

# Preparation Program

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*Detailed Outline*

*Part 1 of 3*

## Introduction

### A. Matthew 19 on divorce

1. When confronted with the matter of the permanence of marriage, Jesus makes it clear that marriage is to be permanent and never to be broken.
2. The disciples conclude: "Maybe it's better not to marry at all (Matt. 19:10)."
3. Jesus does not refute this. He says, that's why some men are voluntarily eunuchs—because they have purposed not to marry (Matt. 19:11).

### B. There is a time when one should consider marriage so seriously, that they actually may not marry because of the consequences of the permanence of that commitment.

### C. One of the reasons why it's so important to deal with premarriage counseling is we need to prepare people to decide whether this marriage is something they can commit to for the rest of their lives.

### D. Jesus has a lot to say about vows and the breaking of them (Num. 30:2ff; Deut. 23:21–23; Matt. 5:31–37).

*"But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no.'" (Matt. 5:37 NASB)*

He says that in the context of marriage and divorce.

### E. We are also to count the cost (Luke 14:27–33).

I know this is really about cost of following Jesus, but we need to count the cost of what it means to marry.

### F. So it is important to approach the topic of marriage realizing the significance. Marriage is a lifelong commitment that has great impact on a couple and on others.

## I. The Need for Premarriage Preparation is Greater Now Than in the Past

### A. Divorce

The divorce rate in the church is alarming and distressing. Divorce is even acceptable in many professing Christian communities. That is disturbing!

### B. Feminism and the blurring of gender identity and roles

### C. Sexual immorality

1. Premarital sex and pornography: two of the things that can be destructive to a marriage relationship.
2. They need to be dealt with before marriage for the sake of the couple and for the kingdom of God.

#### **D. Rape and sexual abuse**

#### **E. Homosexuality and other sexual orientation matters**

1. Some seek to marry to remedy the problem.
2. We need to deal with those at the front-end of the relationship to avoid a disaster.

#### **F. “Pro-marriage counseling”**

1. I also think there needs to be a “pro-marriage counseling program,” necessitated by a reluctance to marry.
  - a) It is distressing to me to see Christians holding back from marriage.
  - b) Reluctance of young men to lead—they’d rather be boys and not have to lead!
2. Two primary reasons for avoiding or delaying marriage
  - a) A faith problem:
    - 1) People are fearful of marrying because so many marriages fail.
    - 2) Do we trust God to work in such a way to make us godly in the midst of our marriage?
  - b) A servanthood problem:
    - 1) One can be selfish more easily when single. Being a servant changes one’s perspective.
    - 2) Whether you choose to be single or to marry, servanthood is the issue in both situations.
      - (a) *If one marries, the husband and wife are to be servants to each other.*
      - (b) *One who stays single is one who does so in order that they can more effectively serve others and serve the Lord without distraction (1 Cor. 7).*

## **II. Purposes of the Premarriage Preparation Program**

### **A. To discourage or delay impulsive marriages**

1. People need time to reflect and to make a careful decision about whether to marry.
2. Our process requires a certain amount of time, usually a couple of months.

### **B. To serve as a filter**

1. A lot of people want a preacher to bless their wedding and have a “church wedding,” but they’re not willing to go with all that comes with it.
2. When anyone comes to us and asks us to perform their marriage, we give them the process and its requirements.

### **C. To provide the opportunity for evangelism**

1. Couples may come even assuming that they are saved. Asking them about their faith may provide opportunities to share the gospel.
2. I’ve heard of situations where the unsaved mate was brought to the Lord as a result of the premarriage program.

#### **D. To provide discipleship**

1. Discipleship is about causing people to grow in their relationship with the Lord. You want to establish long-term habit patterns whereby the husband and the wife serve and seek the Lord together.
2. Marriage must be seen in the context of discipleship. We want to help young couples move toward maturity.

#### **E. To help the couple decide if marriage is God's will for them**

1. The program helps them determine whether or not their marriage will be pleasing to God.
2. It also gives opportunity to talk the couple out of marriage, if it is unbiblical or ill-advised.

