

BILL & MINDY MEIER

"A thoughtful and practical guide for couples."

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Should We Get Engaged?

**50 Questions and Stories
to Help You Decide with Confidence**



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*To the hundreds of couples who have given us the privilege of
coming alongside them as they seek to build a loving relationship.*

Read This First

“Should we get engaged?” What an important question to ask! If you are in a serious dating relationship and need help discerning whether you are ready for a marriage that will last a lifetime, then this book is for you.

We commend you for taking the time to read and discuss the questions in this book as you discern God’s will in this important matter. Doing so shows that you take the decision to become engaged seriously. As you seek God’s guidance through prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit, these questions will be a vital tool to help you contemplate the next step toward marriage.

Over the course of our years in ministry, we’ve heard a familiar refrain: “We’ve been dating for over a year now. We love each other and are compatible in so many ways, yet we also have some problems. But every relationship has problems, right? What kind of problem is a deal-breaker, and what is just something to live with? How can we know whether we’re the right ones for each other? This feels like a journey in a foreign country without a roadmap.” Determining whether to get engaged is an increasingly difficult decision for many couples. This may be the case for you. If so, you’re in good company!

The thought of getting engaged can produce a mixture of joy, excitement, and fear. In one sense, fear is appropriate and healthy. After all, the decision to commit yourself to another person for life is monumental. If you are a follower of Jesus, this is the most important decision you will make, second only to

your decision to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. A healthy fear means you're in touch with the enormity of the decision.

However, some of you may feel paralyzing fear at the prospect of getting engaged because of what you experienced growing up at home. You may come from a home in which your parents' marriage ended in divorce. You know firsthand the pain of a broken home. Or maybe your parents stayed legally married but are emotionally divorced. They sleep in separate bedrooms, have little companionship, and their romance seems completely absent.

Perhaps you have close friends who are struggling with marriage problems or have split up, and this has left you wondering whether a lasting and loving marriage is even possible. Maybe your gut reaction to the idea of marriage is not fear but cynicism. After all, the divorce rate in the United States at the time of this writing is 43 percent.¹ The divorce rate is lower among committed Christians, though divorce still affects a significant portion of Christian marriages.² Many people long to have a marriage that is loving, healthy, and lasting. The good news is that your future marriage isn't determined by your family of origin, your friends, or the culture at large. If your family history is marked by divorce, you can learn from the brokenness in your family so that you don't repeat those mistakes. In our work with young couples, we've witnessed firsthand the power of the gospel and the grace of Christ to enable people from dysfunctional families to build loving, healthy, Christ-centered marriages that last a lifetime. And despite cultural pressures and surrounding influences that claim marriage is disposable, we've seen couples intentionally work to create relationship foundations that are enduring.

In this book, we hope to give you guidance in recognizing what a healthy relationship looks like, and we also hope to set the stage for the two of you to have some robust discussions. Choosing to get married is a major decision, and many couples are eager for help in the discernment process. While there are many wonderful Christian books and resources about dating, marriage, and wedding planning, there's a void for couples seeking to navigate the transition from dating to engagement. After working with more than one thousand couples and leading dozens of seminars on this topic, we decided to draw on our years of experience to create a resource that's long been needed.

We've been married for more than fifty-five years, and while marriage has its challenges, we're glad we answered "Yes!" to the question "Should we get engaged?" all those years ago. Throughout our marriage, we've spent many years ministering to people in their twenties and thirties. Bill has pastored two churches on college campuses and more recently served as the pastor of Counseling and Marriage Ministries in a large urban church in Chicago. Mindy worked for thirty-two years with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, ministering to college students. She logged hundreds of hours in coffee shops talking with students about relationships and even wrote a book about sex and dating. Together, we've walked hundreds of engaged couples through marriage-preparation courses and have frequently led one-day seminars designed for seriously dating couples seeking guidance on whether to become engaged.

