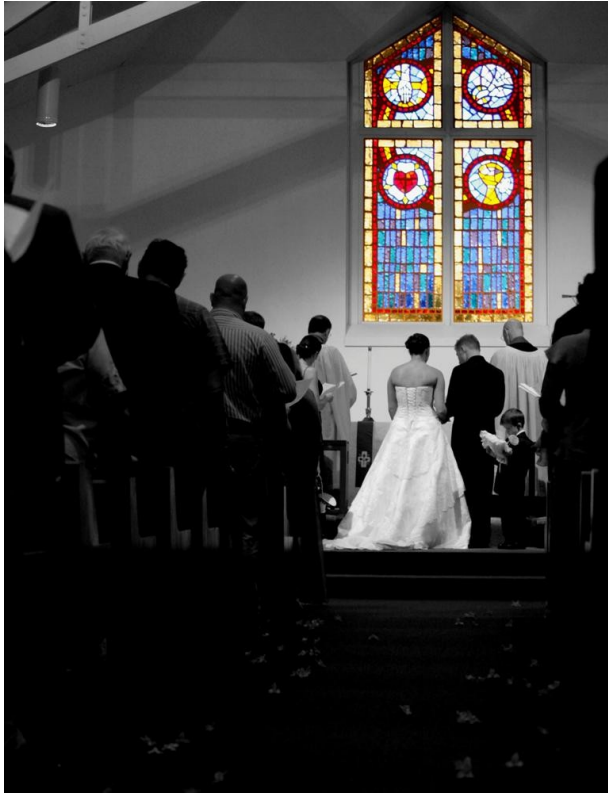


FINDING THE RIGHT SPOUSE

by Pastor Glenn Huebel

Messiah Messenger, June/July 2004



As I drove past a local church recently my attention was drawn to the topic of the Sunday sermon, *Did you marry the wrong person?* Many of you also saw it. I have no idea how this sensitive topic was dealt with, but I assume that the pastor used the opportunity to try to strengthen and affirm marriages and to stimulate fresh starts. I pray that his efforts resulted in some success. The topic reminded me of two things: First, the pain that so many, even in the Christian Church, feel in their marriages. In the world, difficult marriages are often simply cast aside for new relationships. Christians, however, recognize the sanctity of the institution and the importance of fulfilling their vows even if it means bearing a cross. Let us remember to include struggling marriages and families in our prayers. Secondly, the topic reminded me that one of the biggest factors in achieving a happy marriage occurs well before the wedding day, even before the proposal. **The importance of choosing the right person cannot be overstated.** No marriage is “easy,” but we should not be naïve to think that good marriages can be nurtured from just any

relationship. The wedding ceremony does not perform the miracle of making an unwise choice into a good one. How I wish it did! Choosing the right spouse is by far the most important decision we can ever make in matters concerning this temporal life. I want to focus this article on those who have not yet made the wrong choice, who have not yet made a choice at all. The question for you is not “Did you choose the wrong person?” but “Will you choose the right person?”

Some people chose the right marriage partner by sheer accident (and, of course, the mercy of divine providence!). It was not a considered or reflective choice, but it worked. Some people happen to pick the winning lottery number too, but waiting for lottery wins is not a good way to achieve financial security. In one of the traditional wedding liturgies these words are spoken by the pastor: *“Those who purpose to enter this holy estate should do so with a profound sense of the seriousness of the obligations they are about to assume, duly and devoutly weighing what Holy Scripture teaches concerning husbands and wives, and bearing in mind that the vow and covenant once made may not be broken.”* The following questions are offered for those among us who are single and contemplate entering into a marriage relationship someday.

Have You Prayed?

The book of Proverbs says that a prudent wife comes from the Lord (Prov. 19:14). In the very first marriage in history God presented Adam with his wife, Eve (Gen 2:22). God sent His angel to guide

Abraham's servant to find a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:1-26). Rebecca was God's own choice for Isaac. The Book of Ruth shows God's providence in the lives of Ruth and Boaz, leading them into marriage. In the first article of the Creed we confess that "God gives me ... wife and children." The Bible says, "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall direct your paths." —Ps. 37:5. It is never too early to begin praying for God to bless you or your children with a godly spouse. The first thing a Christian should do who desires a blessed marriage, is to seek the guidance of God, and to wait patiently for the blessing He provides. After I decided to enter the seminary I realized that it would be a very special lady to walk the path with me. I sought my wife from the Lord, and He blessed me beyond my expectations. The Lord your God is the best matchmaker of all, but this prayer, like all our petitions, is answered *in God's own way, and in His own time.*

Are You Ready for Marriage?

Simply wanting to get married and being ready for marriage are two different things. Maintaining a marriage union, and prospering in it, requires spiritual and emotional, as well as physical maturity. Some eighteen year olds are remarkably mature in every way. On the other hand, some forty year olds are remarkably immature. Unfortunately, one of the marks of immaturity is the inability to objectively evaluate self. People are usually blind to their own immaturity.

A few questions might be considered as a way of stimulating self evaluation:

Are you a responsible and faithful individual? Can family and friends depend upon you to do what you say you will do, or do you continually let people down by failing to fulfill your promises, do your share of the work, keep their confidences, etc.? Would friends say that you are loyal to them, or do you blow with the wind and change friends often?

Are you emotionally stable? Are you able to restrain your feelings by thinking things through, or do feelings rule your life? Do you make your decisions primarily by feelings? Do you get your feelings hurt easily? Are you easily stirred to jealousy and rage, exhilaration or depression?

