Qualities To Look For – Or Avoid –
In A Potential Mate

Biblical & Practical Wisdom For Choosing A Marriage Partner

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Marriage is, undoubtedly, a wonderful institution ordained by God (Genesis 2:18-25). One of the ways that Christians can testify and model before the unbelieving world the beauty of a healthy, Christ-centered marriage, is to make sure before getting married that we have made a wise choice in our future spouse, one who is truly going to honor and uphold the sanctity of their marriage vows.

Unfortunately, many Christians who would give serious thought and reflection before purchasing a car or a home, would never apply the same amount of scrutiny before marrying their future spouse – one, who in the end, is going to have a far greater impact (whether positive or detrimental) upon their lives than would the purchase of any material object.

Over the years, I have had numerous Christian friends deeply regret the choices that they have made in their wives or husbands. Some have ended in divorce while others have remained married in spite of constant strife and tension within the home. Most, if not all, have made the same mistake: They failed to fully examine the character and level of Christian commitment of the person they intended to marry. Wrapped up in the emotional splendor of courting someone they found attractive, they allowed their critical faculties to go to the wayside and, thus, were unable to discern the folly of their decision. A large percentage of these problem marriages were due to immature and untaught Christians naively choosing persons who were outright pagans or nominal Christians at best. While such marriages can sometimes be saved, many of them cannot because of pride, hardness of heart, adultery, and numerous other sins which pollute the marriage vow. Those rare marriages that remain intact – in spite of continual strife and turmoil among the partners – is usually a form of God’s judgment upon the believer for making unwise or unscriptural choices in a mate. It is hoped that the following points – while not exhaustive – will help those who are considering a marriage partner to make choices that are wise and glorifying to their Creator who graciously gave us the institution of marriage.

#1. The Importance Of Making A Wise Choice At The Outset:

a. It helps to prevent future heartaches and marital problems. Do you want to be spared the tears, the heartaches, and the guilt which comes when we ignore the wisdom of God’s Word in choosing a mate? Make sure, then, that you choose a person who is truly regenerate, who has character, who is mature and responsible, and who possesses a common set of values. The prolific writer and Bishop of Liverpool, J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), has wisely stated the following regarding marriage: “In no relation is so much earthly happiness to be found, if it be entered upon discreetly, advisedly and in the fear of God. In none is so much misery seen to follow, if it be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, wantonly and without thought.” Thomas Gataker, has likewise written, “It is not evil to marry, but good to be wary.”

b. It helps to preserve your testimony as a Christian family before the eyes of the watching and unbelieving world. Part of the reason why so many unbelievers mock the virtues of a Christian marriage, is because they see little genuine difference between their marriages and those of so-called Christians. You’ll give the pagans an even greater opportunity to laugh when they see the level of tension and carnality that exists in your home because you foolishly married a heathen or nominal Christian.

c. A healthy marriage relationship helps to encourage and strengthen your commitment to Christ. On the other hand, how encouraging is it to constantly drag with you everywhere a spiritually-dead corpse in the form of an unregenerate pagan? Making a prudent and Scripturally-wise choice in a marriage partner will do much to direct one’s life on a continual path of holiness – for as J.A. Motyer has said, “Marriage is not a concession to our sinfulness; marriage is a provision for our holiness.”
d. It helps to promote peace and stability within our busy and fast-paced lives. Life itself has enough problems, but why exacerbate those problems by marrying someone who is shady in their character or who has very little commitment to Christ?

e. A good marriage helps to provide our children with a loving and stable environment. But how peaceful and stable is that environment going to be when married to one who possesses the opposite of your values and whose goals rise no higher than this present world?

f. It helps to model what a Christian marriage should be for future generations, thus insuring the continuance of the marriage institution. With so many abandoning and ridiculing the blessing of marriage within our culture, there is an urgent need for Christians to make wise spousal decisions and practically model what a healthy, Christ-centered marriage should look like.

