

Before You Marry, Question Your Relationship

JUNE 3, 2017 | [Rachel Joy Welcher](#)

Since [my divorce](#), people have asked me over and over again: “Were there any red flags when you two were dating?” The truth is: not any glaring ones.

I know that isn’t what people want to hear. They want a way to ensure the person they marry won’t disappoint them. Fail them. Become someone else. But when you get married, as Elisabeth Elliot points out, “you marry a sinner.” You commit yourself to a fallible person and an unknown future. If you are also committed to walking in obedience and pursuing God’s glory, when disappointments and trials come in marriage, you can cling to the God who never fails or forsakes his children.

But though none of us can predict the future, there is wisdom in asking questions of your relationship before committing to marriage. How your significant other treats the waitress who serves you dinner, interacts with people at church, spends their time, treats your purity, and uses their money are all indicators of the kind of spouse they will likely be.

When we’re wrapped up in romantic feelings, it can be hard to see clearly. If we’re honest, sometimes we don’t *want* to see clearly, since it might mean we need to end a relationship we enjoy or say goodbye to someone we love. But if we love God and his Word, we will seek his wisdom ([James 1:5](#)).

One way to seek his wisdom is to ask certain questions about the person you’re with. Here are seven.

1. How do they view God?

A. W. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” If you’re a Christian, what your partner thinks about God should be the most important thing about them to you—not only what they believe theologically, but also how they love God devotionally. The kind of person you want to build a life with will strive to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength ([Luke 10:27](#)).

2. How do they view the local church?

The church is Christ’s bride. If the person you’re with says they love Jesus, they will also love his bride. They will see value in attending church ([Heb. 10:25](#)). They won’t habitually gossip about or slander members of the body. They will humbly pursue fellowship with and accountability from older, godly believers. A few years ago I had a friend tell me he couldn’t think of one person in his church he respected enough to approach for advice. He preferred to fly solo. If the person you’re with feels they have nothing to learn from or offer the church, this reveals not only problems with their theology, but also a lack of love for what Christ himself values.

3. Do they love God's Word?



Does your partner seek and search the Scriptures “with his [or her] whole heart”? (Ps. 119:2). They won’t keep them perfectly—none of us does—but are they continually laboring to become more like Christ? We all wrestle, like Martha, to stop what we are doing and sit at Jesus’s feet. Nevertheless, the amount of time we spend in the Word directly affects our love for God and our desire to grow as Christians.

4. Do they respect you?

Do they respect you with their words?

Does your partner build you up or tear you down with their words? People can and do change, but we marry someone for who they are, not who they *could* be. The way your significant other talks *to* you and *about* you reveals their respect (or lack thereof) for you as an image-bearer of God.

Do they respect you with their actions?

A partner who exhibits violent behavior while dating is someone who will almost certainly exhibit violent behavior in marriage—likely to an even greater degree. There is forgiveness for all sin, including short tempers and violent outbursts, but to continue dating someone who is unwilling to work on changing these habits is not only unwise but also dangerous.

Likewise, a partner who regularly pressures you to sin sexually reveals what they desire most—and it is neither your purity nor God’s glory. From the way some young Christians talk, it is clear there’s a misconception that marriage solves the problem of lust. It doesn’t. Repeated sexual sin, pornography use, and lack of self-control when dating will surely follow a person into marriage if not dealt with and repented of. Again, there is

forgiveness by God's grace. There are fresh starts. But how your partner treats your purity and their own is something that should be discussed, not ignored.

5. How do they treat others?

It has often been said that how a man treats his mother and sister reveals how he will eventually treat his wife. In the same way, how your partner treats strangers, like the cashier at the grocery store or the waiter at the restaurant, speaks to how they view people in general—their worth, value, and dignity. This provides insight into how they will treat the people you want to minister to—your friends and family—and it sheds light on how they might treat you in marriage once the “honeymoon phase” is over.

6. How do they use their time and resources?

Is the person you're with “free from the love of money” ([Heb. 13:5](#))? Do they earn, give, and spend their resources in a way that reflects a prioritizing love for God and people? Again, it takes time to develop these habits. But it's wise to think through how you both approach your resources, as so much of life and marriage involves financial decisions and stewardship.

How they spend their time is also telling. Do they pour themselves out for others, work hard at their job, and know how to relax? Or do they worship work like an idol? Do they neglect their responsibilities so they can binge-watch Netflix? The balance between work and rest is a difficult one. It's important to observe these habits in yourself and your partner and discuss how you would seek a God-honoring balance together.

7. How do they respond to disappointments and trials?

After watching my husband [leave the faith and our marriage](#), this question has become even more important to me. While it's not a character flaw to have a trial-free past, I would want to observe how my potential partner deals with loss and pain. Have they been through the fire and come out the other side still clinging to Christ?

Life is full of small frustrations and disappointments. It also includes devastating phone calls and unexpected loss. How does your partner respond when they don't get what they want? How do they treat you when they are frustrated? Do they pull away when times get hard? How they respond to trials speaks to their patience and also reveals the steadiness of their faith.

Pursue Wisdom, Not Perfection

Before assessing the person sitting across from you, some self-examination is in order. Are *you* the kind of person your ideal partner would want to be with? Do *you* regularly ask God to chip away at your own rough edges? If not, reading a list like this could actually produce pride rather than wisdom.

Asking these questions isn't about ensuring marital bliss, nor is it about acquiring a perfection that can only be found in Jesus. It's about honoring God and walking in wisdom. Ignoring problems doesn't make them disappear, and denying them won't strengthen your relationship. Talking through your concerns can be hard and uncomfortable—it might even result in a break-up—but if you love and trust God, you don't have to fear facing these questions head-on.

