unit.
 - b. Marriage has priority over any other human relationship.
 - 2. What does it mean to cleave (be joined) to one's spouse? Mt. 19:3-9 Mal. 2:14-16
 - a. Permanence of marriage.
 - b. Personal intimacy: communication.
 - 3. What are God's purposes for physical intimacy (sex)? 1:28 Pr. 5:18-19 Heb. 13:4 Gen. 1:28 Cor. 7:3-5
 - a. Expression of lifelong covenant of commitment.
 - b. Children are the fruit of married love.
 - c. Mutual enjoyment.

- C. How do some married people violate God's design?

- D. How do single people violate God's design?
 - 1. Premature leaving, cleaving and one fleshing which results in a regrettable sequence of relationships (mini-marriages) which end in mini-divorces.
 - 2. Partaking of the privileges of marriage before the commitment of marriage has been made.
 - 3. What is the harm of physical involvement before marriage?
 - 4. What are some dangers of becoming romantically involved before you are ready to get married?
 - 5. Many young people make an idol of having a relationship. Isa. 55:1-2

- E. When are you ready to pursue marriage?

F. What should you do while you are not yet ready for marriage? Isa. 55:1ff Pr. 4:23

1. Find your satisfaction in God as you exercise patience and contentment.

2. Guard your heart. Pr. 4:23 II Tim. 2:22 I Co. 10:12

3. Have friendships with people of the opposite sex without becoming boyfriend and girlfriend, with the accompanying commitments, expectations and intimacy.

4. Become the kind of person who would make a good husband or wife.

III. Courtship, Engagement and Marriage.

A. What is the best approach to finding a marriage partner?

1. What are some common mistakes people make in choosing whom to marry?

2. What can you do to avoid making those mistakes (or committing those sins)?

3. What kind of “dating” might be acceptable?

4. Where might you find a prospective marriage partner?

5. What are the possible benefits and dangers of online courtships?

6. How can you deal with the risks of online courtships?

B. Courtship.

1. What is the nature and purpose of courtship?

a. Courtship is the mutual investigation of the possibility of marriage by two people who are ready to take on its responsibilities.

b. The goal is to get to know each other to determine whether each is of suitable character, whether they have compatible beliefs and life goals, and whether there is mutual attraction and compatibility.

c. Look for deal killers (sexual history, debt, anger, etc.).

d. Many have a lot to learn about communication.

See Piper “Engagement questions” below.

2. What are some advantages of courtship over “dating”?

a. Opportunity for protection by family or church leaders.

b. Honesty and openness – no games.

3. What involvement should your family (parents) have in your dating/courtship? Ge.

2:24 I Co. 7:36-38(?) Ex. 22:16-17 Deut. 22:13-21 Prov. 28:26

4. Does courtship always lead to engagement?

5. What is the place of physical affection during courtship? II Ti. 2:22 I Tim. 5:2

C. Engagement (betrothal). II Co. 11:2 Mt. 1:18 Deut. 22:23-24

1. What is the nature and purpose of an engagement?

a. Engagement is a promise to marry.

b. The engagement period is a time of preparation for marriage.

2. When is a couple ready to become engaged? See Challies/Newheiser “Ten Issues to Work through Before You Get Married” <https://www.challies.com/articles/10-issues-to-work-through-before-you-get-married/>

3. What is the role of the parents in an engagement? Deut. 7:3 I Co. 7:36
 - a. Ideally both sets of parents will add their blessing to the engagement.
 - b. Is it ever right for a couple to become engaged without parental approval?
4. For how long should a couple be engaged?
5. Why is pre-marital counseling important and helpful?
6. What physical affection is appropriate during engagement?
7. Under what conditions may an engagement be broken? Ps. 15:4c Mt. 1:19
8. What is the nature and meaning of a wedding?

IV. How should you choose your mate?

A. How much should you depend upon your feelings? Prov. 3:5-6 31:30

1. Should you expect supernatural guidance? Gen. 24:12-14
2. Is there such a thing as love at first sight? Judges 14:1-2 16:4f Pr. 31:30 5:3
3. Is it possible to “fall in love” with the wrong person? Jer. 17:9
Good boyfriends often make bad husbands.
4. Is it necessary to be “in love” in order to have a successful marriage?
5. Choose your love, then love your choice.

