

Article 5 “A Better Way”

Twenty Questions

Can You Ride that Horse?

Vacations were a big deal in my family growing up. Two weeks away camping in Colorado was rivaled only by the anticipation we felt each Christmas Eve. Camping we knew would be filled with campfires and roasting marshmallows, Fishing and rafting, hiking and swimming and on some occasions...Horseback Riding!

As a young'un, I thought these horse experiences were the highlight of the whole vacation experience. There is nothing quite like a dude horse which is of course what we were riding. They are very gentle, often old and about worn out, slow to leave the barn and quick stepping to return. If you are eight years old and watch the Lone Ranger, then for an hour you believe your vocational calling is to be a cowboy. There is nothing like sitting in a saddle and harnessing the power of a huge steed when you are eight years old.

These rides were usually very uneventful and mostly just good for leisurely viewing the scenery. Old horses don't have a lot of manners and I can remember always thinking it was funny when the horse I was riding raised its tail and blasted those behind me on the trail. Eight year olds are easily entertained I suppose. But that was about as exciting as it got, except for this one occasion.

Dad grew up in the country and his family had a horse and buggy. Beyond that I don't know how much experience he had with horses, but he was not a novice. As we arrived at the dude ranch for our annual horse adventure, the cowboy in charge asked us if any of us had any experience with horses. Dad said “yes” and that was the end of it. The horses were readied and we all put a foot in the stirrup and swung in the saddle. It all seemed familiar until by dad put his foot in the stirrup and began his mount. The horse did a little movement away and a sort of half buck, half kick thing. The wrangler in charge seeing this said, he is a little green, can you handle him. Dad said “yes” again and off we rode. The entertainment that day was watching dad and that horse. Dad was indeed correct, he could handle him, but it was entertaining to watch for us kids. That horse never did settle down to walk in a line with the rest of the horses and he did his little buck kick quite regularly. It was just plain fun, filled with lots of laughter, to watch dad and that horse.

Two ideas stuck with me that day, experience matters and don't say it if you can't do it. Once that horse moved away from dad to keep him from mounting up and dad did a little hop jump and then swung himself in the saddle, we all knew who was in charge, even the horse.

If you come from a home where your parents demonstrated for you what a good marriage looks like, then you have some experience that will be useful in making your marriage work. If you walked into my office for pre-marriage counseling, I would begin here. What is your experience level with marriage? Consider your parents and grandparents and what you have learned. Then I would ask you to take a long look at the horse you're intending to ride and ask, “Can you handle him or her?” Your answer of course would be “yes”. Then together we would begin to see if that is true by unpacking “who you are” and “what you are able to handle” based on your experience and how you have processed and learned from this experience. You have a belief system about life and marriage. Everyone needs to identify this before marriage. Next, I would try to help you take a look at the horse you intend to ride and if you don't have what it takes, try to help you prepare for what is coming. Make no mistake about it, making a marriage work is tough, even Paul said, *“1Co 7:28 ...if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. **But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.**”* There you have it. All marriages will face trouble, and like Paul, I want to spare you from as much trouble as possible. Some folks are misinformed and believe that if they get it all right and show up at the marriage altar with a bag full of good stuff, that the mission is accomplished and that their coming marriage will be eternal bliss. Nothing could be further from the truth. You have definitely given your marriage a better foundation and you will indeed be able to avoid many troubles others have created for themselves, but marriage is still going to have its challenges. So, the more thinking and preparation you do on this side of marriage the better you will be after the marriage.

What follows is a set of twenty questions I asked my children to ask themselves as they narrowed their approach toward the marriage altar down to one person. If I told them once I must have told them a thousand times, "keep all your options open!" Sooner or later though they narrow it down to some specific someone that they want to get serious about in terms of "pairing up" and marriage. It is right there at that moment that I really want to get their attention (and yours too). Why? Because I have found through the years that young people are pretty smart if you can just get them to slow down long enough to think. That is what these twenty questions are really about. You can answer them for yourself at any time during your pre-marriage dating/courting years. They can be very eye opening and directional for you. However, when you think you have found mister or miss right, please do yourself a favor and run through these questions with them. It could change your life! How you ask? Well I think they can help you keep from making a big mistake and marrying a person you will never be happy with...remember, I want to spare you some trouble. Believe it or not I have never yet met a person who was entering marriage who did not expect that union to bring happiness to their life. I have counseled many however whose marriage brought them no happiness at all. I had one young lady who went through these twenty questions with her intended and broke it off. He was shocked. "I am sure I will be happy in this marriage" he said to her. "How can this not be right?" He questioned. Her response, "I am sure you will be happy too! But I am positive that I will not!" I guess she decided that this particular marriage was a horse she didn't want to ride. Sounds fair to me. These twenty questions will help you know if you are saddling a horse you really want to ride. My intention in these questions is not to pick your horse for you, but to equip you to be able to ride the horse you choose.

I have had some young people through the years chide me and say these should be called the "Twenty Break Up Questions." Obviously because after going through them, they decided to terminate a relationship they thought was something it was not. Thus the nickname, "Twenty Break Up Questions." This is still the exception and not the rule, though many have changed their life direction after answering these questions. What they will do for you is allow you to enter into marriage with your eyes open. You will be way less likely to wake up some morning and say, "Wow, I didn't see that one coming." The hope is that you will be able to say, "Oh yeah, I knew this day was coming and I know exactly how to ride this horse! No Worries!" Okay so here we go. You think you have found the right life partner? Let me help you ride that horse!

The following "Twenty Questions" attempt to bring couples a Rational Approach to Marriage.

Timing

I think these questions are better done as a pre-engagement activity. Engagement assumes that the "who" of your marriage has already been decided. That makes a rational evaluation much harder. Second, you have now added the pressure of a wedding date and its preparations. These will divide your mind and impede the process as well. I have seen weddings canceled at the last minute as a result of a young man and a young woman honestly looking at their relationship. However, that negates a lot of planning and creates a lot of embarrassment. It is of course always better to walk away when one knows it is the right thing to do, but that is much more difficult to do if one is two weeks away from the wedding date. Thus, if the questions are worked through as a pre-engagement activity, the space needed for rational unpressured thought patterns are more easily maintained.

"Twenty Questions" is a time consuming process. It takes most couples at least six weeks or more to work through these twenty questions according to the prescribed procedure. The honesty required, and the thought process involved may make this one of the most difficult processes you have ever engaged in. THINKING takes time and it is work; while HONESTY is very difficult for some people to muster the courage for.

The process is Simple....

1) **Find a sage and develop a team.** This would be the people who are going to walk through the process with you, give comment, and hold you accountable to complete the process in an orderly fashion. If you

welsh on an answer, they will ask you to back up and do it again, giving it proper time and thought. If you are dishonest, (and they know it) they will be the ones to challenge your integrity. They will be your accountability in every way through the process. When I use these questions in pre-marriage counseling that is, of course, my role.

I have used the material with long distance relationships. The couple just wrote all their answers out, and then sent a copy to each other and to me. Phone calls followed with discussion and we went on to the next question.

