

Question: Many young couples feel that they know each other so well that they do not need any kind of premarital preparation. What do you think Jesus would do?

Marriage and family are foundational to a healthy, functioning society; yet little preparation is expected of couples who are planning to marry. Young people are required to take drivers education and pass a test before they are allowed to drive, and an education is necessary for most professions. But to get married, a couple only needs to go to the court house and ask for a license.

In contrast, Jesus taught the importance of counting the costs before making commitments in life. He once said: “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish’” (Luke 14:28-30). Jesus said these things to challenge those who wanted to become his disciples. But the importance of counting the cost in advance should be applied to all commitments. In fact, I believe Jesus would encourage every couple planning to marry to count the cost before making that important lifetime commitment.

As a minister, I require premarital counseling for couples who ask me to conduct their wedding ceremony. I know that most of them will probably not change their plans to get married as a result of this exercise. Although premarital counseling does not guarantee a long and happy marriage, sociological studies indicate that it does increase the chances of a healthy marriage.

The purpose of premarital counseling is to guide couples through a process that will help them know one another better and know how to build a strong relationship through the years. To do this, they need to arrive at a common definition of marriage and an understanding of the purpose of marriage. They should discuss expectations they have of each other after they are married. It is helpful to look at the family background because people tend to do as their parents did before them. In addition, they should be guided in a discussion of personal values and goals in life.

Good preparation for marriage includes discussion of healthy communication principles and how to handle the inevitable conflicts. Finances, sexual relations and male-female differences deserve special attention as common areas of potential conflict. While many couples feel they can work through these issues by themselves, their desire to please one another so dominates during courtship and engagement that they find it difficult to be completely honest with themselves and with one another. A good counselor understands this difficulty and has tools that can help a couple face these important issues in a more realistic manner.

Above all, Jesus would want every young couple to know something about God's purpose for marriage, as well as other related Biblical teachings. When God created man, he said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). God then made the woman and brought her to the man, and the man expressed his joy at this gift. A good marriage is one of the greatest blessings God has given; but it takes commitment, hard work and God's help to establish and maintain a marriage.

To love a person enough to marry him or her and then to lose that love and be ripped apart in divorce is one of the most painful experiences one can have. Therefore, I believe Jesus would have us do everything possible to save our marriages even before they begin. Yes, he would encourage premarital counseling. If I can help you with finding a counselor or good Christian books on marriage preparation, please write or phone me.

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881. This article is reproduced on the web: www.nchrist.org] 2013/08/30