#### **F. To help the couple understand the permanence of the commitment they are about to make, and the consequences of breaking it**

#### **G. To give the couple a realistic and biblical view of marriage and realistic expectations of what their marriage should look like**

They need to understand that marriage is not primarily about happiness, but about holiness.

#### **H. To bring to the surface issues and problems that are critical to the continuation of that marriage**

Many couples are not very eager to share and divulge the information that may be absolutely essential to a successful premarital program and to their life together. Some incident in one party's wife that they have not shared with their mate could be destructive to their relationship in later times.

### **III. How the Program Works**

- A. The church establishes a policy that no wedding will be performed by our leaders, or in our building, unless they have completed our premarriage counseling program or some other premarriage preparation program that we approve of.**
- B. The church prepares a premarriage preparation curriculum and trains a number of couples with healthy marriages to use it when working with couples who wish to marry.**
  1. A couple from outside the church normally asks a person in the church to conduct their wedding, or calls the office about using the church building for a wedding. The person contacted then explains that we don't perform weddings unless the couple has successfully completed our premarriage preparation program.
  2. If the wedding ceremony is to be conducted by someone outside the church, we check to see that this person is of the same mind in the faith, and if a premarriage program will be done.
  3. A couple from inside the church will usually ask someone in the church directly to marry them.
- C. Contact church office, which notifies the premarriage coordinator. The coordinator assigns a church couple to follow up and set up their first meeting.**
- D. And then there is the first session.**

# The First Session

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*Detailed Outline*

*Part 2 of 3*

The first session of the premarriage preparation program is where the counseling couple (from the church) meets with the couple that is intending to marry and asks them questions. These questions will shape the whole premarriage preparation process.

## IV. Goals for the First Session

### A. Provide an opportunity for the couples (premarriage trainers and hopeful couple) to get acquainted and build a friendship.

1. We also hope for a level of trust that will develop.
2. We hope that this relationship will continue even after the hopeful couple gets married.

### B. Discover their eligibility for marriage.

We allow a broader group of people to enter this first session than any of the future sessions. We expect that there will be couples where at least one member is unbelieving, and we can share the gospel with them.

1. Are both partners saved?
2. Are both partners qualified? (e.g. has either partner been divorced?)

### C. Determine the couple's maturity and potential trouble spots.

This will dictate where the premarriage preparation program should focus. Virtually every couple will have difficulties to deal with, whether it is the individuals themselves or problems.

1. Maturity—have they really thought seriously about where this relationship will go?
2. What are problem areas that will need to be addressed?
3. Is the couple realistic?
4. Are they committed to Christian marriage and biblical principles?
5. Does this couple really know each other well enough to marry?

## V. Stipulations within the Premarriage Preparation Program

### A. Talk about assignments and schedule, outlining the whole premarriage program.

This way, the hopeful couple knows how long this will take and what type of time commitment it is. It will occur over a period of several months.

### B. Make it very clear that you are not committing to perform the marriage or to have the marriage performed in your church.

1. It is a time for us to find out if we are comfortable with their marriage and if they are comfortable with us.
2. Make it clear that we will not commit to proceed with the wedding until a checkpoint

(third session) is completed.

3. Don't send out invitations until after the third session is completed and approval is granted.

**C. Expect that there will be some couples who realize their relationship should not proceed to marriage.**

## **VI. Questions That Should Be Asked**

Not all of these should be asked in the first session, but they must be asked at some point in the process. This is because they reveal things that must come to the surface in order for us to really adequately counsel the couple.

### **A. How did you meet? How long have you dated?**

1. Try to figure out the length of that relationship and how well they know each other.
2. These days, with internet dating service, people may make commitments to marry when they really aren't that far along in their relationship.
3. Other questions in this vein:
  - a) How long have you known each other?
  - b) How long have you been engaged (if they are)?
  - c) When do you plan/hope to marry?
  - d) Have you ever broken up? For what reason(s)? How and why did you reestablish your relationship?