B. What is the most important consideration in choosing a spouse? II Co. 6:14 I Co. 9:5 7:39,16 Gen. 6:1-3 Deut. 7:3-4

1. Why does God warn you against marrying an unbeliever? I Ki. 11:4
2. What is the best way to avoid marrying an unbeliever? Prov. 5:8 Mt. 5:29-30
3. Is it enough that he/she professes to be a Christian?
4. Why is it important that you have compatible life goals?
5. Compatible view of marriage roles – patriarchy, complementarian, egalitarian, feminist. A battle for control. Gen. 3:16

C. What are some of the most important qualities to look for in a husband? I Pet. 3:7 Eph. 5:25-33

1. What are the qualities of a good spiritual leader? Eph. 5:26-27 Deut. 6:1f
2. How can you tell if a man will fulfill his role as a husband? Jo. 15:1ff Ps. 127 I Tim. 5:8 Eph. 5:29 Prov. 28:19-20
3. What kind of relationship does he have with his family?
4. Is he a man to whom you can respectfully submit for the rest of your life? I Pe. 3:7 Js. 1:19
5. From “She’s Got the Wrong Guy” – control freak, promiscuous, unchurched, new convert, unbeliever, angry, lone ranger, commitment-phobic, passive, unteachable.
6. From Phillips: industry, integrity, self-control, kindness.

D. What are the most important qualities to look for in a wife? Prov. 31:30 5:3

1. What kind of beauty is most important? Prov. 31:31 11:22 I Pet. 3:3-4 I Sa. 16:7 How

important is it that you be physically attracted to each other?

2. Does she love and fear the Lord? Prov. 31:26,30,11-12 Ruth 3:11

3. How can you tell that a woman is prepared to fulfill her role as a wife and a mother? Ti. 2:4-5 Pr. 31:11f,29 Gen. 1:28 Ps. 127:1f

4. Is she willing to submit to your leadership?

5. Are you willing to give up your life for her?

6. From Phillips: kindhearted, industry, faithful, gentle, meek.

V. Concluding applications.

A. How should a single person deal with loneliness? I Co. 10:13 Isa. 55:1-2

B. What can you do to get ready for marriage now?

C. Suggested resources .

1. Powlison, Pre-engagement: Five Questions to Ask Yourself

2. Newheiser, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: Critical Questions and Answers

3. Challies/Newheiser <https://www.challies.com/articles/10-issues-to-work-through-before-you-get-married/>

Appendix: Piper: Engagement questions.

In each of these sections one item could be added that I have not listed, namely, How do you handle and live with differences? How do you decide what can remain differences without jeopardizing the relationship? So as you deal with each subheading, include that in the discussion.

Theology

- What do you believe about...everything?
- Perhaps read through the [Desiring God Affirmation of Faith](#) to see where each other is on various biblical doctrines.
- Discover how you form your views. What is the reasoning-believing process? How do you handle the Bible?

Worship and Devotion

- How important is corporate worship? Other participation in church life?
- How important is it to be part of a small accountability/support group?
- What is the importance of music in life and worship?
- What are your daily personal devotional practices? Prayer, reading, meditation, memorization.
- What would our family devotions look like? Who leads out in this?
- Are we doing this now in an appropriate way: praying together about our lives and future, reading the Bible together?

Husband and Wife

- What is the meaning of headship and submission in the Bible and in our marriage?
- What are expectations about situations where one of you might be alone with someone of the opposite sex?
- How are tasks shared in the home: cleaning, cooking, washing dishes, yard work, car upkeep, repairs, shopping for food, and household stuff?
- What are the expectations for togetherness?

- What is an ideal non-special evening?
- How do you understand who and how often sex is initiated?
- Who does the checkbook—or are there two?

