Choosing A Spouse

**Introduction.** A consistent and irrefutable mountain of research has shown, reaching back to the 1970s and beyond, that marriage strongly boosts every important measure of well-being for men, women, and children. Pick any measure you can imagine: overall physical and mental health, income, savings, employment, educational success, general life contentment and happiness, sexual satisfaction, even recovery from serious disease, healthy diet, and exercise. Married people rate markedly and consistently better in each of these, and so many more, compared to their single, divorced, and cohabiting peers. Thus, marriage is an essential active ingredient in improving one’s overall life prospects, regardless of class, race, or educational status.

All of this backs up the claim that God knew what He was doing when He instituted marriage. He knew it would be better for us to be together (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). But that means young people shouldn’t ignore important factors in picking a mate for life. Parents and older adults can’t hesitate to issue warnings about the realities of what makes a good companion (Proverbs 12:15; Ephesians 6:1-4).

What we never want for anyone is for them to get into a bad marriage. Every marriage is different, but in order for you to know what’s in store for you in a bad marriage, here’s a few telltale signs that a relationship is moving in the wrong direction:

- You feel contempt for your spouse.
- Your spouse makes you feel bad about yourself.
- You feel controlled by your spouse.
- You stay only to minimize negative impacts on your family.
- You might be having an emotional affair.
- You’ve stopped arguing entirely.
- Your body language shows disinterest.

Does this sound like something you want to wake up to every day? If not, the five guidelines we’re about to discuss are not intended to discourage marriage until you find the “perfect” person. All happily married couples can testify to the change and growth that’s been necessary to the success of their relationship. These guidelines can at least help weed out those who are unacceptable for marriage.

I. **Pick A Mate Who Has Spiritual Goals And Values**

   A. God’s way and the world’s ways have always been in conflict. God insists that man live by principles of righteousness and the world follows the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (Acts 10:35; 1 John 2:15-16). God demands that His people reject the world, deny themselves, and follow Christ (Luke 9:23).

   B. The difference creates practical, moral problems when one of the two is a Christian. What kind of recreation will the two engage in? Will he be satisfied with a wife who won’t wear a bikini to the beach with him on vacation? Will he be upset when she refuses to watch crude, inappropriate movies? What kind of TV will he let the children watch and what kind of language will he use in front of them? Will he drink, keep alcohol in the house, and get abusive when he has had one too many? Will he gamble away the family’s hard-earned money?
C. But is not just a problem of the “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21). It is a problem of duties assigned by God. What about a man who does not accept his role as a husband and father to love and cherish his wife and children as his own body (Ephesians 5:28-29)? What about the woman who rejects the duties of subjection, motherhood, and keeping the home (Ephesians 5:22-23; 1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:3-4)?

D. Find someone who will pray for you (James 5:16), encourage you (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and inspire you to be a better person (Luke 10:42). The ways of the world have little good to offer marriage, and couples who think marriage can survive the worldly values and goals of greed, pleasure, and power are ignoring both the wisdom of God and the experience of man.

II. Pick A Mate Who Shows Signs Of Maturity
A. Marriage is not for children. That’s why so many teenage marriages end in divorce. Children are usually selfish and seek what’s in their best interest. This can be fatal in friendships with peers, but even more so to a permanent and intimate relationship like marriage.

B. Couples have to work out major problems before they wed. Partners who are unwilling to correct flagrant flaws before marriage are less likely to change afterwards. Sure, there are exceptions — but don’t count on it.
1. Not only must you deal with issues of whether or not a mate is a Christian or if they are living faithfully, but there are also problems like obsession with sports, discourtesy, unkindness, temper tantrums, physical abuse, lying, etc.

C. If successful marriages have one secret, it is the indispensable quality of unselfishness (Philippians 2:2-4).
1. In some respects, adjustments and compromise are vital to happy marriages. What one mate refuses to correct, the other must accept. What one cannot accept, the other must correct.
2. This kind of “give and take” is an integral part of a happy existence (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). “Marry to make your mate happy” is a simple rule that responsible adults understand and young people should discuss before they wed (Matthew 23:11).

D. Finally, maturity recognizes the importance of trust in a relationship, and doesn’t allow it to be overshadowed or excused on the basis of “love.” A potential spouse has to be someone you can trust completely with all your mind, body, heart, and soul to become and be the kind of spouse God requires.

