

LESSON 4 Engagement and Wedding

Usually a great deal of planning and preparation take place before people enter into a partnership in the business world. Those involved would like to be sure, before signing the final contract or agreement, that the venture will prove satisfactory and profitable.

Marriage is a tremendous gift of God to two imperfect people entering into an extremely close partnership. But to assure a relationship of mutual contentment, much planning and preparation must take place during the courtship and engagement.

It sometimes comes as a surprise to people in love that disagreements between them will arise. The best time to discover and deal with many of these is prior to marriage. In this lesson we will study ways in which couples prepare for marriage, opportunities they have for getting to know one another better, and how their lives can bring honor to God during the engagement period.

The Plan

- A. Readiness for Marriage
- B. Engagement Customs
- C. The Wedding

The Goals

1. Identify specific ways to honor God during the period of engagement.
2. Discuss some of the problems that may arise because of engagement customs.
3. Distinguish between the purpose of the civil requirements for marriage and the religious ceremony.

A. READINESS FOR MARRIAGE

Goal 1. Identify specific ways to honor God during the period of engagement.

When a young couple should marry depends on the circumstances. Certainly both should be old enough for the responsibilities of marriage. They should be mature enough to be willing to make the necessary adjustments and begin thinking in terms of what is best for both rather than what is best for one.

Marriage is not for immature people. The young man should know how to work, and he should have a way of supporting a wife and family. The young woman should learn to cook and take care of a home. Sometimes her role will also include a job outside the home, while his could include more household responsibility. Both should understand what their responsibilities will be in marriage, and be willing to accept them cheerfully.

Before marrying it is wise for a couple to have a place of their own. It may be a tiny rented apartment or a very simple place, but it is best that it be *their* home, not that of their parents. It is usually not a good plan for a newly married couple to live with their parents, particularly not indefinitely.

The time of engagement and wedding preparations can be a very happy time for the couple who follow the plan of God in all that they do. This can be a good time to become better acquainted

with each other's families. Understanding some of each other's background can help the couple in their new life together. Starting a new home on Christian principles is one of the best ways of assuring a successful marriage and a happy home.

Application

1 In your notebook make a list of principles to guide a couple in knowing whether or not they are ready for marriage.



B. ENGAGEMENT CUSTOMS

Goal 2. Discuss some of the problems that may arise because of engagement customs.

Judged by God's Standards

Marriage is usually preceded by an engagement, and the customs vary in different countries. There may be a celebration at which the young couple announces their intention to marry. They may exchange engagement rings or go through some other ceremony to show that they are promised to each other. Whatever engagement customs are suitable and in keeping with the standards of God can be accepted. But Christians should not follow customs that are not pleasing to God.

The Christian's principal goal is to honor God and please Him in all things. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Christians want God's blessing on their marriage, and they honor Him in the way they celebrate their engagement. They will not make their engagement an occasion for drunken reveling, even though that may be the custom in some homes.

Application

2 What engagement customs may Christians feel free to follow?

3 What should be the principal goal of the Christian in every area of his or her life?

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4 Name one way an engagement celebration would bring dishonor to God.

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Financial Problems

In many parts of the world the young man must give a dowry, or a bride-price, to the parents of the girl he wants to marry. In other areas the parents of the girl give the dowry to the young man or his parents. This may be a large sum of money or expensive gifts. A custom practiced in other countries is for the young man to give the girl a ring, or perhaps a pendant, which is a symbol or token of their engagement.

These customs may make it difficult for young people to marry if the financial burdens become too great. Additional problems arise. A young man desiring the best for his bride may go heavily into debt to purchase an engagement ring. In countries where the bride's parents bear the expense of the wedding, they, too, may spend beyond their means, and far more than is necessary.

A young man unable to pay the required dowry may choose to disregard the law of marriage, and the couple simply lives together. Still others make no attempt to form a home, and live immoral, promiscuous lives, not confining their sexual relations to one person as God's Word demands.

Although there are no easy answers for some of these situations, God does not make demands, which are impossible to fulfill. Certainly, Christian parents and pastors should provide needed counsel and guidance for young people who are contemplating marriage. Christian parents should realize that what matters most is not the dowry, but the Christian character of the person their son or daughter is to marry. They should not insist on a high dowry or an expensive wedding.

