


So you have a **ring**
and a
wedding

date:

**what's
next?**

BY GARY R. ALLEN



It was nearly dark on a Saturday evening when someone knocked on our parsonage door. It was a lady who stated that the “two young-uns in the car need to get married.” The young couple sitting in the backseat looked more frightened than overjoyed about the situation.

When I explained that I did not perform weddings without spending time with the couple and preferred at least three counseling sessions, she hurriedly returned to the car stating, “These kids need to get married now and surely some pastor in town will marry them!”

I was not trying to be difficult. I was most concerned that the young couple had a solid foundation for building a lasting relationship. This young man and woman needed more than a ring and a few words from the preacher to make a marriage.

Marriage is a lifelong process built upon foundational principles and is sustained by intentional interpersonal relationship skills. After you have a ring and a wedding date, there are still several things you need to do to build the foundation for a lasting marriage.

Seek premarital counseling

Get counseling from a qualified pastor and/or Christian counselor. Regardless of how well-adjusted you think you are, it is good to seek the advice of a counselor when entering a marriage relationship. A marriage professional can help you establish benchmark attitudes, values and behaviors that will provide reference points throughout your marriage.

what's next?

Understand that love is not enough

Loving one another is not enough to sustain a marriage. True love is dependent upon four essential elements:

Trust — keeping your word. If you say you will do something, do it. If for some valid reason you cannot, you owe your partner an explanation.

Respect — acknowledging another's value, time and space. Familiarity should increase our respect for one another. The better we know each other, the more we can grow in appreciation and respect.

Confidence — never using intimate knowledge to coerce, manipulate or intimidate. In marriage, we are expected to be open

comfortable in the presence of one another. This is a result of trust, respect and confidence. A marriage can flourish and grow in an emotionally secure environment.

Conduct a spiritual evaluation

The success and strength of a marriage are directly related to each person's spiritual commitment. Spirituality is not just knowing Christ as your personal Savior, but also demonstrating Christ's presence in values, attitudes and behavior.

Usually a marriage will not be any stronger spiritually than the spiritual strength exhibited by the weaker person. Seldom have I seen the spiritually stronger

realistic assessment of the priority of the Word of God, prayer and local church involvement in the relationship.

Seek financial advice

There are basic financial principles and rules that if not clearly understood and established from the beginning will lead to debts that can strangle a marriage financially and even lead to the destruction of the relationship. Financial problems are one of the primary stressors in marriage.

The cost of a wedding, establishing a home and education loans often combine to place a couple deep in debt from the beginning. Use wisdom, plan wisely and seek financial advice early.

Start by putting God first in your finances. Tithing is a practice of biblical principle, not a budget expense. Tithing and supporting the kingdom of God place you in a position for God's blessing.

Check your baggage

Everyone has some emotional baggage that has accumulated from the pain and anger of life experiences. When you drag this baggage into marriage you risk frustrating your spouse and contaminating the marriage with dysfunctional behavior.

Dysfunctional people do dysfunctional things and sustain the cycle of dysfunctional families who raise dysfunctional children.

Is there hope? Yes! The months leading up to a marriage are an excellent time to evaluate who you are, what you want to be, and then make intentional, healthy decisions with good counsel and God's help. Regardless of your background, with God's transforming power you can be a healthy person who builds a healthy family.

Couples who receive premarital education have a 31 percent lower chance of divorce, according to a study published this spring in the *Journal of Family Psychology*. The number of hours spent in premarital programs ranged from as little as a few hours to 20 hours. The median was eight hours, as reported in *USA Today*.

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and transparent. This makes us emotionally vulnerable, but we are obligated to take the risk. If we use the intimate knowledge to abuse one another, we betray the other person and can wound them severely. Repeated, intentional betrayal and wounding will destroy a marriage.

Emotional security — being

person strengthen their spouse; usually the spiritually weaker person drags the other person down. That is why it is so dangerous to establish a relationship with someone anticipating they will become a committed believer.

Spiritual evaluation before marriage is not being judgmental of one another. Rather, it is a

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what's next?

Distinguish between personality defect and character flaw

Every one of us is a distinct person with personality defects that can aggravate others. When we love and respect one another we can learn to adjust and adapt to each other.

We get our personalities from genetics (parents and grandparents), family interaction and life experience. It is important to understand as much as possible about each other's family and life experiences before marriage in order to identify the personality differences you will encounter.

Character flaws are those intentional, destructive behaviors that hurt, intimidate, coerce and manipulate others and can destroy a

marriage. Usually they are hidden in the emotional baggage of our lives but will soon surface when attempting to build a marriage.

