

PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

Romans 12:1-2

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Success in most things in life is result of a combination of preparation and execution.
2. This, of course, obviously true. Consider a football team. Their success is determined not merely by how well they execute in the game, but by how well they prepare before the game. In sports, what you do before the game is more important than what you do in the game. Success requires, training, practice, conditioning, strategizing, etc.
3. Consider what it takes to succeed on an exam in school. It's not only about how well you perform during the test, but by how well you prepare before the test. The test may only take thirty minutes, but the preparation usually involves hours of hard work.
4. Or consider a trial lawyer. His success is not determined solely by his performance at the trial, but by how well he prepared before the trial.
5. Success is the result of preparation and execution.
6. The Bible talks about this.
7. **Proverbs 21:5 (NLT)** Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.
 - i. Success is not merely the result of hard work, but good planning. It's not just about effort or execution, but preparation.
8. **Proverbs 6:6-8** Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise. Without leader, administrator, or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest.
 - i. Ants cannot survive cold weather. During the winter they have to go underground, something as deep as four feet to get below the frost line. How do they find food if they are underground? Preparation. They gather their food during the summer and store it underground. Ants are able to survive the winter because of what they do before the winter.
9. Today I want to apply that simple principle to marriage, and I want to talk to those of you who are not married. Your success in marriage is not determined solely by what you do in marriage, but by what you do before marriage. What you do in your single years, and specifically how

you date, can play a huge role in the success of your marriage. If you play your cards right with your singleness and dating life, then you can set yourself up for a successful marriage; but if you waste your singleness and dating life, if you act foolishly, then you can set yourself up for failure and hardship in marriage.

10. So this morning I want to talk to you specifically about how to date in way that sets you up for success in marriage.

11. But I must first warn you. What I'm going to tell you this morning is going to sound weird. It's a different approach to dating. It's not normal. But that's okay, because normal is not working. For you to accept what I'm going to say this morning, you have to adopt the mindset of a non-conformist. You have to be willing to be abnormal. You have to be willing to think and live outside the box. You have to be willing to swim upstream, to go against the current of culture. You have to be willing to be different. You have to be willing to live different from the world as a single person. You have to be willing to date different from the world.

12. But if you're a Christian, then you're already a non-conformist.

13. **Romans 12:2 (ESV)** Do not be conformed to this world.

- i. The "world" represents the people and the culture that are not following Christ. It represents what is normal and popular, because most people are not following Christ.
- ii. "Do not be conformed" means don't just blindly follow what's normal and popular.
- iii. Why not? What is normal and popular is decided by people who are not following Christ. If you do what's normal and popular, it will likely pull you away from Christ, away from wisdom, and away from God's best for your life.

14. The same is true for your dating life. As a Christian, don't be conformed to this world. Don't just date the normal way, the popular way. Instead ask questions like: How does God want me to spend my single years? How does God want me to date? What's the wise way to date?

15. So this morning I'm going to give you ten dating principles to prepare for marriage – a successful, prevailing marriage.

16. The first five are negative, and the second five are positive.

II. TEN DATING PRINCIPLES TO PREPARE FOR MARRIAGE

1. Don't marry a non-Christian.

- i. This is simply the commitment to be obedient. It is against God's will for a Christian to marry an unbeliever.
- ii. **2 Corinthians 6:14-15** 14 Do not be yoked together with those who do not believe. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? 15 What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?
- iii. Do you know what a yoke is? A yoke is a piece of farming equipment used long ago that rested across the shoulders of two beasts of burden, joining them so they could work together to pull something, like a plow. Let's say that you joined an ox and a donkey, which are different sizes and strengths. The yoke would pull up on the donkey's neck, and down on the ox's neck. As well, since they travel at different speeds, one animal would constantly be dragged along. So it would be cruel and ineffective to yoke two unequal animals. This is where the Old Testament actually has a law against yoking an ox with a donkey (Dt 22:10). The same is true when a believer and an unbeliever are joined together. The differences will eventually tear you apart and lead to an unhappy marriage.
- iv. But simply marrying a "Christian" is not quite getting at the spirit of the law. A lot of people claim to be Christian, but they don't go to church, read their Bibles, or pray. To be more specific, you need to marry someone who is as committed to Christ as you, not just someone who claims to be a Christian.
- v. To put it another way, you need to marry someone who will want to go to the same type of church as you, and who will want to teach your kids the same things about God. You will be more effective at discipling your kids if you are both teaching the same thing rather than sending mixed signals.