### **B. Give us your intended's testimony. How did he/she come to faith?**

1. The issue is to find out if each party in the couple has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
  - a) If you ask either person if their intended is a Christian, they will likely say "yes."
  - b) You can, of course, ask them to clarify this statement.
  - c) But a very easy thing to do is simply ask each one to share the testimony of the other.
    - 1) You will learn a lot from their answers, or non-answers.
    - 2) You will see how important it really is to them to marry a Christian. There is cause for concern if the potential spouse cannot answer for how the other came to know Jesus Christ because this indicates that they have never talked about the subject!
    - 3) It is a great joy when there is full disclosure how each individual came to Christ.
2. Other questions to ask regarding each one's faith:
  - a) How do you know your intended is a Christian?
  - b) How would you describe your mate's relationship with the Lord?

**C. What character qualities attracted you to your mate and make you want to move toward marriage?**

1. It distresses me that today that marriage is determined on compatibility (how similar you are) and personality.
2. These aren't biblical—Scripture deals with character.

**D. Have either of you been “in love” before?**

1. This is a leading question that is seeking to bring out how many serious relationships they've had.
2. More questions:
  - a) How long did those relationships last?
  - b) Why did it/they end?
  - c) How is your current relationship different? Why do you believe this relationship will last, when the others did not?

**E. Have either one of you been married before?**

1. Don't fail to ask this one!
2. You must know what the backdrop for this couple is, because it determines whether or not you can actually pursue performing the wedding for them.

**F. Have you ever been physically/sexually intimate with each other? Have you been sexually intimate with others in the past?**

1. Are you currently sexually intimate with each other?
  - a) If the answer is yes, the couple needs to come to the realization that they are living in immorality.
  - b) Marriage should not be a means of sanctifying their sin. Their physical relationship is important!
2. If so, is there any possibility that you are pregnant?
  - a) If the answer is yes, this is a game-changer. I as the officiant need to make some decisions, and the couple needs to make some decisions.
  - b) As the officiant, I refuse to cover up or conceal a pregnancy in a hurried-up wedding ceremony.
3. Have you ever had an abnormal sexual relationship?
  - a) If there are any instances of homosexuality, sexual child abuse, or anything else like that, that needs to be brought to the table because it will greatly impact their relationship.
  - b) The other mate needs to be aware of this so they know what is in store.

**G. How do your friends and family feel about your relationship and intention to marry?**

1. We really think it is important to have parental consent in almost every circumstance.
2. We like to know, if parents have a problem, what is the nature of it and how is it being addressed.

3. The problem may be on the parents' side.
  - a) Sometimes we see the parents are not willing to let the children go, the whole issue of leaving and cleaving.
  - b) Are the parents possessive, who demand that you live near them?
  - c) Are they going to put demands on the marriage that aren't really godly or biblical? If so, is the couple willing to draw back and draw together in that type of situation?

**H. Name one area in your intended's life that is a problem that needs to change.**

1. I want to know that they aren't viewing each other through rose-colored glasses but through biblical lenses.
2. As the counselor, you are looking for realistic appraisals of the partner's character and potential problems.
3. Other questions:
  - a) Describe your intended's greatest strength and greatest weakness.
  - b) Knowing your mate as you do, what problem areas do you anticipate having to deal with in your marriage? How do you expect to deal with these?

**I. Describe one argument that you have had, and how you resolved it.**

Find out how they are dealing with conflict in their relationship.

**J. Is there anything in your life, previous to your present relationship, which you haven't told your mate about, but which could impact your marriage?**

This question is critical and needs to be repeated multiple times over the course of the program.

**K. Other questions not mentioned in the video:**

1. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul encourages some Christians to stay single. How can you better serve God and glorify him by marrying, rather than remaining single?
2. How do you think a Christian marriage is different from another marriage?
3. Do you experience normal sexual desires toward your mate, and do you sense that he/she has these toward you?
4. Are there any areas in which you significantly differ in matters of doctrine or practice?
5. Are there any significant differences in the area of your personal convictions? Have you talked about this?

# Topics That Must Be Discussed

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*Detailed Outline*

*Part 3 of 3*

## **VII. Major Topics**

### **A. Spiritual life as individuals and as a couple**

This includes spiritual gifts and how to building each other up spiritually.

### **B. How to handle conflict**

1. Often the couple will come from two different cultures of dealing with conflict. One may come from a family that deals with it in silence, and another may come from a home where they shout and yell.
2. When this couple comes together, they obviously will have to come to some solution of how they are going to deal with conflict.

