

(Sex, Love & Marriage) 6. Finding Your Better Half

by Zac Poonen

God has a plan for your life, including your marriage, and He will guide you to the right person at the right time if you wait on Him and seek His will.

Scripture: Genesis 24:14, Proverbs 23:22, Matthew 11:29, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 3:11

Topics: "Christian Marriage", "Godly Relationships"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the importance of seeking God's will in choosing a life partner, emphasizing the need to listen to God's leading and not rush into marriage decisions. He highlights the significance of being certain of God's choice, forming a balanced assessment of a potential partner, and seeking parental approval where possible. Poonen stresses the need for love, compatibility, and unity in spiritual matters, while cautioning against factors like dowry, race, culture, and haste in decision-making. He encourages waiting on God's timing, surrendering desires to Him, and maintaining a humble and patient attitude while seeking a life partner.

Transcript

God alone can lead you to the person best suited to be your life-partner. In fact He is eager to do so if you will listen to Him.

The Bible teaches that God has a plan for the lives of each of His children (Ephesians 2:10). If that is true, then you cannot but believe that God has already planned whether you should be married or not. If He has planned marriage, then He must undoubtedly have planned the person you are to marry too. But God does not force anyone to obey Him. So it is easily possible for a person either to reject or neglect God's plan, and enter instead into a marriage outside the will of God.

Next to the salvation of your soul, the most important decision that you have to make in life is that of choosing your life-partner. You cannot afford to make a mistake here - for this is one decision in life which once made can never be reversed. If you have chosen the wrong vocation, you may yet be able to correct your error; similarly you may correct many other decisions in life. But if you have married outside the will of God, you can never correct your error; you can only try and make the best of a wrong choice. It is a tragedy to miss God's will in marriage.

Many who married in haste without awaiting God's time or seeking His will are now repenting at leisure! Surely their example is a warning to young people to tread cautiously in this realm.

It is far better to remain single than to be married outside of God's will. Even though God may in mercy bless those who miss His perfect will in marriage and who later repent, yet true happiness and blessedness can result only from being in the centre of God's perfect will.

For the glory of God and for our greatest good, it is essential that we find the person God has chosen for us and that we be married to him/her. When God wanted to provide Adam with a partner, He did not make ten women and ask Adam to choose the one he liked best. God made only one and gave her to Adam. Adam had no choice in the matter. The same God has planned only one person for each of His obedient children. There may be difficulties in understanding all the implications of such teaching - even as there are difficulties in understanding the doctrine of the total sovereignty of God when placed alongside the doctrine of man's free will - but it is nevertheless the teaching of Scripture. If we accept His plan, we shall find that the person God has chosen is indeed the best - prepared by Him in every way to be our complement, even as Eve was for Adam.

Abraham's servant recognized this fact when looking for a bride for Isaac. He did not therefore pray, "Lord, lead me to some good girls here from among whom I can select a suitable match for Isaac". Instead, he prayed, "Lord, lead me to the girl whom you have already selected and appointed to be Isaac's wife" (Genesis 24:14, 44). When God answered his prayer, he could truly say, "The Lord led me" (Genesis 24:27). That was not just a pious phrase glibly used as some use it these days. It was one hundred per cent true. Would that in all Christian marriages there were that same certainty of having been led together by the Lord - and by the Lord alone.

Parental Choice or Personal Choice

God may lead you to the person He has chosen for you, either directly or indirectly, through your parents and friends.

In the Bible, we find only one clear instance of God's guidance in marriage - the case of Isaac and Rebekah, that we have just referred to. That marriage was not arranged simply by the parents - for Abraham did not even see Rebekah, and his servant also knew nothing about her. Neither was it arranged by the boy and girl themselves - for Isaac and Rebekah had never met each other before. It was arranged by God.

This teaches us that the important thing is not the method God uses to bring two of His children together, but this, that it is He Who has led them to each other. Whether we are led to a person through our parents, or through our friends, or by ourselves, the important thing is to be sure that the person is indeed the one God has chosen for us.

God is Interested in Your Need

Many young believers are so conscious of the problems caused by culture and other factors (which they feel are preventing them from finding their life-partner), that they forget that God is bigger than all their problems put together. Others have a secret fear that God is not interested in their problem at all. They may not perhaps express it in these words but their actions betray them.

To all such I bring a message of cheer -

He cares for you....and cares about you (1 Peter 5:7).

Remember, it was God Who saw Adam's need for a wife and Who provided him with one (Genesis 2:18). Adam did not have to go and beg God for a wife. God cared for Adam's need, and He cares for yours too.

Trust God then and wait patiently for Him to lead you. Restless frenzy can accomplish nothing. There is a beautiful symbolism in the fact that God put Adam to sleep and then woke him up and brought Eve to him (Genesis 2:21, 22). Sleep is a picture of rest; and God wants us to be at rest - resting in Him - until the time comes when He Himself will bring His chosen partner to us. This does not mean that we have to do nothing, for the rest I am referring to is not an outward physical one but an inward, spiritual one.

How can we have this rest? Only by doing the will of God, Jesus said,

Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me - i.e., do My will in your life....and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:29).

As Jim Elliot, missionary to the Aucas, put it, we must learn to be

"asleep in the will of God."

If we do that, God will assuredly lead us to the right person in His appointed time. If we are busy doing the will of God in all other areas of life, we need not fear or be anxious about missing His will in this one. Three excellent books that all young people should read, in this connection, are 'The Triumph of John & Betty Stam', by Mrs. Howard Taylor, 'Shadow of the Almighty', by Elisabeth Elliot, and 'Hudson Taylor and Maria', by J.C. Pollock.

We must be willing to trust God. The Bible says,

Without faith it is impossible to please Him. For whoever would come near to God must [necessarily] believe....that He is the Rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

If you earnestly seek to do all His will, He will undoubtedly bring the person of His choice to you. Let it be by any means - through parents, friends or directly. Leave it to Him to choose the method. In His appointed time, He will give you all your heart's desire (Psalm 37:4).