I have had parents go through these questions with their children and fiancé. The same mode of operation seems to work, answer the questions and go over them together. This process is helpful only when the parents are trying to help the kids "Ride that Horse" and not pick their mate. It also helps them give their blessing and full support to the coming marriage.

Yep, grandpa or grandma or both could facilitate this process for you. Some elder in your church might be another option. Any old sage you can find will do. An older happily married couple for forty plus years is a good option. It helps if they have a little wisdom and you both trust them to have your best interest at heart.

If all this breaks down, just do them on your own. Young people who do this often don't complete the questions and that is a bummer! But it can be done with some discipline and determination. Your going to miss a lot of good counsel and sweet fellowship as well but if it is the only option you have, then take it.

In my experience peers are a bad choice. I would just do it without a team if I was reduced to that option. You are looking for someone who has Lots Of Good Marriage Experience, loves you and wants what is best for you and will pray for You. I mean really commit to praying for you.

I am pretty sure with my dad's counsel I could have ridden that horse that day even as a small lad. Left to myself, I am sure I would have landed on the ground. Pick someone who can help you ride this horse because marriage is not without troubles. Pick the right folks and they will be there after marriage for you as well.

2) Answer the Questions in WRITING.

Writing makes you process your thinking and not just blurt out dumb answers. Writing helps others process your answers better as well. It gives them the chance to review your answers if necessary. The hope is that this will allow them to bring thoughtful questions to you and to your future relationship together that could be helpful for you to have answered.

This is not an English paper. No one is grading your grammar, just your content. So no excuses, start writing.

3) Discuss your answers with your intended. **DO NOT** read your intended's response to the question until you have first answered the question in writing yourself. Then you are encouraged to discuss, and discuss at great length, your answers. This will give some structure and substance to all the time you are probably spending together or on the phone anyway.

4) Discuss your answers with your team.

Share your answers with your team. It seems to work smoother if I get the answers via email before I have everyone sit down to a meal or coffee and discuss them. Your team is to receive your original answer before any discussion with your intended. A good way to do this is to send your answers to your sage/team and when they have both of your answers, they can send your intended's response to you. Thus, I prefer answers to be sent to the team immediately on completion. Guys more than gals try to circumvent this process and usually it is guys who have no desire to be honest. It is amazing to me how many couples are engaged to be marriage and still trying to manipulate the relationship for their ends and purposes instead of being honest and real. If someone is dragging their feet on answering these questions.....that is probably your first red flag.

5) Listen to your team! Carefully consider any feedback you get from your sage/team, in writing or verbally. If your team includes more than one person and there is a consensus between them, I admonished

you to consider very very carefully that counsel as you approach the marriage altar. Don't be disappointed if you don't get a lot of feedback from your team. Your answers to the questions and the printed responses often are all that needs to be said. Just know that they are praying for you daily and are ready to give guidance and hold you accountable when needed.

6) **Make a formal decision when all the questions have been answered** concerning the future of your relationship. Options might be: give it more time, end the relationship in it's current capacity and walk away as friends, engagement and marriage.

During the Process Here are some guidelines I hope you will be willing to Apply!

These guidelines are intended to help you pursue a rational approach to your relationship. So here they are:

1) Do not give your heart away!

I realize that this has already likely happened to some degree and there will be some pain of the heart if you part ways; but, **you must give each other the freedom to walk off at any time no matter how much it may hurt.** Scripture encourages us to Give our heart to Christ first and wait for God's timing in marriage. Putting the focus here is not only scriptural (1 Cor.7:32-35), but practical..... if one is truly entering this process with an "open heart" and "open mind" seeking God's best in marriage.

2) Whatever promises or statements concerning the love relationship that were made in the past are not binding....you may have pledged love and loyalty....but by entering into the Twenty Question Process **you agree to give the other party the freedom to terminate the relationship without guilt or explanation at any time during the process....**There will be no....."But you said you loved me" spoken. Many absurd words are spoken in emotion and lust before we engage our minds. This process will not threaten any promise you have made if indeed you did so with your mind engaged. It will however help you see how foolish you have been with your words, if you have not stopped to think.

My hope is that you will give yourselves enough space to depart as friends and trust that God has used this process effectively in your lives and move on with life, if the process leads you to that conclusion. It is also asked that you refrain from such speech during the process as well. Save the "I love you!" statements and other endearing terms for a later date. They will truly mean something after you have answered these twenty questions.

3) **Absolute and Complete honesty** is the name of the game....if you are caught lying....the Twenty Question Process will be put in a holding pattern until your team can deal with the trust issues and trust can be restored. Remember, the devil deals in lies (John 8:44). Ask yourself if you really want to involve him in this process with you. This whole process breaks down when people lie or operate in half truths. We are not looking toward marriage with some pseudo person that doesn't exist. We are honestly seeking God's direction in joining two "real" people in marriage. We are looking for the courage, faith and integrity that honesty demands of us. As far as I am concerned the process stops and ceases to function with the introduction of one lie. My objective would then become one of helping the lying party to mature. No longer am I concerned about the relationship progressing until this issue is resolved. Your team will probably respond the same way.

4) Perimeters to guard your hearts and purity are negotiable; but, make yourself accountable to your team in this matter. If you have been physically involved with your intended, step back for this and work with your team to move away from this lifestyle. If you do not, your thinking will be affected adversely by this immorality. If you are not on that track, stay the course. Let your team help you do that by setting some mutually agreed upon practical guidelines and some honest accountability.

Ultimately, My commitment to you in this process....assuming you are looking at marriage is that I will do all I can to get you ready for the marriage altar and your coming marriage... **with the absolute assurance that you are standing in the center of God's will for your lives.**

So let's get started! Assemble Your Teams! Invite your parents to join your adventure!

Find that Sage, Enlist that Couple! May God Bless Your Journey!

Question # 1 What have you done with Jesus and The Gospel? Where do you stand with Jesus?

Everyone has a spiritual pilgrimage. What is yours? Have you chosen to reject God? If so why? Are you still undecided? What religion were you raised with, if any?

Have you ever encountered God and Jesus Christ His Son? If so, where and how? Do you consider yourself a Christian and if so on what basis? Do you have a conversion experience in your history? If So, what was your life like before you came to know Christ? How did you come to know Christ? What has your life been like since you asked Christ into your life?

So let's start with Jesus....What have you done with Jesus?

I have included a portion of my story in the Introduction Article to give you an idea of what we are looking for in your answer in terms of length and depth. You can always do more, please don't do less. Read it if you so desire. If not, skip it and give us your story. The main thing is, take your time. Tell us your story in detail! Think it through....We want to hear it. We are not grading it; this is not a grammar class. We just want to hear your story.

I will introduce most of the questions that follow with a few comments on the previous question. If you were going through this material with me personally, I would not give my comments until I had received your answers. So, I would encourage you to answer the question before reading my comments as well. We want you to think. We want your thoughts to come out first. Then, for discussion to follow. My comments are intended to make you think, not think for you. I will include scripture in these comments as well and try to bring a "Biblical perspective" to the question that perhaps you have not considered. When you meet with your sage/team, I am sure they can expand on each question with ideas of their own.