This book contains the top fifty questions we've compiled from our experiences, plus five additional questions designed for people who've been married before. With each question, we've also included a brief story that illustrates why that question is important. As we share these stories, we hope you will have some

“aha!” moments. The topics discussed in this book aren’t abstract or theoretical musings; rather, they’re inspired by interactions with real couples who attended our seminars or met with us individually for counseling, although names and details have been changed to protect identities.

We’ve also added a few questions as a result of our work counseling married couples. One of the benefits of a ministry spanning decades is the front-row seat we’ve had to see how issues develop over time. When a husband and wife come to us with complicated marriage problems—sometimes with no-win situations—we occasionally find ourselves saying, “Wow, they should’ve talked about this before they got married!” As these issues have cropped up over the years, we’ve adapted and expanded our content to address these needs. What you hold contains the best of that content.

We encourage you to go through these questions together. Some couples like to look over each question separately before discussing it, giving themselves time for reflection and a thoughtful response. Other couples feel more comfortable reading each question and brief story aloud together, answering spontaneously. Having these conversations in person is ideal, but if you currently live in different locations, you can go through this book over the phone or by video call. Again, the goal is to provide a setting for meaningful conversations on important topics that will help in your discernment process.

Answering yes or no to a certain question doesn’t mean you’ll have an immediate answer about whether you should get engaged. All these questions are important to consider as you make your decision, but there isn’t a specific percentage of positive answers that will give you a clear sign. You might answer no to some and still want to get married; it’s about setting the right

expectations as you make your decision. Think of these as data points that can help you in your discernment.

We recommend starting by quickly scanning all fifty questions to get an overview of the book. You may find that a particular section of questions seems especially relevant to your relationship and decide to start there. If you find yourself avoiding a section, take note of it and make sure you eventually get to it. Twelve weeks is probably a good amount of time to work through the fifty questions. Plan a time to meet and discuss four or five questions each week.

Many couples ask when in their relationship they should begin working through these questions. If you've been dating for a year or more, now is the time to begin having more focused conversations. No matter how long you've been dating, if you've spoken—even casually—about the idea of marriage, this is the right time for these discussions. We hope this book will serve as a guide for you as a couple as you enter uncharted territory and navigate the possibility of engagement.

Compatibility is the ability of a couple to live and work together in harmony. This section moves beyond the initial feelings of love and chemistry toward determining whether partners can truly coexist and support each other over the long term. Compatibility is about the “big-picture” fit—values, worldview, and whether you bring out the best in each other. Examining this issue means assessing whether partners align in core values such as faith, politics, and personality differences, as well as whether you’re hoping your partner will fundamentally change. These topics matter because marriage amplifies whatever already exists. Persistent misalignment can turn everyday decisions into recurring conflicts. Discussing compatibility early helps reveal whether your relationship is rooted in acceptance and growth rather than in wishful thinking or pressure to conform.



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Compatibility Questions

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QUESTION 1

Do you share the same faith and level of commitment?

Assess whether you're spiritually compatible and whether your faith will be a strength in your relationship.

Elena was raised by a Jewish father and a Catholic mother. While there were a few clashes in her home—like when her mom wanted to have a Christmas tree and her dad voiced strong opposition—religious freedom was generally valued in her family.

The open-minded atmosphere in Elena's home made it easy for her to carve her own path regarding religion. In college, she checked out a Buddhist meditation center and a Scientology group. A turning point came when she was invited to a Bible study and ended up becoming a Christian. At one Bible-study session, her leader shared a verse from 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers" (ESV). The leader explained that a Christian is called to marry another Christian. This seemed narrow-minded to her.

This "narrow-mindedness" made more sense when Elena spent a weekend with her sister, who was married and had three kids under the age of five. Elena was intrigued by the way her sister and brother-in-law pulled off going to church on Sunday morning. Her sister made pancakes while her brother-in-law tried to wrangle their three-year-old into shoes. They somehow

made it to church only slightly late—diaper bag in hand. Elena was impressed by their teamwork.