God may lead you to the right person, in your local church or Christian fellowship group, or in some similar fellowship elsewhere. There is nothing wrong in considering someone you meet in a Christian fellowship meeting as your possible life-partner, if you feel attracted to her/him. It may have been God Who providentially arranged circumstances for both of you to meet. It is because many hold perverted views of sex and love that they feel something so "unholy" as finding a partner cannot possibly occur in a holy fellowship gathering! But surely there is nothing unholy about finding your life-partner. It is a sacred matter before God. If your heart is pure and your conduct becoming of a Christian you don't have to fear what others may say.

I mention this here because I have seen some tragic cases of believers who did not look for their partners in the Christian fellowship groups they were in touch with (through fear of what others might say), and who ended up by marrying rank unbelievers proposed by their nominal-Christian parents. The fear of men led them into Satan's well-concealed trap (cf. Proverbs 29:25), and as a result, God and the Church have lost many a potential Christian home.

There are some believers whose circumstances may not give them such (or any) opportunity for fellowship with other born-again Christians, or whose circle of fellowship is small. There are others who may be having problems caused by disease, home-background, unfortunate family situations or cultural factors. These may perhaps wonder how they will ever find the right person. Giving up all hope of ever doing so, many have finally resigned themselves to marrying unbelievers chosen for them by their parents. All such thinking on the part of any believer is entirely due to lack of faith. Is anything impossible for God? Isn't He interested in each one of us? If your situation looks impossible to you then remember that God specializes in things considered impossible by men. Trust Him and you will find that "according to your faith it will be done to you" (Matthew 9:29). If you keep your heart sincere towards Him and stand true to the principles given in God's Word, you will find that God's eyes will "run to and fro throughout the whole earth" on your behalf (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Cultural barriers, parental objections, circumstantial difficulties and a thousand and one other hindrances are no problem to our wonder-working God. I know of a girl who was cut off by her family when she was saved, and who had no-one to negotiate marriage proposals for her. Yet God provided her with a believing partner whose parents, amazingly enough, accepted the proposal without any hesitation, despite her circumstances.

God is the One Who rules over circumstances and if He is our Father, we can be sure that when we ask Him for bread, He will not give us a stone. If evil fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will our Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:11) - and the Bible includes a life-partner among those good things (Proverbs 18:22).

God is waiting for His children to prove His faithfulness. But be patient. Don't lose God's best by impatience and haste. Many have done just that. Trust Him with all your heart. Those who trust Him wholly will find Him wholly true. No one can ever say that his particular situation or circumstance is an exception. The Lord our God rules over all.

I shall not deal here with how to find the will of God, as I have already dealt with that subject in another book: 'Finding God's Will'. God guides us through the exercise of our renewed minds, and so I shall mention here only those things that we should look for in a person when considering whether he/she is God's choice for us.

Oneness

God made Eve to be a helper suitable for Adam. So she had to be one with Adam in many ways. In your case too, the person you marry should be one with you in many ways. In marriage, two are to become one. The Bible says that two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3). There must therefore be oneness, similarity and agreement to a large extent, if a marriage is to be successful. Since the two who are to become one are individually composed of spirit, soul and body, there must be a large degree of oneness in these three realms. Where the union between a man and a woman is a union of spirit, soul and body, their marriage will be one after God's own heart. Such a union will form a three-fold cord which, as Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us, cannot be broken - "broken" referring not just to divorce but also to lack of unity between husband and wife.

When seeking God's will about marriage, you must consider the person from these three aspects. Let us look at them one by one. (What I say below is equally applicable to girls even though I may be using the masculine pronoun only.)

Spirit

We must start with the spirit, for this is the highest part of man. If oneness does not exist in this realm, it is useless to look for it elsewhere. The spirit of a man is that part of him that has the capacity for fellowship with God. In an unbeliever - i.e., one who has never experienced the new birth through repentance and through receiving Christ into his life - the spirit is dead, even if he is a religious nominal Christian, active in the work of his church.

Since the living cannot be united with the dead, there is no question of a believer even considering marriage with an unbeliever. If you are joined to the Lord, your spirit is now one with His (1 Corinthians 6:16), and you can therefore consider marriage only with one who is similarly united to the Lord. It takes a union between the man and the woman and the Lord to make a truly Christian marriage. Anything less than that can never be called a Christian marriage.

The Bible commands us:

Do not be unequally yoked up with unbelievers - do not make mismatched alliances with them (2 Corinthians 6:14).

The yoke is a very clear symbol of marriage. The picture is of two oxen pulling a plough together - symbolizing a husband and a wife united and working together for the Lord. In the Old Testament, God's people were forbidden to plough with an ox and an ass together (Deuteronomy 22:10), because these two animals had different natures. The believer too has a different nature from the unbeliever. Hence the Bible also says,

How can light and darkness share life together? How can there be harmony between Christ and the Devil? What can a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14, 15 - JBP).

It is obvious that if you as a child of God marry an unbeliever (who is a child of the Devil-John 8:44; 1 John 3:10), your father-in-law will be the Devil himself! With such a father-in-law, you can be sure of endless trouble for the rest of your life.

Some believers may contend that if one marries an unbeliever, he can thereby save a soul from Hell. But if that argument were a valid one, surely an All-wise God would have urged all believers to marry unbelievers! Why hasn't He done so in His Word? Surely because He never intended marriage to be a method of saving souls. And so, no-one can expect the Lord to back him if he adopts such an un-Scriptural soul-winning scheme! If your partner is not converted prior to marriage, it is unlikely that she/he will be thereafter.

In any case, a believer who marries an unbeliever, does so in clear violation of the command of Scripture and in outright disobedience to his Lord. It would therefore be presumptuous on his part to ask God to bless his wedding.