III. Pick A Mate Who Can Offer More Than Physical Beauty
A. “Beauty is skin deep” is a fact that all humans rebel against. The fact that older men are leaving their wives for young, more attractive women shows that it is not limited to youth. Think how vulnerable teens and young adults are to this false standard for choosing a companion (Proverbs 31:30).

B. All people in their sound moments know that no direct relationship exists between physical attractiveness and qualities for a successful marriage. Love,
care, personality, maturity, unselfishness, and thoughtfulness are not determined by the degree of physical beauty a person possesses (1 Samuel 16:7).

C. Unfortunately, handsome and beautiful prospects can be egotistical, self-centered people who think mostly of themselves. As the warmth of a house at 20 degrees below zero is not based on the beauty of its architecture, so the warmth and intimacy of marriage does not rest on the great looks of the husband and the wife (Proverbs 6:25; 1 Peter 3:3-4).

D. Marriages aren’t surviving today because concern for the real person is absent between companions. The more husbands and wives care for the total being of one another, the more important each feels. The more energy and enthusiasm each contributes to the relationship, the better people they become. The physical component is necessary to marriage, but it can only be used properly when it is perceived as one of many avenues of love.

IV. Pick A Mate Who Is A Good Friend
A. A man’s best friend should be his wife, and a woman’s best friend should be her husband (Proverbs 17:17). Young people can determine this by taking a good look at how they spend their time. Are they constantly wrapped up in one another’s arms? Do they spend long hours talking and sharing in all of life’s events? Again, physical attraction may be fun, but it is usually not a good gauge of personality. When that passion cools after a few months or years of marriage, the couple may wonder what attracted them to each other.

B. Communication is vital for sharing each other’s interests and for solving problems. Problems are not settled by ignoring them. They call for thought, discussion, and mutually accepted solutions. A goal of dating is to understand a prospective spouse — a time for couples to determine whether they can bare their hearts to one another. Companions who won’t express their feelings and discuss problems with one another in love are neglecting “aggravations” that will fester and erupt.

C. Something can be said for “chemistry,” but 99% of a couple’s time together is consumed by something other than physical intimacy. It can be a long, boring life if physical lust is the basis for marriage. Give it some thought and commit to someone who is fun and comfortable, and who respects you for more than what you are physically. Make certain those terms “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” have real meaning (Acts 18:2, 26; Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). “In sickness and in health, for better or for worse” plays out a lot better when you are married to your best friend (Proverbs 27:17).

V. Pick A Mate Who Views Marriage As Permanent
A. A person who buys a car to last for 20 years treats it differently than if he plans to trade every two years. It is the same with the man or woman who marries a companion for life. Newlyweds who enter marriage with divorce as an option are not committed to the loving care that preserves relationships all the way to death. Obstacles to them become stumbling blocks rather than building blocks.

B. The qualities, on the other hand, that couples develop to withstand problems become the bonding elements that protect the marriage against deterioration.
Talking about problems, adjusting habits in the interest of peace, sacrificing to meet a need, and giving attention to minor issues are a few of those elements.

C. What God joins together, man may not separate (Matthew 19:4-6; Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Many prospective mates neither know nor believe that statement. More and more young people come from broken homes and have no greater respect for the permanency of marriage than their parents. Divorce tends to perpetuate itself in families. No longer can couples-to-be take for granted that their mate really means “until death do us part.” It is a topic that had better be discussed thoroughly before marriage.

**Conclusion.** These principles are not optional; they are the will and wisdom of God. They have been revealed from heaven for the happiness of the human family. If the people you date don’t have these qualities, either work with them to develop these traits and abilities before you marry, or keep looking. Your eternal destiny, and that of your future children, may depend on the choice you make. It’s foolish to settle:

- Despite how physically attractive he or she is.
- Despite how much security it seems to offer.
- Despite how bad your life at home is.
- To prove others can’t stop you.
- To legitimize an out-of-wedlock pregnancy.
- To think you can change him or her later.
- To escape loneliness.

Men and women who will fill themselves with the dynamic energy of God’s spiritual principles will be good husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers. And even if you’re already married, work hard to develop these traits in yourself. The power of God’s word is available to meet the challenge. Think of the blessings it yields — the unspeakable joy and peace that fill the households of those who give and receive love after the likeness of Christ.