



If there is anything better than being loved, it is loving.

Lesson 6

Engagement, Wedding, and Honeymoon

"Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind."

"True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse, and which suddenly dies when severely tested."

"Affectionate hearts, truthful, loving words, will make happy families and exert an elevating influence upon all who come within the sphere of their influence."¹

Going through engagement, a wedding, and a honeymoon is for most a wonder-filled fantasy time, sparked by romance, celebration, dreams, and thousands of things to do. In far too many cases, the real reason for each phase—learning how to love unselfishly—however, is lost in the whirlwind of staging a production straight out of *Bride* magazine. Too many are in love with the idea of getting married, rather than the idea of being married.

When so many marriages end in divorce, what makes you think yours will be any different? A lot will depend on your engagement, the wedding, and the early days of your marriage since half of all divorces happen in the first two years after marriage. Here are some things to think about:

Should you get married?

Marriage isn't for everyone. It's OK to be

single. Jesus and the apostle Paul were two well-known singles. Both spoke highly and respectfully of marriage, but made it clear it wasn't for everyone.

When Jesus said, once married—always married, except for marital unfaithfulness (see Matthew 19:9, 10), the disciples replied, "It is better not to marry."

Ken Abraham imagines that the disciples' reaction went something like this: "Wow, Lord! What if I marry the wrong person? If adultery is the only permissible grounds for divorce, and adultery is a sin punishable by death under Jewish law, I'd be better off never to get married in the first place than to marry the wrong person and be trapped!"²

In Matthew 19:11, 12, Jesus basically agreed that for some it would be better to remain single in order to give unhindered service to God. Jesus didn't command anyone to remain single, not even to better serve God. But if you are called to single-

ness, accept it, and dwell on the benefits.

The question is, Are you called to singleness at this time, or are you called to marriage? It would be a foolish move to become engaged just because your sexual needs are driving you, because everyone else is planning weddings, or because your family and friends are pushing you. Ask yourself, How can I best glorify God? Time and prayer can give you the answer. Don't rush into making a lifetime commitment to another person if you aren't convinced that this relationship has God's blessing.

When should you get engaged?

When you can't live without the person you love? **False!** The answer is when you are quite certain that you can live with the person and his or her faults for the rest of your life.

What's the main purpose of an engagement? To plan the wedding? **False!** It's to fine-tune your relationship, recognize any dysfunctional patterns and correct them, to observe your future in-laws, and to get in the habit of practicing extravagant (unselfish) love.

An engagement is a specific commitment to marry. Once you make the announcement, "We're getting married," everything changes. No longer is your loved one a dating partner, but a future spouse. But it's not yet too late to change your mind. Better now, than divorce later.

Engagement Task 1: Evaluate your relationship

Ideally, before proposing or before accept-

ing a proposal, you will have evaluated carefully your relationship and eliminated any major snags. If you haven't, then your first assignment must be to do so *before you make a formal announcement*.

Most couples do it backward—like Jackie and Keith. As soon as they got engaged, they had a big engagement party and then rushed into planning the wedding. Two months before the wedding, they began their premarital counseling with their pastor.

What they found was frightening. They were two totally different persons. The pastor asked Jackie if she could live without flowers, candy, love notes, and the finer things in life that most women feel are important. He asked Keith if he could manage playing second fiddle to a woman who had strong opinions about diet, health, leisure activities, and most other things in life. Jackie's tests showed a high need for friends, social interaction, and conversation. Keith kept things to himself and avoided crowds. Would Jackie enjoy a vacation in a mountain hideaway with outdoor facilities, a couple of good books, and fishing gear? Would Keith enjoy Disneyland, Broadway, concerts, and ballets?

The countdown had begun. Thousands of dollars had already been spent on the wedding, the nonrefundable down payment had been made on their honeymoon condo, friends and family had purchased airline tickets, and gifts were beginning to arrive. Postponing their wedding or canceling it would be a major embarrassment and a significant financial loss. But with major unre-

solved issues, conflicting marital expectations, and personality clashes, it would be foolish to go ahead and get married! What should Jackie and Keith do? What do you think they wish they had done differently?

If you can answer Yes to all of the following questions and are satisfied that your temperaments and marital expectations are compatible based on testing, you will have fulfilled the first and most critical task of an engagement period. Ask yourselves these questions:

1. Are we ready to get married? Are we mature enough to make a decision for a lifetime? Are we emancipated enough from our families of origin that in a time of crisis we can cling to each other and not Mom or Dad, and can we together set boundaries to limit family's or friends' interference? Have we dealt with past psychological pains and feel comfortable there will be no ghosts of the past that will haunt us in the future? Can we financially support each other? Are we ready to tie ourselves down to the responsibilities of being married—which means paying for a home and having children? Have we done everything we wanted to do as a single, such as being a student missionary, traveling, taking flying lessons, or getting an education? (If not, do it now! If it's really love, it will endure separation or a temporary hold. Don't get married with the possibility that you'll always regret not doing something you really wanted to.)