Elena realized that faith was a bonding factor in her sister's marriage. She left her sister's house that weekend determined to marry a Christian and build a Christ-centered marriage. The Bible verse about not being unequally yoked suddenly made more sense.

Soon after that weekend, Elena began dating Drew, who, like Elena, was a new Christian. Elena noticed his eagerness to study the Bible. She felt confident that both her life and Drew's were moving toward Christ.

In the following months, Elena and Drew created a beautiful relationship centered on Christ. They began to weave their lives together, and each knew they'd found a partner with whom they could follow God and build a life rooted in Christian faith. Elena felt that Drew was the soulmate she'd longed for.

Something to Think About

Elena's visit with her sister's family gave her a compelling vision of life with someone committed to the same faith, which she found fulfilled in her relationship with Drew. When a couple seeks to live out the teachings of the Bible and draw from the spiritual resources of Christ, there's unity and direction in their life together. Your oneness in marriage will grow out of your joint quest to follow God. Are you both growing closer to God?

QUESTION 2

Can you enjoy worshipping together at the same church?

Gain perspective on what's most important when choosing a church together.

Carlos grew up in a Catholic home, where Sunday Mass was a given. He even attended a Catholic grade school. When he started dating Maria, who attended a nondenominational church, he was introduced to an entirely new expression of Christianity. During Carlos's first visit to Maria's church, he was shocked to find an exuberant praise band playing contemporary music onstage, complete with strobe lights and large screens in place of a cross. Maria was equally shocked when she visited Carlos's Catholic church; she felt as though she'd stepped into the 1800s.

Although Carlos and Maria shared the same faith and a deep devotion to it, their spiritual worlds seemed miles apart. They both loved the idea of a shared spiritual life, but how could that happen with such different worship preferences?

They took turns attending worship at each church and participating in other events, such as a Bible study at Maria's church and a service day sponsored by Carlos's church. This experience of entering the other's spiritual world helped them develop a deeper appreciation for one another's faith tradition.

Carlos loved the joyful music and Bible study in Maria's congregation. Maria began to appreciate the mystery, reverence,

and historical depth found at Carlos's church. Participating in meaningful spiritual practices together and sharing what they loved about their own churches gave them a deeper mutual understanding of what spiritual life meant to each of them.

One day, someone suggested they try attending an Anglican church together. Carlos could enjoy the liturgy, the connection with the ancient church, and the altar with communion elements. Maria could enjoy biblical preaching and traditional worship blended with some contemporary music. The Anglican church seemed to be a midpoint between Carlos's Catholic faith and Maria's nondenominational congregation.

Carlos and Maria found a local Anglican church and began visiting. Attending a new church together felt refreshing. Rather than "my church" versus "your church," they thought of it as "our church."

Something to Think About

Carlos and Maria found a church they could happily attend together by visiting each other's congregations and sharing their spiritual traditions. A rich spiritual oneness occurs when a married couple worships together in the same church family, so it's worth seeking a church where you can both flourish. You might plan to continue being part of two different congregations after marriage, but with the busyness of life, that's unrealistic. This will become even more true if you have children. What would need to happen for you to enjoy worshipping together?

QUESTION 3

Do you share the same political beliefs?

Discover whether you're on the same page regarding your political beliefs—and what you might do if you're not.

Brian and Sara met at a soccer event organized by the singles' ministry at their church. They ended up on the same team and hit it off immediately. Brian followed up by asking Sara out. Their relationship progressed, and everything seemed wonderful until Sara invited Brian to meet her family and visit her hometown.

Sara's parents greeted Brian warmly. As they talked, Brian noticed that the TV was on and tuned to a conservative commentator sharing his views with great passion. At the dinner table, Sara's parents brought up the subject of politics. Brian was surprised by how strongly Sara's parents expressed their conservative views. He became increasingly uncomfortable with the conversation.

