This is a guide for a couple contemplating marriage, or engaged to

be married, through a basic process of discovery. Few things are more profitable than men and women committed to the study of God’s Word as it relates to marriage.

These sessions keep in mind that each couple to be counseled will have

different levels of spiritual maturity and needs. Circumstances among couples will also vary. Some will be engaged for the first time; others may have been married before. Children may or may not be involved. There are many possible scenarios. Whatever the scenario, we believe God has something to say to us.

**Session 1: The Criteria for Marriage.**

My job in this marriage counseling process is…

**A.** To get to know the couple and to make them feel comfortable and at ease with

myself, my spouse (should they be able to sit in), and with the counseling process.

**B.** To discern the spiritual condition of the counselees, and the degree to which each is familiar with the spiritual history and commitment of the other.

**C.** To discern problem areas which might disqualify the couple for marriage, and

determine if the couple meets the qualifications for marriage.

**D.** To come to an understanding of the necessity of sexual purity prior to their marriage.

**E.** To outline the counseling process and what will be required of the couple.

Schedule all other meetings, about one month apart, and outline what will be covered in each meeting.

**Questions… Lots of them…**

The following questions need to be asked in this meeting.

**A.** How did the two of you meet?

**B.** How long have you known each other?

**C.** How long have you been dating? Are you formally engaged?

**D.** How and why did you decide that you should get married?

**E.** When do you plan to get married? Where? By whom?

**F.** Why do you want to get married?

**G.** Why do you want to have Pre-Marriage counseling?

**H.** Is it your desire to have a Christian ceremony and Christian wedding? To the best of your knowledge, what is a Christian marriage? How is a Christian service and marriage different from other marriages?

**I.** How do your friends and family (including children) feel about your engagement?

**J.** Have any expressed concerns? If so, what are they?

**K.** Have either of you been married before? (More questions will follow if yes..)

**L.** Have either of you been “in love” before? How many times? How long ago was the last time? What is there about your present relationship that makes it different from those past instances which did not last?

**M.** Describe the spiritual dimension of your relationship up to this time? How do you want your spiritual relationship to improve?

**N.** Describe both the strengths and the weaknesses of your mate. What is it about your mate that attracted you? What potential problems do you anticipate in your marriage?

**O.** Have you been involved in pornography in the past or are you at present?

Whew… Lots of deep personal Questions…

**4 Priorities**

Although there is a lot to do in this first meeting, there are four things that must take priority.

First, and most important; **Do both the bride and groom profess faith in the Lord?**

We care about you. We care about this marriage, but we even more we care about your eternity. We strongly encourage that we take care of this eternal, salvational matter before we move forward with this wonderful yet temporal matter.

There are churches that refuse to be involved in the wedding if this question of faith is not answered in the affirmative. We aren’t saying we won’t be involved, but we are saying we MUST discuss this topic.

Bride, tell the groom’s testimony.

Groom, tell the Bride’s testimony.

There is intimacy in Marriage. **Are you intimately acquainted with the story of Jesus saving your loved one? Can you see the importance of this?**

We are finding out somethings…

**A.** Does the couple talk about their faith with each other?

**B.** Are they confident about each other’s conversion?

**C.** Does the couple seem to have an interest in spiritual things?

**D.** Do they celebrate each other’s salvation experience?

**E.** How well do they really know each other?

**F.** How well do they communicate about spiritual things? One day they may have a new generation to communicate their faith.

It is a delight to hear a couple talk about the Lord, what He has done in their life, and how He is still at work.

Sometimes this question of can you tell each other’s testimony can completely stump the couple! That should reveal some things to us.

If you aren’t really able to tell your mate’s testimony then we will make it an assignment to be ready to do at the next meeting.

Second, **is the couple committed to a Christian marriage as defined in the Bible?** If the couple is not committed in this way, it will be impossible, for example, for the husband to obey the command of Ephesians 5:25: “*Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church* *and gave Himself up for her*.” How can a husband love his wife as Christ also loved the church if he is not committed to the principals of biblical headship?

A Christian marriage is a lifelong building project that begins on the foundation of God’s Word. The couple must express a desire to be in God’s Word on a regular basis and to worship and fellowship with other believers.

