# MARRY THE RIGHT PERSON

## HOW TO FIND YOUR PERFECT MATCH

BY MIKE RIZZO

# INTRODUCTION

**It is nothing short of a transcendent experience, the affirming power that sweeps over the soul, being loved to the extent that someone desires to spend the rest of their earthly life with you.**

It's the missing puzzle piece discovered at last, fitting perfectly in the space of what your heart has been longing for. The sensation of feeling complete would suggest that no further confirmation about marriage is needed. Remember however, we are talking decades of sacrificial commitment, and if the other person is having a reciprocal experience, they will be looking to you as well to remain as the ongoing source of their fulfillment. No pressure, right?

So by all means, if you think you've met your match, enjoy the journey. But you only get one chance to do premarital preparation. Areas of liability that somehow fly below the radar during dating and engagement, become blatantly obvious in married life. It's not uncommon in marriage counseling, to have a spouse press "rewind", recalling a problem area that existed in the relationship from the very beginning. That would have been a "caution flag" that has now become a "marital issue."

***Okay, here we go with fifteen caution flags...***

# CAUTION FLAG #1

# GUT FEELING

***I see this first item as being a sort of "canopy" over all the rest.***

In securing confirmation for important decisions, the common advice is, "Go with your gut", whether it's deciding on a vehicle purchase, buying a home, or accepting a job offer. In this, the most crucial of all decisions, one needs to pray for insight, perception, and clear intuition. Choosing who to marry is undeniably the most impactful choice to be made, not only for yourself but for future generations as well.

I can remember becoming a Christian at age 21, and my first attraction to a young, 18 year old blonde. Nothing wrong with appreciating beauty, but I was relying solely on physical attraction. One of the leaders cautioned me about this girl, based on his prior observation and experience with her in the church community. Sure enough, once I broke the ice and had a couple of casual conversations with her, my "gut" bore witness with the counsel I had been given.

A few years later, I was serving a two year missionary assignment in Asia. My teammate that came with me from the States, was a solid believer and we were there for ministry, not for dating. But in our second year, I met a woman that was a seminary teacher. She was cute, helped me in my language studies, and filled the void of my homesickness. I progressed to the "meeting the parents" stage, and enjoyed my visit to her hometown. We had great conversations, kept good physical boundaries, and her friends and family really liked me. After my return home we exchanged a letter or two, but my "gut" felt like a lead balloon; no life there. I went on with life, attended Bible college, and within the year was dating my future wife.

## CAUTION FLAG #2

# FREQUENT ARGUMENTS

## *First off, a measure of conflict in life is normal.*

We are not always going to agree with everyone around us, but the manner in which we resolve conflict is the key. The recommended process would be "collaborative partnering", where both parties pursue mutual understanding, coming to know the other's point of view as well as to express their own. If arguing is a way of life in your relationship now, it is likely to only increase when you marry. The "conflict resolution" tool is essential to have on board before marriage.

I believe that everyone who has walked with Christ has discovered that adversity serves as a sort of depth gauge. Pressing circumstances, or people, have a way of surfacing the things in our inmost heart that are hindering our deeper maturity. We are prone to desire an end to adversity so that we might move forward in serving God in peace. But God strategically uses adversity to move us forward in serving Him while we draw from His sustaining peace on the way.

Thomas a` Kempis wisely observed in The Imitation of Christ, "How great each one's virtue is, best appears by occasions of adversity; for occasions do not make a man frail, but show what he is." As I pondered this, a thought came to mind: marriage is revelatory. Numerous times over the past 37 years of marriage, my thought began with, I wish she would stop doing and saying things that upset me, and progressed to Wow, I didn't handle that well. I need to deal with my own issues.

Two fallen human beings, united as one, will generate a measure of adversity. Heck, even living with myself does that! Thus we need to learn how to resolve conflict at the heart level. It is essential to develop the skill of resolving conflict before marriage, not only to keep the peace but to also learn about one's self.

