

From our Churches

Author: Doug Klassen

Church: Foothills Mennonite Church

Date: August 2007

This resource is part of a larger **From Our Churches** archives available as an inspirational resource to teachers, ministers and others of Mennonite Church Canada. Posted by permission of the author. Permission to reproduce and distribute is granted.

Pre-Marriage Questionnaire

Adapted from John Drescher's book *For Better or Worse*.

1. For every action we take, we have a reason that explains it. Marriage is a decision, an action... and is done for various reasons.

Discuss: *Our reasons for getting married are...*

2. Entering into a marriage means entering into life-altering changes. For most people this is a welcome thought. For most people there are some uncertainties or fears. Sometimes these fears are legitimate, other times they are based on assumptions that may not be realistic or true. Many times, if fears are suppressed, the emotions may surface in odd areas and hinder the relationship. On the other hand, if fears are talked about, they lose their power.

Discuss: *What worries me about entering a marriage is....*

3. To love a person is essential. To "like" a person is also essential. To "like" means to share the same values, beliefs, interests, life goals, and to have a sense of being soul-mates with the other. It also means that deep down you enjoy that persons idiosyncrasies and the unique things about their personality or appearance. Having said that, there may be some things that you find difficult to "like" in the other person. E.g. the way they treat a friend, foul language, time management skills...etc.

Discuss: *Are there some things about the other that you struggle to "like"?*

4. There are various stages of attraction. For many it begins by "seeing the other across a crowded room" and progresses all the way to a feeling and a decision that this is the person with whom you want to spend the rest of your life with. Marks of lasting love include such things as caring deeply about the other, a sense of companionship and feelings of togetherness in many things, a growing respect for the other on many levels, and a sense of responsibility for the other.

Discuss: *How did we begin to express our love for each other?*

How is our love for each other characterized today?

5. While it is important to discuss the things that you struggle to "like" in the other person, it is important also to think through what you appreciate and admire. There are probably things about the other person that influence you to be a better person. True love is not something you fall into but something which grows deep and strong over a period of time through mutual regard and appreciation.

Discuss: *The things I like, appreciate and admire about you most are...*

6. Hopefully we bring many assets to the marriage.

Discuss: *I feel some of the strong assets we bring to our marriage are...*

Some of the things we will need to work hard on are...

7. Even the best marriages can anticipate many adjustments. Flexibility is a key ingredient to happiness. It is good to anticipate adjustments which may be needed and weigh what these will mean.

Discuss: *Some of the biggest adjustments that I (we) may have to make in marriage are...*

8. One of the real causes for after-marriage difficulty is the desires of partners to change the other at points of difference. When someone sets out to change us, we tend to be defensive and “dig in”. When we feel accepted, there are all kinds of possibilities for change.

Discuss: *Do I have the desire to change the other at any point?*

Do I feel the other is seeking to change me? Do I feel accepted?

9. Some areas may be more difficult to discuss than others. One marriage counselor, when asked what he considered to be the most important ingredient to a happy and successful marriage, replied, “After love, the ability to discuss openly, honestly, and freely all which one feels and thinks.”

Discuss: *The hardest subject to discuss is...*

10. Self-understanding is never complete, of course. Yet a high degree of self-understanding is extremely important in such a step as marriage. To help in some self-analysis, take time to discuss the following

Discuss: *I can best describe myself as... (give about 2 minutes worth of information)*

11. Another factor to consider in marriage is intellectual compatibility. If a person marries someone who does not stimulate their mind or thoughts, or, if a person marries one who is intellectually far beyond, some feelings of distance or even inferiority or superiority may develop.

Discuss: *I think intellectually we are...*

12. Satisfaction in the choice of a life work is important for marital happiness. To be contented and happy in our job builds our sense of self-worth and happiness while unsatisfied ambitions can cause insecurity and difficulty in relationships.

Discuss: *I feel, as far as our lifework is concerned, we are...*

13. Married life is a great oneness. It doesn't mean that we are always doing the same thing or thinking the same thoughts. But it does mean that if we do not enjoy doing a lot of the same things in our leisure time, we will miss much that builds oneness.

