

Counseling for Marriage

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Overview

This set of question and answers are set up to help a couple think and discuss issues that they might have never had the opportunity to talk about.

Each section should be done separately then come together to discuss the answers.

This covers a wide range of topics and can be done in several settings.

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Priorities

One of the first things that one needs to do before entering marriage is to understand one's self. I've devised an instrument here that may help with this. What or who comes first in your life? This is an important question in every relationship. If you were to list the three most important people in your life, the three most important ways to spend your money (after marriage), and the three most important ways to spend your time, what would they be? Below there is a "his" and "hers" list. Starting with the most important in each category, list the things that pertain to you. Your priorities in life indicate your loyalties to people. One of the major tasks of marriage is the shifting of your loyalties from the family in which you grew up to the new family you will be creating with your spouse-to-be. This shifting of focus may be as difficult for you as it will be for your family. However, it is essential so you and your mate may develop your own family unit. Your priorities also give you direction and goals you feel you must achieve. This is the direction—the path—you have chosen to take you, where you want to be. One of the important ingredients in a good marriage is a couple's sharing a common direction in life, a desire to travel the same paths in finance, family, and faith and achieve the same goals.

Her Questions & Answers

The important people in my life:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I like to spend my money on:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I like to spend my time:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

His Questions & Answers

The important people in my life:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I like to spend my money on:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I like to spend my time:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Do you want the same things out of life? Your priorities will change over the years as you grow and develop. And if the two of you communicate well, you will find your priorities growing, developing and changing together.

Communication

Good communication is the art of sending and receiving a clear message. We are all continuously sending and receiving messages to and from one another. Even when we don't talk or write, we are sending a message through our body language or with our eyes or even by what we don't say or do! One

of the largest problems that new couples (and sometimes old couples) have is communication. It's a two-way street. It requires both a sender and a receiver.

The problem comes when there is only one or the other, or even worse, when there is neither. You have come from two different families. You have learned how

to communicate by the way your family communicates. Some people come from families where it's common to speak loudly or even yell during heated discussions and others are appalled as such behavior for they come from a quiet acquiescent family.

The most important factor in a good marriage is good communication. While finances, sex, or other issues may be the topic of heated discussions, marital dissatisfactions, and even breakups, the inability of a couple to communicate and find a solution is the root of the problem. So, you must convey a clear message. And you must communicate that message TRUTHFULLY! A person who lies or deceives is untrustworthy and has already broken the sacred vows of matrimony.

In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus explains that it is what's in your mind and heart that determines who you are. A person who lies or deceives does not honor their spouse or intended spouse; is a cheat and a thief. Marriage should be built on total trust; therefore there is no room

for a liar. In having a happy cohesive marriage it's most important to give quality time to your spouse. Quite often I hear one or the other person saying, "I'm just taken for granted." Or, in other words this person feels that they no longer have any value to the other person. Now is the time to set aside time to share with one another those

precious moments and to share in the things in life that have happened apart from one another—through good communication. Always remember that your partner may see things differently than you do. Different doesn't necessarily mean "wrong"; it doesn't mean "bad"; it just means different and you should respect the other person's opinion. Listening is the key to understanding and love is the key to patience.

In the worksheets that I've provided, I want you to read each statement and then answer quickly "True" or "False" on your own worksheet. Your first response should be your answer. Each of you should do the work alone and then compare your answers after you have both completed the worksheet.

"I see communication as a huge umbrella that covers and affects all that goes on between human beings. Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him."

— Virginia Satir.