## CAUTION FLAG #3

# LACK OF RESPECT

## *No one likes to experience criticism or sarcasm.*

If you are constantly being criticized and treated with sarcasm, it's seriously time to re-evaluate why you are considering spending the rest of your life with this person.

It's especially important to be aware of the subtle ways this might manifest. A common "cover" is that of humor. "Oh, I was only joking; I wasn't really serious." Speaking from experience, I like to make people laugh and I have this dry sense of humor. From my viewpoint, there is an acceptable range of mockery and cynicism, that gives comic power to my words, without being outright harsh or cutting. It's just satire, right?

Granted, there is a gender divide here, as most men tend towards sarcasm, while most women tend towards being sensitive and gentle. (exceptions apply) But at the end of the day, we all want to know that our partner admires and esteems who we are, contributing to our sense of dignity. There is also an inner component at work here, as my own self-respect enables me to show the same towards others, while self-contempt or shame consciousness will make me prone to criticize others. Over the course of our marriage, my totally non-sarcastic wife, has taught me the benefits of this truth and encouraged me to respect and esteem myself.

Here is where healthy community can be an asset. Never date in a vacuum, but always in community. Sure, there are some dates where it will just be the two of you, but a healthy marriage is lived out in a community of other couples and friends, and in my opinion, healthy dating as well. Why is this important? If you feel that you are being treated disrespectfully and want another opinion , you can ask your friends what they've observed. An objective viewpoint is a valuable one.

# CAUTION FLAG #4

# ADDICTIONS

## *Addiction is enslavement.*

Do either of you struggle with alcohol, drugs, porn, or other escape mechanisms? If you struggled in the past, how long have you been free?

The emotional stress that addictions produce in a marriage and family, is overwhelming. This is one place where there should be no compromise, no concessions for infidelity. Being married (or engaged), while having something, or someone, else on the side, should not be tolerated.

*Promises made while dating don't count for much. Sobriety does.*

If you are a Christian, I hope that your vision is for a Christ-centered marriage. Addictions distort our vision because they draw us away from our true self; thus God commands purity for a very positive reason. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God." (Mt. 5:8 NIV) Another translation reads, "Happy the clean in heart because they shall see God." (YLT)

Addiction's power is derived from the pleasure it brings. Our best ally in overcoming, is to find the superior pleasure in knowing God. Freedom from addiction is more than simply a *checkbox*, to verify that I am not in sin. It is more like an *entryway* into a greater ability to perceive who God is.

## CAUTION FLAG #5

# BAD HABITS

## *Are there any pet peeves that drive you crazy?*

Yes we all have some, but are there any major trouble spots? Here is a sampling:

- Poor listening skills (lack of eye contact, incessant talking)
- Personal hygiene and presentation (unkempt hair, mismatched clothes)
- Unsafe driving (may be connected to being careless, lacking focus)
- Table manners (loud chewing, not using a napkin)
- Awkwardness (lacking finesse, not too savvy in social settings)
- Communication skills undeveloped (he/she doesn't converse well)
- Easily offended (always taking offense, judgmental)
- Dietary lifestyle (*Nancy Nutrition* marries *Johnny Junk-food*). She may perceive that he has bad eating habits and may exert effort to influence him towards better health, which may result in occasional conflict. My advice here: share your beliefs but don't make your spouse a "project."
- Time management (aka he/she is always late).
- Entertainment (may be some addictive patterns). If you observe your future spouse spending large amounts of time on that which you consider wasteful, you should definitely challenge him/her on stewarding their time more effectively. The real question is, *Can you live with this habit over a lifetime?*

Granted, these are oftentimes more than just habits and may be serious issues of character and/or simply a matter of personality style. Rule of thumb with habits: do not marry based on a person's potential or a reliance upon your ability to change them over time. It's not like buying a "fixer-upper" that you can renovate in the years ahead. We have counseled many marriages where one or both spouses are worn out, tired of living without adequate renovations.

