



CONSIDERING MARRIAGE

**BIBLICALLY BASED
RESOURCES FOR
CONSIDERING MARRIAGE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Introduction	6
The Marriage Journey	9

Am I Ready for Marriage?

What is a Healthy, Balanced Life?	15
Singleness & Sexuality	22
A Greater Purpose	29

Approaching the Marriage Decision

Marriage Decision Framework	34
Walking Through the Framework	37
Marriage Decision Making	40
A Guide for Reflection	57
Keeping a Balanced Perspective	82
Frequently Asked Questions	89

Intentionally Seeking Marriage

Guide to Seeking Marriage	94
Frequently Asked Questions	98

Supplemental Materials

Biblical Decision Making Resources	109
Marriage Decision Making Podcasts	110
Obsessional Doubt & the Marriage Decision	111



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

How should one go about making the decision to marry? God created and instituted marriage (*Genesis 2*), but we find the Bible does not provide a specific list of commands or a checklist for making the decision to marry. Fortunately, God has left us good instruction. We must use the whole counsel of God (*Acts 20:27*) as we seek God's direction for our lives. Examining ourselves as we walk in the light of the Scriptures, building a biblical understanding of marriage, and considering how to seek marriage in a God-honoring manner with godly counsel can all help complete a picture of marriage decision making.

INTENT AND PURPOSE: The purpose of this booklet is to support you and those who counsel you (e.g., parents, ministers, mentors) with biblical principles of decision making as it relates to marriage.

- It is not exhaustive. Rather, this information should serve as a starting point for you to search the scriptures, pray, and seek God's will. You are encouraged to take time to meditate on the material and not simply rush through the resources.
- It is not intended to present a "quick-and-easy formula" nor is it intended to imply marriage is guaranteed for any individual. Indeed, the resources in this booklet speak to important aspects of living a healthy, foundational life with Christ.

- The purpose of these resources is to encourage you in the spirit of *2 Peter 1:2-4* as you seek God’s direction in your life:

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

Thus, the ultimate goal is to help you grow in your likeness to Christ regardless of whether you marry or remain single.

USING THIS BOOKLET:

- *Am I Ready for Marriage?* - This section is designed for singles to reflect on their walk with the Lord as they approach the marriage decision.
- *Approaching the Marriage Decision* - This next section shares a Biblical Framework as well as several core resources on how to approach the marriage decision. It includes teaching, discussion questions, and reflection sections on *Marriage Decision Making*, *Keeping a Balanced Perspective* regarding marriage decision making, and *A Guide for Reflection*. This last reflection guide should be used with mentors in your life to help highlight your strength and growth areas.
- *Intentionally Seeking Marriage* - The booklet ends with a section on principles and frequently asked questions for those intentionally seeking marriage as well as a few supplemental resources.

A NOTE FOR HELPERS: The resources in this booklet can serve as encouragement and biblical instruction to those contemplating marriage decisions. However, during this time of introspection, mentors, parents, and church leadership all play important roles as they provide support,

accountability, and godly counsel. Many of the resources are best utilized as growth and discussion opportunities together during this vulnerable discipleship moment in an individual's life. We encourage you to use the reflection questions to gently probe for understanding and then lean into further learning as needed using the various resources. Your opportunity as a helper is to be a source of counsel and accountability as individuals engage in the early, exploratory phase of the Marriage Journey.

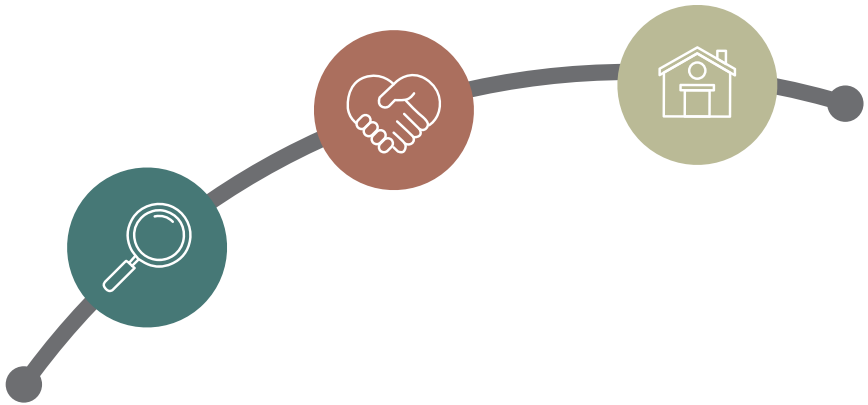


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THE MARRIAGE JOURNEY: THE EARLY STAGES



The Marriage Journey is an important discipleship path within the church. It is a time of transition but also a time of great growth, setting individuals and couples on a path of foundational health and stability in many areas of their lives. These stages identify common phases involved when an individual moves from singleness to marriage. This model can be used to raise discussion and increase perspective in this area of discipleship.



CONSIDERING MARRIAGE

- Individuals are beginning to contemplate the idea of marriage or are in active conversations about marriage.
- Individuals are considering their personal spiritual walk as well as how they intend to approach the marriage journey. They should also be growing in a healthy understanding of the marriage relationship. They should be actively seeking counsel from elders/mentors who can support this learning and discovery process.
- As individuals begin to actively seek marriage, they are intentionally exploring the possibility of marriage with church leadership and within community.



ENGAGEMENT

- Individuals are publicly engaged and moving toward a wedding.
- Individuals are growing in their relationship with each other and moving toward a wedding day. Desiring an honorable engagement, they are both reactively and proactively dealing with issues that arise within the early stages of their relationship. They are actively receiving counsel from their elder and other mentor couples as part of a planned premarital counseling approach. The Wedding Day itself is a special scriptural ceremony to be carried out with reverence, respect, and honor given to the Savior.



EARLY MARRIAGE

- Individuals are in their first few years of marriage.
- Individuals are navigating early marriage and building foundational skills that will serve them throughout their life. They are engaged with local church mentors who are walking through resources and proactive growth opportunities to support them in these early stages of marriage.



**Scan or click for the online version
of "The Marriage Journey."**



**AM I
READY FOR
MARRIAGE?**



WHAT IS A HEALTHY, BALANCED LIFE?

John 10:10, "...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." God's desire for us is that we can live a full and abundant life in relationship to him. Yet, life is full of situations and transitions which can shape and affect our growth, identity, & well-being. How we enter and navigate these transitions is often a mark of our overall health. For some, these times of change and transition may be marked by joy, hope, and anticipation, and for others they may be marked by fear, grief, and discontent. It is important we, as Christ followers, have healthy habits and disciplines in place which encourage us to stay grounded and holistically healthy at all times, even amid life's transitions.

The term 'holistic health' considers the four primary aspects with which God created human beings—our physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual areas. Maintaining health in each aspect helps us prepare for and navigate through changes in our life. However, this is not a checklist. Perfection is not required in each of these areas before making a change or transition in life. The goal is to be stewarding each area in a God-honoring, balanced manner.

The transition from singleness to marriage in a believer's life is a significant decision. As part of this transition, there is a shift in identity as well as daily and spiritual responsibilities. When one is making this decision, there is value in pausing and reflecting on your holistic health –

your physical, emotional, relational, & spiritual readiness. The Reflection Guide (p.19-20) can be a helpful tool to help with this reflection.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

The Bible speaks to the importance of our physical bodies. We read in *Psalms 139:44*, “*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” and in *1 Corinthians 3:16*, “*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you?*” These verses reinforce the importance of taking care of the physical bodies God has given to us. Taking care of our physical health means we have a good sense of what our body needs to be healthy, including areas such as a proper diet, regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and adequate sleep. How we are doing in this physical realm directly impacts other aspects of our wellbeing.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Our emotional wellbeing directly influences how we feel, think, and behave (“*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he:*” *Proverbs 23:7*). Having healthy, emotional wellbeing does not mean someone will not have *any* stressors, but it does mean someone will have coping skills and a level of resilience to manage through stressful times. Taking care of our emotional health means a person pays attention to what they are paying attention to. Thoughts impact how we feel, so managing our thinking patterns is important. Additionally, we show emotional health as we engage in practices to ease tension in the body and maintain a sense of calm as well as the ability to be in the present moment.

RELATIONAL HEALTH

Having healthy relationships is vital to one's overall wellbeing. *Proverbs 27:17* states “*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*” This verse speaks to the benefit and support that happens within godly relationships. Engaging in relationships with others allows us to have good accountability and pushes us towards personal and spiritual growth. When someone lacks relationships in their life, discouragement and loneliness can

set in. Taking care of our relational health means we are active and engaged in the communities God has currently placed near us, such as family, church, and our local community. Being active and engaged encourages relationships to be formed and allows them to grow in vulnerability, where we are both known and loved. This is where iron can sharpen iron and where we can be refined.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Maintaining focus on our spiritual wellbeing takes intentionality. A healthy spiritual life does not just happen. Rather, spiritual health is fostered with practices that help us stay rooted and grounded in Christ. Healthy spiritual habits in areas such as reading, prayer, worship, and service are known as spiritual disciplines. Taking care of our spiritual health means we are in communion with God as we spend time in these spiritual disciplines. This focus will allow the Spirit to do his work as we bear his fruit in our lives.

CONCLUSION

Having a balanced lifestyle built on healthy, intentional practices allows an individual to maintain a sense of one's physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual wellbeing. Building these habits does not eliminate the ups and downs in our life, but these habits can act as guardrails to keep us moving forward and closer to Christ. Steady steps, over many days, build the foundation of a healthy, balanced life. And as life keeps moving and changing, this holistic health will provide a good lens to help us determine how ready we are for our next life transition.



Scan or click for the online version of "What is a Healthy, Balanced Life?"



Appendix: Reflection Guide

Reflection Guide: Use these questions to reflect on areas of holistic health as you prepare yourself for a God-honoring marriage. By intentionally considering these aspects before marriage, you can lay a strong foundation for a lifelong, God-centered relationship. There is added benefit in talking through these questions with someone that knows you well (i.e., mentor, parent, elder/minister, etc.) as they can give you counsel and increase your awareness of any blind spots you may have.

PHYSICAL HEALTH: This includes physical wellbeing, stewarding sexual desires, and sexual health/intimacy.

- How do I prioritize my physical health?
- What area(s) do I need to improve my physical health?
- What health concerns do I have that may affect future relationships?
- How do I steward my sexual desires in a way that honors God and prepares me for a healthy marriage? Am I leading an overcoming life and maintaining accountability for any past or current sexual temptation (pornography, masturbation, sexual history, etc.)?
- What is my biblical understanding of intimacy and its role in marriage?

EMOTIONAL HEALTH: This includes emotional maturity, mental health awareness, communication skills, and coping skills.

- How do I handle stress and conflict? What are my coping mechanisms?
- Have I addressed past emotional wounds or traumas that might impact my marriage?
- Am I emotionally independent or do I seek validation from others in unhealthy ways?

