

# **Mentors Helping Couples Prepare To Take**

# ***The Big Plunge***

**A Five Week Marital Preparation Course  
For Mentor Couples To Use With Marrying Couples**

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# Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

## Index

<b>Page</b>	<b>Title</b>
3	Introduction
4	Chapter One: Getting To Know You
16	Chapter Two: What We Bring To A Marriage
35	Chapter Three: Establishing Family System Priorities
47	Chapter Four: Marital Sex
66	Chapter Five: Marital Communication
78	Being A Mentor
84	Mentoring Evaluation Form

# Introduction

Most people enter marriage carrying three belief systems:

1. They think they know their fiancée well
2. They're pretty certain they're actually in love
3. They think they understand what marriage is about
4. They think they have what it takes to make a marriage last five decades

I said “three” belief systems rather than “four.” Usually, if they're honest, most marrying people admit to not quite knowing all there is to know about at least one of these four items. Thirty years later, looking back over their shoulders they often quip, “Sheesh ~ how naïve we were!”

Today in the USA, roughly 50% of all marriages end in divorce. Nobody starts out thinking this will happen to them, but the marital grim reaper takes half. So would you fly in an airplane if you knew 50% were going to crash and burn? Obviously not. If there's a principle to be learned, then, it is that some form of serious preparation for life's longest-lasting and most deeply meaningful relationship might be a wise undertaking.

This book is written for couples and mentors to go through together. By mentor, we have in mind someone that's at least 25 years older than the marrying couple ~ someone who has had a strong and happy marriage ~ OK, maybe a few bumps and bruises along the way, but they're still together and still love each other.

This book is based upon Christian principles taken from the Bible. So the mentor should also be a believing and practicing Christ-follower. There's nothing “magic” about that, but for those who take their faith seriously enough to penetrate to the roots of their souls and their marriages, it truly does alter everything.

There are separate instructions provided for mentors. Nothing secret or mystical. Just tips on how to help younger couples progress through the material in each chapter.

If you're a marrying couple, don't even *think* you can just slide through the questions in each chapter without reading the material and thinking through the issues. If you try to slick your way through rather than reading the material, everyone around you is going to know you're empty-headed when giving your input to the questions.

Some chapters of this book are longer; some shorter. In some you may feel as if you're drinking from a fire-hose. Just absorb what you can for now, but understand this: Each chapter is a foundational piece for helping you build a marriage that will last for the five decades it takes to say, “We did it ~ we made it ~ and together!”

Go with God ~

Dr. John Splinter

# Chapter One

## Getting To Know You

### *Questions To Discuss As You Prepare For A Lifetime Together*

Almost everyone who marries, believes during the months of their courtship and engagement that they are well matched with their future spouse. Most relationships go through rather predictable first stages. The first stage is usually identified as “the romantic stage.” This stage may or may not be accompanied by gushy romantic feelings – but it is almost always a stage in which both parties tend to IDEALIZE one another.

As such, this stage represents what some therapists call, “temporary insanity.” It’s often an emotional roller coaster. During this stage couples are often willing to ignore massive red flags in one another, or in their circumstances, in order to “attach.” They often blithely dismiss issues brought to them by loved ones or friends. They often stubbornly hold onto their belief that they, and only they, know the truth and depth of the relationship.

Dangerous couples in this stage naively believe that the emotions they feel in this stage, will last, just as they are, forever. The *really* dangerous (AKA, bone stupid) couples use the raw emotional energy of this stage to propel themselves into early sexual activity followed by hasty marriages. Those who leap into marriage while in this stage frequently end up divorcing.

So if you’re smart, and if you’re in this first phase of a love relationship, do yourself and your “significant other” a huge favor ~ slow the train waaaaaay down. Do NOT marry. Take several months to get to know one another. (The rest of this paper will help you do that.)

The second phase of a love relationship is often far less a roller coaster. During this second phase the couple transfers their trust ~ *from* trusting their raw emotions and passions ~ *to* trusting the reality that each of them brings to the table. In healthy relationships, this phase may seem rather boring compared to the first phase. In healthy relationships, neither person is trying to save, rescue, or “fix” the other ~ they just enjoy being together.