Discuss: *How do you feel about how you spend your leisure time together?*

14. Sharing our feelings is very important. For good relationships there must be the feeling of trust to share honest feelings. Feelings that are submerged may resurface in other areas and may cause unnecessary hurt.

Discuss: *In our relationship the sharing of our inner feelings, and letting each other know exactly who we are and how we feel, has been*

15. Sometimes we feel the other person, even while listening, does not really understand us. We may feel that we are misunderstood or not really communicating. If this becomes persistent, it may discourage us to continue sharing what we are thinking. It might lead to us thinking that the other person thinks that what we are saying is not important, or doesn't really care...etc.

Discuss: *Do I feel that I am fully understood and encouraged to share more fully in our conversation together?*

16. An important part of good conversation is the ability to listen and really hear what the other person is saying. Listening, as well as talking, is a part of true love. So it is important that we learn to listen and also that we feel the other person hears what we are really saying.

Discuss: *In our sharing I sense that I am being heard and understood because...*

17. In order to see how you “feel” and “think” with the other person, have one person describe a disappointing situation (e.g., from work, city life, or something) and have the other person assess the feelings/emotions that the situation evoked. For example, “The other day my boss yelled at me for no reason. It all started when...”. After the situation is described, the other person begins to respond by saying, “You must have felt..(assessing the emotions that were experienced).”

Then reverse the process.

18. In marriage it is very important to work together in decision-making. Sometimes one partner is a quicker decision-maker than the other. At other times one partner may avoid making decisions that need to be made. It is essential that, when decisions are made, it be done together.

Discuss: *Before we decide on any issue that affects the other, we...*

19. Marriage means different things to different people. Traditionally it has meant that people stay together “as long as we both shall live.” Others embrace the notion that if it doesn’t work we can separate and divorce if need be.

Discuss: *My view on the permanence of marriage is...*

20. Sooner or later, certain roles in the marriage will develop. There is great benefit to discussing beforehand what you anticipate in the roles each should take. What is your concept of authority within the marriage and family? Does one want a clear leadership role, or should it be a partnership? Or does each take leadership in different areas? Etc.

Discuss: *I see my (wife’s) role as being...*

I see my (husband’s) role as being...

21. Many things cause us to be attracted to another person. Some we cannot fully explain. Yet there are some which are important to look at carefully and consider.

These are sociological similarities. That is, such things as age, culture, religion, background, economic level, interests, etc. These are important and the more of such which are similar the better start one has.

Discuss: *Areas in which I think we are similar are...*

22. Psychologically we tend to choose persons to marry who are quite opposite to what we are. That is, an extrovert will often choose an introvert, an active person a more passive one, a talkative one a more quiet person, a punctual person a person less concerned about time, a mixer with a shy person, a perfectionist with a person more care-free, a morning person with a night person, etc.

Discuss: *Areas in which I think we are quite different are...*

23. The differences between us can add an exciting dimension to our marriage, or it can be areas of tension.

Discuss: *We intend to have our differences add an exciting dimension to our marriage. And to help insure that we will...*

24. Occasionally our differences will make it a challenge for us to find agreement or common ground. Compromises will need to be made during the course of marriage

Discuss: *We will be sure to _____ so that our differences are settled to the satisfaction of both.*

25. Important in marriage is companionship. Marital satisfaction can be directly related to the amount of time a couple spends talking and doing things together.

Discuss: *We find many enjoyable things to discuss and do together, such as...*

26. Stop and think what kind of effect your companion has on you. After spending time together you may feel uplifted, encouraged, refreshed, and/or happy.

Discuss: *When I am with my companion I feel.... When we have to part I feel...*

27. In marriage the “two become one”, but each individual identity does not disappear. Each partner must be able to be himself/herself. Allowing for differences actually promotes greater closeness as well as a sense of worth.

Discuss: *What are the areas of our relationship where we allow and encourage individual expression?*

28. Conflict is present in every relationship. The goal is to keep it at a low level. This can happen when disagreements and differences can be discussed early on in an honest and sensitive manner.

