

Pathway

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

Introduction — *Preparing for Marriage*

One of the biggest decisions you will make in your life concerns marriage. The challenges you encounter in a marriage range from the practical to the sublime. You have to learn to love unconditionally as well as balance a checkbook. It's a good life, but you and your partner have to work at it. And the Lord is the focus of it all. What can you do before marriage to help you prepare for such a big change? This *Pathway* study will give you some insights on the marriage relationship, its demands and blessings. Maybe you're not close to it yet, but getting acquainted with the issues of marriage can help you in your present relationships as well.

Marriage
is the only time
when one plus one
still adds up to one.

DAY ONE — Preparing for Marriage

TALK TO GOD:

You're not too young to pray for guidance in choosing a marriage partner. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and patience to make the proper choice.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT:

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an helpmeet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

Only 1,929 Days Away!

Finally Russ was 18, and his parents said he could buy a car. He spent time at the library reading consumer reports and better business literature. He spent evenings checking every car lot in town. He was determined to get the best for his money.

Karli needed a new outfit for the concert. It took her hours to sort through every clothing store in the mall. She wanted to be sure she chose the perfect dress.

Jason had been reading college catalogs for months. He even visited four or five campuses before making his choice of which college to attend.

Jake and Cathy met each other at the county fair one Friday evening. The next day, they claimed, "We're in love." Two weeks later they made wedding plans. Five months after that, Jake filed for divorce.

Why was so much time spent choosing a car, clothes, and a college, but no time at all in choosing a lifetime mate?

Wait a minute!!! What have YOU done to prepare for YOUR marriage?

Maybe you never realized you could, or should, prepare for marriage! And, maybe you never realized preparing for marriage is something the Lord wants you to do.

A Look in the Book: Read verses 4-8 of the second chapter of Titus. *That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.*

Here Paul outlines what you need to learn in the process of growing toward adulthood.

List just eight of the areas which need to be studied in this "maturity seminar."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Notice Paul tells the young women and the young men what to study. But he also tells them that their teachers should be those who are older and more experienced in the Christian life.

Maybe you're thinking, *Okay, a course in marriage sounds good, but where do I find such a course?*

In some ways, you're learning about marriage just by living in a family. Your parents' attitude toward marriage affects your thinking. If your parents have a poor relationship, you might be down on marriage. Or, you might react to your parents' marriage by determining that your marriage will be better. If your parents have a terrific marriage, you're learning how to treat your future husband or wife by their example.

You can also learn from your parents' experiences as you ask them questions that are of concern to you. For example, ask them where and how they met. How long did they date? How did Dad propose? How much money did they make when they first started out? What were the big adjustments? How did their parents react to the marriage? Did they study the Bible together? What's their definition of love? Probe your parents' minds and LISTEN to what they are saying. Record some of the information that is most interesting and helpful to you.

Remember, the Lord wants and instructs you to prepare for marriage. Since He is the One who created marriage, He is the one to whom you should look for guidance!



DAY TWO — Preparing for Marriage

Hiding It in My Heart:

After advising both the young men and young women to learn soberness, Paul reviews his instruction in verse 12. Memorize this verse and apply it to your life.

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2:12).

TALK TO GOD:

Do you know how to be serious-minded? Ask the Lord to help you develop this desired quality in every area of your life.

Serious About Soberness!

Arnie Canton watched the baseball sail toward the plate.

“Strike three!” the umpire called.

“You’re crazy!” Arnie shot back. “That ball was four feet from the strike zone.”

“You’re out!” the ump stated firmly.

Arnie tossed his bat and helmet on the ground and stomped off the field. Angrily, he knocked someone’s cap off the bench and sat down. “That umpire’s blind!” he repeated.

No one said a word. They all knew how Arnie acted when he got upset, and they weren’t about to mess with him. They’d leave that up to the coach.

Stern-faced, the coach laid his hand on Arnie’s shoulder and warned: “Knock it off, or you’re out of the game!”

