

I don't ...

or

I do?

Knowing when to marry and when to **wait**

By Gary Bruegman

Preparing for marriage, it has been suggested, is like preparing to drive a car for the first time. Both require skill, flexibility, effort and alertness. Both involve a certain degree of risk. It would seem reasonable, then, you should know what you're getting yourself into before you get behind the steering wheel of your car or make the decision to marry. You must have some sense of what you need to do to survive this brand-new experience.

But there is an unfortunate difference between acquiring a driver's license and a marriage license. To legally drive a car you're required to study, take a driving test and a written test and pass those examinations. All you have to do to be legally married is say "I do!" and sign the marriage license. The truth and tragedy of the matter is many of us spend a lot more time learning how to drive a car than we do learning how to effectively and successfully be married.

Marriage experts have written books and articles attempting to equip young couples for the marriage plunge. Assuming many people's busy schedules prohibit them from reading all the recommended material available, I'd like to identify some basic signs or signals that help us know when it's a good time to marry or when it is better and wiser to wait.

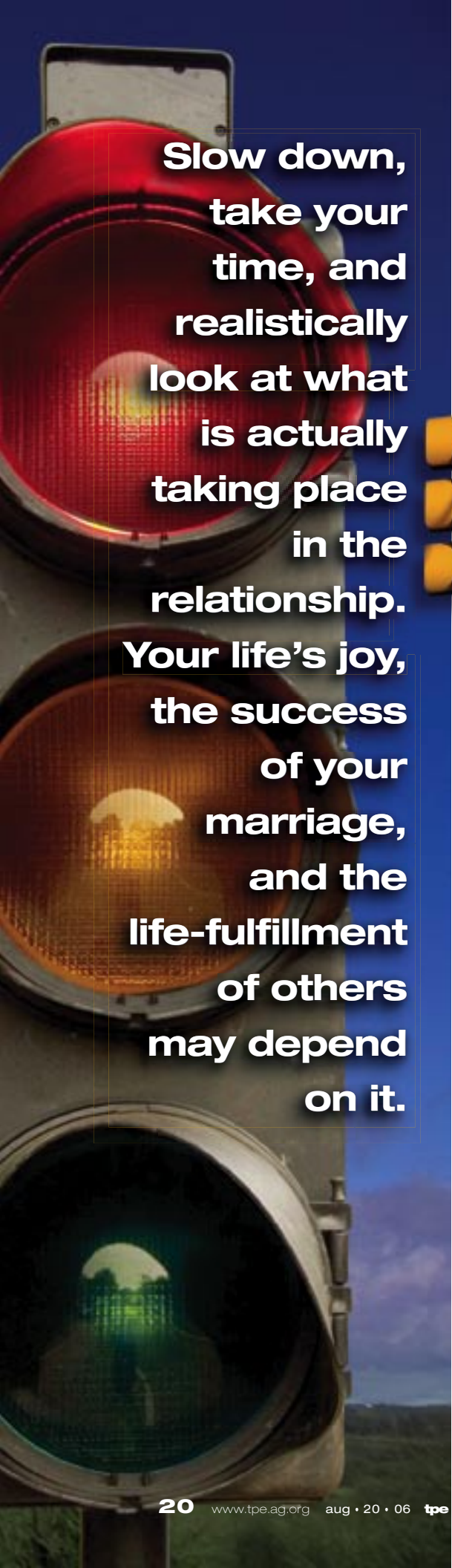


Watch the signals

The experienced driver knows when your car approaches an intersection bearing a traffic signal a green light means everything is clear to proceed, a yellow light means to proceed with caution and a red light means to stop driving altogether. Failure to stop your car in most cases has unfortunate consequences. You can be ticketed for breaking the law, be seriously injured, or seriously injure someone else.

Warning signals can be annoying, but they have proven to be lifesavers. Unfortunately, we are quick to speed through a yellow light for fear of losing precious time and failing to reach our destination on schedule. Couples who rush through a serious dating relationship or formal engagement risk relational damage.

