

A Guide For Choosing Life Partner

Fr. Tadros Y. Malty



“Food for Thought”

A GUIDE FOR CHOOSING YOUR LIFE PARTNER

- 1. INTRODUCTION:**
 - * choosing your partner
 - * maturity
- 2. QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONTEMPLATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR CONFESSOR:**
 - * faith-related fundamentals
 - * lifestyle principles
 - * characteristics of your education
 - * characteristics of your and her/his personalities
- 3. PROFOUND AND METICULOUS EXAMINATION**
- 4. ENDING A RELATIONSHIP**
- 5. SELF-EXAMINATION**
 - * considerations when choosing your life partner
- 6. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE.....**
- 7. WHAT OUR FOREFATHERS SAY ABOUT MARRIAGE.....**
- 8. A FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION.....**

Prepared by

**Very Rev. Tadros Y. Malaty,
Church of St. George, the Great Martyr
Sporting, Alexandria, Egypt**

Translated, through the Grace of God, by George Ishack, Ottawa

1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing your partner - maturity

“And the Lord God said, ***“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”***” (Genesis 2:18)

God granted us the gift of our natural tendency and desires towards the opposite sex. This tendency evolves throughout our physical, emotional and mental development period, which normally lasts from the early stages of puberty to the mature age of marriage. During that period we experience strong desires and yearnings, whose effective control is possible only by yielding to the Holy Spirit. In His hands, we are capable of leading an open life with God and with our fellow men, in the full embrace of God’s Divine love. Throughout our development, and prior to embarking on a life of matrimonial love with a person of the opposite sex, we will savour the chastity of our maturing spiritual struggle, which transcends that of our immature childhood.

Wholistic maturity through the Holy Spirit prepares us for a conjugal life where both partners are joined by a sublime, holy love, neither based nor dependent on spontaneous reactions to fleeting emotional moments. This love is blest by the Church, and is poured and nurtured by the Holy Spirit. In following this approach, Christianity has elevated marriage to the highest possible level, where God establishes the two partners’ union, following the example that Christ set between Himself and the Church (Ephesians 5: 22 - 24), for founding a holy Church, blest and indwelt by the Lord; the Lord, therefore, attends the wedding ceremony, just as Christ attended the wedding at Cana of Galilee.

Since the vital issue of choosing a life partner affects a person’s being and his/her entire life, both in this and in the coming age, Divine guidance is essential to acquire a genuine knowledge of the other party’s traits. Hence, the partner should be trustworthy, faithful, and a true believer; that choice would be conducive to a harmonious life, which achieves common goals built on a common faith, agreed traditions and compatible education. Their life will thus be a joyous trip traversing them to eternal life (2 Corinthians 6:14).

* Such a decision needs much study, prayers, discussions and advice; advice would come from three main sources: the Lord, the person’s confessor and a trusted, spiritually and mentally mature, friend. We should refrain from proudly adhering to our own opinion, and heed St. Peter: “...be serious and watchful in your prayers.” (1 Peter 4:7) In this regard, King Solomon tells us, “Do not be wise in your own eyes...” (Proverbs 3:7)

* We should be honest in asking ourselves and the other party all the questions on our minds, to help us understand ourselves and our would-be partner: “For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.” (Proverbs 3:26)

* Being honest and frank with each other will help both parties in becoming vessels for holiness and dignity (1 Thessalonians 4:14)

2. QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONTEMPLATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR CONFESSOR

a) Faith-related fundamentals

In recognition of the importance of discussions, and since answers to most of the following questions depend on the individual's personality and circumstances, guidelines are given below only for the first two questions.

1. What is your view, and your would-be partner's view, of the Orthodox Faith?

Our Faith is necessary for material (on this earth) success and it embodies:

- * *a loving heart towards God and fellow men,*
- * *an open Bible,*
- * *a joyous life constantly renewed by the Holy Spirit, and*
- * *fellowship with the saints and the celestial beings.*

2. To what extent are you, and your would-be partner, tied to the Church?

Maintaining close ties with the Church has many rewards including:

- * *short-term blessings such as success,*
- * *enjoyment of the Lord's open arms,*
- * *savouring life in heaven, and*
- * *an opportunity for wholesome socialization.*

3. To what extent are your thoughts preoccupied with spiritual matters? Do they have first priority in your heart, in your mind and on your tongue?