2. Are we spiritually compatible? Do

we respect each other's personal relationship with the Lord? Do we have the same doctrinal beliefs and spiritual values? Can we pray together, worship together, study the Bible together, and share beliefs and dialogue comfortably on religious matters? Don't marry thinking you can convert the other. Don't marry presuming the other will, in time, become spiritually mature. Two immature Christians won't make a mature one. Give yourselves a year to grow closer to God! There is no reason, not even an unintended pregnancy, that is so monumental to overlook God's command to NOT be unequally yoked!

3. Do we like each other enough to spend the rest of our lives together? Even if something would happen to destroy the other's attractiveness, the ability to earn a living, or to perform sexually, is our friendship strong enough to carry us through "till death do us part?" Do we both feel that divorce isn't an option? And do we both agree that should some problem arise we can't seem to solve ourselves, we will get the professional help we need? (No one gets married thinking the worst will happen, but it could.)

4. Are we willing to sacrifice for the other? Are we each willing to give up personal desires and dreams for the good of the other and for our marriage? Would we be willing to move, or give up jobs, career objectives, the

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security of a home, family, or friends if it were in the marriage's best interest? More practically speaking, would we be willing to give up a golf game, a walk on the beach, shopping, or our favorite hobby to make the other happy? There is no place for selfishness in marriage.

5. Do we mutually trust and respect each other?

Have we proved to each other our loyalty, respect, honesty, and integrity? Are we absolutely certain there are no hidden agendas or control issues operating in our relationship that would cause us to treat the other as an inferior or abuse the other verbally, physically, or sexually? Can we set the other free to become the person God designed that person to become, without feeling resentment, jealousy, or distrust? Don't get married until you have resolved any doubts you may have had about trust. Love doesn't force, manipulate, or keep secrets.

6. Do we agree on money issues?

If there are disagreements about money, resolve the differences before getting married. You need to agree on a budget, a spending and a savings plan, use of a credit card, and the giving of charitable donations, tithe, and offerings. Discuss who will be responsible for paying the bills and balancing the checkbook and how you will decide on large purchases and investments. Money is a symbol of power in a relationship. Don't get married with unsettled money issues!

7. Do we agree on family-management issues?

Do we agree on such

issues as the division of home duties and responsibilities and how we are going to spend leisure time, vacations, and holidays? Have we talked about who is going to make the major decisions in what areas, how disagreements and conflict will be handled? Have we considered what family policies should be established so conflict is avoided or resolved?

"Examine carefully to see if your married life would be happy, or inharmonious and wretched. Let the questions be raised, Will this union help me heavenward? will it increase my love for God? and will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life? If these reflections present no drawback, then in the fear of God move forward."³

8. Are we intellectually and educationally compatible?

Do we respect the mind, academic level, analytical ability, decision-making, skills in computation, spelling, and reading, as well as reading interests of each other? Do we respect each other's career objectives, achievement motivation, and earning capacity? Would we still respect the person if these were to change because of advanced age or a disease such as an accident or stroke that would limit a person's reasoning ability?

9. Are we socially compatible?

Do we respect each other's families and friends? Do our families get along and respect each other? Are we prepared to

accept each other's families as our own? Do we have mutual friends we enjoy and can continue to enjoy after marriage? Do our friends and family approve of our relationship? Do we respect each other's social and cultural heritage? Do we speak the same cultural language? Do we have the same social and cultural expectations for how we want to live someday and what schools we want our children to attend? Are we both content with our current social status? Are we both interested in climbing the social ladder at the same rate—or not climbing at all?

10. Are our attitudes about children compatible? Do we both agree on whether we will have children, approximately how many, when, and how they will be taken care of? Do we have similar child-rearing philosophies?

11. Are our temperaments and expectations concerning marriage compatible? (The only way you'll know what relational conflicts you might expect in marriage is to take a marriage expectation inventory like PREPARE and a temperament or personality inventory like the "Temperament Inventory" by Robert Cruise and Peter Blitchington or the PF-16.)

Laurence Peter once said, "Engagement has two meanings—in war, it's a battle; in courtship, it's a surrender." How much better it is to battle through an engagement and get all the controversial issues settled, than to surrender early, only to find yourself fighting your way through marriage!