Children

- If and when, should we have children? Why?
- How many?
- How far apart?
- Would we consider adoption?
- What are the standards of behavior?
- What are the appropriate ways to discipline them? How many strikes before they're...whatever?

10 Issues To Work Through Before You Get Married Challies and Newheiser

Some people get married too soon. After love at first sight and a whirlwind romance, they quickly plan a wedding, exchange rings, and settle into a marriage that soon turns sour. So much pain can be avoided by working through issues before that wedding day. While courtship and engagement is, of course, the time to plan a wedding, it is also the time to plan a marriage. Here, drawn from the work of Jim Newheiser, is a list of issues to work through before you get married.

Are you both in love with the gospel, and is it impacting your lives? This is, of course, the most foundational question of all. Are you a Christian? And is your future spouse a Christian? Are you both confessing your sins before God and one another? Are you both extending and receiving forgiveness? Do not marry anyone until you are convinced he or she is a Christian; do not marry a Christian until you are convinced that you, too, are a believer.

Do you respect each other's character? Having been convinced that your future spouse is a believer, are you also able to respect their character? Does that person have the kind of character that will be a blessing to you throughout your marriage? These will be issues of leadership and submission as well as issues of parenting, working, temper, and much else. In short, is this person displaying mature and maturing Christian character?

Do you have compatible life goals? Do you and your future spouse have similar goals for the future? Are you both committed to foreign missions, for example, or just one of you? Are you both eager to begin a family, or just one of you? Do you know how many children you each want to have and when you'd like to begin having them? How about the type and level of your commitment to the local church? Do not assume that you both have the same or even similar life goals. Talk!

How do you function together in group settings? While much of married life will be lived in relative isolation, much will also be lived in community. For this reason it is important to consider how your future spouse behaves in public and how the two of you behave together. How do the two of you work together in public? Are you both meeting people and making friends? Is one of you content to be alone and isolated? Does your future spouse have close friendships or have many of his or her former friends become isolated?

Have you been able to work through the past? It is rare that a couple enters marriage without a romantic and sexual history (with one another or with others) and these issues can be very difficult to discuss and resolve. They can put an immense weight on a young marriage. Have you spoken to your future spouse about their sexual history in sufficient detail that you know enough? Have you asked and extended forgiveness for whatever sexual history you have accumulated? Also, is your future spouse chaste now or content to look at pornography and masturbate? Be sure to work through issues of sexuality.

Are you able to be honest with each other about sins and faults? By the time you are engaged, the "best foot forward" stage of dating has passed and you have learned many of the flaws and foibles of your future bride or groom. The stress of engagement and marriage planning will all but guarantee you will have a couple of good fights, and these will give you the opportunity to see if and how you can resolve them. Is he or she quick to forgive? Quick to ask forgiveness? Long to hold onto sins? Is that person beginning to be like Christ in forgiving those who sin against him or her?

Can you love and accept each other as you are? Some people enter marriage with the idea that their spouse is a project and that a little TLC will be all that person needs to be changed. While that may be the case, old patterns die hard. While you hope that God will continue that work of grace, the fact is there may

not be as much change as you'd like. Don't expect that your spouse will some day be a completely different (and better) person.

Why do you want to marry each other? Couples don't always pursue marriage for the best of reasons. Sometimes the reasons go no deeper than physical attraction. Sometimes it's an inordinate desire for companionship. Sometimes it's that they are feeling guilt for sexual involvement. No matter the case, couples must be clear on why they want to marry one another. Be sure to prioritize godly character over looks, friendship, and everything else!

What are your expectations of marriage? You've probably heard it said that a woman gets married expecting that her husband will change while a man gets married expecting that his wife will never change. The fact is, in some ways both partners will change and in some ways they probably will not. Are you prepared to stick it out for the long-haul with your future spouse as he or she is now? Are you willing to endure all kinds of trials with that person by your side?

How well do you know each other and yourself? Do you know yourself? Do you know your future spouse? A little pre-marriage counseling and planning can go a long way. Before you marry, ensure your pastor or a godly older couple has spent some time with you, whether formally or informally. Talk through these issues and any others that come to mind. A little knowledge can go a long way.