

Choosing a Mate

God arranged the first match for Adam and for Eve. When it came time for Isaac to marry, Abraham, through his servant, arranged the match. Esau made his own choices; they displeased both his father and mother. They were not good choices. Jacob's parents gave him some general guidelines about where he should go and for what he should look--one will find these guidelines laid out in the laws of Israel. Good and bad examples of marriages or matches occur throughout the scriptures.

In Amos 3:3, God asks, "Can two walk together, except *they* be agreed?" The setting for this verse is Israel's spiritual walk with the Lord, but the verse does have an application for this topic. We are considering the matter of matching young people for marriage. God made us different. A whole spectrum of differences exists. That is why a couple considering marriage needs to examine how well their differences will agree.

Matching does not mean that the partners must be equal in every way. Each partner will have strengths, and each will have weaknesses. One may be able to assist the other and compensate for weaknesses. Some matches strengthen both partners. Some matches pull both partners down. Some matches seem to have no effect. Both partners go on with no change, no improvement, and no loss. Marriage for them is almost incidental in most areas of their lives. Our goal is to look for matches that will produce a positive effect in marriage.

One issue that ought to be of great concern to Christians is whether the match will increase or decrease each partner's usefulness for God and the kingdom. Understanding the matter of matching can help the Christian choose a mate that will increase his or her usefulness for God.

Often, after marriage, a couple struggles just to avoid divorce. Understanding the matter of matching can help prevent this. Before marriage, possible problems can be identified and averted.

Perpetuating one's heritage is also a consideration. Two people

may have differing heritages that will not make a good match. God forbid the marrying of His chosen people with the heathen or Gentile nation. This had to be addressed in both Ezra and Nehemiah. Differences in high and low standards, high and low morals, or strictness rather than permissiveness in raising children would make trouble. The partners ought to be considering what they do have in common, and what strengths each will bring to the marriage. One partner's strengths may help the other partner.

In intellectual areas, consider whether this is a good match in education, common sense, and continuing education that translates into job potential. Hobbies and other interests usually indicate intellectual background. Good hobbies and interests result in quality reading. Quality reading exercises the mind, stirs the heart, and helps prepare individuals for what they are going to encounter in life. Hobbies and interests can prove to be of great long-range benefit. There ought to be some similarity or understanding between the partners on their hobbies and other interests. Another consideration is the knowledge of current events. Married couples need to know what is going on around them, so they know how to prepare for what is ahead of them. If one partner is aware of current events and the other is not, this does cause friction in the home. Consider, too, the ability to speak other languages. Skill in languages may affect finances. Because he could speak Spanish as well as English, a man left his job working for \$6.00-\$6.50 an hour and got a job working for \$12.00-\$12.50 an hour. He was able to move ahead and make great financial progress just on the basis of being bilingual. Partners need to be well-matched intellectually.

Prospective partners ought to be aware of what challenges they may face. They need to consider what love and kindness will be needed to cover difficulties. They need to know how to accept and not complain. Often, people marry on the basis of appearance and then complain about everything after that. Before marriage, both partners should think about what they will be facing if they marry.

With the preceding thoughts in mind, we begin to look at several general areas for each partner to consider when choosing a mate. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, the Bible teaches that we are to preserve our

whole *spirit, soul, and body* blameless unto the coming of the Lord. This verse establishes that man is a three-part being and that each part is to be preserved blameless. God establishes a priority of spirit, soul, and then body. (The world says body, soul, and then spirit.) So, the general categories to be considered here are those of the spirit and then those of the soul and lastly those of the body.

Agreement in Spirit

Both partners in a marriage need to be saved. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says that we are not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” This is forbidden by God. Are the possible partners saved and well matched in doctrine, practice, and heritage? This is the first consideration for two people contemplating marriage.

Spiritual mis-matches brought heartache throughout the Bible; Abraham and Hagar, Esau and Ishmaelites, Solomon and outlandish women.

Agreement in Soul

Emotions and Character

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (See Amos 3:3.) They can’t, of course. Two areas for agreement for possible partners to consider are emotions and character. The two are sometimes hard to separate. However, some characteristics in these two areas ought to be noticeable in a prospective partner.

Tenderness

Look for tenderness of nature. (This is not a tenderness put on just to get what one wants.) A person can be strong and still be tender. Probably the best Biblical example of this would be 1 Thessalonians 2:7. This is the picture of the nurse. The nurse is tender with an infant, but she still treats him with firmness and strength. Nobody worries about the nurse dropping the baby. When some others hold the baby, one might wonder if they are going to hang on. They may have tenderness but lack strength. In a mate, tenderness of nature needs to be in balance with strength of nature. (Strength does not mean cruelty or violence.) To deal with life’s situations, one needs a balance.

Patience

Patience is something to look for in a mate because a mate is going to need to be patient with his or her partner. (Patience is expected of other people, whether or not we practice it ourselves.) In marriage, hopefully, both partners will bring a degree of patience. Patience is not ignorance. Patience is not blindness. Patience is a willingness to wait. Keep in mind that it takes struggles, it takes sufferings, and it takes trials to produce patience. Those who will face their trials, struggles, and sufferings develop patience. People who are always trying to find the easy way out of trials, struggles, and sufferings are generally impatient people. “The trying of your faith worketh patience,” according to James 1:3.

Controlled Temper

Consider the prospective mate’s temper. I encourage parents to have their children memorize a verse in the book of Proverbs. Obedience to this verse will save the children and the parents many sleepless nights and a lot of heartache. If children do not get this verse memorized, they ought to hear it often as situations occur throughout life. Proverb 22:24 says, “*Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go.*” Biblically, a man that cannot control his temper is unfit for marriage; and women are commanded not to go with a man that is given to temper. This verse is not talking about somebody who gets upset from time to time. It is talking about somebody who is known for his violent temper. It is talking about a furious person. Biblically, nobody is to be close in friendship with a furious person; and nobody is to go with them. If you have a daughter, warn her. Warn her strongly of what it will cost to go with somebody that is given to fits of temper over and over. Warn her before she has to live her life with somebody who has a quick temper. She will never know what is going to anger him. Going with a furious man will warp her and destroy her. She’ll become like the one to whom she’s married.

Isn’t a person ever allowed to get angry? Of course they are. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26, “Be ye angry and sin *not*...” This Bible verse continues, “... let not the sun go down upon your *wrath*.” Some people have been in a rage for so long that one wonders when they are going to get out of it. They are angry people who are mad at

everybody. Some may notice that when they are not mad, they are gentle and tender. Their emotions swing like a pendulum. This emotional pendulum will cause the emotions of a mate to swing back and forth as well. Both partners will be emotionally back and forth, and their lives will be full of all kinds of trouble. The Bible speaks clearly on this subject. The temper of a possible mate is something that ought to be carefully examined.

Proverbs 22:24 is speaking particularly of a man, but it would not hurt for young men to consider whether they want to have a furious wife. A woman can be subject to fits of temper. If a young man is not subject to fits of temper, he sure will want to think carefully about a match with a young woman who is. What will it be like, never knowing when his partner is going to angrily throw a skillet or spill coffee or shout and scream? If his possible partner does these things before marriage, she is surely going to do them after marriage. If two angry people marry, they are going to scream and shout at each other. That surely is of no advantage to the kingdom of God. It will be a stench to any of the neighbors that might hear it. Remember, one angry partner can create this uncontrolled anger in the other. Uncontrolled anger is particularly a problem with men, but we have a generation of women that want to be the same as men. That really does cause troubles. Instead of trying to be different as God made them, women are trying to be like men. It seems like they want to copy the worst that is in men and not the best.

Kindness

Kindness has to do with actions. Kindness is tenderness put into action. Kindnesses are not actions that are expected or required but those actions that are extras and niceties. Kindness is when the wife bakes chocolate chip cookies when nobody is expecting them. Kindness is when the husband does something a little extra special. Kindness helps a marriage greatly. People that are not given to kindness make a rather mechanical marriage. They follow the rules and feel the emotions, but the marriage lacks freshness and spontaneity and is cold. This is not healthy. Marriages are not intended to be this way.