- Have I sought professional or pastoral counseling for any mental health concerns? Am I actively utilizing skills and tools to manage mental health needs in a healthy way?
- How do I cultivate resilience and patience in difficult circumstances?

RELATIONAL HEALTH: This includes relationships with family, friends, and others in your community.

- How has my family background influenced my views on marriage?
- What cultural or societal expectations do I hold regarding roles and responsibilities in marriage? How do they align with biblical principles?
- How do I handle conflict in my relationships?
- Do I have a strong support network of believers who can provide guidance, encouragement, and accountability?
- What are my financial values and how do I expect to manage finances in a marriage?

SPIRITUAL HEALTH: This includes various spiritual disciplines and overall spiritual growth in your life.

- How am I prioritizing my faith and spiritual growth?
- What are my expectations for prayer, church involvement, and spiritual leadership in marriage?
- How does my biblical understanding of marriage shape my expectations?
- As Christ does for us, am I prepared to extend grace, patience, and forgiveness in a marriage?
- Am I actively surrendering my desire for marriage to God's will and trusting his timing?

Resources



Scan or click to view
Discipleship resources.



Scan or click to view the
Emotional Regulation Course.



Scan or click to view the
Identity Course.



Scan or click to watch A Holistic
View of Health Webinar.

SINGLENESSE & SEXUALITY

Our sexual desire reminds us that we were created for relationship, to be intimately known and to know intimately. God created every one of us, *single* or *married*, *male* or *female*, with the ultimate purpose of experiencing an intimate relationship with the Lord. It is vital for singles to know and believe they are complete in Christ and can experience a beautiful, intimate relationship while stewarding their sexual desires in a way that ultimately glorifies God.

Having sexual thoughts and feelings is part of the human experience and yet God designed sex to be between one man and one woman in a covenant marriage relationship. This means that Christian singles do not have the ability and opportunity to experience sexuality in the same way as married couples. Naturally, this is a struggle for most, if not all, singles.

“Your sexual ache was purposefully designed by God to motivate you (body, soul, and spirit) toward an intimate connection with God, an intimate connection with other members of the body of Christ, and eventually an intimate connection with a future spouse. Even if you never marry, the sexual ache is the divinely created vehicle God uses to give you a longing for intimate connection with himself and with others.”¹

1. Doug Rosenau and Michael Todd Wilson, *Soul Virgins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 138.

Christian singles should not define spiritual victory with sexuality as a state of “not having any sexual thoughts or feelings.” This is not the goal that God is asking us to aim for and there are no scriptures to equate being spiritually grounded with this state. Contentment, joy, emotional connection, purpose and meaning, close relationships, and wholeness are all available to single people and are necessary components of experiencing an *abundant life* as a single person.

The following summaries of *God's Design for Sexuality* and *Stewarding Your Sexual Desire* are as much for singles as they are for those who are married. Biblical principles about sexuality and stewarding sexual desires are the same for males and females regardless of marital status.

- We must think about sexuality in its broadest sense by recognizing that all humans are sexual beings, whether *single* or *married*.
- Sexual temptation does not go away once you are married. Learning to manage sexual temptation now will help you to remain faithful and honoring in the future whether you marry or remain single.
- Single or married, some of the greatest dangers are believing that you are either “above” temptation and invulnerable to it or that you are helpless and there is no use trying to fight it. Pursuing sanctification and holiness is a full-time responsibility for all believers.
- Singles need to remember their value in God’s eyes. He was willing to pay the ultimate price so that all people, single or married, could have a relationship with him. It is beneficial for single people to shift their focus towards relationship with and service to God. Shifting our focus towards this mindset allows singles to shift our focus off the pain and longings of unfilled desires. Maintaining this focus is not and will not be easy. It takes continued reliance on God’s strength and the support of the community he has placed around us. Maintaining this discipline allows singles to lead an abundant life in all aspects of life, including sexuality.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

God's Design for Sexuality

Genesis 1:27; 31a, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them... And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

In *Genesis 1-2* we learn of God's beautiful creation. As part of creation, God made humankind, male and female, two genders distinct and unique, yet sharing equally the image of God. God created male and female with the ability to connect and relate within a covenant relationship and sexuality is a part of this design. God knew that sexuality would be a powerful, intense drive, and as with the rest of creation God looked at it and called it "very good." We as humankind can and should see the beauty and celebrate all aspects of God's design for us, including sexuality.

Within the beauty of God-designed sexuality, there is much scripture that instructs how God expects us to live in obedience and keep our bodies and desires under control in order to maintain sexual integrity (*Hebrews 13:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 2 Timothy 2:22*). Sexual desires, feelings, tension, and temptation are all made from a complex mixture of longings. These longings include the desire to be known and accepted physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

- In addressing healthy sexuality, we must remember our primary source of strength and guidance comes from knowing Christ.
- Finding godly, effective ways of dealing with sexual temptation is crucial rather than waiting for the temptation to go away.
- One of the reasons our sexual drive was given to us is to draw us closer to God in addition to drawing us closer to other individuals.

APPLYING GRACE AND TRUTH TO SEXUALITY

Having sexual thoughts and feelings is part of the human experience. We find in the Word that being spiritually grounded means the person is connected to Christ, lives an overcoming life, the spiritual fruit of temperance is present, and sin does not have dominion over him or her (*Romans 6:12-14*). Two overarching aspects of God's nature are his grace (love) and his truth (holiness). A biblical view of God contains both grace and truth without violating the other as they cannot be separated. When thinking about the concept of sexuality, we must hold on to both grace and truth.

Stewarding Your Sexual Desire

God created humans and part of the human experience is having sexual thoughts, feelings, and desires. An accurate understanding of sexual desire will consider all four aspects of life (biological/physical, emotional/psychological, relational/social, and spiritual) and how they each contribute to sexual desire. Understanding this concept equips an individual to steward their sexual desire in a God-honoring manner.

STEWARDING SEXUAL DESIRES REQUIRES:

- **Understanding the difference between temptation and lust.**
 - Temptation can be defined as the enticement to take part in some activity which will lead to sin. It is not a sin to be tempted or have sexual thoughts pass through your mind, but temptation can lead to sin if acted upon.
 - Lust can be defined as craving sexually what God has forbidden.
 - As lust is acted upon, it conceives sin (*James 1:14-15*). Forgiveness and hope are available to us when we turn away from our lustful thoughts and actions and turn towards Christ.



- **Developing a zero-tolerance policy for sinful inputs and accelerants:** In the context of sexuality, “inputs” and “accelerants” are anything that serve to stir, increase, or lead to lust or sin. Simply put, we must cut them off (*Matthew 5:29-30*).
- **Gaining an understanding of masturbation:** The Bible is very clear on warning about the sinfulness of lust, fornication, and adultery, yet there are no scriptures which specifically mention masturbation. Therefore, biblical principles regarding temptation and sexual purity should be used as guidelines for how to approach this topic in grace and truth.
- **Leading an overcoming life:** We are called as followers of Christ to have a comprehensive approach to dealing with our sexual desires and temptations. Some ways of doing this include:
 - Using scripture to guide thinking.
 - Learning skills to redirect and reframe sexual desire.
 - Protecting yourself against temptation.

Our goal must be to have pure desires and desiring God’s gift of sex to be honored and undefiled. In the spirit of *Colossians 3*, we must continually “*put off*” or “*mortify*” the natural lusts and “*seek those things which are above*” in order to “*put on the new man*” (*Colossians 3:1-11*). As we continue this pursuit of sanctification, we become transformed and conformed to the image of Christ and fulfill his calling for us (*Romans 8:29, Romans 12:2*).

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LIVING AS A FLOURISHING SINGLE



**Healthy Mindset &
Perspective as a Single**



**Refining Through
Relationships**



**A Commission to
Singles in the Church**



**Community
Podcast Episode**

For more resources search "singleness" on our website, www.accounseling.org.

A GREATER PURPOSE: THE MARRIAGE DECISION

Luke 22:42, "...nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

What has God used to grow you in your life? It is a big question, and one that each person would answer differently. Many times, when people look back, they can testify to the power of unanswered prayers in their lives. For individuals that are single, this may involve situations where they encountered the marriage decision.

Discerning whether or not to marry is a process of growth and surrender. It is a sacred time of communion with the Lord. This time can be sweet, but it can also be difficult. For those that are single and desire marriage, it can sometimes feel elusive. Why are my friends marrying and not I? Am I doing something wrong? Am I not desirable?

It can be especially painful for singles when people share their "recipe" for marriage. For example, a single person may be told that they just need to be content, then marriage will happen. While it is always a good idea to pursue *Philippians 4:11*, God's timing may be different than expected and marriage may not come immediately upon contentment, but rather further down the road. For some that desire marriage, the event may never happen. It can be difficult to understand "why" and can lead to self-doubt and discouragement.

FAILURE OR OPPORTUNITY?

Sometimes without realizing it, people judge the strength of their faith by the “success” of the process. In the marriage decision, whether or not they become engaged becomes the metric. Failure for a marriage decision to work out signifies that I do not have enough faith or have not surrendered properly. However, by doing so, people can miss the greater work that God is doing.

The process of surrendering singleness and marriage is not ultimately about the outcome, but about the person you are becoming as you seek to understand God’s plan for your life.

Consider the following: If a proposal results in a “no,” God has the power to work in this difficult situation, and it is still an opportunity. The proposal may have challenged an individual to correct unhealthy habits in their life, spend more time in prayer and God’s Word, or begin working on past unaddressed, relational hurts. The person may gain more through this journey than if the original goal of marriage had been met.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy to see the situation from this perspective. For some, a “no” can make them question themselves—“Did I hear God wrong?” They may begin to question their faith, become discouraged or distrustful of God, or perhaps become bitter towards friends who have gone through the process “successfully.”



Scan or click for the online version of "A Greater Purpose: The Marriage Decision."

FOR REFLECTION

Whether or not marriage is in God's plan for your life, here are some questions to consider as you contemplate this possibility:

- 1. How is my relationship with the Lord?** Am I easily distractable (a spouse will only add to that distraction) or am I able to keep my relationship with Christ primary in my life? (*1 Corinthians 7:32-33*)
- 2. Am I ready and willing to work on myself?** Are there habits or things in my past that need to be addressed? (*Psalms 139: 23-24*). Sometimes people expect marriage to be the “magic bullet” to fix habits or provide healing that realistically might take years of hard work.
- 3. How well do I submit to others?** How well do I love and esteem my brothers and sisters? (*Ephesians 5:21-33*)
- 4. What is this process revealing in me?** Am I able to trust God in this, releasing control of my future? (*Jeremiah 29:11*)
- 5. How can I continue to live a meaningful life amid the uncertainty?** Some people like their lives extremely well ordered, and an unexpected proposal or response can interfere with their plans. Can I trust in the midst of this uncertainty, giving control to God? (*Proverbs 3:5-6*)

God can use the earthly marriage decision making process to help us grow more like him. This conforming into his image remains God's great desire for our lives. As we grow in sanctification, whether we become married or remain single, we prepare for a greater marriage that will someday happen—the marriage of the Lamb (*Revelation 22:17*).