Comments on Question #1.

I have shared with you my commitment to helping you know, when standing at the marriage altar, that you are standing in the middle of God's most perfect will for your life. I never want you to be able to look back at that moment and say, "I think I made a mistake."

My prayer is that you will be able to say, "My marriage is tough right now, but I married the right person, so we can work this out with God's help." How different that is from what often happens in our throw-away society. This is not an "I will give it a try and get a divorce if it doesn't work out" situation. Give it the thought on the front end and be committed for life. That is what a marriage covenant is....till death do us part.

So, here is my reasoning, if we use God's Word as the key to understanding His Will and His Heart and as the source of all truth, then your answer to question #1 is extremely important. Why? Because you cannot stand at the marriage altar in the center of "God's will" with a non-believer or as a non-believer. Check out these verses.

2 Cor 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? NIV

1 Cor 7:39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. NIV

1 Cor 15:33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." NIV

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

In Question #1 you were asked.....Where do you stand with Jesus Christ? Are you His, and is He yours? And if so, on what basis? Hopefully in the matter of faith and conversion you understand clearly now where you and your intended stand with God and His word. If not, pursue this further until you are confident concerning the faith of and spiritual position of your intended.

In Article 4 we went into great detail about all you will be losing if you are a believer and marry an unbeliever. The first three verses above seem to be pretty straight forward about that not being a good idea as well. This is one of the big three. If you intend to ignore the word of God at this point, let's just be clear that you know what you are doing. You are making a choice to be disobedient. We have all done it and will do it again. Nobody is claiming perfection here. You just need to be sure that you are not lying to yourself when you say, "I do". What you are doing when you marry a non-believer places you at odds with scripture and God's will for your life. Think.....Think..... is there any way your marriage is God's best for you if saying "I do" causes you to violate the scriptures?

The Last verse simply states that God wants us all to come to repentance and salvation. That is God's will and plan and hope for all who are perishing without Christ Jesus. If you are not one of His Children, just know that his plan for you is salvation! However, until you walk into that plan, you will have a hard time standing at the marriage altar believing with any confidence at all that you are in the center of God's will. However, as a person without Christ I doubt that would concern you greatly anyhow. But for me as a Christian, I know that God does not bless a mess. So just know what you are getting into. This is gonna be a hard horse to ride.

Question #2 What role do you think that your parents, church and government are to play in the process of you selecting your spouse?

Comments on Question #2

Question #2 was: What role do you think that your parents, church and government are to play in the process of you selecting your spouse?

It has been my experience that few young people ever consider the role of parents, church, or government in the process of selecting a spouse. At best the Dad of the young woman receives a call from said suitor and is asked for his daughter's hand in marriage. This was the first and only conversation I had with my in-laws until three days before the wedding. Not the most optimal approach to marriage.

My parents were completely out of the country when I telexed (an ancient form of texting) them the announcement. Dad's response was a short poem (that I received two weeks later) on the joys of poverty and a warning that if I married "yon fair maiden" before he was able to make a trip back from Africa and meet her that I would be toast. A couple months later my parents flew back to the States and spent a week in Abilene, Texas wining and dining my fiancé and I. As they left to return to Africa, they both conveyed to me that they could not be more pleased with my choice.

Since I lived in Texas and the wedding was to be in my wife's home state of Washington, she did all the research necessary for the obtaining of the marriage license. I arrived just soon enough to sign all the documents and process the paperwork in time for the ceremony.

We met with the Preacher once before the wedding for some pre-marriage counseling. Mostly we talked about the coming ceremony and its specifics.

Next thing I knew, I was walking down the aisle with the girl of my dreams saying, "I DO"!!! Parents, Church and Government played a very minimal role in the process for us. Did it work? It did for me. Would I recommend this method for others? No. One could probably do better.

So what does the Bible say concerning these three systems of authority and the marriage process? Here are a couple of interesting Old Testament Passages.....

Ex 22:16 *"If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. 17 If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins. NIV*

Deut 22:13 *If a man takes a wife and, after lying with her, dislikes her 14 and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, "I married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity," 15 then the girl's father and mother shall bring proof that she was a virgin to the town elders at the gate. 16 The girl's father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. 17 Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town, 18 and the elders shall take the man and punish him. 19 They shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the girl's father, because this man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. She shall continue to be his wife; he must not divorce her as long as he lives.*

20 If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl's virginity can be found, 21 she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death. She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father's house. You must purge the evil from among you. NIV

Pro 1:8-9 *Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. (9) They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.*

From this passage it seems apparent that the father had some say in WHO his daughter married. In the case above he had the authority to veto the whole deal.

It also seems in the second passage that he is considered at least partially responsible for helping his daughter maintain her purity on the way to the marriage altar. Note that they stoned his impure daughter at his door step. I wonder if more fathers and daughters would work together with more diligence to get to the marriage altar with purity if we were still serious about this practice today?

Then, finally we see in the Proverbs passage an oft repeated theme in the old testament, "Listen to your parents!" I think their counsel might be extremely significant as one approaches marriage in order to make no mistakes.

OK, What about the New Testament? Nothing that I know of that specifically speaks to parents involvement in the courting/dating process. But there is this verse that has a universal application to all interaction between parent and child which is really a repeat of the Proverbs passage.

Eph 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"-which is the first commandment with a promise- 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. NIV

"Obey" is simple enough. "In the Lord" is simple enough as well. If your folks ask you to steal a diamond ring from Walmart, then that is an obvious no go "in the Lord." I looked for an age limit on this and couldn't find one, so I suppose it still applies to me even as an old man since both of my parents are still alive. Not every commentary agrees with me on this as some presume this to mean children still under the provision and government of the home. A legal age in our country for such would be 18 or perhaps 21. Thus, some would apply this verse to those respective ages only. However, my thoughts race to Eli and his sons who were married and well into their adult years when they failed to listen to the admonition of their father. So, I question this interpretation. Here is a piece of the story. *1 Sam 3:11 And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. 12 At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family-from beginning to end. 13 For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. 14 Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'" NIV* I have a great Dad and Mom. They have been following Jesus for most of their Eighty plus years. I don't know why, but it just seems right to be humbly grateful to them in obedience just like the verse says, "for this is right."

Honor is a bit harder for us to get a solid grasp on however. "Highly esteem, regard with great respect," most dictionaries will say something along those lines. I have often wondered as I looked back on that visit my folks made from Africa to meet my fiancé, what if they had said, "no way." What if they had traveled half way around the world to meet the girl of my dreams and once introduced their reaction was, "No possible way on God's green earth is this the right girl for you"....What then? Would it be rebellion for me to resist that counsel? Would it have been dishonoring to not obey them in this matter? Is this an occasion where I could claim the "Exasperation" clause and shrug off their counsel? Could I have claimed that this is "in the Lord" and they had just missed it this time and ignore their wishes? In the light of this passage and the high regard I had (and still have) for my parents, I can honestly say their counsel would have been very difficult for me to ignore for any of those reasons.

