

12
Questions
to Ask
Before You Marry

Clayton and Charie King



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

King, Clayton, 1972-

12 questions to ask before you marry / Clayton and Charie King.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-3777-1 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-4195-2 (eBook)

1. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. King, Charie, 1974- II. Title.

BV835.K545 2011

241'.6765—dc22

2011007471

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Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 / VP-SK/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Chapter 1

Are You Willing to Grow Up?

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth...
Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things
grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

EPHESIANS 4:14-15



Here is the best advice on marriage and relationships I have ever heard in my life. Partially because it is simple, blunt, and easy to remember. Mostly because it is absolutely true. Are you ready?

Grow up.

Rick Warren, the well-known author and pastor from California, said that after 30 years of marriage and relationship counseling sessions, he could sum up nearly all of what needs to be said to both men and women in those two words—*grow up*. I agree.

That is why Charie and I chose to put this chapter near the beginning. Right off the bat, straight out of the gate, you need to know that just about every other problem or challenge or struggle that arises in your marriage will only be a secondary issue. The primary issue will be your level of maturity. Because that maturity, above all other things, will determine whether or not you work together as a team to solve problems or whether you act like children, puffing and pouting and pontificating under pressure, and eventually quitting the relationship.

The bottom line is simple. Marriage is for grown-ups. It is too difficult and requires too much effort, patience, and self-control for people

with the maturity level of children. And keep this point in mind: Maturity is not about your age. It is about your acceptance of responsibility.

Acting Like a Kid

There is something epic, right, and good about watching a mom or a dad lay down the law with their five-year-old in the grocery store. I've always been impressed with parents who are firm with their kids and aren't swayed by their emotional outbursts and toddler tirades. So many kids rule and reign over their parents, ignoring their warnings, flopping about on the floor like a smallmouth bass out of water. So when a mom or dad actually follows through on a threat by stopping their child from behaving badly, popping them on the bottom, or grabbing them by the hand and taking them outside to the car or the parking lot, I just want to shout with joy. It's beautiful to watch a mom or a dad accept the responsibility of being the parent. They're acting like grown-ups. And one day their children will also act like grown-ups because their responsible parents taught them how to be responsible for their actions from their earliest years.

I saw something along these lines unfold one day in the post office that left an indelible mark on me. It involved a mom and her son. And it's the perfect illustration of what happens when adults refuse to grow up, to mature, before they tie the knot.

I was behind them in line observing the interaction between mommy and son. This kid was...I really don't know how to describe him. Awful? Disrespectful? Obnoxious? None of these do him justice. Put plainly, the kid was out of control. Yelling, jumping, pulling envelopes off the shelves. His mom was pitiful. Threatening him. Screaming at him. Rolling her eyes and snapping her fingers. It was a just a big display of futility. The kid knew his mom wasn't going to follow through with any of her threats. They had played this game before. He knew he could act however he wanted and get away with it.

Everyone there was embarrassed. The clerks looked frazzled. But all of the grown-ups in the room knew it was not the five-year-old who was to blame. It was his mother. Even though she had accumulated

enough years to be considered a grown-up, she was, in a sense, as immature as her son.

Then everything changed. The boy was running in and out of the large, heavy swinging doors that led to the parking lot. These were thick glass doors with steel frames. Every time he would run through them, he would push them open really hard, and try to jump back through them before they would close. And they would bang closed.

As the tiny tyrant was playing his game while his mother screamed more threats at him, an older woman with both hands full of boxes opened the other swinging door. And right as that door began to swing backward, the kid was jumping through, playing his game. He never saw the door the woman had let go.

The timing was perfect. The physics were just right. The door caught the boy at just the right angle and at full velocity as he came full-speed toward it. The kid was maybe 40 pounds, the door was at least 150 pounds, and he went airborne.

It sounded and looked way worse than it actually was. He was scared out of his mind. There was no blood, no real injury. But it was as if the cosmic forces of justice and discipline decided to step in and deal with a young boy whose mother was not willing to. All of us in the post office froze until we realized he was okay. And as he shrieked and cried and screamed bloody murder, we tried our best not roll on the floor laughing.

For some of you, sadly, this will be your marriage story. Playing games, having fun, acting like a child, when—BOOM! Out of nowhere you will get sideswiped and knocked on your back, and wonder what in the world happened.

Acting Your Age

People who are willing to grow up are developing the wisdom and foresight to look ahead and predict the outcomes of the decisions they make. If they don't like what they see in their future, they make changes. They redirect their spending. They pick new friends. They begin reading books and turn off the TV and computer. They put away their cell phones when they need time to think. They watch what they eat. They adjust how they handle relationships.