APPROACHING THE MARRIAGE DECISION

MARRIAGE DECISION FRAMEWORK

Because a marriage relationship impacts so many areas of life, it is important to use a sound, faith-based approach when considering the marriage decision. While the Bible does not give specific directions on how to pursue marriage, it does instruct towards faith (*2 Corinthians 5:7*) and godly wisdom (*Ephesians 5:15-16*) in all areas of life. The following definition describes what is meant by seeking marriage in a faith-led way:

The marriage decision is a discernment process grounded in faith and godly wisdom that occurs with counsel in community.

Follow Biblical Truth and Principles

Apply Godly Wisdom

Invest in Counsel and Community

Transparent with Leadership

Healthy Perspective of Marriage

The principles-based framework below uses the acronym, FAITH, to promote a wise, biblically informed, and counseled choice.

FOLLOW BIBLICAL TRUTH AND PRINCIPLES

- Seek God’s Kingdom first and maintain a healthy relationship with Christ. (*Matthew 6:33; Mark 12:30*)
- Practice surrender of our will to Christ and commit to prayer. (*Matthew 7:7-8*)
- Lead an overcoming life demonstrated by resisting temptation and sin. (*Romans 6:11*)
- Pursue God’s Word. He designed marriage as a living representation of Christ and his bride, the church.

APPLY GODLY WISDOM

- Seek wisdom from God. This wisdom is grounded in teachings in the Word and gained through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, learning from others, and life experience. (*Proverbs 4:11-13; James 1:5-6*)
- Scripture doesn’t support a mystical search for “one right” person to marry. Avoid over-spiritualizing the marriage decision by seeking repeated signs, emphasizing coincidences, and overly relying on feelings.
- It is not wrong to have interest or feelings for another person. Seeking healthy boundaries, counsel, and “walking in the light” helps avoid being driven by emotions that run past Godly discernment.

INVEST IN COUNSEL AND COMMUNITY

- Counsel with parents, mentors, and/or mature believers in the Body of Christ. (*Proverbs 11:14*)
- Seek input from those willing to provide you with both encouragement and caution where needed. They can provide experience, a different point of view, and encourage ongoing growth. (*Ephesians 4:15*)

- Support people should help examine an individual's readiness for marriage and evaluate what areas of growth and maturity are needed to be a healthy, future spouse. (*Proverbs 27:17*)

T RANSPARENT WITH LEADERSHIP

- Maintain open dialogue with church leadership throughout the entire marriage decision process, along with counsel from other support people to whom you are accountable. (*Romans 12:5*)
- Obtain Godly counsel and encouragement from leadership during the entire decision-making process as this is a time of self-examination, prayer, and surrender. (*Hebrews 13:17*)
- Counsel with local leadership helps ensure necessary learning, guidance on timing, and awareness of, and protection from, blind spots. (*Proverbs 12:15*)

H EALTHY PERSPECTIVE OF MARRIAGE

- Maintain a balanced perspective of marriage. Marriage and singleness are of equal value in scripture.
- Marriage is not an escape from or solution to our problems. Take steps to identify and manage issues that could get in the way of a healthy marriage relationship.
- Consider the various aspects of a healthy marriage relationship including spiritual leadership/submission, gender/family differences, emotional health/bonding, etc. Commit to needed growth. (*Ephesians 5:22-33*)



Scan or click for the online version of "Marriage Decision Framework."

WALKING THROUGH THE MARRIAGE DECISION FRAMEWORK

Use this guide to review personally the various aspects of the Marriage Decision Framework. For each aspect, the most relevant portions of this booklet are referenced and linked along with a few reflection questions which can be discussed with parents, mentors, or church leadership.

F - FOLLOW BIBLICAL TRUTH AND PRINCIPLES

Relevant Resources: Review *Principles to Consider* (p. 49-52) as well as the Biblical Decision-Making resources (p. 109).

Reflection Questions:

- What spiritual practices do I have in place that guide my spiritual journey and shape my decisions?
 - On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not at all consistent, 5 = very consistent), how consistent am I in these practices? If I am closer to a 1, what habits do I need to develop to become more consistent in this area?
- What support do I have in place that helps me resist temptation and walk in spiritual maturity?
- Which Biblical Decision Making principles do I find easier to follow? More difficult to follow?

A - APPLY GODLY WISDOM

Relevant Resources: Review *Approaching the Marriage Decision* (p.43-47).

Reflection Questions:

- What has it looked like for you to apply Godly wisdom in decision making in the past?
- On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not well at all, 5 = very well), how well am I able to separate out my personal preferences in marriage decision making from biblical truth and the Holy Spirit's direction?
- What cultural pressures or common errors are influencing my marriage decision making (i.e. overly spiritualizing, overly relying on signs or feelings, overly influenced by comparison of others, etc.)?

I - INVEST IN COUNSEL AND COMMUNITY

Relevant Resources: Go through the *Guide for Reflection* with a mentor (p.57-81).

Reflection Questions:

- Who am I trusting to speak into my life right now? Who knows me well enough to see blind spots in my character or maturity?
 - On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not at all, 5 = very surrendered), how willing am I to hear “wait”, “not yet”, or “not the one” from mentors?
- What is my typical response when I hear hard truths spoken into my life?

T - TRANSPARENT WITH LEADERSHIP

Relevant Resources: Review the *Guide to Seeking Marriage* (p.94-97).

Reflection Questions:

- Have I invited leadership to provide input early, or am I only seeking their blessing after I've made my decision?
- On a scale of 1-5 (1 = not at all, 5 = completely), how transparent am I being with others around this decision? Are there areas where I am not being completely truthful?
- What stands in my way of seeking accountability from church leadership, my parents, or a mentor in my life?

H - HEALTHY PERSPECTIVE OF MARRIAGE

Relevant Resources: Review *What is Marriage?* (p.40-42) and *Difficulties with the Marriage Decision* (p.53-55) as well as *Keeping a Balanced Perspective* (p.82-88) and the *Marriage Decision Making Podcasts* (p.110).

Reflection Questions:

- How have I found value in my season of singleness? Has it been a time of growth or a time of disappointment and discouragement? Are there issues remaining that will affect my biblical role in a marital relationship?
- What is my biblical view of the purpose of marriage?
- Is my perspective on marriage skewed to an extreme in any area(s)? Where do I need to seek a more balanced perspective?

MARRIAGE DECISION MAKING

What is Marriage?

God designed and ordained marriage in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world. In this setting, he stated, “...*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*”(Genesis 2:18) In the marriage relationship, the man is to “*leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*”(Genesis 2:24) This marital union creates a foundation for companionship, growth, healthy sexual fulfillment, and procreation. This section is meant to be a practical look at the marriage decision process as we discuss what it means to pursue *marriage by faith*.

Marriage by faith can be defined as a discernment process grounded in faith and godly wisdom that occurs with counsel in community.

As we discuss this topic, it is important to begin by reviewing a few key principles.

CORE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES REGARDING MARRIAGE

It is good to start by reaffirming some foundational biblical principles about marriage. Too often, societal influence can erode our core understanding of marriage and alter our standards. The Bible states:

1. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. (*Matthew 19:4-6*)
2. Christian marriage is to be between two Christians. (*2 Corinthians 6:14*)
3. God designed the marriage covenant to be a lifelong commitment. (*Mark 10:9*)
4. God designed marriage to reflect the union of Christ and the Church. (*Ephesians 5:31-32*)

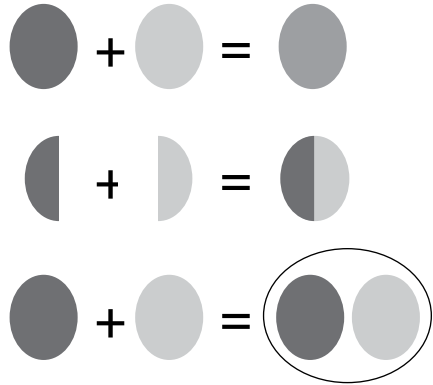
ESTABLISHING A HEALTHY IDENTITY IN CHRIST

It is also critical to understand marriage should not be viewed as a solution to a problem of discontentment or to create a feeling of “completeness.” It is easy to fall into a trap of “If only...” thinking, where we place our contentment hostage to a condition (like marriage) being fulfilled. It is not wrong to desire companionship and other potential benefits of marriage. One can be content and still have healthy desires and goals for life. However, a pattern of lacking contentment in life will not stop with a marriage relationship. It is important to reflect on whether we are seeking marriage in order to get out of an undesired situation or feel more complete, or if we are



dwelling in a state of contentment and still sense the nudge of the Holy Spirit toward marriage.

Some common misconceptions regarding marriage are illustrated in the diagram on the right. We can have the view that in marriage “two will become one” and lose their identity within this union (top line of the diagram). This is not completely accurate. Another faulty view is that a half of a person should seek another person who can



make them complete (second line of the diagram). This can be a recipe for conflict and unmet expectations. After the initial bliss of finding the other half or soul-mate, they find out they married someone who is not able to fulfill the fantasy image they projected on the other person. Both become disappointed. “If you try to find intimacy with another person before achieving a sense of identity on your own, all your relationships become an attempt to complete yourself.”¹ God’s design for marriage is actually for one whole person to marry another whole person (third line of the diagram). It is critical to realize a ‘whole’ person is not a perfect person. However, a single person should establish a firm foundation by focusing on being complete in Christ first and foremost and not looking to other singles to find the person or people who will complete them. This mindset can lead to unhealthy relationships with other singles, delay growth in Christ, and create difficulty in marriage.

***"And ye are complete in him, which is
the head of all principality and power."
Colossians 2:10***

1. Les and Leslie Parrott, *Relationships: How to Make Bad Relationships Better and Good Relationships Great*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), commitment with eyes of faith.

Approaching the Marriage Decision

SHOULD I MARRY?

When considering marriage, one of the first questions to simply ask is, “Should I marry?” Choosing to marry and choosing to stay single can both be good, right decisions in the sight of God. Some will choose to marry, some will choose to not marry, and some desire to marry, but it does not occur. Neither marriage nor singleness should be looked at as a guarantee of a blessing or a lesser state. God wants us to be fully devoted to him in whatsoever state we are in and allow him to work through us there.

The Bible is clear marriage diverts one’s attention away from being fully focused on God’s work. While marriage is not condemned for this, it does require time, effort, resources, and priority. (*1 Corinthians 7:32-35*)

The Apostle Paul mentioned he wished people would remain single in order to focus on God’s work. However, he also recognized God did not intend for each person to be single. (*1 Corinthians 7:6-9*)

THE MARRIAGE DECISION

The Bible does not *prescribe* the specific way or method to get married. However, God gave us many timeless truths and principles in the Word to guide us. In addition, there are a variety of examples of marriage decisions in the Bible including Isaac & Rebekah, Ruth & Boaz, etc. It is safe to say none of our marriage decisions will be exactly like these situations. These stories are meant for our example (*1 Corinthians 10:6*) but not to be replicated in an exact way. They are not to be considered normative for all people at all times, and care should be taken to learn from the principles found within these stories but not to demand God work in our lives in the same way.