The Bible says that we are not ignorant of the devil's evil schemes (2 Cor 2:11)....Let me tell you one of those schemes I have seen repeated over and over. Evidently there are some who are still unaware. There are several key moments in life where we make decisions that are irreversible. What I eat when I am three years old is not one of them. That is easy to change and for the most part, unless I am eating something poisonous to me, I can change course without suffering major ongoing repercussions. Choosing a spouse is for life. It is to be one man, one woman, one lifetime by God's design. Mess this decision up and the rest of your life can very easily become a living disaster. Your service to God and His Kingdom can be completely anesthetized and your only ministry can become your spouse's need for Christ. Divorce and remarry, and your children's life becomes a living disaster as well. So if I am the Devil and I want to completely ruin your life, I don't need you to rebel against the God ordained structures of authority found in the home, church, and government for your whole life.....all I need is a year or two at just the right moment. Ever notice how some of the most incredible God fearing young people often seem to cast off these restraints at just the very moment they are looking for a spouse. Coincidence, or are they falling victim to someone's plan?

There is another issue here that has always troubled me...The Sovereignty of God. More Specifically, God's ability to plant me in the middle of His perfect will for my life when I yield to not only Godly, but often very ungodly authorities, "in the Lord." Consider Jesus' life and times with me for just a moment.

I know how the story goes, I have read the last chapter, but I am with Peter on this all the way. Jesus was guilty of absolutely nothing and now you are coming to arrest Him....I don't think so. Out comes the blade and off goes the ear. Hey, I am with you Peter.... to the death! (Read the whole story in John 18) Then Jesus tells Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (Jn. 18:11 NIV) OK, there goes a good plan and all because Jesus is ready and willing to submit to Jewish and Roman authorities that are going to totally abuse their power and authority by misrepresenting justice, beating Him and then hanging Jesus on the Cross to die. This one little verse is torture for folks like me with a fight or flight mentality. Jesus standing before Pilate was asked, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" (Jn. 19:10 NIV) Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." (Jn. 19:11 NIV)

So, Jesus Submits To Authorities That Are Guilty Of Sin In Regards To the Treatment That He Is Receiving and He Knows that They are Sinning; but, He Yields To Their Power with the Understanding That It is God Who has Placed Them In Power.

Here is the incredible part, that yielding places Him right in the middle of God's perfect will for His life. Now like a lamb before the slaughter His redemptive work is completed, the work for which God sent Him, the work for which He came unto His own. WOW! So, is it possible that God can use imperfect and sinful authorities to put us right in the middle of His perfect will for our lives? I would say, yes! We have to be careful that we do not let our authorities lead us into sin, but if righteousness is not being compromised, then whatever they throw at us must have redemptive purposes.....Right?

So if parents are God given Authorities set in our life by God's design and they are not demanding that we compromise righteousness, then should they not likewise be obeyed in the Lord, and Honored, as having no power over us if it were not given from Above? Would this not also apply to the Government and Ecclesiastical authorities as well? Be careful how you answer, for someday you will be an imperfect parent and you will probably want your children to obey you "in the Lord" and honor you as well. As we proceed, here are a couple more verses to throw in your think tank as well.

Rom 13:1 *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. NIV*

Heb 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. NIV*

1 Tim 5:17 *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. NIV*

With all of this in mind, I suggest that you sit down with your parents, and maybe your Preacher and (in compliance with the laws of the land and the higher laws of God) work out a written plan concerning how they will be involved in your process of selecting a mate.

For my kids, we did this early and renegotiated as needed. We agreed on three Biblical mandates that were not to be compromised in any fashion or renegotiated. Then **I left the rest of the selection up to them with the agreement that I would hold nothing back in the way of counsel in order for them to move to**

the marriage altar with their eyes wide open. In the end they gave me the power of Veto. Not really something I necessarily wanted. They came to this of their own accord by watching my interaction with different couples through the years. Through the pre-marriage and marriage counseling process, often I would come home defeated and say, "This couple is not gonna make it." As these predictions seemed to continually come to pass, my kids just learned to appreciate that. I overheard my son say to one of his sisters that there was no way he would marry someone if dad didn't give his blessing because he is always right. Well, I am not, but at least I was correct often enough to win their respect. The thought came to me, "why am I marrying these folks if I know they are not ready...this is madness...is there something I can do to get them better prepared that would bring them to the marriage altar with their eyes wide open concerning the future of their relationship?" Thus, Twenty Questions.

In the end, most parents don't want the power of veto. We gave up arranged marriages long ago. They just want the opportunity to give their blessing to the coming relationship without reservation. In doing so they are able to throw the full weight of every resource that they have to give toward the success of the coming marriage. When they are unable to do that...be careful! Be very, very, careful! **In my experience the parental blessing has proven to be one of the most significant factors in predicting the future success or failure of the marriage.** Few, and I mean few, will make it that do not have this blessing.

So let me close with this. Years ago a couple came to me to perform their marriage ceremony. As we proceeded through the counseling sessions it became apparent that the young lady did not have her father's approval or blessing. The couple's reason for ignoring this and proceeding forward was due to the fact that her dad was not a Christian. They were both in their early thirties and thought themselves old enough to make this decision without parental involvement or blessing. So, I asked if it would be alright if I called him to see why he felt as he did. They said sure.

I made the call and found him to be a very reasonable man who loved his daughter. As we discussed the upcoming nuptials he had no reservations about the young man to whom she was engaged. His concern was that his daughter was full of bitterness. I was surprised at this "pagan's"(according to the couple) insight. As I returned to the counseling quarters, it took no time at all for me to discern that he was absolutely right. I spent the remainder of our pre-marriage counseling sessions dealing with the bondage of bitterness and the freedom of forgiveness; but, she was totally unresponsive. I warned this young man repeatedly concerning all the painful manifestations that this was sure to bring to the marriage and tried to prepare them for the worse. They would not be dissuaded. Their marriage lasted less than three years and she left that relationship with even greater bitterness over her failed marriage. I have learned to look for the parental blessing and if it is withheld to ask, "Why!" The answer you receive may totally amaze you. Let's move on now to question #3.

Question #3: What does it mean to be male and female in the marriage relationship?

Comments on Question #3

What does it mean to be male and female in the marriage relationship?

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." NIV

Matt 19:3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." NIV

Most folks read this question and start analyzing specific roles that the woman plays as wife and mother and roles the man plays as husband and father. That is the way I would have probably answered the question. However, that is not what I was seeking to clarify at this time in our Twenty Question process. We will come back to those things later.

If you remember, I told you that I was going to do all I could to help you be able to stand at the marriage altar with the absolute confident assurance that you were in the center of God's perfect will for your life. Thus, sometimes it becomes necessary to state the obvious. God is of course the Creator of this universe and all that is in it. Notice in the verse above it says, "at the beginning the Creator made them" and this creator puts things together with phenomenal design. He is stilling creating in life in this world and sustaining this world. (Col.1:17) There are a multitude of verses that address this matter, here is one of my favorites.