Third, **does the couple have parental approval?** Although not necessarily a biblical requirement for marriage, it can be inferred and is very important.

Will the counselor not grant approval for the wedding and for the church’s involvement if one or more parents are against it? We aren’t saying that, but we will point out a lack of parental approval is a huge red flag!

If you find yourself in a situation where you don’t have parental approval, proceed with much prayer and caution. Take some time and find out the reason. If possible I may meet with the parents and have them articulate their concern.

Fourth, and somewhat uncomfortable to discuss, is **sexual purity.** To be specific, **are you involved physically and to what extent?**

If you are involved physically I want to communicate clearly the expectation that from here on to the wedding, you must commit to refraining from all sexual intercourse. Let’s not think our flesh, but let us explore each other’s mind, heart, & spirit.

**I will check with them at each meeting on how you are doing on your commitment.**

I also need to find out if they have been involved physically with others, and have they discussed it?

Although potentially very hurtful, it is better for the couple to address this issue now rather that after they are married.

Turn to and read Ephesians 5:3, I Thessalonians 4:1-8 and

Hebrews 13:4.

Where they stand in relation to these verses?

Another difficult discussion to have, but necessary, is the issue of pornography and/or sexual abuse. Many in our body have witnessed first hand the tragic result of pornography and sexual abuse on individuals and married couples.

If this is too awkard to admit right now in front of your spouse I want you to email me privately about the subject.

This concludes Session 1.

Do you have questions for me?

Let’s close in prayer.

**Homework…**

NO SEX!

Tell those Testimonies!

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This second meeting will cover chapters 3-11 in “Preparing For Your Marriage.” It should take

place about one month after meeting one unless there were circumstances that required an

additional meeting. The couple should come to this meeting prepared to cover these chapters. If

they do not come prepared, you may be getting an indication as to how serious they are about

Pre-Marriage Counseling. These meetings work best when everyone comes prepared. It would

probably be better not to meet if the couple is not prepared. Simply reschedule the meeting as

quickly as possible so as not to throw off the rest of the schedule. Don’t let a lack of preparation

become a habit. Tell the groom you are expecting leadership from him in this area and that it is

now time to start demonstrating it!

Having gone through the book with your spouse, you should be familiar with each chapter. If you

try to cover every question from each chapter in discussion format, you will never finish a

meeting! Therefore, as you and your spouse prepare for each meeting, with prayer and

discernment decide which portions will be emphasized. Some portions you may cover in a

lecture format but most should be through discussion. The emphasis should always be on the

truth of Scripture. Remember, you will want to hear what God is teaching them through their

study. You and your spouse simply facilitate the discovery process. With each meeting and

counseling session, you will get better in this area. The outline for this meeting should include the

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context with chapters one and three. Much can be gleaned from these verses but place an

emphasis on the following.

1. Adam did not a take a wife; he received one from God!

2. Marriage is permanent! Ask the couple for their view about divorce. What they believe

Scripture teaches about it, etc. (If you, as the counselor, are unclear what Scripture say

about divorce, take some time and think about the following passages: Leviticus 21:7,14,

Deuteronomy 22:19, 24:1-3, Jeremiah 3:1,8, Ezekiel 44:22; Malachi 2:16, Matthew 5:31-

32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18, Romans 7:1-3.)

3. Genesis 2:18: *Then the Lord God said,” It is not good for the man to be alone; I will*

*make him a helper suitable for him.”* Clarify why their marriage at this time is the right

thing to pursue. The “Why now?” question.

4. Discern if there will be any hindrances to “becoming one flesh.” The directive of Genesis

2:24 for the man to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Will there be any

problems from parents and siblings in this regard?

B. The tests of love from I Corinthians 13:4-7. To what extent do these qualities of love

exist in their relationship? Which are less evident?

C. A discernment of their maturity, both spiritually and emotionally. (This would be a good

time to introduce the value of reading through the Bible in a year.)

III. Meeting 3: Christian Marriage II – A Christian husband, A Christian

wife.

This meeting will cover chapters 12-17 in “Preparing for Your Marriage.” It is the most

challenging and interesting meeting you will have. By now you will have developed a relationship

with the couple and learned about them in terms of personality, spiritual and emotional maturity,

etc. This insight will be very valuable as you prepare and conduct this session.