4. Do you derive significant pleasure from individual worship and from group worship in the church?

5. Is your repentance sincere when you err and return to the Lord?

6. Do you seek God's guidance, before men's, in all your affairs?

7. Do you consider spiritual matters to be laughable?

8. Do you brag about errors committed overtly or covertly?

9. To what extent are you committed to studying the Holy Bible, and to meditating on it, in your private life and in church?

b) Lifestyle principles

10. Would you describe yourself as a person having a tendency to splurge, a thrifty person, or a penny-pincher?
11. Do you seek to do good to others without being asked?
12. Is your respect for others independent of their age or stature?
13. Do you suffer from any addiction (smoking, drugs, alcohol, internet)?
14. Have you ever committed a crime, however “minor”?
15. Do you insist on your opinion?
16. Are you verbose? Do you interfere in others’ business?
17. Are you trustworthy?
18. Do have a tendency to borrow from others?
19. To what extent are you preoccupied with politices, church matters, worldly affairs family business, and patriotic issues?
20. Is there anything about you that you do not wish your parents and/or your friends to know?
21. Do you seem to lose friends quickly? When you are angered by any of your friends, how long does your anger last and how intense is it?
22. Do you tend to be ambitious? Greedy? Inactive?
23. Do you prefer innovations and, if so, to what extent?

c) Characteristics of your education

There is no doubt that a person’s education is reflected in his/her personality and temperament. In this context, education not only refers to acquired academic degrees, but also to the extent of the person’s absorption and application of that knowledge.

24. Who are your friends, and how would you characterize them?
25. Which types of books do you normally read?
26. What newspapers, magazines and websites do you routinely use or access?

27. What are your preferred TV programs, videos, CDs and DVDs?
28. How do you spend your spare time?
29. What are your and your would-be partner's hobbies?
30. What type of music do you usually listen to?
31. What are your aspirations in life?
32. What is the kind, frequency and size of e-mails that you usually send?
33. Do you use a cell phone and, if so, how often?

d) Characteristics of your and her/his personalities

Personal attributes play a significant role in a marriage. They constitute an important factor in determining whether the couple can lead a happily married life in the Lord. A person can learn much about his/her personality, as well as about that of the other party, by answering the following questions:

34. Are you quick to make promises? Do you make them while doubting that they will be realized?
35. How do you feel when unforeseen circumstances prevent you from fulfilling a promise?
36. To what extent do you respect your appointments with others and in your job?
37. Do you usually covet everything you see?
38. How do you make your decisions? Are you often indecisive? Do you have second thoughts after making a decision?
39. Would you describe yourself as a responsible, committed person?
40. Do you find it easy to apologize? How about your would-be spouse?
41. Are you always burning with energy? Do you pursue your tasks relentlessly?
42. Do you believe you can change the other party's personality to match yours? Do you feel that you can change your personality to match hers/his? Do you think that each should respect the other's differences?

43. Do you have frequent doubts about other people's personalities? Are you often suspicious about their behaviour or intentions?
44. Do you respect your parents, your supervisors and those who are either older than you are or whose social standing is higher than yours?
45. Do you take your subordinates for granted? Do you disrespect them or disregard their feelings?
46. Which usually prevails: your mind (logic) or your emotions?
47. Are your thoughts predominantly carnal when thinking of your would-be spouse?
48. Do you usually keep secret from others your behaviour and the places you frequent?
49. Does the other party have a tendency to change jobs often?

3. PROFOUND AND METICULOUS EXAMINATION

When choosing a life-partner, it is quite appropriate for you to examine closely your prospective partner's traits and behavioural attributes when dealing with others; this conduct can be indicative of what married life would be like with him/her. The following are relevant questions:

50. How does the person behave during social events: how does he/she dress - what kind of language does he/she use - to what extent does he/she control his/her actions?
51. Does the person use profanity in humorous conversation?
52. Does the person get physical (e.g. slap or strike anyone), even humorously?
53. Does the person take care not to hurt your feelings?
54. To what extent does the person control his/her feelings when you are alone together? Does he/she appreciate the body's sanctity?
55. Does the person "push" you towards marriage prior to careful examination of your compatibility?

