

PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

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INTRODUCTION

This presentation aims to help individuals and couples at two (2) stages:-

- 1) before choosing a life partner
- 2) during preparation for marriage

You will be assisted to help others at these stages learn how to handle the problems to be found in marriage. Couples need to develop strategies to face these issues even before they get married. Sometimes, by looking at the difficulties to expect, some persons rightly decide that they are not yet mature enough for marriage, or that they have made the wrong choice in a partner.

Even when the marriage gets off to a good start, couples tend to forget after a while about the pre-marital counselling received. So they need to be constantly reminded through marriage enrichment, educational activities and further counselling, about how to deal with the likely problems that will arise.

Every marriage has its problems and there are certain critical factors that decide whether the marriage succeeds or fails. Most marriages fail because the couples involved have not been educated with regard to what marriage involves. No couples should take the struggles of marriage for granted, they must prepare themselves if they are to overcome.

We will look at problems in marriage, from the stage of finding a mate to the latter years in life.

FINDING A MATE

The young adult, in seeking to find a mate for life, experiences too much **social pressure**, ridicule, as well as attempts by others to “make a match”. With these factors against them, they are faced with the danger of settling down too quickly. Young persons should be allowed by parents and counsellors to experience several relationships for a while if they wish and are able to, so that they may choose wisely. As well, they should be allowed to make their own choices. Marrying to suit one’s family preferences can sometimes bring disaster.

Problems can exist in **finding the right mate**. Young people should be involved in healthy group activities, such as sports, community and church youth groups, where they can meet several persons of the opposite sex. They will need educational group discussions and counselling on what to look for in a mate.

Basically, a prospective partner should be mature and this involves the features below:-

Clients can rate themselves and their prospective partner as to the extent of the presence of these features:-

- 1 = hardly present
- 2 = present to a mild degree
- 3 = present to a moderate degree
- 4 = present to a marked degree

- 1) A willingness to **respond selflessly** to the needs of others;
- 2) A sense of **responsibility**;
- 3) Making some **basic achievement** in life, however small;
- 4) A **willingness to admit weaknesses and to change** views and behaviour for the better;
- 5) An ability to be **self confident and independent**, i.e. not leaning on one's partner too much;
- 6) A willingness to **be objective** in the way one sees others and makes decisions.
- 7) **Seeing all members of the opposite sex as persons** rather than sex objects.
- 8) **Honesty and truthfulness** in all one's dealings.

Self	Prospective partner
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Without these features, one's mate will never be able to cope with the problems expected in marriage. Of course, one must also strive to **be mature on one's own part**.

DECIDING HOW FAR TO GO

Again clients can rate themselves and their prospective partner as to the extent of the presence of these (potential) problems and conflicts:-

While dating, your adults will face problems such as:

- 1) **How far to go** in sexual behaviour.

Engaged couples should be

- 2) **Clear on their values about premarital sex.**

One partner should not give in to the other because of pressure or temptation.

For those who are religious,

- 3) **Failure to please God in chastity** at this stage can bring guilt.

Unwanted pregnancy and hasty marriages can also result.

Couples thinking of getting married need to be objective in deciding whether

or not they are the best choice for each other. This is one purpose of the engagement period. Sexual activity can be habit forming. Whereas sex contributes to a harmonious marriage, during courtship it can prevent persons from being objective and logical in making the big final decision.

Too often courting couples,

- 4) Because they **put too much stress on emotional and sexual**

Self	Prospective partner
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involvement, neglect being objective about choosing each other.

Self	Prospective partner
Of course many of these marriages fail. A basic safety rule in courtship is to: 5) avoid being in a position where one can easily lose control. Here, engaged couples need to use their common sense about where they meet, and the degrees of intimacy they engage in. 6) How much do we believe that <i>God has the power of His Spirit dwelling in us to enable us to enjoy the company of our partner and early stages of physical romance (e.g. kissing and hugging) without needing to give in to the urges</i> to go into deeper play such as genital fondling or go all the way?	

