

Guidelines for Selecting a Marriage Partner (Unabridged Version)

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READERS PLEASE NOTE:

The following presentation is a commentary on my previous document, “[Biblical Guidelines for Selecting a Marriage Partner \(Abridged Version\)](#).” This document is written in sentence outline form for three reasons: (1) to enable young, and older, adults to quickly find comments on items in the abridged outline that I urge them to use in their quest for a spouse who will be pleasing to God and maximize the likelihood that they’ll have a marriage pleasing to him and to themselves, (2) to use for teaching in a course, seminar, or retreat setting, as I have done on a regular basis throughout my ministry, and (3) for parents to use in teaching their younger children this vital part of preparing to be an adult. Permission to use it without changing the content in an educational setting locally, nationally, or globally is granted. Additional information may be added from time to time and can be obtained in the most recent version located on the [Marriage](#) page of my general website at <https://fromacorntooak12.com/> and also on my academic website at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu>.

INTRODUCTION

A. Since God intends marriage to be a lifelong relationship between a man and a woman, since we want to know his will and have his blessing on our marriage, since we want to honor God in our marriage, and since much pain is associated with wrong choices and the dissolution of marriage, careful consideration in the selection of a marriage partner is of paramount importance.

1. Dr. Neil Clark Warren, clinical psychologist, Christian theologian, motivational speaker, entrepreneur, founder of the online dating service eHarmony, and author wrote the following.

...I have developed a whole set of conclusions about what determines the degree of happiness in a marriage.

At the top of my list is this one: *Your choice of whom to marry is more crucial than everything else combined that you will ever do to make your marriage succeed.* If you choose wisely, your life will be significantly easier and infinitely more satisfying. But if you make a serious mistake, your marriage may fail, causing you and perhaps your children immeasurable pain. Most of the failed marriages I have encountered were in trouble the day they began. The two people involved simply chose the wrong person to marry.

...Why do some individuals choose their “lifelong” partners so poorly? Because they have received almost no instruction about how to do it well....

So much of the coaching that does exist is outrageously superficial and ultimately destructive. For instance, Margaret Kent's...best-selling book, *How to Marry the Man of Your Choice* proudly boasts, "This book examines the techniques of manipulation...."

Our society—specifically, television and the movie industry—teaches people to rely almost exclusively on their "natural instincts" when choosing a mate. But romantic feelings, those seemingly trustworthy emotions, offer almost nothing of substance when it comes to making a wise choice about a potential marriage partner: In fact, they frequently get in the way. They literally anesthetize you to the critical factors you desperately need to examine.¹

But here's the good news: *Choosing a marriage partner successfully is a skill you can develop.*

...you can make a wise decision about the person you marry. Great marriages are possible if you select a great mate and this selection is virtually never the consequence of luck or laziness. It is the reward given to those who follow carefully formulated principles.²

These principles are the subject of what follows.

2. Sadly, many Christians (one would be too many) commit the naturalistic fallacy in logic as they look around our society and see how many people are divorcing and conclude that this is the way to overcome a problem or even many problems. (The naturalistic fallacy is the illogical move from "is" to "ought."³) Rather than follow God's Word, which reveals that his will is for people to commit to staying married and working through their problems (e.g., Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 19:6-9), and he helps them do so, they choose divorce for many other reasons than the exception for which God provided in the Bible (and he even helps overcome that huge problem as many have done with his wisdom, guidance, and succor). So instead of divorce ending problems, it adds to them, significantly, especially when children are involved.⁴
3. Rather than solving problems, divorce *adds* to the problems of the couple and even more for the children, which they typically do not consider sufficiently. Not only do the children suffer greatly before, during, and after their parents' divorce, but they suffer

¹ Neil Clark Warren, *Finding the Love of Your Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1992), pp. 2-3.

² Neil Clark Warren, *Finding the Love of Your Life*, p. 4.

³ I explain the naturalistic fallacy in more detail in a primer on logical fallacies in Chapter Four of my book, *What Is God's Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love*, on the [Current Issues](#) page of my [general](#) website and on my [academic](#) website.

⁴ For an overview of just some of the problems that occur when divorce involves children, see Appendix B.

even in their adulthood in many ways, not the least of which is due to cohabitation, which they often choose (8.2% of Americans vs. 16% of Canadians⁵), wrongly thinking that they can thereby avoid problems their parents faced that led to divorce. Instead, cohabitation produces a host of problems that also negatively affect the lives of people who engage in it.⁶ As a result, many divorcees have pleaded with me to tell all who I can that they should not divorce.

B. You have a right to know, and should know, my source of authority, the basis on which I have the boldness to claim that I proclaim God's Word. (You ought to require this of anyone who speaks about anything, especially anyone claiming authority to do so.) Why should you read any further?

1. My source of authority is NOT:

- a. My Ph.D. While it's true and significant that my degree is from a respected university (Michigan State), there are many Ph.D.s running around giving all kinds of advice who are very mixed up themselves.
- b. My feelings are also not my source of authority. How frequently do you hear people today pontificating on subjects such as marriage (and many other issues of enormous import) who often begin with, "Well, I feel strongly that...." Sadly, many of them wind up on TV talk shows...and in prime time!

2. My source of authority is five-fold:

- a. First and highest is the Word of God. Everything I teach is either directly from the Bible, the Word of God, or consistent with the Word of God. In historic Christian systematic theology, a study of all that the Bible teaches that is classified by subject, we see that God reveals himself in two ways that are called special revelation and general revelation. Special revelation is the written and personal Word of God fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, the Second Person of the triune God. (Exodus 19:9; Psalm 12:6; 18:30; 19:7-11; Matthew 5:17-18; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
- b. General Revelation is the information that God discloses about himself and his creation in and through natural phenomena, insufficient in itself for salvation, but very valuable instruction for humankind that God has supplied and which he requires us to know. (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15) This information comes to us through our own eyes and the other senses as well. As such, careful empirical

⁵ Anne-Marie Ambert, "Cohabitation and Marriage: How are they related?" The Vanier Institute of the Family, September 2005, p. 6. http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/family_law/files/vanier_report.pdf (Accessed 5/19/15) I cannot support all the positions taken in Ambert's essay.

⁶ See Appendix A.

investigation, in both the natural and social sciences, yields valuable data that are part of God's general revelation, *when done carefully and rigorously according to the established scientific method.*

- 1) Where these insights are consistent with the Bible, as they typically are when the established procedures are followed, they form a basis for speaking with a high degree of confidence.
- 2) Some of what I want to share with you has come from carefully done research in the social sciences and is consistent with God's special revelation. Since God does not contradict himself, e.g., he would not say something in his creation that contradicts what is in the Bible, we need to pay attention to what he is showing us in ***careful*** empirical study. That which is trustworthy is part of his general revelation. All truth is good and is therefore from God. (James 1:17) If we read of some study that produces results in conflict with God's Word, we are then sure it didn't come from God and that it is not part of his general revelation.

3) Yet we must be careful here.

- a) Sometimes both natural and social scientists claim something is true and 10 years later (or even less!) they produce a new study that retracts the previous one, especially with social science.⁷ However, when any given scientific research is checked to make certain that it is consistent with God's Word, if it proves consistent with what the Bible teaches, it usually remains; any modifications typically constitute additional information.
- b) *Most importantly, we must always place God's special revelation in authority over all other information, using the Bible, the Word of God, as the criterion by which we determine the truth.* We will do best to see careful science primarily as illustrating much of what we read in God's Word. True science also affirms what we read in the Scriptures, though the Bible doesn't need scientific research to support it; the Bible can stand on its own, since it is God's Word. Yet we are not surprised that scientific research that is well done is consistent with what we read in the Bible; we would expect that to be so. We see in carefully done empirical studies some of the reasons why God has told us to obey his will on such matters. Further, the truths in his general revelation disclosed by careful empirical study are helpful for us in understanding daily life and how we can live in accord with God's will as he reveals it in the Bible.

⁷ One reason for such retractions is that much social science research is poorly done, failing to follow the established scientific method and allowing sinful motivations and biases to shape research results. In the words of professors of mine in my Ph.D. program, "You should know that in the field of education alone over 90% of the research isn't worth the paper on which it's printed!" For more, see [Science: Distinguishing Between Sound and Flawed Science](#).

- c. My third source of authority is my ordination issued by a historic Christian denomination, the Reformed Church in America, the oldest Protestant denomination in the United States with a continuous ministry since 1628 and in a continuous line going all the way back to the Reformation with John Calvin and Martin Luther. Luther and Calvin kept all the essential doctrines of the church since Bible times, and their reforms only corrected certain doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church of the time that departed from the traditional church teaching. The Reformed Church's vetting system, including examinations, for determining who has received a call from God to be a teacher, a minister of his Word and Sacraments, has brought me through the whole process, and has been walking with me for over half a century to assure the global church and society that I'm speaking the truth in Christ's name and am licensed to do so.
- d. My fourth source of authority includes personal experience.

- 1) Be careful here also. Many people speak from experience, but that experience is viewed through a limited perspective and bias. Complicating this fact is that we all have a limited perspective and are biased to an extent. (1 Corinthians 13:12) Yet, to help me have the most helpful experience in the subject before us, God gave me the most wonderful wife I could have ever asked him to give me. He also gave her the strength to speak up in love, and at my invitation, to give me the corrective feedback I needed but was not always eager to hear.

Oh how I miss her! We had 53 wonderful years as special friends, 48 ½ as husband and wife until she died of complications of what was diagnosed as an atypical form of Parkinson Disease. Yet as much as I miss her greatly, I thank God every day that she is with him, with no more pain or suffering, and that I'll be with her again, and from then on forever! I thank him also that we'll be together with our family and all God's other people in Christ Jesus! For more information on how to come through the death of a spouse with God's help and to do so successfully, see my essay, "Preparing to Live Again as an Unmarried Person," on the [Marriage](#) page of my [website](#).

You may be thinking, "What? Why now? I'm not even married yet?!" I explain in the essay why now is the time to start, or preferably further continue, to develop your relationship with God, so when the significant challenges of life come, as they do to all of us, you'll be aware of God's presence right there with you with his all-sufficient help. You won't ask, as many do, "Where's God in all of this?" You'll not only know, you'll see clear evidence of his presence, giving you all you need and much, much more.

- 2) I have been an ordained minister since 1966. Throughout most of that time many couples have come to my office and asked for counseling on how to prepare for and how to repair a marriage. To the extent that my experiences in

counselling people who have not heeded the following guidelines are consistent with Scripture, as I testify they are, they are useful.

- 3) Be very careful whom you ask to officiate at your wedding. As is explained throughout this document, you have the greatest likelihood of having a successful and fulfilling marriage by being married in a church with supportive people in Christ walking with you throughout your life and into eternity.
 - a) If you do not have a church home, carefully select one as discussed herein. Make sure the church provides a true and historic witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Second Person (together with the Father and the Holy Spirit) of the triune God. Be certain that the church, and its pastor(s), proclaim the Bible, the Word of God, faithfully.
 - b) Make sure the pastor you ask to officiate at your wedding is authorized by the denomination of which your church is a part, or in the case of an independent church that the pastor is licensed by the denomination that holds his or her ministerial credentials. A valid ministry in Christ is authorized by an historic Christian church that is, in the original words of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, "*one* [with the true church all over the world], *holy*, *catholic* [worldwide], and *apostolic* [in most Protestant theology meaning based on the teachings of Jesus' apostles, especially the Bible, most of whom wrote the New Testament]." This credentialing is necessary to assure you that your marriage will first of all honor God and also be valid both in the sight of God and in the sight of the state or country in which you are married. If your marriage was ever challenged legally, e.g., due to IRS tax returns or inheritance issues, you need to have it hold up in a court of law.
 - c) Some so-called "churches" are ordaining "ministers" online. One of them, the Universal Life Church, has "ordained" more than 18,000,000 since its founding in Modesto, California in 1959; it "ordains" 10,000 "clergy" a month.

[Be very cautious] said Caren Martin, the deputy in charge of litigation for the marriage license bureau of Philadelphia County in Pennsylvania. "Make sure the person is qualified and don't take chances."

New York State, New Jersey and Florida have very broadly worded laws that seem to allow ministers ordained online to perform weddings. Yet it was in New York that a marriage performed by an online minister was invalidated.

In 1989, the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court ruled in a divorce case involving a Suffolk County couple that their marriage and a prenuptial agreement were void because the officiant had been a Universal Life minister.

“A church which consists of all ministers, and in which all new converts can become instant ministers, in fact has no minister,” the court wrote, concluding, “A minister whose title and status is so casually and cavalierly acquired does not qualify for licensing to marry.”⁸

- e. My fifth source of authority is logic. Many statements today about marriage are simply illogical. See [Logic: A Primer on Common Logical Fallacies](#). At the same time, all opinions on and teaching about marriage must be Biblical.
- C. Before proceeding to the guidelines, one more preliminary note should be made. I’m making some assumptions you need to take into account.
 - 1. The following guidelines assume the prospective spouse is mentally healthy with an absence of psychological pathologies, for example diagnosed insanity, schizophrenia, and experiencing excessively wide swings between pleasure and depression as in a manic-depressive state. The person you are considering doesn’t exhibit excessive moodiness, and is able to make commitments and keep them.⁹
 - 2. The guidelines also assume the absence in a prospective spouse of such undesirable behaviors as the abuse of drugs and/or alcohol (e.g., drinking while driving), and an illegal as well as immoral lifestyle.
 - 3. The guidelines assume your prospective spouse is permitted by law to marry, e.g., he or she meets the state’s minimum age requirement; neither of you are already married, including only being separated; and you and your prospective spouse are not first cousins. In most states a man and a woman cannot marry if they are first or second

⁸ Divan Sipher, “Great Wedding! But Was It Legal? The New York Times, August 5, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/05/fashion/05marry.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (Accessed 5/19/15)

⁹ Of course I am *not* saying people struggling with certain health issues should never marry. Nevertheless, significant implications exist for both partners in such a marriage that both should be aware of when they commit to each other in spite of the additional realities involved. For example, in addition to all the other factors mentioned in these guidelines, the person with a special health condition should demonstrate over time the practice of taking all prescribed medications on time, and the prospective spouse needs to be aware of the condition and commit to you “until death do you part.” The prospective spouse needs to be aware of and commit to any required lifestyle limitations that come with the illness or disability his or loved one has. An axiom in marriage counseling is that unrealistic expectations are one of the most common causes of marital discord and dissolution. In the case of considering marrying a person with a significant illness or disability, extra thought, grace, and willing commitment should be part of the decision-making process before committing to marriage. While God will help you with all you need, part of that help is in alerting you to the prior homework, preparation, you need to do.

cousins, unless they are elderly and will not be having children.¹⁰

- a. Do not have anything to do romantically with someone who is married or even separated but still married. The higher moral law of God is always in effect, yielding countless blessings to those who obey his law. At the same time make sure the lower state laws are also consulted, which is also part of God's will (e.g., Romans 13:1-7), as they must be in order to obtain a marriage license. That "little piece" of paper contains many built-in protections for both prospective spouses, e.g., protecting one or both from potential marriage partners who fail to disclose that they are already married to someone else! For several selfish and immoral reasons, many suitors try to hide the fact that they were previously married and that they have not been divorced. That dirty little, no HUGE, secret is disclosed with the process of obtaining a valid marriage license from the county clerk's office in your jurisdiction. In many years of marriage and pre-marriage counseling I've consoled and tried to help in other ways people who've been taken in by such fraud. *Don't be one of them!*
- b. God's condemnation of such practice is the most important and all-sufficient reason for not even considering much less courting a married person; it involves planning to commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14, 17; Matthew 5:27-28; 19:9) With these and other commands from God in his Word about this subject that is all that is needed.
- c. For him or her who needs other reasons (which should raise a red flag in your mind), there are many for not becoming romantically involved with someone who is already married. I cite some here so you can use them if necessary—while praying for and relying on God's help—to try to talk someone out of a decision leading to disaster!
 - 1) The statistical odds against a person leaving his spouse are stacked against you. (Of course this is the poorest of reasons but still a reason.)
 - 2) Why would you want someone you could take away from his wife or her husband? What would keep him or her from leaving you? Some try to answer that question by saying, "Oh he'll keep his promise to me!" To which I reply, "How do you know that? He said the same to his first wife (or, very sadly, his second, third, etc.). If he is the type of person who will break this most important solely human promise, how do you know he'll keep any promise to you? What realistic assurance do you have? Keep in mind whatever answer you give to that question, he (or she) already gave to the other woman (or women, or man or men) he or she left for you."¹¹

This reality is why traditional marriage vows have included the vow to remain

¹⁰ <http://family.findlaw.com/marriage/legal-requirements-for-marriage-faq-s.html> (Accessed 5/19/15)

¹¹ That is, the same can and should be said for both the man and the woman.

faithful to God and to one another “until death do we part.” Notice what greater security this vow gives to both the husband and the wife—as long as the prior time has been taken to ascertain the trustworthiness of the potential spouse—than the modern substitute that many couples tragically insert, where they “promise” to remain together “as long as we love one another.” **Think carefully** about—and avoid—that substitution, especially in the light of the truly realistic Biblical anthropology, which reveals that human beings are essentially sinful and fall short of the glory of God (e.g., Romans 3:23). See also Jeremiah 17:9, where God, speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah, reveals that—ever since sin entered the world through Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience—“the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.” As you develop your relationship with one you think you might marry, follow God’s Word and proceed with wide open “eyes that see” and “ears that hear,” which he gives to those who follow him, so they can function most realistically and arrive at an outcome that pleases God and, therefore, that pleases both spouses...for the rest of this phase of their lives here on earth.

In order to assure yourself that you have the highest likelihood of a good marriage, let your head, focusing on reasoning based on God’s Word, govern your heart. When well-meaning—but very misguided—people “advise” you to “just follow your heart,” in the light of God’s revelation recorded in Jeremiah 17:9, ask them, “Now, wait a minute: Are you really saying you want me to follow my heart, that organ the Prophet Jeremiah revealed as deceitful more than anything and beyond cure? Is that the heart you want me to follow?”

Can you see why it is necessary to follow God’s Word and use these questions to help you do so?

- 3) Economic reasons keep people married. Divorce is very costly in money as well as emotional and physical pain.
 - 4) Spare yourself the pain of being “the other woman” or “the other man,” the enormous anguish of which has been testified to through many tears in my office.
4. I do not assume, and you should not either, that there is only one person in the world with whom you can have a good marriage. *Yet, this assumption applies only while you are single.*
- a. This is an especially important point to keep in mind while you are reading this checklist. If after you are finished reading it, or at some point between then and a wedding, you conclude that this person is not right for you, especially if he or she will not commit to Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord, and follow him, do not conclude that you’ve lost the only person with whom you could ever have a good marriage. Just the opposite. Ask God’s help and continue your quest. Also

keep this checklist (or the abridged version) handy.

- b. If your spouse dies, especially if he or she dies prematurely, don't feel that there is no one else with whom you could have a good marriage. If you desire to be married again, ask God to lead you to a person with whom you can have a marriage that will honor God and in which you can have the joy and fulfillment you seek.
 - Consider also what the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7 concerning unmarried people. They can serve the Lord in special ways that married people cannot.
 - c. However, once married, then it is God's will that you remain married, even when the normal disappointments and issues that make you angry arise. There is special joy in working out and overcoming difficulties together; your marriage will be even stronger as you do. You can do it with God's help. As Jesus said, "with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) Further, you'll serve him well showing others how his will can be accomplished even under challenging circumstances.
5. All healthy marriages have problems, but they overcome them. Enter marriage with the most realistic yet hopeful view of human nature which only God's Word provides: that all humans are sinful but with the new nature in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that blesses all believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus, you have all you need to have a good, successful, and enjoyable marriage.
- Yet, when you put two sinners under the same roof for any significant amount of time there will be problems. Just address them honestly, speaking the truth in love, with full disclosure and trusting that with God's help (directly in your hearts and minds, and if you need it through the help of others, for example a professional counselor) you'll overcome the difficulties. In my ministry of well over half a century, I've seen and counselled many couples with problems ranging from the easiest to fix to the worst possible. However, when both spouses are believers in Christ, maturing in their relationship with him, and truly committed to making the changes they need to implement in their marriage, even the worst marriages can be saved. I've seen examples where this result has occurred. God does miracles.
6. This is not an exhaustive list. Other factors associated with serious marital problems and failure could be added, but these are the most common and especially important. Moreover, always remember and be encouraged by the reality that with both husband and wife committed to Christ and to each other, the problems can be worked through and overcome well.

The following guidelines focus on the subjects that constitute the main challenges of most marriages. They are expressed as questions for several reasons, one of which is to help address these main concerns and to obtain the needed information with which to make the wisest decision in selecting a marriage partner.

I. GENERAL GUIDELINES

Since there are several principles I would like to mention, I'm going to group them to facilitate our discussion. They're expressed in the form of questions you should ask yourself; use them as a mental checklist.

Of special importance: *Use these questions **from the very beginning** of any relationship you think could become romantic and lead to marriage. Don't wait until you are in love before digging out these guidelines, when you'll be sorely tempted to gloss over, downplay, and ignore matters that significantly affect marital success.*

A. Have you made a list of your expectations, all the things that are important to you that your spouse should believe and do, and, if so, have you shared this list with him or her? ***Be very specific.*** Remember, your prospective spouse is not a mind reader. Don't assume he or she always knows what you want. The following list is an example of the items that could be on such a list, but the first item should—indeed, **must**—be at the top of everyone's list of spousal expectations.

1. ***The most important of all:*** That your intended spouse is a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ as his or her only Savior and Lord. (Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Malachi 2:11; Ezra 9:1-2 and 3-10:44; Nehemiah 10:30; Exodus 34:16; Genesis 26:34-35; 27:42-28:1 ff.; Deuteronomy 7:3-6; James 2:26)
 - a. If your spouse is not in Christ, how can you ever trust he or she will be faithful to God and to you? How can you have any assurance that he or she will maintain his or her vow to God and to you to “forsake every other and keep to you only as long as you both shall live?” In addition, you would not have any support in teaching your child(ren) to believe in and love God, including living according to his will, obeying and worshiping him. Also, before marriage non-Christian spouses typically say they will not interfere in their Christian spouse's faith, but they usually do, e.g., planning events other than worship on Sunday morning and regularly functioning counterproductively to their spouse's faith in many other ways with very negative effects on the marriage and family.
 - b. As an ordained pastor for well over half a century, I have counseled with many spouses who are Christians married to a non-Christian, here in the United States and in other countries. The Christians have told me the same story again and again: “My husband/wife promised me before we were married that he/she would never interfere with my spiritual life including attending worship, but now that we're married he/she always has other plans. When I want to go to worship he/she wants to go to the beach or to this place or that but never to church. He/she also puts pressure on me to not spend time in church.”
 - c. Consequently, this presence of the non-Christian has had a significantly negative

effect on the Christian and his or her children resulting in weak faith, lack of maturity in Christ, sanctification, and even in many cases leading the children to abandon the church and faith in Christ, an eternally tragic development as a result of disobeying God's Word. Where the children have continued in the church with their believing parent, their spiritual development typically is hindered by the disbelief and disobedience of their unbelieving parent. They are also sad when they think about the eternal future of the parent outside of Christ if his or her unbelief continues to the end of life.

- d. If you live in a family or in a culture where marriages are arranged by the parents, lovingly help your parents understand God's Word and his command to not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever in marriage. Explain these passages of the Bible to them.

What Do I Do Where Marriages Are Arranged?

