

PRE-ENGAGEMENT

Who should do this?

This document is created for those couples who have been dating for at least a year, or whom respected leaders in their lives suggest it could be beneficial for. It helps couples to ascertain where they really are in their relationship and to help them decide whether they are ready and suitable for marriage.

Why do this?

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, checking whether he has enough to finish it” (Lk 14v28).

Considering marriage is a deeply important decision, probably the most important one that a person will make in their life, second only to belief in Christ. Many people try making this decision without any real framework to refer to. We believe that every couple should ask the questions provided before considering engagement to be married.

How should we do this?

Where there is no counsel the people fall; but in a multitude of counsellors there is safety (Pr 11v14).

Take some time out to really ponder these questions sincerely. Then, along with a respected Christian mentor couple in the church you may want to discuss your answers to these questions over a meal or two. Journeying with another more experienced couple in the church will help develop confidence in your move towards the possibility of marriage. Remember that when processing with others more experienced in the community, it is not about getting permission to do something, but it is about getting perspective. It would be crazy to make one of the biggest decisions of your life without wise counsel alongside you. This doesn't steal from the romance of your engagement but rather adds to the peace and joy of it if it does happen.

(If you don't know of a respected and godly married couple to journey with, contact an elder from your congregation who will be able to connect you to people to walk with.)

We also suggest you buy a book called “The meaning of Marriage” by Tim and Kathy Keller and bring the insights on marriage that you discover in this book to your discussions with your mentor couple.

How long is this course?

Depending on where you are at and the confidence of your mentorship couple it could span over 2 meals or could take a few months of connecting and working through certain issues. With your mentors guidance consider whether you need more time or not in dealing through or discussing other issues.

But what if we are already engaged?

No worries. Just do this course as an engaged couple. But I suggest you both keep an open mind in case you have made a wrong decision.

Getting started

Considering that this process aims to either strengthen or weaken your confidence in moving towards engagement and marriage, it's important that you are both open to walking this road together and that if either person starts to lose confidence in the relationship that they commit to being honest with the other and those you're walking with.

It has been our experience that approximately 20% of couples realize during this process that even though they like many things about each other, that they think it would be better not to continue the relationship. But don't loose heart too soon, that means that approximately 80% feel that this process strengthens their desire to move forward with their partner.

Go through this document and consider your relationship. First do this alone, writing down your answers and then discuss them together, and then with your mentoring couple during the times you meet.

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPATIBILITY

1. Is there a spark between you:

- Physically?
- Intellectually?
- Emotionally?
- Spiritually?
- In terms of having fun together?

2. What are the things you have in common?

3. Are you best friends?

Remember that friendship is neither infatuation nor co-dependency, but rather it is a real commitment to a person where there is healthy attraction and a desire for the other person's best above our own. Friendship is having knowledge of a person with all their short-comings in sight, and still choosing to love them. For a thorough definition read Ch 4, p110 – The Mission of Marriage in The Meaning of Marriage book.

4. Is there any sin in your relationship that, if it were gone, you would not be a happy couple?

Sexual? Habitual? Emotional?

Sometimes relationships are driven by a habit or sin that causes a dependency on the other person. If you desire to get married with confidence, it's important that you are free from this for a good length of time (3-6 months) before you get engaged, because sin is designed to deceive us into a false sense of security and confidence.

5. Do you disagree on any of these key issues:

- What you want to do with your lives?
- Where you want to live?
- What are your spiritual values?
- Do you want to have kids? (When and how many?)
- What is your financial approach to life?
- Do you have a clear understanding of the biblical roles of men and women, and do you as a couple have consensus? (<http://commonground.co.za/course/dna/> - click "Our understanding of gender roles")
- Have you explored what the role of each other's families would play in your potential marriage?

Questions that relate to God (these assume you're a Christian)

- Do you have a sense of peace from God about this relationship?
- Is God at the centre of your relationship? If so, what are the choices you have made that reflect that decision?
- If you are involved in a church, in what ways could you see your future marriage benefitting the church?
- If you're a Christian, have you pursued sexual abstinence until now? If you haven't, are you willing to repent and wait until marriage? If you aspire to abstinence but feel overwhelmed by sexual attraction, are you willing to get help from mature Christians?

Questions that relate to the involvement of others

- What do your closest friends and family feel about you being together?
- Who are the wise spiritual people who you have sought perspective and accountability from?
- In what ways will marriage be good for you into the future?
- In what ways will marriage to this person help you fulfill your life's purpose?
- Do you understand that marriage means putting each other before anyone else, especially family members that have a big sway on our lives? Are you willing to do that?
- Are you aware of what each other's families are like – and are you willing to be involved and at times even put up with the included challenges for life?
- Do you build your relationship towards community or towards isolation?