Ps 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. **14** I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. **15** My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, **16** your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. NIV

Why this one you ask? Well, when I look in the mirror and my nose seems too big, my head too bald and my stature too short for my weight...I like to remind myself that God knew what He was doing. I trust that He made no mistake in the process. My stewardship of His creation could undoubtedly be better. However, in the end I walk away in total contentment and amazement acknowledging that I truly am fearfully and wonderfully made. I have the quieting assurance that as feeble as I am becoming there is enough left in this old body to accomplish all He has ordained for me to accomplish. Now you know why it is one of my favorites.

So God, Creator, creates with purpose and design. In this passage we see God made mankind "in his own image, in the image of God he created them male and female." He also states a few of His purposes in that design ...Please note them: 1) "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. 2) the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'

So now let me state the obvious conclusion of this matter. For two people to stand at the marriage altar in the center of God's will, they must be male and female. I understand that at this moment it is legal to do otherwise in our country. However, the question was not "is it legal" but "is it possible to stand at the marriage in any configuration other than male and female and be in the center of God's will?" I think not.

Consider this passage as well, *1 Cor 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. NIV* This passage makes it very clear that there are some things that are just incompatible with Christianity. Those who practice such as listed above and think them compatible with Christianity would never pass the test we disclosed in question #1 concerning marrying a believer. So now on two accounts we know that to stand at the marriage altar in any configuration other than male and female is to know that we are out of God's perfect will for our lives.

There is yet another issue that seems to arise here as well. Many in Christian circles still question whether or not it is possible to marry outside ones race and be in the center of God's will. The scripture is quite clear, the issue is resolved if the couple is male and female according as God created them. This is the Biblical mandate and the only Biblical mandate concerning this issue. The arguments concerning race often point to Israel and how they were to not marry foreign wives. This is a matter of preservation of their faith however and nothing more. *Deut 7:2 ...and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. 3 **Do not intermarry with them.** Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, 4 **for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. NIV***

Thus we return again to Question #1 and the mandate that believers marry believers.

Now let's put it all together from Questions #1, #2, and #3....

- ➔ Are you a believer marrying another believer?
- ➔ Are you in an Honorable Relationship with your parents and are you seeking to secure their blessing? (You need to be hearing from other God ordained authorities as well, church & government.)
- ➔ Are you marrying as God created you male and female?

If So, then....WooHoo!!! You have met the scriptural mandate. Think about this for a moment. I often have young people who do not want to allow God's word and His timing to encroach on their husband and wife selection process. They just can't seem to trust God with the matter. They are often afraid God will pick for them someone they do not like. That doesn't sound much like God to me. That sounds like crazy talk. The Bible says here are **Three Mandates** and the rest is up to you! Redhead, Blonde, Tall, Short, American, Mongolian, Baptist, Methodist, you decide....just keep these three mandates before you! How can that possibly be too restrictive and anything other than Love?

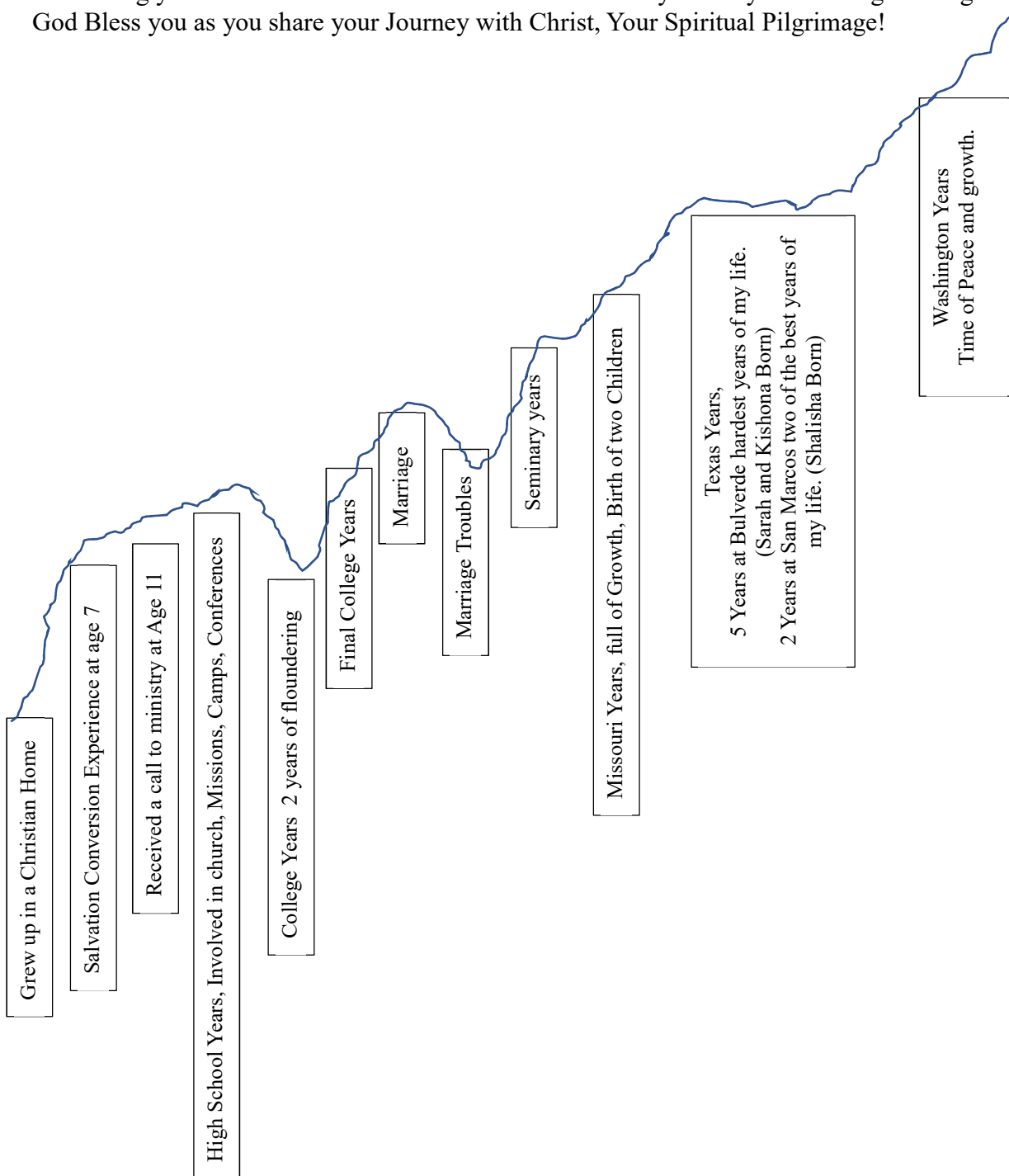
I mentioned it, so I will address it briefly....Timing. Are you willing to wait until these three line up? This is the matter of timing that I was specifically addressing. Don't get ahead of God and rush in compromising these three. If you do....someday you will look back and know you rushed too quickly to the marriage altar.