The Lord can never, under any circumstances, sanction the marriage of a child of His with an unbeliever. (And let me repeat here, lest it be forgotten, that a nominal Christian is as much an unbeliever as a non-Christian or an atheist.) It is pointless quoting the example of some believer whose unconverted partner was converted after marriage, for you are to be governed by the Word of God and not by the example of others. Those who desire God's best should determine that they would rather remain single than be married to an unbeliever.

No-one is under any obligation to obey the urgings of his parents or of anyone else, if the proposed partner is not born again. We are to obey our parents only "in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1) - i.e., only in those cases where you do not have to go against your conscience or against the teaching of God's Word. A believer's prime loyalty must be to his Lord and this may involve his having to stand against his own parents at times. The Lord Himself said so in Matthew 10:32-39. Note verse 37 especially -

Anyone who puts his love for father or mother above his love for Me does not deserve to be Mine" (JBP). A father can give his sons homes and riches, but only the Lord can give them understanding wives" (Proverbs 19:14 - TLB).

Sometimes you may feel drawn towards a girl and later discover that she is not truly converted. Or perhaps you may have already been in love with an unconverted girl at the time of your salvation. The temptation will be strong in such situations to convince yourself (and others) that the girl is really born-again (in spite of clear evidence to the contrary).

If you are a little more honest and realistic, you will reject such self-deception, and preach the gospel to her, recognizing her need of salvation. But be careful to ensure that any response is genuine. Because of mutual attraction, she may go through a process you call "conversion". But such a "conversion" will turn out to be spurious if it does not originate out of genuine conviction of sin. I do not mean by this that you should not present the gospel to her. What I am saying is that the possibility of only a superficial change being wrought must be borne in mind.

I am reminded of a believer I knew, who was active in the Lord's work. His parents arranged a marriage for him. The girl, a nominal Christian, was not saved at that time, but professed salvation when he presented the gospel to her before they were married. But the girl's real nature was manifested within a few months after marriage. It soon became evident not only to others but even to her husband that she had no genuine experience of salvation at all. She became a hindrance to her husband in spiritual things and very soon he lost his testimony and his zeal.

Beware of such "Conversions"!

Satan may show you many good qualities in an unconverted person. He may show you how desirable she is, in so many ways. "She is so sweet and has such an accommodating nature", he will whisper in your ears. But don't give heed to him. He is the father of lies. When he deceived our first parents he tempted them through something that appeared to be so good and beautiful in itself (Genesis 3:6). But God had forbidden it. Even so has God forbidden the unequal yoke (2 Corinthians 6:14). Partaking in what God has forbidden, however good it may appear to us, cannot but bring disaster.

I know of more than one case where rejection of the teaching of God's Word on this subject has led to unhappy marriages and endless trouble between husband and wife. The woman who thought she could convert the man after marriage has had all her dreams shattered and is now unable to open her home for the Lord's work. The man who thought that his partner loved him so much that it would be no problem to bring her to the Lord after marriage, now finds that she is a constant drag on him.

The safest thing to do is to refuse to get emotionally involved with any unconverted person at any time. If you feel an inward drawing towards some such person, check yourself immediately. Consider her as a likely partner only after she is well and truly converted.

If you had fallen in love with her prior to your salvation, you must now make your spiritual position clear to her. She must be made to realize that your first love is now the Lord Jesus Christ, and that there cannot even be a consideration of marriage, until she experiences the same transformation in her life. If Christ is not going to be supreme in each of your lives, your home will not, in any case, be truly Christian. Those who honour God in such situations will find that God honours them too (1 Samuel 2:30). Honouring God will involve your surrendering your relationship with that girl on the altar to God for Him to do what He pleases with it. If the girl is God's chosen one for you, He will bring her to a place of surrender to Christ and then give her back to you as He gave Isaac back to Abraham (Genesis 22). If she is not God's choice for you, then He will let her drift out of your life as He let Ishmael drift out of Abraham's life (Genesis 21). You must be willing for either. God will be no man's debtor and you cannot lose His best if you put Him first in your life.

When both partners in a marriage have a genuine experience of salvation, each will be living in the experimental enjoyment of God's forgiveness. In their relationship with one another, this will manifest itself in a willingness and readiness both to ask for forgiveness as well as to forgive each other, again and again. Many marriages are shattered because this element is lacking in one or both partners.

But conversion alone is not enough. Oneness in spirit involves also identity of outlook in spiritual matters. There are vast differences among believers as regards zeal and devotion to the Lord. If a "hot" Christian marries a "lukewarm" one, the net product will be two lukewarm Christians. The temperature of the "hot" Christian will come down to that of the "lukewarm" one. You have to consider therefore not only whether a person is born again but also whether she will be a drag on your life or an encouragement. She should have the same spiritual depth and hunger for God as you have, and her life must be a constant spiritual challenge to your own. Her spirituality must be such that it evokes your respect. Where both partners are truly spiritual, this respect will be mutual, each considering the other as spiritually superior (Philippians 2:3).

If you have such a partner, she will be able to lift you up spiritually when you slide down, and you will be able to do the same for her. She will be able to sharpen your spiritual edge when it gets blunt and you likewise will be able to do the same for her (Ecclesiastes 4:10). Such a partner's worth is priceless.

But how are we to assess spirituality? Is it by religious activity? A girl who is always organizing Bible Study meetings and visiting homes with the gospel, though possibly spiritual herself, may sometimes make a very poor wife and mother. It must also be borne in mind that an active worker need not necessarily possess spiritual depth, for spirituality and religious activity are not always synonymous. Remember too that the early years of married life will find you and your wife engaged not in perpetual Bible Study and prayer and Christian service, but with noisy children who will demand almost every moment of your wife's time during the day and who will disturb both of you at night. The girl whose concept of spirituality consists in religious activity and Bible Study alone, will chafe and fret at all these things which (she considers) hinder her "fellowship with the Lord".