Discuss: *When we find ourselves in disagreement we tend to...*

29. To know a person means to know what the other thinks, feels, believes, wants, needs and worries about. Sadly, some partners never know or care to know what the other is feeling. Or if they do know, they do not know how to talk about it.

Discuss: *In sharing our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, wants, needs and worries we have been...*

30. Our families are and should be important to us. We want to relate in a pleasant and respectful way to them.

Discuss: *My feelings about your parents and family are....*

31. Assess your ability to communicate with your parents and the parents of the other. Assess what ideals you share and the ones you do not share. Will there be areas where you will have to agree to disagree?

Discuss: *My goals in communicating with parents and parent's-in-law are...*

32. Feelings toward our parents as we grew up will have a bearing on how we will function as how we will relate to each other.

Discuss: *How do I feel about the way my parents raised me? The discipline I received was... I would have appreciated less ... I would have appreciated more...*

33. Parents are models. We learn from our parents how to treat each other.

Discuss: *What things from the life of my parents do I want to carry on in our home? What are some of the things that I would not want to carry over?*

34. Our other friendships are telling. Often our friends reflect our own values and interests.

Discuss: *The relationship and effect of your/our friends on our relationship has been...*

35. Friendships will be altered when a couple enters marriage. For example, there will probably be less time to spend with them.

Discuss: *How do you see friendships changing now that you are entering a marriage relationship?*

36. In our minds eye we dream and imagine what our marriage will be like. Some of these ideas may be more fantasy than real.

Discuss: *Some of the real expectations I have for marriage are...*

37. What we expect of each other can also often be unclear. A couple should take considerable time to discuss what each expects of the other, e.g., income earning, household duties...etc.

Discuss: *Three primary things I expect of you in marriage are...*

38. Couples often bring career aspirations to the marriage.

Discuss: *Our marriage will affect my career in these ways...*

39. Our views on sex may come from different sources. They are often an accumulation of ideas gathered from our earliest years until the present

Discuss: *My view of sex in marriage is...*

40. Our feelings about sex should be discussed. Most often there is excitement around the thought of sharing this special experience together. Sometimes we also have fears. For example, will my partner find our sexual relationship fulfilling?.

Discuss: *My honest feelings toward sex are...*

41. Our faith or religion (or lack of it) will have a substantial effect on marriage. Christian marriages have an additional bond that helps keep them strong. On the other hand, many marriages have been less than the could be because of differences/disagreements in this area.

Discuss: *In faith or religious matters we are...*

42. When differences arise in the above area, determine how you will handle them.

Discuss: *Think of what areas of difference you will face. How will you work at them?*

43. A deep and abiding sense that God has brought us together goes far in giving marital security and building happiness in the home. This will also help us deal with any crisis that arises in our relationship.

Discuss: *Our sense of God's leading in bringing us together is...*

44. Now is the time to decide what religious activities will be put into practice in our home. In many homes, prayer, devotional reading, attending worship services are part of the routine.

Discuss: *In our home, we intend to ...*

45. It is important to discuss the place of the church in our lives. Active involvement within a church is a vital part of individual Christian grow, and the growth and development of a healthy marriage.

Discuss: *Our plans regarding church attendance and participation in church activities are...*

46. Church membership and attendance should be decided before marriage. In many cases, partners will come from different churches or even different denominations.

Discuss: *On matters of church membership and attendance we plan to...*

47. If children should enter the marriage, matters of faith become even more significant.

Discuss: *Should children enter our marriage, I believe our mutual responsibility religiously is...*

48. Goals are essential in a happy marriage. You ought to think together about what goals you have.

Discuss: *What are your long range plans? Where do you expect to be in ten or twenty years from now?*

49. Imagine yourselves at your 25th Anniversary.

Discuss: *What words of appreciation would you dream of saying to your spouse when that day would arrive?*

50. Secretly, think of one special thing you will do for your partner on your wedding day.

Do not discuss it! Keep it a surprise.