

Marriage & Family

Mate Selection

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. In thinking about mate selection, it's important to note that the Bible talks much about mate selection.
 - 1. When Adam was alone, we read, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Gn 2:18).
 - a. I do not know the different ways that Eve was especially suited to be Adam's helper.
 - b. Yet, in some way, the Lord carefully chose the woman for the man.
 - 2. Gn 24:12-21.
 - 3. Ex 36:15-16.
 - 4. Hos 1:2-3.
 - 5. "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39).
- B. While these texts are diverse and some are admittedly quite unusual, they demonstrate the need for careful mate selection.
 - 1. They demonstrate the need for careful because God always seemed to have some idea as to whom his people should marry.
 - 2. Let's think about some important factors in mate selection.

II. UNDESIRABLE TRAITS.

- A. There are several undesirable traits in future spouses.
- B. To help gauge undesirable traits, ask yourself these questions:(1)

Does your partner:

1. Have extreme views on political, family, religious, or world affairs?
2. Encourage you to develop your talents and progress, or does he/she want to keep you hidden in a closet, away from the rest of the world?
3. Allow you time for yourself, or is your partner possessive?
4. Encourage you to have your own interests, your own life too?
5. Allow you to spend time with your friends, or is your partner jealous of your friends and the time you spend with them?
6. Compare you to past boyfriends or girlfriends?
7. Take an interest in other people, or is your partner selfish with his/her time and pursuits?
8. Exhibits behaviors that suggest that the world revolves around him/her?
9. Exhibit behaviors that suggest personality faults such as deep insecurity, excessive jealousy, uncontrollable temper, and inflexibility?
10. Exhibit character flaws such as being condescending, or lying, cheating, stealing, arrogance, etc.?
11. Fail to admit mistakes and can never admit to being “wrong?” (Note: If your partner fails to see mistakes now, he/she won’t be able to see them or admit to them later on in the relationship either. Look for humility and meekness, but personal confidence, as well).
12. Often exhibit negative or critical traits?
13. Complain about your family or spending time with your family?
14. Seek to build relationships with your family or does your partner lack the skills to do so?
15. Have difficulty relating to his/her family? (Note: This is a huge “red flag” that your partner will have difficulty in his/her own family relationships later on).

16. Enjoy work or is your partner prone to laziness and irresponsibility?
17. Have the television on all the time at his/her apartment or home?
18. Criticize your personal appearance?
19. Tell you that you need to lift weights, go jogging, or join a health club?
20. Make fun of your weight or other bodily traits?
21. Verbally, physically, or emotionally abuse you?
22. Tear you down and then try to come back a few days later as “Mr. Nice Guy,” promising that it will never happen again?
23. Need to make major social or emotional changes in his/her life?
24. Promise that he/she will change after the wedding?
25. Have some of the same goals, dreams, and aspirations as you do?

C. There are some other things we need to think of, as well.(2)

1. Is your future spouse a Christian?
 - a. We have already read the instructions to the Israelites not to marry the pagans in the land they were going to inhabit. Notice what happened to Solomon because he did marry pagans: 1 Ki 11:1-5.
 - b. Psychological research tells us that this often occurs.
 - Three researchers summed up the evidence in this way: “If religion is an important factor in human affairs, then we should expect a strain toward similarity in religious affiliation in that most intimate of human relationships, the married pair in the nuclear family.”(3)
 - In one study of denominational mobility, the researcher discovered that a good plurality of those who switched denominations left the denomination of their birth for the denomination of their spouse.(4) Forty-one percent of the female switchers changed to their husband’s

denomination, while thirty-nine percent of the male switchers changed to their wife's denomination.

- In another study, 84 percent of subjects were able to achieve unity in the family's religious practices.(5)
- In yet another study, thirty-three percent of those who switched denominations said the most important factor in so doing was the influence of their spouse.(6)

c. Why is it important for Christians to marry other Christians?

- Christians have a different commitment to marriage than to non-Christians.
 - Of course, we Christians understand that marriage is permanent. When the Pharisees asked Jesus why Moses allowed divorce, Jesus answered, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Mt 19:8-9).
 - A non-Christian may not have that same commitment to marriage. Thus, when things get difficult, non-Christians would be much more likely to leave the other spouse.
- There is certainly that danger mentioned above that we can lose our salvation through a non-Christian spouse's influence.
- Children. If, as we'll argue later in the semester, the most important role a parent has is shaping their child's eternal destiny, what is going to happen if you marry a non-Christian. There are many studies which demonstrate that children from religiously mixed marriages have a much more difficult time remaining faithful to Christ.

