

Individual Interview Questions- At Proposal

At the time of a proposal, it is important to assess the spiritual soundness and sincerity of the brother and sister. Often, elders will have a sense of this from shepherding the brother or sister over time. A proposal and engagement should be founded on the sincere faith of the brother and sister.

In some cases, there are other difficult variables which should also be considered in order to spare both parties pain and to prevent problems and resentment later. These variables include physical health issues, mental health issues, serious sin and temptation issues, significant family conflict, financial concerns such as excessive debt, etc.

During the proposal process, it is important to balance the privacy of each party with the necessity to be open and honest about concerns. While there is not an exact template to use for each case, there are a number of steps that can be helpful.

1. When an elder is asked to extend a proposal, he should search his own heart and memory for concerns he is aware of in the lives of the individuals giving/receiving the proposal.
2. The elder(s) involved should ask each party at the time of the proposal if there are any unresolved issues in their lives that could negatively impact a marital relationship. Below are a number of questions that elders can use to help guide this conversation.
3. Through discussion with the person giving/receiving the proposal, the elder can prayerfully discern whether there are issues significant enough that (1) prevent the proposal from going forward, (2) need to be shared with the other person who is giving/receiving the proposal, or (3) the elder wants to talk with another elder to receive additional counsel before proceeding.
4. Individuals giving/receiving a proposal should know that if there are significant/serious issues in their lives, it may be necessary to share that information with the other person at some point in the proposal.
5. In these cases, the elder should assure the person that this will be done in a kind and sensitive way and not taken lightly. However, it is critical for the future of the relationship to base it on openness and honesty.
6. Issues of a personal matter should not be shared with the person receiving the proposal without the knowledge of the person giving the proposal (or vice versa).

If there are concerns with a proposal, the elders involved should assess whether these issues should be shared and at what point to share them. There are several points at which elders may choose to share information.

1. Generally, it is good to keep issues confidential until there is some indication the other party may also feel led toward marriage.
2. At times it may be good when sharing the proposal with the sister to tell her that there are some private items that you would like to share with her if she begins to feel open to marriage, but that it is respectful to wait until then. She should not be burdened with knowing things of a private nature about a brother she gave a no to.
3. Finally, some issues are of a nature that they can wait to be addressed after the proposal has gone through and the couple is engaged.

The list below contains questions that an elder may want to review with brothers and/or sisters at the time of sending/receiving a proposal. The questions are intended to help elders assess the spiritual wellbeing, maturity, emotional stability, and general readiness for an individual to consider a proposal. It is expected that factors such as how well the elder knows each individual, the elder's preferences, etc. will lead to modifications of this list.

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A sister considering a proposal for marriage should be able to answer similar questions during her process of proving out the will of God for her life. Ordinarily, a sister is first asked if she is prepared to consider a proposal in marriage and is given time to search this out prayerfully before proceeding with considering the brother who has given the proposal.

Relationship with God

- “Are you at peace with God? Are you close enough to God that you can feel His love and grace on a daily basis?”
- “Are you living an overcoming life? Is there any area of your life where you are not victorious over temptation?”
- “Do you have any unconfessed sin in your life?”
- “How are you handling sexual temptation in your life?”
- Discuss the person’s attitude and convictions regarding our church doctrine and practices. For example, “How do you feel about the church? How connected are you to the body of believers?”

Decision Making Process

- “Please describe how you have proved out this matter.” Take note of how the person has or hasn’t included prayer, study of the Word, counsel, adequate time, and self-examination.
- If applicable, talk to the individual about the importance of proving out signs in making a decision like marriage (e.g., they should not be the sole basis for making a decision, they must align with the Word, they should be proven by time, the person should still be willing to receive counsel, etc.).
- “Do you truly believe that God is directing you to submit this proposal at this time with the understanding that His will regarding marriage is yet to be revealed?”
- “Do you expect that she is going to be surprised when she gets this proposal?”

Practical Matters

- For brothers – “Are you ready and willing to assume the role of a spiritual leader in a marriage? What is your understanding of what spiritual leadership in marriage is? What do you think submission is?”
- For sisters – “Are you ready and willing to assume the role of a help meet [helper suitable] for a husband in marriage? What is your understanding of what submission in marriage is? What do you think a husband’s role as a spiritual leader is?”
- “Are you ready to make the personal adjustments required for marriage? For example, are you willing to be in a mutually submissive relationship with a spouse?”
- “In what ways do you think you would need to change in order to move from life as a single person to a married person?”

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- “What is your plan for being able to adequately support a family?” [The following questions can be used to obtain more information, if necessary.]
 - o “Give examples of ways you are currently practicing biblical principles of stewardship in your finances.”
 - o “How much debt do you have? What is your plan for reducing and eliminating any debts that you have?” (Note: Be specific about this number as what is significant debt to one person is a minor debt to another.)
- “Do you have any life experiences or problems in your past that could negatively affect a potential marriage? [The following questions can be used to obtain more information, if necessary.]
 - o “Have you had any life experiences that someone might describe as traumatic or abusive? For example, this could be emotional, sexual, or physical abuse or other traumatic experience. If yes, how are those things being dealt with today? Is there anything that needs to be done to deal with this more effectively?”
 - o “Have you had anything in your past that someone may describe as addictive (e.g., alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling)? If yes, how are those things being dealt with today? Is there anything that needs to be done to deal with this more effectively?”
 - o “Have you struggled with any unusual sexual temptations such as same sex attractions or other inappropriate attractions?”
- “Do you have any physical or mental health issues that could affect a potential marriage?” [The following questions can be used to obtain more information, if necessary.]
 - o “Do you have any current or past emotional or mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, etc.)? If yes, how are those things being dealt with today? Is there anything that needs to be done to deal with this more effectively? Is there any family history of mental illness?”
 - o “Do you have any significant medical problems? For example, do you have any known health conditions that could limit your fertility, life span, or lifestyle?”

Explaining the Process

- Identify and agree upon any relevant information that you learned through the questions above that may need to be passed along with the proposal or shared at some point in the proposal process.
- Mention the need to consult with the previous home elder if the person has not been in residence in your congregation for very long.
- Determine if the person is ready to move ahead with a wedding in a few months if the proposal is accepted.
- Mention the possibility that the sister is already considering another proposal and assure the brother that he will be kept informed as the process unfolds.