Of course, a young man and woman may come from non-Christian homes and consequently will not receive godly counsel

from their parents. One thing they can be sure of, however, and that is God’s direction—if they purpose to honor Him. If God wills for them to marry one another, in His way and in His time, He will make it possible for them to establish a Christian home.

Application

5 Name three possible problems which may result when couples cannot meet the demands of certain customs in their country?

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6 Fill in the blanks to complete the sentence.

Christian parents should consider

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of more importance than the dowry or an expensive wedding.



Behavior During Engagement

The engagement can be a time for a couple to become better acquainted. They begin to discuss the responsibilities of marriage, to plan their lives together, and to talk about the essential needs for establishing their home.

Sharing good times with friends, with church and family groups, is another way of getting to know one another better. The wider the range of situations in which one is able to see the other person, the better they will know each other.

If love and respect are expected of husbands and wives, surely they are no less important for an engaged couple contemplating marriage. A young man and woman who love and respect each other will have an unselfish concern for the other’s happiness and welfare. Each will do his or her part to protect and safeguard the intimacies of marriage for when they become man and wife. A marriage may be already headed for disaster

if entered into by two people burdened with guilt because of liberties they have taken during engagement, or before.

The activities participated in during the time of the engagement should not bring criticism or disgrace upon God's cause. A couple honoring God will be the right kind of example to other young people. Two people who love God and one another can exercise discipline and patience in every circumstance, and later be glad that they did. Remember Jacob, who had to work seven years in payment for Rachel?

Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. (Genesis 29:20)

Application

7 In your notebook, list at least two benefits of the period of engagement.

8 How did Jacob prove his love for Rachel?

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C. THE WEDDING

Goal 3. Distinguish between the purpose of the civil requirements for marriage and the religious ceremony.

Civil Requirements

Christians will need to obtain certain documents in order for their marriage to be legal. These may include birth certificates, health certificates, and a marriage license.

It is a good testimony, proper before God and people, for a couple to meet the civil requirements for legalizing their marriage. The apostle Paul advises, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men" (1 Peter 2:13). In this way, a man gives his wife and children the honor

and protection of his name, as well as the protection of the laws of the land.

Application

9 What documents are ordinarily required for a couple to be legally married?

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Church Wedding

All civil requirements must be met before the church wedding can take place. In some countries a civil ceremony must be performed prior to the religious ceremony.

In a Christian wedding the bride and groom exchange vows to each other publicly, and before God. They promise to love, honor, take care of, and be faithful to each other until death separates them. A minister speaks to them of their responsibilities, listens to their vows, pronounces them man and wife, and asks God's blessing upon their home.

Having a church ceremony is a way of acknowledging marriage as a God-ordained institution. It shows also that the couple is looking to God for help and guidance as they begin married life and establish their home.

We have already discussed the error of going into debt needlessly. To avoid doing so may mean keeping wedding apparel, decorations, and the reception simple, perhaps even limiting the number of attendants.

Of course, a bride and groom will want to look their best. But it is possible to have a wedding that is simple and beautiful as well.

Application

10 Civil requirements must be taken care of

- a)** before the engagement.
- b)** within the first year of marriage.
- c)** before the marriage.

11 What is one way of acknowledging marriage as a God-ordained institution?

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12 We know that a couple honor God when they legalize their marriage according to civil requirements because God's Word says we are to submit to

- a)** every human authority.
 - b)** every custom of the land.
 - c)** the church rules only.
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Check Your Answers

- 7** Any two: A couple gets to know each other better; they can set a good example for other young people; they can plan for their lives together; they can establish their home.
- 1** Check your answer with the section *Readiness for Marriage*.
- 8** He worked seven years in payment for her.
- 2** Those in keeping with God's standards
- 9** Birth certificates, health certificates, marriage license
- 3** To honor and please God
- 10 c)** before the marriage.
- 4** By allowing drunken reveling
- 11** Having a church ceremony
- 5** Some live together without marrying; some lead immoral lives; some go heavily into debt.
- 12 a)** every human authority.
- 6** the Christian character of the person their son or daughter is to marry.