In many other countries in the world marriages are arranged by parents directly or with the help of a matchmaker, either a friend or a professional, contacted by the parents. Young Christians ask me what they should do. They say, "My parents are not Christians, and they bring non-Christians to me that they urge me to marry; what should I do?" Here is my answer.

Tell your parents that you are a Christian and you must obey God's Word. In his Word one of his commandments is to "Honor your father and your mother." Therefore, you will honor them by considering the person they want you to marry. Then use the next year or so to explain to this potential spouse that you are a Christian and can marry only another believer in and follower of Jesus Christ. Explain the Gospel of Christ to him or her and use this time to witness for Jesus. You have an exceptional opportunity to do so. Follow the principles in these guidelines, e.g., determining the genuineness of words by track record over time.

If this person does profess and demonstrate in behavior over enough time a genuine faith in Jesus Christ as his or her only Savior and Lord, you can then decide if you would like to marry him or her. If, however, it becomes clear that he or she will not believe in and follow Christ, you can then say this to your parents: "In obedience to God's Word and will, I honored you by carefully considering the man (or woman) you brought to me. However, since he (or she) will not become a fellow believer in and follower of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I must also obey God and not marry someone who is an unbeliever. Please bring me someone else."

The concept of arranged marriages sounds strange to Western ears, but there is much to be said for arranged marriages. Even in some subcultures in the West it is expected that if a person wants to marry someone from a culture where marriages are arranged, he or she will honor the established procedures for doing so. **Nevertheless, it is essential for a Christian** to follow the above procedures if a non-Christian prospective spouse is involved.

In the West, a modified version of an arranged marriage could provide the benefits of both an arranged marriage and the usual independent choice approach, *if* the adult children are maturing in Christ Jesus, have a good relationship with their parents who are also mature believers in and followers of Christ, and have the wisdom and personality strength to ask their parents' advice. Relatedly, until recently, it has been common, wise, and expected for the man to ask the woman's father for his permission to marry his daughter, thus honoring her father.

Even in the West, there remains a tradition where the man should ask the father of the woman he wants to marry for his blessing. If he, as many young men today, is unaware of this tradition, his girlfriend will be wise to insist he do so. It can be a daunting experience, but, as I found out by doing so, many blessings result, including a stronger relationship with one's in-laws and other extended family, which relationship becomes ever more important in years to come.

More about "Honor your father and your mother." We must also remember that the Biblical command to "Honor your father and your mother" has no time limit. Nowhere in the text does it say that this commandment lasts only until age 18 or age 21. Not even to age 35 or 40, where in many cultures those in that age range are still considered youth, as was true in Bible times. As long as we live, we are to honor our father and mother.

Please note well: This command in the Bible, God's Word—"Honor your father and your mother"—does not mean what other religions mean. We are never to worship our parents or anyone or anything else! Throughout the whole Bible we read that we are to worship God only. (Cf., e.g., Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8) When God commands that we must honor our father and our mother, including our spouse's father and mother (see more below), he means that even after our father and mother have died, we must honor them, for example by loving them (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7); by speaking well of them, not speaking ill of them; by commending them for what they did well; by putting to use the wise and good words they taught us, which since they are good, came to us through them from God, who is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17 *et al.*), whether or not our parents acknowledged God as the source of the good in their lives. However, we best honor our human father and mother by honoring and obeying God, the only true God who reveals himself in the Bible.

Consider carefully one other very practical benefit for obeying the Word of God

pertaining to honoring our father and our mother: When you marry, your spouse's father and mother become your second father and mother. Honoring them also will bring peace and many other blessings into your marriage and family. One of the most common and serious problems that often results in the loss of marital harmony, and even loss of the marriage itself, is disregard and even disdain of one's father-in-law and/or mother-in-law, which is also contrary to God's Word.

Here's how we can honor them: Start by remembering that all humans "have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) That means that our in-laws will have done and still do what is wrong. *But so do and will we.* When they (and all others) do or say something that hurts and causes us pain, we should "take the high road" and with prayer asking God's help—which he readily gives—we should forgive them and be gracious to them, as God has forgiven us in his wonderful graciousness to us in Jesus Christ. It helps greatly to concentrate on the good they do, overlooking the bad (hoping and praying to God that they do the same for us whenever we do something that hurts them), all of which greatly helps us to honor them. Living this way will maturely model Christlikeness and also support your spouse who wants and/or needs to have a good relationship with his or her parents. As you do so in obedience to God—thereby honoring God and honoring your spouse's father and mother—God will bless you in your marriage. Always remember what we regularly pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...." (Matthew 6:9,12) Notice carefully the words, "as we also *have forgiven*," i.e., we've *already done so*; we're not thinking about it, may do it, want to do it, hope to do it, will do it if I feel like it or if [he/she] asks, or someday if the occasion presents itself.

2. You wish your spouse-to-be would stop smoking.
3. You wish he or she would be ready at the agreed-to time.
4. You wish he or she wouldn't drive so fast.
5. You wish he or she wouldn't talk on the phone and drive.
6. You wish he or she wouldn't text or call on a cell phone while driving (WHICH IS ILLEGAL).
 - Humor often helps convey a point and can influence the desired action. You might look for a bumper sticker like one I saw in a Colorado parking lot: "*Honk if you love Jesus. Text while driving if you want to meet Him!*" For theological accuracy I would add one word at the very end of the sentence, "soon." We're all going to meet Jesus when we die and in the Judgment; it's just that those who text and drive have a statistical probability of doing so much sooner than the actuarial tables suggest and also of being a catalyst of others' premature death...not

something you want marring the rest of your life.

7. You wish he or she wouldn't drink so much.
8. You wish he or she wouldn't ignore you at parties.
9. Add any other matter that is so important to you that you would not want to live with your spouse behaving that way. In my premarital counseling I always ask couples to separately identify their wish list of what they most want to see in the person they are intending to marry, and *be very specific*. Then share your lists with each other. In constructing your list, remember two other very helpful Biblical teachings:
 - a. No one is perfect; indeed, we are all sinful and fall short of the glory of God. (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23) Don't have the unrealistic expectation that you will have a flawless husband or wife.
 - b. Don't assume that you can, or even should try to, change everything about a person. Learn to overlook faults that are relatively minor. Put on your list the things that are important to you that you can't overlook. You can also have a second wish list of things you'd like to see or not see, but the present list is of those matters that are most important to you, i.e., likely "deal breakers" or "game changers."
 - c. Share the second list with him or her but then let it be; don't nag. Nagging creates pain, and healthy people try to avoid pain; the result is what educators refer to as an avoidance tendency rather than an approach tendency. You don't want him or her to avoid you and what you wish.
- B. Are you prepared to be concerned about only the most important qualities in your spouse, and if they're present to forego the quest for the nonexistent perfect man or perfect woman? No such person exists on this earth. (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23) There has been only one perfect man since the fall of Adam and Eve, and He lived here on earth 2,000 years ago! Moreover, he neither planned to marry nor did marry. He was also divine, the only begotten Son of God and the Second Person of the triune God. (John 3:16; 10:30)
 1. If your prospective spouse is OK in the spiritual and moral areas (i.e., compatible with what the Bible teaches), then be glad.
 2. Forget about minor differences, e.g.,
 - a. if she won't keep the house as clean as your mother did (such as cleaning every lamp shade each week)
 - b. or if he won't pick up his clothes like your father always did.

C. Do you expect him or her to change after marriage? DON'T! The likelihood of a spouse changing after marriage is remote to nil; therefore, any desired deal-breaker change ***must occur, and remain so over time, before*** marriage.

1. People don't easily change their personality and their habits. In fact, such change is very rare; don't plan on it. Moreover, they don't do so without a stronger motivation to do so, one that comes *not only before marriage, but before the person they want to marry commits* to marrying them.
2. Your prospective spouse has a high desire to please you and is motivated to consider making changes to please you ***before*** your wedding. Prior to the wedding you have considerable leverage in insisting on any changes and/or procedures that are important to you, provided you withhold engaging in sex until after your wedding. It is necessary to hold off setting a date for the wedding until enough time has elapsed where he has incorporated the change you want to see into his lifestyle, and is not just making a promise to make the change, or only doing it for a little while until the wedding. You want to look for evidence that he is willingly, and cheerfully, doing what you want *over time*. However, after you are married that leverage is lost; your spouse-to-be has what he or she has wanted, and the incentive to change is greatly reduced if not nonexistent.

D. Do you want to wait until you are married before having a sexual relationship? If you are a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ, you do. This waiting is God's will as he reveals it in the Bible. (See e.g., Exodus 20:14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20.)

1. You will be greatly blessed throughout your marriage, indeed your whole life, if you obey God's will in his Word. He has given us his laws for our benefit, because he loves us and knows what is best for us. He knows infinitely more than we humans do or ever will. (Isaiah 55:8-9) In fact, if we use God's Word, the Bible, as our standard, and look all about us, we can see the unnecessary pain and suffering that occurs when people do not obey God.
2. The preceding principle pertaining to leverage applies to both waiting until marriage and waiting to have a sexual relationship. The two used to be coterminous; now, with many people having sex prior to marriage, this clarification needs to be made. In fact, having sex before marriage often results in no marriage due to the same principle: after a woman gives a man the coitus he craves, that leverage is lost; her intended spouse-to-be has what he wanted, and the incentive to marry or change behavior is greatly reduced if not now nonexistent.

Daily illustrations of this reality are abundant. Just read the multitude of letters to "Dear Abby," and other advice columnists—whose answers frequently leave a lot to be desired and are sometimes Biblically wrong—by women who are living with a man who, they have come to discover, seriously disappoints them with a character or

behavior (usually linked) flaw that they wonder whether they can live with, so they write “Abby” (the penname of Jeanne Phillips) hoping for advice to change the situation, not realizing they have given up their greatest human capability for avoiding or overcoming the problem in the first place. For more on the scientific, as well as Biblical, evidence as to why cohabitation should be avoided, see below, Appendix A.

- a. Two psychologists have written well explaining why it is wise for girls to avoid sex outside the marital bond. They also suggest how they can put off male pressure for them to do so.

Am I afraid of losing him? Often a boy—physically and emotionally less complicated—will press for intimacy before a girl is sure she wants it. She owes it to herself *and* to the boy to hold back.

Full participation in sexual intercourse is a major milestone in female psychology; for most, it has profound impact. It is not uncommon for a young woman to discover the unexpected force of her sexuality in her first intercourse, thus forming an attachment stronger than she had imagined possible. For this reason, many girls who are neither prudish nor inhibited choose to defer intercourse....

The vast majority of American girls look forward to marriage and a family. Many feel that this is the context in which they want to enjoy a total relationship with a man. They need conditions of permanence, security and mutual support before they feel right and ready for sexual commitment.

If an insecure girl feels she has to give in and have intercourse with her boy friend in order to hold on to him, something is basically wrong with the relationship. Equal rights for women certainly include the right to say no.¹²

- b. These two psychologists argue from biology and psychology, which largely transcend the cultural “times are a changin’” argument. Yet a more powerful rationale exists for the women. For those of us who hold to the Bible as God’s Word and our highest authority, that is the capstone of the argument and a girl’s strongest basis for saying a firm and argument-ending “No!” She does ***not*** have to give in. She can end the argument for good by letting him know that if he ever again suggests in any way that they have sex without the commitment of and prior

¹² Daniel A. Sugarman and Rollie Hochstein, “Is Virginity Obsolete?” *The Reader’s Digest*, June 1972.

to marriage they will cease to be a couple. If he truly loves her and thus wants what is best for her, he'll back off and respect her for her decision. Moreover, she will be blessed by God for obeying him and not becoming involved in sex outside of marriage. (See e.g., Exodus 20:14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20)

One other good response for women who are pressured with the “If you love me you will...” attempt by guys to coerce you into sexual intercourse, or anything else you do not want to do, is this response. “You are either uninformed as to what true love is, or you are being deceptive and lying. I go by God’s Word that says, “love...does not insist on its own way.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5 RSV, NRSV) If the guy says, “Well you’re insisting on your own way,” say, “No. I’m following God’s way.” Then quote or refer him to the 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 passage above, and other Biblical texts pertaining to fornication (all sex outside of marriage) and adultery.

- c. The above observation of the profound intertwined connection between the biological and psychological dimensions of the human body help explain the Biblical phenomenon of the “one flesh” marital bond that occurs in marriage (Genesis 2:21-25; Matthew 19:4-6) and why such great pain occurs when this dynamic unity is torn apart and shredded in divorce or in the breakup of a premarital sexual relationship.

For all the reasons above and those that follow, always remember that one of the greatest gifts you can give your future husband or wife is to save your virginity for him or her only. For the one flesh marital bond to be most fulfilling, it must be exclusive, which is why God, who is all-knowing, forbids sex outside of marriage. God is no killjoy; far from it! Just the opposite! Since he created us, he knows what will bring us the greatest joy and fulfillment, and that is what he wills for us. He knows better than what we do what is best. Faithfulness to God and to your marriage partner provides that exclusivity which bestows the greatest sense of closeness, oneness, and intimacy, a relationship that supplies lifelong support, insulation from loneliness, deep fulfillment, and a multitude of other unique blessings. Very significantly, this commitment to exclusivity begins most effectively in childhood, as children observe their parents’ faithfulness to God and to each other. Then as the child becomes an adolescent and experiences the kindling of the sexual dimension of his or her maturing body, he or she should commit to obeying God’s will to avoid sex outside of marriage and commit to saving sex for the husband or wife yet unknown but who will be greatly blessed by such faithfulness. As you age, your spouse will thank God greatly for your faithfulness him or her and to the Lord, blessings unparalleled in any other relationship. Where such exclusivity does not occur, a significant loss is suffered, as you can see below in Michael’s poignant story. But thanks be to God, due to God’s powerful grace in Jesus Christ, those who have lost their virginity before marriage, can still have a good marriage with an exclusive commitment to the Lord and to each other.

In the light of these bio-psychological and Biblical realities, it is important to ask another question. This question which follows should be asked when you sense you are in a relationship that could lead to marriage.

- E. Ask your potential spouse what he or she has done pertaining to sex before developing this relationship with you.
1. Have you been involved with “sexting?” This phenomenon emerged with the nascence of cell, and especially “smart,” phones. It constitutes sending “selfies” of one’s nude body to (an)other(s) over the Internet.
 - a. This growing and unwise practice is currently illegal, being considered as child pornography even when done consensually among peers who are minors. The law, written prior to the emergence of cell phone technology, was designed to deter child pornography. Those who do it commit a felony that carries with it a life-long punishment of having to register as a sex offender together with its life-altering and devastating effects. There is in 2016 a legislative effort in Colorado to change the law to not have it applied to teen “sexting,”¹³ discerning the difference between an evil economic enterprise and youthful ignorance, with the desire to educate the teens as to why such texting is unwise and dangerous.
 - b. Very dangerous. Once such an image of one’s body is on the Internet, it can be exploited in numerous ways that extensively damage the individual, in exceptionally painful ways in the vulnerable teen years, and throughout his or her whole life.
 - c. Such images also devalue the human body, which has been created by God and contains part of which is meant by being created “in the image of God.” (Genesis 2:26-28) These images, viewed by humans with sinful minds and hearts, facilitate mental, emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual responses that can and many times do become evil. They then become damaging to those involved, the one whose body is being viewed and the one(s) engaging in the sinful and evil behavior.
 - d. Knowing about such images circulating in the global cybersphere will enable you to decide whether you want to deal with the related possible outcomes, including but not limited to, these pictures showing up in awkward or embarrassing relationally, legally, or professionally problematic circumstances in the future; character issues now or later; or parenting challenges down the road.

¹³ “The (Grand Junction) *Daily Sentinel* on teen texting laws,” Other Views, *Loveland Reporter-Herald*, March 14, 2016, p. 4A.

2. Has he or she used pornography? This very serious matter will be considered further below.
3. Has he or she had a sexual relationship with anyone else? Give careful thought to the information in the textbox that follows and act accordingly.

A SPECIAL NOTE FOR WOMEN: Marriage is one of God's great gifts for both spouses, and that is especially so for women; you should hold out for the marital bond if your boy "friend" pressures you to move in with him and cohabit without that degree of commitment. Avoid sex of any kind in any circumstances prior to marriage. You should not do so even when becoming engaged. Women make a huge mistake with lifelong implications when they give up the leverage of their virginity thinking their "lovers" will follow through with their promises for eventual marriage or some other type of commitment, but the men typically fail to keep up their end of the bargain. Once the guys have what they want, they don't see a need to do more. Sooner or later many lose respect and desire for the woman. Withholding sex until after the wedding is the Biblical and time-tested means whereby women can have the level of lifelong love, true commitment, and security for which they long. Keeping her virginity until marriage is the most effective way a woman can truly tell whether a guy genuinely loves her and will commit to her, for **if he truly loves her, he will not leave her prior to marriage if she insists they wait** until his track record on the issues important to her sufficiently assures her that the desired behavior is obviously part of his lifestyle and then they marry. If he does leave, she knows he didn't truly love her and care for what is most important to her. The temporary sadness will pass. She has saved herself a lifetime of disappointment, unfulfillment, and regret. Of course, throughout the Bible we see God's command to both males and females to not have sex outside of marriage, i.e., before, during, and after marriage (due to the death of one of the spouses).

- F. **A caveat:** A vital corollary to the above axiom (C. 2.) is this reality: Some marriage counselors have said that the dating period is a time when both genders try to conceal flaws of all kinds and put on their best masks to attract the prospective spouse for whom they are looking. He or she will tell you anything you want to hear in order to persuade you. Words are easy to say. Therefore, you want to be sure the words are true, and truth is observed in track record. Have you ever discovered your prospective spouse has lied?
1. Here is one place we see how real and important the Bible and our relationship with Jesus Christ is.
 - a. The Bible teaches that all humans are sinful and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23 and many other passages)

- 1) The Bible also teaches about many realities that are invisible but very important, some of which can be very harmful if we aren't careful. One of these realities is Satan and his demonic followers. Jesus revealed Satan as the father of lies (John 8:44), and the Devil constantly tempts people to be deceptive as he is.
- 2) The Bible also says, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1) Therefore, when your spouse-to-be says he or she will do something, be grateful for that statement, for it is an indication, but not proof, of possible willingness to do so. At least you don't have to argue him or her into agreeing with you. That much is achieved. Now you just have to verify the agreement; as the saying goes, "Trust but verify."
 - If the other person says, "Don't you trust me?" Say words to this effect: "Your question is part of my answer. Why did you have to ask? On what basis should I trust that you'll do what you say?" Trust is typically based on actions over time (track record as business people put it). As the Bible most realistically indicates, a marriage is the joining of two sinners under the same roof for 40, 50, or more years. To minimize conflict, we both need to be grounded in the Lord with his Word and will as our standard."
- 3) Now, how do you verify his or her agreement to make the change you desire? How can you tell if his or her words are true and that he or she genuinely intends to, and in fact will, make the desired change? The answer is: *take as much time as you need to observe a track record* of the implemented change. Further, *the change must be done willingly*.
 - a) Take as much time as you need to observe the change being implemented. Just doing it once or twice is not enough. You need to see an incorporation of the desired change in his or her habit. For example, if you want your prospective spouse to go with you to church at least once a week, it is necessary to see him or her actually do so, rather than just promise, "Yeah, we'll go." Or worse, "I'll never interfere with your going to church whenever you want." I assure you that many people with whom I've met for marriage counseling have fallen for both of those lines that never materialized in reality, because they were trusted without testing over time. You need to see such an occurrence taking place over a significant amount of time prior to your wedding. Traditionally, engagements were for a year. Much wisdom undergirds that tradition. That timeframe together with the following factor below will likely assure you of whether your intended spouse will truly do what you wish in this important matter or not.

b) The change should be implemented willingly. With regard to the above example, if your husband- or wife-to-be truly means what he or she says about being willing to go to church with you, it should occur without you having to drag him or her to worship “kicking and screaming.” You should not have to keep reminding, badgering, or nagging him or her. In addition, look for the following indicators of genuine willingness to adopt this change you desire. He or she does the following:

- Remembers the date and time you want to go.
- Shows up and is ready on time.
- Expresses unprompted indications of looking forward to going with you, such as “I wonder if ‘So and So’ will be at church this week.”
- Afterward indicates he or she enjoyed the worship service or other event you attended.
- Inquires about becoming a member of the church.

b. The above realities should also be taken into account and implemented with all other matters important to you in your marriage.

ESPECIALLY FOR THE GROOM: Consider one loving gift you can give your wife on your wedding night and maybe for some time after. Since sex is such an especially profound experience for a woman, willingly offer to postpone your first sexual intercourse on your wedding night if your bride feels uncomfortable doing so. Give her the time she needs for psychological reentry after the huge emotionally draining day the wedding may have been for her (usually much more so than for the groom). Show her how much you love her, and she’ll bless you for your self-sacrificing sensitivity to her needs. Remember God’s Word: love “does not insist on its own way.” (1 Corinthians 13:5 NRSV)

c. The Bible teaches that God’s gift of sex to human beings brings a husband and a wife together in a deeply profound psychophysical and spiritual one flesh marital bond. This unique oneness is a huge blessing that, when it occurs in marriage as God designed, provides a lifelong treasure cherished by both spouses. But when it is mistreated and corrupted in the counterfeit of cohabitation and downplayed with nefarious motivations in unbiblical fornication, deception and destruction occur. As Robert H. Knight has written,

The idea that sexuality is a minor point is belied by thousands of years of human history. Cultures that fail to support monogamous marriage lose the generative vibrancy that comes from commitment and deferred gratification which along with love, make marriages

possible.¹⁴

- d. Thus in the above we see God's way is the best way. Obeying his Word and will provides the greatest security, satisfaction, and joy in life and in eternity! (John 10:10) When people try to cut and paste, taking out of God's perfect plan what they like and not bringing with it the core of what has produced the benefits, they construct a counterfeit that neither satisfies nor produces lasting fruit but rather sooner or later destruction and death. Again it does not surprise us to see true science observing and recording these effects.
- e. Have you gone together long enough?
 - 1) Over time, qualities emerge in troubled people that threaten or destroy marriages (e.g., undisclosed values, previous relationships, self-control issues such as anger management) which can be missed in courtships which are too short.
 - 2) Nevertheless, age matters significantly. A couple who are in their late teens or early 20s should lengthen their courtship to provide enough time for each partner to come to know the other well. How long is long enough? An exact time for everyone is misleading, since many variables exist with each couple. While I've known some people who've had successful marriages since their late teens, statistically the likelihood of teenagers succeeding in marriage is not encouraging, some exceptions to the contrary notwithstanding. In general, it is advisable to wait until age 20 or later. Young adults who still live with parents, and even grandparents, have a significant advantage, as do those in close touch with loving parents.
 - 3) People vary in their degree of maturity; certain ones are more or less mature than others at any age, and life experiences affect decision-making and action, such as the quality of family relationships (e.g., whether the couple's parents have an intact and strong marriage or whether they are conflicted, separated, or divorced), level and degree of success in education, and most importantly relationship with, and maturity in Christ Jesus, including church membership. Track record reveals key characteristics, traits, and behavior tendencies that tend to be predictive of future actions. Younger people especially benefit from these observations over time. Older couples who have more experience need less time.
 - 4) You need time to observe and be sure that promises are kept and that other verbal agreements important to you are true habits! A track record is your highest confidence, humanly speaking, that you can count on a promise being kept, and promises in the form of vows before God are the glue to a successful, joyful, and fulfilling marital bond. In a study of 51 middle-age wives, researchers at Kansas

¹⁴ Robert H. Knight, "Sacred Marriage Contract Only Has Room for Two," *Insight*, June 8, 1998, p. 28.

