

Pre-marriage

Marriage is one of the biggest steps you'll ever take in your life.

It's normal for someone to jump head first into something without giving too much thought. When a person is in their late teens and early twenties they're constantly changing.

- 1) Have we discussed whether or not to have children, and if the answer is yes, who is going to be the primary care giver?
- 2) Do we have a clear idea of each other's financial obligations and goals, and do our ideas about spending and saving mesh?
- 3) Have we discussed our expectations for how the household will be maintained, and are we in agreement on who will manage the chores?
- 4) Have we fully disclosed our health histories, both physical and mental?
- 5) Is my partner affectionate to the degree that I expect?
- 6) Can we comfortably and openly discuss our sexual needs, preferences and fears?
- 7) Will there be a television in the bedroom?
- 8) Do we truly listen to each other and fairly consider one another's ideas and complaints?
- 9) Have we reached a clear understanding of each other's spiritual beliefs and needs, and have we discussed when and how our children will be exposed to religious/moral education?
- 10) Do we like and respect each other's friends?
- 11) Do we value and respect each other's parents, and is either of us concerned about whether the parents will interfere with the relationship?
- 12) What does my family do that annoys you?
- 13) Are there some things that you and I are NOT prepared to give up in the marriage?
- 14) If one of us were to be offered a career opportunity in a location far from the other's family, are we prepared to move?

15) Does each of us feel fully confident in the other's commitment to the marriage and believe that the bond can survive whatever challenges we may face?

No other human relationship can approach the potential for intimacy and oneness than can be found within the context of a marriage commitment. And yet no other relationship can bring with it as many adjustments, difficulties and even hurts. There's no way you can avoid these difficulties; each couple's journey is unique. But there is much you can do to prepare for that journey.

A wedding is not a marriage. A wedding is only the beginning of an undertaking that may or may not, someday, develop into a marriage.

A marriage is not a joining of two worlds, but an abandoning of two worlds in order that one new one might be formed. In this sense, the call to be married bears comparison with Jesus' advice to the rich young man to sell all his possessions and to follow Him.

If your partner seems unable or unwilling to change, you have to face the possibility that such behavior may never change. Marriage will not magically transform your partner's behavior. If you or your partner cannot behave in a way that makes you both happy, you are not the right partners for each other.

The moment you know that this is the person with whom you want to spend the rest of your life, you should start the engagement process. Once you know this, the nature of the relationship changes. You view actions differently, the pressure to have sex increases, and your relationship with others is affected. If you're considering getting engaged, write out the sentence *Staying married is hard work* fifty times. ...Though I say this with some humor, I think these points bear repeating: Don't underestimate the work involved, but don't panic either. (*Kay Cole James, What I Wish I'd Known before I Got Married*)

All relationships go through predictable patterns — the four up-and-down stages of love: Infatuation, Post-Rapture, Discovery, and Connection. Physiological changes account for some of the intense feelings brought on by initial attraction. Phenylethylamine, Dopamine, and Norpinephrine, for example, combine to create the natural high new lovers feel that helps them bond. This heady infatuation stage, glorious as it may be, is not what love is really about. (*Pat Love, The Truth About Love: The Highs, the Lows, and How You Can Make It Last Forever*)

Reasons to slow things down when you're still in the infatuation stage of love: When attraction, or romantic passion, occurs, we often lose our ability to think rationally. We may be oblivious to flaws our partner might possess. In this stage, couples spend many hours getting to know each other. If this attraction remains strong and is felt by both, the people usually enter the third stage of love: attachment. Attachment, or commitment, has to be strong enough to withstand problems and distractions. Again, chemicals are involved: Playing a key role in the attachment stage of love are oxytocin, vasopressin and endorphins.

A lot of chemicals surge through your brain and body when you're in love.

Estrogen and testosterone play roles in the sex drive. Without them, we might never venture into the “real love” arena. That initial giddiness that comes when we're first falling in love includes a racing heart, flushed skin and sweaty palms. Researchers say these are caused by the dopamine and norepinephrine our bodies are releasing:

- Dopamine is thought to be the “pleasure chemical,” producing a feeling of bliss. It is associated with euphoria, craving and addiction.
- Norepinephrine is similar to adrenaline and produces the racing heart and excitement. It heightens attention, short-term memory, hyperactivity and sleeplessness. Together, it is believed, these chemicals produce elation, intense energy, craving, loss of appetite and focused attention.

Researchers have also discovered that people in love have lower levels of serotonin, and also that neural circuits associated with the way we assess others are suppressed — possibly explaining why those in love “obsess” about their partner. ...The feelings of passionate love, however, do lose their strength over time. Studies have shown that passionate love fades quickly and is nearly gone after two or three years. This results in your being able to see your lover rationally, rather than through the blinding hormones of infatuation and passion. *(St. Petersburg Times, What is this Thing Called Love, 2/13/07)*

The Bible gives us one very specific standard for finding the right marriage partner: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” ([2 Corinthians 6:14](#)). Why is this so important to God? The reason is this: The believer and the unbeliever do not share the same values and future hope ([2 Corinthians 6:14b-15](#)). However, Christians are to be like-minded about important issues; if two Christians are committed to their marriage and to obeying Christ, they already possess the ingredients for success. Unfortunately, the world we live in is inundated with many different kinds of professing “Christians,” so it is important to use discernment before devoting yourself to the lifelong commitment of marriage.