Compassion

Look for a mate who has and is able to show compassion either for a prospective mate or for others. There ought to be some compassion for those in difficult situations. All kinds of difficult situations--financial need, physical need, and spiritual need among them--require compassion. Lack of compassion in a mate will be evident after marriage.

Consistency

Consistency--to be able to be counted on--is a desirable quality. One usually knows how consistent people are going to respond and how they are going to feel. One does not have to worry that they are going to change at the last minute. Consistent people are not in-and-out and up-and-down. Marriage holds a lot of uncertainties, and this world holds a lot of uncertainties. If a person is inconsistent or marries someone who is inconsistent, the uncertainties multiply. The home ought to be a refuge from all the uncertainties on the outside. Uncertainty at home should not make things outside the home look more appealing. Someone might feel that if he or she could just get away from home, things would calm down and be a little more consistent. Can you see how this attitude could lead to trouble? Some men work overtime because things are not consistent and calm at work. They are not interested in going home where things are inconsistent and agitated. They would rather be at work the extra hours. The extra money earned is not the issue. Instead of going directly home when they do get off work, they go somewhere else. Some take up bowling, softball, or something else. I've known men--and I don't excuse them--that have been driven to drink because they just could not face going home. If the home has no consistency, what will the partner face when walking through the door?

Consistency is an excellent trait, and people ought to work at developing it. One writer said that if he walked across a bridge over a stream every day and decided that for one hundred days he would pick up a pebble and throw it in that stream, that is exactly what he would do. After twenty days, he wouldn't decide to just pick up eighty stones and throw them in. Because it is necessary to develop consistency, he would not change his plan when only a part of the way through. That writer said that if he had walked beyond the bridge and had forgotten to throw in a stone, he would turn around, go back, and

throw in a stone. He said that the action might seem frivolous, but it would teach him not to make frivolous promises. Later, it would be hard to be consistent in keeping frivolous promises. It is necessary to be consistent. Once committing to something, stay committed. Be consistent, and see that thing through to the end. Compromise and convenience have robbed Americans of our consistency. Americans used to be considered so consistent that the rest of the world knew who we were and what we would do in certain situations. Consistency was one of the traits that helped make America a great nation. It is a trait of the Lord. Aren't you glad Jesus is consistent? There is no changing with Him. We do not have to worry that He changed last night. Since we are to be conformed to His image, consistency is a trait on which we need to work.

Humility

Humility is the opposite of pride. Humility is necessary. Many marriages get in trouble because of pride of one type or another.

Adaptability

Adaptability is the ability to adjust. It is not being molded by the world and compromising for convenience. If our forefathers had not adjusted, they would have continued with buggy whips, horses, and carriages. Some of us adjusted from standard transmissions to automatic transmissions and from rolled-down windows to car air-conditioning. Some people have been able to adjust in a lot of areas, and I am glad we are able to adjust. If somebody gets married and cannot adjust to changing times and changing situations and changing speed, the marriage is going to be a rather awkward relationship. Of course, if both partners have trouble adjusting, maybe they can find a place where they do not have to adjust as much. We are living in a day when adjusting is necessary. We have to be able to adjust as things change and change quickly. We need to be able to adapt without changing our nature, our character, or our spiritual condition.

Firmness

Firmness can be matched with tenderness. Some firmness is necessary so that people are not pushovers. They are not easily manipulated.

Leadership

Leadership is necessary. However, if the lady exercises more leadership than the man, the match is probably a bad one. The man needs to be the head of the home, but the lady needs to be able to organize and run the home. 1Timothy 5:14 says she is to guide the house. It is all right for her to take some leadership. A wife without any leadership ability is going to put a double load on her husband. What happens when he has to be out of town, when he is sick, or while he is at work? Does everything stand still at home? The wife needs to be able to take some leadership and, at the same time, be able to be under leadership. The man needs to be the head of the home and be submitting to the leadership of Christ. In fact, the more he is in submission to Christ, the more ability he will have to operate in the home successfully.

As a nation and as believers, we are facing a crisis in leadership. We have many manipulators and a lot of man-pleasers; but we have a shortage of leaders. Think. How many leaders in the business world exert real leadership and give direction to the economy? Politically, how many leaders are men of principle and know where they are going? People can comfortably follow them. When we choose a president, do we have forty real leaders to choose between; or do we have many manipulating politicians to choose between? Where are the leaders in business? Where are the leaders in politics? Among believers, where are the leaders in our churches? Where is the leadership in our homes?

We have a problem as a nation. Our officials lack this leadership quality. This lack of leadership in individuals drifts from the bottom officials to the top ones or from the top officials to the bottom ones. It is a cause for concern. More and more organizations, committees, and groups give us our leadership rather than individuals. Rather than being able to count on individuals as leaders, everyone is being manipulated.

Study the history of our country. Even though we had leaders that differed, they were each leaders. Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson did not agree, but both of them were leaders. Some people followed one, and some followed the other. Both were able to get something done. Henry Clay never became president, but he was a leader. Examine others down through time. They were not fronts or manipulators; they were leaders. Logically, as the nation got larger, we should have had a greater supply of leaders. However, our homes have failed to produce those leaders. The home is the place where leaders get trained.

Joe Kennedy set out to rear and train leaders for a nation. Whether or not you like the men themselves or the goals of their leadership, you have to agree that those he trained exerted leadership. They had been reared and trained to be leaders. Have we forgotten what it takes to produce a leader? Are our homes struggling just to survive, or are they rearing and training leaders?

Do not let infatuation and the weakness of the moment produce a poorly matched marriage. Because of a bad marriage, some potential leaders lost any opportunity for major leadership. Their future as potential leaders was vastly decreased.

Obedience

Does the prospective mate know how to submit to God's authority and man's law? Obedience is necessary. If a person does not know how to submit, he or she does not know how to exercise authority. The opposite of obedience is rebellion, and some people are much inclined toward rebellion. Marrying a rebel does not make a good match.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness involves consistency. Faithful people are the kind that you can count on. They are always going to be there. If anything, they are going to try to be more and more useful.

Meekness

Jesus is an example of meekness. Moses was an example of meekness. Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is to know who we are in God's eyes and to operate in that knowledge. It is a matter of

humility, self-denial, and usefulness. Meekness does not reduce us to nothingness. Rather, meekness brings us to a full dependence on God.

Openness

It is dangerous to marry somebody who is very secretive. Such a person may not be willing to talk about certain things from his or her past. Openness does not mean that we should be continually confessing every detail from the past, but there ought to be a degree of openness. Openness requires wisdom. Do not be open with just anybody. Openness to the wrong person will make one a victim of gossip. If one is thinking of marrying somebody and cannot trust them and be open, it is probably best not to get married. Learn to be open. It may be painful, but it is necessary.

Will

People who have no will are useless, and people that have a stubborn will are trouble. Those that have a changeable will are dangerous. We can go on and on, but there ought to be something of a will or desire to see things through.

Privacy in Personal Matters

Some people talk with others about personal matters more than is necessary or healthy. A woman worked in a sewing factory. At work, she discussed her most intimate relationships with her husband. She seriously lacked any discretion in personal matters. This is an extreme case, but it is not an unusual case. Men tend to do the same sort of thing both before and after marriage. They often discuss their troubles or difficulties in the home with anybody who will listen. There are times and places to seek counsel. Being too free in your talking is not a good characteristic. Marriage to someone who does not keep personal matters private could be embarrassing or even destructive.

Selflessness

Being selfless is the opposite of being selfish or self-centered. Selflessness is a good trait to possess. A selfless person realizes that love is a matter of giving and not getting. The world generally defines love in terms of what people get and not in terms of what people give.

