

each other by mutual self-disclosure and diverse experiences happening over time. As you gather information and understanding about a person, you create a picture of what you think the other person is like which leads to trust.



2. **Mental self: *Trusting each other.*** Your level of trust in someone will increase over time as you find them mature, adaptable and emotionally stable. Based on your level of trust, you form a dependency on this person to meet more of your needs.
3. **Emotional self: *Relying on each other.*** As you invest yourself in the relationship, so will your partner. Over time you learn to rely on each other. Reliance is the natural outgrowth of trusting someone.
4. **Relational self: *Committing.*** The degree of commitment is measured by the amount of personal investment one person places in another. Your commitment increases as aspects 1-3 grow.
5. **Sexual self: *Ability to form a sexual bond, to desire and feel desired by each other.*** This starts with gazing at each other and progresses to intercourse. The closeness you develop in the other areas translates into physical touch. It is common for relationships today to be out of balance in the sexual area, but the key is to not let one area grow at a faster rate than the one before it.

Your choice of a marriage partner is a decision you want to last a lifetime. Knowing the factors that contribute to a successful marriage will guide you in choosing a life partner. And whether you've grown up with your potential spouse, like Charla's parents, or got to know them far from your family and friends, like Charla and Brian did, you'll feel confident that you are making a wise decision, full of both head and heart compatibility.

For more information on this important subject, read *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk* (Van Epp, John. New York: McGraw Hill. 2007.)

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# The Stewpot

A potpourri of practical ideas to help you become a better steward

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## HOW TO AVOID MARRYING A LOSER

By Alice Merrill



Charla graduated from college with a degree in International Business and was hired by a company that sent her to work at its branch office in France. There she met Brian who, like herself, was a foreigner. They dated and after a year and a half decided to marry. Although Charla and Brian had shared with their parents many things about their significant others, the first time the two families met was the weekend of the wedding.

Charla's parents couldn't help but compare their daughter's courtship to their own. They grew up together, attended the same church and schools for years and their parents knew each other and had been happy when their children decided to marry.

This isn't a true story so I didn't have to change the names to protect the innocent, but it is a scenario more and more common in today's 'shrunken world'.

## MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN TODAY'S WORLD

At one time families were more involved in the courtship process, in some cases even choosing the spouse. Most people are not sad that arranged marriages are a thing of the past, but where do you go for help in choosing a spouse? If we carefully make financial plans for retirement, shouldn't we be just as careful when researching who we wish to spend a lifetime with?

Divorce rates are high in our society today, even in the Adventist

Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality and finances.

church. The emotional and financial hardships arising from divorce cannot be overlooked.

Marital and family discord is a major contributor to higher rates of depression, lowered physical health and poor worker production. The children from a divorce are more likely to develop health problems, repeat a grade or be suspended or expelled than children from an intact home. Teenage girls are three times more likely to have an out-of-wedlock child as those whose parents stay married.

Yet despite these statistics, over 75% of teenagers say they expect to marry and that having a good marriage and family life is extremely important to them.

## CHOOSING A MARRIAGE PARTNER

It's easy to find reports on the results of a poor choice in a marriage partner, but where can a single person go to get some good advice? Making an informed choice about a significant other involves input from both the head and the heart. Here are a few things to consider in making your choice.

### Head Knowledge

- Poor partners, whether male or female, don't seem to understand how they are perceived by others. Red flags might be dramatic mood swings, being contemptuous of others or trying to control them, or needing to be the center of attention.
- It's important to know what your partner's conscience tells them, what he/she considers right and wrong. A conscience also tells us how to relate to other people. The ability to express compassion, empathy and sympathy are important qualities to look for in a partner.
- The ability to communicate is important and should be tested in varied situations. Getting to know a person only by email or over the phone doesn't give you a complete picture. How does communication happen in stressful, uncomfortable or unpleasant situations?
- Arguments in favor of cohabitation say it is a way to find out if you



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are truly compatible. However, statistics reveal that this is not a good indicator of marital longevity. What is true is that compatibility is an important indicator of marital happiness. You do not have to find a life partner exactly like yourself. How you handle differences may be more important than the differences themselves. Some differences are more crucial than others: one partner being a Red Sox fan and the other a Yankees fan may not be as important as when one partner is deeply religious and the other an agnostic.

- Your family of origin, whether good or bad, is going to affect you as well. For example, the story of Jenny from the movie *Forrest Gump* is an excellent example of how the abuse a woman suffered as a child affected her relationships with men all through her life. This is not to say you are destined to follow in the footsteps of your childhood experiences, but rather that you must look at your past experiences and make a conscious effort to not repeat the past.
- You don't marry only a spouse; you marry a family as well. Finding out about a family gives you a good indication of what your significant other will expect in your marriage. Some children are raised in a permissive atmosphere or with one parent having all the authority. How was responsibility assigned? Were the parents attentive or the children ignored? Knowing the relationship of your significant other to their parents is a strong indicator of their relationship to you.

### Heart Knowledge

The five commonly accepted categories or aspects by which we bond are listed below. These areas increase as we form a bond with another person. The intensity of each aspect should increase at relatively the same rate. The better we know each other in each of these areas, the higher the rate of marital happiness.

1. **Physical/sensory self:** *Getting to know each other.* You don't reveal everything about yourself on a first date. We get to know