State University discovered a strong correlation between the length of time the women dated their husbands and the wives' rating of current satisfaction in their marriage; the couples who dated for more than two years prior to marriage consistently scored highest on marital satisfaction. This finding is especially true for couples under 28 years of age. The likelihood of failing in marriage is significantly reduced the longer the period of dating prior to the wedding.

- f. On the other end of the spectrum, older couples should consider the following questions:
- 1) Do you know that the biological clock affects the male as well as the female member of the couple? The quality of the man's sperm is related to the health of children born to the couple, and, as is well known, the woman has a limited number of eggs to be fertilized before menopause. If you put marriage off too long, it could affect your relationship with children and grandchildren. It is advisable to have children earlier rather than later, and then, if the mother wishes, develop a career.
 - 2) Calculate how old you will be when your child(ren) become teenagers. Will you have the energy and desire to keep up with them in activities that will engage them in their teenage years, a challenging time when you need a strong relationship with your teens?
 - 3) How old will you be when your children begin having children? How likely is it you'll be alive and physically and mentally able to function as a grandparent? How much do you want to be a grandparent? (The Bible and social science research reveal that grandparents have a significant role to perform in the lives of their grandchildren who greatly value and benefit from their grandparents.)
 - 4) The Bible records that God wills grandparents also teach his Word to their grandchildren. (Deuteronomy 4:9) Having had wonderful grandparents, and now being a grandparent, I can say that grandparents bestow and receive a treasure trove of blessings in that role.
 - 5) Can you answer all the following questions to the Lord's and to your satisfaction?

II. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A. Spiritual Guidelines

1. Again, **the most important question of all**: Is your prospective spouse a Christian, i.e., a believer in and consistent follower of Jesus Christ as his or her only Lord and Savior? (Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 Corinthians 7:39; Genesis 26:34-35; 27:42-28:1; Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3-6; Ezra 9:1-2 and 3-10:44; Nehemiah 10:30; Malachi 2:11; John 14:6; James 2:26)

- a. Throughout the Bible, God's Word, we see clearly that his will is for his people to only marry a fellow believer. In fact, God commands that we do not marry unbelievers.
- 1) Deuteronomy 7:3-6 links that command with his will that his people, who belong to him, are holy (i.e., uncommon, separated) to him, for he is holy (Leviticus 19:2), indeed, he is holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3), the Hebrew way of saying Most Holy.
 - 2) The apostle Paul writes, "**Do not be** yoked together with unbelievers." (2 Corinthians 6:14) The Greek verb translated "**Do not be**" is Μή γίνεσθε (*mē gínesthe*). Grammatically, it is in the imperative mood; it is a command from God.
- b. Explore carefully the answer of your prospective spouse to this question. It is very easy for him or her to tell you anything you want to hear. Yet, as we see every day, people are doing that all the time without meaning what they are saying; many are being intentionally deceptive in order to achieve what they desire. This is especially true of those who have philosophies and who are in religions such as Islam with its Doctrine of Taqiyyah that teaches it is permissible to lie.

In Islam lying is done to anyone and in particular to an opponent and to non-Muslims to accomplish one's objective, so you can't trust that what they are saying is true. Someone who wants to marry you finds it easy to answer this question about believing in and following Jesus Christ, "Yeah, sure." But as God's Word says, the words only count when they are genuine, i.e., put into practice on a regular basis.

Pay careful attention to the anecdote in the following textbox. This account occurs too frequently, and—according to God's Word and his will—it should never take place among Christians.

One day a young woman came to my office and asked if I would officiate at her wedding. She was a member of our church, and I knew her, but I didn't know her fiancé, who did not come with her, so I asked her to tell me about him.

"Oh," she said, "he's such a wonderful man. He's tall, dark, handsome, a successful dentist, and he is so nice to me." She went on at some length describing the qualities of her fiancé, and then she said at the end, "Oh, I guess I should tell you that he's a Muslim."

I said, "Are you aware of how Muslim men treat their wives?" "Oh," she said with a sweep of her hand, "yes, but that's not true of him." I continued to listen carefully and empathetically, and I assured her I knew what it is like to be in love, and I affirmed that I still am after decades of marriage to my one and only wife.

But after all the appropriate empathy, I had to tell her that God called me to be a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, and to speak his Word truthfully and in love. I said that since he commands (not suggests) that we only marry fellow believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, I could not disobey him and mislead her into a marriage contrary to God's will. I then advised her to wait to witness to him for Christ and not to marry him unless he became a Christian.

Sadly, she found someone else to officiate at their wedding. The marriage only lasted two years; they divorced with two children. Providentially, she was able to keep the children and raise them in Christ; they weren't kidnapped and taken to a Muslim country and raised as Muslims which often occurs. Much pain and suffering as well as continued struggles as identified in Appendix B are avoided by obeying God's loving command to marry only one who is a believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1) Words are basic and necessary but issue forth in concomitant action that proves they are real. Both the Old Testament and New Testament words for word also mean deed (Hebrew דָּבָר [dāvār] and Greek λόγος [logos]). In God's Word true words always issue forth in related deeds. To say one thing and do the opposite would be a form of hypocrisy, which is condemned throughout the Bible. For example, see Jesus' strong words against hypocrisy in Matthew 23.
 - a) So what words do you need to hear? The essence of belief that saves, of a saving faith, has been summarized by the apostle Paul, in what I call the bottom line of the Christian faith, in Romans 10:9.
 - *"...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Note that in the Bible Jesus' being raised, resurrected, from the dead was proclaimed by over 500 eyewitnesses to be a physical resurrection. See also John 21:24-31 and 1 Corinthians 15.

- b) Another very familiar and essential part of saving faith is recorded in John 3:16.

➤ *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*
(John 3:16 (NASB))

- c) A Biblically accurate and historic summary of what Christians believe has been transmitted to us through the ages in the words of The Apostles' Creed.¹⁵ Can and does your prospective spouse agree to and recite the creed in worship with the rest of the church? The Nicene Creed is also a Biblically accurate and historic testimony of the church as to what Christians believe.¹⁶

2) Remember what Jesus said:

- ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.
²¹“Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
²²Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” ²³Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”
²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:20-24)

- 3) Read the other passages from God's Word that are listed in this section. A major motif or theme throughout all of God's Word that applies to this subject is that God commands his people to be separate from those who are unholy to him and to not unite with them in marriage.

¹⁵ Church historians believe that Jesus' apostles likely did not write The Apostles' Creed but that it was written early in the history of the Christian church, probably in the second century A.D., as a summary of the teachings of Jesus' apostles who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit wrote the New Testament.

¹⁶ The Nicene Creed was adopted by the first council of the church at Nicea in 325 A.D. It is the most widely accepted and used statement of faith among Christian congregations throughout the world. Since it addresses issues that have arisen since The Apostles' Creed was written, issues that still persist today, The Nicene Creed should be used predominantly and even always.

- c. If the answer to this question is no, that your prospective spouse is not a Christian, not a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ, talk with him or her about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, including the Scripture passages above (beginning with Romans 10:9 and John 3:16), and ask him or her to believe in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Lord. Explain that Savior refers to the forgiveness of his or her sins, Jesus being the only way to have eternal access to the presence of God (John 14:6), and Jesus' Lordship means demonstrating love for him by being willing to obey his commands. (John 14:21)
- 1) Be sure to not marry this person until he or she accepts Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord. Verify any statement of faith in the manner described above.
 - 2) As a believer in the Lord, called to be his witness (e.g., Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:15), view your relationship with this person, who is someone you are interested in as a possible marriage partner but who is not yet a Christian, as someone the Lord wants you to engage in conversation about Him. View this matter as an opportunity for you to witness for Christ Jesus while his or her receptivity for what you have to say is especially high. Speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), say to your special friend words such as, "If our relationship is going to progress toward marriage, you need to know that as a Christian, the Lord's will is that I only marry one who is a believer in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Can you make that commitment to Him and to me?"

If he or she says no, then ask if he or she would like to talk about the Lord and know more. If so, continue the dialogue. Read Christian literature together, especially the Bible. Ask him or her to read and discuss with you the Gospel according to John. Attend worship and a class at church together.

If he or she says no and is unwilling to consider faith in Christ, then obey the Lord for his sake, for your own sake, and for the sake of your family, friends, your future children, and the church, and keep looking for someone who will be faithful to Christ and therefore more likely to be faithful to you. This is an eternally important matter. Remember, this person is not the only person with whom you could have a successful marriage; in fact, since he or she is not a believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus, you would not have the marriage God and you would like you to have. Without the mutual commitment to Jesus Christ and his Word and will as your standard, you have no ultimate authority to appeal to in the conflicts every marriage encounters. By marrying a Christian, you have the blessing of God and all the resources you need to have a successful marriage.

- d. If your friend says yes to your question about whether he or she believes in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior, then do as above and trust but verify. Allow enough time to be sure his or her commitment to Christ is genuine, using those principles. To keep maturing in Christ, a lifelong process, engage in corporate and individual practices with your potential spouse. Corporately, together attend worship regularly, at least weekly, (Hebrews 10:25) and other church events. Individually and as a couple, read the Bible and pray each day.
- As we typically find, true science illustrates God's Word. Michigan State University Family Life Specialist, Gail Imig, states that religious compatibility is very important. "Divorce rates in inter-faith marriages are roughly three times the divorce rate in homes where husband and wife are of the same faith."¹⁷
- e. Spiritual development is on a continuum of maturity in Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)
- 1) The spiritual questions come first, because they are the most important...by far! If you are one in Christ, the other matters will either come together by logical progression, or you'll have the basis for successfully working through any conflict that should arise.
 - 2) A Christian spouse on the lower end of the maturity continuum will disappoint you much more than one who is maturing in Christ. Maturity in Christ—referred to in the Bible and in [historic Christian theology](#) as sanctification—is necessary for pleasing God and having the most fulfilling marriage. Believers in Christ, who ignore what is necessary to mature in Christ (e.g., reading the Bible and praying only to the triune God, individually and as husband and wife daily; worshiping God in a church home pleasing to him—i.e., one where the Bible is faithfully preached and taught, and the sacraments are faithfully administered—at least weekly; fellowshiping with other Christians in the special relationship that God's Word calls *κοινωνία* [*koinōnia*, fellowship, communion, close relationship] on a regular basis; and volunteering in and through the church in one or more of the many services the church provides in the name of Jesus Christ), those who don't do the above, remain stalemated in elementary stages of sanctification and fail to mature in Christlikeness. The result is people who unnecessarily and frequently function immaturely. Is that how you want your spouse to act toward you, toward others, and most importantly in God's sight?

¹⁷ Gail Imig, quoted in "Prayer helps in marriage," *The Grand Rapids Press*, August 24, 1970, p. 2-B.

- 3) Therefore, use a prospective spouse's present and past behaviors (track-record) as a guide to discerning his or her spiritual development.
2. What does your prospective spouse think of the Bible?
 - a. Does he or she consider it the Word of God and his or her highest authority, which he or she willingly obeys and regularly reads?
 - A track record of daily trying to obey and live according to God's Word will enable you to predict how much this person is likely to use the Bible in his or her life. *If he or she tries to live according to God's Word, your marriage, indeed your whole life here on earth and possibly forever, will be significantly different for the better from what it would be if he or she has little or no regard for it or only gives "lip service" to the Bible.*
 - b. Does he or she enjoy reading the Bible? How often does he or she read it? Daily?
 - 1) The word "enjoy" is very important. Affect reveals genuineness and an indication of how likely he or she will continue to read and do what the Bible says. For example, someone can say, "Yeah, sure, I like the Bible." But do you see a joy in him or her from reading it? And from trying to put it into practice?
 - 2) Affect, the feelings, emotions, and desire to approach rather than avoid a subject, is very significant because it indicates and involves the motivation to do something. Your marriage will be much more enjoyable and successful if you marry someone who has a track record of enjoying and engaging God's Word to the extent of making it a central part of his or her life.
 - a) For just one example, if your spouse is on the same page with you regarding his or her commitment to God's Word and doing his will, think how much more likely it is that you will work well through the conflicts that occur in life than if your spouse doesn't care what God thinks!
 - b) See further how the apostle Paul connects a confession of saving faith in Jesus Christ with affect, the heart.
 - "8But what does it ["the righteousness that is by faith" (v. 6)] say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For it is with your heart that

you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’” (Romans 10:8-11)

- c. Is he or she trying to put into practice in daily life what the Bible teaches? If so, you’ll be greatly blessed, e.g., in the times of conflict that occur in all marriages and other relationships as well.
- His or her lifestyle should parallel, i.e., be consistent with, the teachings of God’s Word. See Romans 10:9, 2 Corinthians 6:14, James 2:26.
 - “...if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)
 - “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)
 - Jesus said, “‘A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit... Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.’” (Matthew 7:18,20)
 - “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:26)
- d. Does he or she pray? Daily?

- Harvard professor Pitirim Sorokin observed that “one out of 2.5 marriages in the U. S. ends in divorce... Yet, where the husband and wife are Christians, and have a family altar where they read the Bible and pray together daily, only one out of 1,015 marriages in this country ends in divorce. Jesus Christ makes the difference.”¹⁸ The term, “family altar” refers to any place, e.g., at the dinner table after a meal, where a time is set aside for the family to read and discuss a

¹⁸ Quoted in “Jesus and the Intellectual,” by William R. Bright, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1968, p. 14. It is commonly said today that fifty percent of marriages fail, but a closer look shows that figure is misleading. First of all, as acknowledged for some time by the Marriage and Divorce Statistics Branch of the U. S. Public Health Service, that figure does not count the large number of marriages prior to the given year in which the reference is being made. Clifton Rogers, “Walk with the Master: Let us Reason Together—Beware of Statistics,” *Firm Foundation*, June 2, 1970, p. 340. It also lumps all marriages together, including all second marriages (70% of which fail) and all third marriages (90% of which fail), which percentages significantly skew the statistics. So people thinking of marrying have strong reasons, most of all in Christ Jesus, for doing so with the expectation of a successful marriage. The guidelines in this document will very helpful as well.

passage from the Bible and to pray together. These times also involve other related Christian activities, such as—but not limited to—singing a hymn or spiritual song together.

- e. Does he or she talk about Jesus, the church, and the Biblical implications of aspects of life without being prompted by you? That is, do these subjects emerge naturally in conversation?
3. Is your prospective spouse a member of a church congregation where the Bible is consistently held to and taught as the infallible and inerrant Word of God and our highest authority? Are the sermons and other teaching consistent with the Bible? Is he or she willing to be a faithful member of the same church congregation with you? What church congregation will that be?

According to careful social science research on marriage, “never going to church was associated with marital maladjustment, while going four or more times a month was associated with marital success,” according to Michigan State University family life specialist, Gail Imig. She added that a study involving husbands discloses that satisfaction in marriage is associated with regular church attendance.¹⁹ These findings are replicated in study after study.

- a. “Faithful member” implies some key factors that are highly correlated with and predictive of Godly behavior and a successful marriage.
 - 1) Faithful membership means *willingly attends* with neither prompting nor nagging needed by you, and it includes regular, preferably at least weekly, attendance in God’s worship. Ideally he or she will eagerly look forward to meeting God, who is most holy, gracious, and all-loving, with his people in weekly worship.
 - 2) Membership means he or she has been *officially accepted as one who belongs to the church and is in good standing on the church’s membership roll*. Some people think that just by attending they are members. Not so. A significant difference exists between church attendance and church membership. See the related essays in the section entitled “What is the church, and how is God using it? (Ecclesiology)” on the Christian [Theology](#) page of my general [website](#).
- b. Jesus said, “a house divided against itself will not stand.” (Matthew 12:25)
 - 1) It is crucial for spiritual maturity that the couple/family be part of the same congregation.

¹⁹ Gail Imig, quoted in “Prayer helps in marriage,” p. 2-B.

- 2) Throughout my ministry, in which I've worked with thousands of couples and families for well over half a century, when both the mother and the father were not part of the same congregation, I've never seen a spiritually strong family growing in and serving the Lord Jesus Christ as well as possible.
 - a) A situation where both parents are not members of the same congregation is very confusing to any children who come into the family, and it negatively affects their spiritual development. This reality is especially true when the husband is not a Christian and even when he is an immature Christian and a non-attender.
 - b) Further, a high correlation exists between spiritual maturity in Christ and family cohesion, harmony, and ability to overcome adversity.
 - c. Does he or she speak well of his or her congregation, having a positive feeling for the church (not being always critical of it or generally negative)?
4. What does your prospective spouse consider the Biblical teaching of the husband's role to be, and how does it compare to or contrast with your view? (Ephesians 5:21-33)
 - a. Do you both agree that the husband will assume leadership in helping the children grow in the understanding of the Bible and the faith at home and in having them attend church with him? Contrary to "politically correct opinion," Christian women, who are becoming "mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) want to see such leadership in their prospective husbands. (Ephesians 5:21-6:4)
 - b. What is the Biblical role of the wife, and how does it compare to or contrast with your view? (Ephesians 5:21-33)
5. Is your prospective spouse willing to attend an adult class or some other Bible study opportunity with you? Group Bible study is very valuable for spiritual growth. Many subjects vital to the Christian life, including marriage, cannot be undertaken in a sermon or even in a sermon series. Discussion is also vital and occurs most effectively in small groups. Be willing to attend groups with older couples who can share their wisdom.
 - a. Keep in mind that spiritual maturity is not only important but vital. In Biblical theology this maturation process is called sanctification, which is a life-long cooperation with the Holy Spirit whereby the believer in and follower of Christ Jesus matures in Christ-likeness. That maturity is nurtured by daily reading of God's Word, prayer, conversation on these subjects with

one's spouse-to-be, then spouse, and regular worship and fellowship with other church members. (Hebrews 10:25) The more you can facilitate your prospective spouse's maturity in Christ, the more enjoyable and fulfilling your marriage will be, and the higher the likelihood you will have of avoiding many problems and working through and overcoming the challenges of married life that do occur.

- b. As indicated above sanctification, maturing in Christ Jesus, is not only done in conjunction with the individual's walk with the Lord but in regular, at least weekly, connection with the body of Christ, the church, in relationship with other believers in and followers of Christ.
6. If any of the above questions cannot be answered "Yes," hold off on marriage until you talk about these vital matters together and until you can say "Yes" to these questions.

B. Personality Guidelines

- 1. Does your prospective spouse pressure you to do things against God's will and your will? For example, does he or she pressure you to have a sexual relationship outside of marriage? ***This is a serious red flag!*** (Exodus 20:14, 1 Corinthians 7:2, Ephesians 5:3-5) NEVER do anything someone else wants you to do with a threat of coercion, for such is not motivated by love for you. (1 Corinthians 13:5 RSV)
 - a. If he or she exerts this pressure on you, you can assume you are not the first. Remember, AIDS is only one of many serious sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and the number is growing. (Cf., "[Homosexuality/LGBTQ+: An Abbreviated Fact Sheet for Speaking the Truth in Love](#)")
 - b. The desire to have sex outside of marriage is often not limited to premarital liaisons. This person is likely to do so after the wedding also.
 - c. Living together before marriage, cohabitation, is contrary to God's will as taught in the Bible, e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9 and in all other passages referring to fornication. It is thus not surprising to find sound social science studies showing a high correlation between premarital cohabitation and early divorce.²⁰
 - d. Sometimes the pressure comes in such statements as, "If you love me, you'll..."
 - 1) Such a statement discloses selfishness **NOT** at all true love as God reveals

²⁰ See the Appendix for other very serious effects of cohabitation.

love in his Word. For example, in 1 Corinthians 13:5 (NRSV) Paul in his famous definition of love says, love “never insists on its own way.” Therefore, one good response to this statement is, “Wrong! If you love me, we won’t! And if you ever ask me to do this again prior to marriage, we’re done looking at a future together. Furthermore, if we do ever get serious about marriage, you need to be tested for STDs.” (The one saying this should also offer to do so if he or she is not a virgin.)

- 2) OBGYN specialist, Dr. Joe McIlheney explains. He has observed that the STD contagion is such that people who have “sex outside marriage with someone who has had sex before, will almost always get a sexually transmitted disease.”²¹ He shows how Person A who has sex outside a monogamous marital commitment has had sex in a very real sense not only with the most recent person (Person B) but with all other persons with whom Person B has had sex and so on in a ripple effect, since STDs are passed along to all in the sex act. The same is true for others with whom Person A has had sex (e.g., Person C and all his or her sexual contacts, as well as any Person D, E, F) and so on. The geometric progression is staggering which explains the STD epidemic that exists today. Dr. McIlheney clarified his statement to mean that this is true unless the person who has had sex before has received treatment for any STDs he or she has contracted that are curable; but be aware: some have no cure, and some don’t become manifest until decades later.
- 3) The seriousness of this epidemic is just partially disclosed with these health findings.

“Testing Positive: Sexually Transmitted Disease and the Public Health Response,” a report prepared by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, an independent nonprofit research organization, notes that women are hit hardest by STDs because they are more susceptible to infection and are less likely to experience symptoms than men. They are also more likely to suffer serious health consequences.

An estimated 1 million women contract pelvic infections each year as a result of undetected STDs, and many of these women become infertile as a result, the report said. About 15 to 30 percent of the 2.3 million American couples who are infertile may be unable to conceive as a result of STDs.

More than 4,500 women die annually from cervical cancer,

²¹ Dr. Joe McIlheney in a radio interview with Dr. James Dobson at Focus on the Family.

which is associated with several strains of human papillomavirus, a common sexually transmitted disease.

In addition, pregnant women infected with STDs can transmit the infections to their children during pregnancy or childbirth. This can result in miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death, premature delivery, low birth weight, chronic respiratory problems, blindness and mental retardation.

“Until the 1980s there were five well-known STDs, including syphilis and gonorrhea,” said Patricia Donovan, Alan Guttmacher Institute’s senior associate for law and public policy and author of the report.

“The CDC now says there are over 50 well-known diseases that are sexually transmitted, and some of them are increasing very rapidly.

Some of the diseases, such as syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia, are bacterial; if detected early, they can be treated and cured. Others, such as genital herpes, hepatitis B or HPV, are viral and incurable.

One of the fastest-growing sexually transmitted diseases is chlamydia, a bacterial infection that affects about 4 million people a year. Up to 75 percent of chlamydia infections in women and up to 25 percent of cases in men show no symptoms.²²

We read in God’s special revelation his will that we abstain from sex outside of marriage. We can see in these figures and in other findings in his general revelation, careful science, that confirms why in his love for us he has commanded that we abstain from sex outside the marital bond.²³

- e. Whenever you’re making a decision, ask yourself if you’re making the decision under any pressure from anybody (including your spouse-to-be, parent[s], society, peer group). Be honest, and if the answer is yes, postpone the decision until you’ve had time to think it through and see if it’s consistent

²² Mary Beth Franklin, “Ailing System: Dramatic rise in STDs strains family clinics,” *Chicago Tribune*, Section 6, April 11, 1993, pp. 1, 9.

²³ See for example <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/living/std.shtml> (Accessed 5/10/15)

with God's Word and will. If not, don't do it...ever! Then inform the other(s) as to why you are not going to do it and firmly in love tell them to never ask you to do so again.

2. Does your prospective spouse have a lot in common with you? Opposites attract only for a brief period of time, and in limited ways.
 - a. Initial fascination of differences soon wears off. (This is another reason to have a courtship of sufficient length.)
 - b. Are you similar in church orientation and theological tradition? If not, be sure to resolve all significant differences *before* marriage. Don't allow passion to trump theology and "sweep it under the rug." After the wedding, sooner or later, it will reemerge and problems can occur that are now harder to resolve. These differences should *not* result in one spouse going to one church and the other to another.
 - c. Are you similar enough in age so you have enough in common including memories?
 - d. Are you similar in educational background? This may or may not be a hurdle to overcome; to determine which, you need to talk with your potential spouse.