Because marriages are failing at an alarming rate, Christian couples who begin to date tend to be more skeptical and overly cautious about



Slow down, take your time, and realistically look at what is actually taking place in the relationship. Your life's joy, the success of your marriage, and the life-fulfillment of others may depend on it.

committing to a serious relationship and potential marriage. All the more reason to keep their eyes focused on the "lights." The only way one can feel safe while driving on the highway or feel safe in a serious relationship is to know that all three signals are working properly and that everybody participating takes them seriously.



Green lights

This is obviously the signal everybody wants to see. The green light at the beginning of a relationship

clearly provides the freedom to proceed without having to worry excessively about making a commitment. This is by far the more enjoyable route to follow. There are limited questions asked and few concerns raised. It is the "getting to know you" stage of the relationship. But regardless of how far you travel with the green light, at some point you'll be faced with another signal.

Speed restriction

Human nature wants those things or people we fall in love with to become an immediate part of our lives. Therefore, it is not uncommon to overlook the need to address disturbing questions, concerns and potential conflict.

The truth about the old adage "love is blind" is that it can actually deter a couple from addressing immediate concerns and unresolved conflict in the relationship prior to getting married. If one or both individuals object to slowing down the relationship in order



to adequately process concerns and make necessary changes, the relationship could end in disaster prior to marriage or shortly thereafter.

A couple will never regret taking the developmental stages of the relationship as slowly as necessary. It's similar to the advice we receive when we are driving in bad or stormy weather. You drive at the posted rate of speed when the weather is good, and you drive cautiously or considerably slower when conditions have worsened.

Slow down, take your time, and realistically look at what is actually taking place in the relationship. Your life's joy, the success of your marriage, and the life-fulfillment of others may depend on it.



Yellow lights

A yellow light tells you conditions are about to change. The relational

"drive" has proceeded down easy street for some time, but is now beginning to experience bumps or minor uneasiness. The couple loves being together, has a great time whatever they're doing, but doesn't see a whole lot of substance in the relationship.

The real substance of the relationship is the choice or willingness to commit to another person through the best and worst of times. If either person is unwilling to talk about or commit to the relationship at a more developed stage, there is reason for concern.

If a surface commitment is made to the other person in the relationship, though there remains an unwillingness to emotionally connect or communicate, it is not a true commitment. To avoid any major damage to the

continued on page 22

PEARL HARBOR December 7, 1941 **2,403 die**
BHOPAL, INDIA, GAS LEAK December 3, 1984 **10,000+ die**
WORLD TRADE CENTER September 11, 2001 **2,752 die**
TODAY August 20, 2006 **52,800 die without Christ**
TOMORROW August 21, 2006 **52,800 die without Christ**
EVERY DAY **52,800 die without Christ**



God experiences heart-rending disaster every day as thousands die without Him ... What can you do about it?

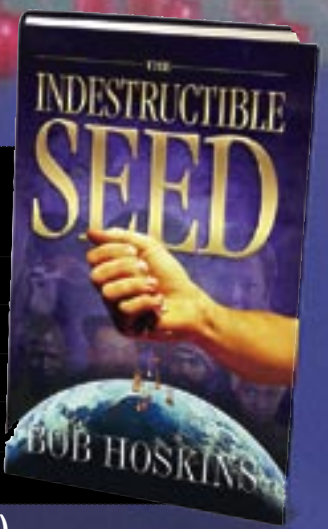
Through the Book of Hope ministry, we're placing God's Word into the hands of an average of **172,602** children and youth every day.

Find out how you can help. Call, write or e-mail today and request your free copy of the book, *The Indestructible Seed*, by Book of Hope Founder Bob Hoskins.

Please send the free book, *The Indestructible Seed*, and tell me more about the *Book of Hope* ministry. *The Indestructible Seed* books are mailed to USA and Canada only.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 Phone _____
 E-mail _____

Return to **Book of Hope** • Assemblies of God World Missions • 3111 SW 10th Street • Pompano, FL 33069



It is essential every couple contemplating marriage seek wisdom and godly advice from a pastor and/or professional marriage counselor.

relationship, caution must be given and progress slowed way down.

