

“I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Those words are like music to the ears of couples anxious to begin life together as a new family. It is their big moment — one of the most important moments of their lives. They are now joined as husband and wife.

What leads people to this point? How do they prepare? What should we know in anticipation of that future time when marriage will come to us or our loved ones?

Be Prepared

As we grow up we may move in and out of “love” abruptly.

We begin to notice the opposite sex. And the more we notice, the more care we give to our personal grooming and behavior — how we look, how we talk, the kind of impression we leave on others.

Puppy love and infatuation are common. Sometimes the person we “love” doesn’t even know he or she is “loved.” Once in a while we feel that we have finally found our “true love.” When that involvement doesn’t work we are crushed. But soon our romantic self has recuperated and is ready for another fling.

It seems that most people go through such stages in growing up. But marriage, the second most important step in one’s life (making a commitment to God is first), is not for the immature. It is only for those who are physically, mentally, emotionally, financially and spiritually prepared.

Some let physical development be the only indicator of maturity. If a person has reached a certain age, some reason, he or she should be married. Others let physical attraction be the determining factor. Certainly there must be physical attraction, but what about a person’s level of education? Is the thinking mature? There are lovebirds and kissing fish, but to be a proper partner in marriage takes mental

Before You Say ‘I Do’

Going to be married? Here’s important information you need to consider.

maturity in addition to physical maturity.

Emotional people are beautiful—they feel deeply and express themselves effectively. But have they tempered their emotions—brought their emotions under control? If so, great. If not, it will be difficult for them to cope with the changes and adjustments necessary in marriage.

Then there are those who put too much emphasis on money. They seem to think they have to marry millionaires. This is unrealistic and wouldn’t work anyway without all the other factors working.

But, then again, it does take adequate finances to run a family. How much do you earn? Do you have a regular job? Is it a career or only a temporary stop in the job market? Proverbs 24:27 tells us to prepare first, and then to build a home and family. So be sure that you are stable financially before as-

suming the responsibilities of marriage.

The most important factor in preparation for marriage is spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity on the part of both husband and wife is extremely important to the success of the marriage.

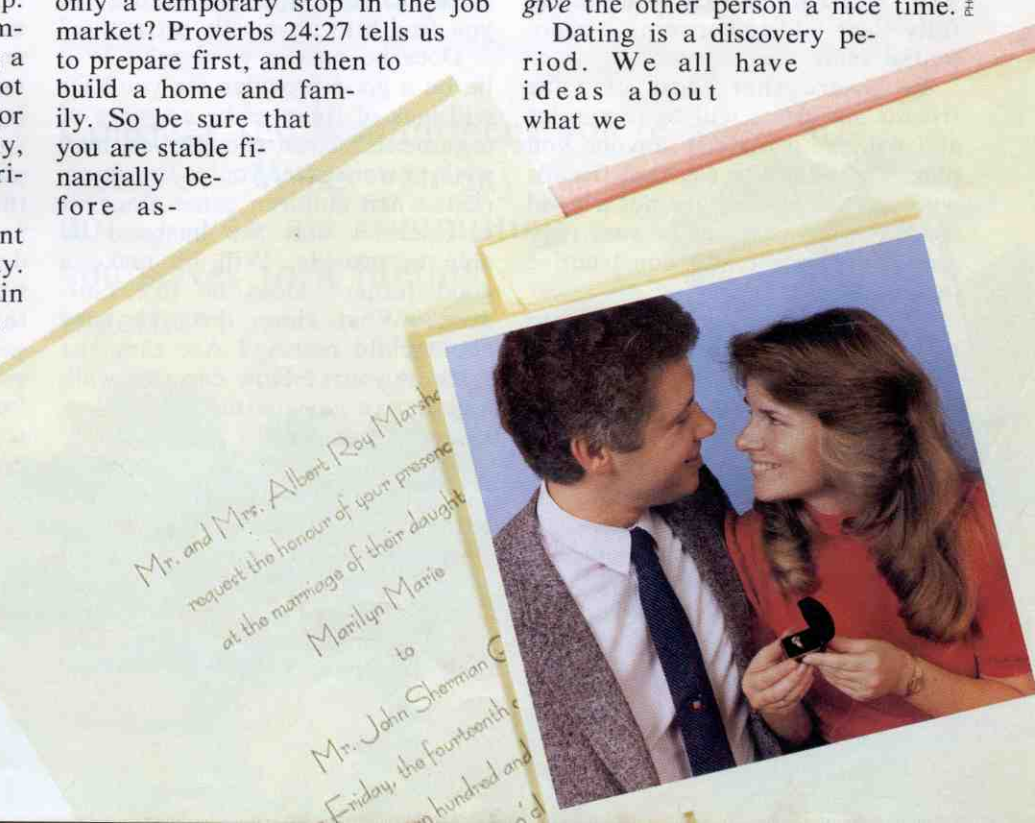
So it all begins with you! Prepare for your future with that special person by making sure you are mature physically, mentally, emotionally, financially and spiritually.