Engagement Task 2: Recognize any dysfunctional patterns and correct them.

Going through the above questions, noting any disagreements and following the assignments that a trained premarital counselor will give you are vitally important. What issues might prove troublesome in marriage? Unresolved parent/child conflict, enmeshment in your family of origin, low self-worth, uncontrolled anger, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, rape, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, and addictions (especially sexual addictions), pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, habitual lying, or deviant behavior. (See Lesson 10.)

Engagement Task 3: Observe your future in-laws.

Unless you are conscious of what behavior patterns need to change, the older you get, the more you will tend to act like your parents—especially she like her mother and he like his dad. Spend time in each other's family home. Note conversational skills, conflict resolution, and habit patterns. Stay long enough so the playacting disappears, and you get a glimpse of what life is really like in that family. If you like what you see, continue your countdown toward marriage. If you don't, you have some major issues to discuss.

Engagement Task 4: Begin practicing unselfish love.

Each will have a different idea of what the other could do to express love in unselfish ways. Affection is the cement that holds marriages together. It's not the same

as sex. Affection can stand alone, but sex can't—at least not for a woman. Anything you can do during the engagement period to learn meaningful ways to show affection will only enhance your sex life later.

If you as a couple have lived together or had premarital sex, one of the best things you can do is promise each other to not

You're in trouble if you believe these popular myths of marriage.

1. Our marriage will be different.
2. Once we're married, things will change.
3. We will make each other happy.
4. Our disagreements will not be serious.
5. My spouse is all I need.
6. If I pray enough, my spouse will change.
7. We're marrying each other, not the families.
8. Our love is strong enough to handle anything.
9. Our marriage is affair-proof.
10. Children won't change our lifestyle.
11. Children make marriages strong and healthy.
12. If we're dedicated Christians, our marriage will last.

have sex again until your wedding night. Instead, start learning some ways to pleasure each other with words, compliments, gifts, gentle (non-sexual) touches, kind acts, and time together sharing feelings and dreams. You will be amazed what this will do for your relationship—and how much more special your wedding night will be.

Engagement Task 5: Planning the wedding

Although planning a wedding is time-consuming, don't neglect the first four tasks in order to accomplish this one. It would be

far better to spend fewer hours planning the wedding, which represents perhaps three or four hours of your life, and more time preparing for marriage—which represents a lifetime!

Why have a wedding? A wedding is a public statement before friends and family of your commitment to love each other for a lifetime. A wedding doesn't have to be big or expensive, but it should be memorable and public. Those who have a civil ceremony just don't seem to have the same commitment to stick together as those who have a wedding with family and guests.

Here are some things to consider:

1. Set the wedding date after premarital counseling, determining with the counselor how much time will be needed to work on any issues that you don't yet have resolved. If the issues are major—wait!
2. If everything else is go, and you're ready physically, don't wait too long to get married. It's better to have an earlier wedding date without Aunt Sue and Cousin Ernie and have the excitement of your first sexual experience on your honeymoon rather than to wait for the wedding and not wait for sex!
3. Plan your wedding to reflect your personalities.
4. Let your wedding have a personal touch.
5. A wedding is symbolic of the wedding of Christ, the Bridegroom, and the church, the Bride. Let your wedding be tastefully planned, with an appropriate spiritual atmosphere.

6. Don't drain your parent's bank account. A beautiful, meaningful wedding doesn't have to cost a fortune. Moderation is an important Christian virtue.
7. If you don't want to be too exhausted to enjoy each other sexually on your wedding night, have the bachelor party several nights before the wedding, get a good sleep the night before, plan an early wedding—and don't drive half-way across the state to get to your honeymoon cottage!
8. Think about what tokens of unselfish love you can give each other that will make your wedding a memorable event.

What makes a great honeymoon?

It's not the exotic atmosphere, the bridal suite at the Hyatt Regency, or an isolated mountain cabin. It's the love that you will share with each other. A honeymoon is a time to be away from any outside stimulation (family, friends, household chores, schoolwork, or career), where you can concentrate completely on getting to know each other without any restrictions and without interruption. That's why the following is important:

1. Choose a place where you can be alone and concentrate on each other.
2. Don't try to do too much. This is not a sight-seeing vacation.
3. Have a few nice places in mind that you could enjoy together, but don't feel you have to do anything. This is the time to pleasure each other and to

experience your own version of the Song of Solomon! Love—extravagant love—takes time.