In considering the marriage decision, some people can become overwhelmed with its gravity while others may not take it seriously enough.

On one hand, the marriage decision is one we make similar to how we would make any big decision; we use a biblically based process of prayer, counsel from others, and study of the Word. On the other hand, additional

We seek godly wisdom and then step out in faith.

time and discernment is required as this decision has life-long implications, impacts more than just one individual's life, and has ramifications for future generations. We show respect for the God-ordained institution of marriage by prayerfully seeking his guidance and direction. In this way, we don't take it lightly, yet we don't remain paralyzed with fear of the unknown. We seek godly wisdom and then step out in faith.

AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS

There are some common errors which can be seen when approaching the marriage decision. Often individuals will focus too heavily on supernatural stories or expect God to directly "speak" to them and work in what most believe to be overtly miraculous ways. For most couples, however, their coming together is a process of God slowly working through their lives. Occasionally, we hear of a more spectacular experience which a couple went through. The tendency will be to compare this situation with our own and expect the same level of remarkable workings. Unfortunately, it can become easy to overemphasize the miraculous and minimize the "ordinary" way in which God works most of the time in the majority of individual's lives.

Another error occurs when individuals expect God to work in their lives exactly how he worked in someone else's life. Making demands upon God is not wise. It is important to neither limit God's ability nor demand he provide us with specific clarity in a specific manner on our specific time schedule. Too often, single individuals base their knowledge of how couples become engaged on a conglomeration of stories and perceptions from other situations.

Finally, many individuals fall into the belief there is only one, “perfect” potential spouse for us in this world. While this is a romantic idea, it is not supported scripturally. There may be individuals who would relate better to us, who will be more spiritually refining for us, or whom God may be leading us toward. However, the idea that if we miss out on “the one” we have fallen short of God’s perfect will is a potentially damaging thought process which we should balance with the whole counsel of scripture. It is important to be aware of this inaccuracy and other common errors as we approach a healthy perception of the marriage decision.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Do you ever find yourself leaning toward any of these common errors? If so, which one(s)? How do you balance this with God’s truth(s)?

HOW WELL SHOULD I KNOW A POTENTIAL SPOUSE?

Sometimes individuals go to extremes about how much they should know a potential spouse prior to marriage. Some individuals err on the side of believing it is more spiritual to not know a potential spouse while others believe they need to know nearly everything before they can move forward. It is not more spiritual to not know a potential spouse, yet neither is it automatically better to know someone well. In general, engagement is a time for learning about each other and coming together toward marriage. Premarital counseling can help couples grow in their appropriate understanding and knowledge of each other.

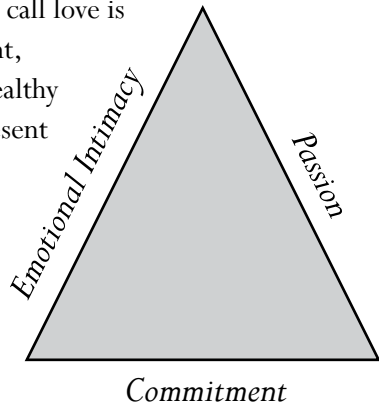
LIFE DIRECTION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PERSONALITY TYPE

As we consider a prospective spouse we may ask, “Are they my type?” It is important to realize questions of an individual’s life goals and the

direction they feel God is leading them are different than questions of preference or type. We can have overconfidence in our opinion of the type of spouse we feel we would like to marry. We can misinterpret our own wisdom to justify why we should not be open to what could be God's prompting toward an individual who might stretch us in our current state. This is very different than understanding and prayerfully thinking through whether a potential spouse has similar life goals and a life direction. Or maybe a potential spouse has significant life issues which need to be considered. A balanced perspective reliant on trust in God while utilizing wise counsel from elders and godly mentors is critical in this area.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF EMOTION AND LOVE IN THE MARRIAGE DECISION

Some marriage decisions will originate out of strong emotion for another individual, and some will originate from a sense of commitment or companionship. The feeling we often call love is composed of three aspects: commitment, emotional intimacy, and passion. In a healthy marriage, these three aspects are all present and reasonably balanced, similar to the triangle pictured here. It is important to realize in a marriage decision that one of these sides can easily get out of balance.



Individuals who become infatuated with someone based on the passion side of love can be convinced they have found “the one” while overlooking the commitment, character, or counsel. Others may be concerned that their emotions toward a potential spouse are automatically “self” and must be crucified and play no role whatsoever in the decision. Yet others may have respect for the spiritual depth or friendship a person brings into their life, but struggle

with the decision because the passion side of love isn't present to a degree they thought it should be.

In each of these situations, an individual needs counsel from godly mentors and encouragement to understand the various aspects of love in marriage. Healthy and unhealthy marriages can be started from any of these situations. Keep in mind the balanced triangular view of love, and pray for surrender to God's direction in this matter, not our feelings (or lack of feelings). Wise, biblical counsel from others can often help discern through emotions in these matters as well.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How well are you able to separate the different types of love in your life and relationships? Can you distinguish them in your life and your relationships?

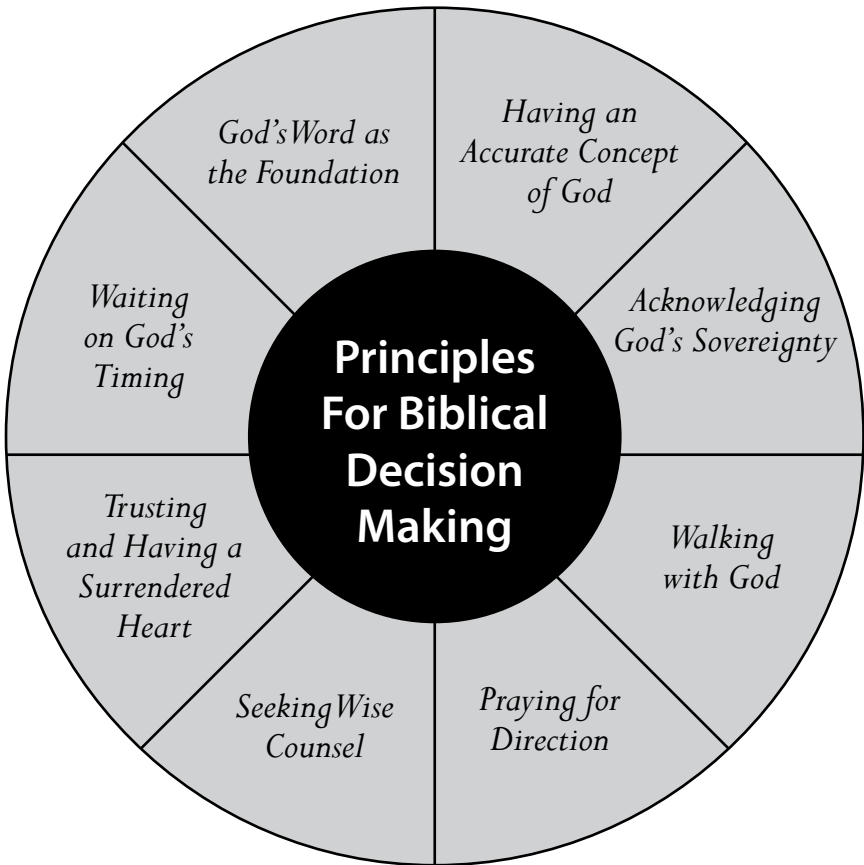
THE IMPORTANCE OF LEAVING AND CLEAVING

Finally, when two people enter into marriage, they are to leave their family of origin, cleave to their spouse, and establish a new family unit. Relationships with family and friends will change. These former relationships can and should continue to play a role of support in the lives of a couple, but there must be a transition to one's spouse becoming the primary support in life.

These considerations are not meant to be scary or limiting, but they are meant to be part of the call to "*count the cost.*" (Luke 14:28) We ask God for wisdom as we consider the cost of the commitment of marriage, viewing the commitment with eyes of faith.



Scan or click to read the
"Principles of Biblical
Decision Making."



Principles to Consider

It is important to approach the marriage decision using faith and godly wisdom. Many principles and cautions are laid out more extensively in the document, “Principles of Biblical Decision Making” (see QR code). We encourage you to think through the principles of biblical decision making in the context of marriage as you make your decision. A few guiding points for these principles are below.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As you review the principles below, which one(s) seem to be easiest for you? Which one(s) might be more difficult?

A. GOD'S WORD AS THE FOUNDATION

Psalm 11:3, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Establishing that we will pursue a marriage decision based upon the foundation of God's Word and his principles is a critical first step. Purposing that we will follow the truth of the Bible and not rest in what seems wise in our own eyes is crucial. While having personal motives, thoughts, and emotions is not bad or wrong, we must be aware that a feeling or sense of what is right or wrong apart from God's Word can powerfully influence us. The marriage decision is by nature personally charged; we must balance out our personal persuasions with the unchanging counsel of God's Word.

B. HAVING AN ACCURATE CONCEPT OF GOD

Our concept of God can greatly affect how well we trust him with our marriage decision. If an individual does not view God as trustworthy (*Psalms 9:10*), they are more likely to take matters into their own hands. If someone does not believe God desires the best for them (*Jeremiah 29:11-13*), they struggle to have faith and confidence he is working “*all things for good*.” At times when we do not understand God’s ways (e.g., when someone desires to be married and is not or when a proposal does not go through), it is easy to feel as though God is withholding good things from us. It is wise in the marriage decision making process to spend time developing an accurate concept of God to further build on the foundation of Scripture.

C. ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

God is the object of our faith as we consider marriage. No one knows the future. Ultimately, we move toward the future by faith. We are to put our faith in him and commit, up front, to seek his guidance and direction throughout the process. This can be greatly liberating, comforting, and terrifying at the same time. Faith asks us by its nature to give up control and surrender to the one who is greater than us. Yet faith can bring comfort when we believe and trust that he loves us and desires the best for us. God’s sovereignty gives us the perspective to say, “I will move forward with the Lord, and whatever happens, God will be with me.”

Faith asks us by its nature to give up control and surrender to the one who is greater than us.

D. WALKING WITH GOD AND PRAYING FOR DIRECTION

Our relationship with God is of utmost importance as we consider marriage. God places high value on this decision as it affects not only us but also our potential spouse. We should have a healthy relationship with God and be living an overcoming life by his grace. Our walk with God

should be centered on the strong commitment to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. (*Matthew 6:33*) Our prayer life should be vibrant, filled with the confidence God can perform that which he desires but also filled with the humility to place our desires in submission to his will. Walking with God, praying in the Spirit, and continually conforming to the image of Christ are critical first steps in the marriage decision process.

E. SEEKING WISE COUNSEL

Seeking wise counsel is essential for the marriage decision.