Sara noticed that Brian was quieter than usual and more cautious in his conversation. This wasn't how she'd hoped the first meeting between her parents and Brian would go. After dinner, Brian and Sara took a walk alone to talk about what had happened. Brian shared that he'd been raised in a politically liberal home and had found some of her parents' statements biased

QUESTION 8

Do you feel good about the power dynamic in your relationship?

Appraise the balance of influence and control between you and your partner.

Taylor and Zoe began dating after meeting at the wedding of mutual friends. Both were well into their thirties and took their relationship and its potential for marriage seriously.

When they met after work one Friday, both were eager to kick off the weekend. Taylor wanted to go to a sports bar for a burger, but Zoe thought sushi would be a great idea. She loved the quiet atmosphere of the sushi restaurant and was eager to talk and hear about Taylor's week. Hmm. Deadlock.

Zoe always seemed to feel strongly about her preferences. Passionate by nature, she could argue her case like a well-trained lawyer—even if it was just about choosing a restaurant. Taylor was conflict-averse and usually gave in to Zoe's ideas. *After all, what's the big deal about where we eat?* he would think. Sushi it was.

After numerous situations in which they had different preferences and Taylor gave in, he found himself growing resentful.

He became quiet and withdrawn. Zoe noticed Taylor pulling back but had no idea why.

Taylor realized he needed to find his voice. His ideas were worthwhile. Even though he didn't want to engage in a tug-of-war, he thought it reasonable that he should get to call the shots sometimes.

Zoe and Taylor had a productive conversation about the power dynamic in their relationship. Taylor explained that he didn't want to get into arguments but did want a stronger voice in their decisions. Zoe admitted that being single for so long and living alone had made her fiercely independent and accustomed to getting her own way. She realized she needed to step back occasionally when they made decisions and give Taylor space to shape some of their activities.

Something to Think About

Taylor and Zoe struggled with the balance of power in their relationship but took steps to work on it. The power dynamic in a relationship isn't about headship and submission but about the balance of influence and control. Most people seek a partnership, not a dictatorship. How do you feel about the power dynamic in your relationship? Do you need to speak up more to your partner about your preferences, or do you need to pull back and give your partner space to do so?

QUESTION 9

Can the two of you resolve conflict well?

Reflect on your ability to handle disagreements in a constructive way.

Brad and Melanie had lunch with some friends. There was plenty of laughter, and Brad thought they'd had a great time. However, Melanie didn't agree. During the car ride home, she said, "Brad, I need to share something with you. Do you realize how often you interrupted people during lunch? You also tended to hijack the conversation and change the topic we were discussing."

Brad became defensive and angry. He had a very different perspective. He thought he was being helpful by drawing out people who were shy or reluctant to join the conversation. He also felt he added humor to the gathering.

Brad said to Melanie, "You know, you're just like your father—always telling people what they did wrong and never what they did right."

That set Melanie off! She exclaimed, "Brad, you're so blind! You have a habit of interrupting people, and it upsets them! Can't you see that?"

Things escalated from there—the volume of their voices rose and their retaliatory comments grew more hurtful. Both tried

to get in the last word until they reached Melanie's home. She got out of the car, slammed the door, and quickly went inside.

The next morning, both felt awful about what had happened. They were bewildered by how their exchange the previous day had escalated so quickly. They decided to meet and talk about it. This wasn't the first time it had happened. If they were to get married someday, would it continue?

A counselor helped Brad and Melanie analyze their latest argument. Melanie realized she should lead with affirmation before offering criticism. Brad agreed to be open to Melanie's observations about his behavior in groups and never to compare her to a family member again. Both learned how to take steps toward de-escalating an argument.

Something to Think About

Brad and Melanie saw how a brutally honest conversation could turn hurtful and resolved to do better. Conflict is inevitable, and many couples try to avoid it. However, conflict resolved well promotes deeper understanding and can increase a couple's intimacy. Think about one of your recent arguments. What went well, and what went poorly? Is escalation during disagreements an issue in your relationship? Do you need help learning to resolve conflict peacefully?