#2. What Relational Concepts/Principles Must Be Foundational In A Mate?

a. There is absolutely no justification for knowingly marrying someone who is not a believer (1 Corinthians 7:39). To do so, exposes not only your disobedience to the revealed will of God, but brings into question your status as a child of God or, at the least, the quality and maturity of your Christian walk. Moreover, it is a fools game to engage in “missionary dating” (i.e., dating unbelievers in hopes of evangelizing them). It places the believer in incredibly tempting situations (Matthew 4:5-7), thus potentially discrediting his testimony if he should fail.

b. While there is no precise and definite rule on this, it is the better of wisdom to court for a relatively long period of time before getting married (perhaps for two or three years). This allows for greater opportunities to see the true character and person that one is intending to marry. It’s easy to put on a mask and conceal the immoral skeletons hiding in one’s closet for a period of time, but it’s much harder when such props have to be maintained over many months. Longer courtship’s help to solidify and deepen the relationship, develop and improve communication skills, ferret out any differences in roles or child-rearing philosophies, and insures that one is making a prudent and God-glorifying decision.

c. It is probably not wise to court a newly converted believer. Not only is time needed in order to prove the genuineness of their conversion, but they need time and space in which to develop a deep relationship with Christ; one that is not distracted by another’s affection and time that is not robbed from Christian ministry in order to pursue courtship activities.

d. It is not wise to court immature or irresponsible persons, regardless of how physically attractive they are or their Christian status. It may seem unnecessary and patently obvious to point this out, but it is amazing how many Christians will wreck havoc on their marriages because they ignored such obvious danger signs as immaturity and irresponsibility when they were courting.

e. It is probably not the wisest to court those in the process of recovering from an emotional break-up. In the majority of cases, they’re still emotionally attached to that person and are often quick to dump their new love interest if given the chance to return to their old flame. Besides, would you really want to pursue the possibility of marriage with someone on an emotional roller-coaster? Can you really be sure that their interest in you is not a temporary filler until someone else comes along?

f. Seek to establish a similar marital philosophy and goals before getting married. Make sure that you’re both thinking along the same lines since it will help to prevent or reduce any future confusion about leadership roles in the home, child-rearing, and the numerous issues that newly-married couples must face.

g. Consider and value the opinions of mature Christians (perhaps the elders of your assembly) regarding the personal and spiritual qualities of your selection in a marriage partner. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (Proverbs 12:15; see also 13:10).

h. Center your courtship on the things of God (e.g., Bible study, church-related activities, ministry) and not merely “fun” or social events. While there is a time and place for fun activities, these should not dominate the relationship nor should they cause us to abandon our ministry commitments unto the Lord.

i. The discerning Christian man, as leader within the courting relationship, should not place himself in a setting or environment where the potential of fornication can be realized. It is much wiser to court in a small group of other couples or even having a chaperon present who can oversee the event and hold you both accountable.
#3. What A Christian Woman Should Look For Or Avoid In A Mate:

a. Spiritual Maturity and Christ-likeness: Is he serious about his walk with God? How long has he savingly known the Lord? What do his closest friends think about the level of his Christian commitment? The truth is, the woman who is serious about her Christianity will desire – and only be content with – the man who is likewise devout and serious about his Christianity! The Christian woman who settles for anything less – particularly the woman who is “desperate” because she sees herself getting older – should justly expect much turmoil and frustration in her marriage as well as relatively little fruit in her spiritual walk. Although, admittedly, there are rare exceptions, this in no way justifies settling for a “nominal” Christian (which, in most cases, is nothing more than an unregenerate pagan cloaked in religious attire).

b. Personal Responsibility: Is he responsible in maintaining a job, paying his bills, and in meeting other personal or social responsibilities? This will tell you much about his level of maturity.

c. Ethical Behavior: Is he an ethical person? Is he known as a liar or cheat? Does he constantly stretch the truth? What do his closest friends think about his moral character?

d. Watch out for the man who is rude or disrespectful to his parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-3). This is an important indicator of how he will treat you once married. Be alert also to the man who has not spoken to his parents in years and has stopped all mutual communication. In some instances, this might be justified; but, in most, it’s an indication of hard-heartedness.

e. Watch out for the man who brags of his previous female conquests (sexually). Most likely, he’s intending for you to be his next victim.

f. Avoid the overly macho types. They’re filled with pride and usually can’t see beyond themselves. The same also applies with the man who is always talking about himself. Such people are too self-centered to give themselves in sacrificial service to others.