Assessment of spirituality and even of the fact of the new birth is not easy. It is made all the more difficult by the fact that most people in today's world live in an atmosphere of pretence. There are very few who are totally devoid of guile. Most believers seek to give others an impression of possessing a higher degree of spirituality than is actually the case. This is especially true among young people - and more so among those who regularly attend fellowship meetings. We must remember this and be cautious lest we be deceived by a person's appearance. It is indeed most difficult to form a correct assessment and yet we

have to do so when considering marriage. You should not be satisfied with just a verbal confession by the other of an experience of salvation. As I've mentioned earlier, it is possible for a person to testify about the new birth without ever having experienced it. The Lord has told us that we shall know people by their fruits (Matthew 7:16); and if we walk with the Lord daily, He will help us to assess correctly, when the time comes.

The fruit of the Spirit -

love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence)" (Galatians 5:22, 23)

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is what we should look for primarily. The person being considered should also evince a keen interest in Christian fellowship and in the work of the Lord.

A girl must possess

the unfading loveliness of a calm and gentle spirit (1 Peter 3:4 - JBP).

She should not be noisy or bossy as some 20th-century girls are - who give the impression that God made a mistake in determining their sex!

The Bible gives us a description of a virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31. The qualities described there are what every young man should look for in any girl he considers. Physical beauty and gracefulness are despised there, as empty and deceitful. Emphasis is placed on "the fear of the Lord" (verse 30). In the Lord's eyes, a girl is only as beautiful as she is holy. If we desire to know the will of God, we must learn to look at people as God looks at them. This is the meaning of the "renewed mind" which Romans 12:2 tells us is an essential prerequisite for knowing God's will. If, knowing that God looks at the heart and not on the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7), we still continue to be influenced in our choice by physical beauty, we cannot expect to be led of God. We then leave the door wide open for Satan to deceive us and to lead us astray.

All the characteristics of the ideal wife referred to in Proverbs 31:10-31 have reference to her inward nature. She gives no room for any suspicion. She seeks the good of her husband (in preference to her own good). She works willingly and hard. She has forethought for her family. She is not ashamed to work with her own hands or to do any lowly, menial task. She is thrifty and yet not miserly - for she is generous-hearted and kind to those in need. She knows how to control her tongue knowing when and what to speak and when to keep quiet (how important this is!). She does not idle away her time but redeems every moment. No wonder her husband, her children, and even God praise her.

We may not be able to ascertain with absolute certainty whether all these qualities exist in a girl. Yet if we want to know God's will, these words should remain at the back of our minds and should form the basis of any assessment that we make.

Beware again of the Satanic suggestion that if the person you are considering is not spiritually up to the mark now, you will be able to improve her and lift her up after marriage. That hardly ever happens. If she is not devoted to the Lord now, there is no guarantee that she will be, later on. It is extremely difficult to stand on a table and to pull up another person from ground level to the table top. It is much easier for the other person to pull you down: the same is true in a spiritually unequal marriage.

For a truly Christian marriage your attraction should be based primarily on a person's spiritual qualities. If you look for these first of all, you will find that all your other essential requirements are also met in the person God has chosen for you. The principle of Matthew 6:33 applies even here:

Set your heart on His kingdom and His goodness (first), and all these (other) things will come to you as a matter of course (JBP).

One who neglects the spiritual or even gives it a secondary place when deciding, will thereby deprive himself of God's best.

Soul

The soul of a person consists of his mind, emotions and will. For compatibility in marriage, there must be some degree of similarity in these realms too. We cannot be rigid here (as in the case of oneness in the spirit), and we acknowledge that there are exceptions where there may not be similarity in these realms and yet where God may lead to marriage. But we are speaking here of the normal case.

Though secondary to the spirit, yet the soul is more important than the body. Therefore, after having considered the spiritual aspect, the next question that a young man should ask himself is still not, "What does she look like?", but "Does she suit me intellectually and emotionally?". In most cases, God's chosen partner for a person will be of the same mental age as he is. Mental age can be different from physical age. There are some 25-year olds who behave like 15-year olds. Their mental and emotional development has obviously not corresponded with their physical - not necessarily because of any disease or deformity, but perhaps due to their being too dependent on their parents or due to other environmental factors.

There are many reasons why we should consider mental age. Conversation is a very important part of married life, and if there are very few or no interests in common to the two partners, this can lead to many tensions and frustrations. There should therefore normally be a wide range of common interests - for married life is not just a matter of a few months but of many decades. Similarly, if the intellectual ability of one is far below that of the other, it can lead to an unnatural married life. If the wife is the intellectual giant, then woe betide her husband, for he will be nothing more than a pawn in her hand! If the husband is the one far superior intellectually, then the wife will be reduced almost to a non-entity. In such a case, she will be little more than a servant in the home. I am not saying that there are no exceptions to this rule, neither am I suggesting that the intellectual ability of both should be exactly on a par. But I do say that it is unlikely, if you are a doctor of philosophy, that God will lead you to marry an illiterate village-girl, however spiritual she may be. The wife is to be a helper suited to her husband - and so she must in some degree at least be able to cooperate with her husband in his life and work.

A.S. Triton, in his book, 'Whose World?', relates an incident which illustrates this aptly. He says,

"The author well remembers the distress of a highly cultured man who, when converted in his twenties, had thought that the only thing that mattered was that he married a Christian. He had asked an almost illiterate girl to marry him and she had been unable to resist such a charming Christian man. They found after a while, however, that tensions and friction developed between them. She never read anything, he devoured books. He was academic and analytical, she spontaneous and intuitive. They loved one another and were both genuine Christians, but what they had in common as human beings was slight. The result was a long period of strain and difficulty which would have shattered many marriages between non-Christians. What most baffled the man at the height of their problem was that prayer did not seem to

do any good. But prayer is not intended to be a method of avoiding all our difficulties, particularly those we have created ourselves. He was finally helped by an experienced minister who told him that the problems were entirely his own fault and that he must set himself a long-term programme to bridge the human gaps between them. This needed much prayer and spiritual grace on both sides, but it needed action also on the level of the natural gifts and abilities and potentialities that each possessed. She learned to read and enjoy books, he learned to enter into her interests. There are unfortunately quite a few Christian marriages that have run into difficulties in this way, basically because they had not understood (or stopped to think) what marriage is for, in God's plan."