If one has had considerably less formal education, does this matter to either of you? If so, how important is it to you both? Unless it is a serious matter to one or both, it need not be a problem. There are many ways to learn, and a person growing up in a family where one or both parents have a college education, talk regularly about thoughtful matters, travel together as a family and individually, read widely, and live in a community and with a church where the people are highly educated, in those and in many other ways the person with only a high school diploma learns to think like and obtains an education comparable and sometimes superior to one with one or more college diplomas. I have known people with only a high school diploma, and some with only a GED, and no one else knew they only had a high school or equivalent degree, except for some they told; upon hearing that a common reply was, "I never would have known." Their learning in other ways enabled them to converse and interact with people who have college degrees.

In fact, educators in academe do admit but rarely publish what they call "the dirty little secret" in education. The secret is that formal education, though it can be useful in some ways, is not a predictor of success in life. As columnist George Will has written,

There is evidence, as abundant as it is depressing, that there are enormous differences between the seriousness of the

curriculums students study and the rigor with which their mastery of them is measured: “As employers have come to learn, many diplomas tell little or nothing about the holder’s readiness for work or for life.”²⁴

- e. Be extra careful if you’re different in many ways (i.e., truly opposite) and if any of those ways are considerably outside your comfort zone. For example, a skydiver may be an exciting person to get to know, but to live with for the rest of your life is another matter completely if security is especially important to you. Marriage has enough challenges in normal relationships; additional challenges need to be carefully considered to see if they can be accommodated without too much stress and other counterproductive effects.
 - 1) Nevertheless, each person is different, and therefore each couple is different; what would be unworkable with one couple may, with God’s help, be workable for another. Yet if these additional factors are present, take it to the Lord and ask for his wisdom, guidance, and direction, and take the time you need to make the decision without any pressure. You may please God with the skydiver; you won’t please him with a divorce.
 - 2) *Decide these matters early, before you become romantically involved.* Once an emotional attachment occurs, it is difficult to think as rationally as need be and to discontinue a relationship that should be ended. The tendency is rather to rationalize and to defend the choice to continue and to discount and ignore important differences that overtime threaten a relationship, especially a marriage.
 - 3) It is not fair to start down the road in a relationship leading to marriage, then spring on the sky diver that you want him or her to get another occupation, or, what more often occurs, to nag and harp on the factors you dislike about his or her work after the wedding.
3. Does your prospective spouse have a healthy self-concept? A Christian has a naturally built-in resource for a healthy sense of worth and dignity that strengthens and frees him or her to affirm and encourage others. Being a maturing Christian who takes the Bible seriously, he or she is rooted in the only certain source and basis of a healthy self-esteem that will last through all time and circumstances. A view of oneself as worthy based on his or her creation in God’s image and reborn and maturing in Christ can never be taken away from him or her by others. Indicators of such a strong sense of worth and dignity, or the lack thereof, include the following:

²⁴ George Will, “Purdue has the President American needs” <http://www.unionleader.com/George-Will-Purdue-has-the-President-America-needs-06162016> (Accessed 6/24/16)

- a. How well does he or she handle corrective feedback?
 - b. How often does he or she “build you up” (compliment you) privately and in front of others? Those with a weak sense of worth and dignity either can’t do this or don’t do it well enough.
 - c. Does he or she tend to “tear others down?” This behavior, too, indicates someone who lacks a healthy self-esteem.
 - d. Does he or she brag? This sad behavior reveals a person crying out for affirmation so much that he or she has little to offer others to help raise their sense of self-worth and dignity. This and the above negative behaviors are hard to live with for a whole lifetime.
4. Does your prospective spouse handle anger well? If you haven’t had any significant disagreements yet, I’m concerned about whether you know each other well enough. Since all humans are sinful (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23), you will not always be in a state of bliss. Don’t become engaged until you have had enough arguments to see how you can work through such common occurrences in life, including in marriage. Here is another way Christian marriages are most realistic and at the same time most hopeful since they are in Christ.

A minister friend said that when couples tell him they’ve been married 35 years (or some other large number) and they’ve never had a fight, “I tell them you’re either lying to me or you’ve never had any fun.” What did he mean by that? You know what he meant by the lying part. With the Biblical reality that all humans are sinful and fall short of the glory of God, they’ll have plenty of “fights” in just one year, let alone 35. But what did he mean by the part about having no fun? If it is true that they don’t fight, that means one person always gets his or her way and the other’s concerns are ignored or disregarded. Can you imagine being that person for 35 years? No fun!

- a. Your prospective spouse should not internalize anger but express it constructively, i.e.,
 - 1) communicating how he/she feels,
 - 2) and why he/she feels that way,
 - 3) admitting at the time that he/she owns the problem. (Does he or she ever ask for forgiveness?)

- 4) Does he or she recognize that the other(s) who are involved need to know how and why he/she feels as he/she does, so they can help resolve the difficulty, including owning any part of it for which he, she, or they are responsible?
- b. He or she should express anger in terms of acknowledging the personal threat involved but also indicating the need to share his or her frustration with the person or people who is or are perceived to be partially responsible.
 - 1) Anger is not to be valued (Ephesians 4:31; Galatians 5:20), but the Bible's realistic yet hope-filled message is that it can and must be controlled and managed. (Galatians 5:23) Thus, we do not identify with those who unrealistically say that people shouldn't become angry or that they'll have an unsuccessful marriage if they display anger.
 - 2) Rather, we read in God's Word that when anger occurs, it should be expressed without sinning.
 - a) "Be angry and not sin." (Ephesians 4:26) In a sinful world sinful human beings become angry, sometimes justifiably and sometimes not; in all cases do not sin. The verbs are two imperatives connected with the Greek word **καί** (*kai*), meaning "and." Thus, as the outstanding Biblical scholar, Richard Lenski, writes, "We are urged to be angry, *and* in the same breath are urged not to sin in such anger."²⁵
 - b) For example, don't break the relationship, and don't mistreat the other person(s) involved.
 - 3) He or she should express anger rationally. Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23), which is also a reason to look for spiritual maturity in Christ.
 - 4) Can he or she request and accept forgiveness?
 - 5) He or she should not use previous arguments, or the awareness of the other's weaknesses, to try to hurt the other or to gain advantage in current conflict situations.
 - 6) After having talked out the problem which has caused the anger, he or she should not carry a grudge, including giving "the silent treatment."

²⁵ Richard C. H. Lenski, *New Testament Commentary: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, p. 577, WORDSearch.

5. Does he or she consider whether others will be affected by decisions he or she makes, and, if so, take their viewpoints into account before acting?
6. Is your prospective spouse reliable?
 - a. Is he/she habitually punctual, an indication that he/she considers others in his/her decision-making? Does he or she apologize when arriving late and keeping you waiting?
 - b. Does he/she keep his/her word and follow through on promises? Does he/she honor commitments? Can you trust that when he/she says he or she will do something, you can rest assured it will be done? All these are indicators of the degree to which he/she values commitment and his/her word—indicators of the degree to which he/she is likely to honor and follow through on the marriage vows, including not seeking an unprovoked (or any) divorce from you.
7. Does your prospective spouse value marriage as a lifetime commitment?
 - a. What commitments, especially irrevocable commitments, has your prospective spouse made *and continues to keep*?
 - b. Has he/she indicated a desire for a prenuptial agreement? Ask “Why?” Also keep in mind that some churches have policies concerning prenuptial agreements. The concern for such a desire raises questions pertaining to the degree of commitment to and lack of trust in one’s relationship with God and with the prospective spouse and very possibly within him or herself.
 - Don't get married with the idea that if it “doesn't work out, we'll just get a divorce.” Love can be rekindled. Arranged marriages still exist in many places in the world.
8. Is he or she realistic?
 - a. It is normal for couples in love to become so absorbed in their affection for each other that idealism some- (even many) times overrides realism.
 - b. Work hard at testing your ideas.
 - c. Look for a potential spouse who has a good ability to deal with matters as they are, one who is
 - 1) not a Pollyanna
 - 2) or someone living in denial.

9. Is he or she well organized?
 - a. Does he or she set goals and accomplish them in spite of distractions? Does he or she become so absorbed in accomplishing a goal that he or she forgets to do other important things?
 - b. Your life will run smoother.
 - c. You'll accomplish more for the Lord and for yourselves.
10. How did your prospective spouse's parents view marriage?
 - a. What was their marriage like?
 - b. How many marriages did they have? (Children of divorce tend to divorce more easily than those whose parents have never divorced.)

C. Social/Relational Guidelines

1. Does he or she give as well as want to receive? (Is he/she a “giver” or a “taker” or both?)
2. Does he or she show concern for the feelings of others? (Not just you) When talking with others does he or she draw out others in discussion or prefer to talk only or mostly about him or herself?
3. Have you met and do you know your prospective spouse's friends?
 - a. Friends tend to be a lot alike.
 - 1) This is why the Bible teaches that we should always be careful who we allow to become our best friends, who sociologists refer to as our reference group. A reference group is comprised of those two or three usually no more than five people to whom we turn for advice, whose opinion we value, and who influence our decision-making and resultant actions. God says we'll be blessed if those best friends belong to him so that our thinking, decision-making, and actions will be in accord with his Word and his will and that we'll be glad we did. (Psalm 1; Proverbs 1)
 - 2) The Bible teaches that we should “not give up meeting together” (Hebrews 10:25), including after we become married.
 - a) Meeting together each week with fellow believers and the Lord, and nurturing our relationships with a reference group comprised of some

of them will keep us on track and help us and our spouse avoid the phenomenon of one partner (or ourselves) changing our values and leaving the right path. This will help us avoid what many couples have said, “He/she really changed the past several years, and we just grew apart....”

- b) Meeting at least weekly for worship with the body of Christ and in other settings with his people reinforces our values, commitments, decisions, and actions to be in accord with God’s Word and will, which means they will be best for everyone involved, including us, and most importantly glorify God in the high and holy calling he has given us to be his people, participating with him in his redemption of his creation!
- c) Even the wedding itself has a positive impact on the marriage relationship. Researchers have discovered that

the wedding itself also mattered. Couples who had a formal wedding and those who had more guests at their wedding reported happier and more stable marriages. The researchers attribute this finding to two factors: symbolic commitment and community support. A wedding symbolizes public commitment of a decision and may strengthen commitment to that choice. And having more friends and family who witness that commitment may likewise help increase that commitment.²⁶

The impact of the wedding is especially significant when it is done with and as part of the body of Christ, the church. When the vows are made in the presence of God who is most holy, and his people are witnesses to those vows and who will help in whatever way needed to support the couple making those vows to live their lives together in the marital bond according to God’s will, not only the couple is blessed, but their family, their friends, the church, the broader community, and the society are blessed as well.

- b. Consider carefully these wise words on friendship:

²⁶ Rachael Sheffield, “Want a Happy Marriage? Avoid These Three Behaviors,” http://dailysignal.com/2014/08/19/want-happy-marriage-avoid-three-behaviors/?utm_source=heritagefoundation&utm_medium=email&utm_term=headline&utm_content=140816&utm_campaign=saturday&mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRonvq%2FNZKXonjHpfsX56e8tXaGylMI%2F0ER3fOvrPUfGjI4ARcFqI%2BSLDwEYGJlv6SgFQrLBMaIozrgOWxU%3D (Accessed 08/23/14)

- 1) From a Spanish proverb on the effects the reference group: “Tell me with whom you walk, and I’ll tell you who you are.” A key and vital question that arises for us who are Christians is: Are these friends helping me, or hindering me, to follow and serve Jesus Christ in accord with his will as revealed in the Bible?
- 2) From God’s special revelation in his Word:
 - “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” (Psalm 1:1-6)
 - “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.” (Proverbs 1:8-10)
 - “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.” (Proverbs 22:23-24)
 - “A man of many companions may come to ruin....” (Proverbs 18:24; cf. Luke 6:26)
 - “...anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God...Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:4)
 - “‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend.” (James 2:23)
 - [Jesus said] “You are my friends if you do what I command.” (John 15:14)

c. From friends you can learn much about what a possible marriage partner...

- 1) values,
- 2) has done in the past, and
- 3) is likely to do in the future.
 - a) Remember: a basic principle of social science research is that people tend to be poor predictors of their future performance. (An example from the field of education: We don't include in surveys questions such as: "If such and so were offered as a course, would you take it?" The answer is invariably, "Yes," but don't order that many textbooks!)
 - b) So, while people tend to be poor predictors of their own future actions, past behavior (or "track record," as business executives speak), including the behavior of one's interaction with friends, tends to be much more accurate. The same is true in marriage. You can predict quite accurately how your future spouse will likely act by learning about his or her past performance, habits, and lifestyle.

An exception is if he or she has had a conversion experience in Christ that includes regret for and repentance of past deeds, and commitment to a significantly different lifestyle that is observable and maintained over time. Here is another reason to have courtship and engagement periods that are of sufficient length to satisfy you that the important behaviors you want to see are part of your intended spouse's internal motivations and lifestyle and not just words.

4. Am I receiving little or no encouragement from others who know and love me best to pursue this relationship into marriage?
5. What is the mentality of your counterpart in your prospective spouse's parents' marriage?
 - a. Look at how your intended's mother functions (if you're female) and how your intended's father functions (if you're male).
 - b. Then ask yourself if this is the way you want to be, for there is more than an even likelihood that your intended is going to have these expectations of you.
 - If you see something that you don't want to do that your counterpart does in his or her marriage, ask your boyfriend or girlfriend if he or she expects you to do this in your marriage? If so, then tell him or her that you don't want to do that in your marriage. What is his or her answer?

6. How do/did your prospective spouse's parents treat each other?

- a. If your intended's father beat up his mother, watch out!
- 1) One-half of all wives are beaten by their husbands sometime in their lives, and six percent of husbands are beaten. Beaters usually were beaten and saw beatings in their families as children. Strong evidence exists in the field of education as to the significant influence of modeling in teaching. The children of beaters have had a very inadequate, but influential, model of how husbands treat their wives or how wives treat their husbands. Many women have been severely beaten and even killed by their "lovers."

Those women have either never considered these vital questions or, if they did give one or more a moment's fleeting thought, quickly dismissed it or them as impossible...a tragic error. Please don't make this costly mistake! When well-meaning—but very misguided—people "advise" you to "just follow your heart," remember what we saw above, the light of God's revelation recorded in Jeremiah 17:9, and ask them, "Now, wait a minute: Are you really saying you want me to follow my heart, that organ the Prophet Jeremiah revealed as deceitful more than anything and beyond cure? Is that the heart you want me to follow?"

In this context, it is highly informative and valuable to note that the original Hebrew word which the Holy Spirit inspired Jeremiah to write, *אָנָשׁ* (*'ānash*), here translated as beyond cure, typically refers to conditions that are fatal. This is another reason to insist on marrying only a believer in Jesus Christ, whose heart and mind have been transformed in the new birth (regeneration) by the Holy Spirit; even then the new believer must mature in Christlikeness (sanctification). Notice again how realistic—most realistic—is God's infallible and inerrant Word! There is much more information to know about the relationship of head, heart, and behavior. See the discussion in [Essential Christianity: Historic Christian Systematic Theology—With a Focus on Its Very Practical Dimensions](#).

- 2) Boys and men: If your father beats up your mother, or even hits her in any way, that is not a behavior to be valued or to follow in trying to resolve your difficulties when you marry. It is not God's will that you behave this way. (See e.g., Galatians 5:19-23; Ephesians 4:26.)
- 3) Girls and women: Even when passions are fierce and hormones are kicking up a storm, hitting and other forms of abuse are counterproductive to obtaining the objectives you seek. It is not God's will that you behave this way. (See e.g., Galatians 5:19-23; Ephesians 4:26.)

- b. Did either one tend to “win” most of their disagreements, or was resolution more by consensus?
- 7. What do your parents think of this person you are considering as a prospective spouse?
 - a. Do they see any “red flags?”
 - b. What advice do they have?
 - c. If you don’t have parents, talk with a pastor.
 - d. Especially if you are young consider the following:
 - 1) Young adults are sometimes reluctant to ask their parents’ advice, thinking it’ll make them seem more independent if they ignore their parents’ advice.
 - 2) Actually the opposite is true. Your parents will see your asking for their opinions as a sign of wisdom and maturity, and they’ll respect you more for it.
 - 3) Listen to what older people who have a successful track record in Christ have to say. Don’t make the mistake young King Rheoboam did when he took the erroneous and unwise advice of his peers and in the process lost all but the tribe of Judah in his kingdom. (1 Kings 12:1-20)
 - 4) Also, asking for advice and asking for their blessing is different from asking permission.
 - 5) Always be careful in seeking advice apart from your parents or your pastor. Make sure the person is qualified and a mature Christian.
 - 6) Seek the blessing of both sets of parents.
 - a) Family is very important and becomes more important through the years.
 - b) Your family life will have much more joy if you nurture and keep a harmonious relationship with your extended family. For just one example of many: the Bible, social science research, and personal experience all testify to the importance of grandparents in the life of children.

- c) Do you agree on where you will spend the especially important family times: e.g., Thanksgiving and Christmas?
- 8. What does your prospective spouse want to do for entertainment?
 - a. Is his/her idea of fun wholesome and in accord with God's Word, the Bible? This is another important reason to read the Bible each day.
 - b. If his or her idea of fun is contrary to God's Word, keep in mind that immoral forms of entertainment are progressive; they only titillate for a time, then they have to be ratcheted up and become more extreme in order to titillate. This would especially be occurring after the wedding when the routine becomes established.
- 9. How does your intended relate to women and children?
 - a. For the bride-to-be:
 - 1) Does your husband-to-be speak about and treat other women—not just you—with respect? He will treat you well prior to marriage, because he wants to win you; glimpses of how he will treat you after the wedding are revealed in comments he makes about other women now.
 - 2) Does your intended indicate a love and desire for children and caring for them? What indicators have you observed?
 - 3) The highly credentialed 20th century cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead, wrote that “every known human society rests firmly on the learned nurturing behavior of men.” She added that “civilization ‘depends upon social inventions that will make each generation of males want to nurture women and children.’”²⁷
 - a) This reality is true also of marriage and the family. Are you seeing such a desire in your fiancé to be your and your children's nurturing protector, servant-leader, guardian, and caregiver? Is he receptive to advice and learning from successful Christian husbands and fathers?
 - b) Does your church home value Biblical male leadership and have a men's ministry that your husband to be would be willing to attend?

²⁷ *The Daily Citizen* excerpt from Jason L. Riley, “Socialism and the Decline of the Black Family,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2026. While Mead was wrong in many of her views (*op cit.*), she was right in this empirical observation.

- b. For the husband-to-be:
 - 1) How do you view and talk about the friends of your wife-to-be?
 - 2) Do you like children? What have you done with children to show yourself and others you like children? Do you want to be a father? What do you plan to do with your child(ren)? Have you told your wife-to-be your answer to these questions? What does she say? Does she like what you are thinking?
 - 3) To whom do you look for a model of what a Christ-like husband and father does? How willing are you to ask such a person for his wisdom on certain matters?
 - c. Do you agree with your prospective spouse on how many children to have, when to have them (in ways that are in accord with God's Word), and how to raise them?
 - d. Do you both agree to raise your children to believe in, love, and obey Jesus Christ? (Cf., e.g., John 14:21; Ephesians 6:4)
10. Is physical attractiveness (i.e., beauty or handsomeness) or athletic success very important to you?
- a. Keep in mind that physical attractiveness diminishes over time. Look for lasting beauty inside your prospective partner in marriage for the greatest satisfaction that will last as long as you both live. Remember these vital words from God's Word:
 - "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)
 - "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)
 - b. Thus, don't feel like you have to go for the most beautiful cheerleader or the best looking athlete, male or female. Be careful of one other concern in this matter: their statistics for failure in marriage are exceptionally high.

11. If your prospective spouse has been divorced, what went wrong with the previous marriage?

- a. First of all, do you have Biblical grounds for even considering marrying this person? (Matthew 19:9)
- b. What indicators do you have that the same problems will not occur if you marry this person? Careful social science research reveals that divorcees tend to marry the same type of person whom they divorced, which is one reason why statistically 70% of second marriages fail and 90% of third marriages fail. Be very careful, and take much time in considering marriage with a person who has been divorced, and only do so after counseling with a pastor or another counselor who holds the Bible to be the Word of God, infallible, inerrant, and his or her highest authority.
- c. Consider also that people who have come from a broken home are more inclined to divorce when problems occur than those whose parents have had an intact marriage, who work out their problems with a commitment to remaining married “until death they part.”
- d. Go slowly. Marriage on the rebound is unwise and typically unsuccessful bringing great additional pain as with all divorce.
- e. Consider also that 80% of divorces are initiated by the woman. If you are a man, how committed is your prospective bride to remaining married throughout your whole life together, no matter what problems arise? If both husband and wife are committed to remain married, most marriages can be saved. If you do so, when the end of life does come, you’ll be glad you maintained your commitment to each other. So will your children and grandchildren. And many others. Most importantly you will have honored and glorified God!
- f. A word about statistics. Be careful of what you read and hear about the high number of divorces. It is true that the incidents of divorce rose significantly during and after the 1960s. Even worse, the high divorce rate also occurred among even evangelical Christians, those who hold to the Bible as the Word of God, where we read that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and that it is His will that a husband and wife remain together throughout their lives (Matthew 19:6) “until,” as the ancient wedding liturgy puts it, “death do [they] part.” However, it is important to see this reality in the fullest and healthiest perspective.
 - 1) Some studies are poorly done, and even in some studies where statistical figures are close to accurate their interpretation is not always accurate.

- 2) The frequently asserted statistic that “50% of marriages fail” has never been sound and accurate.²⁸ In addition to other problems, the figure has been based on government data that lump together all marriages in a given year: first-time marriages together with couples who are wedding for the second, third, fourth, and more times. For reasons stated above, those marrying multiple times tend (some exceptions to the contrary notwithstanding) to skew the statistics to a higher rate of divorce than pertains to the population as a whole. Thus, “everybody’s not ‘doing it,’” even though some reports, often done with questionable motives, are written to make it seem that way.
- 3) When the data are carefully analyzed, we see that often overlooked variables significantly affect our understanding of what is occurring in the divorce statistics. For example, we find that when the bride is 25 or more years of age and has a college education, the divorce rate is much lower.²⁹
- 4) Most importantly remember that these studies research the whole population. When the data that pertain to Christians who are maturing in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:13) are examined, the divorce rate is significantly lower and much different from the society as a whole.
- 5) Thus, if you worry about the high number of divorces and think that maybe you shouldn’t marry in order to avoid the very significant pain of divorce, keep these observations in mind and marry committing yourselves to being faithful to the Lord and to each other with every confidence that thereby He will bless you greatly and enable you to overcome the challenges that occur whenever two sinners live under the same roof.
 - a) I offer a personal testimony as anecdotal evidence that such a marriage is not only possible but probable if you follow the principles in this document. I prayed fervently that my girlfriend, Carol, whom I loved greatly would marry me. God gave her to me, and me to her, and we had 48 ½ years together in a strong marriage before she died due to a serious illness. Far exceeding all my education and pastoral experience, my greatest human credential is Carol’s telling me and a friend of hers before she died that I was a good husband. Every day I thank God for her, for her being a wonderful wife in every way, and for her being a wonderful mother, grandmother, partner in life and

²⁸ John Hawkins, “Debunking 5 Phony Statistics Liberals Love to Toss Around,” <http://townhall.com/columnists/johnhawkins/2015/12/15/debunking-5-phony-statistics-liberals-love-to-toss-around-n2093733/page/full> (Accessed 12/15/15)

²⁹ Kalman Heller, “The Myth of the High Rate of Divorce,” <http://psychcentral.com/lib/the-myth-of-the-high-rate-of-divorce/> (Accessed 12/22/15)

ministry, and, solely humanly speaking, my one flesh counterpart (Genesis 2:18, 24; Matthew 19:6; Ephesians 5:31) in a strongly committed marital bond, and best friend in a whole different category from all other people.

