

Choosing a Spouse

Objective

To understand the process of evaluating one's readiness for marriage and the suitability of a potential spouse in order to establish a home that is pleasing to God.

References

Bishop Mettaous, *Sacramental Rites in the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 2nd Edition.

Bishop Youssef Sermon – “The Crowning Ceremony”

Bishop Moussa, *Youth and Family Life* from “Publications of H.G. Bishop Moussa, Bishop of Youth,” provided by the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Bishopric of Youth.

Bishop Paula, *The Christian Family*, Edited and Revised by Ms. Lisa Agaiby, February 2001: Sydney, Australia.

Scriptural Verses

“ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’; so then they are no longer two but one flesh.” Mark 10:7-8

Lesson Guidelines

1. Marriage is a binding covenant

- Marriage is not a social contract, but a *covenant* that can only be dissolved by death or unfaithfulness.

2. Take Your Time to Evaluate Yourself and Your Partner

- Haste in choosing a partner prevents us from seeing the potential incompatibilities in the potential spouse. Personality characteristics often do not become apparent immediately but usually become evident when tested by circumstances.

3. The Forces Working Within You When Choosing a Spouse

Sexual Instinct

Studies have shown that this instinct resides in the part of the brain where desires for physical necessities such as hunger reside. Others say that this drive also can arouse the brain in the same places that drug addiction does.

“It has its call, its heat, its treacherous currents, especially under the influence of external stimulation and internal hormonal activity.”¹

The urge to satisfy this drive can be so strong that we often are willing to neglect the other aspects of a relationship that must be considered when determining the eligibility of a potential spouse.

“The lower drives (*e.g. sexual instinct*), unfortunately, are the most pressing and clamorous. The higher powers are less insistent, yet they are the more reliable guides.”²

Emotions

While emotions are a better guide than sexual instinct, emotions are also deceiving and are too often confused when a relationship takes on a physical dimension. Getting into a

relationship with someone who pleases you physically will often give you wonderful emotions but sexual immorality is clearly not helpful nor does such sin edify (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23)

Mind

Since emotions and sexual instinct often cloud the mind from making good choices, involving other spiritually minded individuals in your decision making is imperative.

Spirit

While the mind is superior to sexual instinct and emotions, the mind is limited and should be led by the aspect of humanity that is unlimited in its capacity to grow: the spirit.

This is “the divine part in us, the power which links us to God.”³

We must strive to be in communion with the Holy Spirit and therefore guided by His will. This is achieved by spiritual exercises such as prayers, surrendering to God’s will, reading Scripture, and allowing spiritually minded people to guide you.

Qualities to Consider When Evaluating Another and Evaluating Yourself

a. Age

When looking for someone compatible to yourself, age is clearly a factor to consider. If the age gap is too large there is greater risk that the two individuals will not be adequately compatible.

b. Education and Wealth

Understand what your expectations are of your potential spouse’s educational level and evaluate whether or not they are realistic.

Make sure you understand how much time this person will be able to dedicate to work and home.

c. Maturity

It is important to find someone who is mature enough to be responsible for a household, and as well as to be mature enough to wisely evaluate the compatibility of a potential spouse.

SPIRITUAL

A spiritually mature spouse will be more family centered. They will nurture a spiritual environment in the home. They will also be less likely to make unsound decisions, as they will seek guidance from the Holy Spirit.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

A psychologically mature spouse is one who shoulders the responsibility with his/her spouse. They are not totally dependant on their spouse to make all decisions and course of action. They do not seek to control or manipulate their spouse.

Getting involved with someone at a young age impedes this type of maturity.

Getting involved with someone early in their college experience may not always be wise because at that age people are just beginning to “find” themselves. They are beginning to

settle into a more stable personality and to figure out who they are and who they want to be. Relationships may impede this growth.

d. Physical Attraction

Be aware of what you want physically. The pickier you are the harder it will be to find a spouse. Attractiveness is subjective. Seek someone that is attractive to *you*, not others.

“Although beauty is a gift from God, we must search for a person who is gifted in many areas, most importantly being adorned with the gifts of the Holy Spirit: *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Galatians 5:22-23).⁴

Seeking someone who is beautiful to you is not wrong as long as that is not the only criteria you are using in determining the eligibility of a spouse.

e. Love

Falling in love is a state of being that is usually not controlled by your own feelings towards someone but rather a feeling that you find yourself having. Falling in love is an emotion induced by what you *receive* from the other person.

Falling in love is an absolutely necessary and absolutely noble factor when considering finding a spouse. Unfortunately, often this feeling consumes a relationship and genuine love is diminished in its significance as a precondition to finding a spouse.

Genuine love is a selfless love that gives to others without expecting anything in return. This is the love that Christ expressed to us even unto the cross (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Ephesians 5:25, 1 Peter 3:1).

A successful marriage is one where the two partners place each other's desires and comfort above their own.

Conclusion

Marriage is a binding covenant. Choosing one life partner involves sincere evaluation of oneself and their potential spouse. We often focus a great deal on physical attraction, and not so much on the spiritual component necessary in marriage. We should be aware of both, and never forget that “love never fails.” If we find someone that loves us genuinely, and if we grow in our ability to love genuinely, we are increasing the likelihood of a successful marriage.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. How long should a couple get to know each other before getting married?
2. What are things we can do to help ensure that we are not relying solely on our sexual instinct and emotions in choosing a spouse?
3. What role should wealth play when choosing a spouse?
4. One way to test whether a potential spouse is a good spiritual choice is to ask yourself: If (God forbid) you were to die the day your child was born, would you feel confident with your child's spiritual upbringing and salvation in the hands of your potential spouse?
5. Write down a list of essential and nonessential qualities you want in a life partner.

¹ *Id.*

² Bishop Moussa, *Youth and Family Life*, from Publications of H.G. Bishop Moussa, Bishop of Youth, provided by the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Bishopric of Youth.

³ *Id.*

⁴ H.G. Bishop Paula, *The Christian Family*, Edited and Revised by Ms. Lisa Agaiby, February 2001: Sydney, Australia.