From the above incident it should be obvious that to ignore compatibility on the intellectual level is to invite unnecessary hardship and suffering for both partners. It is no sign of spirituality to ignore this factor, because God's purpose is that a partner should be a true companion.

A wise question that a man could perhaps ask himself about the girl he is considering is,

Is she the kind of person whom I would want as the mother of my children and with whom I could pray and discuss and work out life's problems?

By this I do not mean that the emotionally volatile should marry only those of like temperament - their life would then be very unreal. And if the grave and solemn married only those equally grave and solemn, their home would be like a graveyard! Extreme differences in temperament however, should be given consideration.

Certainly, I would suggest that you look for a sense of humour in the person you are considering. He does not have to be a comedian (it is better if he isn't), but he must be able to laugh at himself. A sense of humour is of vital importance in married life for at least two reasons. First, it acts as a safety-valve. It helps to prevent angry arguments. Second, it adds spice to life. Marriage can be extremely boring with one who can neither crack nor stand a joke!

The third area of the soul is the will. You should not look for a girl who considers it her duty to say "Yes" to everything you say - for then she will be no better than a robot. No doubt it is dangerous for a man to marry a woman with a more dominant personality than his own. On the other hand, a woman who has strong convictions can be a great asset to her husband. The girl you consider must certainly be willing to submit to you, but not to the point of being a mere Yes-woman. Many men have become great through the faithful and honest criticisms of their wives.

Walter Trobisch in 'I Loved A Young Man', tells of one of his friends who wrote thus about what he expected from his future wife:

1. She must challenge me to the highest, through absolutely honest criticism of me.
2. When she is disappointed in me, she must never withdraw her confidence.
3. Untiringly she must help me to overcome my weak sides.
4. She must never pretend, but must tell me honestly when I have hurt her".

But that can only be possible where the other partner has a will of her own which she is prepared to exercise. What a man needs is not a slave but an equal partner.

Body

The body is also a part of God's creation and so there are various aspects of the physical part of man, too, that need to be considered when contemplating marriage. We do not want to go to the extreme that some people go to, who marry merely in order to satisfy their lust and to whom marriage is little more than legalized adultery. At the same time, we do not want to go to the other extreme of saying that it is the spiritual alone that matters, thereby totally ignoring the physical. There is a Scriptural midway position between these two extremes that God expects us to take.

Since we are not disembodied spirits but human beings, there must be some degree of physical attraction between the two partners in a marriage. It is not wrong to be attracted by physical beauty, provided such attraction is always kept in its proper tertiary place, next to the spirit and soul. Anyone however, who places undue emphasis on physical attractiveness or on the colour of a person's skin, will eventually find marriage extremely disappointing. If you are initially drawn to a girl through her physical beauty and not through her spirituality, you will find many problems awaiting you after marriage - even if the girl is a believer. With rare exceptions, a beautiful girl is usually very self-conscious and habituated to receiving plenty of attention from men. She will naturally expect such attention to be given her by her husband after marriage. You will therefore find that your "beautiful" wife makes most unreasonable demands upon your time and attention.

Age is an important factor to be considered. Since the husband-wife relationship symbolizes the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church, and since the man is to be the head of the woman, it is only logical that the husband should be the older and the more mature of the two. A man reaches maturity more slowly than a woman does, and if he is younger he is bound to be less mature than his wife. This is unhealthy, because a woman should be able to look up to her husband. When the man is older, he has the added advantage of having had more practical experience in the world too. Yet another reason for the man to be older is that a woman ages more quickly than a man - especially after bearing children; and so, if she is older, the difference between them will be aggravated in the middle age. In view of all these factors, it is inadvisable for a man to marry a girl older than himself.

However, since difference in age affects some people more than it does others, there may be some exceptions to this rule. If marriage is being considered with a girl who is older, the difference in age should not be more than two or three years. If it exceeds this, the woman is more likely to be a mother than a wife to her husband. In any case, no girl should marry a man who is less mature than she is.

It is equally inadvisable for a girl to marry a man who is more than ten years older than she is, for such a man will be more of a father than a husband to her.

It is not possible to lay down any specific rules in relation to age, but it is advisable for a man to marry between the ages of 25 and 32. Before 25, he will be immature, and in any case should devote himself undistractedly to the Lord's work. After 32, it will be more difficult for him to make adjustments (which are unavoidable in marriage), as he will be more set in his ways. For similar reasons, it is advisable for a girl to marry between the ages of 20 and 27. These are not rigid rules, for circumstances and other factors may sometimes compel a person to marry at a later age. But where the choice is in your hands, it is better to keep within these limits.

Factors relating to health, general constitution of the body and heredity (that may affect the children) should also be considered. It is essential that each person be utterly honest in revealing any hereditary

defects, diseases or mental breakdowns (in oneself or among one's near relatives), that can possibly affect the next generation. Where in doubt about this, it is better to consult a doctor for confirmation. Such defects need not prevent marriage, for the other partner may feel that the marriage is in God's will and therefore will trust God to overrule or heal all physical shortcomings. But it is wrong and sinful to hide anything of such a nature. Many marriages have been wrecked because some such fact hidden prior to marriage was discovered subsequently. In any case, a believer can never afford to practice guile. There is no need to fear that you may lose your partner by being honest. On the contrary, he may respect you even more for your sincerity. If he breaks with you, because of your honesty, you can rest assured that God will not let you suffer for honouring Him. Where He permits such a breaking-up of the relationship, it will always be with the intention of giving you His best - someone else.

It is dangerous to marry any close blood relation. This is because of abnormalities that lie dormant in a person may manifest themselves in children, if the other partner is a close relative (thereby possessing the same abnormalities). Remember that this is a deterrent that God Himself has placed in human nature, to prevent close relatives from marrying one another. The Bible also forbids such marriages (Leviticus 18:6).

