

The Road to Marriage

Premarital counseling

Welcome to the second step in the marriage process. It involves some traditional interaction with the potential officiate of your marriage, but it also involves some fun, non-traditional innovative experiences with others. That is described in more detail below.

For now, it's important that you understand that this step in the process does not guarantee or obligate this church or anyone at this church to perform your marriage ceremony. That decision will be evaluated during this process. Remember, we're interested in launching a relationship not just performing a ceremony.

1. Meetings

- Meeting #1 Work through Road to Marriage
- Meeting #2 (after two dinners) Work through Road to Marriage
- Meeting #3 (after two last dinners) Work through Road to Marriage and plan ceremony. Write and email personal vows (love letter)
- Meeting #4 Rehearsal, ceremony, reception
 - Preparation; Do you have a check list for marriage? License, etc.
 - Rehearsal; Date, location, time, marriage coordinator, etc.
 - Ceremony; location, colors, dress plan for officiate. Plan B for weather?
 - Reception; We are not the MC, you'll have to get someone else for this.

2. Personal background

- a. Share about your family. What positive/negative family of origin issues do you bring to the relationship?
- b. What is your academic and/or employment background?
- c. What hobbies do you have?
- d. What are you passionate about?
- e. What is your spiritual background?
- f. When did you realize your need for the grace of God?
- g. Are you trusting in the substitutional death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ alone for your eternal life?

3. Blueprint

- a. Ephesians 5:22-33 provides a description for a healthy marriage. Read this passage aloud.
 - i. Describe in your own words your role as explained in this passage.

ii. Do you see an Ephesians 5 person emerging in your fiancée? Explain.

4. Dinners

Ask four couples who follow Jesus, if you can have dinner with them to discuss a list of questions about marriage. They must be couples you don't know well enough to know how they will answer the questions. They should be couples who are at different stages of life (newly married, married with children, middle age, empty nesters). Ask your Pastor for names. Lasting friendships have developed from these dinners. The questions are the same for each couple. "What advice do you have for us about the following?"

- (a) Love
- (b) Communication
- (c) Work
- (d) Parenting
- (e) Faith and spiritual growth
- (f) The Scriptures
- (g) Church and ministry
- (h) Baggage; overcoming negative family of origin issues
- (i) Blessings; embracing positive family of origin issues
- (j) Finances
- (k) Sex
- (l) Surviving hardship and difficulties
- (m) Overcoming mistakes, failures
- (n) The role advice (mentoring, counseling, disciple making) plays in your marriage
- (o) Your keys to a healthy marriage?
- (p) What other advice do you have that we have not mentioned?
- (q) Do you have a favorite recipe to share with us?

5. Your "Ten Commandments"

Collect ten verses from the Bible about marriage, that relate to you both. Each of you contribute five to the list. No duplicates. These are your "Ten Commandments." They are verses that reflect YOUR marriage not verses about marriage in general. Verses about your hopes, dreams and aspirations. Frame them. Use only a concordance and cross references.

6. Friendship

Good marriages are founded on friendship. Describe what you have done to establish a friendship? These questions are taken from Marriage as found on Facebook.¹ This is a good site to subscribe to.