Communication - Her Questions & Answers

Questions relating to your family:

- T F 1. The hardest topic for my family to talk about is sex.
- T F 2. In my family when my parents were angry, they would hit or slap each other.
- T F 3. In my family I often heard the phrase "I love you" frequently spoken among family members.
- T F 4. In my family every person's feelings were important, and we were encouraged to share and talk about them.
- T F 5. My father would say one thing and do another.
- T F 6. In my family, yelling was one way of getting what we wanted.
- T F 7. There is a great deal of arguing and fighting in my family.
- T F 8. My parents listened to my opinion and tried to understand me.
- T F 9. My mother was the parent in charge and her word was law.
- T F 10. My father had to have the last word on everything.
- T F 11. It's important in my family to respect the rights and privacy of each other.
- T F 12. In my family, God and Christ were the center of everything.
- T F 13. My parents would go for hours without talking when they were angry.
- T F 14. In my family, everyone was encouraged to express their thoughts openly.
- T F 15. Honesty, integrity, and truth were at the forefront of our lives.
- T F 16. My family enjoys playing together.
- T F 17. My mother frequently complimented my father.
- T F 18. My father frequently complimented my mother.
- T F 19. I frequently saw my mother and father kiss and make up after fights.
- T F 20. It was OK to cry in front of other family members.

How you want communication to be between the two of you:

- T F 1. It's very important that you accept my feelings.
- T F 2. I think that we should be able to disagree without fighting.
- T F 3. Sometimes I'm afraid to tell you what I really think.
- T F 4. I believe that arguing is bad for a marriage.
- T F 5. I believe that both the man and the woman should be able to express their feelings.
- T F 6. I think I am an attentive listener.
- T F 7. I think that it's alright to talk about our married life with whomever I please.
- T F 8. Sometimes I need "space" before I can discuss something I'm upset about.
- T F 9. I find it difficult to share my feelings.

- T F 10. When I have a problem, I believe you'll be there to help me.
- T F 11. Loud yelling bothers me and I withdraw when it occurs.
- T F 12. I find it difficult to criticize you without your getting angry.
- T F 13. Sometimes I need time to myself but that doesn't mean I don't love you.
- T F 14. I think that we should be able to put each other down and tease each other.
- T F 15. The hardest topic for us to talk about is religion.
- T F 16. I think that you frequently talk down to me.
- T F 17. I think that it's important to keep our families informed as to how we are doing in our marriage and with our health.
- T F 18. I'm willing to compromise to keep peace in our relationship.
- T F 19. I would like to have our serious talks just before bedtime.
- T F 20. Sometimes I can be very pushy and to the point.
- T F 21. Disagreement can be healthy in a marriage if both people fight fairly to resolve differences.
- T F 22. It's very important to me to know how you feel and what you think.
- T F 23. I'm very sensitive to criticism.
- T F 24. I believe that it's important to you to be right all the time.
- T F 25. When I get angry and you ask me what's wrong, I will answer "Nothing."
- T F 26. I think the man should be the head of the house.
- T F 27. It's very hard for me to change my mind once I've made a decision.
- T F 28. I believe that it's OK to keep secrets from each other.
- T F 29. I think that you often interrupt me and try to dominate the conversation.
- T F 30. I believe that if you don't get your way, you'll be angry with me.
- T F 31. I feel close to you when you let me help you.
- T F 32. I have no difficulty lying.
- T F 33. I will say or do anything to get what I want.

Now that you've finished both parts of the communication work sheets it's time to compare. This is not the time to find fault with one another, but a time to find what you have in common and to find the strong and weak points on which you can build.

Communication - His Questions & Answers

Questions relating to your family:

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Communication Covenant

Marriage is a special kind of relationship. It's a covenant to be open, honest, faithful, and it's permanent.

Place your initials in the space following the responsibilities you agree to in this Communication Covenant.

You have the freedom, of course, to make any changes to fit your own personal relationship.