2. Is your future spouse from a broken home?
 - a. I do not mean to imply that you shouldn't date or marry a person from a broken home.
 - b. However, it is true that children of divorced parents have a higher divorce rate. That statistic is particularly true of men.
3. How physically intimate have you been?
 - a. Has there been genital to genital contact? Is there any "surprise" for the honeymoon?
 - b. Couples where the girl is pregnant at marriage have much lower success than where the girl is not pregnant.
4. What is the social class of your future spouse?
 - a. It is a general rule that the higher the social class, the higher the success rate for marriages.
 - b. It is also true that the more similar the partners are in social class, the greater the chance of success in marriage.
5. What is the level of education? As years of education increases, divorce decreases.
6. How old is your future spouse? The older the age at first marriage, the greater the success of marriage.
7. How long have you known your future spouse?
 - a. The general rule is that the longer you have known your future spouse, the greater the chance of success.
 - b. Generally, courtships of less than a year have a great probability of divorce.

III. WHAT DO YOU WANT IN A MATE?

- A. Complete the "Choosing a Mate by Making a List" worksheet. Discuss.

- B. There are several keys to building a strong marriage.(7) We can actually turn these keys into questions and think about whether or not our future spouse has these qualities:
1. Commitment. Is your partner willing to commit himself/herself to marriage? How do you know?
 2. Positive thinking. Is your partner willing to think positively about you? How do you know?
 3. Affection. Is your partner willing to show affection in ways you need it shown? What types of affection has been demonstrated?
 4. Kindness. How kind is your partner toward you?
 5. Understanding/respect. How does your partner demonstrate understanding/respect to you?
 6. Shared purpose. Do you and your partner have a shared purpose in life? In marriage? In childrearing?
- C. Some other questions to ask:(8)
1. Why am I getting married? Why am I choosing to share my life, my resources, and my dreams with this person? What has brought me to this point in my life? Why is this the time?
 2. Do my parents, friends, peers, or co-workers support my choice or are they concerned for my welfare? How do I feel about their apprehension? Have I really made a good choice for me or have I compromised my values because I hope things will get better?
 3. What does commitment mean to me? Do I have a role model to follow who helps me see how to navigate through the tough times?
 4. What changes do I expect to see after the wedding?
 5. How do I handle conflict? Am I willing to face the situation and discuss options, or do I ignore the facts and hope they will go away?
 6. Can I talk about my anger or disappointment with my partner and can we reach a compromise? Can we come to an agreement about how to deal with our problems—a way to communicate that does not include violence, put-downs, or walking away without resolving the issues?

7. What are the common goals and dreams we want to achieve? Where will we live? How many children do we want? Who will clean the toilet and take out the trash? Who will handle the money? How many credit cards will we have? How much money will we save from each paycheck? What color will the bedroom be? Where will we spend the holidays?
8. What kind of marriage relationship do I want? How happy am I in this relationship? Who is responsible for my happiness? How much fun do we have on our dates? Do I have fond memories of our courtship?

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1. Mark Ogletree and Victor W. Harris, "The TOP 25 Signs to Watch Out For," <http://www.utahmarriage.org/index.cfm?id=Yyr0m6yXWf&print=YES> (accessed January 28, 2008).
 2. Some of this material comes from my dissertation, and some comes from Bill Bagents, "Predictors of Marital Success," Heritage Christian University, unpublished manuscript.
 3. Nicholas Babchuk, Harry J. Crockett, Jr., and John A. Ballweg, "Change in Religious Affiliation and Family Stability," *Social Forces* 45 (1967): 552.
 4. Frank Newport, "The Religious Switcher in the United States," *American Sociological Review* 44 (1979): 547.
 5. Babchuk, Crockett, and Ballweg, "Change in Religious Affiliation," 553.
 6. Dean R. Hoge and Thomas P. O'Conner, "Denominational Identity from Age Sixteen to Age Thirty-Eight," *Sociology of Religion* 65 (2004): 81.
 7. Tabitha Staier, "Keys to Building a Strong Marriage: Introduction," Mississippi State University Extension Service, Information Sheet 1787.
 8. These questions come from Melinda J. Hill, "Before You Say 'I Do,'" The Ohio State University Extension, FLM-FS-1-01.