For most couples, this will be their first in-depth study of what it means to be a Godly husband

and a Godly wife. There is so much misinformation about this topic that many couples find the

truth quiet a relief!, while others find it hard to accept. Keep in mind Ephesians 4:14-16: “*So we*

*are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind*

*of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes. But*

*practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. From him*

*the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each*

*one does its part, the body grows in love.”* In context, these verses are talking about the maturity

and unity of the body of Christ. These verses precede Ephesians 5 which talks about, among

other things, the proper relationship between husbands and wives. Encouraging maturity and

speaking the truth in love are your responsibilities as part of the body of Christ, and in this case,

as Pre-Marriage Counselor. You are encouraged to not shy away from the truth of Scripture,

particularly as it relates to husbands and wives.

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This meeting is conducted differently than the other meetings. First, the men will talk, covering

chapters 12-13, while the women remain silent and listen. Then the women will talk, covering

chapters 15-17, while the men remain silent and listen. For some, the temptation to talk instead

of listen is very great, but this must be resisted.

The outline for the men should include the following.

A. Biblical headship and leadership. The main Scripture references will come from

Ephesians 5.

B. How is the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the Church? Verses from Ephesians

5 and Colossians 3 should be emphasized.

C. Define what it means to live with your wife in an understanding way. What is the

command and warning of I Peter 3:7?

The outline for the women should include the following:

A. How is the wife to be a helper to her husband?

B. A submissive wife as defined by Scripture. There will be many passages studied in

chapter 16 of “Preparing for Your Marriage.” The project pages of this chapter will play a

key role.

C. Home is where the heart is!

During your discussion about headship and submission would be a good time to discuss

personal convictions. In particular, the husband must especially be sensitive to his wife’s

convictions. He should not seek to override those convictions in the name of headship. Have the

couple read I Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14. Then consider asking the following questions.

A. What if a husband disagrees with his wife’s convictions? Should a husband expect or

require his wife to submit to him when it would cause her to violate her convictions?

B. Should the husband or wife try to impose their personal convictions on their mate?

C. What are some of your personal convictions regarding tithing, Christian service or

ministry, children, birth control, sexual activities/practices?

By the end of this meeting, you will probably have enough information to determine if you will give

your final approval for the marriage. If you do give the green light, you will need to call the couple,

the wedding Officiant, and the Pre-Marriage Coordinator to let them know. The wedding date

should still be about two months away, plenty of time for the couple to get wedding invitations out

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jumping into some hot water here, but this is one of the hard parts of being a Pre-Marriage

Counselor.

IV. Meeting 4 – Before Your Marriage.

This meeting will cover chapters 18-21 of “Preparing for Your Marriage.” You’re on the home

stretch! The majority of the critical subject matter has been covered. If you were a novice at Pre-

Marriage Counseling before you started, by now you’re a bona-fide pro! If you have given your

approval for the wedding, these last two meetings are full of enthusiasm and anticipation. It’s a

joy to spend time with an engaged couple just prior to their marriage. If you are still undecided on

the marriage, these final meetings could prove to be critical in your final evaluation.

The Book of Proverbs will figure prominently in this meeting. It would be wise if the couple

started pondering through Proverbs, as outlined in chapter 19, from the start of counseling so

that they don’t rush to complete chapter 14. Bill McRae makes a great suggestion in his book

regarding Proverbs. Proverbs is 31 chapters long. During the time between the last meeting and

this one, (approximately one month), have the couple read one chapter each day. Encourage the

couple to meditate through Proverbs rather than complete it as an assignment!

In addition to completing chapter 23 from the book for the next meeting, which is an overview of I

Corinthians 7: 1-7, have the couple study I Thessalonians 4: 1-8 and be prepared to discuss how

a sexual relationship in a Christian marriage differs from a pagan one. You might find it helpful to

get Bob Deffinbaugh’s notes from his exposition of I Corinthians 7.

The gift of money management is sometimes lacking in a newly married couple. “The Complete

Financial Guide for Young Couples” by Larry Burkett would be a good book for the couple to

read. It is available to be checked out from the church library. At minimum, you should ask the

couple to come to the next meeting with a complete budget, which will be reviewed and

discussed. The outline for this meeting should include the following.

