

(Sex, Love & Marriage) 8.

by Zac Poonen

A happy marriage is built on careful preparation, mutual respect, and a deep commitment to each other and to God.

Scripture: Genesis 2:24, Exodus 14:14, Psalm 15:4, Psalm 45:10, Proverbs 12:22, Ecclesiastes 3:5, Matthew 5:37, Romans 1:25, 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 5:12

Topics: "Preparation for Marriage", "Engagement Guidelines"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of preparation for marriage, likening it to the meticulous planning required for a space mission. He advocates for a period of engagement that allows couples to know each other better and to detach from parental attachments, while also warning against the dangers of physical intimacy before marriage. Poonen highlights that minor disagreements during engagement are normal and should not be seen as signs of incompatibility, but rather as opportunities for growth and humility. He stresses the need for couples to seek advice from experienced married believers and to plan a Christ-honoring wedding, free from non-Christian customs. Ultimately, he encourages couples to establish their own home after marriage to foster a healthy family unit.

Transcript

"Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five.... Excitement mounts at the launching site as the countdown approaches zero. Another manned flight to the moon is about to begin. Months of intense preparation have preceded this day and many last-minute checks are even now being done. It would be fatal to go about these casually - for human lives are involved.

Married life can be far more adventurous - and far riskier too - than any space flight. It cannot be approached casually or carelessly. Preparation is essential.

It is advisable to have a day, some months before the actual wedding, when the "countdown" can begin (call this an "engagement", if you like - the name does not matter). It should then be announced to the public that the boy and the girl are to be married. From that time onwards as the countdown approaches the wedding-day, it is only natural that both partners will be excited. But this excitement should not prevent them from preparing themselves for marriage.

The main advantage of having an engagement is that it enables the two who are going to be married, to get to know one another to some extent, prior to marriage. They can now correspond with one another

freely and meet together without fear of gossip. It also enables each to know something about the other person's family: family members and family history. This is necessary in India, since marriage in our country invariably involves close links with the family of one's partner.

Attachment to Parents

A period of engagement has the advantage of giving time for both partners to cut themselves off from any unduly strong attachment to their parents. It is not wrong to continue to love and to be concerned for one's parents even after marriage. In fact this is Scriptural. But many marriages have been ruined by either one or both partners being more attached to their parents than to each other.

Those who have lived at home all their lives and never been away from their parents are more prone to this tendency than others. But the Bible is very clear in its teaching on this subject:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall become united and cleave to his wife (Genesis 2:24).

This obviously applies to the woman too (see Psalm 45:10).

Going Out Together

Where the engaged couple have opportunities to meet frequently, is it right for them to go out on their own and indulge in petting? Once again we must keep in mind the principles mentioned in Chapter Two. In India, I would say that even after the engagement, it is inadvisable for them to go out together by themselves. Of course, after engagement it is only natural and right that a couple will want to meet and talk together privately. But this is best done either in the house of one of the partners or in the house of a common friend, where the couple can sit by themselves and talk. Going away to a lonely place by themselves will not only give room for gossip but will also lay them open to sexual temptations.

As for petting, I would say without any hesitation, that it is wrong. Engagement is not a certificate for sexual license. There is a right time for everything. There is "a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing" (Ecclesiastes 3:5). The time to embrace is after marriage. Be patient here and you will find your married life more enjoyable, for it will be free from all regret. Where a couple commence petting and caressing before marriage, they lay themselves open to the possibility of personal relationships deteriorating, emotional tensions increasing, prayer together being eliminated (for petting will replace praying), and even indulgence in pre-marital sexual intercourse.

The possibility of engagements being broken must also be borne in mind. If petting has been indulged in, then when the engagement is broken, the girl will feel sorry that she allowed the boy to handle her body. And so, as I have mentioned in Chapter Two, if the boy tries to be unduly forward, the girl must apply the brakes because she has more to lose than he. She need not fear that she may lose him by refusing to be caressed. If he is worth marrying, he will not be offended by such action, but on the contrary, will respect her even more. If he is offended, it only reveals that he is unworthy of her.

Disagreements and Difficulties

Some engaged couples consider that the occurrence of even minor disagreements indicates underlying incompatibility, and question whether they should continue the engagement; but the person who enters marriage thinking that he will never have any disagreement with his partner is living in a dream-world,

more affected by fairy-tales than by reality. Even in the most perfect of marriages, between the most spiritual of people, there will be minor disagreements. This in itself is no indication either of incompatibility or of the marriage not being in God's will. If it were so, there would be no God-ordained marriages anywhere. The only marriage in which no disagreement or difference of opinion will ever arise, on even minor issues, will be where one of the partners is a mere robot without a will of his/her own. Minor disagreements should therefore never be a cause for breaking off the engagement. On the contrary they are a healthy sign of life in each individual, provided both have the capacity to humble themselves and to ask one another's forgiveness. The man should be just as willing to apologize as the woman. In Indian society this is considered a disgrace for a man - but it should not be so for a Christian. A man who is unwilling to apologize to his wife should never get married.

There can be other external problems and difficulties during the period of engagement which may sometimes necessitate delaying the marriage, or may cause suffering and pain to both partners - for example, parental disapproval or financial problems. These should not be permitted to generate discouragement and frustration. On the contrary, it should be recognized that they strengthen the bond of love and deepen the foundation of the future home. God knows how much you can bear, and He

can be trusted not to allow you to suffer....beyond your powers of endurance" (1 Corinthians 10:13 - JBP).

