

101
Questions
to Ask Before
You Get
Remarried

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Many of the questions to ask before remarrying are similar to questions important for first-time engagements. Some of the questions, discussion points, and insights in this book have been drawn from H. Norman Wright, *101 Questions to Ask Before You Get Engaged* (Harvest House, 2004).

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Establishing a Solid Foundation

Today blended families have moved into the majority. Unfortunately, the divorce rate of second marriages is higher than first marriages. Lack of preparation and the abundance of unexpected problems contribute to this problem. *101 Questions to Ask Before You Get Remarried* is for you if you're contemplating marrying again, whether you are divorced or widowed. It's designed to address significant issues in advance so you can discuss differences in views and styles and establish a solid foundation of harmony before you make that lifetime commitment. This will give you a leg up for finding solutions when differing opinions and conflicts arise. You'll also discover how to better work together to resolve issues and face the world as a couple.

What will you find in this helpful book? A balance between significant and penetrating questions for you to discuss and brief, informative selections of beneficial information. The questions asked in this resource come from my experiences as a Christian counselor to thousands of couples, from conducting many marriage seminars, and from being a widower who is happily married again. Dozens of individuals who have experienced remarriage also contributed questions based on their experiences. Contemplating these questions and talking through your answers will hopefully help you create a relationship that will stand the test of time.

Here are some realistic expectations to consider if you're in a serious romantic relationship and thinking about getting married.

- You can expect your second marriage to be successful if you dig in and work for the long haul.

- The new marriage will be tougher than a first marriage. It will be complicated, exasperating, and tiring at times.
- You can expect a slow building process.
- You can expect some “old scripts” at times, but you are also writing a new script every day.
- You can expect to want to run from it every now and then—but you won’t.
- You will be able to solve the problems that often cause a “run or rust” mentality in second marriages.
- You can expect this marriage to be different because you’ve learned many things from your previous marriage and how it ended.

You will be asked many questions in this book. You may feel some are repetitive. They are, and there’s a purpose for that. The second time you see a question, your answer may be different because of the context or wording. This will help you dig a little deeper into your thoughts and expectations. Also, some of your ideas and thoughts will change as you work through this book and consider your views and your partner’s views.

Can Romance Survive Practical Questions?

So often we get caught up in our emotions and how wonderful it feels to have someone next to us when we attend events, travel, watch television, and go to church. Time together can be so exciting that we overlook how much we don’t know about the person. And sometimes we don’t even realize how much we don’t know.

Even though time is valuable, spending it now to really get to know your potential life mate will do one of two things. It might save you from a lot of heartache and misery if you discover there are some values you can’t work out or idiosyncrasies you don’t want to live with. Or discussing these questions now will solidify your relationship, improve your communication, and help ease you over difficult spots when they arise because you’ve already covered them.

During my many years of being a Christian counselor, I’ve heard so many people say, “The person I married was not the same one I dated or

honeymooned with. It's as though he (or she) changed overnight. What happened?" The answer is simple. The person asking the question married a stranger. There was either courtship deception, naïveté, not enough questions asked, marrying for the wrong reason, or marrying too soon. Here's a good illustration.

Let's assume you have sufficient money to purchase a new car. You go to the auto mall where there are 16 dealerships. The lots are filled with cars of all makes, models, colors, vintages, and prices. You pull into the lot, park, and stroll over to a great looking car. It's a previously owned model (which means *used*). It's been around the block a few times. But you really like the way it looks and smells. You get in, and it's very comfortable. There are a number of fun gadgets, including a GPS.

A salesperson comes up and asks if he can help you. You respond, "You sure can! I want to buy this car."

"Great. What would you like to know about it?"

"Know? What's there to know? I saw it. I've checked it out. I like it. I want it. Let's draw up the paperwork."

"I can do that. Do you have any questions about its warranty, performance, estimated mileage, or the GPS? And since it's a recent addition to our inventory, we haven't even put a price on it. Don't you want to know how much it's going to cost?"

"Not really. All I know is that I want it. And you don't even have to wrap it!"

Would you buy a car in this way? It's doubtful. In fact, it's almost ridiculous because you'd be going into it blind. So no, of course you'd ask questions. It's too big of an investment to not be careful. You don't want to make a costly mistake.

Unfortunately, many people who get engaged do a similar thing. They don't ask enough questions. They like what they see, how they feel, what they enjoy doing, and that's all that counts for the moment. Their hearts flutter, and that's enough, right? After all, asking questions isn't very romantic... and they may not like the answers.

