

5 Crucial Questions Every Christian Should Ask Before Saying 'I Do'

We live in a culture obsessed with romance. Sweet stories of sensual passion, quick commitments and affectionate promises surround us this time of year. And yet, even while we seem to worship love, its crumbling runs rampant as divorce rates skyrocket. The truth is that what we often see portrayed as true love in love movies and other media is actually just the heat of infatuation.

Psychological studies have concluded that the intense rush of excited happiness that is infatuation is only sustainable for about 18 months. After this period, the dopamine high that gives you a feeling of blissful happiness wears off. What's left will determine the success or failure of the relationship. Dr. Susan Heitler wrote in *Psychology Today*, "It's easy to confuse loving the feeling of infatuation with the totally separate issue of how loving you are likely to feel toward that person after the infatuation has worn off."

As Christians, this should come as no surprise, as the Bible makes clear the ongoing struggle between the heart's desires and what is wise. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is more deceitful than all things and desperately wicked; who can understand it?"

So how can you tell the difference between love and infatuation? Thankfully, you don't have to be fooled by your brain chemistry. There are some helpful things to keep in mind at the beginning of any whirlwind romance, before you take the plunge into marriage. Here are some important questions to ask yourself:

Are Feelings the Entire Relationship?

Would you have been friends with this person even if romantic feelings never developed? Do you have shared values and goals? Looking beyond feelings is a tough exercise, but extraordinarily necessary in this and all areas of life. Be honest with yourself and evaluate what's left if romance flickers.

Do Your Friends and Family Like This Person?

While "leaving and cleaving" is an important part of growing up and establishing a marriage, it is still important to take outside feedback into consideration. Do the people who know you best agree that your relationship is a positive thing for you? What do the other person's family and friends think? Maintaining community and heeding wisdom from those you trust is crucial.

Are You Able to Truly Be Yourself With This Person?

In the early stages of a relationship, it's natural to want to put your best foot forward. But if you're still in performance mode (or if you suspect they are), give it some time. If you cannot truly be yourself with this person, do you really want to spend the rest of your life with them?

Has the Relationship Had Time to Grow and Develop?

It's easy to want to jump into a lifelong commitment when you are wearing rose-colored glasses. Because we know that infatuation simply cannot last forever, one way to be sure you're seeing clearly is to wait it out. Not only does this give you the opportunity to see the other person in a variety

of circumstances, but the delaying of gratification is an important exercise for you both. Christian psychologists Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend wrote in *Boundaries in Dating*, “Love waits and respects, but lust must have what it wants now.”

How Do You Handle Conflict Together?

When you're not feeling so happy, does your relationship still stand up? How you handle conflict as a team is an important indicator of whether your relationship can stand the test of time. When you fight (not if, but when), take note of how it is handled. {eoa}

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