g. Watch out for the man who has serious difficulty in communicating with you. Since communication is an important element to a healthy marriage, why would you want someone whose expressions are limited to grunts and one-liners? While I grant that men are not as expressive as women, an emotionally-stable partner must be able to communicate, to some extent, his thoughts, feelings, and future goals.

h. Watch out for the man who has worldly interests and is easily attracted to carnal pursuits (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). Such a man is spiritually unstable and is destined to bring misery to anyone who is foolish enough to marry him.

i. Avoid men who are effeminate or who struggle with their sexual orientation. It is much wiser to avoid the man altogether who has come out of the homosexual lifestyle, since homosexuality is an especially wicked sin to overcome and, most likely, there will be the constant drive or pull to return to that lifestyle. The potential of serious marital problems and heartaches is all the more increased when courting former homosexuals. I freely acknowledge, however, that some couples have been able to sustain a healthy, well-balanced marriage in spite of their previous lifestyles – and the New Testament clearly recognizes that homosexuals, by the sovereign power of Christ, can be delivered from such vile practices (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Even still, the woman who is considering marriage to a former homosexual ought to, at least, be aware of the unique and potentially harmful problems that await her.

j. Avoid men who are wimpy and unable to make leadership decisions in their life. Such men are usually lacking in direction and the motivation needed to be true leaders in the home. Watch out also for the man who is excessively attached to his mother and her opinions.

k. Along the same lines, watch out for the man who is looking for a mother-figure, not a wife. These type of men are notorious for abdicating their leadership role within the marriage.

#4. What A Christian Man Should Look For Or Avoid In A Mate
a. Spiritual Maturity and Christ-likeness: Is she truly serious about God? Did she just recently decide to be spiritually-minded since meeting you? Many people (both men and women) suddenly get “religious” when they discover that the person they’re attracted to is a church-going Christian.

b. Is she responsible in her personal affairs? Does she meet her financial obligations if any? Is she a responsible employee? “House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord” (Proverbs 19:14).

c. Watch out for the woman who excessively gossips, since such a woman will more than likely be a source of strife and tension with others because of her inability to keep matters private. Any man who hopes to one day serve in a pastoral function should also be wary of the woman who gossips, since she may be one of the means to discrediting his ministry among church members who need to have confidence that their private matters won’t be spread to the church-at-large. “He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip” (Proverbs 20:19).

d. Avoid domineering women. This kind of woman will most assuredly fight with you over leadership issues in the home. “It is better to live in a corner of a roof, than in a house shared with a contentious woman” (Proverbs 21:9; see also 25:24). Godly men should seek for the kind of qualities mentioned in both Proverbs 31:10-31 and 1 Peter 3:1-6. Along the same lines, it is probably wiser to also avoid loud or boisterous women since they are particularly inclined to provoking conflict in the marriage.

e. Watch out for the woman who excessively spends money, since it will probably be a point of contention in the marriage. More than that, it reveals a materialistic spirit and the foolish gentleman who chooses to marry her will probably incur much unnecessary debt throughout his life.

f. Watch out for the woman who is discourteous and disrespectful to her parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-3). This is an indicator of how she will probably treat you.

g. Avoid the woman who dresses provocatively or who wears revealing clothes. It is a clear indicator that she lacks discretion, propriety, and modesty (1 Timothy 2:9-10); and has been overly influenced by worldly fashion standards. It also demonstrates that she is less than sensitive to the visual temptations that all men struggle with.

h. Women who are continuously jealous or easily suspicious of your unfaithfulness (unless you deserve such suspicion) should be avoided. It indicates personal insecurity, immaturity, and lack of trust in the marriage bond.

i. Avoid women who are idle or unproductive in their daily lives (Proverbs 31:10-27; Titus 2:3-5). This also applies to the woman who is continually dependent upon others to provide her purpose and meaning for her existence. In other words, lacking self-motivation, she constantly needs other people to stimulate and motivate her. If a woman proves to be lazy or idle before the marriage is consummated, it will most likely occur and continue after the wedding day. Generally speaking, they turn out to be poor homemakers and sacrifice very little for their families.