The fact is that at some point in time you will discover the answers to the important relationship and lifestyle questions, whether you ask them or not. Asking them *before* you say "I do" will help you evaluate your relationship and either save you from heartache or confirm you're heading in

the best direction. Having more information gives you a better base for making wise decisions.¹

Yes, asking questions can be awkward and even a bit scary. And if the answers aren't satisfying or raise red flags, it's painful to slow down or end a dating relationship. But it's even more painful to break off an engagement and cancel wedding plans or get into a marriage full of conflicts. Hopefully, the questions and information in this book will help you say, "Yes, I really know this person. I feel comfortable in moving ahead" or "I'm glad I asked these questions. Now I won't pursue this relationship. It's time to move on."

Any Red Flags?

How long and how well do you know this person you're considering as a marriage partner? Most of the questions and thoughts in this book have been derived from people who discovered the answers *after* they were married. They were shocked, dismayed, and some even felt deceived. Many of the questions are direct and blunt so you may feel hesitant to ask them. You may think, "I can't ask that!" You may worry you might offend your potential life partner. Or you may think, "Asking these questions seems so unromantic." Or perhaps you don't want to hear the answers (ignorance does not create bliss).

Remember, you're thinking about marrying this person you're involved with. Few areas should be off-limits. You may feel awkward asking about debt, past romantic relationships, or the difficulties the person has had with his or her children. You may even be worried about answering these types of questions yourself. The truth is that you can ask the questions and discuss the answers now or not ask them and discover the answers later. It's your choice. I believe it's better for you to be in charge of when you find out because, as I said earlier, you will eventually.

Along with the questions offered in this book, you'll find suggestions and helpful guidelines for open discussions and things to watch for gleaned from my counseling practice and people willing to share their stories. Some may sound like warnings or cautions. They are. Now is the time to look for red flags or concerns so you can discuss them, work through them, or, perhaps, decide to slow down or end the relationship. Although it can be very painful to apply the brakes on a relationship, it's even more agonizing to not do it and end up in a rocky marriage.

I've shared the following story from a friend at my conferences, and people have found it helpful. I believe you'll find it useful too.

In searching for the perfect mate, it has taken a long time for me to discover that there really is no such creature out there. Everything is found in degrees of compromise. *Can I live with this or can I accept that?* When I have found one that fits most of my criteria and parameters, then the question is, *Will I fit hers?* It's extremely difficult trying to find someone where all the gears seem to mesh into place without a lot of grinding.

I think one of the things I find valuable in dating now is all the experience I have compiled over the years from different situations. I have reached the point now, in my 40s, where I feel I finally know some of the answers to the questions I didn't even know to ask in my 20s or 30s. But to this day, I am still adding and updating my list of questions.

If there are any bits of advice I could give anyone who is looking for their ideal mate, it would be these. Ask questions of anyone you date. Store their answers in your memory bank to see if the answers continue to be consistent with their actions. If something appears to be a red flag, confront it. Don't let it slide as "not that big of a deal." Interact with the other person's friends (in group settings), such as on camping trips or skiing trips or by playing interaction group-type games. If possible, spend time with the other person's parents or children (and if any red flags come up, don't ignore them because their children are products of their environment). If there are ways of seeing how the other person will handle pressure situations. . . put them in it (this way you are able to see how flexible they are or can be and how they hold up under pressure).

Build a real friendship but stay out of bed. Pray together, have similar values and interests in things, come to know the other person's faults and if you can accept them, watch to see how they treat their pets, and continue to interview them right up to the last moments before marriage. . .

And as hard as it may seem, if that inner voice tells you

that you are making a mistake, at least stop and listen to it. Be willing to pull the plug or at least put things on hold until issues can be clarified in the relationship—right up to the day of the wedding. It is my feeling that I would much rather be very embarrassed and cause hurt to both of us by putting things on hold—or walking away from the relationship right up to the final days before the wedding—than suck it up, be mad, and live in misery for the rest of my life. Why marry when maybe you know deep down inside that things are not right or that small things are adding up to be big things, but you don't know how to confront them? Why marry just because you're afraid you might hurt the other person by confronting them? A lot of this stuff will come to the surface through premarital counseling. Know ahead of time that some people are able to mask or hide things. If you don't ask specific questions, they may feel, "If you didn't ask, I didn't lie." Never assume anything.