Pay close attention to those concerns expressed by family members or friends. They often possess a clearer, more objective perspective of what might be happening in the relationship. Don't ignore negative comments just because you want the relationship to work.

God never intended to mess up our plans or make life miserable for us by using warning signs. Our joy and happiness — whether we live alone or with a spouse — is really found in relationship with God. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).

Yellow lights don't mean a relationship is about to end. The light hasn't turned red, so it isn't necessary to stop everything. But definitely proceed with caution.



Red lights

When the light switches from yellow to red, progress in the relationship needs to halt. Stopping at this signal allows those in the relationship ample time to look in all directions, think about their next move and proceed forward only when the signal turns green again. It allows individuals time to reflect on where they have been in the relationship, issues of concern and any unanswered questions.

It has been said the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. While God is able to change lives completely, the fact remains most people will do in the future the things they do today. The following attributes, if consistently present in the relationship, serve as warning lights:

- *Spiritual incompatibility*
- *Questionable character*
- *Lack of integrity*
- *Unresolved conflict*
- *Poor communication skills*
- *Disrespect of self/others*
- *Unfaithfulness*
- *Addictive behaviors*
- *Extended family issues*
- *Differing value systems*

No U-Turn

Next to committing one's life to Christ, there is probably no greater life-shaping decision than that of marriage. Those who enter their marriage relationship according to God's plan agree it is for a lifetime.

"There's no turning back." This motto should be decided, pledged and honored by both individuals throughout their lives.



As traditional wedding vows illustrate, both partners choose to remain together whether they encounter joy or heartache, whether they are wealthy or dirt-poor, or whether they are in the best of health or facing terminal illness.

An unwillingness to agree to this commitment by both individuals sets the stage for major disappointment and agonizing pain later on. It is always in a couple's best interest to wait to get married if warning signs continue to suggest concern and fear and watered-down commitment in the relationship. Courtrooms are filled with couples who thought problems could be resolved after they were married.

There is a significant statement in a typical driver's manual: "If you aren't sure you understand a traffic law, ask a law enforcement officer." It is essential every couple contemplating marriage seek wisdom and godly advice

from a pastor and/or professional marriage counselor. Two people choosing to marry should understand they are entering unfamiliar territory.

It can be pretty frightening to attempt something as important as marriage without experience. But that is how all of us start out. It is crucial both individuals in the relationship fully understand the responsibilities attached to marriage and carefully heed any and all warning signs prior to making the decision.

Ultimately, the decision to marry or to wait will be yours. May God be your source of help in this life-impacting decision. **tpe**

GARY R. BRUEGMAN, M.A., is director of Denominational Relationships for the National Institute of Marriage based in Hollister Mo.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

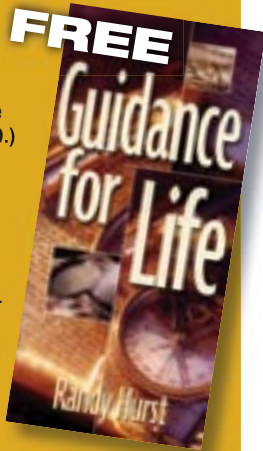
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center



I OPENING

Pacha:

- Participated in his first animal sacrifice at age 14
- Prays to Satan on a daily basis
- Believes God is too busy to bother with his issues
- No one has told him otherwise

Throughout the CIS and the Baltic Republics, our team is engaged in bringing the hope of Christ to a tapestry of cultures and religions. In just over a decade we have taken the gospel across this region, yet many communities and people groups still have never heard. We are going to the edge, shining the light of God's love in the darkest corners of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania.

God is opening doors. All you have to do is walk through them. It's that simple.

Read our story. Open your "I." Join the Eurasia community.
Visit www.eurasiacommunity.org



EURASIA

CIS/BALTICS