

GUIDE TO SEEKING MARRIAGE

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO INTENTIONALLY SEEK MARRIAGE?

As one approaches the decision around who to marry, there are various approaches to seeking a potential spouse that can be God-honoring as well as emotionally and relationally healthy. This discernment process takes foundational faith, godly wisdom, intentionality, spiritual maturity, and transparent openness to counsel within community. **The AC church values careful, but flexible approaches to marriage decision making, while continuing to discourage a casual, dating relationship.**

The graphic below depicts a visual representation of seeking marriage. On the left and right, extremes to be cautioned against are highlighted. In the middle, the core **FAITH** framework is surrounded by principles which are often seen in a healthy, God-honoring marriage decision process.



Following are a few examples of how the marriage decision could be intentionally approached in a God-honoring manner. Within each example, you will see principles of healthy marriage decision making played out in various ways.

ALL MARRIAGE DECISIONS SHOULD BEGIN WITH:

- A time of discernment around one's spiritual health and readiness for marriage. This discernment should be done with accountability and within community alongside a parent, mentor (not a peer), or church leader. It is based on a foundational faith in God, his character, and his ability to work in the lives involved.
- The individual is transparent with church leadership about their interest in marriage. A time of discussion regarding readiness to step into marriage takes place.

WHILE RESPECTING THE NORMS AND CUSTOMS OF THE CONGREGATIONS INVOLVED, FOLLOWING THIS DISCERNMENT PROCESS FLEXIBLE APPROACHES MAY INCLUDE:

Example 1:

- An individual comes to the conviction before God that they are to pursue marriage with another individual. This begins a process of coordination with church leadership and both individuals involved.
- Once the first individual shares their conviction with church leadership, a marriage proposal is made through church leadership based on that conviction. The other individual is contacted and enters into their own time of discernment.
- In some cases, communication may include questions and answers facilitated by leadership, as well as one or more meetings between the individuals to better understand each other's convictions, calling, direction, and readiness to enter marriage.
- If the proposal is accepted, the couple moves toward a public engagement. If declined, both individuals seek care and support from their church communities.

Example 2:

- An individual comes to the conviction before God that they are to explore the possibility of marriage with another individual. This begins a process of coordination with church leadership and both individuals involved.
- If there is mutual openness and agreement for discussion, the individuals engage in respectful, purposeful conversations supported by mentors and leadership. They may also spend intentional time in shared community settings to observe one another in natural contexts.
- In some situations, the individuals might enter a focused, time-bound period of intentional interaction, marked by spiritual conversation, paced emotional connection, and ongoing accountability with leadership, families, and mentors. It is encouraged that after this time of intentional interaction, a separate, private discernment period by both individuals is incorporated to help support Spirit-led direction.
- If conviction deepens and there is a growing shared vision for marriage, a marriage proposal may be made through church leadership. If the proposal is accepted, the couple moves toward a public engagement. If declined, both individuals seek care and support from their communities.
- If a conviction toward marriage does not deepen during this time of discernment and interaction, the individuals should seek care and support from their communities as they prayerfully and gracefully transition and end the intentional interaction.