In some parts of India, there is a custom for a young man to marry his own eldest sister's daughter (where such a girl is of marriageable age). This is a tradition of heathen origin and should never govern the thinking of any believer. It is in any case contrary to nature and to the Scriptures. In one such case that I saw, all the children born to the couple were abnormal in one way or another. When God Himself has forbidden something we may be sure that there are very good reasons for His doing so.

Love

If the Lord leads you to marry a person, He will always give you love for her. We have already considered in Chapter Three what the characteristics of such love will be. Love may or may not grow to any degree prior to marriage, but it must at least exist. When Isaac took Rebekah (whom he had never met before) as his God-chosen wife, we are told that "he loved her" (Genesis 24:67). He did not know her well but he was sure of God's will in the matter, and so love sprang up in his heart for her.

I agree that God does not usually lead a person (as He led Isaac) to marry someone about whom He knows nothing. But then neither does He normally grant such a spectacular revelation to His will as He did in that case. The primary lesson to be learnt from that incident is surely the importance of knowing that the person you are marrying is indeed God's chosen one for you. And if the person you are considering is indeed the one of God's choice, then, whether you were led to her through your parents or directly, the Lord will put love in your heart (as He did in Isaac's) for her. This love of course will be mutual.

But love cannot be produced to order! If it does not spring up spontaneously from within, but has to be forced up, it will not usually be true love at all. True love grows out of respect for a person. If you do not respect and admire a person you can never really love him/her.

Sympathy should never be mistaken for love. To marry a girl just because her unfortunate circumstances evoke your sympathy is always extremely unwise. You may consider it an act of gallantry and sacrifice, but if genuine love does not exist in your heart for her, your marriage can end in a breakdown. Love is an utterly essential pre-requisite in every Christian marriage. Sympathy and pity alone can never be enough.

If you do not respect a girl for her spirituality, the courage of her convictions and her intellectual ability, and if you do not have thoughts of admiration concerning her, it would be unwise to go ahead.

The Bible says that love is the greatest thing in the world (1 Corinthians 13:13). We cannot afford to ignore it.

Race, Culture, Caste, and Wealth

In addition to all that has been said thus far, there are some other factors too that need to be considered when looking for your life-partner.

One of these is race. Is it right for a believer to marry a person of another race? What does the Bible teach about racial differences?

Colossians 3:11 (TLB) says,

In this new life, one's nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant. Such things mean nothing; whether a person has Christ is what matters.

In Galatians 3:28 (TLB), we read,

You are no longer Jews or Greeks or slaves or freeman or even merely man or woman, but you are all the same - you are Christians, you are one in Christ Jesus.

These verses teach beyond any doubt that as far as our acceptance before God is concerned, what race we come from makes no difference. In our treatment of one another in the fellowship of the church, any deferential treatment because of race is also totally unjustified. But that does not mean that there is no difference at all between the races. In Galatians 3:28 (quoted above), we read that "in Christ" just as our race does not matter our sex does not matter either. But that does not mean that there are no differences between the sexes! A man cannot decide to marry another man quoting Galatians 3:28! Similarly, there are many differences between the races that need to be borne in mind, when considering marriage.

Scripturally there is nothing wrong in an inter-racial marriage. But there are at least two other factors that need to be considered in this connection. First, children of mixed parentage usually face many problems - especially in India. Secondly, a person's service for the Lord will be greatly hindered (in India) if his/her partner is a foreigner. Some people, in their immaturity and in their even greater selfishness, ignore these factors and rush ahead into such a marriage. Years later, they regret it.

Another factor, closely linked with race, that needs to be considered, is culture. In the case of an Indian marrying a foreigner there may be many differences in culture that can make mutual adjustments after marriage extremely difficult, especially if they live in India. This will also be true, though to a lesser extent, in the case of an Indian who marries someone from another part of India, with a different background from his own. There may be cases where cultural backgrounds can be overcome easily, and in such cases marriage can be considered even though the persons are from different States of India and speak different languages. One common language however is obviously essential. If both parents are fluent in one common language there will not be much of a problem. But it will be very difficult if one partner has to constantly use a language that he/she is not familiar with. The place of permanent residence is also an important consideration in this connection. It must also be understood from the beginning, in such a marriage, that one culture will ultimately dominate the other.

Caste plays a major role in deciding marriages in many parts of India. The caste system is an evil that has been carried over into Christendom by half-converted Christians. Since Christ removes all caste

differences, a believer should never reject a marriage proposal merely because of a difference in caste. A person who is influenced by caste in marriage behaves in a manner unbecoming of a child of God.

However, marriage should not be carried out across racial, cultural, linguistic, or even caste boundaries, merely to prove that Christians are above and against such divisions.

The wealth or social connections of the other person's family should also never influence one's decision when considering a marriage proposal. It is a shame and a disgrace if one who calls himself a believer is influenced by such factors.

Dowry

Another accursed practice in our country is that of asking for dowry. The dowry system (as prevalent in India) ignores the personal relationship in marriage and reduces it to a mere business deal. Among unbelievers (which includes nominal Christians), such a practice is understandable because, being spiritually blind, they allow covetousness to rule their lives. But what shall we say when many believers also indulge in this practice - even some who claim to be separated from the world and to possess the New Testament pattern? Surely the Devil has blinded them too.

Many a marriage arrangement has failed because the parents of the girl could not meet the exorbitant demand for dowry made by the parents of the boy. How many girls in our land have been emotionally disturbed and brought to frustration because of this.

God cannot but severely judge those who make marriage arrangements a matter of merely striking a bargain. This judgment will begin at the house of God, in the midst of those who profess to be born again. It is because many believers, who should have known better, have not spoken out against this heathen practice that it is still prevalent in the Church. It is a grievous thing when those who should be standing upright for God in a warped and crooked world, become warped and crooked themselves. No Christian who desires to please God should ever ask for, or receive a dowry.