2. Don't date a non-Christian.

- i. Does the Bible say not to date an unbeliever? It says not to marry an unbeliever, and dates become mates. Eventually you will marry the person you are dating. If you don't want marry an unbeliever, then don't date an unbeliever.

- ii. A lot of Christians marry unbelievers even though they know they aren't supposed to. Why? Because they allowed themselves to date an unbeliever. Then they fell in love and talked themselves into getting married.
- iii. If you don't want to get burnt, don't play with fire. If you are dating an unbeliever, or an uncommitted Christian, or a Christian with whom you have deep theological differences, you are playing with fire because you may end up getting married to someone who is not compatible with you.
- iv. I've never met a Christian who only dated Christians and who ended up marrying an unbeliever.

3. Don't date until you are ready for marriage.

- i. This is where things get a little abnormal. What's normal is to start dating in the third or fourth grade, and then date in middle school, and then date in high school, and just always have a date. I want to encourage you not to do that, but instead to wait until you are ready to get married.
- ii. This leads to two questions: First, why? Second, how do you know if you are ready to get married? Let's take each in turn.
- iii. First, why wait until you are ready to get married to begin dating? I'll give you two reasons:
 - 1. First, to protect yourself from heartbreak. If you start dating when you are too young, then you are likely going to bounce from one serious relationship to another, and each breakup is going to feel like the end of the world. I had a friend in high school who literally killed himself with a shotgun after his girlfriend broke up with him. Several years ago I had a coworker at FedEx whose girlfriend broke up with him, so he went to her house and beat her to death with a baseball bat and is now serving life in prison. Breakups are hard. Why expose yourself that? If you wait until you are older and ready to get married before you start dating, you won't necessarily avoid all breakups, but they will be fewer and you will be more equipped to handle them.
 - 2. Second, because dating brings with it sexual temptation, especially if you are in love and the two of you plan on

getting married one day. When you give someone your heart, your body wants to follow. That's natural. It's the way God made you. But if you find the love of your life and fall in love too early then you have to endure years of intense sexual frustration. And from what I've seen, the vast majority of teens who start dating too early end up doing things sexually that they regret for the rest of their lives.

iv. Second, how do you know when you are ready for marriage?

There are two easy answers to this question:

1. Legally: In Louisiana you have to be 18 to get married. You can get married as young as 16 or 17, but you need written consent from both parents and a judge, and that's not going to happen. So, let's just go with 18. If you're not yet 18, you're not ready to get married.
2. Financially: Are you ready to step from under your parent's financial umbrella? If you and your spouse couldn't make it without your parents' help, then you're not ready. One time a young man asked my person to try to date one of my daughters and this is the very reason I said no. He was not in a position to financially support a family – not even close. Now, if he was close to graduating with a good degree and would soon be making good money, then the conversation might have gone differently.

4. Don't date until you are spiritually healthy.

- i. Unhealthy people create unhealthy relationships. If you want a healthy dating relationship and a healthy marriage, you need to be spiritually healthy.
- ii. What does it look like to be spiritually healthy? Two spiritual goals to achieve before you begin dating: You happy alone, and you are holy alone.
- iii. First, you are happy alone. In other words, you are perfectly happy and content being alone. You don't need a boyfriend or a girlfriend to be happy. Your joy and your peace come from God. Your self-worth comes from God. If you are not happy as a single person, then you have spiritual problems that a human

relationship cannot fix. You'll be unhappy in the relationship, and worse, you'll assume it's the other person's fault.

- iv. Second, you are holy alone. You have conquered lust and sexual sin as a single person. If you are struggling with sexual sin and you start dating, the temptation will only multiply, and you will likely drag the other person down with you. Also, if you can't be faithful to God with your sexual purity, what makes you think that you will be faithful to your spouse? You won't.
- v. If you are single, now is the time to get extremely serious about your spiritual growth. Focus especially on these two areas: Conquer unhappiness and conquer lust.