4. ENDING A RELATIONSHIP

Although you might find it imperative that a certain relationship be terminated, such a situation is understandably painful, and requires the following:

- a) prayer, and seeking God's guidance to find an approach that would not result in hurting the other person's feelings;
- b) expediency, since you have already decided not to marry the other person - meetings should stop immediately, since time is not on anybody's side;
- c) clear and honest answers which do not leave "the door open" that the relationship can be resumed, and which also help the person in not missing other opportunities;
- d) being pragmatic - although the other party may seem to feel that "life without you is impossible," all the facts should be put in proper context, emotions aside, and the point should be made that divorce (especially when children are involved) is a far more painful undertaking than breaking-up at the current stage;
- e) avoiding accusations levelled at the other party - your reasons for terminating the relationship should be clear, concise and, above all, not expressed in derogatory terms or in personal attacks;
- f) the possible presence of a spiritual guide or counsellor in the event that the other party shows signs of depression or a suicidal tendency; and
- g) patience, and seeking protection, in the event that the other party exhibits signs of violence - do not counter violence with violence.

5. SELF-EXAMINATION

Choosing a life partner is, as mentioned before, a decision that will affect your entire life; it requires fasting, prayer and sanctification, in order to claim and enjoy God's guidance. "Rose Publishing" proposed a questionnaire entitled "100 things to know before dating and marriage," designed to help a person determine the suitability of another of the opposite sex for a lifetime conjugal partnership; it is also meant to help identify the potential pitfalls. This questionnaire is offered below, with some minor changes to reflect the Orthodox thinking.

The idea is for you to count the number of “green,” “yellow,” and “red” points (green is for “a,” yellow is for “b” and red is for “c”). Many “greens,” however, should not propel you towards a permanent relationship with the other person; you should still seek God’s guidance and wisdom, and you should still consult with your confessor and with others. Several “yellows” would indicate that there are potential problems; this requires prayer and suspension of the relationship. Many “reds” signals the presence of a “high hazard!!”

<p>1. My age is: a) 26 or more. b) 23 - 25. c) 22 or less.</p>	<p>2. My living expenses: a) I pay my living expenses. b) My family contributes. c) My family pays all.</p>	<p>3. My relationship with my family is best described by: a) Joy and harmony prevail. b) No disputes. c) I live in isolation.</p>
<p>4. My close friends: a) I have many close friends. b) I have at least one close friend. c) I do not trust any friend.</p>	<p>5. My friends: a) Do not take advantage of me. b) Sometimes exploit me. c) Their sole purpose is exploitation.</p>	<p>6. I want to get married because: a) I found the right person. b) I am now 25. c) I suffer from loneliness.</p>
<p>7. My view of marriage: a) A union in the Lord. b) Raising a family like my friends, having children, having a helper. c) A means for emigration, emotional compatibility, pleasing the parents.</p>	<p>8. I met the other person: a) In church or through family or friends. b) Unexpectedly while executing a certain task, while shopping, in school/college. c) At a party, via the internet.</p>	<p>9. The other person: a) Is a church-goer and has an intimate relationship with God. b) Attends the church’s meetings. c) Rarely goes to church.</p>
<p>10. My family and spiritual friends: a) Feel comfortable with the relationship and support it. b) Are neutral. c) Feel uncomfortable about it.</p>	<p>11. The other person’s traits: a) Gives unreservedly to all. b) Only reacts as required. c) Behaves as he/she pleases.</p>	<p>12. Emotions in relationship: a) Our love is mutual and controlled. b) Our emotions are uncontrolled c) There is no modesty in our relationship.</p>
<p>13. In the event of an argument, I: a) Apologize, seek forgiveness, and change my behaviour. b) Say I could have been mistaken, and did not mean it. c) Insist it was not my fault.</p>	<p>14. The marital/social status of the other person is: a) A virgin. b) Divorced with no children. c) Divorced with children.</p>	<p>15. When I meet the other person, I feel: a) Love, esteem and respect. b) Pure emotions and carnal desires. c) A desire to end the meeting quickly.</p>
<p>16. We usually talk about: a) Spiritual or cultural subjects, our future, our love and esteem for each other. b) Nothing in particular - we just try to kill time. c) Uncontrolled emotions.</p>	<p>17. My relationship with the other party’s family is: a) Pleasant and harmonious. b) Neutral/non-committal. c) Characterized by their feeling that I am trying to take away their son/daughter, OR by their feeling of pity for their son’s/ daughter’s problems (health, etc)</p>	<p>18. Our decision to get married started after: a) Several meetings and discussions of various subjects. b) Discovering the other person’s success and potential. c) Admiration or love at first sight.</p>

6. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE....