The word “sober” means a lot more than “not drunk.” A sober person is one who is “serious-minded, self-controlled, and capable of sound judgment.”

Arnie did not react soberly to the umpire’s call.

A Look in the Book: In Titus 2, Paul wrote that soberness is part of the maturing process. It is also mentioned several other places in the Bible.

Read the following verses and write what they say about soberness in your own words.

1 Peter 5:8: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*

Romans 12:3: *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

1 Peter 1:13: *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Do you get the idea that the Lord wants you to be sober all the time? He does! In fact, it is such a desired characteristic that the Apostle Paul mentions it more than once in his outline. He specifically writes that being sober is a quality both young women and young men are to learn. (One of those categories includes you!)

Incidentally, “serious-minded” doesn’t mean you can’t ever have fun. It does mean knowing when to quit and how to keep the fun under control.

Soberness should not only be practiced at all times, but in all areas of your life. If you can’t handle mowing the lawn without complaining, you probably won’t be able to handle a full-time job. If your little brother makes you lose your temper, you may have a problem taking care of and training your own children. If you can’t remember to pay the 10 dollars you owe for your band uniform, how will you handle an entire family budget?

What responsibility discourages you the most? Work at doing that particular job promptly and to the very best of your ability. Take your responsibility seriously.

If losing your temper is a problem, practice walking away from a situation until your anger is under control.

Instead of simply following the crowd, consciously take time to think through what is happening around you. Make good judgments in regard to your decisions.



DAY THREE – Preparing for Marriage

TALK TO GOD:

Ask the Lord to help you consciously practice love in your everyday life. Ask Him to especially help you show kindness to that unlovable neighbor or family member.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT: *Wherefore they are no more twain [two], but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:6).*

Learning to Love

“I’ve met the most awesome guy!” Julie jumped and hopped and skipped around her living room. “And I’ve definitely fallen in love.”

Have you ever felt that way?

Stop a minute and think about the word “fall.” It’s not an encouraging word. If you fall out of a tree, you get hurt. If your grades fall, it means you aren’t doing well. If the stock market falls, there’s chaos. Even the fall (autumn) season is a time when flowers and leaves die. Likewise, if you “fall” in love, the outcome may be disastrous.

You might be instantly charmed by Katie’s flirting brown eyes, Jerry’s red BMW, or Tiffany’s extravagant lifestyle. That “instant charm,” however, is not love.

Love is based on two people working together. It is not something you fall into by accident, but rather it develops through a growth process.

A Look in the Book: 1 Corinthians 13 is commonly called “The Love Chapter.” Grab your Bible and read this chapter. As you do, carefully think through what Paul has written.

Notice that Paul doesn’t say anything about personal feelings. Yet, in today’s world, love seems to be synonymous with “feeling good.” Your friend might exclaim, “Oh, John makes me FEEL so wonderful!” or “I FEEL great when I’m with Kathy.”

In your opinion, what problems will result when a marriage is based just on feelings?

The wedding is not some magic moment which is followed by only bright and happy days.

You won’t “feel good” when you have the flu, and your husband just lost his job. You won’t necessarily “feel good” washing dirty dishes a thousand times each year. You won’t “feel good” when you’re on your way to a party, it’s pouring rain, and a tire goes flat.

When a marriage is based on genuine love, rather than just feelings, then your marriage is much more likely to survive the ups and downs of daily living. When a marriage is based on feelings, you may “fall out of love” as quickly as you “fell into it.”

When you marry someone, you make the choice to love that person through good times and bad. Those marriage vows about richer and poorer, in sickness and health, make sense! You must make the decision to care about your husband or wife no matter what the circumstances. Love that remains Christ-centered and consistent through the easy times and the rough times will grow and blossom.

Fill in the missing words in the following verses from 1 Corinthians 13. (Note: “charity” means “love.”)