- b) Be informed, but do not be misled and especially not paralyzed, by the statistics from trustworthy sources. Use them together with the other information herein to guide you in selecting your marriage partner.
- 6) Avoid cohabitation. Instead of helping it hurts, deeply and in lifelong negative effects. It overlooks psychological, biological, relational, and most importantly spiritual realities, the violation of which are devastating and harmful for one's current and future relationships, including being counterproductive to marriage. Commenting on the ill-informed and misguided thinking that cohabitation is supposedly some kind of "preparation for marriage," Barbara Defoe Whitehead, Ph.D., then co-director of the outstanding and highly-regarded Rutgers National Marriage Project, said, "cohabitation is not to marriage what spring training is to baseball."³⁰ For more on the dangers of cohabitation, see my essay, "Is Cohabitation an Option for God's People?" in Appendix A.
12. Do you feel comfortable communicating with your prospective spouse about any and all subjects? For example, can you ask him or her if he or she has had sex with anyone else?
- a. You don't have to probe for details. If you are both in Christ, the power of God can enable you to overcome the sins and other misdeeds of the past. However, the consequences of these sins and other misdeeds of the past can be devastating physically and negatively affect you as a couple in other ways if they are not addressed.
 - b. Before AIDS this conversation was elective...*now it is mandatory*. If your prospective spouse has had sex with another or others, he or she can be infected not only by the one(s) with whom he or she has had sex but by all others with whom the others have had sex in a geometrical progression. Be sure to insist on testing for the other more than 50 sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) some of which are latent, not showing up until many years later; some of which have no cure (one of which is HIV/AIDS, because the virus mutates so rapidly that when a cure is found for one form it has already mutated into another form even within the same person); and some of which can be life-threatening. Have this testing done for your sake before you consummate your marriage, and for his or her sake.

³⁰ Glenn T. Stanton, "Does Cohabitation Protect Against Divorce?" *CitizenLink*, March 21, 2003.

c. If the answer to the above question is yes:

- 1) How long ago did you have sex outside of marriage? If STDs are present, it is important that they be treated, but it is especially urgent that some be treated as soon as possible to prevent serious developments later in life. In a euphemistic attempt to downplay these diseases they are now called STIs (sexually transmitted infection), but this, like most euphemisms, is deceptive: they are still diseases and many are deadly.
- 2) With how many other persons? Be aware that if your prospective spouse has had sex with someone outside of marriage, and careful research indicates it has likely been more than one, an average of five, he or she has been affected and likely infected by the sexual relations that other person has had with others and all with whom they've been sexually active, even if condoms were used.
- 3) Are you willing to be tested? If he or she says no to testing, that may well be a deal breaker; it could have a serious negative effect on your health, indeed your very life.

13. Has your intended **ever** cohabited with someone outside of marriage?

- a. Living together before marriage is contrary to the teaching of the Bible, the Word of God, and highly correlated with early divorce, violence, and many other unpleasant outcomes. (1 Corinthians 7:2-7) See Appendix A and consider the implications; talk about them with your prospective spouse and about how you'll overcome these outcomes. Don't gloss over these impactful realities with the sweeping superficiality, "Love conquers all." Love (first for God and then for each other) is basic, but it needs a lot more to go with it.
- b. Since sex outside of marriage is contrary to God's will (the preceding passage from the Bible and many others, e.g., Ephesians 5:3-7), we are not surprised to see many negative and painful results from doing so, as social science research amply illustrates. See especially the updated version of Appendix A, which has been published as a separate paper, [Is Cohabitation an Option for God's People—Or for Anyone Else?](#)

14. Does your intended smoke? Are you aware of the scientific research on the effects of first-hand and second-hand smoke? Also a 1998 study at the University of Minnesota showed that smokers have more psychological problems, and smoking is correlated with divorce. Also keep in mind the dangers of second-hand smoke.

15. Does he or she gamble?

16. Does the person you are considering marrying use pornography? Has he (or she, usually the male) ever done so? Similarly, does he or she do “sexting?”

- a. If the answer to these questions is Yes, you should ask when and for how long. Especially if it was for any length of time and recently, obtain counseling from a pastor who holds to the Bible as God’s infallible Word and his or her highest authority.
- b. Since pornography is a very serious matter that is a manifestation of deeper underlying spiritual and psychological problems that threaten a marriage, put any plans for marriage on hold until successful counseling is concluded. If the pastor recommends professional counseling on a deeper level, be careful to ask him or her for a recommendation. Many psychologists and psychiatrists are not well qualified. The social science literature indicates that 80% of those who go into psychology do so to solve their own problems. I personally have known some excellent psychologists and psychiatrists, but I also know many who are incompetent and more mixed up than those they “counsel.” Prefer a psychologist or psychiatrist who is a Christian; your pastor can help you find one who is a believer in Christ and also competent and caring.

If you don’t have a pastor or a church home, ask a pastor who faithfully proclaims and teaches that the Bible is the trustworthy and infallible Word of God, is without error and focuses on the Lordship of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, that God is triune, and that Jesus is the only way to eternal salvation. (John 14:6) One of the Biblically accurate doctrinal standards the historic Christian church has developed over the centuries with which to discern authentic true churches is the Nicene Creed, the creed most widely used by the church all over the world.

D. Financial/Economic Guidelines

Here is one aspect of marriage where “the little piece of paper [read marriage license]” that many, especially young, people thoughtlessly disregard as unimportant, on the contrary proves to be vitally important. The assertion runs like this: “When two people love each other, there’s no need for a piece of paper.” This statement is one of those slogans that sounds nice (to some people whose passion overrides their intellect) but with a modicum of thought is seen to be at best ignorance and at worst deception.

Those who “buy into” (not with money of course) that line of thought are overlooking some very important aspects of reality, some of which are only apparent through God’s special revelation, the Bible. The first overlooked reality is that human nature is not essentially good but sinful and inclined to that which is evil. (Psalm 51:5; Romans

7:14-25; 3:23) People may think they're "on the same track" when they redefine and engage in a "make your own" marriage, but when they bump up against the complex realities of life, many of which are unpredictable and some harsh, and many others were just not contemplated due to lack of thought, then they find out that cohabitation offers no help at all on these matters, especially for the woman.

Another factor, such as what constitutes true love, is in many people's minds light-years away from how God defines it in his Word. For starters the real "true love" which God has in mind is not primarily about passion and is other-oriented and committed to caring for the total well-being of the other, even when the other is acting in unlovely ways; true love does not insist on its own way. (1 Corinthians 13:5 RSV) It thus takes into account the premature death of the male and makes provisions for the female that the state in which they've been living will recognize. This is only one of many such provisions which need to be made legally, which requires not only one "piece of paper," the basic one, the marriage license, but many other pieces of paper in order to provide for one you truly love. As palimony attorney Marvin Michelson has well written, "That 'piece of paper' can make an enormous difference."³¹ He adds

Cohabiting couples are an extremely impermanent group, with the average lifetime of such an arrangement being only about three years....

Agreements [preferably in writing] or a marriage license are methods of keeping the woman independent by guaranteeing her some kind of economic protection....

And so it is that the problems of living together usually begin with economics. And usually it's only when the live-in relationship breaks up that the couple discover how complicated the problems are. Too often, that's the first time they realize they should have had something in writing.³²

³¹ Marvin Mitchelson, "Living together: The 1st rule may be the hardest," *Chicago Tribune*, Section 12, June 14, 1981, p. 4.

³² Marvin Mitchelson, "Living together: The 1st rule may be the hardest," *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1. An important caveat: Mitchelson was a well-known divorce and palimony lawyer, who has insightfully disclosed relevant legal issues involved in marriage and cohabitation. Since these issues are related to justice, and since God tells us throughout the Bible that it is his will we be very concerned with, adhere to, and carefully practice justice matters, which are an aspect of love (e.g., Deuteronomy 16:20; Hosea 2:19; 12:6; Amos 5:15; Micah 6:8; Matthew 12:18; Luke 11:42), we find Mitchelson's description of the legal issues related to marriage and cohabitation important to know. However, if you read any more of what he has written, keep in mind that many of his recommendations for how to change the laws of our land are not in accord with God's Word. That is, when he is talking about what *is* (the law now), he offers some valuable insights; when he talks about what *ought* to be, he departs from the Bible. This is an important discernment to make when reading or listening to anyone. In fact, he did what most people do on this subject when appealing to make what *is* what *ought* to be and try to legitimize current cohabitation practices, though with some legal protections added on to what is; in so doing Mitchelson and these others commit the naturalistic fallacy in logic. Worse, what they offer alongside the institution of marriage that God established is a

Mitchelson says that there is “widespread pain and inequity” when cohabiting couples break up. He adds that when there is a statement of some kind in writing, it is a lot easier to convince a court of how an equitable distribution of the couple’s accumulated assets can be administered than if there is nothing in writing. Thus, here again we have empirical evidence that God’s way is by far the best way concerning the economical part of marriage as well as all the other aspects of marriage and the rest of life as well.

Marriage is upheld as normative by society and religion in every culture throughout the world. Living together outside of marriage is not looked upon in the same way. Contrary to couples who live together without the benefit of marriage, as Mitchelson was implying, spouses sharing the marital bond, have the legal right to inherit property, pensions and other retirement programs, including Social Security benefits applying to spouses (but not live-ins as many learn sadly), and spouses, but not live-ins, can legally make decisions about medical care if illness suddenly strikes leaving the other spouse incapable of making a decision.

Sociologists have found that even married couples who argue a lot about money are less likely to stay together than those who agree on how they will handle their finances. Now, during courtship, is the time to find out whether you agree on these important matters, not after you’ve stood before God and the witnesses to your vows and professed your commitment to him and to each other to remain wed “until death do you part.” Eighty-five percent of couples who divorce cite financial problems as the major issue of their fighting.

The following questions will help you discern the degree to which you and your prospective spouse are compatible in this important matter. If you find you have differences, they are not necessarily deal breakers. You’ve just brought to light some key issues you need to work through prior to marriage. Maybe you’ll need to talk with a trustworthy counselor to help you reach willing (never forced) consensus. As we saw in the first section, if you are both maturing in your relationship with Jesus Christ as your Savior and your Lord, you have what you need to work through this and all the other significant aspects of marriage, but it is essential that you make sure you are willing to come together on and work through each of these issues before you marry just in case one of you is unwilling to come to agreement.

1. Does the husband-to-be have a steady full-time job with which he is satisfied and which produces an income that will meet the needs and desires of both spouses?

Note: Some couples have agreed that the wife will be a fulltime homemaker from the beginning of their marriage. Some couples have agreed both will work for pay outside the home, with the wife working at least until they have children.

counterfeit “marriage” that harms rather than helps those who embrace it.

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And some couples have agreed to switch roles, with the wife working outside the home for pay, being the primary source of income, and the husband staying home to be the primary child-raiser and homemaker. This arrangement can work for some but only with a lot of thought, including taking into account several very important factors, including faithfulness to God and to each other, mutual agreement, and the essential male-female differences that have historically led the marriage partners to divide the workload according to those differences.

Key differences needing consideration include—but are not limited to—the husband’s natural characteristics, e.g., strength, assertiveness, ease of separating factual data and emotional aspects of work and other relationships, and the wife’s natural characteristics, e.g., procreation, nurture, and inclination to not isolate factual data and emotional aspects of relationships including those at work—that can produce significant and impactful stressors—which typically manifest themselves in physical, mental, and spiritual health matters. It’s not that each can’t do the work of the other, which sometimes has to occur even in a traditional marriage with, e.g., the disability or premature death of a spouse. The question is not that each can’t do the other’s role, but in the light of our God-given and uniquely valuable distinctive differences, how is it better for this particular couple to switch roles? God created Eve to be a helper fit for (עֵ֫נֶדְּךָ [kěnegdô, counterpart, corresponding opposite]), Adam. That wonderful female counterpart brings 6,500 genetic characteristics the male does not have. He has capabilities she does not have; but together they complement each other and bring to the marriage what the other lacks. What a perfect design God has created!³³

However, each also brings his and her values, hopes, desires, and needs. Pertaining to work, a very important part of life, they need to carefully discuss these questions that require both “being on the same page” in order to maximize the likelihood they will have a marriage that both view as good. Further, pertaining to the subject of work, what will be the long-term effects? If the decision is to switch roles, the couple should have regular reality checks to see how each is feeling and doing and whether either or both want to modify the arrangement.

³³ Concerning our God-given male-female distinctive differences, see [Leadership and Administration in the Church—Balancing Two Key Dimensions of Leadership: Initiation of Structure and Consideration](#). Pertaining to the 6,500 genetic differences between males and females, see [Transgenderism: Medical Doctor Explains Why Transgenderism Is a Mental Illness and Not a Civil Right](#).

Since in most marriages the husband has the responsibility in whole or in part for supplying his marriage and family with the financial resources they need, the following will proceed according to the historic and still normal practice.

- a. If the husband-to-be does not have a steady full-time job with which he is satisfied and which produces an income that will meet the needs and desires of both spouses, does he have specific plans, and is he actively engaged in pursuing those plans, for obtaining such a job?
 - b. What is his track record on employment?
 - 1) Has he had jobs previously?
 - 2) Does he commit to working with his employer, or does he practice “job hopping” and times of being out of work? Keep in mind there is a significant difference between looking to advance and “job hopping.”
 - 3) Does he function responsibly, e.g., listens, organizes well, seeks to help when needed, trustworthy, punctual, reliable, competent, relates well to his employer and others at work?
 - 4) When he decides to change jobs, does he maintain his current employment, not quitting until he has a new job and starting date?
 - c. If he has a job, is it one the wife-to-be can live with and accept? That is, does the job have any aspects to it that could become a detriment to their marriage, e.g., too much time at work, too much travel, spending too much time with certain people, requirements to engage in practices that are immoral and unbiblical?
 - d. If she has a job, ask the same questions of her as of him in 1.c.
2. If the female member in your marriage will work for pay outside your home, do you both agree, and, if so, how much will she work, for how long, and when? How does she feel about needing to work? New reports indicate that an increasing number of women want most to be what God has created a woman uniquely to be and do, functioning as a wife and mother, prioritizing the role of homemaker.
 - Optimally, one parent, preferably mom, should be home daily at least for the first 19 months of a child’s life, ideally through preschool years. Teens even enjoy—though they don’t always readily admit it—and benefit significantly from mom being home after school.

3. Does he or she have any indebtedness which will limit you in your marriage?
- a. Do you each know the financial condition of the other? One woman walked into a counselor's office to talk about her failed marriage and said she just couldn't figure out what went wrong; he always waved so much money around when they were dating that she just assumed (red flag!) that he was well off financially. Big mistake! Open all the books; no secrets when you're entering the one flesh marital bond in God's institution of marriage. Such surprises as what this woman experienced are unfair, immoral, and sinful, but both parties should not make unwarranted assumptions. In addition to prayer, one other safeguard: a sufficiently long courtship. Two years—and without coitus—is associated with the successful marriages, especially for those under 28 years old. (The two years are helpful but not as necessary for older people as well, but they too should abstain from sexual intercourse prior to marriage.)
 - b. Does your intended spouse have large debts, in addition to maintaining a mortgage? For example, does he or she have a large amount of unpaid balances on credit cards, student loans, thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars yet owed on unnecessarily expensive vehicles? These examples, of course, are illustrative, not exhaustive, and are only some of the most common. It is very important that you find out, list, and develop a plan to eliminate all that debt as soon as possible.
 - 1) Debt is a huge factor in limiting the growth of wealth. Debt restricts and retards the attainment of wealth. Follow the guidelines in Dave Ramsey's book, *The Total Money Makeover*. Use his website for further resources to become debt free and grow and use wealth most productively. The URL is <https://www.ramseysolutions.com>. Enroll in his Financial Peace University.
 - 2) Does either the prospective groom or bride have any reluctance to immediately—now, before the wedding—begin the needed steps to eliminate the debt? The debt does not have to be totally eliminated before the wedding, but both the husband-to-be and the wife-to-be must have no doubt at all that the other has a rock-solid commitment—with a constant observable willingness and actions being taken to carry out their mutually-agreed upon plan—to wipe out the debt. Delay any wedding plans until you both have such a certainty of the other's commitment to do so.
 - In fact, delay wedding plans if you see **any** reluctance in each other to **willingly already** be acting on what you both have agreed upon in any of these guidelines. Keep in mind that words are cheap and easy to say. Many people will tell you anything you want to hear in order to receive your agreement but won't actually do what they say once they have your

agreement. What you need to see is **behavior over time, evidence that the words represent real commitments that are being willingly lived out in corresponding behavior each and every day over time**, again: *track record*. (Cf., e.g., Matthew 7:15-28) **Such behavior builds trust, which is the essence and basis of any relationship, especially a marriage.** This need to observe words being put into action willingly over time is one of the main reasons for the traditional circa year-long engagement prior to marriage. You want to see the words now part of his or her lifestyle if not previously.

- c. Are his or her wages garnisheed? If so, ask why.
- 4. Do you have a budget and agree on how the money will be managed (e.g., who pays the bills, reconciles the bank statements, and files the income tax), on having wills and trusts (and what's in them) and on insurance matters, including term life insurance especially on the husband-to-be?
 - a. Do you agree on the type of budget you will use and that you'll adhere to it?
 - 1) There is not one right or wrong way to budget, though certain ways are much safer than others, but you as a couple must agree on the method you'll use.
 - 2) I know of a man who so closely adheres to the budget that he knows how many brushings he can obtain from every tube of toothpaste and how many shaves out of every can of shaving cream. His wife is much less constrained to be so precise. She just makes sure that expenses never exceed income and their agreed-upon budget items and that any credit cards are paid off each month, carrying no balance. Both are acceptable practices...IF each spouse agrees.
 - b. Do you both agree on whose money the money is? In some states by law each spouse owns 50% of the couple's total assets.
 - c. Do you both agree on how the family income will be spent? (I.e., who decides, e.g., does he or she have to account to the other for every dollar spent, or do just big amounts need to be cleared with his or her spouse? How big is big?)
 - d. Are you keeping any secrets from each other? If so, why? Full transparency and disclosure is crucial for a successful and fulfilling marriage. Pertaining to finances, for example, do either or both of you have separate bank accounts about which your spouse-to-be either does now know or access to which he or she cannot have? Why not? Doing so indicates likely lack of trust, which undermines a marriage and can destroy your God-given unique union.

5. Are you thinking of a December wedding? Be wary of being married in December. Check out how it will affect your taxes; you may wish to wait a month.
6. Do you intend to tithe your income to the Lord? The basic principle in God's Word is that his people should set aside 10% (it can be more!) of their income to give to the Lord as part of his worship in gratitude to him for all he has done, is doing, and will do for us in and through Christ Jesus. All we have is from the Lord (e.g., James 1:17). The tithe we return to the Lord is used by him through the work of the church, the body of Christ, to accomplish his worldwide work of redeeming and restoring his creation, which will become the new heaven and the new earth. (Revelation 21:1ff.)

My precious wife and I tithed throughout our whole life together until she died, and I still do it. We've had great joy in tithing; to see what God does with what we and others give in the name of Jesus Christ locally, nationally, and internationally is truly exciting! To participate in what God is doing in the world is a huge blessing! We were never sorry we gave that money (and more); and we have always had more than we need after giving those offerings, even earlier in our marriage when our income was quite small. God always provides. The 10% was and is always in the budget, and we never planned to use it for any other purpose; thus we never even missed it.

Of course some peers had more "things" than we did, but we always kept in mind that the most important part of life is pleasing God, a major theme throughout the Bible. The periodic recollection of that reality gave us, and still does, an unsurpassing joy that lasts forever! The things we buy we cannot take with us. The joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment of giving to produce resources the Lord will use in his redemptive work for his creation comes with us into and through eternity!

Does your prospective spouse agree to tithe?

Principle: "Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year." (Deuteronomy 14:22) *Application of Principle:* Be sure to set aside a tenth of your income to give back to the Lord for his redemptive work.

- "“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. ‘But you ask, “How do we rob you?”’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,’ says the LORD Almighty.” (Malachi 3:8-11)

- “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7; cf., 1 Corinthians 16:2)

CONCLUSION

- A. If these questions sound like too many and too specific to go to the trouble to answer, remember that these are the stumbling blocks over which many marriages have fallen. My experience in counselling couples for many decades, my study of careful social science research, and most of all my study of God’s Word, clearly convince me that one of the main causes of marital failure is selecting the wrong person to marry, and that if the couple had followed the principles in this document, they could have avoided enormous pain for themselves, their child(ren), and many others including God! (Ephesians 4:30) You wouldn’t buy a house without asking as many or more questions. Why not put forth this effort for a marriage which in God’s sight is infinitely more important than a house?!
- B. Use these guidelines as a frame of reference which will help to filter out the undesirable or less desirable prospective spouses you daily meet, some of whom may even be decent people but just not a good fit for you. Thus, gradually narrow the field to him or her with whom you will have the strongest likelihood of building a successful marriage as you walk together as one flesh in and through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Always remember: The information above and below is not to discourage but to inform and give you the surest foundation on which to build a successful and fulfilling marriage. Again, the most important factor by far is that you and your prospective spouse are both maturing in Christ Jesus. If you are, then you have the all-sufficient power and love of God who can overcome anything to help you. One of the ways he already helps is to enable you to be fully aware of all the realities involved, which is what these guidelines are able with God’s help to do. As you both mature in Christ you have a good future to look forward to with each other.

Appendices follow.

Appendix A
Is Cohabitation an Option for God's People?
Rev. Edward D. Seely, Ph.D.

NOTE: Additional information for this appendix is available in my paper, "[Is Cohabitation an Option for God's People—Or for Anyone Else?](#)" This paper is free and can be easily accessed on my safe and secure general website by clicking on the hyperlinked title; it is also available on my free, safe, and secure [academic website](#).

Cohabitation is being chosen over marriage by a large and rapidly growing number of people today, especially but not only by young adults. One reason they give is to avoid the pain of divorce, since most of them have been significantly impacted by their parents' discord and/or divorce.

That reason is by far the most often cited rationale people use for cohabiting instead of marrying. Other reasons they give for living with their "significant other" before getting married, e.g., convenience (9%) and saving rent (5%), don't even come close to the most cited but weakest value of testing compatibility (84%). According to careful research by the Barna Group, "By far, the reason cohabiting couples are shacking up is in order to test the waters before taking the plunge."³⁴

They think they that they'll try living together, but without the commitment of marriage (and especially without God's blessing), thinking errantly that they'll find out before marriage if such a relationship is "workable" for them. But unsurprisingly it does not work out well and as they expect, or at least hope. As will be seen below, the negative effects of cohabitation revealed in the strong social science studies now available led researcher Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Ph.D. to conclude, "cohabitation is not to marriage what spring training is to baseball."³⁵

Couples living together have increased over twelve times since 1960, and now over half of all entering a first marriage do so by first living together in contrast to virtually none 50 years ago. Between 1960 and 2,006 there occurred close to a 1,000% increase in the number of cohabiting couples living with children.³⁶

Even so, cohabitation is not being done by everyone. Popenoe and Whitehead clarify the demographics.

