

Still Single? Ask These Questions Before You Say 'I Do'

Last month I had the privilege of performing the wedding of a Russian-speaking couple in Seattle. I met Roman when I was teaching at a ministry school two years ago, and he has traveled with me on a missionary trip to Peru. When he got engaged to his girlfriend, Ina, he asked me to do the honors—and I was thrilled to be a part of their big day. The celebration ended with a Ukrainian feast for 300 people!

Like many Slavic Christian immigrants, Roman and Ina got married young. Roman turned 21 only a week after his wedding, and Ina is only 18. Yet they are incredibly mature and responsible for their age. When I did premarital counseling with them (I have a conviction that I won't marry anyone without doing basic counseling) I was amazed to see how ready they were to embrace a lifelong marriage covenant.

But not every Christian who is old enough to get married is actually ready to tie the knot. And if you aren't ready, the worst thing you can do is rush to the altar. When I talk to singles about their desire to get married, I always ask if they have gone through this simple checklist. You can also share this with single friends who are eager to tie the knot:

Have you fully surrendered your life to Jesus? You can't build a strong marriage on romance, sexual passion or feelings alone. Your marriage will be weak if you are weak spiritually—and the same is true if your partner is not wholeheartedly sold out to God. You are taking a huge risk if you get married when your spiritual life is not healthy.

Do you get along with others? If you have a history of broken relationships and continual drama, don't expect marriage to be

any different. You need to get control of your anger, jealousy, pouting sessions and pity parties now, not after you commit to live the rest of your life with your spouse.

How have you and your partner handled conflict? All couples have arguments. But if you are having shouting matches and continual disagreements before your wedding, you are asking for trouble. And if there has been any form of physical or verbal abuse, call things off immediately and get counseling.

Have you been open about your past? Marriage is about intimacy. But you will never experience this gift if you can't be transparent about your faults and struggles. If you hide your pain behind a mask, you will bring that pain into the marriage and it will eventually hurt your spouse. Whether you deal with depression, addiction or some form of sexual brokenness, get as much healing as you can before marriage.

Do you trust your partner's past? Don't rush into a marriage if you feel unsure about your partner's history—especially if he or she has been married before. It's OK to ask lots of questions. Get all the cards on the table. You don't want to wake up after the honeymoon and learn that your Dr. Jekyll has become a Mr. Hyde.

Are you planning a life together, or just a wedding ceremony? Too many couples today are in love with the idea of marriage, but they haven't thought beyond the honeymoon. If you are obsessing over cakes, flowers and the guest list, get your priorities straight. You don't want to spend \$25,000 on a wedding and then watch it disintegrate after one year.

Are you financially responsible? You don't have to have boatloads of money to be a happy couple. But if you have not planned how to pay your bills, financial stress will choke your marriage. Be wise. Many couples today have not even learned how to manage a bank account, create a budget or save money. Find a mentor if your parents didn't teach you the

basics of life management.

How does your family and your partner's family feel about this marriage? There's no guarantee that all parents will be happy with your choices. But if there are major conflicts in the extended family, you may need to assess whether this is a wise decision. Romeo and Juliet loved each other, but their story ended in tragedy because of their parents' attitudes. Seek pastoral support if family members are trying to stir up conflict.

Do you and your partner have similar goals and dreams? You don't have to like the same movies or prefer the same kinds of foods. But when God puts two people together, they support each other's dreams. This is especially true when it comes to expectations about children. If your spouse doesn't want kids, and you do, don't assume this will just "work out." If you are a woman who wants a career and your fiancée prefers you to stay home, it's time to reevaluate.

Do you and your partner pray together? This is a perfect way to tell if you are spiritually compatible with your partner. If you feel a deep level of spiritual intimacy when you pray with your fiancée, that's a good sign God is putting you together. But if your partner isn't interested in growing spiritually with you, take that as a hint to look elsewhere. When God brings a man and woman together, they should become one in every way.

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