

Before you get married: Questions that need answers

June 23, 2008

This is the first in a five-part series by retired pastor and director of missions Wade Paris to assist pastors in helping couples begin Christian marriages. They might also help couples who marry without the benefit of premarital counseling.

Healthy premarital counseling begins with basic questions asked with the potential bride and groom both present to hear each other's responses.

Such questions will stimulate conversation and help present the case for a Christian marriage. Some are delicate and must be approached with tact. The order of the questions may be adjusted:

1. Are you living together? Are you pregnant?

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It may seem blunt to begin with these questions, but the pastor/counselor needs to know. If the answer is yes to either question, it alters the counseling. If two people are marrying only because the woman is pregnant, the pastor may suggest their situation is not the best motivation for marriage and discuss other options.

Some pastors will not marry couples who are living together. Some churches will not allow such persons to be married in their facilities. To refuse marriage for this reason makes a statement for righteousness.

However, some pastors and churches allow such marriages, believing, "Couples who live together should marry. This is an opportunity to minister

and help a couple begin a good marriage.” In such instances, the pastor/church can affirm, “We do not approve of your lifestyle, but neither do we condemn you.”

2. Are you Christians? Have you given your life to Jesus? Is he Lord of your life?

Christian marriage is more than just marriage. In a Christian marriage the couple desires to know and do God’s will in all things.

3. Do you believe God brought you together? Do you believe you have his blessings to marry?

Couples can marry without God’s permission, but marriages ordained in heaven are more likely to succeed than marriages just made on earth.

4. Are you committed to this marriage until death?

If either party enters marriage thinking, “If this doesn’t work, I can always get out of it,” then the chances of success are reduced. If both enter marriage believing, “God has brought us together, and with His help we can overcome any problems,” success is much more likely.

5. Are you active in church?

Faithfulness to church and worship will help keep the couple closer to God. The closer both are to God, who is love, the closer they will be to one another and the more able they will be to love one another.

Marriage is like a triangle with the husband and wife at the bottom points of the triangle and God at the top. As both move up the triangle towards God, they will be closer to one another.

In church, couples are more likely to make friends who have a common interest in their marital success. They can cultivate friends who will help

their marriage, not harm it. Church may not be the only place to do this, but it beats most other places.

6. Have you been married before? If so, is that over? Is your divorce final? Have you discussed this together? If that marriage did not work, what makes you think this marriage will be okay? What are you doing to make sure you will not repeat the same mistakes?

7. Have you ever been sexually active with others?

When couples have been sexually active prior to their marriage, they owe it to each other to have a medical exam to discover any health concerns. If a couple truly loves one another, they should want to do this. If one's fiancée is reluctant to do so, the other should want to know why.

There will be other questions that are peculiar to specific couples. However, these basic questions will help the pastor/counselor begin premarital counseling. The order of the questions may be arranged to suit the counselees.

A former pastor and director of missions, Wade Paris writes a weekly syndicated column, "The Shepherd's Call."