Fools are not willing to grow up. They like being able to have fun and do what they want. They can run around and scream and yell and pull stuff off the shelves, so to speak. And they can play silly little games with other people's hearts and emotions. They can sleep around, fool around, and break up with people at will. But just like the rowdy kid in the post office, if they refuse to grow up, hoping a great marriage will automatically come along someday, they will get blindsided by a force bigger and stronger than them. The kid never saw the door coming. Millions of people each year never see the divorce, the affair, or the meltdown coming.

Mature adults see trouble in the future as a result of their current decisions, and they change. Immature kids don't.

This is why God gave us parents. Whether yours were good or bad, the job of parents is to guide and protect their children, preparing them to be mature adults in the real world one day. All good parents have, at one time or another, told their child to "act your age." The assumption is that if a child is eight years old, they aren't allowed to roll around on the floor in the middle of Wal-Mart like a two-year-old who doesn't get the toy they want. There is an expectation that is not only natural but also normal. There needs to be level of maturity that is equivalent to the number of years a person has been alive.

So before you tie the knot, it is paramount that you deal with this issue as quickly as possible. Again, every single issue and problem and misunderstanding you face in your future as a married man or woman will be framed by your maturity level. If you have never really grown up emotionally, you will find yourself in the midst of a disagreement over something as insignificant as whose family you will visit over the Christmas holidays, and before you know it, it has blown up, and so have you, into an all-out fight. And you (or maybe both of you) are dredging up things from years past, making accusations that are irrelevant to the decision about Christmas plans, and raising your voices to the decibel level of a Metallica concert...all because you did not get your way in the discussion.

Be honest. Do you ever do this? Internally or externally? If you've never really asked yourself this question, you should do it right now.

And answer truthfully. There is nobody to judge you or make you feel bad. I'm not here watching you—I wrote these words long before you picked up our book. So what do you have to gain by being dishonest about your maturity level? Just own up to it and tell the truth. It's the first step in preparing yourself to be the kind of woman or man who is ready for the lifelong commitment of marriage.

Read the Signs

On the next couple of pages, you'll find a basic list of words, attitudes, behaviors, actions, and reactions to serve as a grid...a grid by which you can judge your own level of emotional, spiritual, social, and financial maturity. Look at them as you would look at road signs.

The department of motor vehicles in your state will not issue you a driver's license until you can prove to them (on a test, administered in a crowded building by less-than-happy DMV employees, usually) that you not only know how to read all road signs, but that you can also interpret what they mean. The DMV wants to know that you are competent enough to obey posted signs—signs that indicate laws that were established for our protection.

God has established laws in the universe He created. His laws are for our benefit and blessing, to protect us and keep us from harming others and ourselves. He has given us signs that He cares for us by establishing laws governing our behavior. He's given us the Bible, the church, pastors and teachers and leaders, our parents, coaches, and the experience of older people to warn us. If we ignore the signs, we pay the price, just as ignoring road signs could cost us a speeding ticket or a head-on collision. It could cost us a fine, our privilege of driving, or even our life. So it's much better to read the signs and obey them. Or as one observer of life has pointedly reminded all of us, "You better check yourself before you wreck yourself."

As you consider your maturity level, do not be discouraged if you realize that you do indeed need to grow up in one or more areas. Rather, be motivated to change, make course corrections, get help, seek a mentor, read some books, see a counselor, change jobs. If you merely feel bad over being immature, you've missed the point. Think

of these words as shining a light into your life that will illuminate you to yourself.

You may need to grow up if...

You are over 30 years old and still live with your parents. With the exceptions of caring for aging or sick family members or the sudden loss of a job, by your thirties, unless there is a physical or mental limitation, you should be self-sufficient enough to leave the nest. Who really wants to marry someone who still lives in their parents' basement at age 34?

You have never had a job of any kind for more than six months. If you have never worked, you need a job. Any job will do. Just start somewhere. You need the experience. If you've had numerous jobs over the years and none of them have lasted very long, it may be a sign that you are lazy or easily bored, or have a problem being told what to do by a boss.

You are unable to pay your basic bills each month. Without assistance from family members or friends, you simply could not make it financially. This includes car insurance, rent, groceries, power bill, and basic medical expenses. If you can't pay your basic bills, you will cause a train wreck by getting married to someone.

As a general rule, you lack self-control in your life. Whether it's your spending habits, how much you eat, the amount of time you spend watching TV, or your constant obsession with being online (checking e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube), these are signs of immaturity, and are a crucial red flag that points to an inability to control your desires.

Your relationships look more like a roller coaster than a marathon. You are unable to develop long-term relationships with the opposite sex. You've never learned how to push through problems, boredom, or conflict, and your default mechanism is to break it off and start a new one. Your past is filled with failure in the area of commitment.

