

# THE FIVE C'S OF CHOOSING A COURTSHIP PARTNER

What should you look for in a mate? How do you know they—or you, for that matter—are ready for the most demanding and rewarding relationship you'll ever have? Here are five simple guidelines to help answer these questions.

**Character-** In the bestselling book *Sacred Marriage* Gary Thomas rhetorically asks, “What if God didn't design marriage to be 'easier'? What if God had an end in mind that went beyond our happiness, our comfort, and our desire to be infatuated and happy as if the world were a perfect place? What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” These questions point to the central biblical truth that, contrary to popular opinion, the foremost purpose for marriage is not romance, but character development.

In *Cinderella*, Oscar Hammerstein wrote, “Do you love me because I am beautiful, or am I beautiful because you love me?” Do your interactions with your date bring out the best in your character? Even more importantly, is your relationship a place where you can be honest about the worst in your character? Might your relationship become a workroom where you can be hewn, cut, sanded, and polished into a work of art instead of a battlefield where you must be on the defensive? Would a partnership with this particular person facilitate your spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social growth? If the answers are no, stop here. If they're yes, go on to the next question . . .

**Connection-** An emphasis on character doesn't mean you don't need to worry about chemistry. You must, as a couple, “get” each other and like each other. Two individuals may be great Christians, they may have similar convictions, even compatible life paths, and still not be suited for each other simply because they don't connect.

Do you converse freely with this person, without self-consciousness or fear of reproach? Do you find yourself saying, “Exactly!” as you resonate with one another? Do your communication patterns weave together, making conversation enjoyable, gratifying, and uplifting as opposed to stilted, effortful and contrived? If your answers are no, stop before it's forever too late. If yes, go on to the next question . . .

**Calling-** Now you need to get down to the hard work of sorting out your respective life callings. First of all, you should know something about who you are as an individual before entering a serious relationship. Assuming that's so, your life calling should be, if not crystal clear, at least well-shaped. And so should your date's. Do the life callings match?

Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, “Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking together in the same direction.” Can you concretely define how a life partnership with your date would help you fulfill your personal mission and potential? If the answer is no, start looking elsewhere. If yes, move on to the next question . . .

**Counselors-** In the book *Thunder Dog*, author Michael Hingson reports how his guide dog Roselle helped him find his way out of the fume-filled chamber of stairwell 8 on September 11, 2001. "I trust Roselle with my life, every day," he says of that time; "She trusts me to direct her. And today is no different, except the stakes are higher." When it comes to choosing a life partner, the stakes are very high. It's then we need another set of eyes, our guide-friends and counselors. Ask others: Do they see you and your date forming a healthy, loving, lasting relationship? If no, stop and reassess. If yes, move on to the last question.

**Conscience-** One couple fell deeply in love. They believed their life callings meshed, and that they brought out the best in each other. They even found a few supportive friends to endorse their union. The problem was, one of them was already married. When they chose to go forward with their relationship anyway, they learned the bitter lesson that disobedience to moral standards brings a curse that darkens the most sunlit of smiles.

Is your relationship right in the eyes of God? Is it pure, with boundaries, dignified, and harmless? Will it uplift and help rather than hurt others? If no, it's time to take stock and make things right with God. If yes, go forward in the fear of God.