

Conversation #4:

God



There comes a point in every romantic relationship where the question needs to be asked, “Are we going in the same spiritual direction?” In other words, are both of you authentic Christians who are pursuing spiritual growth?

Because marriage is a spiritual relationship, your spiritual compatibility will influence the quality of your relationship more than any other factor. Consider this passage from 2 Corinthians 6:14-15:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

This passage refers to a yoke, a wooden crosspiece that was fastened over the necks of two animals (in biblical times, those animals were typically oxen) and attached to a plow or cart that they pulled as a team. If one ox was stronger than the other, the plow cut through the ground erratically, and sometimes ineffectively, because the two animals were out of sync. The oxen needed to be equally yoked so the farmer could maximize his work.

Do you see the connection? If Jesus is at the center of your life, why would you want to be “yoked” with someone who doesn’t understand this? Why would you want to marry someone who has nothing in common with you spiritually? If you are unequally yoked in your marriage, sooner or later you’ll pull against each other and that will undoubtedly lead to heartbreak.

Second Corinthians 6:14-15 warns Christians about building their lives with someone who has opposing values and goals. Building relationships on Christian values, trust, and love is essential in the Christian life, especially in marriage, the most intimate of all human relationships. God





created marriage, and its greatest fulfillment and enjoyment can only be found when both husband and wife have a growing relationship with Him.

When Christians marry nonbelievers, they usually experience a growing frustration after marriage:

- They are unable to discuss the most precious, intimate part of their life with their spouse.
- They have conflicting goals and expectations.
- They clash over the values they teach their children.
- They have differing circles of friends.
- They have difficulty communicating and resolving conflict.

If one of you is a Christ follower and the other is not, you need to consider how deeply this will affect your marriage. It brings up a very tough question: Should the two of you marry?

COMMITMENT TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The book of 1 John tells us, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). You may both have received Christ, but if one of you is more focused on loving the world rather than loving God, you will no doubt experience many of the same conflicts as a believer and nonbeliever. Your goals and values will differ. Your lives are going in different directions.

If you are both growing in Christ, however, you will experience a special joy and teamwork in your marriage. Running coaches usually encourage their long-distance runners to train in groups rather than as individuals because in a group, runners encourage and push each other to push past their weariness and pain. In fact, a runner may run faster in a group than he would by himself, and even feel less fatigued. In the same way, two people who share the same commitment to God can encourage and help each other to keep their eyes on Christ as they “run with endurance” (see Hebrews 12:1) and push each other toward spiritual growth in Him.

- 1) Indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement, and why: “Jesus Christ is at the center of my life.”
- 2) Indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement as you think about your fiancé, and why: “Our relationship has a solid foundation with Christ at the center.”





To further evaluate this area of your spiritual compatibility, ask yourself questions such as:

- Do both of us share the same desire to know and please God?
- Do I have any sense that one of us is putting on a façade of spiritual commitment?
- Do our actions back up our words?
- Do we both consistently display a desire to obey God in all things?
- What priority does each of us place on ministering to other people?
- Are we both willing to follow God's direction?

3) How would you rate your spiritual compatibility at this time?

4) What changes would need to occur in you to increase your spiritual compatibility?

5) What changes do you think would need to occur in your fiancé to increase your spiritual compatibility?





MIRRORING GOD'S IMAGE

To understand God's design for marriage, you first need to understand that God created marriage itself to mirror Himself.

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

(GENESIS 1:26–27)

Mirroring God's image is a foundational to understanding God's design. It means that God chose to reveal to us a part of His character and being *through* our relationships. For example, when we forgive each other, we reflect Him who forgave us in Christ (see Ephesians 4:32).

Why is this important? Because God created us to know Him and live within the context of His plan for our lives. When a man and woman come together in a marriage, with God at the center of their relationship, they will reflect His image. The world can see in that relationship a representation of who God is and how He loves.

Mysteriously, God chose to use a husband and wife as a way to represent (or mirror) Himself to humankind. It's through this marriage relationship that a couple can make it possible to demonstrate a portion of God's love, His forgiveness, and His long-suffering commitment to people.

- 6) List some ways that your upcoming marriage can mirror God's image (e.g. love, commitment, forgiveness, unity, etc.).





GROWING TOGETHER

A lot of Christians like to ask the question, “What is God’s will for my life?” It’s rather common to hear someone ask this question or something similar to it, but an even better question to ponder is, “How does my life fit into God’s will and what He’s already doing in the world?”

The second question shifts the focus to the appropriate place—namely, onto God instead of ourselves. It assumes that God is moving and working in the world, and that He is of utmost importance. He is in charge and whatever He calls us to do, we do, knowing that He will care for us along the way.

Of course, it’s impossible to say how God will actually care for us along the way since everyone’s life is different, but in general, it’s easy to see with even a casual approach to reading the Bible that God is very much *up in our business* throughout life. He’s present, pervasive, and personal. He’s working and active in this world, and a good question for you and your fiancé to ask is, “How is our marriage fitting into God’s will?”

It’s critical that you as a couple pursue spiritual growth together alongside personal, individual growth. Personal growth with the Lord often looks like private time alone with God, reading the Scriptures, prayer, worship, etc. Spiritual growth as a couple, however, is something that can be a bit more challenging because there are two people involved with two sets of ideas, preferences, struggles, and ways of processing growth.

You’ll find though that growing together spiritually as a married couple is one of the most refreshing and rewarding experiences you can have. Deepening your relationship with the Lord alongside your best friend for years upon years is one of the most precious gifts of divine grace that God gives.

Collective growth as a married couple can involve several elements: studying a book of the Bible together, reading a Christian book together and discussing it, corporate prayer, sharing your faith together, listening or watching sermons together and sharing your notes/highlights, etc. There are so many ways a married couple can discover new heights of spiritual development alongside each other—they simply need to collectively commit to it, stay disciplined in the process, and ask the Spirit of God to create the growth in their lives together.

Setting up a pattern of regular time together dedicated to your collective spiritual growth will foster a good habit and healthy norm in your marriage that will produce fruit for decades to come.





- 7) Brainstorm a list of ways you and your future spouse can grow together spiritually after you get married. Think of both general and specific ways.

- 8) Keeping in mind what you know now about each other and what your plans are once you get married, list some of the potential roadblocks to your collective spiritual growth.

GOD HIMSELF MAKES IT POSSIBLE

When it comes to the common and difficult problem of consistent spiritual growth and development, we simply lack the power to see victory on a continual basis. Willing our way into spiritual maturity doesn't get the job done. When we try to go toe-to-toe with the behemoth that is the sinful nature, our own strength will peter out before the fight's over. But *with God* all things are possible (see Genesis 18:14, Luke 1:37, Matthew 19:26).

As Christians, we trust God to work in us, and bring life to the dead and weak areas of our lives. And even though buckling down and trying harder isn't the answer, we do have a role in our spiritual growth. We cooperate with Him through obedience and trust. Understanding and living this out will change your life and deeply influence every aspect of your future marriage.





9) Where are some areas in your Christian life that you'd really like to see strengthened?

10) By allowing God the Holy Spirit to make spiritual growth possible in your future marriage, think about and discuss with your fiancé what your relationship will look like as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control saturate you as a husband/wife.

Now, write out a prayer asking God to do the good work of transforming you more into the image of His Son, and consequently shaping your marriage into the best it can be by the life-changing power of His Spirit.