You always play the victim. You're always secretly trying to uncover a conspiracy by your peers to exclude you from social outings, parties, get-togethers, or group dates. It's immature to think that the cosmic forces of nature and love have combined their powers to hurt *you*. None of us are that important in the grand scheme of things.

You tend to speak negatively of other people. Whether in one-on-one conversations or in large groups, your habit is to bash or attack someone who is not present to defend themselves. Immature people say things about people behind their back (or online) that they would never dream of saying to their face. This can ruin a marriage in a hurry, because it reveals deep insecurities.

You are plagued by jealousy. Little children get upset on the playground when they see their best friend playing with or talking to another child. Grown-ups get past this stage...at least they should. Are you consistently jealous of other people's possessions, salaries, houses, cars, friends, physical appearance, or family? Can you celebrate the blessings of God in others' lives? Or does God's goodness to others stir up envy inside your heart toward them?

You have trouble finishing. My two sons are notorious for starting little projects around the house, getting bored, and then abandoning them for us to clean up. They don't know how to finish things yet because they're not even ten years old. If you are known for beginning things all gung-ho with great passion, but you consistently fizzle out and never see it through, this is a relationship killer. Marriage is not something you can start, then walk away from, without serious emotional damage. Grown-ups finish what they start.

You are crippled by debt. If you are single and want to get married, the most practical area of your life to examine is your finances. This is the issue most couples fight about most often. If you owe tens of thousands of dollars on credit cards, student loans, your car, and so on, then your problem is not your debt. It's immaturity. You haven't yet learned how to live within your means.

You can't say *no*. Marriage by nature requires you to say “no” to thousands of other opportunities (and possible mates) so that you can say “yes” to one person for a lifetime. If you are the guy or the girl who is always taking care of others, bailing your friends out, staying up 'til 2 a.m. on the phone trying to talk them out of another crisis, then you will have a rude awakening once your mate expects you to give them your undivided attention and affection.

You fall in love too fast. How many times have you told someone that you were “in love” with them since you turned 18? This may be an indication that you need to mature emotionally. Falling in love after every first date shows you haven't really moved very far toward emotional maturity. It also guarantees you will get hurt as often as you fall in love, leaving your heart wounded for years to come.

Your relationships are too physical. If you have a track record of messing around and messing up with just about everyone you've ever liked or dated, this is bad news. When you start out basing a relationship on making out, kissing, or fooling around physically, you teach yourself to ignore the other person, their feelings, and the self-control that is essential in a godly marriage. Adults draw the line and stand back. Children run ahead without caution and suffer for it.

You have a problem with authority. Pay attention to this one, because marriage is about submitting completely, heart and soul, to someone else. Children hate being told what to do, regardless of their inability to be responsible for themselves. Are you like that? Do you tend to rebel against all forms of authority in your life? Do you balk at being told what to do by the government, the IRS, even a traffic policeman? Grown-ups understand that submission to authority is in their best interest, and they are willing to submit to God first and then to one another. Immature kids rebel.

DO I NEED TO GROW UP?

I vividly remember the moment in my life when I started to ask that question.

I'd been dating a girl off and on for about four years. We were both in college, in our early twenties, and hopelessly "in love" with each other. There were only a few minor problems.

1. Neither one of us could ever feel any sense of peace from God that we should get married.
2. We came from totally different backgrounds.
3. Our families were as different as night and day.
4. Her parents begged her to break up with me (a real bummer for a dating relationship).
5. We had fairly consistent arguments about meaningless things where one or both of us would end up in tears. (As I said, a few *minor* problems.)

It was during one of our arguments about something totally insignificant that I had a sort of "out-of-body" experience. It was as if I was looking at myself from above, and what I saw scared me because it was really happening.

I was sitting on the floor, frustrated and angry and confused. I was crying like a baby. She was lying on the floor, balled up in the fetal position, weeping and wailing and telling me how I never listened. It occurred to me that this scene looked like an episode of *The Jerry Springer Show*. We were both acting like little children.

Then and there the reality set in. We were not ready for marriage. We couldn't even have a healthy dating relationship. We were totally wrong for each other.

I broke it off and never looked back. My problem was immaturity. I needed to grow up.



In the remainder of the book Charie and I will explore these ideas and encourage you to continue asking yourself difficult questions as you prepare yourself to become the kind of woman or man that is ready for the lifelong commitment of marriage. You may want to come back to the list in this chapter and glance at it as you read, asking yourself if your biggest issue is your maturity level.

Remember, everything you face in marriage can be dealt with and handled correctly if you and your spouse have the maturity to work together as a team, by God's grace, to tackle any problem that comes your way.

In what areas of your life do you need to grow up?