³⁴ Barna Group, "Majority of Americans Now Believe in Cohabitation," https://barna.org/research/family-kids/research-release/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation?utm_source=Barna+Update+List&utm_campaign=573151e2e6-Cohabitation_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8560a0e52e-573151e2e6-172028445&mc_cid=573151e2e6&mc_eid=5a38b91ac5#.V22wAjWAY8B (Accessed 6/24/16)

³⁵ Glenn T. Stanton, "Does Cohabitation Protect Against Divorce?" *CitizenLink*, March 21, 2003.

³⁶ David Popenoe "The Future of Marriage in America," a report on the massive and groundbreaking research project with Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/SOOU/TEXTSOOU2007.HTM> (Accessed 02/22/08)

Cohabitation in America—especially cohabitation as an alternative to marriage—is more common among Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and disadvantaged white women. It is also more common among those who are less religious than their peers, those who have been divorced, and those who have experienced parental divorce, fatherlessness, or high levels of marital discord during childhood.³⁷

The Bible is the most important guide on this subject, and many passages apply (e.g., Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5-6, Ephesians 5:3). Cohabitation is one form of fornication, part of the sexual immorality (Greek, *porneia*) of which Paul informs the Ephesian church there should not even be a hint among them and is improper for the people God has called to be holy.

Scientific data come in the form of statistics, including their analysis and application, and in the form of anecdotal findings. The former, when obtained from a carefully designed and carried out study by the head, the cognitive domain, are generalizable; the latter, while not generalizable are strong indicators of what is possible and in fact of what does occur. Anecdotes also have the ability to tap deeply into the affective domain, the heart, that motivates people's decisions and actions.

Following in the text box below is one example of what takes place in cohabitation as reported by a man who engaged in it and encountered its lack of fulfillment, satisfaction, security, and its destructive effects. He now is a Christian and has the strength and courage to speak the truth to help others avoid the pain he and those involved with him have undergone and, *sadly, continue to experience*.³⁸

³⁷ Popenoe and Whitehead, "Unmarried Cohabitation," <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/SOOU.htm>. 5/22/00.

³⁸ Michael Zadig, "Just like being married (or is it?)" *The Church Herald*, September 16, 1977, pp. 14-15. Reprinted from *HIS* magazine, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. 1977.

You'd think it would be ideal: all the sexual problems solved and a friend to talk to. But sex soon loses its mysterious, tantalizing glow and takes a back seat to the everyday getting along that two people must do to live together. But...[i]t was something else that undermined our relationship and will undermine every other relationship like it: We had made no commitment to each other.

I will never forget the night she turned to me and told me she loved me. It was a hopeful statement, almost a question, and she waited for my response. I opened my mouth, but I couldn't speak. I wanted to answer her but knew I would be going further than I intended. I said nothing, yet in my silence I had answered her, and she knew it.

We never spoke of it again, but after that evening our relationship drifted. We cared for each other...but we had no commitment and that night merely brought it out into the open.

Commitment is the issue. You can't say to someone, "I love you. Let's live together and see what happens." On those terms, either of you can split at a moment's notice. As a result you never really can be yourself or feel free to disagree without fear of losing the other person. You can never have the liberty to share your deepest feelings. You have to hold back. The relationship doesn't get a chance to grow because it is based on a conditional acceptance which is the cover for the self-gratification of two people indulging themselves in what they politely term a meaningful relationship.

Real commitment, on the other hand, says, "I am willing to spend my life with you to see you grow." "For better or for worse...."

Love may have some cold spots, and it alone will never be enough to hold two people together. It's commitment that carries them over difficult times. Commitment is what God intended between a man and a woman. That is why he set up marriage—to express a lifelong commitment.

God intends for all of us to enter into relationships as whole people. That's why he says we shouldn't play with sex or live together outside marriage. We inevitably tear away from the "one flesh" relationship and leave pieces of ourselves behind. In a very real sense we rob our future spouse...it is a psychological robbery that the lack of sexual virginity, male or female, signifies. You will never be able to retrieve that part of your affections carelessly squandered in the past. Sometime, you will have to look your partner in the eyes and say, "I'm sorry, but there's a part of me you will never be able to have."

Such an apology is very real. I had to do it. Even though God has forgiven me in Christ, the past still exists. I still remember, and memory can be devastating. There is a part of me that my wife will never have. Someone else has it. I know it. I feel it, even after six years. Often I'm aware of it in crowds. I see someone pass who reminds me of June [Michael's live-in first partner] and something within me jumps. There is a pull and a tug where a part of me should be. I can never own or share it again.

All this that Michael reports applies also to his first partner, June, and to her husband. How many people have irretrievably lost something precious as a result of cohabitation! Here we have one example of why God tells us to look not only to our own interests but to the interests of others, having the same attitude as Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:3-5) This and much other pain is what God in his love for us made possible to avoid by obeying his commands to shun all forms of sex outside of marriage. (E.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9) Remember this poignant story if the research data below are not persuasive enough.

A massive volume of empirical research documents what occurs when God's Word is obeyed and disobeyed. Consider just this sampling from careful scientific studies about cohabitation. Contrasted with married couples, study after study show those who live together instead of marrying report the following:

- **Less satisfaction and pleasure in their lives.** The National Institute for Healthcare Research reports that couples who marry after living together disclose less satisfaction in their marriage than married couples who did not live together prior to marriage.³⁹
- **Significantly less security in their relationship, which negatively affects their peace of mind,** since they've not committed to remain together permanently.
- **Sexual anxiety rather than sexual freedom.**

UCLA researchers Stuart Perlman and Paul Abrahamson report that the less permanent living arrangement of cohabitation is characterized more by sexual anxiety than sexual freedom. They found that the absence of an enduring commitment hinders sexual satisfaction.⁴⁰

- **Less healthy mentally and physically.**
 - A highly respected study conducted by the National Institutes of Health reports that women who cohabit had rates of depression more than five times higher than women who are married. Cohabiting couples are significantly more inclined to engage in alcohol and drug abuse, heavy smoking, and other behaviors counterproductive to their health. They're more than twice as likely to experience any form of mental illness than are people who are married. Analysis of the research literature suggests that "[m]uch of this depression could be linked to greater feelings of insecurity in cohabiting relationships."⁴¹
- **Much less well off financially.**

³⁹ "Recent studies on the family," *AFA Journal*, September 1998, p. 9.

⁴⁰ "Recent studies on the family," *AFA Journal*, September 1998, p. 9.

⁴¹ Glenn T. Stanton, "How Healthy are Cohabiting Relationships?" *CitizenLink*, March 20, 2003.

- Sociologists and other social scientists have discovered these two outcomes consistently for decades. For one, sociologist Melanie Heath writes in her book, *One Marriage Under God: The Campaign To Promote Marriage in America*, “‘Married people’—for whatever reason—‘are happier, healthier and better off financially.’”⁴²
- Careful social science studies strongly and consistently show that marriage, not cohabitation, is a wealth-building institution. Children are especially affected in negative ways financially. The National Marriage Project found that the poverty rate for children in cohabiting households is 31% contrasted with the poverty rate of six percent in married households.
- **Do not communicate as well.**
- **Higher levels of conflict and are almost twice as likely to breakup within 10 years, contrasted with all first marriages.** Two-fifths of cohabiters do not continue for more than a year; only a third last two years; only one in 10 remain together after five years; and the median is just 1.3 years. *Ironically, instead of avoiding the pain of divorce, when cohabiting couples split up, an emotional trauma comparable to that of divorce occurs, and psychological scars remain.*
- **Abuse one another more frequently and more violently than those who are married.**
 - The women are almost five times as likely to suffer severe violence, including rape. Canadian and U.S. studies reveal that women are nine times more likely to be killed by live-in partners than are married women. The National Crime Victimization Survey reported that 65% of all violent crimes committed against women by their “intimate partners” were perpetrated by either a boyfriend or an ex-husband contrasted with nine percent committed by husbands.⁴³
 - Michael McManus, author of *The Marriage Savers*, citing a study by the Justice Department, “Female Victims of Violent Crime,” states that a cohabiting woman is 56 times more likely than a wife to be assaulted. Analyzing the data, he reasons that men respect wives, not live-in lovers.⁴⁴
 - Children also suffer violence in cohabiting situations. The safest environment for a child is in a family with a mother and a father and where the family has always been intact. Child abuse is six times higher in the second safest family environment, a blended family where the child’s mother has remarried. Cohabitation is a major

⁴² Quoted in Cal Thomas, “Coolidge in 2016,” *Reporter-Herald*, November 12, 2014, p. 4A.

⁴³ Virginia Wing, “The Truth About Domestic violence in Marital Versus Cohabitational Relationships,” *CitizenLink*, July 8, 2004.

⁴⁴ Michael McManus, “How to avoid a bad marriage,” *AFA Journal*, July 1993, p. 21.

factor in child abuse. Child abuse is 33 times higher if a child is living with his or her mother who is cohabiting with a man.⁴⁵

- **Women who cohabit are significantly more likely to commit suicide than are married women.**⁴⁶
- **Cohabitors engage in much higher levels of unfaithfulness to their partner than do those who are married.** The women are eight times more likely to cheat on their partner, and the men are close to four times more likely to be unfaithful, than are men and women who are married. Those who cohabit are less likely to marry and much less faithful if marriage does occur. Infidelity is very likely to occur in marriages where a partner has cohabited.
 - A study by John D. Cunningham and John K. Antill of Macquarie University in Australia reports only 30% of cohabiting couples married, and of those who did, wives who had cohabited show less commitment to their present partner, and husbands who had cohabited prior to marriage were less likely to be employed full-time. The wives had less restrictive conditions on having sex with men other than their current husbands. The husbands were also more likely to have jobs with lower status. Cohabiting couples showed more orientation toward autonomy and less to attachment; they're more likely to be promiscuous. This orientation does not bode well for "being there for you" when the tough times come in the future, e.g., illness, disability, extended job loss, when there's no commitment "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself truly with all my heart."⁴⁷
 - A study published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* disclosed findings of sociologists at the University of California, Irvine, that

"[t]he odds of a recent infidelity...were more than twice as high for cohabitors than for married persons" ($p < 0.01$). Since cohabitors' predilection to betray their partners stands out even in statistical

⁴⁵ <http://www.circleofmoms.com/moms-against-child-abuse-and-sexual-pedophiles/child-abuse-statistics-197095> (Accessed 5/18/15) See also Laura Schlessinger, "Society is doomed: Rule by the morality of the lowest common denominator," *Chicago Tribune*, September 6, 1998, Section 13, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Steve Doughty, "Being unmarried 'makes a woman a higher suicide risk,' Daily Mail, February 29, 2008 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-522428/Being-unmarried-makes-woman-higher-suicide-risk.html>. (Accessed 5/10/15)

⁴⁷ These comforting and reassuring words the bride and groom historically have vowed to each other before God and the witnesses they've invited to their wedding, that meet one of the most important human needs, the need to love and to belong, are from the "Order of Service for the Solemnization of Marriage," *The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America together with The Psalter*, Geritt T. Vander Lugt, Editor (New York: The Board of Education, 1968), p. 122.

models which control for differences in personal values, the researchers reason that “cohabiters’ lower investments in their unions, not their less conventional values, accounted for their greater risk of infidelity....” [Further they found that] belated wedlock does not end the relatively common betrayals among such couples. The researchers’ data reveal that even after taking into account the nontraditional values generally linked to cohabitation, “living together before marriage raised the net odds of marital infidelity by 39% ($p < 0.05$).”

The Family in America reports that what these sociologists have found is that “what cohabitation best prepares couples to do is not to make wedding vows but rather to break them.”⁴⁸

- **Higher rates of marital separation and divorce, which foster a diminished view of marriage as an institution.**
 - Living together before marriage *increases* the likelihood the couple will divorce if they marry. Marital dissolution reaches a nearly 80 percent higher rate than among those who have not lived together before marriage, according to research conducted at Yale and Columbia University, which was published in the *American Sociological Review*.⁴⁹
 - Studies in the U.S., Canada, the Netherlands, and Sweden reveal that *cohabitation increases rather than decreases the risk of marital breakup*. To cite just one of many studies revealing this reality, a study of nearly 7,000 couples by two University of Wisconsin sociologists discovered that couples who cohabit prior to marriage are twice as likely to divorce within 10 years as those who did not live together prior to their wedding. One of the researchers, Larry Bumpass, who once held to the idea that cohabiting was a good method for discovering incompatibility before marriage, is now convinced that cohabitation directly contributes to divorce. He correctly reasons that the partners in cohabiting couples have less claim on each other.
 - The above data and other research, such as a study done at Pennsylvania State University by sociologists William G. Axinn and Jennifer S. Barber, show that just the opposite of attracting couples to marriage, cohabitation is correlated with an increasing hostility toward wedlock and child-rearing. *The Family in America* interprets the report as indicating that

⁴⁸ *The Family in America, New Research*, July 2000. Source: Judith Treas and Deirdre Giesen, “Sexual infidelity Among Married and Cohabiting Americans,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62 [2000]: 48-60.

⁴⁹ Glenn T. Stanton, “Does Cohabitation Protect Against Divorce?” *CitizenLink*, March 21, 2003.

[t]he power of cohabitation to harden young people against marriage and child-rearing stands out clearly. [The study's findings enable] the researchers to document the fact that "cohabitations significantly alter attitudes toward family formation in early adulthood."⁵⁰

We are not surprised by these data. When God commands us not to do something, he does so because he loves us and he knows the unpleasant and even devastating results we would experience if we were to do what he forbids. True science describes the results when his commands are disobeyed.

The church and the parents among its membership don't need any more incentive than this report for motivation to engage their young adults and others in their decision-making process on this subject. Parents and church leaders, professional and volunteer (e.g., elders and teachers) should do all they can to lovingly explain these truths from God's special revelation (in the Bible) and in his general revelation (in careful science). They should "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) and do all they can to help their young adults choose the Lord's way and prepare for marriage according to his commands and other teaching in his Word that will result in fulfillment, joy, and an abundant life (John 10:10 NASB) rather than choosing cohabitation, the way to disappointment, discouragement, and destruction.

We cannot remain silent. Remember that we do not live in a spiritually neutral milieu. We are engaged in a cosmic battle with the forces of evil whose purpose is to take glory away from God and lead his people astray; we must teach this reality. Otherwise people will be floundering around on the battlefield in the darkness and without any armor, and they won't be equipped with what they need to win this battle anywhere else.

- **Much less inclined to worship and to do so with any regularity, which leads to further problems.**
- **Poorer relationships with their parents and in-laws.**
- **Harm their children.** Voluminous studies show the life changing and severe effects on their children. The children of cohabiters, in contrast to their counterparts in intact family settings with a married mother and father, are:
 - Significantly more likely to exhibit problem behaviors at home and at school.
 - Less physically and mentally healthy.
 - Much more likely to live in poverty.
 - Exhibiting much lower academic performance.

⁵⁰ "Learning to Hate Family Living," *The Family in America, New Research*, April 1998.

- Much more likely to be physically and sexually abused and subjected to violence, especially when the children are from previous unions, as are the significant majority (63% according to one estimate). The *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* reports that children living with a caretaker other than their parents are at greater risk of being mistreated, and a study published in *Pediatrics* states that children living in a household with a non-parent are eight times more likely to die of maltreatment than children living with both parents. The National Marriage Project reports that the most unsafe of all family environments is such a cohabiting situation.⁵¹
- Tending to experience worse outcomes in their lives.
- Much more inclined to experience the life-long negative effects of divorce. The severely damaging effects of divorce are well documented.⁵² Three quarters of children of cohabiters will see their parent and partner break up prior to age 16, whereas only a third (and much less for those whose parents are mature Christians) of children living with their parents in an intact family household will see their parents divorce.⁵³

We must make this information known, beginning in our families, in our church congregations and denominational organizations, and in the broader social media, print and online. To take God's children into such households is unconscionable!

- **Other relational harms** in contrast with married spouses are reported.⁵⁴
 - More negative and less positive problem solving and support behaviors compared to spouses who have not cohabited.
 - Decrease in problem solving skills.
 - More individualistic attitudes and values that are counterproductive to healthy marital attitudes.

Gender differences should be considered carefully.

Marriage offers unparalleled blessings for both genders and special benefits for women.⁵⁵ Yet is not surprising that women and men view cohabitation differently. Indeed, the differences stem from core differences in the way men and women think about love and sex as well as other matters. Psychologist Meg Jay reports the following results of research on gender differences.

⁵¹ Glenn T. Stanton, "Cohabitation and Children," *CitizenLink*, April 14, 2003.

⁵² See Appendix B for a sample.

⁵³ Glenn T. Stanton, "Cohabitation and Children," *CitizenLink*, April 14, 2003

⁵⁴ Glenn T. Stanton, "Does Cohabitation Protect Against Divorce?" *CitizenLink*, March 21, 2003.

⁵⁵ See above in the main part of this paper, which is on the [Marriage](#) page of my general [website](#) and on my academic website at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>.

Women are more likely to view cohabitation as a step toward marriage, while men are more likely to see it as a way to test a relationship or postpone commitment, and this gender asymmetry is associated with negative interactions and lower levels of commitment even after the relationship progresses to marriage [which rarely occurs]. One thing men and women do agree on, however, is that their standards for a live-in partner are lower than they are for a spouse. [But that doesn't satisfy either. One of Meg's female clients told her that] "I felt like I was on this multiyear, never-ending audition to be his wife," she said.⁵⁶

An adage you may have heard somewhat oversimplifies, but contains an insightful observation concerning, differing gender perspectives on the issue before us. "Women give sex for love; men give love for sex." One of the fundamental problems herein however is an inadequate understanding by both genders of what constitutes real love. Most don't understand love in the way God presents it in his Word.

Countless men, consciously or unconsciously, buy into a male concept expressed in a crass and repulsive analogy, albeit which accurately discloses the way numerous men think, that is expressed this way: "Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?" Too many women are unaware of, or ignore to their lasting detriment, this mindset and let their heart overrule their head. When the woman gives a guy what he wants without tangible and life-long assurance of his commitment, she loses her most effective asset and leverage, and she loses what she most wants in this matter. His incentive and motivation to marry is significantly lessened.

That tangible and life-long assurance for believers in Christ includes a wedding in the church in accord with divine authority "before God and these witnesses...until death," as the historic liturgy states, witnesses who will testify to the bride's and groom's commitment to God and to each other and support and encourage them throughout their marriage. Many other tangible assurances are built into church weddings, including but not limited to, the vows each member of the couple makes to the other before God, our infinitely highest authority and the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), and the assembled witnesses including, as the liturgy specifies, to sacrificially love the other, "as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...to love...comfort...honor...and keep [to the other only], in sickness and in health, and forsaking every other, keep to [his wife or her husband], as long as they both shall live...to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto [I] pledge myself truly, with all [my] heart." Prayer for the couple, led by a faithful and righteous pastor, called by God and affirmed by the church, is offered with powerful effects (James 5:16). Rings that are exchanged are daily reminders of these commitments before God and his church. Can you see, as we saw above in the main part of this paper, why God requires that his people only marry a believer in and follower of our only Savior and Lord Jesus Christ?

⁵⁶ Meg Jay, "The Downside of Cohabiting Before Marriage," April 14, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/opinion/sunday/the-downside-of-cohabiting-before-marriage.html?_r=0. (Accessed 5/8/15)

Of course, the couple needs to always attend to and never neglect the above discussed historic means of maturing in Christ, in order to be receptive to and act on the Lord's blessing upon their life-long marriage.

For both Christian and secular couples, the tangible assurance also involves an authoritative wedding license issued by the state that has strong legal support and benefits. The cohabiting couple has no such tangible assurance; indeed, they have nothing of the sort at all, which especially harms the most vulnerable member of the couple. Thus, both genders lose in choosing to cohabit before marrying. But women lose more.

Marriage stabilizes society; cohabitation leads to societal instability.

Where marriages dwindle in number and in strength, society sees increases in crime, suicide, poor health, poverty, and academic failure. Yet Popenhoe and Whitehead and others see indicators of positive trends. Furthermore they reiterate the observations of social scientists, philosophers, historians, and many others when they write of the institution of marriage being the basis of a stable society.

Marriage is a fundamental social institution. It is central to the nurture and raising of children. It is the "social glue" that reliably attaches fathers to children. It contributes to the physical, emotional and economic health of men, women and children, and thus to the nation as a whole. It is also one of the most highly prized of all human relationships and a central life goal of most Americans.⁵⁷

Therefore, it is unwise to try to redefine marriage and to replace it with man-made alternatives that do not satisfy and that even harm the people engaging these counterfeit "marriages." As Rev. William H. Genne, former director of the Commission on Marriage and Family of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, wrote in response to the famed anthropologist Margaret Mead's attempt to redefine and propose an alternative to traditional marriage,

Rather than seek to legalize the immature relationship...Dr. Mead would do better to look at the preparation for marriage which we are offering our young people.... Let us help them understand and appreciate this gift of their Creator and let us help them mature into manhood and womanhood before offering them a counterfeit marriage.⁵⁸

Mead quotes another clergyman, William Phelps Thompson, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church. Thompson clarified the importance of grappling with the matter from within the realistic Biblical understanding.

⁵⁷ Popenhoe and Whitehead, <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/SOOU.htm>. 5/22/00

⁵⁸ Quoted in Margaret Mead, "A Continuing Dialogue on Marriage: Why Just 'Living Together' Won't Work," *Redbook Magazine*, April 1968, p. 48.

The Christian Church recognizes that in marriage and parenthood, as indeed in all of life, human performance will always fall short of the Christian ideal. The solution is not to abandon the ideal for something approximating human performance. Rather, with spiritual guidance, church members will strive more nearly to attain the ideal.⁵⁹

Thompson and Genne were responding to Mead, who, as Mitchelson and many others, was committing the naturalistic fallacy and trying to reason from *is* to *ought*, thinking that since so many are cohabiting, we ought to legitimize it. Of course that is a logical fallacy, and it fails to take into account many other vital factors, starting with God and his revealed will in the Bible. Since God's commands are always in accord with his holiness and the holiness he requires of those who would be his people, they are also in human beings' best interest.

Those whose interests are best protected by marriage are women. The most thoughtful and careful of them "get it." Women, who see sex as a much more profound and complex experience than men, wrote the following to Mead:

A young engaged girl wrote: "Some people fall in and out of love every few months. I know this because my girl friends do, and it makes me sick to hear them and everyone else call it love, because it isn't. If love doesn't last forever, then it isn't love...."

...a writer from Westbury, New York, commented: "Sex is not a shoe to be tried on, and if it does not fit, try another."

A very young wife...wrote: Life was never meant to be easy here on earth and there is no easy way to make a marriage work. But with love and God's grace we *can* make our marriages work....⁶⁰

In the light of these data from careful social science studies, one cannot find any support for the idea that cohabitation will help couples accomplish their objectives and avoid the pain they are trying to escape. Rather, the contrary is true; the very experiences they're trying to avoid when rejecting marriage are exactly what they encounter by choosing to cohabit.

Glenn Stanton quotes researchers Alan Booth and David Johnson regarding their conclusion as to the basic premise of cohabiters. "On the basis of the analysis provided so far, we must reject that argument that cohabitation provides superior training for marriage or improves mate-selection."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Quoted in Margaret Mead, "A Continuing Dialogue on Marriage: Why Just 'Living Together' Won't Work," p. 48.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Margaret Mead, "A Continuing Dialogue on Marriage: Why Just 'Living Together' Won't Work," p. 46.