THE PROBLEMS OF MARRIAGE

When a partner is chosen, then comes the inevitable problems of marriage itself. These include **general problems** such as - sexual adjustment, dealing with in-laws, managing money, running the home, the working wife, sharing of interests and recreation, having different friends, family planning, and agreeing on how to raise children.

Some couples will have **special problems** such as - unfaithfulness, alcoholism, gambling, not sharing each other's religion or denomination, **staying out late** and **domestic abuse** (verbal, emotional, physical, sexual).

All the above problems must be discussed in detail and decision made as to how they will be handled in the future. Otherwise, the marriage will be endangered. The engaged couple must be clear about their values in each area.

APPROACHES TO DISCUSSING TOGETHER

In order for couples to adequately agree on strategies of approaching the problems of marriage, certain approaches to discussion are necessary. These are as follows:-

- 1) Spending **regular times in communication** by talking together;
- 2) Trying to **discuss all potential marital problems** that arise rather than leaving some alone to solve themselves;
- 3) Being willing to say "**I am sorry**" and "**I forgive you**", rather than being proud and keeping malice.
- 4) **Working out how decisions are made.** This includes the questions of who, what, when, where and so on.
- 5) Sharing in **Bible reading, prayer and exhorting** one another so that God may guide one's decisions.

Without these approaches to discussing together communication fails and disaster-producing problems will be brought into an unsound marriage.

Rate these on yourselves.

PICKING UP WARNING SIGNS

It is not uncommon that couples who are engaged or going steady can begin to experience some of the common problems or the more serious problems that are possible. The chapter on “Critical Issues in Marital Success and Failure” has some rating scales for these problems. It is suggested that both members of the couple complete these questionnaire sections and compare notes with each other. This is best handled in the context of what I refer to as PRE-DECISION COUNSELLING - not just *premarital counselling*. One first has to decide: “do I go steady with this person?” or “do I get engaged with this person?” before even making preparations for a wedding.

Warning signs of future difficulties mean that:

- 1) one or both partners are blind to significant problems.
- 2) the problems are in the *special problems* category (see above).
- 3) one or both partners are reluctant to get systematic and sustained professional help.

If a person does not show the *willingness or ability to change* before a marriage, it is hardly likely that he or she will develop it just by getting married.

Persons can be warned by these signs. If so, they need to decide whether they can remain friends by:

- 1) having some serious discussions about the common problems.
- 2) getting professional help.
- 3) dissolving the relationship and sparing each other the unnecessary pain due to incompatibility - and seeking to grow while seeking other opportunities - relationships.

Individuals need not create warning signs when there are none. Persons need to avoid looking for the *perfect partner* - the other individual may be looking for the perfect partner too!

CONCLUSION

The general problems of marriage will emerge in most marriages, and the special problems in several. Individuals prepare themselves by choosing a mature mate as well as one with whom they are otherwise compatible. They must decide how far to go sexually in terms of Christian morality and ensuring objectivity in decision making.

Couples considering marriage need to identify the common problems of marriage and determine together the strategies they will adopt to handle these issues, using certain approaches in discussion. Sometimes some engaged couples find that there are such differences of views about these problems and such differences of maturity, that despite how much they love each other, the marriage will not work.

Helping a couple to break an engagement out of wisdom is sometimes necessary to prevent untold hardships for the rest of their lives.

A pastor is not being adequately responsible if he holds a wedding without adequate efforts at pre-marital counselling. He must speak honestly if he feels the marriage will not work. Engaged couples are equally responsible for seeking such counselling from a pastor or psychological counsellor.

For couples who become married, they need constantly to discuss the strategies that they need to use in dealing with problems both expected and unexpected. Here constant family life education and marriage enrichment activities are necessary.

It is hoped that these ideas and insights will be useful to professionals in helping one's client with premarital preparation . Individuals can use this guide in discussions with the person they are considering to be their partner and even before they choose a partner.