

How to Prepare a Couple for Marriage

Question 1: What role does the pastor play in preparing couples for marriage?

- The pastor (or someone he has been trained) must explain to every couple the teaching of the Bible that marriage is a life-long commitment to love and care for your husband or wife.

Question 2: What do you do when a couple approaches you to give your blessings to their marriage?

- Before I agree to conduct the marriage, I ask if they are willing to meet me and my assistant a few times so that we can explain to them the teaching from the Bible about marriage.
- I always try to involve an assistant because it is important to train others to serve in this area.
- Then I tell them Jesus teaching about marriage:
 1. Jesus said (Matthew 5:31,32) It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.
 2. (Matthew 19:3-12) Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

"Haven't you read," Jesus replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female", and said, "**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.**"

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. **But it was not this way from the beginning.** I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."
- I say to the couple, "Jesus taught us that marriage should last for as long as we live. Are you prepared to love and care for one another for as long as you are alive? Jesus is also teaching us that we should not have any sexual relationships outside marriage. Do you promise to keep this command?"
- The couple should agree to these teachings before the pastor agrees to conduct the wedding.

Question 3: What is the main promise that you make to your marriage partner?

- We promise to love and care for one another for the rest of our lives - through good times and hard times - through enjoyable times and boring times.
- This is how Jesus loved us.
- He left the glory, the beauty, the comfort and the security of heaven and entered our world of suffering, war, sickness and evil - so that He could help us.
- Even when we were unlovely - He loved us.

- Story: John was a caring husband and a wonderful father - handsome, a strong sportsman, a manager of a company earning a good salary. But then he became very ill. He lost a lot of weight and very soon did not look handsome at all. Later, he could not even walk. He lost his job. All his wonderful qualities that first attracted Mary to him were gone. But his wife Mary kept loving him just the same. This is true love.
- True love comes from the inside of the lover - it does not depend on the beauty and attractiveness of your partner - it is a commitment to always care for your partner no matter what happens.
- Jesus died for us on the cross – this also teaches us about love.
- Pain is a part of love – the more you love someone – the more that person can hurt you.
- Jesus rose from the dead – this also teaches us about love.
- You may experience many problems in your marriage. You may feel that your love has died – that you have no more feelings. If you ask God for help, He will teach you to love again.

Question 4: How will you answer if a couple asks you the following question? We love one another very much. We are sure we are going to get married in 6 months time - why can't we have sex now? Why must we wait for the wedding day? Why does the Bible teach that having sex before marriage or outside marriage is wrong?

- I like to answer this question by asking three other questions:
 - When you get married, would you like your partner to be someone who has already had sex with many other people?
 - After you are married, would you like your spouse to have sex with other people?
 - Most people answer: “No!” to both questions - we prefer our partner to keep himself /herself pure.
 - “No sex before marriage” - if you follow this rule - what discipline will this teach you?
 - It will help me control my desire to have sex.
 - This self-control is a very important discipline!
 - A young man falls deeply in love with a young girl. He wants to marry her and live with her for the rest of his life. He has strong sexual desires for her. But the wedding is still 6 months away. So he has to exercise his self-control. This is a very important discipline! Every time he wants to have sex with the one he loves - he stops himself - he says - “No, I must wait for our wedding day.” The more he says “No” - the stronger his discipline of self-control becomes. **This same discipline of self-control will help him all through his married life!**

Question 5: What do you mean when you say that this discipline - no sex before marriage - will help the couple all through their married life? I thought that once you get married, you do not need to exercise self control any more - you can have sex as often as you like!

- All through your married life, you will need this discipline of self-control.
- Every effort you make to control your sexual desires before marriage will be of very great benefit later in your marriage.

- After you are married, you will still be sexually attracted to other people. You must control your desires and have sex only with your partner.
- There will be many times when you may have a strong desire to have sex - but your partner does not - what do you do? You must control yourself and wait.
- She may be too tired, or having her monthly period, or very worried about something, or pregnant, or mourning the loss of a loved one, or she may be sick - there are many reasons why she may not feel like having sex - but you have a strong desire for sex - what do you do? You must control yourself and wait.
- “No sex before marriage” is a very important teaching - it will help you control your sexual desires. You will need this self-control all through your married life - so please teach this to your church.

Question 6: What advice do you give to someone who asks you: “Many times I do not feel like having sex, but I know that my partner wants to have sex - what should I do?”

- In 1 Corinthians 7: 3-5, the apostle Paul says: “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”
- He is teaching us that when we are married our body belongs to our partner.
- So sometimes, even when you are not in the mood to have sex, but your partner wants to, you should have sex together.
- At other times, you can say something like, “I am very sorry dear, but I am very tired right now, can we have sex tomorrow instead?” - then please make sure you keep your promise!

Question 7: What do you do to help the couple settle arguments?

- I ask the couple to discuss the following two questions:
 - “What does your partner do when he/she gets angry?”
 - “What would you like your partner to do when you are angry?”
- When two people have different opinions, they should listen carefully to one another and try and find a solution that combines the best points of their ideas.
- I try to help the couple realise that every argument they have is an opportunity to understand their partner deeper. It is not a fight! They are on the same team facing a problem together.
- The following actions are very harmful to a good marriage:
 - Shouting during an argument.
 - Banging the table or slamming a door.
 - Breaking something.
 - Striking the other person.
 - Remaining silent and refusing to talk for long periods.
- I give a few suggestions to help them prevent the harmful behaviour described above:

- As soon as you realize that you are losing control and beginning to raise your voice - stop talking for a few minutes and allow things to calm down - anyone can take the lead and the other should follow.
- If you are getting angry, you can say: "I am getting very angry now. I do not want to lose control and say something that I will regret later. I love you very much and I believe we can work out a solution together - but I need a few minutes to calm down. I need to think things through for a short while and then lets get together and talk again."
- If your partner is getting angry, you can say: "When you raise your voice, I feel like someone is attacking me. I know you are very upset - and I do want to try and understand you. Please can we stop talking for a few minutes? I am afraid I will shout back and say something I regret. I need to think things through for a short while and then lets get together and talk again."
- When I am very angry, I find it very helpful to write down why I am so angry.
- When I am very angry, I tell God or a good friend why I am so angry. This helps me to calm down and think more clearly.
- If a couple is finding it difficult to settle their quarrels in a peaceful way, they should ask for help.

Question 8: Are Christians allowed to practice birth control methods?

- Yes. I know some Christians teach that the main purpose of marriage is to have children - so they do not allow any artificial method of birth control. But the Bible teaches us that the **main purpose of marriage is for companionship.**
- Genesis 1:18 - The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Question 9: What should I do if we did not plan to have a child but I became pregnant - may we abort the child?

- No. One of the blessings and responsibilities of marriage is the birth of a child. Even the life of the unborn child in the mother's womb is precious.
- The only reason to abort the child is if there is a problem and the mother's life is in danger.
- I am sure that one day God will bring his judgment on many societies that have allowed millions of unborn children to be murdered.
- If you are not able to look after the child yourself - it is much better to give birth to the child first and then offer the child for adoption. The church of Jesus Christ must always work hard to provide a home for every unwanted baby.

Question 10: What other things do you discuss with the couple to help them prepare for marriage?

- I check with both sets of parents that they are in agreement with the marriage.
- I arrange for counselors to talk to the man and woman separately (man to man, woman to woman) and make sure they know the basics of sex and birth control methods.
- I ask the couple about their financial situation because many couples have fierce quarrels about money.

- If one or both of them is a pastor, I talk with them about how to balance their family life and ministry.