A crucial check in the marriage decision making process is the counsel of others. It is a blessing to be a part of the Body of Christ where we are “*members one of another.*” (*Romans 12:5*) These “*members*” can speak “*the truth in love*” (*Ephesians 4:15*) by helping an individual check motives, determine a readiness or maturity for marriage, identify areas where an individual is not seeing clearly, and other aspects of wise counsel. It is strongly encouraged that counsel is sought from a support team of one’s parents and experienced and trusted mentors in Christ, not just peers. The wisdom of *Proverbs 12:15*, “*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise,*” is especially poignant in an emotionally charged decision such as marriage. Those who know us well can prayerfully help with the discernment process. Support people should help examine our readiness for marriage and in what areas of life growth and maturity are needed in order to be a healthy future spouse.

Get counsel from your elder early in the process.

It is strongly encouraged individuals meet with their elder when they are starting to consider marriage. The time of considering marriage is a deeply spiritual time. It is a time of self-examination, prayer, and pruning. Godly counsel and encouragement from an elder can be of great benefit during the entire process. This means meeting with the elder or church leader and seeking counsel early in the process, well before the final proposal.

F. TRUSTING, HAVING A SURRENDERED HEART, AND WAITING ON GOD'S TIMING

At some point in a marriage decision process, there will be a “step of faith,” a decision to move forward with either a proposal or an answer. How sure do we have to be to take a step of faith? By its definition, taking a step of faith does not mean having perfect certainty or having everything figured out. It is walking in his strength and teachings today while trusting him for the future and surrendering the outcome to him. It is trusting God through the uncertainty.

It is trusting God through the uncertainty.

In addition, there will be times where we seem to be waiting for God to act or potentially work in others. Sometimes the “who” and the “when” of marriage do not seem to line up. Patiently wait for God to orchestrate while praying your faith can remain strong in the promise God is working even when it does not seem like it (*Isaiah 40:31*). However, care should be taken to ensure we are not passively waiting for God to simply work a miracle in our lives. Actively continue to serve the Lord faithfully. We should talk through our sense of leading toward marriage with our elder or godly mentor, continue to pray for our future spouse, and seek to walk with the Lord in large and small aspects of life. The first step in a marriage decision is a healthy relationship with God.

As a final point to consider, the Bible counsels us in *Ephesians 5:15* to, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” As such, when we make decisions, especially a decision that will impact lives as profoundly as marriage, we must consider the implications both short and long term. Asking ourselves the right questions and prayerfully reflecting on our answers in the light of the scriptures is a critical aspect of the marriage decision. The *Guide for Reflection* (p.57-81) is a resource to support self-reflection or to walk through with a mentor.

Difficulties with the Marriage Decision

There are many individuals whose godly desires and expectations have not been met in the manner they wish. At times, God's desire for our lives is different than we would choose. At other times, we must recognize we live in a fallen world and are affected by the choices of others, some of which can affect our ability to marry or be fulfilled in marriage. This fact does not negate the goodness of God but rather reflects the brokenness of a fallen world.

Dealing with an unmet desire we believe is a wholesome desire is very difficult.

Often, it leads people to question God and his Word. One may conclude they

are ready to marry and believe they are supposed to marry, yet it still doesn't happen. The marriage decision can be especially difficult as it involves the will and decision of two individuals. When unmet expectations on the part of one or both individuals arise in a marriage decision situation, it is often not possible to know the answer to the question, "Why did this happen?" We can find ourselves spinning as Job did, attempting to explain and fully understand our situation. In moments like these, it is important to cling to what we know to be truth. We can cling to the continuing certainty of God's desire to sustain us in the midst of hurt and disappointment. We can cling to the certainty of his love for us; we can cling to the certainty of his desire to use even this difficult situation to conform us to the image of his Son.

We can cling to the certainty of his love for us.

Romans 8:28-29, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

We can know God, but not perfectly. We can know his will, but not perfectly. Sometimes we need to seek grace to accept life as it happens to



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us, instead of needing to know God's purpose or thinking. We must allow God to be bigger than us and more mysterious as his ways are above our ways (*Isaiah 55:8-9*). Sometimes what we envision for our life does not come to reality, and it is not possible to completely understand why. That is where faith becomes truly real. When we find ourselves questioning God, it is best to fully acknowledge those questions to him and seek comfort from him and his Word.

Sometimes what we envision for our life does not come to reality and it is not possible to completely understand why. That is where faith becomes truly real.

Psalm 27:14, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."

2 Corinthians 12:8-10, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."



Scan or click to read the "Unmet Expectations" article.

Conclusion

Few decisions in our life will challenge us, grow us, and conform us to the image of Christ as the marriage decision will. It calls us to walk by faith while applying the wisdom he has given us to think and act biblically. It calls us to a state of vulnerability as we seek counsel and make our intentions known to others. And ultimately, it calls us to be dependent on him, leading us to a high level of trust in our God and his goodness, no matter what the outcome. One thing is sure in the marriage decision process. If entered prayerfully and with a surrendered heart, it will change us. We can expect to grow spiritually throughout. And if we purpose to maintain our trust and faith in him, it will bless us.

Psalm 84:11-12, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."



**View the online version
of this article, "Marriage
Decision Making," here.**

A GUIDE FOR REFLECTION

One of the aspects of utilizing godly wisdom is performing self-reflection. The following are some topics which can guide this crucial process as you consider marriage. It is important to bear in mind every individual and couple enters marriage with room for growth. The intent of this section is to encourage you as you prepare your heart towards Christian marriage. **It is meant to be completed carefully and with time and is best utilized when discussed with a trusted mentor.**

This self-reflection section is designed to identify potential areas of weakness and provide you with the tools for growth in these areas. Prayerfully move through the content, allowing the Spirit to confirm areas of strength and reveal areas of needed growth. When a weakness is revealed, linger on that area of growth and allow the Spirit of God to mature you in that area. Follow the example on the next page.



Scan or click for the
online version of
"A Guide for Reflection."

Self Reflection Topic

The topic description gives context and clarity, providing a basis for contemplation and discussion between you and a mentor. Listen to counsel and the Spirit's prompting while answering the question, "Should I linger on this topic?"

1. My relationship with Christ is healthy.

Our personal relationship with God must be first in our life and more important than any human relationship, including a potential spouse. A marriage relationship should be built on the foundation of our relationship with Christ. It is essential our relationship with Christ be healthy & growing.

Mark 12:30-31, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

Meditate on your relationship with Christ using his sermon to his disciples. – *Matthew 5-7*



Scan or click to watch
"The Vision for Discipleship."

Prayerfully internalize the biblical reference.

Find online resources that help flesh out the topic in tangible and applicable ways.

Spiritual growth requires feeding on God's Word. Change occurs according to God's timing. Allow his Word to be grafted on your heart by meditating on the given passage. Suggested method: prayerfully read/listen/rehearse the passage in repetition (every day for a period of time).

Areas of General Reflection

RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST IS VITAL

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Meditate on your relationship with Christ using his sermon to his disciples. — *Matthew 5-7*



Scan or click to watch
"The Vision for Discipleship."

2. I want to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Marriage is designed to be an earthly representation of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Anyone wishing to enter into the covenant relationship of marriage should be willing to become conformed into the image of Christ.

Colossians 2:6-7, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have

been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

Meditate on the "mind of Christ" regarding relationships. – *Phil. 2*



Scan or click to view the
Spiritual Formation course.

PERSONAL HISTORY IMPACTS MARRIAGE

1. I have no unconfessed sin in my life.

Unconfessed sin is a seedbed for future hurt. Deal with sin before it hurts spouses and children.

Psalm 51:3, "For I acknowledge my transgressions: & my sin is ever before me."

Meditate on David's repentance. – *Psalm 51*



Scan or click to read the
"How to Repent" article.

2. I am living an overcoming life in Christ.

An overcoming life is demonstrated by consistent spiritual progress whereby a Christian is quick to repent for sin, is determined to resist temptation and relishes God's peace and favor. One is not dominated by sin, responds quickly in a setback, and continues to grow toward greater understanding of the biblical meaning of overcoming.

Romans 6:11, "...Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Meditate on living in the Spirit and not the flesh. – *Galatians 5*



Scan or click to read the "What Does an Overcoming Christian Life Look Like?" article.

3. I view God in a healthy way.

Often our image of God can become distorted from experiences in life or inaccurate interpretations of God's Word. It is critical we are constantly examining our views in the light of the Word and conforming our view of God to this truth.

John 4:24, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Meditate on God's attributes. – *Psalms 139*



Scan or click to listen to the "God Image" podcast episodes.

4. I acknowledge and am willing to work through unresolved emotional or relational issues in my life. I am also willing to share this with my potential spouse.

Some people have gone through various life experiences which can impact the marriage decision. Experiences of abuse, trauma, past inappropriate intimate relationships, dysfunction in your family-of-origin, mental illness, etc. can all lead to further difficulties if they are not dealt with appropriately. Seek wise counsel for help dealing with these issues. These issues are not reasons to avoid marriage; rather, they are issues which need to be worked through so you can better become who God wants you to be.

2 Corinthians 2:11, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."

Meditate on the hope and power offered through the gospel to every aspect of our life. – *Ephesians 2*

Take a Deeper Look: Appendix A: Factors that Could Potentially Lead to Marital Struggles (p.76-77)

5. I do not view marriage as an escape or solution to my problems.

Marriage is not a good escape from problems. Only God can truly “settle” us. If we seek this settling in relationships, things, or by escaping a current situation instead of trusting God through it, it can lead to further spiritual detriment for ourselves and others. Seek to be content in “whatsoever state” you are.

1 Peter 5:10, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

Meditate on the true meaning of contentment. – *Philippians 4:11-13, 1 Peter 5:5-11*



Scan or click to listen to the "Contentment" podcast episodes.

6. I have established a pattern of healthy relationships and emotional health.

Marriage will bring light to unhealthy patterns and habits in the areas of relationships and emotional health. It is imperative an individual recognize their relational strengths and weaknesses and be willing to purposefully grow areas of weakness.

2 Tim. 2:20-21, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

Meditate on the "put offs" and "put ons" of *Ephesians 4:17-32, Colossians 3.*

Take a Deeper Look: Appendix B: Characteristics of Emotionally Healthy People (p.78-79)

MARRIAGE GIVES RISE TO COMMITMENTS

1. I am willing to commit to a life-long covenant relationship.

Similar to how God's covenant with us is meant to be eternal, the marriage covenant is meant to endure as long as we have life.

Matt. 19:4-6, "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For

this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Meditate on God's covenant and the sanctity of vows.

— *Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:38-41, Ecclesiastes 5:4-7*

Take a Deeper Look: Appendix C: An Example of Apostolic Christian Marriage Vows (p.80-81)

2. I am ready and willing to "leave" my father and mother and "cleave" to a spouse.

When two people enter marriage, they are to "leave" their family of origin, "cleave" to their spouse, and establish a new family unit. This means relationships with family and friends will change and a spouse should become the preeminent relationship in your life. This might also mean significant geographic or even cultural changes. These "costs" should be counted.

Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Meditate on "oneness" as we see it in and with the Trinity.

— *John 17:21-26, Ephesians 4:1-14*



Scan or click to listen to the "Leaving & Cleaving" podcast episodes.

3. I currently build a rapport of trust & confidence with others and will build this trust and confidence with my spouse.

Marriage unites two into one (*Ephesians 5:31*). For this to happen fully, there must be a high level of trust between the individuals. This pattern of trust should first begin in one's single life. One's appearance and behavior should carry the overtones of a character which values singularity and trust.

Proverbs 20:6-7, "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him."

Meditate on the singularity of marriage. – *1 Corinthians 6:12-7:5*

Take a Deeper Look: Write out a description of why you should be considered trustworthy by others. Be specific in your examples.

4. I am willing to take on the responsibility of children should God give us children.

God designed marriage to be the context in which children are born. When considering marriage, both men and women should evaluate their willingness and ability to take care of the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of children. Having children is a blessing. However, they also require parents who will selflessly devote themselves to the parenting journey and its blessings and challenges.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Meditate on the duty to train children. – *Deuteronomy 6, Eph. 6:1-4*



Scan or click to listen to
Parenting podcast episodes.

MARRIAGE REQUIRES A WILLINGNESS TO SET ASIDE ONE'S OWN DESIRES FOR THE SAKE OF THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

1. I am willing to submit to a spouse.

Christian marriage models the submission of the Trinity—unity born out of diversity through the pattern of preferring the other.

Ephesians 5:21, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

Meditate on the power of submission. – *Ephesians 5:21-33, 1 Peter 3:1-7*



Scan or click to read the
"Biblical Headship and
Submission" article.

2. I am able and willing to be flexible, forbearing, & forgiving.

Marriage naturally results in changes, transitions, and challenges.

Therefore, anyone entering into marriage will need to make adjustments and be willing to sacrifice in order to accommodate the other person and to grow in Christ-likeness. Differences in personality,



family background, decision-making, and preferences/taste can be areas of conflict and polarization or opportunities for developing mutual understanding and appreciation. Having a forgiving and forbearing spirit is an essential quality people considering marriage should be cultivating.

Colossians 3:12-14, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

Meditate on *Ephesians 4: 17-32*.



Scan or click to read the
"Forgiveness" article.

MARRIAGE IS EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY INTIMATE

1. I am not overly influenced by outward appearances.

God created us with physical attraction. It is understandable and natural to notice and be drawn physically toward others. Furthermore, it is appropriate to be a good steward of our physical health and body. However, an over-focus on our outward appearance or how others look can distract us in the marriage decision. While it is impossible not to notice another person's outward appearance and physical attractiveness, Scripture teaches that valuing appearance and external qualities over the heart is unwise. How a potential spouse looks is guaranteed to change with time and age; character is one of the most enduring aspects of one's life over time.

1 Peter 3:3-4, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

Meditate on true beauty. – *Proverbs 31:30, 1 Peter 3:1-7*

Take a Deeper Look: List five internal virtues (i.e., patience, self-sacrifice, compassion, etc.) you believe are important in a potential spouse.

2. I understand true physical intimacy is born out of true emotional intimacy.

Physical intimacy is private, sacred, and singular. It is a physical expression of emotional and spiritual oneness. Being able to open your heart as well as receive another's heart is important to physical intimacy and a healthy marriage.

Proverbs 31:11, "The heart of her husband (his wife) doth safely trust in her (him)..."

Meditate on the trust demonstrated between the sheep and the Shepherd. – *John 10:1-5*



Scan or click to read the
"Triangular Model of Love"
article.



3. I am ready to love my spouse biblically.

When facing the marriage decision, we must consider whether we are committed to developing love for a spouse. One must be committed to love both romantically and in a self-sacrificing way. The Christian command to love self-sacrificially becomes even more important, and often challenging, in marriage. Romantic love is also very important in marriage. It grows and develops over time in different ways for different people. It takes effort and intention to learn how to express romantic love in a way our spouse can feel it.

Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;”

Titus 2:4, “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,”

Meditate on the attributes of true biblical love.

– 1 Corinthians 13

Take a Deeper Look: List the attributes of biblical love described in *1 Corinthians 13*. Give examples as to how they are evident in your life currently.

THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL LEAVES US UNCOMFORTABLY VULNERABLE

1. I am surrendered to the potential outcome of a marriage proposal.

One of the most difficult aspects of a marriage decision is that even though individuals strive for surrender and submission to the Lord in such a weighty matter, it still ends with a decision which two people must agree upon. There are times when despite each individual's best efforts to surrender and align to God in this matter, two wills still do not align, and disappointment occurs. True surrender allows someone to be open to the response no matter what it might be and turns such disappointments into growth opportunities, not seeds for bitterness. It is important to remember we are accountable for our own actions, not the actions or decisions of another.

1 Corinthians 7:39 "...she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

Meditate on God's sovereignty and our call to trust in him.
— *Psalms 84:11-12, Romans 8:18-39*



Scan or click to view resources
on Unmet Expectations.

Specific Questions for Men

1. I am actively pursuing to grow as a spiritual leader.

Men considering marriage need to be willing and ready to assume the role of a spiritual servant-leader who will watch for and guide the course of the family. This includes being the spiritual “pace-setter” for the family and loving in a self-sacrificing way that does what is necessary to make a wife and children feel nourished and cherished.

Ephesians 5:25-30, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”

Meditate on the Christ-like pattern of being a husband. — Eph. 5:21-33



Scan or click to watch the
"Biblical Roles of Men &
Women in Marriage" webinar.

2. I am willing to learn about and be sensitive to the needs of a wife.

Men considering marriage need to be intentional about learning to understand the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual needs of a wife. Women are designed by God differently than men but are to be valued equally. This concept is important to remember in the marriage relationship.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."

Meditate on the sensitive care of God our Father. – *Psalm 23, 103, 112*



Scan or click to read the "Love Languages & Gender Differences" article.

3. I am handling my finances using principles of biblical financial stewardship and have a sound plan for how I can provide materially for a spouse.

Men who are considering marriage should reflect whether they are able to financially provide for a wife and children. While it is important to not be materialistically focused, a potential husband should have a reasonable plan and ability to provide for his family.

1 Timothy 5:8, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

Meditate on the need to take on responsibilities in the appropriate time. – *Ecclesiastes 3:1-15*



Scan or click to read the "Money Matters" article.

Specific Questions for Women

1. I am willing to respect my husband and yield to his spiritual leadership.

Women considering marriage need to consider whether they are willing to be submissive to and respect a husband. They must be willing and ready to assume the role of a wife that is a helper who is suitable (i.e., “help meet”— *Genesis 2:18*) to respect and encourage her husband.

1 Peter 3:4-6, “But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.”

Meditate on Christ’s submission to the Father. — *John 17*



**Scan or click to watch the
"Biblical Roles of Men &
Women in Marriage" webinar.**

2. I am willing to learn about and be sensitive to the needs of a husband.

Women considering marriage need to be intentional about learning to understand the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual needs of a husband. Men are designed by God differently than women but are to be valued equally. This concept is important to remember in the marriage relationship.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself

unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.”

Meditate on the sensitive care of God our Father. — *Psalm 23, 103, 112*



Scan or click to read the "Love Languages & Gender Differences" article.

3. I am willing to help provide for the family by contributing what I am able without neglecting the family.

The burden of responsibility for provision often falls on the husband. In these cases, being thankful and supporting this effort will communicate love and respect to your husband. There are exceptions to these circumstances, but, in all cases, healthy communication concerning financial matters is key to a healthy marriage.

Proverbs 31:27, “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.”

Meditate on the respectful initiative of a godly wife. — *Proverbs 31*



Scan or click to read the "Money Matters" article.

Appendix A: Factors that Could Potentially Lead to Marital Struggles

Below is a list of factors that, if unaddressed or unresolved, can lead to marital distress. Go through these items with a support person and discuss how any of these factors have affected you in the past or may affect you currently. If you have questions or concerns about whether any of the items below might affect you in marriage, seek counsel from your elder, mentor, or trusted professional counselor.

- **History of abuse or trauma.** This may include issues such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, rape, serious accidents, etc.
- **History or strong potential for alcohol or drug (illegal or prescription) addiction/abuse.**
- **History of growing up in a dysfunctional family.** This may include having a disconnected, chaotic, overly involved, rigid, or abusive family of origin.
- **Serious history or present concern with pornography, compulsive masturbation, or other sexually addictive behavior.** One should not assume that marriage alone will remedy problems with out-of-control sexual behavior.
- **History or present concern with same-sex attraction or gender confusion.**
- **History of being hurt in close relationship leading to difficulty trusting, fearing commitment, or fearing abandonment by others.** This could include growing up in a home where divorce took place, being taken advantage of by someone you trusted, abuse, etc.
- **History or strong potential for mental health issues or personality disorders.** This may include situations where ongoing need for counseling and/or medication will likely be needed.

- History or strong potential for being controlling or emotionally abusive.
- History or strong potential for disabilities or medical conditions that could impact the relationship.
- History of poor financial management decisions with serious outstanding debt.

Appendix B: Characteristics of Emotionally Healthy People

While there are many characteristics of healthy, emotional well-being, the list below (adapted from Shedler & Weston's 2009 Psychological Health Index) provides a good summary. Please review the list along with a support person and discuss whether each item represents a strength area, a growth area, or an area of deficit you need to actively work on. A potential spouse will not necessarily be perfect in all areas but should demonstrate healthy tendencies.

- Is empathic; is sensitive & responsive to other peoples' needs & feelings.
- Tends to be conscientious and responsible.
- Is able to use his/her talents, abilities, and energy effectively and productively.
- Is able to form close and lasting friendships characterized by mutual support and sharing of experiences.
- Tends to express emotions appropriate in quality and intensity to the situation at hand.
- Appreciates and responds to humor.
- Generally finds contentment and happiness in life's activities.
- Is creative; is able to see things or approach problems in novel ways.
- Has moral and ethical standards and strives to live up to them.
- Is capable of sustaining a meaningful love relationship characterized by genuine intimacy and caring.
- Is able to assert him/herself effectively and appropriately when necessary.
- Finds meaning in belonging and contributing to a larger community (e.g., organization, church, neighborhood, etc.).
- Is able to find meaning and satisfaction in the pursuit of long-term goals and ambitions.

- Is articulate; can express himself/herself well in words.
- Enjoys challenges; takes pleasure in accomplishing things.
- Is capable of hearing information that is emotionally threatening (i.e., that challenges cherished perceptions, and self-perceptions) and can use and benefit from it.
- Is able to find meaning and fulfillment in guiding, mentoring, or nurturing others.
- Has the capacity to recognize alternative viewpoints, even in matters that stir up strong feelings.
- Appears to have come to terms with painful experiences from the past; has found meaning in, and grown from such experiences.
- Tends to elicit liking in others.
- Appears comfortable and at ease in social situations.
- Has a healthy view of sexuality and is not controlled by it.