Biblically, the love that we need to have is love like Christ's. He gave Himself. Love is defined in terms of what we give. It is not defined in terms of what we get. People say that they "fell out of love" with someone. What they mean is that they selfishly quit giving. This problem could be solved if they just quit being selfish and started giving again. People say that they do not "love" someone any longer. They are actually saying that they will not give to them any longer. They will not sacrifice themselves any longer. These people are selfish. Those who tend to be selfish usually experience much trouble.

Sense of Humor

A sense of humor is absolutely necessary in marriage. If partners do not laugh sometimes, they are going to cry all the time. If they cannot laugh at some of the difficulties and let them go, the difficulties are going to beat them into the ground. We need to have a sense of humor. Realize that things are not funny because they are cute but because they are absolutely ludicrous. For example, we say that the world is against us. Do we really believe that the whole world is spending all its time trying to destroy us? We must think we are extremely important people. Now, if this ludicrous idea does not set us to laughing, then we are taking ourselves too seriously. A sense of humor tends to put things back in perspective and get them back in focus.

Some people have a sense of humor, and they always laugh at their mate. They even make fun of their mate. That is not the sense of humor we need. We need to be able to laugh at ourselves. We are taking ourselves too seriously if we think everything hinges on us. Realize that God got along without us before we showed up. He is even able to get along without us while we are here. There is a possibility He might be able to get along without us after we are gone. A sense of humor will help us be able to laugh at ourselves. However, there are two sides to this. There also ought to be some seriousness. Some people laugh all the time and never get serious when they need to.

Balance

One of the key characteristics of a successful match is balance. When looking for a match, a person is looking for the prospective partner who is going to make a good balance for him or her. Balance

for one couple may not be balance for another couple. There is not a set of rules to be found to make every marriage balanced. What works for some will not work for others. God commands that we train up a child in the way he or she should go. Each child is to be given individualized training according to his own direction and potential. I have five children, and each one of them is going to need a different balance in the home. Each is different from the others, and a different chemistry will exist in each home. The balance for one of my children is not the balance for another of them.

In the Old Testament, the Jewish priests were limited in whom they were allowed to marry. They could marry the widow of another priest, or they could marry somebody who was single. They could not marry the widow of somebody who had not been a priest. That widow would have learned a certain kind of balance that would not work in a priesthood home. She would have brought over expectations and understandings of liberties that would have greatly handicapped her in marriage to a priest. Not only would the wife be frustrated, but the priest would be hindered in his ministry. The balance in the home of the priest differed from the balance in the homes of others among the people. This difference in balance affected how matches were made for the priest. God was sharing His great wisdom here. The more someone reads the Bible; the more he or she sees God refer to this concept of balance.

Reserve

There ought to be a sense of reserve in the company of the opposite sex. Christian parents produce immoral children by teaching them how to flirt. These children learn how to play with other's emotions as if those emotions were toys. These children learn how to display themselves for the purpose of exciting passions and desires. The Bible speaks rather strongly on some of these things and the dangers of them. Be assured that flirts will not have the best of marriages. Flirts do not make good marriage partners. Wise people will avoid them and avoid seriously considering them as possible partners.

Maturity

A mate needs to have a degree of maturity. In the past, it was

constantly preached in fundamental circles that a couple should never marry until they are at least twenty-one. However, age is not the issue. Some people are not mature enough to get married at fifty, and some are mature enough before twenty. The issue is how mature a person has become and not how many years he or she has lived. How mature is a person in the realms of character and emotions?

Independence

There ought to be a degree of independence in a prospective mate. God does some unusual things among teenagers. He gives them a spirit of criticism so that they are not as likely to be deceived. They may exercise that gift wrongly, but it is given to them to protect them. Because they are at that time when they are facing marriage, teenagers need to be very critical lest they marry the wrong person.

Separation from Parents

One of the great challenges of young people is to gain independence from parents without being disobedient. Some parents make this terribly difficult. They want to dominate and control the teenager beyond what they did the child. Developing independence should be gradual with opportunity for mistakes. It is better for teenagers to make mistakes while they are still at home than for them to try to deal with those mistakes on their own. For parents to make the decisions and then suddenly turn the decisions completely over to the young person is dangerous. Young people must gradually gain independence from their parents, or they will be too attached to their parents. That will be trouble in the marriage thereafter. God gifts teenagers in gaining a degree of independence. Often times gaining independence is harder on the parents than on the young person.

Rising Above One's Upbringing

No one has had a perfect upbringing. There are always some difficulties. Do we live with those difficulties as an encumbrance? Do they become excuses? "That's how I was raised"; "I suffered, and I am going to make you suffer." We must rise above that which was imperfect or that which was lacking in our upbringing. We must not repeat the errors of the past and inflict them on the next generation. A person who cannot rise above the difficulties of his upbringing is not a

good marriage risk.

Friendship

A prospective partner needs to be friendly and capable of an enduring friendship. One must know how to choose friends, make friends, and keep friends. Marriage is not just an emotional and physical relationship. A husband and wife ought to be the best of friends.

Appropriate Compliments

A partner needs to know how to be complimentary. Everybody likes to be complimented; it is desirable to know how and when to compliment in a right way.

Positive Attitude

Negative people do not make good marriage partners. They are always discouraged, always critical, and always troubled.

Correct Attitude Toward the Opposite Sex

What is the individual's attitude towards the opposite sex? This often shows up in how they treat their father, mother, brother, or sister. The attitude they show is likely to carry over into their marriage.

Quiet or Talkative Nature

Are they quiet or talkative? There was a young lady who was interested in a young man and then his brother. However, her loud and constant talking destroyed her opportunities.

Honesty

Honesty is a necessity. A person who is dishonest with others will eventually be dishonest with a mate.

Patience to Wait for the Right Partner

Young people today are afraid they are forever going to be single. They jump at the possibility of a marriage and just do the best they can for fear of being left out. **THEY FORGET THAT A BAD MARRIAGE IS WORSE THAN NO MARRIAGE AT ALL. Often times, somebody marries out of desperation; and the person of his or**

her dreams shows up a month later. He or she gets a sick feeling but is already married and has to live with that choice. If a person is to be married, God knows the partner who is right for him or her. There needs to be that willingness to wait patiently for the mate God is preparing. My parents did not meet until they were in their thirties. Many cases of that sort exist.

Agreement in Soul

Cultural and Social Agreement

Amos 3:3 “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” As discussed, prospective mates need to agree in emotions and character. They also need to agree culturally and socially. Culture affects a person’s social view. In marriage, similarity in rearing is helpful. Did they grow up in similar types of homes, with similar backgrounds, convictions, standards, goals and motives; or were their homes so dissimilar that they do not really understand each other socially or culturally? A great dissimilarity can create problems and can cause two people to pull apart after they are married. The two just do not understand each other. One does not understand how the other thinks or comes to decisions.

Behavioral Norms

Most people think that the culture and society in which they grew up is the finest and that others have their weaknesses. If the partners come from different cultures and societies, each may eventually disdain the other. It is a temptation for those who have grown up in what we would call lower levels of society to mock those who have grown up with more culture. Some are proud that they do not have all the culture, society, and background. Of course, those on the upper levels may treat those below them as if they are inferiors, servants, or even slaves. Where there is not a similarity in background, real strains could be put on the husband-wife relationship. Some very embarrassing things happen when people do things that are not considered socially acceptable in certain circles. The behavior may have been perfectly acceptable in the social circles in which those people grew up. They have always done things that way. Believing that their social circle was the finest, they cannot understand why the behavior would be unacceptable in other circles. Differences in

behavioral norms can be a real problem. Behavioral norms should be discussed ahead of marriage and given some serious consideration.