- a. **Do I genuinely like this person?** I know this seems redundant, but it's not. I talk to many couples who say they love each other, but when you get past all the romantic feelings, there's no friendship at the core of the relationship. Marry somebody you love to hang out with. Without a strong friendship, I believe a marriage is destined for failure. Don't just marry somebody you love... marry somebody you like!
- b. **Am I attracted to more than their looks?** Physical attraction is important but looks are going to change. That hot girl or guy you're staring at now is going to look a lot different in 40 years! You need to make sure you're drawn to who that person is, not just how that person looks.
- c. **Do I want this person to be the father or mother of my kids?** Before you get married, you need to ask more than "Do I want my kids to look like this person?" You need to ask, "Do I want my kids to be like this person?"
- d. **Can I be myself around this person?** This is huge. If you feel like you must be somebody else around your potential spouse, don't get married! There's nothing more exhausting than pretending to be someone you're not for someone's approval. Your spouse should bring out the best of who you are, not try to change who you are.
- e. **Does this person share and strengthen my faith?** God's design for marriage is that a husband and wife come together with Christ in the center. Without Him as the foundation, the marriage will crumble. Marry someone who not only shares your faith but also strengthens your faith. Your spouse should bring you closer to Jesus, not drag you farther away.
- f. **Do the people who love me most think we are a good match?** If your family and friends who love you the most, don't think you are good for each other, then please look past your feelings and weigh carefully if you're marrying the right person. You need a spouse who is going to strengthen your family bonds, not put a huge strain on them. If your family loves your fiancée, that's a great sign! If they don't, seriously reconsider your next step.

¹ Dave and Ashley Willis, "Stronger Marriages," Facebook Fan Page, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/strongermarriages/>.

7. Compatibility. It's the key to a lasting relationship. The default is to look for someone that is good for you. However, that is a selfish approach to marriage. A selfless approach looks at things the other way around and asks, "Am I good for this person?" Describe how you compliment the other person. Explain why you are good for one another. What experiences demonstrate that you are the right person for your future spouse? Keep in mind that my goal of this process is not just to determine IF you should get married but to make sure you STAY married.

8. Purity.

a. Past. Previous sexual relationships can impact future relationships. Explain your understanding of this statement. Describe the level of communication you have had with each other about this.

b. Present. The purer the relationship the easier it is to make important decisions, like reconsidering the relationship. The more physical and/or sexual involvement there is, the harder it is to make important decisions. What are you doing to make sure your relationship is pure and God honoring in the area of physical or sexual involvement? What are you doing to own the responsibility to keep things pure? Do you need make decisions right now to purify your relationship? Explain.

9. Master, Mission, Mate.

Healthy relationships proceed in this order:

a. Master. Are you living under the direction of the Lordship of Jesus Christ? A good measure of this is how much time you spend with God in his word and prayer.

b. Mission. Have you discovered your ministry direction in life? Have you served together? Have you done the type of ministry you're drawn to, together?

c. Mate. Discover someone who has already worked through the Master and Mission phase.

Tim Keller said, "Don't stop and look for a life mate, run as fast as you can towards the cross and reach out and grab the hand of someone nearby." Does this describe your relationship? Explain.

Describe your involvement in these three steps together.

10. Fear.

Fear of hurting another's feelings can prevent needed communication. Fear of confronting hampers a relationship from making necessary adjustments. It's been said, everyone has some level of fear going into marriage. What fears do you have about your marriage? Are you afraid to communicate about something? Do you resonate with any of the above statements? Are any true of you? Explain.

11. Right versus Wrong person.

Healthy relationships are built around two people being the right people for each other at the right time. The right person at the wrong time is the wrong person. Explain why you are the right people at the right time for each other?

12. Readiness.

Are you ready for marriage? A readiness for marriage doesn't just mean you are available, eager and looking forward to life together. It means you are ready to experience continued character development in the context of marriage. It means you are willing to let your marriage mature YOU. Author Rod Dempsey states it this way, "Being married...exposes who you really are. Being married is like looking into a "character mirror." If you are selfish and immature before you marry, then you will be selfish and immature after you marry. I agree with Martin Luther, who "viewed marriage as a school of character, whereby God uses the hardships of daily family life to sanctify us."² With this new perspective, describe why you are ready to get married.

13. Score.

Here is how this works. You can score a total of four points. Each of you can bring two points to the equation. One point for each parent who modeled what it means to follow Jesus. Out of a possible score of four, what is your total score? What does it matter? If you're not a four what should you do about it?