Knowing where you stand with the Biblical Mandate, let's pursue the Spiritual a bit further.

Question # 4 is really more of an assignment than a question.

Let's graph our spiritual pilgrimage. I have included mine as an example.

For most Christians it is a line that is constantly moving upward. Difficult times may be the times of most growth but not always. They may be just the opposite. As you will note, other than a few college and some intense marriage trouble, my spiritual pilgrimage moves forward continually. What this chart does not reflect is the destructive and addictive behavior patterns that I developed in those negative down swings that followed me for years. As you review your spiritual pilgrimage with each other, some dialogue concerning your life's traumatic events and the residual they left in your life might be significant. May God Bless you as you share your Journey with Christ, Your Spiritual Pilgrimage!



Comments on Question # 4

Graphing our Spiritual Pilgrimage.

Everyone has a story, a life journey that is filled with significant experiences that have helped to shape and mold them into the people they have become and are becoming. Through the years I have learned that this story is important. I am not sure I can ever really truly understand another person, but the best shot I have at understanding another person's thinking is in the context of their life's story. What people believe, enjoy or love has been formed in the context of their life's story. Their concept of truth. Their sources of truth. Their prejudice, bias, and hatred all lie in this story. What they are passionate about. What brings them joy and makes them feel alive. These things most often are the product of this life experience.

If you have not already done so, please discuss with each other those traumatic events or particularly hard times you may have faced in your life. You do not necessarily need to open up old wounds with a lot of detail but rather **Examine the traumatic events of your life in light of how they have impacted your belief system, your ideas about what is truth and your ideas about God, your fellowman, and yourself.** I have discovered through the years that there is a repeated pattern among people that surrounds traumatic events in that the enemy (Satan) uses these events as an opportunity to impregnate our lives with his "lies" concerning God and reality. The lies that follow certain events are generally universal though this is not absolute. Let me give you an example. Divorce. People who come from divorced homes generally have trouble transitioning into manhood or womanhood. I believe that this is because it takes two parents of a male and female persuasion to make this happen in its proper season. Their Ideas about love are distorted. They think of love as being conditional..... I am loved "if" I perform a certain way, or meet certain demands. After all, dad didn't add that bathroom to the master bedroom and so mom left. I hope I can come up to mom's expectations or she will leave me too. The terms of love could be said to be a "because" kind of love also. I have some certain desirable qualities in my life such as appearance, intellect or ability and "because" of these I am loved. When mom got fat, dad left. I sure hope he still loves me even though I have acne. Their concept of authority is usually corrupted also as the lines of authority are unclear and their authorities are divided. Thus, they are not properly protected and given clear direction. Unsupported they are particularly vulnerable and the target of all sorts of predators. They are often rebellious toward God and disappointed with Him as they associate their love relationship with God as equivalent with their earthly father and mother's love relationship with each other and themselves. They may even blame God for not keeping their parents together. They have no model for God's way of Love that involves commitment, integrity, maturity, and perseverance. Thus, the concept of two people maturing in Christ Jesus and learning to love each other while practicing forgiveness and covenant love evades them. They cannot bring to the marriage altar the concept of an unselfish covenant love even conceptually. Thus their marriages often follow the same pattern as that of their parents. You get the idea....traumatic events distort and corrupt our view of truth and Satan has a hay day with his lies! Thus these traumatic events merit some honest discussion as they affect our concept of truth in respect to God, others and ourselves. In the process of this discussion you will need to identify your sources of truth. It will be hard to find unity as a couple if you do not come to complete agreement on your source of truth. These are the kind of things I would encourage you to discuss in relationship to your personal spiritual pilgrimage graph. These questions and concept of life are extremely important to evaluate and to work through before you make those nuptial vows.

If I was working with a couple with the above scenario, I would ask them to consider the following:

1) That the word of God is the supreme and absolute truth. It is based in God's character and person and as such is the best guide for life and truth.

• *John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. NIV*

• *Ps 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. NIV*

• *Ps 119:144 Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live. NIV*

- *Ps 119:151 Yet you are near, O LORD, and all your commands are true. 152 Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever. NIV*

2) That God defines Love in terms of covenant and selflessness.

- *John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. NIV*
- *Luke 22:20 "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. NIV*

3) God wants us to experience this love first hand in relationship with him and then pass it on to others.

- *Eph 3:17 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. NIV*
- *Eph 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. NIV*
 - *John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. NIV*

As I stated previously on the example graph, if you are the facilitator or a part of the Twenty Question team you may need to do homework. As you look at the spiritual pilgrimage graph of the couple you are working with, you may need to do some research in order to understand and ask relevant questions. The goal is to help the couple move forward to new levels of freedom in Christ Jesus if that is needed.

Next, I would ask you to look at the progression of the graph and consider the following parable.

Matt 13:1-9

13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop-a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." NIV

As this parable teaches, not everyone goes the distance with God. How important is it to you that the person you marry goes the distance with God? Based on the progression of the graphs you are looking at....are you and is your intended likely to go the distance with God? Too early to tell? Doesn't matter to you? Will it matter if you marry and have children? Will it matter to your Children?

Notice the progression of my graph. In later years, even when times were difficult, my spiritual life continued to flourish. The progression of the graph, though plagued with many deadly dips, is still upward and heavenward. It is this overall pattern I want you to consider on your graphs. As you do consider and ask each other the question, **What are your future projections for what your pilgrimage with God will look like?**

Introduction to Question # 5

What we often do not see on the graph are our passions and where they come from. Perhaps this is because they are hard to graph as they may be simple small moments repeated over a lifetime that go unnoticed by us. Things like a loving parent that faithfully took us to church.

So let's think for a moment about what we are passionate about. Ask yourself, "how did I arrive at that particular passion?" Consider for a moment what brings you great joy and makes them feel alive. These things most often are the product of our life experiences as well. Let me give you an illustration. You will not see this in my spiritual pilgrimage graph but if you really want to know who I am this is important stuff!

Thus you will want to share this type of info with your intended and you should be enthusiastic to understand their passions as well. You should have many stories to write down (like the one below) as you consider and identify your passions and joys.

Illustration of what we are looking for in our quest to identify our passions:

In the context of my life story "hunting" and "fishing" are important. In my years of hunting and fishing I spent lots of valuable time with my dad. It was time that was rich with communication. We were not at some event where we were absorbed in being entertained and words were minimal. In the quiet of a setting sun with a shotgun on my shoulder, I received instruction in how an honorable man was to treat the ladies.