Dating

Dating is an art that is rapidly being lost in societies that have it as a practice. Many people are interested only in what they can *get* out of a date. A person should be concerned with how he or she may *give* the other person a nice time.

Dating is a discovery period. We all have ideas about what we

PHOTOS BY G.A. BELLUCHE, JR. AND WARREN WATSON



want in a mate, and dating helps bring that image into clear focus. Dating widely at first helps a person to narrow the field.

Actually, the more individuals you date before settling on that special one, the better. You will observe good and not-so-good traits in those you date. You will gain a more realistic picture of your "dream girl" or "knight in shining armor."

Remember, though, that you should not view dating as merely a search for a husband or wife. Don't be in a hurry to get serious — with God's help, you will find the right mate at the right time — and keep in mind that your goal is to *give* to your date in friendship, genuine concern and good, clean recreation.

Those interested in more information on dating may request our free book *The Missing Dimension in Sex*.

Seek Counsel Early

Marriage is a divine institution (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18, 21-24), and we should make every effort to insure its success. One way is through proper mate selection. When you find yourself getting interested in a certain someone, it is good to get counsel (Prov. 11:14).

Talk to those who know you both, especially your parents and families. Your parents know you and your strengths and weaknesses. You should seek and consider carefully their advice concerning a potential mate.

Be aware that most of your friends and peers will be romantics and will see a mate in anyone you pick. This is not to say that friends who know you well are not a good source of counsel, but be sure they are being honest and constructive in their evaluations.

When seeking advice be sure to be open-minded. How often we all want to hear the answer we want from someone else! But to avoid marital problems later, it is wise now to maintain an open mind and honestly seek help. Be open about your feelings. Disclose your positive views as well as any apprehensions. Take off the proverbial rose-colored glasses and look objectively at the person with whom you want to spend the rest of your life.

Men (and marriage is for men, not boys), the major areas you should look for in women are compatibility and adaptability. Does a young lady easily follow your lead? Do you sense that she respects you? Are you able to lead her in every way (Eph. 5:22)?

Ask yourself: Do I really deeply care for her? Is she the most lovely person in the world to me? Her physical attraction and personality must make her tops in your book (verse 25). What about her intelligence and maturity? Would she make a good mother? Does she desire children?

Finally, what is her level of spirituality? Is she godly? If pleasing God is the driving force in her life, chances are that she will apply God's marital laws, which are so necessary for success.

Women, consider how sensible the man you are planning on marrying is. If he makes poor decisions or is reckless in his habits (driving, drinking, taking care of his health), will you be able to respect him and submit to him (verse 24, I Pet. 3:1)? Does he ask for input from you before making decisions?

How caring is he about you? Does he show love and concern, not attempting to spoil your future with premarital sex and necking — I Cor. 6:18? Does he find you attractive and is he expressive to you in proper affection and words? Do you find him physically attractive?

Does he have a good job? Will he be a good provider for you? Or will lack of finances be a source of arguments? Even though you may wish to work after you're first married, when children come along, it is essential that the husband be able to provide. Will he make a good father? Does he like children? What views does he have about child rearing? Are they the same as yours? How can two walk together in any matter unless they agree (Amos 3:3)?

The Engagement Period

So, after much consideration you decide that you are right for each other. What now? Some have become engaged, set the date and merely notified the minister and their families. This doesn't show

much respect for families or minister.

One way is to counsel with a minister first. Tell him about your interest in each other and that you would like to become engaged. This gives him the opportunity to help you by advising a longer waiting period or by mentioning certain difficulties he might have seen. He may want to know that these difficulties are now resolved.