5. Don't have sex before marriage.

- i. Save sex for marriage.
- ii. Why? First, this is actually God's will for you. It's a command.
- iii. **1 Thessalonians 4:3** For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality.
 - 1. This verse explains what God wants for you.
 - 2. God wants your sanctification – your growth in holiness. Conformity to the character of God, and obedience to the will of God.
 - 3. Specifically, this means you need to keep away from sexual immorality. Sexual morality is any sexual activity outside of marriage – pre-marital sex, pornography, lust, adultery, etc.
- iv. Second, studies show that pre-marital sex is a bad idea (*Apologetics Study Bible for Students*, p. 1227):
 - 1. Those who save sex for marriage are far more likely to experience lasting sexual satisfaction with their spouses.
 - 2. Sexually transmitted diseases are epidemic levels, and the rates in Louisiana are among the highest in the country.
 - 3. Those who have pre-marital sex are more likely to be depressed.
 - 4. Two-thirds of those who have pre-marital sex with they had waited for marriage.
- v. Studies also show that those who have sex before marriage have a much higher risk of divorce and a much more unstable marriage. (<https://thefederalist.com/2017/01/18/why-your-risk-for-divorce-is-probably-lower-than-you-think/>)

- vi. If you want to save sex for marriage, you need to come up with a purity-strategy before you start dating. One of the best ways to stay pure is to avoid being alone together. You can be alone together without being alone together in a way that exposes you to impossible temptation. For example, it's one thing to be alone together in public, like at a restaurant, and it's another to be alone together in your apartment.

6. Get married before you live together.

- i. Living together before marriage is called cohabitation, and it's a really bad idea for two reasons. First, it will be impossible to remain sexually pure if you are living together. If you move in together, you are making a public announcement that you have abandoned your commitment to God and to holiness.
- ii. Second, studies show the following:
 - 1. Those who live together before marriage are less satisfied sexually after marriage.
 - 2. They are less satisfied with their marriage overall.
 - 3. And they are more likely to divorce than couples who do not. Cohabiting couples have a 50-80% higher likelihood of divorce than non-cohabitating couples.
(<https://thefederalist.com/2017/01/18/why-your-risk-for-divorce-is-probably-lower-than-you-think/>)
- iii. Living together is for married people. If your boyfriend wants to move in together, tell him to marry you.

7. Become the type of person you want to marry.

- i. I want to teach you a fun exercise that will help you to prepare for dating and marriage. There are three parts to this exercise.
- ii. First, grab a piece of paper and make a list of what you want in a mate. Be as specific as possible.
- iii. Second, go back and label each item as either "essential" or "flexible." "Essential" means non-negotiable, and "flexible" means it's important but you're willing to budge. For example, an essential item would be that he is a committed Christ-follower. That's non-negotiable. A "flexible" item could be that he is tall, or that he loves chick-flicks.
- iv. This exercise helps you to make a good decision when you are choosing to date or to marry someone.

- v. The third part of the exercise is to become the type of person you want to marry. Especially when it comes to character issues. For example, if you are looking for someone who is fully-devoted to Christ, and is active in church, and is respectful to his parents, and doesn't have any addictions, then you strive to be that person.
- vi. Why? Because you attract who you are. If you aren't fully-devoted to Christ, then someone who is fully-devoted to Christ is not going to be attracted to you. If you aren't sexually pure, then someone who is committed to purity is not going to be attracted to you. If you have a potty-mouth, then someone who is mature in that area is not going to be attracted to you.
- vii. I heard **someone** say, "Stop looking for the person of your dreams and start becoming someone another person is dreaming about."

8. Only date people who are marriage material.

- i. Let me give you a very common scenario. Guy asks girl out. Girl knows he's not marriage material. He's got a bunch of issues and quirks, and he doesn't check off her "essential" boxes. But, he's cute, and he's fun, and he's got a really cool truck, and being in a relationship is more fun than being single, so girl dates guy. Then two possible things happen:
 - 1. Possibility One: Girl falls in love with guy, lowers her standards, and ends up marrying a guy who is not God's best.
 - 2. Possibility Two: Girl and guy fall in love, but she is strong and wise enough to not marry him, so she eventually breaks up with him, and it's a terrible and messy breakup.
- ii. Both possibilities are terrible.
- iii. A better approach is to only date potential mates. Only date someone if they check off your "essential" boxes. And then as soon as you discover that you don't want to spend forever with them, break it off immediately. Don't play with their heart. Don't waste your time or theirs. The sooner you break things off, the easier the breakup will be, and the sooner you can both move on to finding your future spouse.