Why does all this matter? The graphic shows building blocks which healthy people possess and from which healthy relationships are formed. Note each level affects, and is affected by, one's relationship with Christ.



*The list above is adapted from Shelder & Weston's 2009 Psychological Health Index
Graphic from Counseling and Marriage by Friesen & Friesen, 1989.*

Appendix C: An Example of Apostolic Christian Marriage Vows

At this time you may arise and join hands to take your wedding vows.

Do you realize the seriousness and the sacredness of the marriage vows you are about to take?

Brother _____, can you now tell us as your love and affection grew for Sister _____ that you counseled with your God and asked him to give you the faith that she should be your future wife?

Sister _____, can you tell us when the proposal came to you, that you counseled with your God and asked him to give you the faith to believe that Brother _____ should be your future husband?

Brother _____, will you pledge your faithfulness to Sister _____ in all love and honor, in all kindness and sympathy, in all faith and tenderness, to cherish her and respect her as your wife, in the holy bonds of matrimony according to the ordinance of God?

Sister _____, will you pledge your faithfulness to Brother _____ in all love and honor, in all kindness and sympathy, in all faith and tenderness, to cherish him and respect him as your husband, in the holy bonds of matrimony according to the ordinance of God?

Brother _____, do you now promise and covenant before God and these many witnesses to be a kind, loving and faithful husband in days of want or plenty, in sorrow or joy, sickness or good health so long as ye both shall live?

Sister _____, do you now promise and covenant before God and these many witnesses to be a kind, loving and faithful wife in days of

want or plenty, in sorrow or joy, sickness or good health so long as ye both shall live?

Will you both strive to keep your home in godly order reading the Word of God and praying together?

Should the Lord bless your home with children, you have a duty to rear them in the fear and nurture of the Lord. Your lives are to be an honor unto God, unto the Church, and a blessing to each other.

God has heard your vows and by the authority granted by the Word of God, I now pronounce Brother _(first and last name)_____ and Sister _(first and last name)___ as husband and wife and this is done in the name of the Lord. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

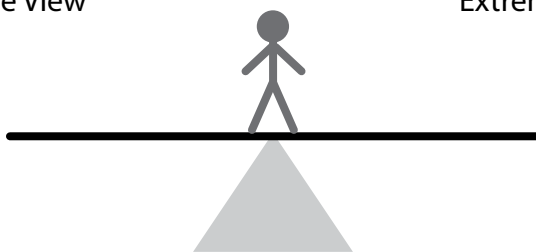
“May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”(Numbers 6:24-26)

KEEPING A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

We each view life from our own perspective. While this is certainly normal, we can all have blind spots and tendencies in our thinking which may lead us to inaccurate conclusions. Because the marriage decision is so important, we must be intentional about keeping a balanced perspective as we seek to discern well. This section will hopefully bring clarity and balance to some common, extreme views on the marriage decision. It is meant to highlight a few examples where marriage decision making thoughts can become off balance. Review the following statements with a mentor and consider if your perspective is off balance.

Extreme View

Extreme View



Balanced View

Extreme View

Believing marriage is of greater spiritual value than singleness.

Balanced View

Realizing both marriage & singleness are commended in the scriptures.

Extreme View

Believing singleness is of greater spiritual value than marriage.



Extreme View

Believing there is one perfectly right way for the Lord to direct every couple together. Believing that God *must* speak to you directly or that supernatural signs *are required* for God to lead you to a spouse.

Balanced View

Believing God deals uniquely with each person and not according to a formula. Being submitted to God throughout the entire decision-making process can give you confidence God will lead you over time.

Extreme View

Believing you can choose to do whatever you want and God will automatically bless your decisions. Believing God doesn't intervene or play a role in our marriage decision making.



Extreme View

Holding the belief there is only one person in the world whom you could marry.

Balanced View

Taking the decision to marry very seriously and cautiously. Seeking out God's direction through the Word, prayer, and godly counsel.

Extreme View

Believing God doesn't care about who we marry so we are free to do whatever we want.



Extreme View

Believing "waiting on the Lord" means being completely passive.

Balanced View

Moving slowly and intentionally, praying through every step and seeking counsel.

Extreme View

Being impatient and unwilling to wait on the Lord. Making impulsive decisions.



Extreme View

Allowing sin in your life and believing it won't harm you. Believing emotional or relational issues in yourself or future spouse won't interfere with your marriage or your marriage will even solve them.

Balanced View

Realizing unresolved or ongoing sin, emotional or relational issues can be stressful or even increase in a marriage. Focusing on living an overcoming life by taking responsibility, being accountable, and desiring to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Extreme View

Believing you have to be completely perfect in all things in order to get married. Holding emotional or relational issues against yourself or someone else.

Extreme View

Believing a potential spouse's past mistakes indicate those mistakes will be repeated in the future. People can't change.

Balanced View

Realizing people can change, but also realizing some things may only change a little and some things won't change at all.

Extreme View

Believing marriage and love will change a potential spouse into the person who you wish he/she was. Love will change his/her personality.

Extreme View

Believing knowing little to nothing about a potential spouse is more spiritual.

Balanced View

Seeing the importance of knowing a potential spouse is of Christian character and has values and a core direction in life which lines up with yours.

Extreme View

Believing you must know everything about a potential spouse in order to step forward.



Extreme View

Believing any type of a relationship with a person of the opposite sex is always bad and avoiding all contact.

Balanced View

Having good male-female relationships while maintaining accountability and ensuring you do not do anything which could potentially compromise yourself or another person.

Extreme View

Believing freedom in Christ means you don't need healthy boundaries and accountability. Being flirtatious or immodest in your interactions.



Extreme View

Believing you will not have to change or adjust after marriage.

Balanced View

Realizing honoring and preferring one another is essential to marriage AND so is having a healthy Christ-centered identity.

Extreme View

Believing you must lose your identity and opinions after marriage.



Extreme View

Believing it is better to not have feelings of love for a potential spouse so you feel like it was God’s will and not your will. Viewing awareness of physical attraction to a potential spouse as bad or of the flesh.

Balanced View

Realizing feelings of love or attraction to a potential spouse are normal, healthy, and godly; however, emotions should not be the only measure of whether the decision is wise. Since God examines the heart, so should we.

Extreme View

Believing feeling intense love means it must be right. Viewing feelings of love as an automatic indicator you should marry someone. Placing too much focus on physical attraction instead of character.



Extreme View

Throwing caution to the wind, not preparing yourself for marriage, and not considering the pros and cons of your decision. “It will all work out.”

Balanced View

Understanding the decision to marry does not come with absolute certainty about the future. It is to be a balance of faith and wisdom, where we prayerfully use godly wisdom to seek his will and then step out in faith.

Extreme View

Being unable to proceed without having absolute certainty about all aspects of how things would work out if you got married.



Extreme View

Not seeking out godly counsel from others OR refusing to receive counsel and advice.

Balanced View

Seeking counsel from a support team of wise, mature Christians who take you to the Word. They are encouraging to you; however, they are also willing to challenge you, pointing out blind spots or places you need to grow.

Extreme View

Talking indiscriminately with too many people and getting poor advice or seeking until you get the advice you want.



Scan or click to view the online version of "Keeping a Balanced Perspective."

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW DO I GO ABOUT FINDING 'THE ONE'?

It is understandable to desire to find a believing spouse with whom to share life. However, overly focusing on finding *'the one'* God has for your future spouse is an unhelpful way to walk through the marriage decision journey. This kind of thinking can increase pressure that will result in fear, anxiety, and reoccurring doubt. The marriage decision journey is one that is marked by faith, counsel, and godly wisdom. Discernment around the 'who' should come from the individual's character (evident fruit of the Holy Spirit, Spirit-led focus and actions, love for God, etc.), spiritual compatibility, and wisdom from your community. How God leads us toward a potential spouse will look different for everyone, and we must be careful to not compare our approach to others or to what we see in society or media. Rather than overfocusing on *finding the one*, an individual seeking marriage should be stewarding their relationship with God in a way that promotes wise, faith-based, God-honoring decisions.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM IN A HEALTHY, OVERCOMING STATE REGARDING SIN?

A healthy, *overcoming state regarding sin* is part of spiritual maturity. *Overcoming* is not about being perfect, but it is about an upward trajectory where you are quick to turn towards God, confess, and seek accountability. A person in an overcoming state has created patterns of change that have led to overall growth. There should be a willingness to create and abide by healthy boundaries around who they interact with, what content they engage with, and where and how they spend their time. In contrast, a person *not* in an overcoming state may continue to hide, justify, or choose not to fight against sin. Due to the deceitful and corrupting nature of sin, an individual will need open, honest, and transparent relationships with others in their life to help them see clearly. Overcoming sin is an ongoing process that one needs to lean into with the support of those in their community. For additional resources, please see this expanded article.



Scan or click to read the "What Does an Overcoming Christian Life Look Like?" article.

HOW IMPORTANT IS ATTRACTION?

Attraction is a good, natural aspect of relationship growth and can take on many forms: emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical. While culture tends to focus on physical attraction, *leading* with physical attraction can be a distraction from following healthy, biblical principles around the marriage decision. What feels 'attractive' to someone today may change down the road. Spiritual and emotional attraction is of higher, biblical value, and attraction should ultimately come from the fruit of a Christ-centered relationship. Aspects that biblically matter include:

- Character: Is this person Christ-centered, humble, and trustworthy with a heart to serve?
- Shared faith and values: Are you equally yoked spiritually? Is the person a believer? Does this person have a compatible life trajectory?
- Emotional maturity: Does this person have emotional maturity/balance or are they controlled by their emotions?



**INTENTIONALLY
SEEKING
MARRIAGE**

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 on the next page 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.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

IS EMOTIONAL INTIMACY HEALTHY WHEN SEEKING MARRIAGE WITH SOMEONE OR SHOULD IT BE AVOIDED?

Emotional intimacy is the deep closeness that happens when two people feel *safe, known, and understood* on an emotional level. This involves being emotionally present and responsive to one another as each shares their fears, dreams, & vulnerabilities.

This closeness feels good and desirable. However, *Proverbs 4:23* reminds us to *guard our hearts*. This is a healthy principle to follow until both individuals are serious and committed to pursuing marriage. Potential risks of heightened emotional intimacy prior to this commitment include:

- A false sense of closeness and dependency.
- A tendency to overlook red flags, because of the deep bond prematurely created.

Waiting to develop healthy emotional intimacy until there is a commitment to marriage allows:

- Two people to grow together spiritually first.
- Unrushed and unclouded judgment when seeking God's will in this decision.