Do you carefully weigh the consequences of your actions or potential actions? ... Or do you speak and act before you think? Are you impulsive? Do you often do or say things that you later deeply regret?

Are you self sufficient? Do you expect marriage to rescue you from a bad situation? Do you feel you desperately need a husband or wife? Do you want or expect a spouse to make you happy? To make you rich? To make you secure?

Can you see beyond yourself? Is life all about you? Do you ever do good and right things at personal sacrifice without asking or thinking, "What's in it for me?"

Do you have a good grip on reality? Do you have stars in your eyes? Do you think your potential marriage partner is perfect or nearly perfect? Do your friends and family irritate you by pointing out flaws in your partner that you refuse to see? Are you the only one who "understands" your partner?

The State requires a person to be a certain age before marriage, but age is not maturity. If you are not yet a stable, emotionally secure, reasonable, and fairly well adjusted individual, marriage is not your answer. It will likely only increase your problems.

Is Your Partner Ready for Marriage?

A truly fulfilling and happy marriage requires two adults, not just one. The question you should ask is not whether your partner wants to get married, or is willing to get married, but is he/she ready to be married? Many young people who want to get married judge a potential marriage partner by the wrong standards. The Bible says, “Beauty is deceitful, favor is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord shall be praised.”—Prov. 31:30. Character, not superficialities, contributes to a good and satisfying marriage union. Does your partner have the basic character traits of integrity, kindness, gentleness, self-control, moral courage, faithfulness, etc.? If so, is your partner mature? Do the marks of maturity described above apply?

What Do Your Parents Think?

There was a time, not really long ago, when a young man would seek permission of the father before proposing to his daughter. Parental blessing has historically been a necessary pre-requisite to an appropriate entry into the marriage union. That tradition is still recognized in the marriage ceremony by the father escorting his daughter down the aisle, and offering her hand to the groom. Most young people today groan to think that parents should have anything whatsoever to do with choosing or approving a spouse, but there is much wisdom behind this tradition. Parents usually know and love their son or daughter more and better than anyone else, and are therefore able to judge the potential of the proposed marriage union. If parents are strongly opposed to the union, a Christian son or daughter should regard that opposition as a serious warning flag. Parents are usually not inclined to deprive their children of happiness, but are quite concerned to guard their welfare. Of course, many people today get married, even for the first time, long after moving away from their parents, but even those who are no longer under parental authority would do well to seek and weigh carefully the counsel and advice of parents.

Is Your Partner a Believer in Christ? A Lutheran?

This question is one that people expect a pastor to ask simply because of his “profession,” but the question is much more important than an obligatory pious inquiry of a clergyman. This could well be the single most important question of all to consider by a Christian who desires to enter the marriage union. The Bible clearly teaches that the difference between a believer and an unbeliever is the difference between light and darkness, night and day. This is not to say that unbelievers cannot be fine, decent people and fine marriage partners. It is certainly not to imply that a believer is free to divorce an unbeliever. St. Paul answers



that question in 1 Corinthians chapter seven. However, let it also be soberly considered that a believer is ruled by Christ, and an unbeliever is under the dominion of the devil, the world, and the flesh. The believer is guided and empowered by the Spirit of God. The unbeliever does not have the Spirit. For the believer, Christ's love for the church is the model for marriage. For the unbeliever, marriage is only a social contract. Two believers can face their problems and challenges with the strength and promises of Christ. A believer and an unbeliever yoked together are not united by a common faith.

The question of whether the spouse is a Lutheran is not intended to be a frivolous one. When two believers from two different denominations marry, there are many issues that must be settled, including where, or even whether, they will attend church, perhaps whether they will baptize their babies, what Sunday School the children will attend or whether they will attend parochial school. These questions may not seem like big issues to those who are not yet married, but they often loom very large after the wedding.

Do You Match?

Two people may be mature Christians, even Lutherans, and still not be compatible. Some personality differences add spice to the relationship. Others become exceedingly wearisome in time. The same may be true for certain similarities in personality. Do your personalities match, or will you forever be antagonizing one another in the close quarters of a marriage relationship? Do you share similar goals in life? Do you have the same expectations of marriage roles? Do you have the same hopes and dreams? Do you both want children? Can you be married for the rest of your life to the person as he/she is NOW, or do you expect to change your partner? Do you match?

A Word of Warning

I should not have to add this note, but the world encroaches upon us. It is never, never, never wise to seek a good spouse by shacking up with someone, playing house to see if it will work. This common practice is clearly contrary to God's will and subject to His judgment, since the sexual relationship is sanctified only within the marriage union. Moreover, all evidence indicates that co-habitation arrangements, and even pre-marital sex, is extremely detrimental to a future marriage union. Those who have already erred in this way should not despair. The mercies of God are new every morning. They have the opportunity to begin anew through confession and absolution.

As our nation mourns the death of President Reagan, many have made note of the amazing relationship that existed between Ronald and Nancy Reagan. Even in this fallen world marriage can be a wonderful, satisfying, blessed union. This is especially true for Christians who have opportunity to live out their faith in Christ by imitating the mutual love between Jesus and His bride, the church (Eph 5:22-33). Faithful marriages and families are the real, long term answer to the deterioration we see in the culture. Let us all pray for those among us who have not yet discovered their God-given spouses, that they might be prepared and led by God's Spirit into the blessed relationships God wills for them.