

What Do I Look For In A Spouse?

Introduction. I know that no spouse is perfect — but I don't want you to be in a bad marriage either. God uses even devastatingly hard relationships for His purposes, yet I know that because God places value on every person, being in a bad relationship is not His desire for you.

Are there “warnings” or “red flags” we can look out for that can help us avoid marrying into an bad relationship? This is an important question.

Almost always red flags can be waving, but very few young people are willing to acknowledge them when passions are waving higher. We've all experienced this either in our lives or as we've observed the lives of other people. It's all about the here and now. The feelings. The romance. The dream. The excitement. The longings fulfilled.

Nobody wants to be practical and think about uncomfortable parts — because it's dull! But the fact is, if a young person refuses to look carefully at the other person from all angles, taking time to observe them objectively and get the input of other objective observers, the feelings, romance, dream, excitement, and fulfilled longings will end abruptly at the altar. And then there's the long “and they lived unhappily ever after.”

How can you avoid this? Remember that time is your ally. Take advantage of time in order to see what a potential mate is like under pressure. And although they might be super nice, worship the ground you walk on, be very religious, do good deeds, or be incredibly charming, how they handle themselves will tell you everything.

I. How Do They Handle Negative Feedback?

- A. An ungodly person cannot accept negative feedback. They will chafe. At the beginning of the relationship, you might just see them grow a little cold and silent. But as the relationship progresses you will see anger. Some will express their anger with words and shouting while others may even use physical violence (Proverbs 9:7-9). Others will make you feel guilty for criticizing their behavior.
- B. Does your partner respond humbly to the negative feedback you give (Proverbs 12:1; 15:32)? If your answer is rarely or never — you are probably living in an emotionally destructive relationship. A healthy person accepts negative feedback and grows from it.
- C. If the person you are dating appreciates the feedback you give them, and if you actually see them implementing change, you may be working with some healthy spouse material. The Bible calls this humility (Proverbs 22:4; 1 Peter 5:5), and it makes for good relationships.

II. How Do They Handle Your Needs?

- A. A thoughtless person has very little or no empathy (although they can fake it quite nicely when necessary). Empathy is identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives.
- B. A thoughtless person can't put themselves in another person's shoes. If you lose someone or something you love, this type of person can't relate. They want you to get over it. If you are sick, that cramps their style. When you are no longer able to meet their needs, it annoys them. If you are sad about something or mad

about something or glad about something, they can't enter into your sorrow, angst, or joy. Life is about them, not you.

- C. A healthy person demonstrates empathy and concern for the needs of others (Philippians 2:4; Colossians 3:12). They are interested in your life, your thoughts, and your hopes. What makes you tick. They want to learn more about you, and you fascinate them, not because of what you offer to their existence (sexually or otherwise), but because of who you are as part of God's creation and a fellow heir of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7).

III. How Do They Handle Differences Of Opinion?

- A. A bad marriage candidate has to have their way. Lots of young women have been taught that the man gets to have his way, and she is godly insofar as she gives it to him. The Bible calls this selfishness, and it destroys relationships (Romans 2:8; 1 Corinthians 10:24; 13:5).
- B. A healthy person is willing to compromise and negotiate when that is appropriate and necessary. He is willing to let you have your way when he knows it is important to you. He is respecting and honoring the desires of others and taking them into consideration because it delights him to do so (1 Peter 3:7). Healthy boundaries make healthy relationships.

IV. How Do They Handle Communication?

- A. Do they use communication tactics that have the potential to blow up the relationship? Here are several:
 1. Does he tell jokes that let you "in" on what he believes about different subjects (i.e. racial jokes, sexual jokes, dumb blonde jokes, etc.)? And when you ask him about it he says, "I was only joking!"
 2. Does she avoid giving straight answers?
 3. Does he use guilt to get you to do what he wants?
 4. Does she want you and others to pity her?
 5. Do you feel intimidated by him?
 6. Does he expect you to read his mind?
 7. Does she blame you every time something goes wrong in the relationship?
 8. Does she say negative things about your family, friends, or job?
 9. Is she constantly correcting you? Is she critical of you, even in small ways?
 10. Does he tell you how to wear your hair, what type of clothing he likes, how he wants you to act, look, or behave?
 11. Have you ever caught her in a lie, a half-lie, or a lie by omission? If she lies at all, she is a liar, and you are in for a life of total confusion and chaos. Lying is a relationship killer.
 12. Does he go out of his way to tell you that he would never look at porn, cheat on you, lie to you, drink, etc.? Someone who is hiding something will do that. Someone who isn't doing those things probably won't even think of saying it because it isn't an issue in their lives.
- B. A good spouse's communication will not be corrupt (Ephesians 4:29; 5:4). It will be righteous, encouraging, and edifying. We need to marry people who will build us up, like Barnabas did the early church (Acts 11:22-24).