“A friend and companion never meet amiss: but above both is a wife with her husband.” (Sirach 40:23)

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” (Ephesians 5: 25 - 30)

“Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.” (Proverbs 21:19)

“Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.” (Proverbs 21:9 and 25:24)

“A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. Whoever restrains her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand.” (Proverbs 27:15 and 16)

7. WHAT OUR FOREFATHERS SAY ABOUT MARRIAGE....

* Marriage transcends any human undertaking. It is a small kingdom representing a miniature version of the house of the Lord.

* Who are the two or three gathered in the name of Christ, and in whose midst the Lord is present? Are they not the man, his wife and their child? This is because the man and his wife are united in God.

* Marriage is a sacred image that should be preserved in all purity against any attempt at its defilement. It therefore befits us to arise with Christ from our slumber, and to resume our sleep with prayer and thanksgiving.

* The hearts of our loved ones are winged.....love could change to hate, if certain factors creep in, such as lack of mutual respect.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

* How can we express marital joy, promulgated and sanctioned by the Church, edified by oblations, and sealed by blessing?

(Tertullian, the genius)

* The bodies of the married are sanctified, as long as they are faithful, one towards the other, and towards God.

(St. Augustine)

* Marriage is a spiritual gift. It cannot, however, be thus, if practiced with non-believers. The Spirit of God will not in-dwell non-believers.

* Husband and wife are one, just as the wine and water become one when mixed. THEREFORE, since a non-believing partner corrupts a believer, those who seek a spouse must **EITHER** refrain from marriage, **OR** seek a marital relationship in the Lord.

(Origen, the genius)

* Who would, when on the verge of marriage, turn to acquiring wealth and possessions of various sorts, as though he were about to purchase an object of some kind, or about to enter a “contractual” arrangement?! I have heard much talk of “marriage contracts,” which concept demeans God’s grants, since it implies that marriage is a trade of sorts! **It befits us not to seek a wife because of her wealth, rather, because we are seeking a life-partner**, who would help us have and raise children. God granted man a woman not for the purpose of acquiring wealth, rather, to be his helper!

* Concerning wild, soul-defiling, wedding parties: Tell me, why do you permit your daughter’s ears to be filled with ugly lyrics and, consequently, why do you permit such an ill-conceived celebration which desecrates the revered sacrament of holy matrimony? You should reject all this, teach your daughter modesty from the very beginning, and invite the priests to effect the rites of holy matrimony with prayers and blessings. This way the groom’s desire will flourish, the bride’s chastity consolidated, and virtue will work in all facets of their lives.

(St. John Chrysostom)

8. A FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION.....

“Is it acceptable that two students be engaged, and maintain a chaste relationship until they should get married?”

To answer this question, the following should be borne in mind:

- a) Christian believers surrender their life to Christ, with no preoccupation about the future. It suffices to discharge the duties of the day faithfully.
- b) Marriage, as a holy sacrament, should be celebrated openly before the Church and the couples’ families. Whoever walks in darkness errs!
- c) Man erroneously believes that being engaged protects his chastity. In so doing, he ignores the fact that he risks falling in the emotions of puberty: unbridled, and untempered by the grace of God.
- d) Some fear “losing” a particular person if someone else beats them to being engaged to him/her; this reasoning defies our Faith, since we should believe that our future spouse will come from the Lord’s hand in accordance with His economy.
- e) Finally, some others favour the student-to-student engagement approach on the basis of the students’ desire to get to know each other better. The Church does not prevent its children from meeting their potential future spouses. However, to what extent would a young man, for example, be able to concentrate on his studies while, at the same time, a young woman is vying for his attention and emotions?!

In closing, it should be emphasized that the hazards of such forwardness must be fully appreciated in the light of our understanding of the right way, laid out by our Faith, for choosing our life partner.

REFERENCES:

1. The Open Bible - New King James Version.
2. “100 Things to Know before Dating and Marriage,” Rose Publishing.
3. “Marital Love,” Very Rev. Tadros Y. Malaty.
4. “Family Love,” Very Rev. Tadros Y. Malaty.