Expectations

Expectations should be considered. Where does a possible partner expect to be culturally? Sometimes a poor person will marry a rich person expecting that the match will put them into the highest society. Money does not always give access to the highest society. You may have a lot of money; but if you do not have education, entrance into higher society may be blocked. You may have the money and the education; but if you do not have the manners, entrance may be blocked. You may have the money, the education, and the manners; but if you do not have three generations of high society behind you, entrance to society that is often called “old money” may be blocked. If people have the expectation that they are just going to intrude into higher society, they are deceiving themselves. Certain social doors are closed to me because of my accent. I would need to change my accent in order to enter. If I choose not to change my accent, then I accept the consequences of that choice. A mate who has high expectations in marriage may be very disheartened.

Consider, for example, a professor at a university whose new wife did not complete high school. The wife may just assume that, because of her husband, she will be accepted in the levels of society where he is accepted. However, she may not be invited to attend functions to which he is invited. Her expectations would not be met, and she would be a very disheartened young lady. Perhaps she would become cynical, critical, offended, or depressed. What does each prospective mate expect of the other culturally and socially? Will a prospective mate be able to deal with certain situations, and know how to handle certain problems?

Level of Society

From what social level did a prospective mate come? We are not as much a melting pot in America as some would teach us. We are very stratified. Great varieties of social levels exist, but those levels are not always clearly defined. A person may be able to move easily in three or four levels. However, what is the social level from which that person actually came? Are prospective partners from similar social levels?

From which financial levels did the prospective partners come? If one grew up poor and the other grew up on a more comfortable level, this does create real stresses in the marriage. Both partners have expectations of how things are going to be handled. Perhaps a young lady has some money in her background and a young man does not. If the young man marries her, he may be thought to have married her for her money. Perhaps she will be disheartened if he is not able to provide for her in the way to which she is accustomed. Is she going to be disappointed in him? Is their difference in financial level going to put a strain on the marriage? Any difference in financial level will become a barrier that a man of sincerity will have to decide exactly how to handle. As for her, she may love him dearly. How does the young lady deal with their differences in financial level? She must let him be the provider and not put him in bondage or embarrass him or strip him of his manhood. Differences in financial level can be a real problem for both partners.

Work Ethic

A lot of people do not think about work ethic before marriage, but a poor work ethic can be a big issue that puts strain on a marriage. Lazy people do not make good husbands no matter how sweet-talking and fine-looking they are. Mates that will avoid work and are inconsistent or lack energy in their work may be a great disappointment. We are living in a day when women are able to make as much as men. Some men love this because they can avoid work, and meals are still provided. This creates problems. The husband may decide that he does not need to work because his wife makes enough to provide for them. The wife may have thought that her husband would work and provide for the family.

Some people are too proud to do certain kinds of work. They would rather be unemployed than work a job below their education level or their skill level or the pay level of their last job. If they cannot do something better than the work available, they will do nothing. They will wait until something better is available. Something better may not become available in this day of downsizing.

Upgrading skills and knowledge is often necessary. Job identification in America is changing rapidly, and skills and knowledge that used to earn jobs may not earn them in the future. People have to be willing to change. Even in their forties and fifties people may have to drop down to a lower level in another skill area and start working their way up. Also, people cannot assume that they are going to stay at one company all of their lives. Companies lay off workers--laborers and management--thousands at a time. People with associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, and master's degrees are being downsized. People with special computer skills are being laid off. When they are downsized or laid off, those who have a good work ethic will find other work. However, those with a poor work ethic may just sit and moan over their loss. A young lady may marry a young man with a poor work ethic. If he is laid off, this will create problems in the home. A man may marry a woman that he expects to support him. If she gets downsized, this will create stress in the home. According to the University of Pennsylvania, the number one cause of divorce is money problems. Many money problems begin with a mate who has a poor work ethic.

Our education and our society may have promised us that in the future we are always going to make more money and work less hours. The fact that we have to work sixty hours to make what we used to make in forty hours is painful and angers us. This is not what we were told. This is not what we believed. Those that have a good work ethic will accept reality and make positive changes. Those that have a poor work ethic not only suffer the loss of a job but also refuse to make necessary changes. They will have troubles in their marriage. Thus, when it comes to matching, you want to look at a person's work ethic. Lazy people that avoid work--especially hard work--do not make good marriage partners.

A poor work ethic may not show up in dating. Before marriage, do a little investigating into a possible mate's honesty and work ethic. Let me cite an example from Israel. A young fellow wanted to enter into engagement with a young lady. In Israel, the father sits down with the young lady; and they discuss the possible engagement. Actually, the engagement is what Americans would call regular dating. In Israel, individuals do not do much dating until they are ready for engagement. However, they do much groundwork before the

engagement. In this example, both individuals worked in a hospital. He was a doctor, and she had a good position. They had seen and known each other. He thought she would make a good wife, and she thought he might make a good husband. However, first she talked with her father. The father talked with the young man and asked for a lot of information and for a number of references. This was his daughter, and he wanted to know just what this young fellow was like. The father began to visit around and ask questions. He learned that although the young fellow had said that he had gotten his medical degree in the United States, the truth was that he had only taken some undergraduate work there. He had actually gotten his medical degree in Bulgaria or Romania. They do not have the quality of educational program in Bulgaria or Romania that they have in the United States. These facts indicated there may have been a problem in the young fellow's work ethic during his undergraduate work. There certainly was a problem as far as his honesty. The young lady told me that she did not really care where he had gotten his degree. However, it bothered her that he tried to appear as if he had worked harder than he actually had. She wanted somebody with a right work ethic. She herself was a hard worker. She was taking a fairly heavy load at the university, she was working full-time at the hospital, and she was helping at home. If the young fellow had been a hard-working mechanic instead of a doctor, that would have been perfectly fine. She wondered why he could not be truthful about his educational work. If she loved him, an engagement to an honest and hard-working car mechanic would have been fine. The plans for an engagement ended. She and her father considered an honest, consistent, and hard-working man to be a necessity in an engagement. She was so thankful to her father for checking everything before she got emotionally involved.

Social and Cultural Adjustment

Some people will not adjust easily because of their social or cultural background. They are what they are, and they are not interested in changing for marriage. They are going to be what they are going to be. Imagine a garbage collector who delights in being a garbage collector and in discussing his garbage. Garbage is his main interest. He insists that he is not going to change. Do you think the President of the United States would want somebody like that

consuming his time? Do you think a banker would be inclined to invite him for supper and have him in his home? A person who is unwilling to adjust limits himself. Being able to adjust can open doors, and refusing to adjust will close doors. Of course, the ability to adjust affects marriages too. Some people are set in their ways. They refuse to adjust for marriage. They are going to be what they are already. People who will not adjust are really bad marriage risks.

Manners

A person's background in manners can have a real effect. Proper manners have opened doors, and they have closed doors. A crude American preacher was visiting a family in Europe. This family did not have a lot, but they sacrificed to serve a tremendous breakfast. Normally, they would eat a roll with some butter or jelly and drink a cup of tea. On this morning, they had tea, rolls, sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, and much more. The preacher said, "Do you have any jam? I don't eat my rolls unless I have jam." He was making himself at home. In his home, that question would have been acceptable. Here, it was rather embarrassing because the family did not know the word "jam." I did not know whether to translate the word as "jelly." I did not want to sound like I condoned his crude question. I did not even want to sound like I was from his country. This American preacher had crudeness in his manners. Whoever married him had to live with that. Not only that, this family was quite upset because the preacher blew his nose at the table. To them, one of the rudest things someone could do at the table was to blow his nose. To them, this was like spitting in somebody's drink. If somebody spit in your water, you know how you would feel. That was how they felt. The American preacher should have excused himself and gone into another room.