Spend a sufficient amount of time together before discussing marriage. We suggest experiencing all “the seasons” of life together before committing for life. Watch how your potential partner reacts to different situations, how they behave around family and friends, and the people they associate with. Discuss issues such as morality, values, children and church affiliation; are you in agreement in these areas? Study God's Word together, especially the roles and duties of a husband and wife found in [Ephesians 5:22-31](#), [1 Corinthians 7:1-16](#), [Colossians 3:18-19](#), [Titus 2:1-5](#), and [1 Peter 3:1-7](#); are there any red flags or major doctrinal disagreements? Finally, we recommend premarital counseling for all engaged couples. *(Bill and Bridget Dunk, GTO Ministries, www.marriages.net)*

- Don't stop with the question, “Is this person a Christian?” You need to ask a much deeper question than that: **“Is this person I am thinking about marrying displaying the character and mind of Christ?”** I would look deep into the character of the individual. Make sure he or she loves the Lord with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength. And look for the “markers” that are displaying that love in

their lives. (From the web site for the ministry of Dr Gary Smalley at www.smalleyonline.com)

Marriage is more than sharing a life together; it's *building* a life together. What you do now is for both, and what is said now is for both.

But it's the merging of two lives *after* the wedding that will be the greatest undertaking you'll ever face in your life. It involves sacrifice, it involves work, and if you have children, it involves huge, huge amounts of responsibility.

Being in love does not mean that you shouldn't have to work to create a life. You're going to have to learn to share time, and space, and money, and effort and energy. You need to have a division of labor. Set goals for your children. There's a lot of work in a marriage and when you're thinking about it, make sure that you have goals so you're moving in one direction. Don't just flounder around. (Dr Phil McGraw)

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God. ([Ecclesiastes 5:2-7](#))

You must have the strength to be willing to end the engagement if you do not believe that marriage is the appropriate step.

Getting married is the boldest and most idealistic thing that most of us will ever do. (Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage*)

Too many couples fall in love, but they don't realize that **falling in love and getting married are two different steps.** It's not too difficult to fall in love with someone. But that doesn't mean that you should spend the rest of your lives married to each other. You may have "loved" each other through a certain season of your lives, but this relationship may not be one that would last through the rest of the seasons of your lives.

In taking marriage vows, we are doing what the Lord Himself did with Abraham: making a promise of love to one individual. In keeping this promise, we are actually mirroring the Lord's own faithfulness to all His people, a faithfulness designed from the beginning to spill over to the whole of mankind. (Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*)

While it's good to ask someone "Are you a Christian?" before you begin dating, it's better to ask, "Are you a follower of Jesus?" They may sound the same, but there's a huge difference.

Before you begin dating, find out about the person's character. Remember that character will also manifest itself in self-control. How does the person respond to frustration and disappointment?

We see the beauty of the ceremony but miss the beauty and wonder of the covenant. We sometimes also miss the fact that we are embarking on one of the most difficult journeys of our lives, one that does not begin on the wedding day. *(Kay Cole James, What I Wish I'd Known Before I Got Married)*

Thus, again, the issue isn't whether or not you are in love. The real question remains, "Is my love mature enough to lead to a commitment and a lasting relationship?" *(Josh McDowell, The Secret of Loving, pg. 240-241)*

If you have serious doubts and get married anyway, the odds are that you'll be sorry. Don't let your desire to get married overpower those doubts. *(From the book "Wonderful Marriage" by Lilo and Gerard Leeds)*

First, we need to be prepared to be a reasonably mature, emotionally healthy, and spiritually committed spouse. Second, we need to select a mate who is ready to be a reasonably mature, emotionally healthy, and spiritually committed spouse. And third, we need to be willing to face our needs to grow and become better people and well-adjusted marriage partners. *(Dr. Clyde Narramore, from the article: A Pre-Marriage Checklist)*

But if you've got 30 pounds of difference, there had better be 30 pounds of flexibility.

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Marriage is the single most wholehearted step they will ever take toward a fulfillment of Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as oneself. *(Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage)*

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Neither you nor your potential mate is going to be perfect, nor will you ever be. **The qualities we look at which go into becoming the right person easily can seem**

overwhelming. But bear in mind that not every aspect of each of them will be present or perfectly active all the time.

Often the female is infatuated with a “wedding” more than a marriage. The wedding is the ultimate showcase and the relationship then quickly subsides afterwards. Beware young men on this one!

Snared by the \$40 billion wedding industry machinery, brides and their relatives are mauled and squeezed until they come up with a sum large enough to buy a small car or two.

But it’s terribly tricky because a wedding is a fantasy magnet.

So many celebrate the wedding by putting forth months and months of work ahead of time into planning for and preparing for this sacred event.

But what about the marriage? What work and effort is put forth *ahead* of time to prepare for the *marriage* that’s about to begin after the wedding celebration?

And there are some men who can simply never, ever be married. They can have dogs and cats, but they can’t have a human in that house with them because when a man isn’t submitted to the Lordship of Christ, he can become irresponsible or abusive, and both of those will drive you crazy.

The problem comes into our married lives when we marry out of “neediness.”

When you’re marrying, you’re marrying all of the history of that person. (*Unknown*)

This is a good time to identify your family differences and your personal expectations of marriage that result from your unique upbringing. We all have expectations, even if we aren’t aware of them. Most of our expectations are not voiced—or even recognized—until they have been broken.