I understand that communication is the key to a successful marriage, so I agree to the following responsibilities:

1. I understand that communication is the key to understanding and agree to be as clear and open as possible. _____ & _____
2. I agree to find a special "sharing time" each day to give my spouse my undivided attention. _____ & _____
3. When there's something important to discuss, I agree to turn off the TV, turn off all other distractions, and turn my attention to my spouse. _____ & _____
4. I agree to share my thoughts openly and honestly with my spouse and give him/her my approval to share openly and honestly with me. _____ & _____
5. I agree to share my feelings openly and honestly with my marriage partner. _____ & _____
6. I agree to be an attentive listener. _____ & _____
7. I agree to never to call names, hit, or say "I don't love you" to my marriage partner. _____ & _____
8. I agree that it's OK to disagree about some things. _____ & _____
9. I agree to take responsibility for what I say and do. _____ & _____
10. I agree to never speak for you unless I've consulted you. _____ & _____
11. I agree to be truthful with you. _____ & _____
12. I agree to hug you every day of your life. _____ & _____
13. I agree to spend time with you each year that will enrich our marriage. _____ & _____
14. I agree that if, for any reason, our communication seriously breaks down, I will go with you and get professional help. _____ & _____

I agree to this Communication Covenant because I love and respect you and want only the best for us in our marriage relationship.

Signatures: _____ / _____

Who Does What?

This next section will deal with “who does what?”

It’s to get the idea of how you feel the way the marriage responsibilities should work. Even these small issues are important for it lets each of you know what is expected of the other. After answering these questions and comparing answers, you will need to identify the “why” and then decide as to the “who”. The answer key will be: -husband -wife -both -neither.

Her Questions & Answers

-    1. Do the grocery shopping.
-    2. Take care of children when they’re sick.
-    3. Decide what insurance to buy.
-    4. Decide what TV programs to watch.
-    5. Go to P.T.A. meetings.
-    6. Do the lawn work.
-    7. Help children with homework.
-    8. Repair household appliances.
-    9. Is the boss.
-    10. Do the hugging in the family.
-    11. Decide which church to attend.
-    12. Take out the trash.
-    13. Make the beds.
-    14. Choose a house.
-    15. Set up social activities.
-    16. Do the ironing.
-    17. Decide where the family will go on vacation.
-    18. Will work for the family income.
-    19. Vacuum the house.
-    20. Keep the cars running.
-    21. Wash the cars.
-    22. Arrange the furniture in the home.
-    23. Shop for clothes.
-    24. Cook.
-    25. Do the laundry.
-    26. Choose what to do for entertainment.
-    27. Do the budget and pay the bills.

This is, of course, just a small list of things you could consider. I'm sure that you will come up with more as time goes by.

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Religious Orientation

When you include God in your relationship, you will have a covenant relationship that will not be taken lightly or broken easily. In the scriptures, Jesus spoke about how His relationship to His people is like a marriage. That relationship is special, a covenant, in fact, a “oneness”. This oneness, this compatibility, is only achieved when you share the same basic beliefs. These are the very foundation of your marriage relationship. From this foundation come the building blocks of how you conduct yourselves, your moral standards, values, and ethics. How compatible are the two of you in your religious beliefs? How do you see God? Who is God? Is Jesus Christ your personal Savior? And what does that mean to you? Will you, as a couple, go to church? Which church? How often? On what day—Sabbath or Sunday? How involved will you be in the church? And how about baptism? When do you believe a person should be baptized, as an infant not knowing what is promised for you or as an adult making your own decision and vows; and how—by sprinkling or actual submersion? These are only a few questions that can be important issues in a Christian relationship. How will your basic differences in religious beliefs affect your relationship and the relationship with your families? Denominational teachings and doctrines can vary to such a degree that a couple’s understanding of God and life, thus their compatibility, are directly affected. And these doctrinal differences can involve their complete family systems.

Enclosed is another worksheet to help you determine what you have in common in your faiths and how to cope with your differences. It is, of course, the best of all situations if you both will come to the true understanding of God’s word. Each of you should do your work alone and answer “True” or “False” on your own sheet and then come together for comparison and discussion.