Social and cultural background does have an effect on marriage. Suppose that a person from one culture marries someone from another culture. This difference in attitude toward blowing one's nose at the table did not show up in their dating. They marry; and sometime after the first month, one of them gets a cold. As they sit down at breakfast one morning, one of them blows his nose. That one cannot understand why the other one is upset the rest of the day. The social and cultural differences in their backgrounds need to be addressed. It has been said that one of the best ways for parents to

break up an unwelcome relationship is to invite the young fellow over and serve spaghetti. Very few young fellows are ever going to pass this test. He will flunk the test, and she will see something she never saw before.

I will give you the example of a test that took place in Texas in the early fifties. A young man went to visit the home of the young lady who would later become his wife. Because he had grown up in a lower level of society, her parents felt that he was not going to be a good match for their daughter. However, he had learned the differences in their cultures and was prepared to make adjustments. Her parents had him come for a formal meal. Everything was fancy. The young man had learned to have proper manners and to handle situations correctly on her level of society. As the butter was being passed, the young man reached to get it. As the young man reached out, the father of the young lady quickly moved the butter dish. The young man's hand went into the butter. The father intended this to happen, but it was to look accidental. The father said, "In our house, we pass the butter plate. We don't grab the butter with our hand." What was the young fellow to do? He responded, "Where I grew up, we didn't try to embarrass our guests by jamming the butter onto their hand." The young lady's father admitted, "You'll do, son. You'll do." The young man knew how to handle this unexpected bombshell and handle it with grace yet firmness. The father's strategy would have completely thwarted some young men. It probably had thwarted some. The young man found the father had already done this to several other fellows, and they had failed the test.

There was a case in Ohio of a fellow who came wanting to marry the young lady of the house. The young lady's father pulled a gun and threatened to shoot. He actually did shoot over the young fellow's head right there in the house. The father told the fellow to get off the property and never come back. If the fellow came back, the father would kill him. The fellow never came back. He married somebody else. Another young man did pass the test, and did get to marry that young lady. In that culture, this was how a father tested a young man who wanted to marry his daughter. How would the young man respond to pressure? Each young person in a couple should know how to handle the differences in culture and manners of their potential partner. One does not know what kinds of situations one might need to

face.

Geography

Geography has an effect on people culturally and socially. Generally speaking, people who grow up in the mountains have certain things in common. The same is true of those who grow up along rivers or those who grow up in cities. Those who grow up in colder climates differ from those who grow up in warmer climates. These are differences that can be reconciled, but a person needs to be alert to them and needs to understand them. Some people are so proud of where they live geographically. They are convinced that they live in the best of places. Anybody from outside their geographical area is vastly inferior. These are geographic issues that need to be considered.

Racial Differences

Remember that Moses married an Ethiopian, and Miriam made an issue of this. As a result, God gave her leprosy. (Be cautious what you say about other people's racial differences in marriage.) Where there are racial differences, possible problems need to be considered by the prospective mates. Certain racial combinations in marriage are a problem in some parts of the world. Children of those racial combinations may face special problems. In other parts of the world, the same racial combinations may not be a problem. Also, no special problems result for the children. Racial distinctions in culture and thought pattern go all the way back to Ham, Shem, and Japheth. Racial differences in a marriage do have an effect because they can open or close doors. In marriage, possible problems resulting from racial differences are not insurmountable, but they need to be considered.

National Background

Suppose a Frenchman married a German before World War I or World War II. The wars could have put some real strains on the marriage. Suppose that someone of German background marries someone of French background in today's world. Current disagreements between the two nations could easily flow over into the home. Problems can show up in the marriages of partners of different national backgrounds.

Ethnic Background

The ethnic differences of marriage partners can show up. Sometimes the ethnic differences show up in the cooking. Sometimes they show up in what a partner considers correct manners or in a partner's access to certain areas of society or in a partner's concepts of the acceptable way to live. In the Scriptures, change culturally and socially shows up. When Ruth married Boaz, she did not try to make him like a Moabite but adjusted to Boaz's culture. In fact, Ruth changed from the ways she had grown up and was already gleaning in the fields before Boaz ever expressed any interest in her. Ethnic differences show up and show up often in marriage. Some people find shelter in their ethnic backgrounds. Adjustment may be difficult.

Citizenship

Marriage between partners with different citizenships may bring advantages or disadvantages. How will the different citizenships affect the children? Different citizenships were a real problem after each of the wars when we had a lot of war brides come. Today, we are facing this issue often as more and more immigrants come into the United States.

Political Viewpoint

Sometimes, prospective marriage partners have different political viewpoints. Both are convinced that their viewpoint is correct. The partners may agree to each vote and let their votes cancel each other. Each partner may try to change the other partner's viewpoint. Some partners may refuse to vary from their political party's decisions or from how they have voted in the past. Some partners may examine the individual candidates and vote on the basis of the candidate's stand on issues. Different political viewpoints could create friction in the home. Some couples decide that they will just ignore political differences. However, that does not settle any problems, and might even make things worse.

Finances

Two individuals who are thinking of marriage ought to carefully consider finances. Financial level in a marriage can cause many problems. Many questions need to be answered. At what financial level

has each person been living? At what level does each want to live? To what is each accustomed? Are they used to having enough money to eat out when they please, or are they used to living frugally? Are they used to having new clothes or only what they get at yard sales? Are they used to waiting for bargains or used to buying what is in style as soon as it is available? Who earns the money? Who is going to spend the money? These questions ought to be discussed and necessary actions planned out ahead of time. I grew up with my father and my mother. The last years of my life at home (from the fifth grade on), my mother taught full-time. She had her checking account, and my father had his checking account. She paid certain bills, and he paid certain bills. They each had their own views on how to spend the money. As long the bills got paid, neither knew how much money the other had or what the other was spending. (I do not recommend this.)

In some cases, no flexibility is practiced. One of the partners makes all the decisions, and the other does not make any decisions. Sometimes money is just not available. No real decisions need to be made. The only question is, “Do we put anything in the water for soup tonight, or do we just have water?”

Spending Priorities

The number of things to spend money on is always greater than the amount of money available. There will always be more needs than money. Some things may not actually be needs. They may only be desires; but when desires are strong enough, we will convince ourselves that desires are needs. Here is a good rule to obey--true needs should always come before wants. Establish spending priorities. Do not groan or complain; but be thankful for what you do have. If somebody does not establish spending priorities, really curious things will happen about the third month of marriage when the bills start coming in the mail.

Savings and Investing Viewpoint

What is the view of each prospective partner as far as savings and investments? Is there any similarity of view? Is saving and investing important, and what can be accomplished by it?

Earning Potential

What kinds of job skills do the potential partners have? How many different kinds of jobs can each hold? How many different places could each get work? If a potential partner needs work, does he have a variety of skills to utilize? When an oversupply of workers with one skill is seeking jobs, a person with only that one skill is in trouble. A person ought to have a variety of job skills. With more skills, their potential for finding a job is greater.

Ability to Adjust Job Skills

The ability to adjust job skills connects to the area of earning potential. Is the quantity of one's job skills increasing and the quality of one's job skills improving? Does a possible mate have a job with a future, or is their job about to die? Jobs are always becoming obsolete. Examples include the following: serving as captain of a canal boat, grading eggs by hand, making buggy whips, and building carriages. Today, being the best carriage maker in town will cause you to go hungry. Suppose you are an expert at putting inner tubes in car tires. In the past, a person who could patch tubes and could put them in without wrinkles could stay fairly busy. That person might be in financial trouble today.

Adjustment to the times is a definite need. A lot of job skills being used right now are not going to be needed in ten years. The individual with only those skills will be by-passed because a machine will do the same work. New products will come out, and the need for that skill will become obsolete. Fax machines replaced a lot of errand boys. They also replaced couriers who traveled coast to coast and could be trusted to move and protect legal documents. Computers and the internet have now replaced fax machines.

Does the job of a prospective mate have a future to it? Imagine. A young couple wants to get married. He has a great job now, but that job has no future. He doesn't want to increase his skills. In only a few years, he will be out of work; and his marriage will be in dire shape. All the skill, experience, and honesty one might have will not get him work if the job is dead.