Learn interpersonal skills

One of the elements missing in dysfunctional families is good interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills must be learned and practiced or we will revert to the dysfunctional patterns of our past and our marriage will not progress beyond what our parents modeled.

Getting along with others is a constant, intentional effort. I have learned the number of people who aggravate me is in direct proportion to the number of people whom I aggravate. Paul says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on

you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18, NIV).

Learn conflict-management skills

There will always be some level of conflict because all of us are different from one another. Conflict will either be constructive or destructive. Healthy conflict is when we adjust our differences and make our marriage better. Destructive conflict is when we demand our way and alienate one another. Again, our family background is usually the determining factor in how we manage conflict.

Define roles and expectations

A couple's expectation of one another's role in their home is established by what they saw their parents doing. This is good if both family backgrounds are similar and healthy. Usually there is enough family experience difference that the couple starting their marriage has several role-definition problems. These can be prayerfully worked through over time.

Practice healthy sexuality

Biblical sexuality is healthy sexuality. God created marital sex for joy and fulfillment. The biblical boundaries of sexuality are what God expects for our well-being and the good order of community. What is portrayed in the media about sex is usually not what the Bible teaches. Premarital sex is sin, adultery is sin, and pornography is sin.

If you take the time and effort to prepare for marriage you will experience a lifelong journey of exploration and adventure with one another that is enjoyable and fulfilling. **tpe**

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

Q U I Z

Test your Bible knowledge

1. How many additional years did Hezekiah live after recovering from his illness?

- A. 40 B. 20
C. 15 D. 12

2. What queen of Persia did Esther replace?

- A. Meres B. Vashti
C. Xerxes D. Jezebel

3. What is the longest chapter in the Bible?

- A. Psalm 119 B. Matthew 27
C. Job 13 D. Genesis 42

4. About how many people accepted Christ as Savior as a result of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost?

- A. 300 B. 5,000
C. 3,000 D. 120

5. Who was Naomi's husband in the Book of Ruth?

- A. Boaz B. Mahlon
C. Elimelech D. Killion

6. Who said the meek will inherit the earth?

- A. Jesus B. Paul
C. John D. Isaiah

7. More than how many people lived in Nineveh during the time of Jonah?

- A. 500,000 B. 250,000
C. 300,000 D. 120,000

8. From what passage did Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth?

- A. Ezekiel 24 B. Isaiah 56
C. Jeremiah 16 D. Isaiah 61

9. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue, which parts were made of silver?

- A. Head and neck B. Chest and arms
C. Legs and feet D. Belly and thighs

10. What sons of Aaron died after offering unauthorized fire to the Lord?

- A. Mishael and Elzaphan
B. Eleazar and Ithamar
C. Nadab and Abihu
D. Uzziel and Bezalel

Answers on page 30.

(Some questions adapted from the Junior Bible Quiz program. For more information, visit nationaljibq.org.)



L I V I N G I T

Our good shepherd

"When he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice" (John 10:4, NKJV).

John 10 is one of my favorite Scripture passages. It clearly reveals Jesus who has chosen to guide me personally. The symbolism casts me — or anyone who chooses to follow Jesus — as the sheep and Jesus as the Great Shepherd who leads and cares for His sheep.

Jesus knows the way that I take and He knows that I need someone to lead me in that way. As the Good Shepherd, He never expects His sheep to go anywhere that He has not already gone. He not only knows the way, but He also knows the conditions along the way. Where He leads may not be easy; it may be in the very presence of the enemy. But, be assured that it is a secure way because Jesus is there. He always protects and cares for His sheep.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, takes a personal interest in each and every sheep. He knows the strength and potential of each one. He regularly examines every one for thorns, cuts and bruises. He applies healing balm to the injured.

Jesus gave His life to save the sheep. He makes himself known to each individual sheep. His true sheep recognize Him and respond to His voice and are not distracted or misled. They may stray, but He always seeks the lost and straying.

Jesus shows true concern for His sheep. He is not just working for the owner; He is the owner. We are His! He loves and stands by His sheep no matter what happens. His sheep follow Him because they love Him. Love is the secret of this close relationship.

Some see salvation as a quantum leap out of sin into righteousness. In reality, it is a continual walk with God. Each and every day the Good Shepherd calls His sheep by name and leads them out. He knows every name. All I have to do is follow.

Phyllis Fenstermaker

PHYLLIS FENSTERMAKER pastors the St. Michael Assembly of God Mission in St. Michael, Alaska.

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