There are those who hide under the excuse that it is their parents who ask for the dowry and not they themselves. But if they have convictions, one wonders why they do not speak up and tell their parents that they do not want a dowry. Perhaps the reason often is that they secretly desire it themselves too. If we are convinced that the dowry system is wrong, we should speak up for the truth. It is an amazing fact that many who are strong-willed in other matters, often act like spineless jelly-fish when it comes to expressing their convictions on dowry!

Some may say that it is only reasonable that their parents who have spent so much money on their education should now receive some money as dowry from the girl's parents. Others may justify their asking for dowry by saying that their parents will need money to give as dowry for their sisters when the latter get married. But all these arguments become invalid when we recognize that the dowry-system itself is displeasing to God. We can rest assured that God will not disappoint us if we obey Him. He will honour you and meet your family's need too, if you honour Him (1 Samuel 2:30).

Others may ask, "What is wrong in receiving money which the father of the girl gladly gives as a gift?". There is certainly nothing wrong in that. But lest any use this as an excuse for their covetousness, let all young men in such situations answer these three questions first:

Was this money any factor at all (even if the least important) in deciding the marriage?

Did you or your representatives (whether father or relatives) ever ask for the money, after the marriage had been settled?

Did you secretly hope that money would be given (either to the girl or to you)?

If the answer is "Yes" to any of these three questions, you have certainly fallen a prey to covetousness, however well it may have been covered up by different excuses.

It is in such situations that the disparity between a believer's preaching and his practice becomes evident to all. No wonder infidels are prompted to say, "Whatever Christians may preach, when it comes to money, everybody has the same religion". Woe betide the believer who, through his conduct, gives occasion for such a charge to be levelled against Christians.

Many may resent such strong denunciation of the dowry system, but let them remember that the system is a product of man's covetousness, which the Bible says is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). One has only to read the severe denunciation of idolatry in the Old Testament to realize how God detests it. The prophets of old were fiery in their fulminations against it. They did not mince words when speaking against that which God hated.

Other Factors

Denominational affiliation and doctrinal convictions are also important factors to be considered before deciding on marriage. There must be agreement on subjects such as church-fellowship and baptism, otherwise problems can arise later on. One partner may want to baptize the children as infants, while the other may not. Instead of fighting over these issues after marriage, it is best that these are decided upon beforehand. It is essential that the whole family worship in one church. A family where the father and perhaps some of the children attend one church, and the mother and the other children attend another, demonstrates not peaceful co-existence, but a violation of Scriptural principles. This can lead to serious divisions in the family too. A Christian family must manifest unity in public worship.

Any other strong religious convictions held must be disclosed and discussed prior to marriage.

Another important factor to be considered is compatibility of calling. If you are called of God to work in a certain place or in a special type of ministry you must have a wife who is prepared to go with you. She must not only be willing but should herself share the same calling. Although in India, wives are traditionally expected to follow their husbands wherever they go, yet if your wife lacks your vision she will only be a drag on you and will finally draw you away from the place of God's call. It is best to check such matters before marriage takes place.

Financial resources should also be taken into account. No young man should consider marriage until he has enough income to support a family. To say, "The Lord will provide", may perhaps be a misquotation of Scripture, for the Lord has already provided us with enough common sense to think and to decide sensibly. If one does not use that, it is unlikely that the Lord will do a miracle to provide for his needs when he gets married. No believer should make a girl suffer unnecessarily by marrying her before God's time.

Yet another thing to be considered is how long you will have to wait before you can marry. Circumstances or other factors may perhaps preclude the possibility of your getting married for quite some time. In such cases, it is wisest not to consider any girl at all until at the earliest one year prior to the date when marriage is considered possible.

Forming a Balanced Assessment

The best and most spiritual person in the world is still a human being with frailties. So the one who is looking for a "perfect" life-partner, is wasting his time. You won't find her anywhere. Even if such a person does exist she may not be willing to marry you, for she will naturally want a perfect partner herself!

All that has been said thus far is therefore not to encourage you to look for the perfect partner, but to enable you to form a balanced assessment of any person you consider, and thereby to ascertain the will of God.

Even where God gives you the clearest possible leading to the person of His choice, you will still find that there are many mutual adjustments to be made after marriage. The more you come to know one another the more you will discover how imperfect you both are. If you are honest you will discover more imperfections in yourself than in your partner. Marriage reveals a person's imperfections perhaps more than anything else in the world. It can shatter the conceited opinion of one's own spirituality that a person may have had when single. As D.H. Small has said,

"Marriage at best, is two imperfect people imperfectly related".

Yet, even though we are imperfect, it is possible - yes necessary - to be clearly led of God in marriage. That alone can form the solid rock-foundation for a truly Christian home. When faults and blemishes are noticed in one another after marriage and disagreements arise, woe betide the couple where even one partner is not a hundred percent certain that it was God Who led them to each other. This is why it is utterly essential for both partners to be certain to the will of God before marriage. The man who built his house on the rock took more pains and spent more time laying the foundation than the man who built on sand. But when the storms came, the former realized that it was worth all the effort put in, for his house stood while the other man's fell (Matthew 7:24-27). A marriage founded on the will of God can weather every storm of life. It is worth taking pains then, and waiting, until you are sure of God's will before beginning to build your home.

Forming a balanced assessment is therefore so very important. Due weight must be given to each of the factors mentioned in this chapter, according to the relative importance of each. Some believers fail because they neglect certain factors and overemphasize certain others, and thereby arrive at an unbalanced assessment. Others make the mistake of allowing their hearts to be carried away before they have begun to exercise their minds. As a result, their critical faculties lose their sharpness, and it becomes almost impossible to form a correct assessment of the other person. This is why marriages among sensible unbelievers can often be happier than marriages among Christians who do not form a balanced assessment in their choice.