⁶¹ Glenn T. Stanton, "Does Cohabitation Protect Against Divorce?" *CitizenLink*, March 21, 2003. Quotation from Alan Booth and David Johnson, "Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Success," *Journal of Family Issues* 9 (1988):

What can the church do?

The church with its mission to proclaim the Word of God has the most trustworthy message on the subject of marriage and its counterfeit, cohabitation. The scientific literature and my experience confirm that young adults long to hear a strong message affirming the Biblical teaching and the related science and have the opportunity to discuss these matters. This is especially true for the women, who have the most to lose and who enter cohabiting relationships with contrasting expectations from those of the men. In classes I've taught on marriage the students' attention is riveted when we discuss these facts, and they're astonished but express relief, joy, and hope for themselves when I tell them I was married to the same woman for 48½ years until she died. They're unaware of the many such marriages today.

The church has not only a great opportunity, but a profound moral obligation, to teach God's will concerning marriage and to contrast it with the "marriage" counterfeit, cohabitation. We need to teach these truths from God's Word, and their benefits, to all generations, and we need to begin with children in the family⁶² and in church education programs, before they become teenagers⁶³ and involved in romantic relationships, for careful and disturbing research informs us that a majority of people in the United States today believe in cohabitation (65%). More than half (57%) of all adults have lived with a girl or boyfriend. A very sad statistic shows that of that 57% of adults who have cohabited outside of marriage, 59% of those are practicing church members. The Barna Group defines "practicing church members" as "those who attend a religious service at least once a month, who say their faith is very important in their lives and self-identify as a Christian."⁶⁴ The Barna report did offer some encouraging findings pertaining to young adults in the Millennial generation (defined as those born between 1984—2000). Of the 57% of adults who are currently or have previously cohabited, 47% of Millennials are among those groups who are less likely than average to cohabit.

Clearly, we are confronting a cultural phenomenon that is growing and involves all age groups. Barna reports that "Even a growing number of parents—nearly half of Gen-Xers and Boomers, and more than half of Millennials—want and expect their children to live with a significant other before getting married."⁶⁵ We need to address this matter with all generations, including

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⁶² See, e.g., Deuteronomy 4:9 (which includes parents and grandparents); 6:4-7; Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-4:5.

⁶³ Of course, parents, grandparents, and church education programs should continue to do so throughout the teenage years and in adult education as well, but such instruction needs to begin with children in age-appropriate ways.

⁶⁴ All the statistics and the quote in this paragraph are from the research report, "Majority of Americans Now Believe in Cohabitation," Barna Group, https://barna.org/research/family-kids/research-release/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation?utm_source=Barna+Update+List&utm_campaign=573151e2e6-Cohabitation_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8560a0e52e-573151e2e6-172028445&mc_cid=573151e2e6&mc_eid=5a38b91ac5#.V22wAjWAY8B (Accessed 6/24/16)

⁶⁵ "Majority of Americans Now Believe in Cohabitation," Barna Group, https://barna.org/research/family-kids/research-release/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation?utm_source=Barna+Update+List&utm_campaign=573151e2e6-Cohabitation_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8560a0e52e-573151e2e6-172028445&mc_cid=573151e2e6&mc_eid=5a38b91ac5#.V22wAjWAY8B

grandparents, in the church and use all instructional means available, including sermons.

We must begin by informing the church where this counterproductive idea comes from, where all ideas, read lies, that oppose God's will and harm his people come from; as Jesus explained they come from the father of lies, the devil himself. (John 8:44) The church needs to do this informing at home in the family and in the congregation from the pulpit, in the classroom, in youth ministry, in small groups, in seminars, in forums, and in special programs. A premarriage education program that includes employing and explaining an established premarital inventory such as the one above in the main part of this paper, and others such as "Prepare," should be implemented. Where done, these programs have prevented many divorces and strengthened the subsequent marriages. One church reports that half who take the course decide not to marry, but of those who do marry, the divorce rate is below 10%!⁶⁶ So as you and your prospective spouse contemplate marriage don't fail to enroll in such a course that your pastor recommends.

The course should include a mentoring program that matches a couple with a mature husband and wife who've been successfully married many years. Consistent with the Biblical teaching about encouraging one another, the Greek word for which also involves admonition, and the caring of the church that also involves accountability (2 Timothy 3:16), such a program involves the young couple keeping in touch with the older couple. Such love and caring are able to produce the following exchange, reported by Michael McManus.

couples taking [the course] must sign an agreement with tough demands: They will finish the eight-session, four-month course, even if the relationship breaks, they will not discuss engagement, will be mutually exclusive in dating, will limit time together, and will not be sexually active. In fact, if they go beyond French kissing, they must agree to call the instructor!

My wife Harriet and I, who mentored two couples, got such a phone call one Saturday. "We went further than we should have last night," said the young man. "We are disappointed with ourselves, but we feel good about calling. It is good that the church has someone to hold us accountable."⁶⁷

Why did the young man say that? Was he serious? Yes, because he and his special girl realize *the church cares about them and their physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual health!* From what they've learned in this course they're eyes are open; they know what they're up against, but they have the all-sufficient help of God, directly in their lives and indirectly through the body of Christ, the church.

McManus adds,

[172028445&mc_cid=573151e2e6&mc_cid=5a38b91ac5#.V22wAjWAY8B](#) (Accessed 6/24/16)

⁶⁶ Michael McManus, "How to avoid a bad marriage," *AFA Journal*, July 1993, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Michael McManus, "How to avoid a bad marriage," *AFA Journal*, July 1993, p. 21.

Every church should train mentor couples to help. A young woman we mentored said, “It was invaluable to have Harriet involved. I needed to have my view and perspective validated by another woman that I respected.” Her fiancé added: “Any church will have a lot of happy, well-grounded couples who are the best resource of a church to save marriages.”⁶⁸

We need to teach and heavily emphasize the positive values of God’s plan for marriage and not just list all the overwhelming, though rarely disclosed, negative results of cohabitation. Certainly people, most of whom are unaware of the negatives, need to be informed of these stark realities. But what is most important is to explain God’s plan (marriage is his idea and will) and why it is most fulfilling and beneficial to the couple, to their family, to the church, and to society.

As parents, grandparents, teachers and pastors we need to explain these realities in ongoing dialogues well before young people engage in romantic relationships. As David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead wrote in their report for The National Marriage Project at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey,⁶⁹ “it is especially important for [young adults] to know what contributes to marital success and what may threaten it. Yet many young people do not know the basic facts about cohabitation and its risks. Nor are parents, teachers, clergy and others who instruct the young in matters of sex, love and marriage well acquainted with the social science evidence.” In a recent update they conclude that **“no positive contribution of cohabitation to marriage has ever been found.”** [Emphasis mine]

Of course that result is to be expected. When God tells us not to do something, it is for our own good. Therefore, we would expect to see empirical observation of the benefits of following God’s law, and we do see that in a vast amount of research that has been carefully done according to the established scientific method. In their report Popenoe and Whitehead write the following.

The belief that living together before marriage is a useful way “to find out whether you really get along,” and thus a way to avoid a bad marriage and an eventual divorce, is now widespread among young people. But the available data on the effects of cohabitation contradict this belief. There is no evidence that those who decide to cohabit before marriage will have a stronger marriage than those who don’t live together, and some evidence to suggest that those who live together before marriage are more likely to break up after marriage.⁷⁰

The church needs to teach these truths from God’s special and general revelation. Our children, young adults, their parents, and all others won’t hear it from anywhere else. The church is the repository of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and of all other good news, including the Biblical truths regarding marriage, divorce, and cohabitation. We must inform our children,

⁶⁸ Michael McManus, “How to avoid a bad marriage,” p. 21.

⁶⁹ The National Marriage Project is now at the University of Virginia.

⁷⁰ Popenhoe and Whitehead, <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/SOOU.htm>. 5/22/00

young people, and adults that the high rates of divorce, are unwarranted reasons for considering cohabitation. In fact, anything against God's Word should not even be considered.

Pertaining to divorce statistics, we need to help children, young people, and adults to look more carefully and with discernment, to analyze the causes and related factors in order to understand them. These statistics are not at all determinative, especially for God's people. Evangelist Billy Graham cited these significant statistics contrary to those of the general population and even some Christians who are divorcing: Where couples simply go to church together, the divorce rate is one out of forty; where couples go to church together, read the Bible and pray together, the divorce rate is one in four hundred!

Expose the unseen but very real cause of the problem.

As mentioned above and must be emphasized again and again: we cannot remain silent. Constantly keep in mind that we do not live in a spiritually neutral milieu. Jesus said, "Watch!" (Matthew 24:4, 5) We are engaged in a cosmic battle with the forces of evil, and we must teach this reality. (Ephesians 6:10-18; Revelation 12-20) Otherwise people will be floundering around on the battlefield in the darkness and without any armor, and they won't be equipped with what they need to win this battle anywhere else. Many are clueless. How can anyone send someone he or she loves out to any battlefield without protection?!

The big problem with the forces of evil and their false prophets is that they present themselves and their counterfeit alternatives as attractive. "Here's what you need!" they sing out. "This'll help you avoid pain and find ecstasy!" "Have all the sex you want! When you get tired of one, go for another." But if they haven't been warned, the couple falls into the trap, and it's only then that they realize reality is just the opposite, as God's general and special revelation both disclose.

The church today needs to do what the apostle Paul did.

➤ ¹²"And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about.

¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.

¹⁴And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." (2 Corinthians 11:12-15)

We thus know where the evil comes from. As William Hendricksen explains in his excellent commentary on the Book of Revelation, *More than Conquerors*, there is a great turning point in the Apocalypse at chapter 12. The first eleven chapters have depicted the enormous evils in the world; then beginning with chapter 12 the Holy Spirit discloses through the apostle John what lies behind all the evil. The Spirit gives us "eyes to see" and the calling to proclaim what we see.

As a physician does with a disease, we have to address the source not just the symptom. Blood in urine has to be traced back to the source of the flow, and a cancerous lesion is discovered,

which must be removed for restoration of health. As important as this is to do in the physical realm, it is infinitely more important in the spiritual realm. Where is all this abortion, adultery, murder, substance abuse and addiction, same-sex “marriage,” and cohabitation coming from? Pertaining to the subject before us, cohabitation is the cancer; the painful infidelity, violence, dissolution of relationships, and other manifestations of cohabitation are the symptoms, serious in themselves, but to be effectively addressed the cause must be identified and removed.

Concurrently in this case, the unseen spiritual malady, due to Satan and his demonic followers with their attacks (the oppression, hammering away at God’s people, influencing and drawing uninformed, undiscerning, unprepared, and receptive people away from God and his Word and will) is the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. It is only when we’re informed as to what is going on and maturing in our relationship with Jesus Christ, that we can see the light, come to our senses, grasp the required resources, and engage the battle; with Christ’s omnipotent power (Ephesians 1:18-23) we win! Ignoring Christ, and the spiritual warfare all around us, we lose—badly! It’s like wandering into a battle zone with a ball, a glove, a bat and some others, blissfully expecting to play a game of baseball, unaware that there are missiles heading toward us.

With patient love we need to engage church young adults and others who are unaware of what is going on (the eyes of their hearts need opening [Ephesians 1:18]), so they can see what is leading them astray. When they can be informed, with much prayer, about their identity in Christ and that they belong to him and are called by him to be holy to him for the greatest mission in life and eternity—to be in the service of God, the Owner of the universe—then a much more powerful incentive to do what is right in God’s sight can emerge.

To employ another analogy, one Jesus used, we cannot allow the Good Shepherd’s precious sheep to wander outside the zone of safety without being connected to the vigilant oversight of the Shepherd and his undershepherd, and where they’ll be vulnerable to the wolves in sheep’s clothing. (Matthew 7:15 ff.) And this is the commission Jesus gave us, to care for his sheep! (John 21:15-17) Those of us who are undershepherds, pastors, teachers, and elders, will answer to him as to how well we did caring for his sheep, including pursuing the one(s) having gone astray. (Matthew 18:12; James 3:1)

Moreover, we must always keep in mind that the institution of marriage is not man’s idea; it is God’s. As God’s people we must remember who we are and our calling from God to be holy to him. Since he is the sovereign and omnipotent owner and ruler of the universe, we always have hope and his all-sufficient help, especially as we trust and obey him. We must honor him.

Steve Watters explains how to honor God to a parent whose son has decided to move in with his girlfriend.

If your son and his girlfriend want to honor God, they shouldn’t move in together.
Of course this probably won’t be what they want to hear, and it might seem impractical, but God will honor you for telling them the truth and honor them if

they do what's right.⁷¹

Parents and church leaders should not always assume the couple will fight you if you speak up, as the church has been told to do (e.g., 2 Timothy 3:16), especially if they are true believers in and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may just be doing it because “everybody else is doing it” (which, of course is neither true nor a logical reason to do so), and sometimes the couple, especially the woman, is silently, secretly, hoping that someone or something will intervene to help them change course. This is especially true if a solid explanation from God's Word is given.

For one example, I spoke with an older couple who even had their wedding date planned, and the man told me that he was moving into his fiancé's house to save money on rent until the wedding day, which was about three months away. He assured me that they wouldn't be sleeping together, no sex at all before their wedding, and that he would be sleeping on a couch on her porch, not even in the main part of the house. Of course I know that people don't always tell the truth about such matters, but having known this man for a number of years I believed him, but I said that their neighbors wouldn't see it that way. Moreover, knowing he and his fiancé are Christians, they would be sending the wrong message to their neighbors. I reminded him of such passages from God's Word as 1 Timothy 5:7, “be above reproach,” so your witness for Christ Jesus is neither mitigated nor impugned. He agreed and found another place to live out of his love for the Lord.

Furthermore, God has given us stewardship responsibilities in his work to which he has called us to participate with him in his redemptive purposes. In the light of the above empirical research showing what people experience who cohabit, how can anyone who loves someone who is considering cohabitation ignore or affirm much less encourage that loved one to proceed in such a relationship? We must inform people, model holy living according to God's will, and pray in order to preserve the well-being of our families, churches, and society.

⁷¹ Steve Watters, “From Steve Watters Q and A,” Focus on the Family, March 2008, p. 15. Acquaint them with or remind them of John 15:8, “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (NIV) Of course the bearing much fruit involves obeying God's will.

Appendix B
Is Divorce Harmful to Children?
Rev. Edward D. Seely, Ph.D.

NOTE: Additional information for this appendix is available in my paper, "[Is Divorce Harmful to Children?](#)" This paper also is free and can be easily accessed on my safe and secure general website by clicking on the hyperlinked title; it is also available on my free, safe, and secure [academic website](#).

I've had many people come to my office to seek help in various stages of problems in their marriage. As with most ministers, too many of these couples have come in after they've decided to end their marriage and only wanted our blessing on that decision.⁷² Before they leave it is very important to ask them a two-fold question. It's one of last things they *want* to hear but one of the first things they *need* to hear.

After all the appropriate listening and empathizing with their painful experiences, at an opportune time in the discussion, it's essential to talk about God's will in their lives and in this matter, in particular as he says in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce...." Then ask the first part of the question, "Why do you want to do something God hates?" Allow some time for the person or couple to think before saying anything, then ask, "Have you considered how your decision is going to affect your children?"

"Oh, yeah," they typically say. "I've thought about it, and it won't be that big of a deal for them. They're resilient; they'll get over it fast."

Really? Says who?

Many if not most people who have marriage problems talk with and seek the advice of others who have marriage problems themselves. They also talk with people who are already divorced and who are trying to justify their decision, rather than seeking the wisdom, advice, and help of those who have a strong marriage and from whom they could learn how to overcome the challenges in married living, which all people have.⁷³

⁷² When people have a problem in their marriage, they should make an appointment to talk with their pastor right away; don't wait. There is no shame in asking for help; far to the contrary such a request is seen as a sign of strength and is highly respected as a desire to do God's will. Ask for help early, when it is easier to work through and resolve problems that can grow bigger, harden hearts, and dissolve the desire to resolve marital discord. Every marital problem can be overcome with God's succor, when both marriage partners are willing to accept him and his all-sufficient help. The sooner a couple, or even only one spouse if the other won't attend, meets with a pastor or other competent counselor, preferably a mature Christian, the higher the likelihood the problem(s) can be overcome, and the marriage can be strengthened in the process.

⁷³ They also read books by people who have been divorced. Be very careful with such literature. The authors write with varying motives and levels of maturity, and many are not Christians. Some write to justify their own decisions and actions. Always evaluate such and all other literature comparing and contrasting with the Bible, God's Word and our criterion and standard.

As I've often mentioned in marriage and related classes, when you put two sinners under the same roof for 35 days let alone 35 years, you're going to have conflicts. Couples, especially young people who are idealistic and passionately in love (or at least in a strong like), typically have unrealistic expectations of married life. When they run up against the problems that are part of real life in this world, they sometimes throw in the towel before learning how to work through the difficulties and come out with a stronger marriage and love for their spouse.

When a couple decides to split and children are involved more than two people in the family are deeply affected, and the other people, being little, with a vast number of questions and little information and less ability to understand, have a huge hurt. Moreover, their problems are just beginning. Research on children of divorce, and on adult children of divorce, reveals a very significant impact on the children that they carry with them throughout their lives. Overtime some develop better coping skills than others but all suffer significantly and in lasting ways.

The subject before us is Biblically based guidelines for selecting a marriage partner. Therefore, this appendix will only cite a limited number of the effects of divorce, and that number will be further limited to certain key effects on children.⁷⁴ The reason for including this appendix is to further indicate the importance of selecting a spouse with whom you'll have the strongest likelihood, humanly speaking and of course with God's help, to have a lifelong and successful marriage. An essential part of marriage is the family that emerges from this God-given institution for a husband and a wife. The children are normally loved very deeply, and they love back similarly. It is important that people understand what occurs in the lives of children of divorce, due to the above and other reasons, not the least of which being political correctness in a symbiotic relationship with media bias, which usually obscures and distorts rather than reveals what occurs to children of all ages, including the littlest and most vulnerable people impacted by a divorce.

Careful scientific research indicates that unlike what the media and others would have you believe, children suffer deep and long lasting negative effects from divorce. The effects of divorce on children include more than those here listed, and a multitude of careful research reveals these outcomes, only a sampling of documentation is supplied for reference if needed. See below the quote by renowned sociologist David Popenoe in Section #4.

One hopeful observation should be kept in mind for parents who are unmarried due to the death of their spouse. Careful science reveals that the following effects of losing a parent by divorce usually either do not occur at all or, if any do occur, are rare and not nearly as severe or as long lasting. Moreover, a strong connection with a true church, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), is especially helpful.

Again, this list is not exhaustive but illustrative. Children from divorce situations in contrast to

⁷⁴ This appendix, "Is Divorce Harmful to Children," is also separately available for free on the [Marriage](#) and [Family](#) pages of my general [website](#) and on my academic website at <https://seelyedward.academia.edu>.

children from intact families exhibit differences in the following ways:

1. Significantly lower levels of
 - a. Health (NR⁷⁵ 10/88, p. 3)
 - b. Self-efficiency (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - c. Social support (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - d. Effectual coping styles and fewer psychological resources for coping (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - e. Ability to adapt to daily challenges and disappointments (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - f. Self-perception of scholastic competence (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - g. Feeling accepted by peers (NR 3/95, p. 3)
 - h. Friends, fewer friends and less of a support system⁷⁶
 - i. Achievement in school (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539), [including completing a college degree](#)⁷⁷
 - j. More “likely to experiment with or practice the spiritualities of religions other than their own.” (Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching*, p. 85)
 - k. Church attendance⁷⁸
 - l. Self-esteem (NR 3/95, p. 3; Franke⁷⁹)

“Feminists have typically supported liberal divorce laws. Yet it is young women who often pay a high psychological price when their parents divorce. In a...study at Rhode Island College, researchers Terry Clifford and Roger Clark investigate the effects of parental divorce on young women by analyzing the psychological well-being of 198 female college students, 27% of whom had experienced parental divorce. Clifford and Clark’s statistical tests suggest that parental divorce does scar daughters: ‘adult female children of divorce have lower self-esteem than other adult female children.’

“Further parsing of the data establishes that the diminished self-esteem of adult daughters of divorce can ‘not be interpreted in terms of abusive environments in families of divorce,’ for the researchers see no evidence of such abusive environments in the young women’s responses. But this diminution of self-esteem

⁷⁵ *The Family in America: New Research*

⁷⁶ Linda Bird Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1983, Section 15, p. 6. While this article contains significant research findings pertaining to the effects of divorce on boys, subsequent scientific investigation reveals that girls are hit equally as hard only the effects are delayed, seen later in what Judith Wallerstein calls “The Sleeper Effect.” As she discloses in her findings reported in this section, “We can no longer say—as most experts have held in recent years—that girls are generally less troubled by the divorce experience than boys. Our study strongly indicates, for the first time, that girls experience serious effects of divorce at the time they are entering young adulthood.” Judith S. Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 22, 1989, p. 21. Thus the title of Francke’s article should be altered.

⁷⁷ Edwin Benson, “Help Your Children Graduate? Stay Married,” on website, *Return to Order*, by John Horvat at <https://www.returntoorder.org/2020/06/help-your-children-graduate-stay-married/?pkg=rtoc0992> (Accessed 6/12/20)

⁷⁸ Agnieszka Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” *Christianity Today*, March 2006, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.

‘*can* be interpreted in terms of the loss of access to a parent that frequently...accompanies divorce.’ Indeed, regression analyses indicate that ‘virtually all’ of the association between parental divorce and diminished self-esteem among adult daughters of divorce ‘may be accounted for in terms of divorce’s impact upon parental access, on the one hand, and parental access’s impact upon self-esteem’ on the other. [*emphasis added*]”⁸⁰

m. In adulthood:

- 1) Less religious⁸¹
- 2) Fewer cultural opportunities (FA⁸² 8/88)

2. Significantly higher rates of

- a. Speech problems (NR 7/88, p. 3)
- b. Emotional disturbances (NR 7/88, p. 4)
 - 1) “Children sense a deep loss and feel they are suddenly vulnerable to forces beyond their control.” (Psychologist Lee Salk, Quoted in “The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 58)
 - 2) “The trauma of divorce is second only to death.” (Lee Salk, *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 58)
 - 3) “An inordinately high proportion of children in mental-health treatment... Children of divorce make up an estimated 60 percent of child patients in clinical treatment and 80 percent—in some cases 100 percent—of adolescents in inpatient mental hospital settings.”⁸³
 - 4) Feel abandoned and again feeling so if a remarriage occurs (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, pp. 59, 66)
 - 5) Depression.⁸⁴ One-third experience moderate to severe depression after five years.⁸⁵
 - 6) Feeling overburdened. Many children feel responsibility to care for a divorced parent who is doing poorly, yet Wallerstein finds that “In truth, few children can rescue a troubled parent. Many become angry at being trapped by the parent’s demands, at being robbed of their separate identity *and denied their childhood*. And they are saddened, sometimes beyond repair, at seeing so few of their own needs gratified.”⁸⁶ (Emphasis mine)

⁸⁰ Terry Clifford and Roger Clark, “Family Climate, Family Structure and Self-Esteem in College Females: The Physical- vs. Psychological-Wholeness Divorce Debate Revisited,” *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, Vol. 23, Nos. 3/4, pp. 97-110 in NR, April 1996, pp. 1-2.