Staying in community and maintaining transparency can help emotional intimacy grow in a healthy, paced manner. Examples of ways to grow emotional intimacy in a healthy, paced way include:

- Use Mentorship and Accountability: Regularly talk with a trusted mentor, parent, or church leader.
- Practice Intentional Conversation: Keep conversations purposeful, not romantic or emotionally intense until there is a commitment to marriage.
- Serve and Worship Together: Participate in ministry, church activities, or acts of service.
- Take Time for Individual Reflection: Avoid relying on the other person for your emotional stability.
- Spend Time in Group and Family Settings: Build emotional safety without isolating as a couple.

WHAT IS INFATUATION & CAN THIS BE AVOIDED?

Infatuation is an intense and typically *short-lived* emotional attraction, which can interfere with navigating the marriage decision. Infatuation is a problem because it:

- Clouds judgment & leads to a tendency to overlook red flags.
- Makes one feel as if others who share concerns about a relationship are being picky, unreasonable, or judgmental.
- Makes one feel their relationship with the other person is so unique and special that potential challenges become unimportant and easy to overlook (i.e., creates blind spots).
- Rushes intimacy (emotional or physical).
- Fades quickly when the “high” wears off, often leading to pain.

Ways to create distance from the pull of infatuation can include:

- Slow down, pace your interactions together, especially in one-on-one situations or with your digital communications.
- Maintain a supportive community and stay accountable.
- Have healthy, godly physical and emotional boundaries. Physical affection and touch should be avoided.
- Highly vulnerable sharing should be limited prior to the commitment of engagement.

WHY DOES THE CHURCH CAUTION AGAINST DATING?

Casual dating is discouraged in the church due to the spiritual, emotional, and physical dangers it can bring. In today's culture, dating often focuses on fulfilling personal desires rather than seeking God's direction. This can cloud judgment during a time of discernment. Dating can also lead to both physical and emotional boundaries being compromised as familiarity without commitment is fostered. Compromising emotional boundaries happens when two individuals share support, connection, and/or vulnerabilities in a way that leads to levels of intimacy inappropriate outside of the commitment of marriage. While dating is not specifically discussed in the Bible, the Scriptures point to principles that can be applied to this topic which include:

- Guard your heart (*Proverbs 4:23*)
- Seek wise counsel (*Proverbs 15:22*)
- Do not awaken emotions early (*Song of Solomon 8:4*)
- Believers should pursue believers (*2 Corinthians 6:14*)
- Love sacrificially and honor others (*Romans 12:10*)
- Pursue purity (*1 Thessalonians 4:3–5*)

These biblical principles act as guardrails for someone who desires to engage in a wise, faith-led approach toward the marriage decision.

HOW DO I INTENTIONALLY EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF MARRIAGE WITH ANOTHER PERSON IN AN APPROPRIATE MANNER?

As two individuals faithfully pray about the possibility of marriage, there may come a point where, for a limited timeframe, they desire to be more intentional in their interactions with each other prior to public engagement. This is not casual dating. Rather, it is a prayerful, purposeful period carried out under God's authority and with the guidance of family, mentors, and church leadership. It occurs when two individuals sense the possibility of marriage but wish to explore this potential in an intentional manner. This occurs with accountability, yet before committing to engagement.

Principles:

- **Seek God first and foremost:** God knows us better than we know ourselves (*Matthew 6:33*).
- **Walk in love:** Act with selfless, Christlike love (*1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 1 Peter 4:8*).
- **Trust his leading:** God doesn't promise certainty but gives peace to those who walk with him (*Exodus 33:15, Prov. 3:5-6*).

Posture:

- **Honor each other as believers:** Your relationship as brother and sister in Christ comes first.
- **Be open and accountable:** Stay transparent with one another and connected to mentors, parents, & church leaders.
- **Surrender to God's will:** This is not a time to try to "win someone over;" rather it is about discerning God's will and submitting to his leading.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (DISCUSS TOGETHER):

- How have you sensed a level of peacefulness and direction with this marriage possibility? Do you see it as an encouragement to your walk with the Lord?
- What expectations do you have for marriage? How have you worked through unmet expectations or disappointments in the past?
- Describe your readiness for marriage spiritually, emotionally & circumstantially (financially, life stage, etc.).
- What hesitations or questions do you still have regarding marriage? (Consider obligations, timing, etc.)
- What are some prayers or aspirations regarding raising a family, career, serving in church/missions, etc. that you have?
- How do you intend to honor your parents and family and yet cleave to your spouse?
- Where do your beliefs and convictions seem to be aligned? What differences do you have?
- Who are the mentors who speak into your life? What is their counsel? How have you responded to their counsel in the past?
- What more do you want to know about this person before you are ready to make a marriage decision?



Scan or click to find a longer list of "get to know you" questions.

WHAT ARE SOME RISKS REGARDING DIGITAL COMMUNICATION DURING THE MARRIAGE DISCERNMENT PROCESS?

Some level of digital communication (texting, social media, etc.) during the marriage decision making process is probably unavoidable. However, care should be taken as you engage in this way. Digital communication can foster a level of emotional intimacy without the grounding of in-person interactions. By their nature, in-person interactions often allow for a clearer, more realistic picture of who someone is.

Digital communication often lacks healthy accountability. Because it is always accessible and offers a degree of privacy through texting or social media apps, interactions can become more frequent, more private, and more emotionally charged than those that occur in community settings. Additionally, the nature of digital platforms allows individuals to carefully curate their words and image, which can create a barrier to forming authentic, healthy relationships.

Another concern is the mixed signals that come with social media interactions. Follows, likes, and comments on posts can be confused with someone showing interest, leading to false narratives that might end in hurt and misunderstanding. Ultimately, digital communication tends to create noise that leads to distraction, confusion, and rushed emotional intimacy rather than healthy spiritual discernment. It should be approached with caution and purposeful accountability.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN IT IS TIME TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP?

The decision to marry is a discernment process grounded in faith and godly wisdom that happens with counsel in community. This means there is not a checklist or specific assessment that shows whether you are ready to move forward or not. Rather faith, personal discernment through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and support from your community will help you discern when this is the next right step.

WHAT IF ANXIETY SEEMS TO BE GETTING IN THE WAY OF MOVING FORWARD?

It is natural to have some level of anxiousness with such a large life decision. However, sometimes fear and uncertainty can overcomplicate or cause paralysis as the decision whether or not to move forward with marriage gets closer. If you are feeling continual doubts and concerns which are blocking your ability to move forward, this additional resource may be helpful.

Take a Deeper Look: Read p.111-114 and learn about "Obsessional Doubt in the Marriage Decision."

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS



BIBLICAL DECISION MAKING RESOURCES



Biblical Decision Making Articles

This series of articles walks through the factors involved in making wise, biblically based decisions. We hope these articles will bring out both the obvious and subtle factors that affect decision making.



Biblical Decision Making Course

Each of us makes decisions every day that affect our lives and the lives of those around us. This course walks through the factors involved in making wise, biblically based decisions.



Biblical Decision Making Podcast Episodes

This podcast series considers principled truths as well as common misconceptions in decision making.

MARRIAGE DECISION MAKING PODCASTS



Unmet Expectations

Become aware of unmet expectations, understand the grief associated with them, consider redeeming them in light of the gospel, and review biblical examples.



Marriage Decision-Making

Marriage decision making is under consideration in this episode of *Breaking Bread*. Critical elements that form up “marriage by faith” will be discussed.



Before "I do"

This episode speaks about the pre-contemplative, contemplative and engagement phase of marriage and the great deal of promise these stages hold.

OBSESSIONAL DOUBT & THE MARRIAGE DECISION

The decision to marry is a major life decision. Uncertainty around who to marry, when to marry, and “how to know for sure” are common questions individuals considering marriage face. As Christians, there are additional layers of discernment around honoring God, aligning with his will, and stepping out in faith.

Obsessive doubt is a condition where intrusive, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) target core aspects of a person’s identity, motives, morality, relationships, and/or faith. It can create a feeling that *something isn’t quite right*, producing relentless mental checking, rumination, or avoidance behaviors in search of a certainty that never comes. For those who experience obsessive doubt, the distress they feel while navigating major life decisions, like the marriage decision, surpasses the expected distress felt commonly by those who are navigating major life decisions. The feelings are often more *consuming, spiritually urgent, repetitive, and distressing*. Some individuals experiencing this may persistently seek reassurance through prayer, scripture reading, talking with people, or emotional “testing” of their feelings. Others may avoid approaching this decision all together, but avoidance only works in the short term.

Below are some examples of repetitive and consuming obsessional doubt. Note that the content of the thought is not what makes it

obsessive. Rather, it is how the obsessing individual gets stuck on these thoughts:

- What if I don't truly love this person?
- Am I ignoring red flags?
- What if this isn't God's will, and I'm just ignoring a sign?
- What if my lack of peace is the Holy Spirit telling me to leave?
- What if I'm leading someone on and ruining their life?
- What if I'm settling or disobeying by saying yes?

Specifically, healthy discernment and moving forward in faith tend to be replaced with anxiety-driven investigation that demands certainty of the future and seeks an emotional feeling of peace.

Obsessional doubt makes the experience of discerning God's will around marriage especially distressing. Specifically, healthy discernment and moving forward in faith tend to be replaced with anxiety-driven investigation that demands certainty of the future and seeks an emotional feeling of peace. The difference between healthy discernment and obsession doubt looks like:

- Healthy discernment seeks clarity but tolerates uncertainty. Obsessional doubt demands certainty.
- Discernment leads towards peace and forward movement while obsessional doubt leads toward paralysis and fear.
- Discernment invites counsel. Obsessional doubt seeks reassurance.

IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD

If you are dealing with obsessive doubts, we encourage you to reach out for support to a mentor, trusted adult, or a professional who can provide support for the distress you are facing. It is essential to gain skills that can help you deal with the circular nature of obsessive doubts rather than believing that overthinking and analysis will solve it.

Since there is not one certain answer to the doubts, it is helpful to have ways to reframe repetitive thoughts such as:

- *"I can walk forward in faith, surrounded by counsel in community."*
- *"God does not expect me to have perfect clarity to move forward."*
- *"It is okay to feel uncertain and still move forward in faith."*
- *"Peace is not the absence of all fear, but it is trusting God through the uncertainty."*

While the marriage decision is challenging for most people, it is a decision that can be discerned through the combination of faith, being surrounded by wise counsel, and grounded in biblical truths and Godly wisdom. Obsessional doubt can distort the process of making wise, faith-filled decisions by demanding certainty where God calls us to trust. When the marriage decision becomes consumed by fear, mental checking, or an endless search for peace, it is important to seek the support of godly counsel, utilize therapeutic tools, and have a willingness to walk forward despite uncertainty. Individuals can move toward marriage one step at a time, even when it doesn't feel *just right*.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are my thoughts leading me to greater trust and freedom—or greater fear and paralysis?
- Am I demanding certainty from God in a way he never promised?
- What am I afraid will happen if I move forward?
- What role does fear play in my discernment process?
- How may I have mistaken anxiety for the Holy Spirit?
- What if I could make a faithful decision without complete clarity?
- Who do I need to seek counsel from in order to better understand if my thinking is being hijacked by obsessive doubts?



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