Religious Orientation - Her Answers

- T F 1. My family is actively involved in teaching and leadership in the church.
- T F 2. My family believes that right after you accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior you should be baptized.
- T F 3. My parents prayed with us before we went to sleep at night.
- T F 4. My family believes the Bible is the true and only Word of God.
- T F 5. I believe the Bible is the true and only Word of God.
- T F 6. My family prays only at meal times.
- T F 7. My family believes that attending church on the Sabbath is important.
- T F 8. I believe that attending church on the Sabbath is important.
- T F 9. My family believes that a person should decide for himself or herself what is the Truth and follow that to Jesus, no matter what their belief is.
- T F 10. My parents believe that marriage is permanent.
- T F 11. I believe that marriage is permanent.
- T F 12. My parents believe that children are a precious gift from God.
- T F 13. My family considers water submersion the only form of baptism.
- T F 14. My parents made me attend church whether I wanted to or not.
- T F 15. My parents believe that God and Christ should be the center of one's life and the center of the family.
- T F 16. I believe that God and Christ should be the center of one's life.
- T F 17. My family prays together at times other than mealtimes.
- T F 18. My family attends Bible Study regularly. I believe that my parents are Christians: they have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
- T F 19. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- T F 20. My parents believe that there is a heaven for the righteous that one goes to at death.
- T F 21. I believe that there is a heaven for the righteous that one goes to at death.
- T F 22. My parents believe that there is an ever-burning, torturing hell that the unrighteous goes to at death.
- T F 23. I believe that there is an ever-burning, torturing hell that the unrighteous goes to at death.
- T F 24. My parents have strong religious beliefs.
- T F 25. My parents believe that Jesus was born of a virgin.
- T F 26. My parents believe in praying to the dead.
- T F 27. My parents observe the Holy Days of God.
- T F 28. I know to observe the Holy Days of God.
- T F 29. It is important to me that I follow my parents' beliefs for that is the way that I too believe.
- T F 30. I believe that there is only one head of the church and that's Jesus Christ.
- T F 31. My family believes that you should be baptized at birth.
- T F 32. I think that it's important to go to church every Sabbath.
- T F 33. I believe that only men should teach in the church.
- T F 34. I believe that women should not teach or preach the Word of God.
- T F 35. I believe that since God forgives us, we should be willing to forgive each other.
- T F 36. I believe that Christmas and Easter are secular holidays rather than religious celebrations.
- T F 37. I think that it's important that a husband and wife pray together.
- T F 38. I consider it very important to read and study the Bible.
- T F 39. I think that it's important for us to attend church together.
- T F 40. It's important to me that my spouse be a Christian.
- T F 41. I really do not consider myself a very religious person.
- T F 42. I think that a marriage that includes God is stronger.
- T F 43. I don't believe that I have to belong to a certain denomination to be a good Christian. T F
- T F 44. I believe that Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit are one in the same and forming a Trinity.
- T F 45. I believe that the church should follow the directions and examples of the apostles and Jesus Christ, which are found in the Bible.
- T F 46. I believe that if you're a "good person" that is all that is necessary as far as God is concerned.
- T F 47. I don't think it's important that couples have the same religious beliefs.
- T F 48. I believe that it doesn't matter what religion a person is because we're all headed in the same direction, and following all the directions of God is unnecessary.
- T F 49. I think religion is an area we need to discuss more.