A good thing to remember is that you can't reshape, remake, or reconstruct another person. You can't get gold out of a mine filled with lead. I've seen people who don't get along at times but assume it will get better once they're married. They usually end up frustrated and critical, feeling betrayed and trapped. Some people feel called to be reformers. They like to reshape others—or at least try to. In doing so, they ease their own pain by not looking at issues in their lives.²

Every Morning at Breakfast

In the book *There Goes the Bride—Making Up Your Mind, Calling It Off and Moving On*, the following suggestions were made. Please consider them carefully:

- "If you have mixed feelings about engagement, don't! You need to be certain. If you get engaged, listen to the feelings, especially numbness or dread or just plain wrongness. These shouldn't be there."
- "Engagement is a serious state. Listen to these words: 'Dating is one thing, but signing up for the rest of your life is liable to

give anyone a few second thoughts. The challenge is deciding if you're suffering from garden-variety cold feet or what I call "Frozen footsies"—a much rarer malady.”

- “Don't feel pressured into engagement or marriage because your biological clock is ticking faster and faster. As one woman said about making a mistake of becoming engaged, 'I was turning thirty and that expiration date stamped on my forehead was flashing so brightly that it blinded me from all the signs.’”
- “If you're thinking of committing your life to someone for the rest of your life, identify the nonnegotiables. Don't do this after the fact. Consider these nonnegotiables:
 - ▶ If your partner hurts you physically, don't proceed. It won't get better.
 - ▶ Emotional abuse is more difficult to identify, but it involves lack of respect, controlling, etc.
 - ▶ Does the other person put you before their parents' wishes or are they controlled by their parents? The scriptural teaching of 'leave their mother and father' includes emotional as well as physical.
 - ▶ Don't plan on marriage fixing your current problems. It compounds them. Work on fixing them now, but if you can't repair them. . .
 - ▶ If you feel inhibited in what you talk about and can't bring up your needs and concerns now, it won't improve. Try new approaches now.
 - ▶ If you find yourself saying 'I love him or her, but. . .' why would you think of proceeding?”
- “Remember, a wedding is exciting but it lasts for just one day. Is this the person you want across the breakfast table from you every morning?”³

Here's another insightful story about romance that reveals some

important considerations when it comes to dating and considering engagement or marriage.

My wife had died from lung cancer. While cleaning out her closet of clothes, I realized that the beautiful dresses I had bought for her that she loved wearing were now meaningless to me...that it was the person *in* the dress that made the dress come alive and not the dress on the person making them pretty. It was at that point that I prayed to God, "Make my life have purpose for You, give me direction in where You want me to be so it will have real meaning."

In the last stages of her cancer, my wife told me that if she wasn't going to make it, she wanted me to not spend the rest of my life single. In going through a period of time of grieving, I came to a point of feeling alone. But where do you even start at 55 and having had an incredible marriage? I had truly found my soul mate when I found Sherry. She was a godly woman, pretty, smart, loving, loved the outdoors where we fished and hunted together. She was sweet, kind... She was everything I had dreamed of in a wife and more.

It had been through many years of prayer and patience that I had finally found the love of my life, and now she was gone...I had a huge void in my life. It had taken years to find a lady like Sherry, but when I found her I can remember thinking to myself after six months of marriage, "Now I know a little of how Adam felt when God introduced him to Eve... This is so good, and this is what marriage is supposed to be like!" Sure, we had our little everyday problems like every marriage has, but I really can't picture marriage any better than what we had nor a wife as special as she was.

So in beginning to date, the first three or four dates didn't have a chance, and neither did the next three or four—and really, it probably wouldn't have mattered what the women's qualities were or how godly they were. I was trying to find another Sherry, and no one could ever fill her shoes. The one thing that I wanted more than anything if I were to find someone that I could fall in love with again was to have

purpose for God. Almost four years had gone by, along with an untold amount of first and last dates, when I met Kathy. I had met her on a Christian internet site when she wrote me. . . We wrote each other and then talked. She seemed like a possible good match, so we carried it to the next step. . . to meet in person. I asked her where she would like to meet, and she gave me the location. It sounded like a familiar place, but it wasn't until I got there that I realized this was the exact place that Sherry had brought me on our first date. Now what are the chances of something like this happening? It was Sherry's favorite place, it was also the same beach where we spent our last anniversary together. Now this was almost too eerie. I was wondering at the time if this was some kind of a sign from God, and if it was the passing of the baton—and I was the baton.