Attitude Toward Money and Debt

Observe whether a prospective mate is careful or careless with money. What degree of carefulness is there? What is the attitude

toward debt? There will be trouble if one partner is fearful of debt, and the other does not care how much the debt swells. For what reasons is debt acceptable? How much debt is acceptable? How is the debt to be paid?

Budgeting

How much does a couple want to earn? A young couple might want to live at \$40,000 a year, and they currently have an earning capability of \$30,000. What financial changes would help them? They might want to make a budget. Each of them should make a budget and then compare. He might be shocked at how much it is going to cost for food. If he likes steak but plans to give her bologna money, he may need to visit the grocery store. There are men that have insisted on eating steak. Those men demanded to have meat even if the kids only had bread and butter. Since they earned the money, they thought that they ought to be fed steak. That attitude puts strain on a marriage and causes resentment in the wives and children, and those men cannot understand the resentment. This problem was never thought of before marriage.

Sacrifice Level

What level of sacrifice will a prospective partner make? For some, sacrifice is never eating out and never having food sent in. For others, sacrifice is eating out only four times a week. Some can sacrifice to the level of changing what they eat. They learn to eat very little meat or cheese but fill up on less costly foods such as potatoes or macaroni. For some, sacrifice is setting the thermostat in the house at sixty degrees in both winter and summer. Others must have the temperature in the house comfortable at all times. Sacrifice might mean resoling your old shoes instead of buying new ones. Sacrifice might mean wearing socks that have holes in them if no one will see those holes. For some people, this goes beyond sacrifice. This is suffering. It is unthinkable. The sacrifice level makes a difference financially in the home. Problems occur when one partner says that she cannot cut back any further than a certain level, and the other says that he has never lived on such a high level.

Closely connected to their sacrifice level is their level of generosity. Are they generous? Are they generous in giving to God?

Materialism

How materialistic are the prospective partners? Has either set aside money to start the marriage? Does either own any property? Does either have any possessions to bring into the marriage? It is generally recommended that if a couple cannot afford a two-week honeymoon, then they are not ready to get married.

Ability to Adapt to Financial Highs and Lows

In Philippians, Paul tells us that he knew how to be abased and knew how to abound. He knew how to have much and knew how to suffer need. Is there that adaptability financially for us, or must we always live at the same level and never have our ups and downs? Generally, a person must learn how to do without. People that never have to do without usually do not know how to handle what they have and might lose it. Though these people may be able to hang onto some of what they have, they will not appreciate it and will not benefit from it. They never make any great financial progress.

My wife and I had job skills, earning potential, and jobs with a future. These made up for some of what we lacked financially in the beginning of our marriage. We both knew what we desired to accomplish financially, and we both knew how to live at a sacrificial level. We were not materialistic, and we were careful with money. With these strengths, we were able to compensate for certain weaknesses. All this was carefully thought through as we planned when we would get married. Some couples wait so long while they are getting financially established that they wait longer than they ought to get married. They wait because some things are not quite where they should be. Those things could get worked out after marriage if the couple considers and agrees on them before marriage.

Thought to Consider

How is emotional promiscuity harmful? Emotional promiscuity goes on not only before marriage but also during far, far too many marriages. People may never have done something physically, but they have done it emotionally. Both men and women participate.

Remember Proverbs 23:7, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”
Remember Matthew 5:28, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”
Adultery has already occurred if it has gotten into the heart. Is flirting before marriage related to infidelity later? Is the American-style dating system scriptural?

Agreement in Body

The final area is the physical. Remember. God established the priority of spirit first and then soul and then body. God gives this area the finishing place. The physical area is where the world starts. The world and God’s people are to be different. Some of God’s people have been so influenced by the world that their marriage may handicap them for life. Marriage can be a blessing, and marriage can be a handicap. This depends on the nature of the match.

Health

A person’s health has a big influence on their marriage. Lack of health is one of the greatest causes of poverty. Some people, because of bad health, are poor without a choice. In the Bible, the woman with the issue of blood spent all her money on doctors; and still was not any better. Her sickness caused poverty; did it not? Poverty will cause trouble in the home. If she had been married, imagine how her husband would have felt. He may have worked extra hours, and his wife was still weak and sickly. That could make a little trouble in the home.

A fellow had dated and proposed to my aunt, but my aunt was sickly. The advice of the family was that she should not marry him. “You will be very unhappy, and he will be very unhappy. You know he wants a big family, and you are too sick to have a lot of children. This will cause trouble in the marriage.” So, based on her poor health, she backed out of the relationship and never did marry. She realized that she was not a good marriage risk. If she married, there would be misery year upon year because of her poor health.

Health is a real issue in marriage. It is something that ought to be seriously considered. Poor health can become a grinding issue in the home. In this day of health insurance and government health programs, some people have developed the hobby of spending more

time with doctors than is necessary. Constant sickness can be a real problem. Of course, some people choose to be sickly or choose to overemphasize their sickness. Some people use sickness as a tool to manipulate, dominate, or control in the home. A sickly person is not a good marriage risk.

Strength

Strength may be related to health but not always. Somebody may not be sick, but neither are they strong. They can only do so much and are limited in what they can accomplish. Physical strength is something to be considered in marriage because one never knows when that strength will be needed.

Endurance

To be able to work long hours or work extra hours or work beyond what is expected requires endurance. To men who have endurance, forty hours at work seem like nothing. They can put in a ten, twelve, or fourteen-hour day. When necessary, they are able to do this for a number of days. Some men come for forty hours a week on a job, but they cannot work forty hours. I mean *work* forty hours. As a result, they only get the low-pay positions; and they may be some of the first to be let go. They may be put under emotional pressures on the job to try to squeeze more work out of them. This will make a big difference in the home. When the man comes home after his eight hours of work on the job, he cannot do the whole list of things that needs to be done at home. He cannot go out. He cannot get involved in the children's activities. He cannot help with homework. He has already put in his hours for that day, and that is as much as he can do. As a constant situation, this man's lack of endurance could put a strain on the home and its functions.

Not all have these problems, but some do. Some people would never make it on the mission field. They are incapable of traveling two or three hours without a stop to rest. Some cannot physically handle certain loads or strains, and that limits them. Endurance needs to be considered when choosing a mate.

Diet

Diet can be a problem. Stay alert to this. Problems result when

one eats certain things and the other does not. Suppose he is a meat, potatoes, and gravy fellow; and she is a salad girl. After the first week of marriage, diet can cause difficulties. This is something that they never thought about before getting married. Some leeway must be made or some understanding shown if the partners do not match. Maybe they can get along fine. One eats this, and the other eats that. They do not pick at each other for eating so much cholesterol or eating rabbit food. If prospective partners cannot compromise on their diet differences, they are going to clash. It is the little fox that spoils the vines. Recognize differences. Do not just assume that a prospective partner's diet is the same. Do not consider differences to be wrong. A happy home is not produced by correcting a mate's diet. Some understanding is required.

Habits

This wide area covers major and minor habits. In our extended family tree, a couple took a while before they finally solved a problem they had. She believed in rolling the toothpaste tube up from the bottom, and he believed in squeezing it in the middle. He would unroll the tube and squeeze, and she would roll it back up. Finally, they decided to get two tubes of toothpaste because one was not going to change the other. Where I grew up, if you got the towel back on the rack, it was a surprise. My wife grew up in a home where they neatly and carefully folded the towel in thirds and put it on the rack. Because our backgrounds differed, we agreed on how to handle this before we were married. These things need to be thought about and considered before marriage. He may never have suspected that she wore curlers to bed. She may never have suspected that he used snuff at night. If curlers and snuff are not the problems, other problems can be just as grievous to some.