### **C. Dealing with and reconciling differences**

1. Church—where they are going to attend after they are married?
2. Denominational or theological differences
3. Personal preferences
4. Convictions
  - a) Each individual is going to have their own convictions.
  - b) In Romans 14 and 15, it seems to me that you are not to impose your convictions upon another person.
  - c) This is an area where the headship of the husband and the submission of the wife have to be looked at very carefully.
    - 1) I would say to a husband, don't ever impose your convictions upon your wife.
    - 2) Don't ever force her to violate her convictions in the name of submission.
  - d) Some of those convictions will come in areas such as their sexual relationship, and will need to be resolved well because they are very deep and personal convictions.
5. Children
  - a) How many?
  - b) How soon?
  - c) How will you discipline and train your children into the knowledge of our Lord?

### **D. Gender roles**

1. This is not a time that honors the biblical roles assigned to husbands and wives.
2. We also need to be very careful we don't misinterpret the biblical roles also.
3. Spiritual leadership and submission

- a) I've seen some young women who would look at a man and say, there's a man who's a spiritual leader. The reality was, he was just domineering. It looked spiritual, but when you marry and it becomes a pattern of life, that may become an autocratic style of leadership.
  - b) A real leader may not have that same forcefulness that seemed attractive.
  - c) A submissive wife is not just a doormat who never speaks up!
  - d) These matters need to be worked through when talking about marriage.
4. Example from Scripture: 1 Samuel 25 – Abigail and her interaction with David
- a) Abigail's husband Nabal was a fool. He declined the request to give an offering or gift to David and his men. David was intent on killing off Nabal and every male in his household.
  - b) When Abigail set out with the goods that David had requested, it was clearly against her husband's command or wishes.
  - c) Submission is not necessarily doing everything your superior says.
  - d) Submission, as I understand Scripture, is subordinating your interests to those of the one to whom you are submitting.
    - 1) Abigail subordinates her interests to those of her husband and risks her life to save her husband's life.
    - 2) Interestingly, she was also submissive to David her king, because she told him in a submissive manner that shedding blood would be detrimental to his kingdom when he became king of Israel.
    - 3) So David was persuaded by a submissive argument from her, and later when Nabal died, David married her.

#### **E. Matthew 18 – Church discipline and marriage**

- 1. Somehow, when you talk about church discipline, families seem to think that families are exempt. They think that "family matters" are private and to be dealt with only within the family.
- 2. But as I understand Matthew 18, it very much applies to marriage!
  - a) A husband and wife need to understand that if something comes up that is potentially destructive, it is the church that is to come alongside with the process in Matthew 18 with the purpose of saving that marriage.
  - b) I think this needs to be emphasized to the couple from early on.

#### **F. Divorce**

- 1. Make sure the couple has read the text and that they understand clearly the restrictions of what God permits for divorce.
- 2. If it is a biblical divorce, remarriage is possible.

3. I don't ever think that divorce is something that should ever be advocated as the better option, but I do believe it is a possibility in very limited circumstances:
  - a) Immorality on the part of one of the mates
  - b) Desertion by an unbelieving spouse

#### **G. Parents**

1. Leaving and cleaving is a very difficult matter for couples to deal with.
2. But they must do so if they are to have a union that is not overridden by family pressures.
3. Therefore, this should be discussed during the premarriage preparation process.

#### **H. Any hidden sins**

They are undoubtedly going to come forth in the context of the marriage and need to be dealt with ahead of time.

### **VIII. Some Questions and Answers**

#### **A. Who should the church authorize to marry?**

1. I come from the state of Texas, and according to the state laws, any officer of the church or anyone sanctioned by officers of the church can perform weddings.
2. We would likely authorize any elder or deacon, and in some cases other qualified men to conduct a wedding ceremony.

#### **B. Should the church/officiant charge for conducting a marriage? Should the church charge for its services?**

1. I personally believe that, when I perform a wedding, I do it as part of the church's ministry. So I ask people not to give.
2. If people give anyway, I sign that over to the church and the financial secretary sends a thank-you note (so it is obvious I did not keep the gift).
3. The reason is, I want to be able to say no if at any point it goes against my convictions, and I also want to freely proclaim the message that God has given to me in the ceremony.
4. The church building
  - a) In our church we do not charge members for the use of the building.
  - b) Outsiders would be charged for costs (cleaning, set up, lock and unlock).