If one or more of these caution flags is evident in your current dating relationship, bring those concerns to your pastor, close friend, or a mature married couple that you trust. You will never regret giving due diligence in the vetting process.

## CAUTION FLAG #6

# JEALOUSY OR IRRATIONAL ANGER

## *Is there jealousy when there is interacation with the opposite sex?*

If you feel like you can't be yourself, or engage in casual conversation with the opposite sex, due to your significant other becoming jealous, it's time for a serious discussion. Or, if you are the one who is feeling jealous, ask yourself why. It could be a sign of insecurity or rejection.

Once married of course, everything changes, as you are no longer a "single." What was previously normal, such as having coffee with an opposite sex friend for an hour or two, must now be "cleared" so to speak, with your spouse. Put yourself on both sides of this scenario. Would you want your husband, or wife, to be on a friendship date with someone of the opposite sex?

A common example that we encountered in our own marriage, was being at an event together but then one of us had to leave early. The remaining spouse needed a ride home and an opposite sex friend offered to help. Many variables here, right? Is it a close friend, someone you both trust, etc ? Either way, the close confines of a vehicle, just the two of you, perhaps at night, driving several miles together, presents an opportunity for the enemy to brew up a plan of temptation.

# CAUTION FLAG #7

# APPREHENSION

***Apprehension discussing certain subjects because we are afraid of the reaction.***

Meeting someone and growing in a friendship opens many doors of discussion. Topics will include:  future hopes and dreams, favorite music, food, personality styles, church preferences, theology, politics, moral standards, money, parenting, sex, finances, etc. While it's rare for a couple to agree 100 percent on every issue, it's vital to have agreement on the core issues, often with a little "give and take" sprinkled in. If tension or stress is being resolved by relegating topics to the "do not discuss" pile, this is not healthy.

## CAUTION FLAG #8

# UNPREDICTABLE MOOD SWINGS

***Extreme emotional expressions; unpredictable mood swings.***

Much can remain hidden and undisclosed in a dating relationship. But over time, who we really are will come to the surface. It takes time to know if someone is really stable and mature. If you are observing variations of mood, beyond what is normal, it's time to hit the pause button.

## CAUTION FLAG #9

# CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR

***Controlling behavior — "I feel like I'm being manipulated."***

Is your voice being heard, even in simple discussions such as where to go out on dates? If engaged, do you feel a partnership, a sense of teamwork, as you talk about your future marriage? Is there a willingness to hear each other's views?

# CAUTION FLAG #10

## PRIDE

***Pride—difficulty admitting when wrong, thus never fully resolving conflict.***

Pride, in and of itself, is not a bad quality. We should definitely have a sense of dignity about who we are and also feel good about what we've accomplished. In this sense, we can accommodate both pride and humility in a balanced environment. The danger, according to one of the more well known Bible verses on pride, is when our head "swells" and it becomes all about us. "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (Prov. 16:18) Beware, the next steps lead towards being a narcissist, where you feel entitled to be acknowledged as being right, most, if not all, of the time.

# CAUTION FLAG #11

# FEELING TRAPPED

***Fear of hurting each other by suggesting that marriage may not be for us.***

People want to be absolutely sure that they are marrying the right person, for the right reasons. Confirmations over time, leading to a firm assurance, are essential. If you feel backed into a corner, without options, and there are still more questions to address in the relationship, you need to acknowledge them.

As a side note, this is why we so strongly advocate physical purity while dating. When you're having issues and you revert to the physical area to restore the feeling of attachment, it can give the illusion that all is well. No matter how great your physical chemistry is, it will never be able to carry the weight and responsibility required to be married for life.  Having said that, if you are starting to feel trapped it's most likely due to some area of caution that needs to be addressed. Better to put the brakes on now, than to marry a person because you don't want to hurt their feelings.