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Money Matters

Another area of contention that causes problems in many marriages is money—too little, too much, how it's spent, who spends it—and what we feel about it. How important is it? Your attitude about money comes from your religious teaching and your family of origin. The New Testament addresses the subject of money more frequently than any other subject—except the Kingdom of God. The scriptural message on finances is very clear: We should love people and use things, not love things and use people. The Bible teaches that we are to be good stewards of our money and make wise investments. We aren't to treasure things more than relationships because our hearts will be where our treasure is. The greatest treasure you can have is your relationship with God and with your chosen mate. Like all other areas in your marriage relationship, it's essential that you communicate about your finances. Money is simply a medium of exchange, but the use of it gets tangled up in emotional complexities: love, power, family relationships, and self-worth. For some people, controlling the money in the family means they have the power in the family. What does money mean to each of you? Most of us have received very little training in managing money. But many of our financial problems can be avoided by being aware of several important biblical concepts of good money management. One thing to consider and think about, especially for the more mature person, is that you may have worked many years to obtain your money and property and this is your security that God has allowed you to have in these golden years. Do not be frivolous with it. Do not give the control of your assets to anyone. God has entrusted them to you and has blessed you with them. Let God set the standard for the love and use of your money. A budget is a necessity. Establish a simple, flexible financial outline (budget) to help you meet the goals and priorities you've set together. Remember that this should be a joint project. Establish a simple method of record keeping for income tax purposes. Communicate. Along with knowing and feeling that you're working together toward common goals, communication is essential. Establish how you will use credit cards. Set limits and avoid becoming a "credit card junky." Be open to changing your budget as your goals, priorities, and family change. The following worksheet is to make you both aware of the other's feelings and attitudes toward money.

Her Answers

- T F 1. I think that it's OK to declare bankruptcy.
- T F 2. It's important to me that we have a budget and try to stay with in it.
- T F 3. I have clear goals of what possessions I'd like to buy.
- T F 4. I believe that we should recycle newspapers, etc.
- T F 5. I think that it's important that the wife establish credit in her own name.
- T F 6. Credit card balances should be paid off each month.
- T F 7. All of our money should go into the same pot and all expenses be shared.
- T F 8. I think that it's important that we have our own bank accounts.
- T F 9. I think we should have a will drawn up.
- T F 10. Vacations are more important than saving money.
- T F 11. I will go into debt to buy a house.
- T F 12. I think that I should be the one who controls the money.
- T F 13. I think that each of us should control our own money.
- T F 14. I always balance my checkbook to the penny.
- T F 15. I think it's important to save for the future.
- T F 16. I think gambling is OK.
- T F 17. It's important for me to have some money for which I don't have to be accountable to you.
- T F 18. I would not borrow money from my friends.
- T F 19. Men should always make more money than women.
- T F 20. It will bother me a lot, if I have to ask you for money all the time.
- T F 21. I think that I should be able to lend money to a friend or relative without having to ask you.
- T F 22. Time together with you is more important to me than a high paying job, as long as we have enough money to meet our needs.
- T F 23. It's important to tithe at least 10% to the church.
- T F 24. I believe that the male has the primary role to provide for the needs of the family.
- T F 25. I want to eat at a restaurant at least once a week.
- T F 26. I want us to have the latest fashions that we can afford.
- T F 27. I think that we should help our parents in their old age if they need it.
- T F 28. I think the husband should handle all family investments.

Money Matters

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Sexual Relationship

Touching, holding and hugging are not something you should do; they're something you must do to communicate your love for one another. Although we know that good communication is required for a good marriage, the one area in which we communicate with each other the least seems to be in our sexual relationship. No one, male or female, is a mind reader. To meet the needs of your mate, each of you must be free and willing to express yourself openly and honestly in all areas of your relationship. Over the years our society has made sex something not to be talked about. If sex was discussed, it was usually in an embarrassing, humorous, or coarse context; or it was described as a duty, something you just had to put up with.