A. Become familiar with Scripture as it relates to solving problems and conflicts.

B. Thoroughly review the Book of Proverbs and encourage the couple to heed the counsel

found there.

C. Add the study of I Thessalonians 4: 1-8 to the homework assignment.

D. Add the preparation of a budget to the homework assignment.

V. Meeting 5 – Your Wedding and After.

This meeting will cover chapters 22 – 26 of “Preparing for Your Marriage.” Schedule this

meeting as close to the wedding date as possible, preferably within three weeks. In this meeting,

you will give the couple the opportunity to ask any unanswered questions they may have. It is also

an opportunity for you to review previous meetings and potential problem areas that will require

more attention in the coming months.

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This meeting will have three parts. In the first part, everyone will meet together and review the key

Scriptures studied during counseling. The purpose being to help them formulate goals for their

marriage. Chapter 22 of “Preparing for Your Marriage” has an interesting assignment about

setting goals which you will want to spend some time talking about. It will also be important to

emphasize the necessity, after they are married, of praying and being in God’s Word on a daily

basis. Ask the couple if they have found a church home, if they have been attending on a regular

basis and if they plan to continue. It will be worth noting if the groom has taken steps of

leadership in this area.

The second part of the meeting you will split up, men with men, women with women. Don’t

assume the couple has talked about the “birds and the bees” with anyone. Even if they have,

there still may be unanswered questions. Splitting up will provide an opportunity for private

conversation which otherwise would be awkward in a “group” setting. Simply make yourself

available to talk with them about issues like birth control, the wedding night, sex after marriage,

etc. For many couples, this will be unnecessary, but for others, it will be quite helpful.

The third part of the meeting you will all get back together. Find out if they have selected their

wedding vows and if you could read them. Have them consider the following Bible texts dealing

with vows: Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Judges 11:29-40; Psalms 15:4; 76:11;

Proverbs 20:25; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5. You probably already know, but in case you don’t, inquire

how the wedding ceremony plans are coming along. Finally, but still very important, review a

budget with them to see if they have realistic financial expectations. Suggest that they read one

of the books on finances listed in Section 11.

Preparing for Your Marriage

Source URL: http://bible.org/seriespage/sample-approach-pre-marriage-counseling How well do they really know each other?

E. How well do they communicate about spiritual things?

As you might guess, this approach can open up some wonderful and meaningful discussion. It is

a delight to hear a couple talk about the Lord, what He has done in their life, and how He is still at

work. This approach can also completely stump the couple! Should that be the case, rather that

allow them to “wing it,” make this an assignment they will be ready to do at the next meeting. The

church’s Pre-Marriage Counseling and/or Wedding Process, states that after the first meeting

you and the Wedding Officiant are to decide if the couple qualifies to continue. Since you are

postponing this requirement to the next meeting, this won’t be completed. Don’t worry about it.

Pre-Marriage counseling is a process, and it’s better to get to the heart of the matter rather than

to complete a checklist.

Second, is the couple committed to a Christian marriage as defined in the Bible? If the couple

is not committed in this way, it will be impossible, for example, for the husband to obey the

command of Ephesians 5:25: “*Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church*

*and gave Himself up for her*.” How can a husband love his wife as Christ also loved the church if

he is not committed to the principals of biblical headship? A Christian marriage is a lifelong

building project that begins on the foundation of God’s Word. The couple must express a desire

to be in God’s Word on a regular basis and to worship and fellowship with other believers.

Third, does the couple have parental approval? Although not necessarily a biblical requirement

for marriage, it can be inferred and is very important. Should you grant your approval for their

wedding and for the church’s involvement if one or more parents are against it? That’s hard to

say. Lack of parental approval is a huge red flag! Granting approval without parental consent

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should be an extreme exception. The church desires and expects parental approval. If you find

yourself in a situation where you don’t have parental approval, proceed with much prayer and

caution. Take some time and find out the reason.

If possible meet with the parents and have them articulate their concern. You may want to devote

an entire meeting or more just to address this issue. Consult with other Pre-Marriage

Counselors who may have experienced this situation, and certainly seek the counsel of the

Elders and Deacons of the church.