⁸¹ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 41. “If Gen X is the generation of the spiritual but not religious, then children of divorce account a lot for that generation’s turn.” (p. 41)

⁸² *The Family in America*

⁸³ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 43.

⁸⁴ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

⁸⁵ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Divorce and Kids: The Evidence is in,” *Reader’s Digest*, July 1993, p. 120.

⁸⁶ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 41. See also Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” pp. 42-43.

- 7) Store up resentment (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
- 8) An obsessive desire to reunite the parents (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61)
- 9) Longing for their fathers. Wallerstein and her associates found that “In the decade after divorce, three in five children felt rejected by one of their parents, usually the father—whether or not it was true. The frequency and duration of visiting made no difference. Children longed for their fathers, and the need increased during adolescence.”⁸⁷
- 10) Suicide (NR 9/88, p. 2; Ronald Kotulak, *Chicago Tribune*⁸⁸)
 “Although society has a difficult time believing that adolescents commit suicide, it has an even harder time understanding that toddlers can take their own lives, said Dr. Perihan A. Rosenthal of the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, Worcester.

 “‘Intentional death-seeking behavior in children under five years of age remains an unappreciated phenomenon,’ said Rosenthal, who reported suicidal behavior in a 2 ½ year-old boy. The boy stopped eating for two weeks, threatened to throw himself in front of cars and bit himself to the point of bleeding after his parents’ divorce.”⁸⁹
- 11) Trouble making friends⁹⁰
- 12) Wallerstein reports children of divorce “Suffered a wide range of other behavior problems”⁹¹ “Perhaps most important, overall, was our finding that divorce has a lasting psychological effect on many children, one that in fact, may turn out to be permanent. Children of divorce have vivid memories about their parents’ separation. The details are etched firmly in their minds, more so than those of any other experiences in their lives. They refer to themselves as children of divorce, as if they share an experience that sets them apart from all others.”⁹²
- c. Drug abuse (NR, 8/90, p. 4; NR 1/95)
- d. Alcohol use (NR, 1/95)
- e. Poverty (NR 1/90, p. 3; FA 8/88, p. 5; Wallerstein⁹³)

⁸⁷ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42.

⁸⁸ Ronald Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 30, 1982, Section 1, p. 5. See also <http://www.children-and-divorce.com/children-divorce-statistics.html#long-term-effects>. (Accessed 5/19/15)

⁸⁹ Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” p. 5.

⁹⁰ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

⁹¹ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

⁹² Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” pp. 41-42.

⁹³ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42. “One in four [children of divorce] suffered a severe and enduring drop in the family’s standard of living and went on to observe a lasting discrepancy between their parents’ standards of living.” Wallerstein and Kelly found that “At the time of divorce, two-fifths of the families had been solidly upper class or upper middle class, whereas two-thirds of the women and their children were now [five years after the divorce] either solidly middle class or lower middle class.” Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly, “California’s Children of Divorce,” *Psychology Today*, January 1980, p. 68.

- “Nearly three-fourths of children in single-parent families will experience poverty by age 11, vs. about one-fifth of children in two-parent families.”⁹⁴
- f. Premarital sex⁹⁵

“Children from intact families are less likely to give birth out of wedlock or get in trouble with the law—both of which end up costing the government a bundle.”⁹⁶
 - g. School problems
 - 1) Trouble concentrating⁹⁷
 - 2) Excessive tardiness (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539)
 - 3) Excessive discipline problems (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539; Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120; Brown⁹⁸)
 - 4) Twice as many suspensions (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539)
 - 5) More than half the truancy (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539; cf. Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
 - 6) Most of the expulsions (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539;⁹⁹ Brown, 6/28/80)
 - 7) More inclined to drop out (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539; Brown, 6/28/80)
 - 8) Account for the large number of Title I remedial programs (*Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539)
 - 9) Inordinately high proportion of children in special education classes.¹⁰⁰
 - 10) Boys more inclined to aggressive behavior, including bullying and classroom disruption (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120; “The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
 - 11) Girls typically become withdrawn and silent (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
 - 12) Elevated sense of malaise. A team of distinguished British and American researchers studied 10,353 male and female children between ages seven and twenty-three. “They documented a highly significant ($p < .0001$) link between parental divorce between ages 7 and 16 and elevated scores on the Malaise Inventory used to assess the mental health of adults at 23...the research team established that, after taking into account gender and economic status at age seven, parental divorce between the ages of 7 and 16 increased the odds of scoring above the clinical cutoff for psychopathology by 48 percent.”¹⁰¹
 - h. Age group distinctions
 - 1) Toddlers between the ages of 18 months to two and four years old
 - a) More irritable (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D.¹⁰²)

⁹⁴ Matthew Cooper, “Going to Chapel,” *Time*, June 10, 2002, p. 31.

⁹⁵ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Divorce and Kids: The Evidence is in,” p. 120.

⁹⁶ Cooper, “Going to Chapel,” p. 31.

⁹⁷ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

⁹⁸ “1-parent children fare worse in school: study,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 1980, p. 1. Report of a study by Frank Brown of 18,244 children, grades 1-12 from all economic and social levels.

⁹⁹ In the research on which this study was based children at the secondary level from one-parent families were the *only* ones expelled. *Kappan*, 4/80, p. 539.

¹⁰⁰ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 43.

¹⁰¹ P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, Andrew J. Cherlin, and Kathleen E. Kiernan, “The Long-Term Effects of Parental divorce on the Mental Health of Young Adults: A Developmental Perspective,” *Child Development* 66 (1995), pp. 1615-1634 in NR.

¹⁰² G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., “Little ones big losers in divorce,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12/9/81, Section 6, p. 6.

- b) Regression in development to a more dependent earlier level, e.g., demanding to be fed instead of feeding themselves; reverting to using diapers. (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59; G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81, et al.)
 - c) Frequent and particularly terrifying nightmares¹⁰³
 - 2) Children between the ages of five and one-half/six and eight years old
 - a) Assume responsibility for their parents’ divorce (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
 - b) Fears: abandonment and starvation (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 59)
 - c) Pervasive sense of sadness (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61); inconsolable sadness¹⁰⁴
 - d) Children’s most vulnerable age when parents divorce, including for later suicide.¹⁰⁵
 - 3) Children between eight and twelve years old
 - a) Anger directed at whichever parent is perceived to be the initiator of the divorce (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61) or both parents (Maya Pines, *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1)
 - b) Guilt (Maya Pines, *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1)
 - c) Concern about being unloved and maybe unlovable (Maya Pines, *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1)
 - d) Formation of a very close relationship with one friend or with a teacher or another adult, transferring emotions from the noncustodial parent (“The Children of Divorce,” *Newsweek*, February 11, 1980, p. 61)
 - e) Loneliness (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
 - f) Isolation (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
 - g) Helplessness (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
 - 4) In teen-age years
 - a) Precocious sexuality (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120; Dobson¹⁰⁶) related to identity confusion¹⁰⁷ “Just as girls without fathers have never really learned how to relate to a man, boys have not learned how to be one.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ From a report by two Ohio social scientists, Carl Tishler and Patrick McKenry, of a study of 46 teen-agers who had attempted suicide. *Sources & Resources*, 4/15/81, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ James Dobson, “Breakdown of family alters kids’ moral code,” *The Grand Rapids Press*, September 7, 2003, p. J6. “A team of researchers from the Oregon Social Learning Center...found that parental divorce plays a direct role in fostering sexual experimentation among adolescents.” Dobson adds “two-parent families are the healthiest and contribute directly to a stable society.”

¹⁰⁷ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 6. As a pastor it has grieved me to talk with many single mothers, mostly all divorced, who pleaded with me to connect them with male role models in the church. One program I began in response to this request was a well-received one called “Anglers for Christ” in which men in the church took children of single mothers fishing. Sadly, the board established to run the program had to close it due to legal advice concerning fear of litigation.

- b) Teen-age marriage (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- c) Pregnancy (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- d) Nonmarital birth (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- e) Divorce (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
- f) Incarceration¹⁰⁹
 - “Children from intact families are less likely to...get in trouble with the law...which end[s] up costing the government a bundle.”¹¹⁰
- g) Advancement of the time at which adolescents must develop independence and form their own adult identity (G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., 12/9/81)
- h) Wallerstein’s study shows that “adolescence is a period of particularly grave risk for children in divorced families. Through rigorous analysis, statistical and otherwise, we were able to see clearly that we weren’t dealing simply with the routine angst of young people going through transition but rather that, for most of them, divorce was the single most important cause of enduring pain and anomie in their lives. *The young people told us time and again how much they needed a family structure, how much they wanted to be protected, and how much they yearned for clear guidelines for moral behavior. An alarming number of teen-agers felt abandoned, physically and emotionally.*”¹¹¹ [Emphasis mine]
- i) Suicide (Ronald Kotulak, *Chicago Tribune*¹¹²)
 - “Suicide is the No. 1 cause of death among adolescents, according to mental health experts who are attempting to deal with the growing problem of troubled youngsters. Fueled by a skyrocketing divorce rate....”
- i. Children worry even if they THINK their parents might be heading for a divorce.
 - “Young adolescents view the possibility of parental divorce with deep concern, fearing it more than serious injury, the death of a friend, peer rejection, and even physical abuse.” (NR 3/89, p. 2; 9/95, p. 1)
- j. In adulthood
 - 1) Long-term effects, including “sleepers effects” that don’t emerge until many years later¹¹³ Wallerstein and her associates found that children were worse off five years after the divorce: “these children were not recovering, as everyone thought they would. Indeed, most of them were on a downward course. This is a powerful statistic, considering that these were children who were functioning well five years before...[yet who] suffered such a rate of sudden serious psychological problems.”¹¹⁴
 - 2) Fear of betrayal¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120. “Nationally, over 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from homes without both parents present. Family breakup is thought to be an important source of high crime rates in the nation’s cities.”

¹¹⁰ Cooper, “Going to Chapel,” p. 31.

¹¹¹ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42.

¹¹² Kotulak, “Suicide called the No. 1 killer of adolescents,” p. 5.

¹¹³ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 22.

¹¹⁴ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 21.

- 3) Anxiety and other worries.¹¹⁶ In her 10-year follow-up study Wallerstein found 41% of now adult children of divorce “were doing poorly; they were entering adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating and sometimes angry young men and women.”¹¹⁷ After her study, and after her and her colleagues’ experience in counseling more than 2,000 families in the Center for the Family in Transition that she founded, Wallerstein observes that it is necessary “to see divorce not as a single circumscribed event but as a continuum of changing family relationships—as a process that begins during the failing marriage and extends over many years. Things are not getting better, and divorce is not getting easier.”¹¹⁸
- 4) Delinquency in adulthood (NR 8/90, p. 4)
- 5) Adultery (NR 8/90, p. 2)
- 6) Divorce (NR 10/88, p. 3; NR 2/97; Tennant¹¹⁹)
- 7) Violent behavior (*The Washington Post*, 1/29/91, A6)
- 8) Cohabitation (NR 1/95; cf. Edward W. Beal, M.D. and Gloria Hochman, *Adult Children of Divorce: Breaking the Cycle and Finding Fulfillment in Love, Marriage, and Family* [Delcorte Press, 1991])
- 9) Premarital sex (NR 1/95)
- 10) Anti-social behavior, including failure to pay debts, drug dealing, handling stolen goods, and using a weapon (NR 7/97)
- 11) Child abuse and neglect (NR 2/97)
- 12) Insecurity (FA 8/88, p. 5; See also Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 13) Instability (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 14) Underachieving (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 15) Self-deprecating (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
- 16) Harder time achieving intimacy in relationships¹²⁰ (See also Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120.)
- 17) Harder time forming a stable marriage (Zuckerman, 4/12/93, p. 72)
- 18) Harder time holding a steady job (Zuckerman, 4/12/93, p. 72)
- 19) Large percentage (45%) of males (age 19-23) 10 years after the divorce “still had no set goals, a limited education and a sense of having little control over their lives”
- 20) Less successful as adults, particularly in two essential domains of life, love, and work (Zuckerman, 4/12/93, p. 72)
- 21) Reduced desire to obey the commandment to honor both parents. “They weren’t there for me,” but a willingness to honor (including caring for in old age) one who is perceived as having cared for him or her. “I honor my mom. Given everything she did for me, how could I not?”¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Judith S. Wallerstein, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce*, Quoted in Cal Thomas, “Divorce American Style, Is Ruining Our Children’s Lives.” *World*, April 2, 1989.

¹¹⁷ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

¹¹⁸ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 20.

¹¹⁹ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

¹²⁰ Mortimer B. Zuckerman, “The Crisis of the Kids,” *U.S. News & World Report*, April 12, 1993, p. 72.

- 22) Distrust and even hatred of mothers (FA 8/88)
 - 23) Die sooner (NR 12/95)
 - 24) Children who are already adults whose parents recently divorced: “are very upset. They feel a lot of anger toward their parents.”¹²²
3. Other problems
 - a. Shock (Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.)
 - b. Denial (Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.)
 - c. Anger (Francke, “Weight of separation falls hardest on sons of divorce,” p. 1.)
 - d. Feelings of guilt (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989.)
 - e. At 10 years after parents’ divorce, drifting (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
 - f. At 10 years after parents’ divorce, troubled (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
 - g. Loneliness (Wallerstein in Thomas, April 2, 1989 and Wallerstein and Kelly.¹²³)
 - h. “[T]remendous fear they may end up with broken marriages of their own.”¹²⁴
 - i. The divorce of parents when a girl or boy is still in childhood is also correlated with male and female homosexuality.¹²⁵
 4. “‘...in three decades of work,’ writes sociologist David Popenoe, who has devoted much of his career to the study of families, ‘I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole, for children, two-parent families are preferable to single-parent and stepfamilies.’ (Whitehead, July 1993, p. 120)
 5. Judith S. Wallerstein reports that “more often than not divorce is a wrenching, long-lasting experience for at least one of the former partners. Perhaps most important, we found that for virtually all the children, it exerts powerful and wholly unanticipated effects.”¹²⁶ “In many instances, conditions in the post-divorce family were more stressful and less supportive to the child than conditions in the failing marriage.”¹²⁷
 6. Wallerstein and her research team, unexpectedly to them, found “a diminished capacity to parent” and that “fully a quarter of the mothers and a fifth of the fathers had not gotten their lives back on track a decade after the divorce. The diminished parenting continued,

¹²¹ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 43.

¹²² June Louin Tapp, a University of Minnesota psychologist in a preliminary study of eight women aged 21 to 35 in “Divorce can shatter older children, too,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 2, 1984, Section 6, p. 12.

¹²³ Wallerstein and Kelly, “California’s Children of Divorce,” pp. 70-71.

¹²⁴ Maya Pines, “Divorce: Children follow in parents’ footsteps,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1982, Section 1, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Linda Ames Nicolosi, “New Evidence Found for Childhood Family Factors Influencing Sexual Orientation,” <http://www.narth.org/docs/influencing.html> (Accessed 4/12/15). For a more detailed explanation of the correlation between children of divorce and later homosexuality, see my book, *What Is God’s Will Concerning Homosexuality? Help for Church Leaders and Others to Speak the Truth in Love*, pp. 76-77, available for free on the [Current Issues](#) page of my [general](#) website.

¹²⁶ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 19.

¹²⁷ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 42.

permanently disrupting the child-rearing functions of the family.¹²⁸

7. Current research that is carefully done, following the scientific method and where the scientist has suspended his or her subjective biases and allowed the data to speak for themselves (exegesis) rather than reading into and manipulating the data to provide what he, she, or a study sponsor or grantor want to see (eisegesis), tends to show results consistent with the earlier studies. Yet be careful of some newer “studies” that are tending to play down painful elements in previous studies.

Scientists are human also and therefore are sinful, like every other human being (Romans 3:23), and that sin issues forth in motivations that interfere with the finding, interpreting, and publishing of true, sound, and reliable research results. Such motivations include avoiding the pain of the typically harsh reactions social scientists have received when disclosing the truth about divorce and its effects. Others want to please their institutional sponsors who have paid them for their research and hoping for a certain result. With a mind toward future work some scientists want to reward their sponsor with the results he or she wants to see. The scientist also wants to play in accord with the politically correct orientation of those government and other organizations that provide grant money for research. The desires for fame and peer approval lie close to consciousness when shaping the research plan and interpreting the findings as well as applying its results.

8. In her four-year, nationally representative survey of 1,500 young adults between 18 and 35, Marquardt, herself a child of divorce, found that “most marriages that are ending in divorce are low-conflict and look a lot like the ones that are staying together. Research shows that married couples generally fight about the same five things: money, sex, in-laws, religion, and time. Some choose to get divorced over it; some don’t. If, after divorce, you could find new strength within yourself to get past your issues and cooperate with your ex, then you could do it before he or she is your ex.”¹²⁹
9. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, research associate at the Institute for American Values, asserts that the societal trends since the 1970s, such as single-parent families, out-of-wedlock childbearing and no-fault divorce have been devastating to children. A *Chicago Tribune* editorial synthesizes Whitehead’s findings.

Indeed, it was an unreasoned but emotionally appealing shift in attitude, Whitehead says, that allowed Americans in the 1970s to begin viewing spiraling rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock childbearing and other “family disruptions” as nothing to be particularly worried about and even, on the whole positive for society because they seemed to serve the happiness of individuals.

¹²⁸ Wallerstein, “Children after Divorce: Wounds that Don’t Heal,” p. 21.

¹²⁹ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 43.

That “shift in the social metric,” Whitehead says, replaced the well-being of children with adult happiness as the yardstick for measuring social behavior. “Once the social metric shifts from child well-being to adult well-being,” she writes, “it is hard to see divorce and nonmarital birth in anything but a positive light.”

It also is hard to avoid contriving the sorts of lies with which adult Americans begin to rationalize their moral neglect of their children...

Increasingly, Whitehead’s article makes clear, both social science and common sense make such nonsense untenable. The rationalizations that adults used to comfort themselves have discomfitted our children terribly, and we are all paying a heavy price for it.¹³⁰

10. While all things are possible with God (e.g., Matthew 19:26), not all things are beneficial, even though he helps his people deal with their pain and suffering. (1 Corinthians 6:12) Even though some people consciously or unconsciously avail themselves of God’s grace that gives them the ability to survive the divorce of their parents and function reasonably well as adults, they all suffer greatly, carrying the effects of the divorce to varying degrees throughout their whole lives.

Parents thinking about divorce must consider the above information and choose an alternative to overcome their problems, especially parents who claim to be Christians. Remember that God says, “I hate divorce” (Malachi 2:16). We’ve seen above some of the reasons why.

God provides ways to overcome problems in marriage. The first way he provides is preventative, even before marriage, i.e., taking the steps in the main part of this document/program, following the Biblical guidelines for selecting a marriage partner discussed above, including God’s vitally important command to only marry a fellow believer in Christ—one who demonstrates over time (before marriage, even before engagement) that he or she is growing and maturing in his or her love for and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the sake of the children, who are first and foremost God’s children, to overcome and not add more problems, and to honor him, also follow these other ways God provides. These ways can be found in God’s Word (e.g., John 3:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 5:18-33) and by consulting with a church pastor who holds to and faithfully proclaims the Bible to be the true, trustworthy, infallible, and inerrant Word of God and his highest authority.

¹³⁰ “Was Dan Quayle right?” *Chicago Tribune*, March 21, 1993, Section 4, p. 2.

Marquardt found that “The way that evangelical theology emphasizes the central saving role of the personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God as your Father resonates with some children of divorce. They say, “*My earthly parents were not there for me—or, My earthly father failed me, but in God I found that loving father figure I never had.*”¹³¹ [Emphasis Tennant’s] Churches also provide opportunities for Godly men to interact with children who lack a significant male figure in their lives.

Marquardt observes that “evangelical churches do a somewhat better job of acknowledging divorce as a problem. Our mainline Protestant churches don’t want to offend divorced and single parents in their congregations, so they don’t reach out to the children as a consequence.”¹³² What the above means is that we, who have the help God provides his people, must proactively reach out to them to offer it and not just wait until they come to us.

There is much truth to the old adage, “Stay together for the sake of the children.” Even more so, do it to glorify God, who can help you save your marriage. Your marriage can be saved if both of you are willing to follow God’s will. I’ve seen the toughest marital situations resolved and those marriages restored in and through Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said, “with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26; cf., Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Luke 1:17; 18:27; Romans 4:20-25)

If you can’t stop your spouse from divorcing you, seek pastoral counsel and legal advice from an attorney who is a mature Christian. If you don’t know one, your pastor can help you find one. Just don’t be the one to put yourself and your children through the trauma of divorce with the seriously mistaken view that “they’re resilient; they’ll be OK in little while and be just fine.” Seek God’s help directly and through the body of Christ, the church. Don’t despair. If you’ve done all you can to save your marriage and you can’t, trust God. He’ll help you and your children to come through this very difficult situation; it won’t be easy, but he’ll get you through it.

In Christ we have huge hope, a realistic and realized expectation.

Since God is sovereign, loves us, and keeps his promises, we have a realistic reason for hope. (Cf., e.g., Romans 4:16-25; 5:1-11; 8:22-27; 15:13; Ephesians 1:15-23; Hebrews 6:9-12, 19-20; 11:1; 1 Peter 1:3-9) Our hope is firmly grounded on God’s fulfillment of his promise of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose first coming has already occurred, laying the basis for the completion of God’s plan of redemption and all the joy coming with it, much of which is already present, even though it is not yet here in its fullest.

¹³¹ Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

¹³² Tennant, “Lives of Quiet Turbulence: Elizabeth Marquardt on what happens in the souls of children of divorce,” p. 42.

This firm hope is based on the Bible, God's Word, which reveals that Jesus Christ has accomplished victory over sin, evil, Satan and his demonic forces, and all that would eternally separate us from God and his all-sufficient help. In Christ we have salvation now, but it is not yet in its fullest and most complete manifestation; that will come when Christ returns in his glorious Second Coming and restores God's original plan of perfection for his creation.

Yes, God will bring us through the deep waters and the great valleys of life. (Isaiah 43:1-5) As in the theme of the Book of Revelation, Christ has overcome the forces of evil, and those of us who are his called, chosen, and faithful followers to serve him will be victorious as well. (Revelation 17:14) Some divorced and now single parents who are maturing in Christ have raised their children in Christ and have overcome many if not most of the harms inflicted on them due to their parents' divorce. They have overcome to the extent that they are able to live responsible and fruitful lives in the Lord, but most of all because of their relationship to and maturing in the Lord (the theological terms for which being regeneration and sanctification respectively).

Children of divorce who do believe in, mature in, and follow Christ will overcome, but this maturity in Christ is not a given as seen above; the tendency with families of divorce is less, not more, involvement in church and spiritual maturity. Neither is it in any way to be considered encouragement and/or a reason for going ahead with a divorce. Further, why give your, and even more importantly God's, precious children added wounds and scars they'll carry for life? Inform your spouse of this information. Depending on what your family member needs, give him or her a copy of this whole paper—or the expanded version of this section that contains all the information in this appendix and much more—which was referred to in the opening NOTE at the beginning of this appendix.

If you have a friend with children who is thinking about divorcing his or her spouse, gently raise the question I did in the second paragraph of this section. Remember your calling from God to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), and give your friend a copy of this study or the link to it on the [Marriage](#) page of my general [website](#).

Seek the triune God's help directly and through the body of Christ, the church. Don't despair. If you've done all you can to save your marriage and you can't, trust God. Ask God for forgiveness for anything you've done that has led to the divorce. He'll help you and your children to come through this very difficult situation; it won't be easy, but he'll get you through it.

- "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea...." (Psalm 46:1-2)
- "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you...I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be

content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:6-7, 9, 11-13)