Remember, engagement not only means a flashy ring on the third finger of your left hand, but carries with it a promise to marry. So before you make such an acceptance and formal announcement, be sure you are ready to marry!

After securing a minister's or counsellor's advice, next call or see the parents of the bride-to-be. (Some may want to put this first, followed by counsel with a minister.) Ask the father for the daughter's hand. Many a father has felt bypassed, overlooked or neglected when this wasn't done, and it negatively influences future relationships in the family.

When both sets of parents are consulted, it makes them feel more involved and makes them more willing to help the couple. If distance is a problem, a phone call would be next best to asking in person. It produces more confidence in and a better relationship among everyone when parents, their children and prospective mates have met before the actual engagement. If that's not possible, meetings ought to take place during the engagement period.

Suppose your parents disapprove of your prospective mate. Take their comments to heart. You will need to seriously and intelligently decide what to do in such a situation. Ask what it would take for their approval.

Barring parental bigotry, parental views should be heavily weighed. To force them into acceptance is to ask for future in-law trouble as well as probable marital trouble for you, the couple (Prov. 18:19).

Engagement periods vary according to the couple. Some have short engagements, some longer. It is not advisable to wait longer than a year; closeness (and you should be drawing closer) for too long a

time may lead to premarital sexual involvement.

It is during engagement that you should spend most of your free time together. This is the time when you begin to lose the "I" and "me" and "you" and become "we" and "us." Each must consider what's good for "us." This takes time and often compromise.

Housing, furniture, foods, entertainment, automobiles are other factors needing the input from both individuals involved. Most especially, discuss your hopes in life, family plans, finances, living quarters and general outlook for living together.

Of prime importance is the wedding day itself. When will it be? Where will it be? In setting the date, be sure to check with the minister you've asked to perform the marriage. Then check with parents and see if that date is all right with them, since, in many areas, the father of the bride traditionally bears much of the financial cost of the wedding. He is definitely to be considered for his input as to when it takes place.

The location of the wedding will depend largely on the bride. She will probably want to have it in her hometown. The proper hall will depend on the size of the wedding and whether there is to be a catered meal or only refreshments. Here again, parents and minister should be consulted regarding the plans.

Once all the physical details — when, where, by whom — are worked out, invitations may be ordered. If the other planning can be done early, beautiful invitations may be ordered at fairly reasonable costs from various companies.

Premarital Counsel

Next in your preparation for the big event is counsel with a minister. He will probably want to spend at least two sessions (probably

more) discussing marriage with you.

With his appreciation and understanding of the marriage institution, a minister will want to do all he can to facilitate your happiness since you have asked him to perform your wedding (usually the minister you counsel with will be the one performing the wedding).

Throughout his meetings with you, your minister or counsellor will be accumulating information to help you plan your future together. He will be looking for the signs that make for a good marriage as well as those that lead to problems.

According to authorities, there are certain qualities that make a person "most marriageable": adaptability and flexibility, empathy, ability to work through problems, ability to give and receive love, emotional stability, similar family backgrounds, similarities between the couple themselves, communication.

The Big Day

Finally, you are as prepared as possible for that special day. Double-check to make sure all is in readiness. Rehearse for the ceremony.

Before walking down that aisle be sure to consider the commitment you're about to make. Let us go over the words in the ceremony that God's Church uses.

The minister would ask the man:

"Do you, then [groom], faithfully promise and covenant with God, in the presence of these witnesses, to take [the bride] to be your lawful wedded wife, and to cleave to her unto death — to love her, cherish her, honor her and provide for her?"

The minister would ask the woman: "And do you [bride], faithfully promise and covenant with God, in the presence of these witnesses, to take [the groom] to be your lawful wedded husband, for the remainder of your natural life, and as God has ordained, to submit yourself unto him as unto the Eternal, to be subject to him in everything and to respect him?"

When you say "I do" to these promises, you are committing yourselves to a lifetime together (Matt. 19:4-9).

Marriage was established by God at creation and pictures God's relationship with Israel (Isa. 54:5, Ezek. 16:8). It also depicts the spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:21-33, Rev. 19:7-9). So be sure you know what is involved when you say "I do" on your wedding day, and be sure you intend to live up to the responsibilities of this godly institution.

With the words, "By the authority of Jesus Christ, I now pronounce you husband and wife," may you two become one and truly live happily ever after. □

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