

Six Questions to Ask Before You Get Married

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Priests and deacons, marriage preparation team members, and sponsor couples all agree that they have met some truly wonderful people in this process. Marriage preparation is indeed a joy! Those who work with engaged couples also discover that there are many questions that couples don't think to ask before they get into a serious relationship. By the time they are engaged, it is often too late, or at least they think it is. The date has been announced and the invitations have been sent. Somebody ought to tell them what they need to be looking out for before it gets past "the point of no return." Engagement is just that—a time of engaging and encountering one another in a clear-headed way. This doesn't mean that engagement can't be fun; it simply means that this is a time of asking the right questions and expressing one's expectations of the proposed relationship. It is a time of growth and personal preparation for this life-changing event. The following questions are good start:

1. Why are you getting married?

Obvious, but necessary: clearly identify the reasons why you want to get married. Sure, you love him, but do you like him (or her)? Are you best friends? Do you trust this person with your whole life? If you had to choose between your partner and something else, what "something else" might you choose instead of a relationship with this person? Is there any reason you can think of why this relationship might not work out? What, if anything, would make you want to walk away from this relationship? Please be honest!

2. Do you know and trust your partner's personal history?

What he/she has done in the past is a very good indicator of how he or she will act in the future. "He's got potential" or "I know she's going to blossom" is not a realistic expectation. Don't think you are going to change your partner. Marry who your partner is, not who you hope that person will be. Marrying someone so you can manipulate him/her later is selfish and unrealistic.

3. Are you planning the wedding more than you are planning the marriage?

Daily life is what you have left after the wedding is over. Have you given adequate thought to what life is going to be like after you are married? Don't expect your partner to "make you happy." One should not expect one's partner to "complete" him or her, and meet his or her needs. Marriage is not two halves making up a whole. It is two whole persons seeking partnership and companionship from the other. It's still your job to be the best person you can be. Remember: "The best thing I can give you is a good me."

4. Are you investing more than you can afford to lose?

Many people get married for what they expect to get out of the relationship. Truly, marriage can bring great rewards. Make no mistake; however, second to raising children, marriage is probably the most self-sacrificing thing a person can do. It requires a great deal of patience, kindness, and self-giving to one's spouse. In marriage, we are called to love one another in the way Christ loves us. If your primary goal is "what's in it for me?" be careful about getting married. In marriage, there are always sacrifices to be made—great ones! Are you about to sacrifice more than you are willing to give up? What do you suppose you will have to "give up" in order to be married? Are you willing to live with that? What personal goals of yours might you have to give up or compromise in order to be married? Can you live with that?

5. Have you identified and communicated your expectations to one another?

Can you live with your partner's goals and dreams (or lack thereof) and can he or she support you in yours? What sacrifices are you willing to make in order to help your partner achieve his or her goals, or in order to achieve joint goals together? Don't do anything before you get married that you are not willing to do after you get married. Be yourself; don't put on masks to impress the other person. You can't keep up a charade forever. Sooner or later, the "real you" will rise to the surface. That's when the real drama begins!

6. Have you memorized your marriage vows?

You don't need to memorize them for the ceremony; you need to memorize them for your life. Getting married is something you do in a day; being married is something you do for a lifetime. Pray with the words of the wedding vows long before your wedding day so that you can live them every day afterwards. Seek to understand what they truly mean. When you are ready to say these words to someone—and mean every single word—only then are you ready for marriage and sex—not before: "I (*name*) take you, (*name*) to be my husband/wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life." Be prepared to say this and live it.