Under dad's tutelage the way of the birds and the bees became very clear to me. I received character lessons in things such as how to be patient, and that hope deferred can make a heart sick. Here I was introduced to failure and disappointment with every misplaced shot or broken line. However, schooled properly, I learned that one's failure does not mean one cannot rejoice with others in their successes. I learned to be generous in times of abundance and prudent when meager provision was supplied. It was in the outdoors that I got my first taste of life and death responsibility. It was there dad taught me how to operate two of the most dangerous pieces of equipment I would ever touch in my life as I sharpened my aim and pushed the clutch to the floor. In this special wilderness I made important steps transitioning toward manhood. It was there that I tested my endurance. I learned to survive and how to know the difference between need and want. The value of quiet and meditation in worship with Lord were some of the first fruits of my adventures on this journey to manhood. The awe filled moment when the soul touches heaven as the majesty of God is seen in creation opened my awareness to the incredible bonding that can take place between two mortals when they are able to share the same worship experience. Here is where I experienced my first taste of the irresponsible behavior of drunkards and knew it was never going to be my path. It was in this place that I was first taught how to be a good steward of God's creation and the care needed lest one fall to worshipping the creation instead of the creator. I learned to respect and honor my God given authorities with obedience even when the laws and rules made no sense. I learned independence and also the value of a cord of three strands. Friendship, however strong, without good communication will not save your life. As I applied the skills I had learned, I found something very practical and provisional in hunting and fishing. I feasted on the delicacies of kings with the wages of a pauper.

As I became a father, with great anticipation I immersed my family in hunting and fishing. My hope was beyond measure that I might be able to share with them a passion and a love which I had developed in my outdoor experiences with both my earthly and heavenly father. It is not on my spiritual pilgrimage graph, but hunting and fishing are definitely a part of my spiritual pilgrimage. I am passionate about them! They are filled with experiences that for me are rich and valuable. Oh the stories I could tell you! Wow! The corners of my mouth turn upward at just the thought of it.....

Now it is your turn....What are you passionate about? I have discovered that most couples absolutely delight in this question. Rightly so! What a pleasure it is to share that which for us brings great joy. So Here is Question # 5.

Question # 5 What are you Passionate about and Why?

Give us at least your top three, but we will gladly take as many as you want to write.

This Next Set of Questions deals with our Value System

Introduction to Question #6

Identifying Values reflected in your Passion.

In a good marriage the two become one. This, of course, never happens if the two do not share a common faith and common vision. There is some give and take in this however, and each person is an individual but the superficial stuff that unites most couples before marriage fades quickly after marriage. Things like: physical appearance, shared activities, sexual attraction, common interests in hobbies and recreation, etc... They all fade pretty fast as far as the glue that produces “The two Becoming One” kind of relationship.

What doesn't fade quickly after marriage are the things that you are passionate about. The stuff that drives your life. The stuff that causes you to get out of bed in the morning with purpose and direction. If these are noble causes then life is of course better, but they do not have to be noble. Consider...I have known people who were passionate about money. It was the total pursuit of their life. It became their purpose. I have seen people driven by hate and revenge. I have worked with people driven by drug use, or pornography, or homosexuality. Where does the list end? When passions such as these become the defining purposes in our lives they produce a spiritually dead life.

I have seen people passionate about a hobby or some form of recreation that was more morally neutral and everything in life fed into the maintenance, pursuit and indulgence into that hobby or activity. Life's purpose became the ability to excel at and indulge in that particular passion. Here the issue might not be the integrity of the passion but rather the purpose in the passion. There is an intersection of passion and purpose that is very significant and necessary to define in order to manage our lives and relationships in a healthy manner.

Consider my passion for hunting and fishing which I spoke of in the previous question. When brought together with God's purposes for my life I find that these activities are great relationship builders. They provide evangelism points in my life. Also, Some of the most significant prayer and worship events in my life have come from the setting provided by these hobbies. Prioritizing these objectives has certainly changed my indulgence in these hobbies. They are no longer just about me and what I love, but they now require good stewardship of God's purposes, my time and my resources. My investment is very calculated and planned now according to God's purposes and not just my passion. Where Passion meets Purpose, there you will find and come to appreciate your spouse or fail to do so and totally destroy the richest part of the relationship God wants you to share. To Appreciate my wife's passions and to join her in God's purposes for those passions is a major connection point for us that moves us to becoming one. I may never share her passion or she mine, but I can connect and invest in God's purposes for this very unique individual as He created her to be. So now the activity is not so important but rather the spiritual connection we find in God in those things where our passions abide.

Begin now (before marriage) the struggle to move beyond many of your less than noble passions to something more noble. If we are honest with ourselves, our faith (what we believe) and vision for life can intertwined with what we are passionate about. For instance, if my passion is to indulge in Marijuana, Alcohol, Pornography, Homosexuality, (I just chose the hot topics of our day) then I will create a belief system that will accommodate my behavior. I am forced by my conscience to try to develop a belief system that defends and protects my less than noble passions or give up those ignoble passions. Our faith and theology are then much more practical than just intellectual exercises in right and wrong which are disconnected from our behavior. They are expressions of our heart and our passions. It is my profound belief (in that, I believe this to be absolute truth) that all people will live what they believe! We must be Careful that our Vision for Life does not come out of our passions exclusively. To rationally identify one's source of truth is a major step toward maturity. It is under this microscope that one's passions can be evaluated, altered and monitored. People choose their source of truth. Some choose themselves, their own intellect as their ultimate source of truth. In such case, one's “passion” becomes the driving force for everything in the Belief System. Other options are History and Tradition, Parents, Science, Church, just about anything. I Chose the Bible. I Believe that it is the only absolute truth that exists in our world. It is

timeless, universal and comes from the God of this universe. That is my faith statement. Here is the deal, once you identify your source of truth....you have a variable that begins to change your belief system and ultimately your passions. Remember, I believe we will all live what we believe.

It works like this, let's say, I have a passion or a desire to indulge in pornography, however my source of truth says that it is totally unacceptable. *Php 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* I now have no peace at all until I line up my Belief System with my Passion or my Passion with my Belief System. Since the first is not possible based of my source of truth (God and His Word)....This variable that I have introduce as my source of truth has served then to change my belief system, my passion and my life style. (In Christian circles this is considered a question of Lordship, whether I will yield to and obey Christ and God's word or create my own truth to accommodate my evil passions.)

So here is the deal, by the time a person is 20 plus years of age...passion and lifestyle are great revealers of one's Belief System and one's chosen Sources of Truth.

In marriage, "two can only become one" as they share the same source of truth and belief system. Again, the Lordship issue arises. Cognitive ascension to a shared belief system is not enough, Why? Simple, I have never seen two different sources of truth line up universally. It is out of this amalgamation of personal passion, belief system, one's source of truth and Lordship that vision and purpose for life evolve individually and as a couple.

For instance, my vision and life purpose would include: being the husband God wants me to be; being the parent that God wants me to be; Being the Son and Son-in-Law God would have me to be; Serving the family of God-my fellow believers- building them up in the things of Christ Jesus; and Serving my fellow man by striving to reflect accurately Jesus Christ so that the world might find Him as I have. Probably every Christian would Say something very similar but would flesh that vision out completely differently. There would be complete unity in my life with that person living an entirely different lifestyle because we share the same source of truth, belief system, passion (as in Lordship of Christ in our lives), and vision. We just live it out differently in our unique calling, place and time in history. Really simple when you think about it. It is why a Church can walk in unity, as one, and be so diverse.