Certainty

You should never allow yourself to be pushed into marriage by friends, relatives, well-wishers or even by servants of God, when you yourself are not one hundred per cent sure of God's will. It is always best in such cases to wait. If you feel something within you holding you back, don't proceed. Wait. Heed such checks of the Holy Spirit, and you will not have regrets later on.

Some may be wondering how they can ever know anything about a person of the opposite sex, when Indian culture does not permit dating or even (in some places) conversing with them. But the one who

thinks that by conversing with or even dating a girl, he is going to know all about her, is sadly mistaken. We have only to look at the thousands of divorces in Western countries (where dating is commonplace from a very young age and where each person chooses his own partner), to realize that dating is not the answer. The solution really lies in asking God to show you the true character of the girl/boy. You should make every effort to find out all you can about the person, from other believers who know her/him - for thus alone will you be able to pray intelligently about the matter. Since God is more eager than you could possibly be, that you should find the right person, He will enable you to know all that is necessary about any person, in spite of every apparent cultural handicap. Trust God to do this for you. Nothing is impossible with Him. Don't limit Him by your unbelief (Matthew 13:58).

After ascertaining God's will, it is wisest (at least in our country) to convey the proposal through your parents or through a common friend.

What if the other person turns down your proposal? In such cases, the best thing to do is to wait and pray. Don't ever try to force the issue in any way. If after waiting for a time, the other person still refuses to consider you as a life-partner, then you may be certain that you were mistaken in your guidance. Where it is truly the will of God, He will always convince the other person about it too. If the guidance is felt only by you, then your "guidance" certainly did not come from God. If you wait for God's time, He will bring across your path the one He has chosen for you - and in such a case she/he will undoubtedly say "Yes", as Rebekah did (Genesis 24:58).

Parental Approval

What if your parents say "No" to the person you consider to be God's choice? Your first step in such an event should be, of course, to pray that God Himself will convince your parents. You should then explain to them the reasons for your conviction in the matter. You must be frank with them. Never underestimate them, for there is much help to be obtained from their wise advice. Even if you feel they are old-fashioned, you don't have to tell them so. Show them sincere appreciation and love. God can use them to save you from many a pitfall in marriage.

The Bible says,

Listen to your father's advice and don't despise an old mother's experience....only a fool despises his father's advice; a wise son considers each suggestion....take to heart all of their advice....their counsel will lead you and save you from harm....their advice is a beam of light directed into the dark corners of your mind to warn you of danger and to give you a good life

(Proverbs 23:22; 15:5; 6:21-23 - TLB).

All this is, of course, fully true only of parents who are born again and walking with God. Yet, even where they are unsaved, their advice can often be of help.

Parental approval is a great blessing and should be obtained wherever possible. If your parents are believers then you should wait until they approve, even if it means waiting for a few years. Where they disapprove, you should re-check your guidance. God will honour you for doing so. He is Sovereign and is well able to change your parent's thinking in His own time (Proverbs 21:1). I know of more than one case where He did this for those who honoured Him and waited for Him to work on their behalf. Many others have missed such a precious experience, by rushing ahead in impatience. Hudson Taylor has said,

"Conquer through the Lord. He can open any door. The responsibility is with the parent in such a case, and it is a serious one. When the son or daughter can say in all sincerity, 'I am waiting for Thee, Lord, to open the way', the matter is in His hands and He will take it up" (quoted in "Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret" by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor).

However, where parents are unbelievers or where, though believers, they object unreasonably on worldly grounds, then it is not necessary to wait indefinitely for their approval. But even in such cases, one should wait for a while at least and seek to obtain their approval if possible, before getting married. If you are convinced finally that God wants you to go ahead without their approval, then make this known to them in a spirit of humility and love. Avoid giving them the impression that you are being arrogant or rebellious.

Our Attitude while Waiting

Let me add a word here to those who still have a long time to wait before they can consider marriage. The desire for marriage and family life must be offered up to God even as Abraham offered up Isaac (Genesis 22). In other words, you must be willing to remain unmarried through life if it be for the glory of God. This attitude, if maintained, will keep you from looking at every attractive person of the opposite sex as a possible life-partner. Every spare moment should be turned to account for the Lord in one way or another. This is what it really means to be "asleep in the will of God". When God's time for marriage comes, He will give back to you what you had offered up to Him, even as He gave back Isaac to Abraham. There are many who can testify from their experience how the maintaining of such an attitude before God (as described in this paragraph) saved them from many a snare of Satan, and how in the end when God's time for marriage came, He gave them the very best.

J. Oswald Sanders, former General Director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, said that when he was a single young man with his life surrendered completely to Christ, he promised the Lord that he would not approach a girl until he knew

what the Lord wanted him to be

that the girl was the right girl, and

that it was the Lord's time to approach her.

He also told the Lord that he was willing to remain single. Six weeks after he knew that God wanted him to be a missionary, he met the girl who later became his wife. He felt attracted to her immediately. But it was not till 6 1/2 years later that the Lord told him to approach her. Those who honour God thus, invariably get the best. This is the safest path to take.

A Word of Caution

Two final warnings I would give here. First, never decide on some new person immediately after one proposal or friendship is broken; or immediately after someone whom you desperately wanted to marry gets married to somebody else. The temptation will be strong at such a time, for you will be emotionally upset and you will want someone at once to fill the void in your heart. All decisions made thus, "on the rebound", are invariably regretted later on. Keep clear of all proposals for at least six months after you have faced such a disappointment. This will give you time to come down to earth and to think rationally again. I can think of more than one marriage that was entered into while in such an emotionally disturbed state and that ultimately led to regret.

Secondly, never decide to marry someone just because he threatens to commit suicide (or to do something equally drastic) if you don't. If you marry on that basis you are again certain to end up in regret.

It is wonderful to know at the wedding, that you are being united by God Himself, according to His fore-ordained plan, to the person of His choice, and in His appointed time. Blessed are the couples who have such an assurance.

Theirs indeed is "joy beyond compare".

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/sex-love-marriage-6-finding-your-better-half/>

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