14. Color.

Here is how this works. People are one of two temperaments (colors). They are either Red or Blue. Red is a person who is quick to anger. They are hot when it comes to conflict. They are

² Dave Earley, Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013), 193, Kindle.

quick to blame and slow at accepting fault. They will prolong an argument until they win. They pursue rather than withdraw in a conflict. They seek a truth rather than compromise. They are fixers. They value being right.

Blue is a person who is slow to anger. They are cold when it comes to conflict. They are quick to accept blame (even it's wrong to do so) and slow to assign fault. They will end a conflict just to seek peace. They don't try and win an argument. They withdraw rather than pursue when it comes to conflict. They seek compromise rather than truth. They are processors. They value being loved.

What color are you? Why does it matter? Describe conflict you have experienced as a couple.

15. Partnership

I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible. 1 Corinthians 7:35 NLT

You should be looking for a person to partner with not just someone to be with. Marriage is all about serving the Lord together. It's about standing side by side and ministering to others, not standing face to face mesmerized by each other. Marriage is a couple's approach to fulfilling the Great Commission. Describe how you intend to fulfill the Great Commission together. How will you make disciples at partners?

16. Time apart

Absence makes the heart grow fonder...sometimes. Healthy relationships often have a chance to evaluate from a distance. Share about time you spent apart and what affect that had on your relationship? Are you willing to spend time apart with no contact or communication?

17. Heart

Healthy relationships are one in heart on these issues.

Describe your heart for God. Where are you in your spiritual journey? What do you do to keep your heart strong for God?

Describe your heart for each other. What makes you want to be partners for life?

Describe your heart for ministry. What is your ministry passion? What makes you think you will serve well together?

18. Read a book

Each of you read a copy of the same books on your own. Highlight the most important parts of the book. Read over each other's highlights and talk about them.

Bride: What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men, by Patrick Morely.³

Groom: What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women, by James Dobson.⁴

Both: The Meaning of Marriage, by Tim Keller⁵

19. Read How I saved my marriage.⁶

20. The Marriage Triangle (See attached)

Where are you in the triangle? Why does it matter?

21. The Spirit filled life.

Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.
Galatians 5:16 NLT

One in three Christian marriages end in divorce. That means one in three couples begin their marriage in love yet end it in hate. There are several factors that contribute to this process. Many of them have been covered above. Yet there is one principle that can save any marriage from ending, learning how to live the Spirit filled life.

³ Patrick M. Morley, What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999).

⁴ James Dobson, What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003).

⁵ Timothy Keller, The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God (Penguin Publishing Group, 2013).

⁶ Richard Paul Evans, "How I Saved My Marriage," accessed November 1, 2018, <http://www.richardpaulevans.com/2015/02/09/saved-marriage/>.

There are two voices that speak to you in any given situation, the flesh and the Holy Spirit. Our sin nature (the flesh) almost always speaks first and loudest. The Holy Spirit awaits his turn and speaks. He speaks with the words of love and truth.

The wise person refuses to listen to the flesh but chooses instead to listen to the Holy Spirit. The heart language of the Holy Spirit is Scripture. That is why it's so important to read and know the words of the Bible. If you don't know much Scripture you will have a hard time hearing what the Spirit says.

The Holy Spirit and the flesh have a different message. The Spirit guides towards love; the flesh towards truth. The goal of the Spirit is winning a heart, the goal of the flesh is winning an argument. The Spirit guides towards confession; the flesh guides towards blaming. The Spirit builds up; the flesh tears down. The Spirit loves; the flesh hates.

Learning to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit is the single most important thing about a healthy and lasting marriage.

Rate your ability to live the Spirit filled life?

22. God's Plan for Marriage

To the prospective husband:

- Describe how you will financially provide for your wife?
- Describe how you will spiritually lead your wife?
- Describe how you will emotionally nurture your wife?
- Describe your dreams and goals for your family?

To the prospective wife:

- Describe how you financially contribute to your husband?
- Describe how you will submit to your husband's spiritual leadership?
- Describe how you will respect your husband?
- Describe your dreams and goals for your family?

The Marriage Triangle

