

Real Relationships

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I. RELATIONAL WISDOM

1. Bad reasons for going steady/ getting married.

- Physical attraction: grounded in sexual desire or emotional lust.
- Emotional attraction: on the basis of projected daydreams and fantasies.
- Escape from home: If you have a bad home situation, let God grow you to glorify and thank Him in it before you get married. Then, when marriage is tough, you will have learned to stick it out.
- Escape from loneliness: Especially females often think a bad marriage is better than no marriage.
- Emotional dependency: where you think you need someone to lean on and take care of you (males in mother/son and females in father/daughter like marriages).
- Desire for social acceptability: that results in dating or marriage for the purpose of making parents or friends happy.
- Desire for social desirability: that results in finding someone to help you meet cultural standards of wealth, beauty, job, athletic ability, education level, etc.

2. Good things to consider if you plan to go steady or get married.

A. God's glory – the most important question is whether it would glorify God (Matthew 5:16, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 2 Corinthians 5:9)

- Two sold out Christians will be able to climb any hurdles – and there will be hurdles to climb in all marriages.
- Between two sold out Christians, success in marriage is close to 100%. It's hard to assess whether you are truly sold out for Christ when you are still dependant on your parents, but you can practice by giving time in faithful worship/service to the Lord and by spending your money as if it were His.

B. Family Background – How would the meshing of our family backgrounds result in God being glorified?

- Typically, poor adjustment runs in families – but God's grace and Holy Spirit's power can change us.
- Children whose parents divorced have a higher probability of divorce in their marriages. If your parents divorced, you must recognize that the interactive patterns you have observed are not God's way (Malachi 2:13-16).
- People who evidence stability are more likely to date people who evidence stability, while those who are unstable are more likely to date those who are unstable.

C. Social Class/Education – Would our backgrounds make it easier to have a stable and happy marriage?

- Significant differences in education levels of attainment create differences of perspective. Bigger problems occur when female is above male than when male is above female.
- The more the economic, social and educational backgrounds differ, the higher the probability of divorce.

D. Religious Orientation - Sold out Christians date sold out Christians.

- If you love God, your heart will break if your marriage doesn't glorify Him and your children aren't raised to be sold out for Him. When religious orientations differ, the probability of divorce increases.
- The problem is that college students don't see themselves as highly committed, but religious commitment that was often latent at time of marriage comes back after children arrive.

E. Courtship – it is unwise to rush into marriage with hurdles that have not been overcome or problems have not been resolved.

- Conflict in the relationship: The absence of significant conflict is positive. Dating relationships without emotional turmoil result in lower probability of divorce. If emotional turmoil characterizes a relationship, consider the wisdom of terminating, because conflict will increase upon marriage.
- If abuse occurs while dating – terminate immediately!
- Permission of parents: Visit and get to know each other's families prior to marriage. The more conflict exists with in-laws, the more problems there will be in marriage.
- Emotional ties to parents are deep and strong, and cannot be run away from. Anger and rebellion towards parents must be worked through prior to marriage.
- Both sets of parents should be in favor of the marriage.

F. Age – upon marriage relates with probability of divorce.

- The younger the couple at time of marriage, the higher the probability of divorce. Couples who marry late will also have problems, but are more likely to try and work them out.
- If you have doubts as to whether you would glorify God in marriage now, get older. Longer dating before marriage equates with better chance of success, depending on your age.
 - For couples 18-21, 3 yrs. of dating has better results.
 - For couples 21-23, 2 yrs. of dating has better results.
 - For couples 23 and up, 1 yr. of dating is plenty.
- College students who meet on campus should not get engaged until spending at least one summer apart. Spending too much time together eliminates wise objectivity in evaluating the relationship. It is a point of maturity to be able to spend time apart and still continue the relationship.

G. Sexual experience –before marriage negatively impacts marriages.

- Sexual experience before marriage is sin. Involvement in sex before marriage is related to emotional instability, and a lack of understanding what love is.
- Those who abstain from sex before marriage enjoy sex more in marriage, and have a higher probability of marital happiness.
- Past sexual sin that has been confessed and forgiven will not impact a marriage negatively.

3. Personality factors that impact relationships.

A. Characteristics that affect relationships positively include:

- Emotional stability:

How do I (or how do we) react to major stress? Do I (or we) get frazzled and undone, or can I (or we) face difficulties and learn from them?

- Vulnerability:

Do I (or we) we share inner thoughts and feelings truthfully? Does a wall go up where there are prolonged times of silence? Do I (or we) work to create a climate wherein I (or we) are both safe to be vulnerable?

- Capacity for conflict resolution:

Do I (or we) have the ability to work things out with my (or our) parents and siblings? In our relationship, do we work things out so both of us are happy?

- Positive outlook on life:

Do I (or we) have a sense of humor that gives the ability to laugh at myself (or ourselves)? Do I (or we) choose to find and point out the bright side?

B. Characteristics that affect relationships negatively include:

- Irresponsibility or laziness:

Am I (or are we) able to get and keep jobs, or do I (or we) faithfully complete classes? Do I (or we) try to do the least I (or we) can to get by? Laziness in schoolwork, or the work force, will show up in laziness in relationships.

- Victim mentality:

Do I (or we) think people are out to get me (or us)? Do I (or we) blame others for our problems? Do I (or we) place expectations on others, and get upset when they do not meet them?

- Negative attitude:

Is conversation characterized by pessimism? Is there a critical spirit that talks about the faults of others? Chronic complainers eventually turn on each other.

- Deceitfulness:

Don't try to dig up the past, rather look at today. Do I (or we) say one thing but do something different? Do I (or we) live in a fantasy world?

- Acceptance of serious psychological problems: (such as depression, phobias or manias). This is different from the recognition of personal negativity, fear, and a lack of self control. When a person admits his or her sin, there is forgiveness and God graciously grants repentance.