Fourth, and somewhat uncomfortable to discuss, is sexual purity. To be specific, you need to

find out if the couple is involved physically and to what extent. If they are involved physically,

communicate clearly the expectation that from here on to the wedding, they must commit to

refraining from physical intimacy. Tell the couple you will check with them at each meeting on

how they are doing on their commitment. You also need to find out if they have been involved

physically with others, and have they discussed it? Although potentially very hurtful, it is better for

the couple to address this issue now rather that after they are married. You might ask, “How do

you bring up the subject of sexual purity tactfully?” The best way to start is to look at God’s Word

on the subject. Have the couple turn to and read Ephesians 5:3, I Thessalonians 4:1-8 and

Hebrews 13:4. Then ask them where they stand in relation to these verses. Let the discussion

proceed from there. Another difficult discussion to have, but necessary, is the issue of

pornography and/or sexual abuse. Many in our body have witnessed first hand the tragic result of

pornography and sexual abuse on individuals and married couples. You might have to meet

privately, men with men, women with women, in order for this to surface as an issue to address.

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that they don’t rush to complete chapter 14. Bill McRae makes a great suggestion in his book

regarding Proverbs. Proverbs is 31 chapters long. During the time between the last meeting and

this one, (approximately one month), have the couple read one chapter each day. Encourage the

couple to meditate through Proverbs rather than complete it as an assignment!

In addition to completing chapter 23 from the book for the next meeting, which is an overview of I

Corinthians 7: 1-7, have the couple study I Thessalonians 4: 1-8 and be prepared to discuss how

a sexual relationship in a Christian marriage differs from a pagan one. You might find it helpful to

get Bob Deffinbaugh’s notes from his exposition of I Corinthians 7.

The gift of money management is sometimes lacking in a newly married couple. “The Complete

Financial Guide for Young Couples” by Larry Burkett would be a good book for the couple to

read. It is available to be checked out from the church library. At minimum, you should ask the

couple to come to the next meeting with a complete budget, which will be reviewed and

discussed. The outline for this meeting should include the following.

A. Become familiar with Scripture as it relates to solving problems and conflicts.

B. Thoroughly review the Book of Proverbs and encourage the couple to heed the counsel

found there.

C. Add the study of I Thessalonians 4: 1-8 to the homework assignment.

D. Add the preparation of a budget to the homework assignment.

V. Meeting 5 – Your Wedding and After.

This meeting will cover chapters 22 – 26 of “Preparing for Your Marriage.” Schedule this

meeting as close to the wedding date as possible, preferably within three weeks. In this meeting,

you will give the couple the opportunity to ask any unanswered questions they may have. It is also

an opportunity for you to review previous meetings and potential problem areas that will require

more attention in the coming months.

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This meeting will have three parts. In the first part, everyone will meet together and review the key

Scriptures studied during counseling. The purpose being to help them formulate goals for their

marriage. Chapter 22 of “Preparing for Your Marriage” has an interesting assignment about

setting goals which you will want to spend some time talking about. It will also be important to

emphasize the necessity, after they are married, of praying and being in God’s Word on a daily

basis. Ask the couple if they have found a church home, if they have been attending on a regular

basis and if they plan to continue. It will be worth noting if the groom has taken steps of

leadership in this area.

The second part of the meeting you will split up, men with men, women with women. Don’t

assume the couple has talked about the “birds and the bees” with anyone. Even if they have,

there still may be unanswered questions. Splitting up will provide an opportunity for private

conversation which otherwise would be awkward in a “group” setting. Simply make yourself

available to talk with them about issues like birth control, the wedding night, sex after marriage,

etc. For many couples, this will be unnecessary, but for others, it will be quite helpful.

The third part of the meeting you will all get back together. Find out if they have selected their

wedding vows and if you could read them. Have them consider the following Bible texts dealing

with vows: Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Judges 11:29-40; Psalms 15:4; 76:11;

Proverbs 20:25; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5. You probably already know, but in case you don’t, inquire

how the wedding ceremony plans are coming along. Finally, but still very important, review a

budget with them to see if they have realistic financial expectations. Suggest that they read one

of the books on finances listed in Section 11.

Preparing for Your Marriage

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