9. Get to know the person before you begin dating.

- i. Let me explain a few things:

1. The purpose of dating is to discover if you should get married.
 2. The purpose of friendship is to discover if you should date.
- ii. A lot of people get these things mixed up. They date simply to have fun, even if the person is not marriage material. And they often skip the friendship phase and start dating a person before they get to know them.
 - iii. What's the problem with that? There's an old expression that says, "Don't put the cart before the horse." It means do things in the proper order or you'll end up with an inefficient outcome. That's what happens when you date someone before you get to know them.
 - iv. If you start dating and find out that they are not marriage material, then you have to go through a difficult breakup. You have to break their heart.
 - v. But if you will take the time to get to know someone first, then you can often discover that they are not marriage material before you start dating and avoid wasting time and a difficult breakup.
 - vi. The fact that she's cute is not a sufficient reason to start dating. You need to know more about her than that. Does she check off all your essential boxes? Does she check off a lot of your flexible boxes? You can get almost all of your questions answered about a person before you even start dating.
 - vii. Lydia and I did this. People are amazed that we only dated for five weeks and then got engaged for six months. How did we move so fast? We didn't. We spent about two years getting to know each other before we started dating. By the time we started dating there wasn't much more that we needed to know. So we dated a few weeks and I popped the question.

10. Obey your parents with your dating life.

- i. I'm ending with this one because it might be the most important, and it's definitely the most controversial.
- ii. **Ephesians 6:1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right.
- iii. Who does this verse apply to? Just little children? No. If you are living under your parent's roof or are financially dependent on

them, then you are obligated to obey them. God has placed them in authority over you.

- iv. What does it look like to obey your parents with your dating life? Get your parents' permission before you start dating someone.
- v. Why? Well, why does God want you to obey your parents? For your protection and prosperity. For your success. God knows that your parents love you dearly, and that they are wiser than you. Therefore, you will have a better chance at success if you submit to them.
- vi. The same goes with your life. God has placed your parents over you to help you safely navigate the treacherous waters of dating and choosing a mate.
- vii. What does this look like practically? Well, your parents may not require you to do this, which means you will have to voluntarily submit yourself to them. This is what I had to do. My parents and Lydia's parents didn't require us to get their permission to date, so we voluntarily submitted to them. I decided before I started dating that I was going to submit to my parents and to Lydia's parents. So, before I asked Lydia to begin dating I asked my parents' permission. Then, I drove all the way to DeRidder to meet Lydia's parents and to ask their permission. Only then did we start dating.
- viii. I know this sounds unreasonable, but that's only because it's so abnormal. But it's perfectly reasonable. Let me tell you what is unreasonable. God has given you two (or one, in some instances) parents who adore you and who would kill for you and who only want your happiness. These two people happen to be wiser than you – much wiser. Imagine if your parents tell you that you're not ready to start dating, or that that guy or girl is not right for you, and yet you ignore them and move forward anyway. That's unreasonable. That's extreme. That's reckless.
- ix. You might be thinking, "I'm an adult. It feels funny asking my parents for their permission." First, if you're still financially dependent on them, then you're not as big as you think you are. Second, **Proverbs 15:22** says, "Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisors they succeed." The choice of who to date and who to marry are some of the most consequential choices

you will make in life. Regardless of how old you are, why would you want to make those decisions independently? And why would you ignore the counsel of people who love you and who are wiser than you?

- x. Lydia and I got to know each other through the Baptist Collegiate Ministry and through church. We spent about two years getting to know each other. At some point I started to like her, so I started intentionally spending more time with her and getting to know her. I started asking her pointed questions. What's your favorite food? How many children do you want? What's your favorite color? Have you thought about being a home maker? What do you like to do for fun? Have you considered homeschooling? Have you thought about being a pastor's wife? Tell me about your parents. At the end of my junior year in college I asked my parents and hers to begin dating. We dated for five weeks, got engaged for six months, got married, and that was almost twenty-five years ago.
- xi. These principles worked for us, and so we use them with our children. We don't let them date when they're young. And when they're ready to date, they have to get our permission.

III. CONCLUSION

1. Steph Curry is my favorite basketball player. He is the greatest three-point shooter of all time. But his success is not just determined by what he does on the court, it is mostly determined by what he does before he steps on the court. His preparation includes making 500 game-speed practice shots every single day, which equates to 3,500 shots per week.
2. Success is not just about execution, it's about preparation.
3. God loves you very much, and He wants you to have a happy, prevailing marriage. That's what your parents want. That's what our church wants for you. But a successful marriage is not just determined by what you do in marriage, it's also determined by what you do before marriage. Don't waste your single years and dating years by making bad decisions and just following the crowd. Use these years, your singleness, and your dating to prepare for a successful marriage.