Your sexual relationship is much more than just sexual intercourse. Intercourse without the freedom to share, to enjoy, is no longer a sexual relationship. It then becomes a duty. It's important to understand that God holds a very high view of our sexuality. The Bible teaches this. The first chapter of Genesis tells us God created us male and female—in His image, for one another and having the capacity to love and be loved in a special way. God gives His blessing on our sexual relationships. So communicate your needs, what makes you happy and what pleases you. Talk about positions, frequency, where to touch and where not to touch. Give each other the freedom to express yourselves. Enjoy the differences. Your mate's needs are not statements of your adequacy or inadequacy. As you accept those needs, you will communicate your acceptance of your mate. It's important to realize that if you're interested in a good sexual relationship, you must not use sex as a weapon or reward! The key to sexual satisfaction is taking the time to communicate during lovemaking. It's a step and signal process. The willingness to guide and be guided to pleasure is part of the process. The greatest secret to sexual satisfaction is to please your partner. In pleasing your partner, your partner will please you. If you both keep this in mind then all will go well. You will learn what to do and what not to do—what pleases and what doesn't. Here again is a list of statements that are true or false to you. Answer them by yourself and then return to one another for comparison. Remember, this is not a time for embarrassment or for pointing fingers of accusation. It's a time of communication through love for each other.

Her Answers

- T F 1. In our marriage the wife should always be willing to submit to the husband's sexual needs.
- T F 2. If I do something that is displeasing during our lovemaking, I want my mate to tell me.
- T F 3. I believe that it's important to be physically clean.
- T F 4. I believe sex is only for having children.
- T F 5. I think that there are some non-acceptable forms of sexual activities.
- T F 6. I believe that learning more about my mate's needs will enrich our sexual relationship after marriage.
- T F 7. I believe that we should communicate so that we'll really know what is pleasing to each other.
- T F 8. I think that it's important to "set the mood" for lovemaking with music, candles, flowers.
- T F 9. I was sexually abused as a child.
- T F 10. It's important to me that we greet each other affectionately after being apart all day.
- T F 11. I have some fear of sex.
- T F 12. I believe that it's alright for the woman to guide the man to what pleases her.
- T F 13. I think that sex outside of marriage is OK as long as my spouse doesn't know.
- T F 14. I believe that if my mate doesn't like what I do sexually, I should be allowed to do it anyway.
- T F 15. I believe that men think more often about sex than women do.
- T F 16. I believe that pornographic movies and books are good for a healthy marriage.
- T F 17. I believe that at a certain age, sex is no longer important.
- T F 18. I enjoy affection in public.
- T F 19. I believe that birth control is completely the woman's responsibility.
- T F 20. It is alright for the woman to initiate sexual activity.
- T F 21. There is nothing wrong with male masturbation.
- T F 22. There is nothing wrong with female masturbation.
- T F 23. I enjoy hugging and kissing passionately.
- T F 24. I don't believe that women should be made to have sexual intercourse during her menstrual period.
- T F 25. I believe that one should continue to have sex as long as one is physically able and enjoys it.
- T F 26. I believe that it's up to the man to take the lead in sex.
- T F 27. I would like to be held and touched without always having to have intercourse.
- T F 28. I am easily embarrassed when I'm nude.
- T F 29. I will fake orgasms.
- T F 30. I am confused about how to really please my mate sexually.
- T F 31. I like the use of "dirty talking" during sex.
- T F 32. The "missionary position" is the only way sex should be done.
- T F 33. If I am not satisfied sexually, I will just not ever mention it.
- T F 34. The man's satisfaction is the only thing that's important.
- T F 35. I think oral sex is fine, when done on me.
- T F 36. I think oral sex is fine, when I do it to my partner.
- T F 37. I think it's the man's job to speak to our children about sex.
- T F 38. I think that our parents (or grown children) should be involved in knowing how our sex life is doing.
- T F 39. I think that our sex life is very much a part of our love life.
- T F 40. Our sex life is no one's business but our own.

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The End

I hope that these counseling sheets of questions will be helpful to you in establishing a strong and honest marriage. Of course, there are many, many other questions that will come up before and after your marriage, but you should consider this as a “primer” or at least an instrument to let you know more precisely what you’re getting into. However, if you remember that communication is the key, then I’m sure things will go well for you. Keep Christ in your hearts and God in your future and your lives will be blessed.

Dr. John H. Currier, DD • Pastor, Dothan Church of God
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