#### **C. Gay marriage – How will this impact the church and weddings?**

1. I believe we will see a day when the activists in that community will put the church to the test.
2. But I think that our premarriage program is intensive and extensive enough that you won't have very many pursuing their way through that. And since it is only the people who meet the qualifications and agree to the principles that we agree to marry, it will be harder for activists to cry "discrimination."

#### **D. The use of alcohol and tobacco at weddings/receptions at the church**

1. It is common to ask people not to smoke in public buildings, so the couple just needs to be reminded of this.

2. The issue of alcohol often has roots that have to do with whatever part of the country you are in. For example, in our part of the world (the South) the use of alcohol (in punch, at the reception) is more common.
  - a) It is not my preference, but I have been a part of a wedding where alcohol was used in moderation, and it was not a problem.
  - b) We don't encourage it, but have allowed it, with the understanding that we do not wish for abuses in this area, and we hold the couple accountable to see to it that this is kept under control.

#### **E. Special situations**

1. Marrying two non-Christians
  - a) I did one such wedding. You can do it as an agent of the state and slip the gospel in during the counseling process.
  - b) That marriage was a disaster, and I don't plan to perform any non-Christian weddings anymore. There are plenty of others who can do their ceremony for them if they wish.
  - c) I've concluded that I'm a minister of the gospel, so I'm only going to do ceremonies where the couple is committing to the gospel.
2. One mate unsaved
  - a) I've been here. In this case, a young man had gotten a young woman pregnant, and afterward he had gotten saved and was growing like crazy. But the couple had clearly become one flesh, and they wanted to get married.
  - b) After serious consideration by the elders, we would have done this marriage. I would have married them, but someone else did the ceremony. However, during the deliberation process, I explained to the unbelieving bride-to-be that 1 Corinthians 7 says she could walk away, and this was her time to do it. I told her, "Your intended has become a Christian, and he is no longer going to be the same person that you first knew. Are you willing to marry him and to stay in the marriage, knowing this?" She said, "Yes."
3. Divorce and remarriage – See earlier discussion on this topic.
4. The couple is separated by great distance (for example, the fiancé is in the military and is overseas).
  - a) At our church, we have done several premarriage programs long-distance.
  - b) We will often utilize a mature Christian leader where the distant party is located and talk frequently with the other mentor as well as with both individuals.
  - c) Nowadays, with Skype and modern communication, there are various options.

#### **F. Have I ever opted out of a wedding?**

1. Yes, it was because one of the partners was simply not taking the commitment seriously.
2. To my surprise, they did get serious, and so I did marry them in the end.

## **IX. Biblical Texts That Should Be Covered (Not in Video)**

### **A. Genesis 1-3**

### **B. All of Proverbs**

1. This is really crucial, because Proverbs enables us to identify character (the fool, the scoffer, the sluggard, the naïve, the wise).
2. Proverbs also tells us what kind of people we should avoid. For example, we should not associate with someone given to anger (Prov. 22:24). If this is so, why would you ever marry a person with anger issues?

### **C. 1 Samuel 25 (the story of David and Abigail: What submission looks like)**

### **D. Ephesians 5; 1 Peter 3**

### **E. Philippians 2**

## **X. Suggestions Concerning Wedding Plans**

### **A. Take charge at the rehearsal, so that the couple knows that you know what you are doing.**

I tell the couple that I have everything written down, so if they forget it, I still have it (the vows etc.).

### **B. Much of weddings is cultural, not biblical. What can be done to make the ceremony more biblical?**

### **C. Preach the gospel!**

1. At one wedding I performed, the couple had wandered far away from God before they got married. When they came down the aisle, they stopped and everyone sang "To God Be the Glory."
2. Encourage the couple to take initiative and leadership to make the ceremony say what they want it to say in presenting the gospel. The guests are much more likely to listen to what the couple has to say than what you or I as the officiant says.