4. Start some rituals that you would like to make a part of your life, such as burning a candle on Friday night, reading the Bible together in bed before going to sleep, holding hands while praying, kissing after prayer, showering or bathing together.
5. Don't expect magic with your first sexual experience. This is a time to learn how each other responds. Enjoy the process without worrying about the climax. Great lovers are experienced lovers. It only gets better!

What keeps the honeymoon alive?

Romance! Finding fresh and creative ways to say "I love you." A marriage must not be viewed as the end of the hunt, but the beginning of an adventure.

One fascinating way to continue to evaluate a marriage relationship is with Dr. Willard Harley's love bank concept.⁴ Basically, Harley suggests each individual has a love bank in which each significant person in his or her life has an account. With each encounter an evaluation is made: If the interaction was positive, a deposit is made to that person's account. If negative, a withdrawal.

Before marriage, couples who are on their best behavior have little difficulty making significant deposits in each other's love banks. After marriage, unless they continue to make deposits, the negative encounters subtract from the balance, as the couple is

When a six-year-old girl was asked, "What do you think a honeymoon is?" she replied, "It's for kissers. You have to be in love to get a honeymoon."

trying to adjust to each other, solve conflicts, and establish gender roles. Unless new deposits are made by romancing a mate with fresh and creative ways of saying “I love you” (acts of kindness, love gifts, listening, meeting the other’s needs, spending time together, and “dating” each other), the account will continue to decline, resulting in a stalemate! You love each other, but without the little positive attentions that add spark to a relationship, your marriage becomes boring. Too often as the spouses’ bank accounts decline, other unsettled accounts grow, making a marriage ripe for an affair.

The honeymoon is a time to share expectations for the marriage, plan how to fulfill them, and how to keep adding to each other’s love bank. Throughout their married life, couples should continue to evaluate their marriage on a regular basis so that they keep the “honeymoon” alive.

Anchor Text

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Ephesians 5:31).

Bible Search

1. The Bible on marriage and singleness

- A. What attitude does Jesus express toward marriage and singleness?
Matthew 19:3-12.

B. What was the response of the disciples to Jesus’ words? Matthew 19:10.

C. What does Jesus mean in verse 12?

Read it from a modern version of the Bible. What does the apostle Paul say about marriage and singleness?
1 Corinthians 7:1-9.

D. What are the sexual obligations of husband and wife?

E. What is Paul’s personal opinion about those who aren’t yet married?

F. Read 1 Corinthians 7:7, where Paul calls singleness a gift. What does he mean?

2. Jesus’ attitude about weddings

Read John 2:1-11 and write a summary paragraph that will reveal Jesus’ attitude about weddings.

Note: Miracles of healing, raising the dead, and feeding the five thousand were significant miracles. You would think Jesus’ first miracle would have been on that same level of significance, but it was merely turning water into wine. Jesus’ miracles were never to impress, but to glorify God in meeting needs.

Endnotes

1. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 50.
2. Ken Abraham, *Don’t Bite the Apple ‘Til You Check for Worms* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1985), 116.
3. Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 449.
4. See Willard Harley, *His Needs, Her Needs* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1986).

Reaction

Discussion Questions

1. Most unsuccessful marriages fail in the first two years. Why?
2. What is unselfish love? Give some examples based on your family or friends.
3. In what ways could singleness be a gift?
4. In Christ's day an engagement was a legal contract that could be broken only by a legal divorce. If that were the policy today, how would courtship change?
5. Many young people are in love with the idea of a wedding, rather than in love with each other enough to spend a lifetime together. What could be done to put the relationship first, rather than the ceremony?
6. In Moses' day the man was given a year off to get married. Why do you think this was so?
7. Why should couples take a honeymoon? Is it really essential to the happiness of a marriage?

Personal Response

1. What do you need to do to prepare yourself for your own wedding someday?
2. Are you prepared for the wedding of Jesus to His bride, the church?

Practical Application

1. The Engagement Period

Brainstorm all possible tasks that need to be accomplished during an engagement period; then rank these in order, with the highest number indicating the most important. Remember that your major objective is to prepare for a long-term commitment to your partner.

2. Making the Right Choice

Read two of the following chapters in *Messages to Young People* by Ellen G. White and write a brief summary of each. Include the quotable quotes and references you want to remember.

- A. Chapter 149 "Wrong Forms of Courtship," 437, 438.
- B. Chapter 150 "Engagement With Unbelievers," 439-442.
- C. Chapter 151 "Need of Counsel and Guidance," 443-451.
- D. Chapter 152 "Premature Marriage," 452.
- E. Chapter 153 "Marriages, Wise and Unwise," 453-455.
- F. Chapter 154 "Marrying and Giving in Marriage," 456-460.