Sometimes I have found that we try to look so deep in trying to find a sign from God that this is where He wants us to be, but in dating I found it to be more coincidence than a message from God. This was one of those times where I was looking more for the divine than listening to reason.

Kathy and I dated for more than a year and a half. We became very involved in both church and weekend missions into Mexico. It was something I had so much wanted to be involved in because we were giving so much to the children of migrant workers. When we first found this camp, it was like one of those commercials you see on TV asking for donations for sick children. Their noses were all running, and they had flies all over their faces. They were malnourished. . . It was just an extremely sad sight to behold. It was exciting for me because for the first time in my life I really felt this was a real purpose to get involved in, and it was with someone I was having feelings for. Kathy had lost her husband about the same time Sherry died, and she felt that missions were her calling. It was feeling more and more like a match that truly was made in heaven.

I was so happy in what I was doing with her that I failed to notice some of the red flags that were popping up—like the relationship was all one way, and it was either her way or it

was going to be the highway. I really felt that this was where God wanted me to be, so I continued to compromise. . . It was nothing like what I'd had with Sherry, where we were both givers and couldn't out give each other. . . Now I had found a taker, and, being a giver, I just gave and pretty much didn't get anything in return other than how I was being blessed in seeing so many children and adults coming to Christ from what we were doing.

I share this only because I really thought this was where God wanted me to be, and I accepted things in the relationship that I shouldn't have. We married, but the old adage that you always hear, "If they are not nice to you while you are dating, why would you think they will be nice to you when you are married?" came true.

Another thing I learned from all of this was just because a person claims to be a Christian doesn't mean that they will always act like one. Another is even though they act one way at church in front of friends, that doesn't always mean that that's the way they really are behind closed doors. Also, just because you might date for a year and a half, if they don't let you into their life other than what is on the surface, you really don't know that person. In other words, you want to feel like you know that person warts and all. If they're not willing to show themselves as less than being perfect on the surface, know that this is a major red flag. Don't go through it without addressing that issue with that person.

It is easy to look in the rearview mirror and see the things that you couldn't see when looking forward. The biggest bit of advice that I can give someone when dating after you lose a spouse, be it through death or divorce, is not to take anything for granted. Don't let little things go without addressing them because they grow on you and become major. When they finally come to a head—and they will—they're harder to resolve or you will just be in denial and confrontation becomes harder.

It has been a little over four years now since I went

through that divorce. In my dating, I'm taking advantage of my past errors. I will only date someone who is a giving person, someone who shows that she has the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and that she is a Proverbs 31 lady to some extent.

One last piece of advice is to date through all four seasons, and spend a lot of time interacting with both your friends and hers. Listen to what your friends have to say. Stay in prayer that God will keep your eyes wide open.

Warning Lights

There are more warning signs about relationships. Take a look at the following points. They may be indications that marriage is not the best direction for you to take right now.

- Are you asking, “Are you really sure you love me?” again and again? It’s an indication of low self-esteem. Counseling would be better than marriage.
- If most of your time is characterized by quarrels and disagreements that never get resolved, marriage will make them worse.
- If you plan to live together before marriage, don’t. It hurts your chances of a lasting marriage.
- If your partner is like a parent you don’t get along with, why would you want to marry that person?
- If your partner is all for your interests and activities, but then reacts to you spending time on them, this won’t get better in marriage.
- Don’t marry just for sex. Physical intimacy alone won’t keep a marriage together. You need the emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, and recreational intimacy as well.
- How do you feel if you spend a day with your partner just hanging out and talking? If it’s intolerable, why are you together?
- If you haven’t recovered from a previous relationship, you’re not ready for a new one.

- If your partner has an addiction and isn't in a recovery program, you're not their therapist. And promises to reform aren't a basis for marriage.
- If the two of you are totally opposite, what delights you now will probably be a pain in the neck later.⁴

I hope the information and responses have given you guidance about whether or not you should pursue the relationship you're in. That's the purpose! All of them are meant to be spoken out loud to your potential mate. His or her responses can either be verbal or written. I recommend you set aside an ample amount of time regularly to allow for discussion as you go through this book. After the questions, I offer some insights and, at times, suggestions on how to deal with some of the answers.

Hopefully, you'll enjoy learning more about your partner and you. Maybe after you've finished this book, you'll be even more convinced that engagement is right for you. Wonderful! Or perhaps you'll question whether this relationship is "the one." Either way, keep reading and asking questions. It's better to discover the truth now.