Charity _____ long, and is _____; charity _____ not; charity _____ not itself, is not _____ up. Doth not _____, seeketh _____; _____ not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the _____; _____ all things, _____ all things, _____ all things, _____ all things. Charity _____

You don’t have to be married to practice being patient, kind, and selfless! In fact, it has often been said that a teen guy’s attitude toward his mother may likely be the same attitude he will show toward his wife! So, girls, watch how your boyfriend talks to his mom! If he’s kind and respectful, he will probably treat his wife with equal respect. If he’s nasty and lies to his mom, his future wife is probably in for the same treatment!



DAY FOUR — Preparing for Marriage

TALK TO GOD:

Are you willing to take responsibility around the house? Talk to the Lord about your feelings. Ask Him to make you willing to do your share of work without complaining.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT:

Do all things without murmurings and disputings (Phil. 2:14).

Practice Being Practical

James and Christie got married as soon as they graduated from high school. They were sure they had found the answer to ALL their problems. Adults warned them that marriage was a lot of hard work, but they laughed away the warnings. They KNEW what they were doing. After all, James had a job at the gas station, and Christie was taking a class in pottery! Christie's parents were even renting them the basement apartment, so they had a reasonable place to live.

What could go wrong? A lot.

Christie wasn't very excited about keeping a house clean, and James wasn't much help. They quickly discovered that James' salary didn't go much further than paying the rent and food costs. Right after that, they discovered there weren't many "want ads" for beginners in pottery making! Christie began spending her days sleeping and watching soap operas. James became discouraged trying to keep up with it all. Within three months, they went to their pastor for counseling. Marriage was not what they dreamed it would be.

How do you look at marriage? Describe the type of marriage relationship you hope to enjoy someday.

A marriage usually begins with celebration. You're the center of attention as people shower you with gifts, best wishes, and congratulations. Everything is new and wonderful and exciting.

Then you're faced with reality. The car that was supposed to last at least another year breaks down the day you return from your honeymoon. The only things you can cook are grilled cheese sandwiches and scrambled eggs, and your husband can't stand either.

The promised job falls through, and the bills are due. In the midst of it all, your new spouse clams up just when you need to talk.

A Look in the Book: In Titus 2, you read that the young women are to learn to be keepers of the home. Proverbs 31 describes a "keeper of the home" in more detail. Read Proverbs 31:10-31.

These verses are talking about the wife, but it's just as important for guys to prepare for the practical aspect of marriage. For instance, you can:

1. Plan and cook a meal for your family.
2. Redecorate your room, projecting your unique interests and personality.
3. Carefully plan a budget and stick to it!
4. Take care of the yard for your parents.
5. Learn how to fix a flat tire, a leaky faucet, or a broken chair leg.

Realize that marriage is hard work. Don't enter it with your head in the clouds. Take responsibility NOW. Be willing to learn how to care for a house NOW! Learn how to take care of your money NOW!

On My Own: List several couples whose marriages you admire. Tell each couple about your personal study on marriage this week and ask, "If you were to teach a class on preparing for marriage, what would be the first lesson?" Record their ideas.

The Lord ordained marriage. He desires you to have the very best family life possible. Listen to His instructions. A marriage built on God's principles is a fulfilling, joyful relationship. Work at being a responsible teen.



DAY FIVE — Preparing for Marriage

TALK TO GOD:

Ask the Lord for wisdom and kindness as you interact with children. As you live for Him, your love and concern for others will grow.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT:

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).

What About Kids?

Here's a survey to determine what kind of parent you will be. Answer honestly.

1. Your six-month-old baby is competing for the world record in the "staying-up-all-night" category. Does this excite you?

2. In his exuberance, your two-year-old knocks over a pyramid of 300 tuna fish cans at the grocery store. Do you feel embarrassed?

3. Your son's kindergarten teacher calls you in for a special conference. Johnny's flunking "sandbox sharing." Are you angry?

4. Your fourth-grader wins the school poetry contest. She receives her award, and her picture is in the town newspaper. Then you discover she copied the poem from an old book. What's your reaction?