V. How Do They Handle Themselves?

- A. Is he chronically late to everything? This indicates he cares little for the time of others and feels entitled to show up any time he wants because it's a control issue (Romans 12:3).
- B. Does she want to control your time and get jealous when you spend time with other people or cultivate other relationships (James 3:16)?
- C. Is he constantly changing jobs because he was mistreated or unappreciated at work (2 Thessalonians 3:10)?
 - 1. Get out now. He is unable to take responsibility for his behaviors.
 - 2. If others are ending their relationships with him, you'll want to end yours too.
- D. How does she treat family members? Servers at restaurants? People in traffic? Is she honoring and patient (Proverbs 15:18)?
- E. Is he open and honest about his past, or is it like pulling teeth to get him to open up and share anything (Colossians 3:9)?
 - 1. If he is vague or reluctant to share private things from his past, then he is hiding from you.
 - 2. This might seem fine at the beginning of a relationship, but never tie the knot with someone who has something to hide.
- F. Is he a good steward of his money, time, talents, and resources (Luke 16:11)? If not, do you really think he'll be a good steward of his future family?
- G. What is her motive for doing things?
 - 1. Does she seem motivated to do what's right in order to avoid negative consequences, to manage an image, or to gain the admiration (or sympathy) of others?
 - 2. Is she motivated by fostering obedience to God and proclaiming the praises and glory of God in her life (Matthew 7:21; 1 Peter 2:9)?
- H. Does he respect your boundaries?
 - 1. Does he feel entitled to invade them and eradicate them from your life? No respect now usually equals no respect later.
 - 2. If you're trying to remain pure and present yourself as a "chaste virgin" (2 Corinthians 11:2), does he support you? Or does he constantly attempt sexual immortality with you (cp. 1 Corinthians 7:1)?

VI. How Do They Handle Conflict?

- A. Do they say they're sorry when they hurt you or others (Psalm 51:3-4)? If they do, does a change in behavior follow (Psalm 51:13-15)? Or are they just saying sorry to get you off their back temporarily? Do they make excuses for their behavior or shift the blame to you or someone else?
- B. Do they want to get to the bottom of a disagreement and take responsibility for their part in a conflict, or do they prefer to sweep it under the rug? Are they good at taking responsibility for any outcomes of their personal choices (cp. Genesis 3:12)? Don't fall in love with childish behavior (1 Corinthians 13:11).
- C. Do you feel that after a conflict has occurred and been dealt with, that there is satisfaction and a feeling of well being for both of you? Or do you feel confused and uncertain? This is a very bad sign. Conflicts are good and should bring you closer — not make you guilt-ridden and bewildered.

Conclusion. This list of questions was compiled from feedback from people who were in years-long abusive relationships. These are what they would tell you to look out for if they could.

Nobody will have all of these traits. You may only observe a few. You want to look for patterns of behavior that are controlling or manipulative. Trust your instincts and observations. If your observations are telling you that something isn't right, give it more time and involve other objective people who will help you figure it out. Even then, the ungodly behavior may be so subtle that it is difficult to detect for a while. Ask God to give you wisdom (James 1:5), but then listen when it comes along.

Let's finally think about where you are. Are you desperate to get married? Do you feel unworthy of a good spouse? Do you feel unworthy of love? You need spiritual health. You are worthy of love, and you are worthy of a good person. Don't settle for the wrong one just to be able to say you belong to someone. You are a treasure. You are a beloved child of the King. Raise your head and don't accept anything less than a good (not perfect, but humble), honest, spiritual person.

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