Habits of personal hygiene and cleanliness are issues to consider. People from certain parts of Europe may take a bath once a week. They feel bathing is a cause of sickness because a person washes off all the body oils and protection that keep germs from invading through the skin. Others feel that bathing only once a day is living dirty. Bathing or not bathing is cultural, but not bathing can also be odoriferous. Heavy colognes are used to try to cover the odor. Certain missionaries could not stay on mission fields because they could not

handle the odors when the people came to worship. Those people had taken a bath the night before, but they only washed their clothes on rare occasions.

Cleanliness habits can become a problem in some homes. How often should socks be washed? Does one wear them three weeks or three days or half a day before washing them? Does one wash and rinse the dishes with cold water? Does one use soap on the dishes? Does one scrape off what food they can see and then rinse the dishes with cold water and let them drain?

Purity

When a person has been impure before marriage, this creates problems for the marriage. This is true even if the impurity is with the one they marry. Impurity creates questions, doubts, and troubles because it is a violation of God's law. The one who has been impure will have to accept some consequences. The consequences are complicated, and they are heightened if the impurity was with somebody besides the marriage partner. When talking with certain people, you know impurity is at the root of their problem even though they may not have divulged it. They must deal with their impurity both with God and with their own spouse. They can cover impurity, but they will lose friendships over it. It will change them emotionally, and it will change them doctrinally. It will wreak havoc in wide circles. Some preachers, because of impurity in their own marriages, have changed their beliefs about the sanctity of marriage. They have changed their beliefs about anybody that will preach on the negative consequences of impurity. They will openly attack those people; or in churches elsewhere, they will undermine them. Impurity has caused all kinds of trouble because people do not want their sin to be exposed. There can be forgiveness, but a price must be paid.

Those that have suffered as a result of impurity must shout a warning to the younger generation. Do not hide and let the younger generation fall into impurity. Try to keep them out of it. I am thankful that I did not fall into impurity; but 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." This is a serious issue. Marriages cannot be as solid when somebody has been guilty of impurity. They cannot be as solid because something has been lost. Proverbs 2:19 says that the impure cannot return to purity. They must

live with the price of impurity. A person can deny impurity, but denial does not annul its price.

Pain level

Some people can bear a lot of pain, but some can take only a little. Some have to find relief for just a little pain. Others can endure a lot of pain without needing care. Generally, women can handle more pain than men. That is one reason God has women bearing the children instead of men. Most men could not endure the pain.

How much pain can a prospective mate handle? Those that have a very low threshold of pain—that can endure only a small amount of pain—have the potential to become legal drug addicts. Doctors may cooperate with prescriptions that aid addiction. Over-the-counter medications may keep someone bound. Drugs will affect minds and, eventually, bodies. Medical poisons deal with one issue, but their side effects are still there. Inability to handle pain does not help make a good marriage. Learning to handle pain will make a better marriage for them in the future.

What degree of pain will bring a reaction? At what point does pain, familiar or unexpected, affect us emotionally? If some people are bumped, this causes them to flare up emotionally. Others can accidentally hit their thumb with a hammer and stay calm. Consider how a prospective mate responds to pain and sickness. How does he or she respond to familiar pain, unexpected pain, muscular pain, nervous pain, or any kind of pain? If they hurt, some people cannot work. They may get the slightest headache, and they cannot work. Trouble occurs in a marriage if one person is stopped by a little pain, but the other works in spite of their pain.

Suffering Level

A person is pushing his or her body, and the pain begins. How much suffering can he or she tolerate? Sometimes athletics teaches one to tolerate suffering. Not always physical pain, suffering may have to do with other areas. Some people can absorb a great amount of suffering. Others are exposed to just a little, and they cannot handle it. Differences in suffering levels rarely translate into tranquility, peace, or happiness in a marriage.

Coordination

Is a prospective mate coordinated? Those that are clumsy have problems.

Handicaps

If we will be honest about it, we all have some type of physical handicap. Does our handicap hinder us? Do we regard it as a barrier, or do we see it as a challenge? Do we see our handicap as something to overcome, as something to get along with, or as what we are? When I was in college, I was denied all jobs that paid anything above minimum wage because, on the paperwork, I was handicapped. At that time, businesses did not give any preference or even any opportunity to the handicapped. I was blind in one eye. This was the same as having a leg cut off. I could not get a job in a union company or in factories. If they asked me if I was handicapped, I would say no. That was not lying because I did not see myself as handicapped. However, they saw blindness in one eye as a handicap. It is a physical disability, but it was not stopping me. I had polio. My muscles had been affected, and my nervous system had been shattered. My response time was limited because of being blind in one eye, and my depth perception was gone. In spite of these disabilities, I graduated as a physical education major. I saw my disabilities not as a barrier but as a challenge. Some people view their handicap as a barrier, and they struggle with it. They focus on what they cannot do rather than on what they can do. Their handicap is a physical problem, but it becomes more. It becomes an immense life problem. This makes trouble in a marriage.

Children

With regard to children, several issues need to be sorted out. Consider one's love for children. Are they a priority? What is the desired number to have? Consider the time invested in raising children. How are they to be trained? How are they to be disciplined? What does one want to produce in each child? What goals will be set for each? All these things need to be sorted out in terms of matching. Consider, too, that these issues concerning children relate also to issues

concerning finances.

Appearance

Appearance should be neat, but decide if you want an appearance which is natural or unnatural. Some say, "If the barn needs painting, paint it." They choose the unnatural. Somebody believes in the painted look, and somebody else believes in the natural look. You put the two together, and guess what you have?

My father, a poor farm boy from western Pennsylvania, went to visit my mother before they were engaged. She was the daughter of a wealthy man who had lived among the upper class in a suburb of New York City. As they were talking in the living room, she looked over at my father and asked, "Is there anything about me you do not like, and you would want to have changed?" He said, "I don't care for the lipstick you are wearing." She excused herself, went and took the lipstick off, and never put lipstick on again. She decided she wanted to match and not to battle. That is how that matter was settled. My father would not have married her due to an issue like that. It was a major issue in those days and still is in some areas and places.

Modesty

Some men--with their wives in agreement--like their wives to physically display themselves in such a way as to draw lustful attention. The man gets pleasure out of this, and so does his wife. The two are matched in their immodest way of doing things. Others feel differently about modesty. If you have partners that disagree about modesty, you have a problem in the home. A pastor had helped his wife buy some clothes. The clothes had looked fine on the rack, and he had enjoyed them. When his wife wore them in church, however, other people had gotten the same feelings he had gotten. Those feelings should have been kept in the bedroom. That pastor had not distinguished between his own personal viewing rights as her husband and the rights of others. His wife could not understand why; but, suddenly, he did not want her to wear those clothes in public any more.

Physical Attractiveness

The Bible says that there were none fairer in all the land than

the daughters of Job. Being attractive is not wrong. However, other than wealth, an attractive physical appearance is the number one attribute people look for today. Other issues all get subordinated to that one. Consider a prospective partner's conviction about one's appearance being sensual? The Bible is rather clear on this issue.

Age

If somebody twenty-five years old wants to marry someone sixteen years old, their differences may be problems. However, if somebody at forty-five wants to marry somebody who is thirty-six, their differences will probably not be problems. In both cases the span between ages is the same. However, in the second case, the prospective partners are older.

If the wife is older than the husband, this can cause marriage problems. Some women marry somebody younger so that they can train him to be like they want him. That is a strong statement. There is nothing wrong with an older wife and a younger husband, but much understanding and much consideration must precede marriage.

Some older saints of God--in their sixties, seventies, and eighties--have married somebody in their twenties. In one case, a certain evangelist whose wife had died married a woman in her twenties. She had been his nurse, and it was not fitting for him to travel with a female nurse. She was able to extend his ministry by marrying him.

When the first spouse has died, a second marriage should be given even more thought than the first one. One person or both have already taken on certain identities and culture through the first marriage. Those identities and that culture will cause differences. It is not just the individual differences that they bring to marriage. Making the second marriage work will require dropping traditions, changing habits, and changing ways of handling things. Both partners must make adjustments.