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forgiveness by God's grace. There are fresh starts. But how your partner treats your purity and their own is something that should be discussed, not ignored.

5. How do they treat others?

It has often been said that how a man treats his mother and sister reveals how he will eventually treat his wife. In the same way, how your partner treats strangers, like the cashier at the grocery store or the waiter at the restaurant, speaks to how they view people in general—their worth, value, and dignity. This provides insight into how they will treat the people you want to minister to—your friends and family—and it sheds light on how they might treat you in marriage once the “honeymoon phase” is over.

6. How do they use their time and resources?

Is the person you're with “free from the love of money” ([Heb. 13:5](#))? Do they earn, give, and spend their resources in a way that reflects a prioritizing love for God and people? Again, it takes time to develop these habits. But it's wise to think through how you both approach your resources, as so much of life and marriage involves financial decisions and stewardship.

How they spend their time is also telling. Do they pour themselves out for others, work hard at their job, and know how to relax? Or do they worship work like an idol? Do they neglect their responsibilities so they can binge-watch Netflix? The balance between work and rest is a difficult one. It's important to observe these habits in yourself and your partner and discuss how you would seek a God-honoring balance together.

7. How do they respond to disappointments and trials?

After watching my husband [leave the faith and our marriage](#), this question has become even more important to me. While it's not a character flaw to have a trial-free past, I would want to observe how my potential partner deals with loss and pain. Have they been through the fire and come out the other side still clinging to Christ?

Life is full of small frustrations and disappointments. It also includes devastating phone calls and unexpected loss. How does your partner respond when they don't get what they want? How do they treat you when they are frustrated? Do they pull away when times get hard? How they respond to trials speaks to their patience and also reveals the steadiness of their faith.

Pursue Wisdom, Not Perfection

Before assessing the person sitting across from you, some self-examination is in order. Are *you* the kind of person your ideal partner would want to be with? Do *you* regularly ask God to chip away at your own rough edges? If not, reading a list like this could actually produce pride rather than wisdom.

Asking these questions isn't about ensuring marital bliss, nor is it about acquiring a perfection that can only be found in Jesus. It's about honoring God and walking in wisdom. Ignoring problems doesn't make them disappear, and denying them won't strengthen your relationship. Talking through your concerns can be hard and uncomfortable—it might even result in a break-up—but if you love and trust God, you don't have to fear facing these questions head-on.

Rachel Joy Welcher is a wife, teacher, and poet (“[Blue Tarp](#),” Finishing Line Press). She is currently getting her MLitt in theology at the University of St. Andrews and writes poetry and essays on theology for magazines such as [RELEVANT](#) and [Fathom](#). You can [follow her on Twitter](#) and read her writings at [joypublished.com](#).

Before You Marry, Question Your Relationship

JUNE 3, 2017 | [Rachel Joy Welcher](#)

Since [my divorce](#), people have asked me over and over again: “Were there any red flags when you two were dating?” The truth is: not any glaring ones.

I know that isn’t what people want to hear. They want a way to ensure the person they marry won’t disappoint them. Fail them. Become someone else. But when you get married, as Elisabeth Elliot points out, “you marry a sinner.” You commit yourself to a fallible person and an unknown future. If you are also committed to walking in obedience and pursuing God’s glory, when disappointments and trials come in marriage, you can cling to the God who never fails or forsakes his children.

But though none of us can predict the future, there is wisdom in asking questions of your relationship before committing to marriage. How your significant other treats the waitress who serves you dinner, interacts with people at church, spends their time, treats your purity, and uses their money are all indicators of the kind of spouse they will likely be.

When we’re wrapped up in romantic feelings, it can be hard to see clearly. If we’re honest, sometimes we don’t *want* to see clearly, since it might mean we need to end a relationship we enjoy or say goodbye to someone we love. But if we love God and his Word, we will seek his wisdom ([James 1:5](#)).

One way to seek his wisdom is to ask certain questions about the person you’re with. Here are seven.

1. How do they view God?

A. W. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” If you’re a Christian, what your partner thinks about God should be the most important thing about them to you—not only what they believe theologically, but also how they love God devotionally. The kind of person you want to build a life with will strive to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength ([Luke 10:27](#)).

2. How do they view the local church?

The church is Christ’s bride. If the person you’re with says they love Jesus, they will also love his bride. They will see value in attending church ([Heb. 10:25](#)). They won’t habitually gossip about or slander members of the body. They will humbly pursue fellowship with and accountability from older, godly believers. A few years ago I had a friend tell me he couldn’t think of one person in his church he respected enough to approach for advice. He preferred to fly solo. If the person you’re with feels they have nothing to learn from or offer the church, this reveals not only problems with their theology, but also a lack of love for what Christ himself values.

3. Do they love God's Word?



Does your partner seek and search the Scriptures “with his [or her] whole heart”? (Ps. 119:2). They won’t keep them perfectly—none of us does—but are they continually laboring to become more like Christ? We all wrestle, like Martha, to stop what we are doing and sit at Jesus’s feet. Nevertheless, the amount of time we spend in the Word directly affects our love for God and our desire to grow as Christians.

4. Do they respect you?

Do they respect you with their words?

Does your partner build you up or tear you down with their words? People can and do change, but we marry someone for who they are, not who they *could* be. The way your significant other talks *to* you and *about* you reveals their respect (or lack thereof) for you as an image-bearer of God.

Do they respect you with their actions?

A partner who exhibits violent behavior while dating is someone who will almost certainly exhibit violent behavior in marriage—likely to an even greater degree. There is forgiveness for all sin, including short tempers and violent outbursts, but to continue dating someone who is unwilling to work on changing these habits is not only unwise but also dangerous.

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