Here is the unity that matters. This is the place the two become one. Very much unique and individual in their roles and the fleshing out of their faith, but one in Purpose and Vision unified by a shared belief system (as in a shared faith). This I suppose is the question I am wanting you two to consider. **Based on your Source of Truth, belief system, Purpose and Vision is this level of intimacy possible for you to achieve? This is Question #6. Let's find out....**

Make a List of the Passions you identified in Question #5 and evaluate them from a Life Purpose, faith and Vision Perspective. Then discuss this a length with your intended.

Example: My Passion, Hunting and Fishing.

Purposes I hope to achieve pursuing this Passion:

- ➔ Build Relationship with my Family.
- ➔ Build relationship with and edify the Family of God.
- ➔ Build Relationship with folks who don't know Christ.
- ➔ Worship and Share Worship experiences with others.
- ➔ Engage in private Meditation and Pray encouraging my own personal Love Relationship with God through Christ Jesus.
- ➔ Provision, Fill the Freezer.
- ➔ Have Fun!

My wife and I can evaluate each hunting or fishing trip now according to these purposes. We now have the ability to make very calculated decisions on whether our investment is accomplishing our purposes. She can be a part of this with me whether she ever goes on a hunting trip or not. She can support me in this now with her prayers and a host of other ways. She has prepared meals for the guess I have taken out hunting and fishing and met us at the end of a long tiring adventure with a feast. She has sent me off with and incredible array of snacks that would bless both me and my guests. Even though she doesn't like the water she is a big part of every adventure. We also have a rational basis on which to consider whether the time and money is well spent. We approach this as "one" with a connection that is more than just sharing the activity. How different this is from the normal battle that occurs every hunting season between couples as men head off into the woods. I am amazed at the number of couples that have never found purposeful meaning in their Passions and the activities associated with them. Thus, they have never built that relationship of intimacy where the "two become one". As you and your intended share, you will find uneasiness, contention, or agreement as your belief systems are examined. When you are finished rate the level of unity you have at the present time and the level of unity you believe might be possible in the future on a scale of one to ten. Ten being Total Unity and One being No Unity. Without this unity in purpose, I believe that your relationship will not be bless with the intimacy of oneness spoken of in Scripture.

Present Unity

No Unity										Total Unity
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		10

Possible Future Unity I believe is Possible.

No Unity										Total Unity
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		10

Comments on Question #6 and Introduction of Question #7.

Purpose in Passion

As you walked and talked this week I hope you found agreement and not contention in your purposes which abode in your passions. If you found contention however, Highlight those Items that you found abrasive or contentious. Remember that I told you this section is about core values. As you look at the highlighted areas you are most likely looking at areas where your core values are being challenged. I want you to spend some time with your team and go beyond the surface level and see if you can identify any core values that are in conflict between you. Let's take Last weeks illustration and pursue that further...

Example: My Passion, Hunting and Fishing.

Purposes I hope to achieve pursuing this Passion:

- Build Relationship with my Family.
- Build relationship with and edify the Family of God.
- Build Relationship with folks who don't know Christ.
- Worship and Share Worship experiences with others.
- Engage in private Meditation and Prayer encouraging my own personal Love Relationship with God through Christ Jesus.
- Provision, Fill the Freezer.
- Have Fun!

There is another place in this exercise where your core values become observable as well. That is in the activities pursued to accomplish the pursuit of the purposes associated with each passion. Again, Let me illustrate.

Suppose on this trip I am taking two of my grandkids and looking to "Build family Relationship", I would:

- 1) Take my Bible and start the day with a Scripture and a prayer.
- 2) Put some Scripture Cards in my pocket and share them throughout the day.
- 3) I would point out continually the detail in creation hoping to introduce my grandkids to my awesome loving Heavenly Father.
- 4) I would pack the tastiest camp food I could find and provide a memorable fellowship time over a Breakfast and Supper plate with food and conversation to be remembered.
- 5) I would slip the guitar in the trunk and teach them a few chords around the campfire at night as we worship the Lord in Song.
- 6) With any favor of God's grace, I would show them how to field dress their game as I taught them of the ways of God's provision and the significance of a grateful heart.

You get the idea. You also see how there is an overlap of what I am doing so that some activities might touch more than one purpose. For instance, that supper meal could touch my worship objective as we pray and my evangelism objective depending on the stories I share at the table.

Let me introduce you to one of my friends. He too had the same objective of building the family relationship with a couple of his kids on a hunting trip as I did; but, he did his trip a little differently.

- 1) He began by teaching the kids the value of keeping a secret and then taught them the little adage

and repeated it often, "What happens in the woods, stays in the woods."

2) His stash for the trip did not include a Bible or Scripture Cards but rather tobacco and beer.

3) His plan for the evening campfire did not center around the guitar and worship but the pornographic magazines and pornographic movies he had brought along.

His teaching and trip looked totally different than mine even though we shared the same purpose...to build the family love relationship. So what is the difference? Core values. So the conclusion here is to talk not only about Passions and Purposes but also how one will pursue the fulfillment of those Passions and Purposes. Again, we are looking to identify and examine our core values.

So now... here they sit wanting some marriage counseling. He is upset because his wife does not approve of his hunting adventures. When questioned, she can't even give me a reason why. She just knows that whatever he is doing in the woods is tearing the family apart. Since "what happens in the woods stays in the woods", she is clueless to what is really happening. His Response is anger at the fact that she doesn't want to support his hunting habit or put any more money into his family outdoor sporting activities. So, their presenting issue in my office is MONEY! At least that is how they present it to me, "We are having some money issues." Statistically, most couples fight over money sooner or later; but, what I have discovered is that money is rarely, if ever, the real issue. The use of money just illuminates core value issues as people do not like to invest heavily or sacrificially in things that are of no value to them. This would include their investment of time as well. In the end this couple did not succeed in making their marriage work. Why? They had very, very few shared core values. They thought they did when they got married, but failure to stop and really think rationally and examine these differences never occurred until years into the marriage. What a mistake. Please do not follow their pattern. Examine how your intended pursues his or her purposes and passions. Look closely at the activities associated with this pursuit. Give yourself enough time to do this. You may have to wait on hunting season, cheer at a ballgame or attend a philharmonic. Take the time to make it happen and be observant. Remember we are simply trying to identify Core Values from Passion, Purpose and the Pursuit thereof. Then, and only then, can we ask ourselves, "Are we a match?"

So here is Question #7 as with some of the other questions it is more of an exercise.

Share a few stories concerning the activities involved in your pursuit of your Passions and Purposes. It might be wise to even call the other people your intended has shared some of those activities with and get them to tell you about those adventures.

And finally go with them and see what they do. Keep in mind this will probably be different with different people, so this may not be the truest test.

List those activities here and consider what core values they reflect?

Then ask yourself if you are a good match.