What adjustments are going to be necessary with differences in age? The older the person, the more adjustments he or she is going to have to make. Tendencies still moldable in the teens and twenties become habit and pattern in the thirties. They are pretty firm by the forties. Older people can get set in their ways. My father and mother

did not meet or marry until they were in their thirties. This created problems because both of them were fairly settled, and they differed in some areas. On some things, they agreed to change. On some things, they never did change. They were set in their ways, and this created problems.

Biblical Examples of Matching

These Biblical examples vary and show contrasts in matching.

Adam/Eve

God did the match-making for Adam and Eve. He did it through creation. God created Eve for Adam so they would be able to meet each other's needs. The two were not identical, but they were complimentary. God took from Adam to make Eve. What Adam no longer was or had, was to be found in Eve. A man is not complete in himself. If God would have a man to marry, what that man needs to be complete is found only in the woman that God gives him in marriage.

Abraham and Sarah

Somehow the match between Abraham and Sarah must have been arranged in the family. Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. We are not told much about this in the Bible.

Isaac and Rebekah

The Bible gives a whole chapter—a classic chapter—to the matching of Isaac and Rebekah. This matching involved outside advice and help. The father of Isaac sent a servant with specific directions to negotiate with the parents of the one he believed would make a fit mate for his son. Isaac was not opposed to this match. He was a grown man, but he felt this match would work out well. Isaac was satisfied, and no problem ever seemed to come out of that matching.

Esau

Esau, one son of Isaac and Rebekah, did not consult his parents nor allow them to have anything to do with his marriage. In real contrast to Isaac, Esau did not want outside advice and help for his matching. He went out without any advice and picked the one whom he would marry. Also in real contrast to Isaac's match, this match

brought great grief to his home and disgrace to his name. Isaac accepted outside advice and help. Esau made his own choice. Which method is the one that is more common today?

Jacob and Leah and Rachel

In this match, a blend of accepting outside advice and help and making one's own choice takes place. Jacob was sent by his parents. He was given directions on where to look and given an idea for what he should look. However, he did the picking and negotiating. Jacob got more than that for which he bargained. Not all was to his benefit. He might have done better if he had checked a little further into the match. If his knowledge of how he matched up with Rachel had been better, he might not have been deceived by Leah. Fellows, if she wears a really heavy veil, you might want to peek under before the vows are taken.

Boaz and Ruth

Boaz and Ruth followed the customs of that day. Boaz did a lot of considering, and he did the pursuing. Ruth simply did as she was instructed by her mother-in-law.

Solomon

The marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter (like the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel) was based on politics and money. Their marriage set up a power base. Many marriages today are based on politics or money. Maybe these marriages have the same kinds of results.

Hosea and Gomer

Hosea and Gomer is a unique example. Hosea married Gomer because of God's command and for the sake of his ministry. As God directed in his ministry, Hosea went through some very violent and difficult things.

Esther

The marriage of Esther and Ahasuerus was based on his lust

and his selfishness. In the book of Esther, read the account of how Ahasuerus achieved this match. He dismissed one wife and demanded a beauty contest. This was not a good way to choose a mate, but it is certainly the world's way and is often practiced today.

Christ and His Church

In Ephesians 5, we have the match of Christ and His church. This match is based on Christ's love. We love Him, because He first loved us. The match is also based on His ability to change us into what we ought to be and on our willingness to be changed. Those that are unwilling to be changed certainly are not a part of His church—His bride.

Concluding Thoughts

We have dealt with some principles in this matter of matching. Marriage can produce a good effect, a bad effect, or no effect. Sometimes an individual will have no effect on the one he or she marries; the partner just goes on in the same way. Marriage is a sort of side issue; it does not have a great effect positively or negatively. Usually, though, marriage does affect the partners in one way or another. It can produce increased usefulness for the kingdom, and it can produce decreased usefulness for the kingdom. Matching can help prevent divorces. It can be a way to perpetuate heritages. Matching is based on what the two individuals have in common and what strengths each individual may bring to the marriage. Matching for marriage will work for young people and for older people too.

In intellectual areas, consider whether this is a good match in education, common sense, and continuing education that translates into job potential.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul said he prayed that God would preserve their whole spirit, soul, and body blameless until the return of Christ. Man is a three-part being--spirit, soul, and then body. Matching ought to be done in the order that God decreed. First is

matching in the spiritual areas. Next is matching in the soul areas. Last is matching in the body or physical areas.

Spiritually, both partners need to be saved. According to II Corinthians 6, we are not to be unequally yoked together. That is forbidden by God. Consider, too. Do the prospective partners match in doctrine, practice, and heritage?

In the soul areas, we considered both character and emotions and cultural and social issues. First, we considered character and emotions. How do prospective mates relate to each other? Will they be able to get along? Is there balance in character and emotions? Does each have the ability to make adjustments? Is there wisdom in knowing how to be private in personal matters? Second, we discussed cultural and social issues. Similarities and differences in rearing, expectations, social and financial levels, work ethic, adaptability, manners, geographic background, national and ethnic backgrounds, racial differences, political views, and citizenship are all to be evaluated. Social and cultural issues include the issue of finances.

These are a few among the many financial questions to be answered. Who is going to earn the money? Who is going to spend it? Are there spending priorities? What is the attitude toward and practice in savings and investments and debt? What is the sacrifice level? What is the immediate and long-range earning potential? How much money is it going to take for the couple to live? Similarities and differences on social and cultural issues can appear often in marriages.

In the area of the physical, prospective mates need to consider issues such as purity and modesty. Health, strength, diet, habits, handicaps, children, and appearance were some among the issues discussed. Remember. This is the area that God gives the lowest priority.

God made us different. A whole spectrum of differences exists. That is why a couple considering marriage needs to examine how well their differences will harmonize. Some people will marry because they are in love with the concept of getting married. Some are desperate. Some people make fine singles; but because of how they choose to be, they are a bad marriage risk and probably should never get married. Something is worse than being single, and that is being unwisely

married. A lot of people do not believe this. After a few years of marriage, they become believers. It is too late because they went ahead and did what they wanted. Some of the people getting married cause me to shudder. Somebody is going to have to cope with the consequences. It takes more than a wedding to make a marriage. Some couples had the wedding ceremony, but they were not interested in harmonizing as a married couple. They just battled on after the ceremony. Married couples in so-called Christian homes would never want to reveal the amount of battling that takes place behind their closed doors or in their cars going to and from church. Many American homes see more battling than harmonizing.

Allow me to share my personal experience. My wife and I had known each other since the eighth grade. We started dating at the end of the summer before our junior year of college. We were informally engaged before the end of the semester but had not informed anybody because her folks were out of town. I discussed it with her father as soon as he returned. I am not opposed to quick courtships when people have known each other and have had the opportunity to make sure that they do match. I am opposed to quick courtships where there is no opportunity to really find out if the prospective partners match. Such courtships will cause terrible problems.

In countries where parents have a part in or make the decisions about who is to marry, the divorce rate is far lower than in countries where the young people make that decision themselves. It seems as if marriage partners are more compatible and work together better when parents make or are involved in the choice of a mate. This does not indicate that all of these matches are happy ones. They are not. Sometimes though, sober heads look at things a little differently than those that are infatuated. Parents might have insights that could slow down or encourage where needed.

Some will be considering marriage for themselves. Some will be considering it for their children, brothers, or sisters. Some want to know how to pray for couples who are not as well matched as they might have been. A mismatch just means the couple is going to have to work harder on their marriage. Where they are mismatched, at least, they ought to work harder. If they understand that they are mismatched in an area and work hard, maybe they can solve a

problem before that mismatch ignites a fire that burns the marriage down.

More Bible study with sober thinking and discussion makes better matches. Better matches make better marriages. In Amos 3:3 God asks, “Can two walk together except they be agreed?”