# CAUTION FLAG #12

# LACK OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

***Lack of personal responsibility — my fiancé struggles to hold down a job and pay bills.***

It's wonderful to dream but you also need to eat, put gas in the car, and pay your mortgage. Will you both follow through on what you are pledging towards one another? When the time comes for men to have the "father-talk", every dad will naturally make inquiries into the job stability and work ethic, of the man who wants to marry his daughter. It's a reflection of a man's character in many ways and also serves as an indicator of how a man is ruling over the arch-enemy of "passivity."

A question for the future husbands to consider: will my future bride be willing to work if needed, or does she believe that the man needs to take care of all the provision? What about previous debt in either of your financial portfolios? How will you navigate the responsibility of paying it off while also dreaming for the future? How you are handling debt now, will most likely be how you continue to do so when married. I strongly suggest having conversations on the topic prior to getting married.

*Note: A recent (2013) Pew Research study found that wives provide at least half the income in 15 percent of married households, up from 3.5 percent in 1960. This trend will most likely continue to increase, but it still remains true that men are called to the role of "provider" and thus the importance of evaluating this aspect of your future marriage.*

## CAUTION FLAG #13

# DEPENDENT ON PARENTS

***Dependent on parents for emotional and financial security.***

It's important that the marriage relationship be prioritized above all and that healthy boundaries are in place. It's not beneficial when most decisions in a marriage have to be run by mom and dad first. It's okay of course to gain from their wisdom, but an unhealthy dependence will cause your spouse to wonder where your first allegiance lies.

# CAUTION FLAG #14

# HISTORY OF FAILED DATING RELATIONSHIPS

***History of failed dating relationships.***

The keyword here, would be “pattern.” Sure, we’ve all most likely had other relationships, but has there been a consistent occurrence of things getting derailed over the same issues? In other words, if a person has a history of break-ups, you have the right to inquire as to why, and over what issues.

# CAUTION FLAG #15

## SELFISHNESS

***Overly self-centered, always wants their own way, tends towards narcissism.***

Keyword here is “overly.” My suggestion: only marry a person who is quick to acknowledge and repent when their ego goes outta whack. Happens to the best of us. Your role in marriage is to be “equal partner”, not a “fan.”

# OUR STORY

We first started to converse one day in the cafeteria lunch line—Bible college students from the same hometown. It was not a star-struck, “love at first sight,” enamored moment, à la Hollywood style, but over the weeks as we became friends, attraction was in action. By the end of the semester, Anne and I were dating. Now the serious vetting could begin, to insure that I would marry the right person!

My criterion was a woman with a heart for God who was willing to follow me anywhere. (At that time I was planning to return to the mission field in Asia where I had just served for two years.) This was a portal through which a potential wife in my world must pass. While for me this was a very narrow and specific criterion, a wider principle should always be in play.

**Is the person you are considering as a lifelong partner, a person of vision, and is that vision compatible with yours?**

## VISION 101

Yes, vision will contain transition over time, but to marry the right person, a common core vision must be in place. Beyond a particular ministry assignment, we are all called to the vision of becoming Christ-like: to be "transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory" 2 Cor. 3:18 This is "Vision 101" and serves as a foundation for all of life's aspirations, whether in the home, church, or workplace. What you do (assignment specifics and locations) may change over the seasons of a marriage; who you are (the fruits of inner refinement) will always be at the forefront of God's directives over your life.

## SPIRITUAL HISTORY

To marry the right person, it is imperative that you discover and weigh in your heart the spiritual history of your person of interest. Is he a person acquainted with restraint? "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint" (Prov. 29:18, ESV). Does she display the self-discipline necessary to turn from lesser pleasures and follow the supreme path of allegiance to Christ? Now is the time to evaluate before you choose; once married, you forfeit that luxury.