5. You get a call from the police. Your teenage daughter missed the turn at the corner of Main and Second and landed in someone's yard. In the process, she ruined five rose bushes, squashed a garbage can, and hit a cat. What is the first thing you say to your daughter?

So, how'd you do? Does parenting sound like fun?

A Look in the Book: In Psalm 127:3-5, the Psalmist writes about children. *Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.*

Notice how the Lord's view of parenting is different from that of the world's.

In many ways, society does not respect the job of parenting. Name three ways society shows this disrespect.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

But how do you feel about small children? Do you ignore them? Or maybe you see them as annoying pests (which they can sometimes be). Maybe you see children only as baby-sitting (and therefore monetary) opportunities. All children are not alike any more than all teens are alike. They are separate and individual people. Get to know some of them! Practice caring about children!

How can you get better acquainted with younger boys and girls? Here are some suggestions.

1. Do you spend time with your little brothers and sisters? Do you care about their likes and dislikes? Are you willing to encourage your brother by going to his soccer game? Do you show your sister you care by attending her piano recital?
2. Is baby-sitting desirable only because it's a paying job? Recognize the individuality of the children for whom you baby-sit. Become their friend.
3. Take advantage of service opportunities at church. Could you be a Sunday School or children's church teacher? Have you ever considered being an Awana leader?
4. Volunteer to serve as a camp counselor for a week or two next summer. You literally are a substitute parent for the time the child is at camp.

Throughout the Bible, the Lord emphasizes the importance of children. It's very likely that you'll someday be a parent. It will be your responsibility to nurture and care for a child. Why not start learning now how to enjoy, care, and train children?

DAY SIX — Preparing for Marriage

Hiding It in My Heart:

The first step toward establishing a good spiritual relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend is to only date Christians. Memorize 2 Corinthians 6:14. Try to keep it in mind at ALL times! *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?*

TALK TO GOD:

Ask the Lord to give you the patience to wait for the person to marry who loves Him as much as you do.

Knowing What You Believe!

Last week a girl called a local church office wanting to get married. Neither she nor her future husband attended church anywhere, but they wanted a church wedding.

“We don’t discuss religion very much,” she explained. “We were brought up in different denominations which have different ideas. We don’t want to argue, so we don’t talk about what we believe.”

This couple has spent hours discussing budgets, their future home, and their future children. They have talked about their favorite television programs, their favorite foods, and their favorite colors. They have shared their fears, their embarrassing moments, and their goals. But they do not discuss their religion.

If you are already dating, do you and your boyfriend or girlfriend feel comfortable talking about the pastor’s sermons? Could you ask your date how he feels about a Bible verse you don’t understand? Is it natural to pray together before eating that hamburger and fries?

Even if you have not begun dating, you need to analyze your motives. Does Julie’s walk with the Lord mean as much to you as her nice figure? Does Steve’s ability to lead youth-group devotions attract you as much as his star position on the football team?

A Look in the Book: There are many places in the Bible where the Lord emphasizes the importance of knowing for sure what you believe. One of those places is Titus 2 where the young men are told to have *uncorruptness* [or integrity] *in doctrine*.

Read the following verses and then explain what they mean.

1 Peter 3:15: *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

2 Timothy 2:1: *Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*

If your Christian faith is weak, the spiritual foundation of your future marriage will also be weak. You need to establish why and what you believe.

Being strong in your own Christian faith is the first step for building a strong marriage. Can you think through and answer some of these questions? If you aren’t sure how you want to answer a question right now, think for awhile. Come back later and write your thoughts.

How do you know for sure that you are a Christian?

What does Christ mean to you personally?

How has the Lord changed your life?

If you’re enthusiastic about your Christian faith, it will become a natural part of your dating conversations. As the two of you discuss the things of the Lord together, your Christian faith will be strengthened. It will also give you insights how your dating partner regards a possible Christian marriage relationship and the standards he or she hopes to achieve in marriage.