In His own time He will make a way through every "Red Sea" and will lead both of you triumphantly into the place that He has prepared for you (Exodus 14). So trust Him and don't allow your heart to fail!

Engagement - For How Long?

How long should the period of engagement last? No rules can be laid down, but it is not advisable for this period to exceed six months when the couple are together in one place and meeting frequently. Where they are away from one another, this period should not normally exceed twelve months. This is because the emotions of both partners will be at a very high pitch after engagement, and to keep them so highly strung for an excessively long period of time can lead to strains and tensions.

Walter Trobisch in 'I Loved A Young Man', compares the period of engagement to the time that a baby is in its mother's womb. He likens the wedding day to the day when the child is actually born into the world, and everybody sees it. But before the birth actually took place, there were months of preparation and growth inside the womb. This is indeed a beautiful picture of what an engagement should really be.

Engagement - A Solemn Covenant

A formal or informal engagement is a solemn covenant to marry and should not be treated lightly. The Bible says that the person who lives in God's presence is one who

keeps a promise even if it ruins him"

(Psalm 15:4 - TLB). God loves those who keep their promises, and hates those who don't (Proverbs 12:22 - TLB).

A Christian's "Yes" should mean "Yes" and his "No", "No" (Matthew 5:37; James 5:12).

May an engagement be broken off if new facts are brought to light which raise doubts about the wisdom of the marriage? If the other person is not born again, then you certainly must break off the engagement

immediately - although the fact of the new birth should have been verified before the engagement. Such a withdrawal of promise does not constitute a breaking of the commands mentioned in the paragraph above, for the marriage would be not only to your detriment, but to the detriment of the Lord's cause on earth also. You should be guided by 2 Corinthians 6:14.

If the other person is born again, then the only grounds on which you should break off an engagement, are that the other person has proved unfaithful to you, or that some really serious incompatibility not known before, is discovered, such as sharp doctrinal difference on vital issues. God certainly cannot honour those capricious believers who give their word to a person and then just as quickly break it because they say they are now uncertain of God's will. I know of one young man who broke off his engagement merely because he wanted to go abroad. This left the girl in an extremely difficult position where her family were unable to find anyone who would marry her. Men are more often guilty than women of such behaviour. Unstable people like that are a disgrace to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. One must be hundred per cent sure before giving his word. When unsure, it is always best to wait. But we shouldn't ruin other people's lives by our fickle-mindedness. "It is far better not to say you'll do something, than to say you will and then not to do it" (Ecclesiastes 5:5 - TLB).

Seeking Advice

It is most advisable for those getting married to consult at least one married believer of their own sex, in whom they have confidence, and ask for advice on married life. The advice thus received can be of immense value.

It is also necessary that both partners have a general idea of sexual anatomy and the physiology of the principles of reproduction, and of the physical aspects of marriage. For this, they should individually consult a married doctor of their own sex, preferably a believer. Some married couples experience frustration because of continued sexual maladjustment - which in turn is often the result of ignorance. Information on sexual anatomy and physiology may be found in 'Towards Christian Marriage' by W. Melville Capper and H. Morgan Williams (IVF).

Plans for the Wedding

Both partners must discuss and plan the details of their wedding. They should then inform their parents and their pastor how they wish to have it conducted. Every believer should insist on a plain and simple Christ-honouring wedding, with no heathen customs or rituals incorporated therein. Alas, many "Christian" weddings in India are plagued with customs borrowed from non-Christian religions. It is a shame that even believers often submit themselves to such a rituals. They say, in defence, that they do not want to offend their parents and their relatives. Apparently they do not mind if God is offended and grieved and dishonoured (perhaps they fear their relatives more than they fear God and so "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator" - Romans 1:25). It is presumptuous to expect God's presence to grace a wedding, if the door is left open for non-Christian rituals on the occasion. Stick closely to the Word of God and refuse to compromise at any cost - and God will honour you.

The wedding provides an ideal opportunity for both the bride and bridegroom to give a short testimony of their faith in Christ. This opportunity should not be missed but should be fully exploited for the Lord. All this should be discussed with parents and pastor well in advance, and the wedding planned accordingly.

After the Wedding

Immediately after the wedding, or as soon as possible thereafter, it is most advisable for the couple to go off together to some quiet place for at least one week by themselves, when they can be alone with each other and with the Lord. Whether this is called a "honeymoon", or not, such a time can be of great value. If this appears impossible in your case for one reason or another, make it a matter of prayer and you may be surprised to see what the Lord can do for you.

After marriage, it is always preferable for the couple to stay in a home of their own, even if that be a small hut. Staying with relatives can cause many problems and tensions. In India, due to economic or other factors, a couple may not in some cases, find it feasible to stay on their own. Such couples should make this a matter for serious prayer, for it is God's will that each family should be a separate unit. They should trust God to open a way for them, and should set up their own home as soon as possible.

We have seen above some of the main factors to be considered in preparation for marriage. None of them should be taken lightly. The effective take-off of a space-rocket depends on the careful preparation that has preceded the zero-hour. Even so, the foundations for a happy marriage are laid long before the wedding-day.

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