Since the best marriages are built upon the best friendships, these couples take the time and invest the energy needed to create deep, peaceful, and enduring friendships with each other. They don’t depend on dating to create an image of themselves. They take time, time, and more time, and get to know each others’ values, friends, strengths, weaknesses, hopes and dreams.

As relationships grow into deeper and more stable post-romantic phases, often the very things which drew a couple together in the beginning become problematic issues, hurdles to be overcome a year or two later. As odd as it may sound, sometimes couples don’t even begin to process some of the *most important issues pertaining to the depth, breadth and strength of their relationship* until months after they are married. Any pastor or therapist will tell you that couples will process this level of content – it’s just a matter of time.

As the partners' experience of the word "intimacy" evolves from sexual overtones to connotations of a deeper understanding of the other person, it's not uncommon for people to uncover surprises in one another. While there are always going to be some surprises in marriage, the more couples can explore one another's emotional and spiritual depth *prior to marriage*, the fewer surprises are likely, and the easier the emotional and spiritual adjustment will generally be following marriage.

What follows are a series of questions which we encourage couples to process together. There's nothing magical about these questions. They are intended to lead couples into areas of deeper reflection as fiancées consider pledging their lives to one another, "until death do us part." We encourage you to use the following questions as a discussion format for several "dates," giving perhaps five minutes to each question as both partners give their answers. One way or another, you will process this level of information.

Wisdom says it's smart to do so before getting married. So take your time. Take one question at a time. Perhaps discuss one question each time you are together, or if distance separates you, each time you're on the phone, or on Skype, or texting. Think about your answer and then ask the other person to share their answer. When you find any broad discrepancies, stop and talk about them. You're not going to avoid these questions by marrying – but you will almost certainly intensify the challenges if you marry with these kinds of questions unaddressed.

If you're Christians, pray together about these issues. Learn to invite God into your relationship beginning right now. You'll find prayer is one of the deepest aspects of intimacy that you'll ever experience as a couple.

You might think this is too much to do ~ we don't need this ~ who's got the time ~ etc. However, marriage is a life-long commitment. Are you willing to put in the time it takes to know one another well and deeply, or do you think you already know it all? If that last thought makes you bristle, then perhaps the next 60 questions are *especially* for you.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Question</i>
1.	Do I have the capacity to create and sustain an emotionally intimate relationship? How have I demonstrated this ability thus far in my life? How do I feel when my fiancée and I are discussing deep or private issues? Am I comfortable with it, or do I tend to want to change the subject?
2.	Does the person I am considering, have the same capacity? How has he/she demonstrated that capacity thus far in his/her life? How does my fiancée appear to feel when we are discussing deep or private issues?
3.	Would I say that I am "eager," or "hesitant," for my partner to know my deepest and most private issues? Why?
4.	Am I still emotionally tied up with any difficult or painful relationships or experiences which have happened to me previously in my life (e.g., previous love relationship,

previous or ongoing problems with parents, a former marriage, etc.), or will I be able to focus most of my emotional energy on my marriage? Tip: If you're still emotionally tied up, then seek counseling and get these things worked through before marrying, or you'll just transfer your emotional problems and issues into your marriage.

5. How would I answer the previous question in regard to the person I am considering becoming attached to?
6. How generally mature am I? E.g., am I mature enough to live with both my, and my partner's inconsistencies, rough edges, and quirks? Do I seek "perfection" in either myself or my fiancée? Can I allow myself, and/or my fiancée, to have personal inconsistencies, rough edges, and quirks? Am I capable of loving a person who is not perfect?
7. How emotionally mature and stable are we both when we're together? Are we more mature, or less mature when we're together? Are we as mature and stable when we're apart, as when we're together?
8. Am I capable of trusting? Do I want to trust him/her? Do I have a history of being comfortable with trusting others, or do I feel I have a lot that I tend to keep "close to the vest?" Tip: People who have difficulty with trust, almost always have broken parts in their souls. Those broken parts will definitely put a "load" onto the marriage; in some cases those broken parts will destroy marriage.
9. Is my fiancée capable of trusting? Does he/she want to trust me? Has he/she demonstrated a capacity to trust me even with "damaging" information?
10. Am I flexible? Do I have the capacity and willingness to change as may be necessary within an ongoing relationship?
11. How flexible is my fiancée?
12. How similar are our values and dreams?
13. How much do we know about one another's parenting styles? Are we comfortable with .....