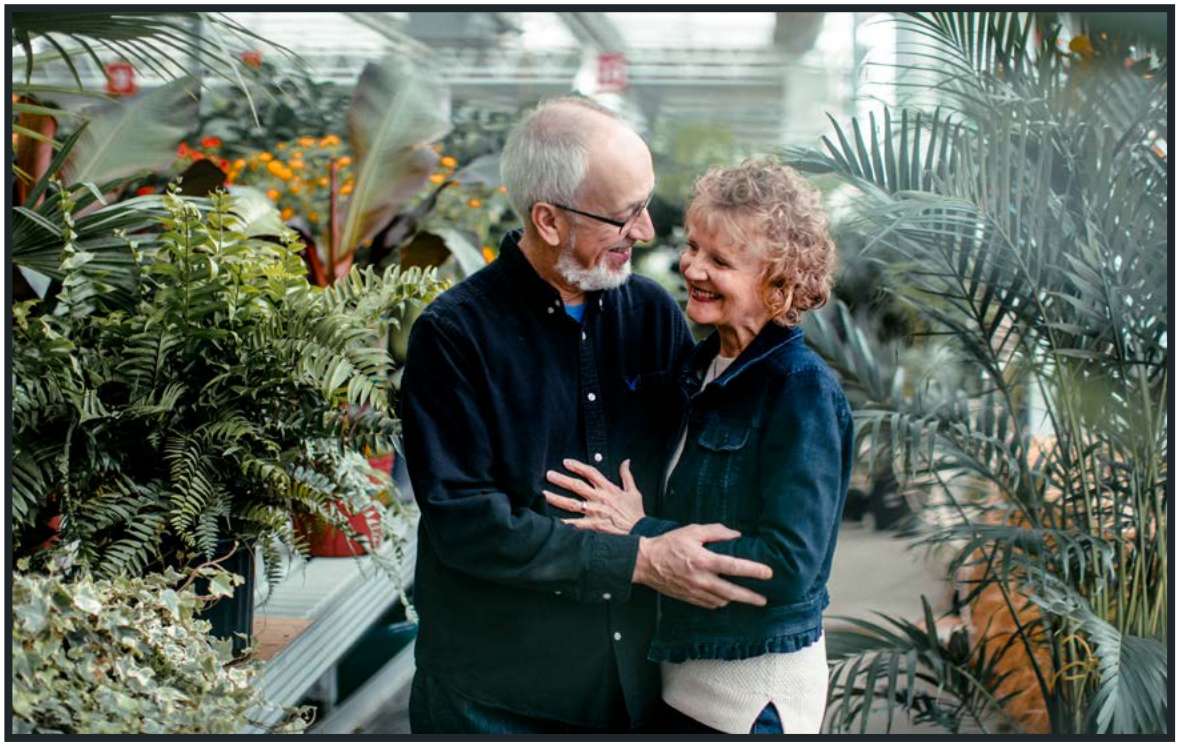
I once heard this illustration: when you stand before the entryway into marriage, there is a banner overhead that says, "Whosoever will." Naturally, we pray, proceed at a moderate pace, get counsel, and pray some more; but on this side of the door, we get to choose whether he or she is the right one to marry. Once over the threshold, we turn and see a banner that reads, "Predestined and foreordained from the foundation of the world." God knew who your choice would be, and now it's a covenant pact for life.

In our premarital manual, *Vertical Marriage: A Godward Preparation for Life Together*, we recommend couples consider these fifteen potential caution flags. The need for caution may not necessarily mean that you shouldn't marry each other, but it may indicate the need to slow down the relationship.

If one or more caution flags is evident in your current dating relationship, bring those concerns to your pastor or a mature married couple that you trust. Covenant marriage is like the union we have with our Bridegroom God. The choice He made on the cross for us, and the choice we make to follow Him, is irrevocable. It's a one-time, life-time, decision.

**The "right" one for you is the one you can do pilgrimage with, holding core values of surrender and transformation central to your union, while you envision a God-glorifying life together.**

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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