

## General considerations

When the time is right, (parents approve, children are mature enough to handle it) dating is a way to obey the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). Healthy dating relationships should reflect derivative qualities of his omni-attributes. Below we will use a series of questions as relationship-examination tests to be used by dating couples, pre-marriage counsellors and parents to gauge the sickness and health of the relationship. Serious sickness in any one of these tests could be a cause for a counsellor or parent to recommend either waiting for signs of change toward health or separation of a dating or engaged couple. The longer the sickness factors have pre-existed in one of the persons (to the point of being habitual), the more serious the sickness would be. The more signs of habitual sickness you see, the more likely any future marriage will face proportional levels of conflicts, sorrows and difficulties beyond the normal troubles of life in a fallen world. While a Christian pre-marriage counsellor or Christian parent or mature Christian friend who knows the couple well cannot determine whether a couple should marry or not, he/she may give a measured opinion warning of the future types of problems that couple will likely face unless the couple seeks immediate help to bring specific changes into areas of greater health. One possible goal of evaluating is to develop early counselling intervention and prevention of repeated mistakes. Growing into all areas of health is possible by God's grace. One factor to look for is not so much perfect health in all areas as much as a willingness to learn, submit to the Word of God and repent of specific areas of sin that may negatively affect the relationship. Basically, is this couple "wise" in the Proverbs sense of the word? Romantically infatuated couples may need to step back and look more carefully at each other, since couples usually assume that the relationship is healthy enough to face all problems and minimize the existing problems. This kind of couple would benefit from these tests to alert to areas where emotions may have clouded a needed evaluation phase in the relationship prior to engagement or marriage. Are they living in the fear of the Lord, and seeking counsel and instruction from other mature Christians (Prov. 9:9-11; 11:14)? Are they willing to submit to the Word of God where that is made plain to them? If some important areas can be strengthened prior to engagement or marriage, moving forward cautiously might be possible. If no signs of change or improvement in the "sick" areas are evident after a period of counselling, the couple may need to consider separating, or else be prepared to face numerous marital problems.

To those who agree with these health tests but feel no one fits these required qualities or passes these tests, caution against this overly zealous perspective is advised. Some extremely cautious individuals (parents or couples) may want a guarantee of a perfectly mature and compatible spouse before giving permission to marry or agreeing to date or get engaged, possibly due to a loss of optimism in the institution of marriage or in the trustworthiness of people. Maybe someone had been hurt in relationships before, perhaps

someone whose parents had been divorced or separated. Such a person may be so intent on perfectionistic guarantees of marital success that he/she will be too afraid to commit to anyone or to take the risks of seeing and loving another deeply flawed sinner. This type of person may tend to use these tests as a weapon to accuse and demand changes, rather than serve the other in love with words that build up, and wait patiently for God's power to work changes (Eph. 4:15, 29-32). No relationship can survive under constant scrutiny! There are phases of scrutiny that can be helpful, but to live under the threat of instant rejection for failure is not the Christian pattern of relationships, since Christ first died for us while we were his enemies, brought us into a relationship of mercy and credited righteousness, then seeks our actual change in the security of that justifying covenant love. Some changes in your partner will have to wait until that human covenant of gracious acceptance is sealed by marriage and the long, slow process of daily living together that works mutual sanctification and mutual interest in satisfying the desires of the spouse. Marriage is one of God's redeeming institutions, in almost every sense of the possible areas of Christian growth! To a critical perfectionist looking for "perfect 10" I usually counsel his/her need to develop more humility, patience with, acceptance of and joy in other imperfect Christians by trusting the perfecting grace of Christ, using the example of Paul's attitude to the imperfect Philippian church. Christ will finish the work he begins in a person (Phil. 1:3-6). The author recalls a memorable metaphor used by Pastor Tim Keller in a taped message he gave to singles without the gift of singleness: 'Marry a good piece of marble, rather than seeking a perfectly formed statue! Enter into marriage to share in the privilege of being used by God in shaping your future spouse into the image of Christ's holiness.' A solid core of maturing Christian qualities with unfinished form is sufficient to begin the adventure of marriage.

Also a word of correction to those men, especially, who refuse to pursue a woman with godly qualities just because he has no immediate attraction to her physical features. Repent and value the qualities that God values! Even if you don't feel a great emotional attraction to the physical features of a potential spouse, you can learn to value other qualities that God values now. After marriage, the nature of mutual service to one another will usually bring the emotional attractions that make for sexually-satisfying delight.

Finally, for parents evaluating children and their potential life partners, they should show as much support for their adult child's choices as possible. Some parents wanting the best for their children may try to use these tests as a wedge between their child and the one he/she loves. Parents need to be extremely careful in speaking out opinions too forcefully on the chosen partner of their child. Try to work constructively with your child for the improvement of the existing relationship in a more Christian-oriented direction, if at all possible, rather than seeking a separation. Let your adult child make the directional choices. Treat your adult child with respect and as much trust as possible. Try to offer wise insights, or suggest books or

articles that will enable your child to better evaluate their partner choice. Let them know that some choices will have consequences that will limit their options (a Christian marrying a non-Christian will limit church wedding options; marrying without minimal financial stability may limit your job-relocation, educational, housing and vehicle choices; marrying someone who comes from a troubled family background will tend to reproduce some of the behavioural tendencies observed growing up). Make observations about observed character patterns that will not just change by getting married. If they ask for your opinion of the partner, again, be cautious about what you say. Remember, if this relationship goes forward, your negative comments may be held against you for a long time, and your child will likely repeat your comments to the partner who will want to know your opinion of him/her. By all means, attend the wedding of your child's chosen partner, though you may need to limit your active participation in any forms of idolatry, giving support for false religions or denying gender-binary homosexual marriage. Keep your influencing options open for the future! You're not done evangelizing your non-Christian child, or drawing back a backslidden child or helping your faithful Christian child mature in Christ just because he/she gets married.

#### Specific RKD-*lex Christi* sickness-health tests for dating and engaged relationships

##### 1<sup>st</sup> C omni- supreme Lord recreates us pro-Lord, prophet-priest-kings

*Do all our words and behaviours show a delight in God and a desire to love and worship him above all other things? Sickness:* Speech, behaviour and schedule filled with busyness about the world's cares and worries, choking out fruitfulness for God. *Health:* Both are Christians: each person shows a solid commitment to Christ, preferably a faith that is independent of the wish to marry this person. (1 Cor. 7:39). God is your treasure and your joy, and he is your delight to worship and praise. You maintain a commitment to regular worship with God's people on the Lord's Day as well as personal devotion in praise and worship, Bible reading and prayer.

*Are we both prepared to persevere in our marriage through worldly troubles? (1 Cor. 7:28, 40) Sickness:* Fantasy of an easier life together. Marriage & love will overcome all problems. *Health:* We hope for some joys, but also are prepared to face troubles together: troubles from the physical lack of health or resources, troubles from enemies of the gospel, troubles in culture and society, troubles from our own sinful nature and sin in the church. Able to give and receive empathetic concern and lead toward faith in God during difficulties.

*Do we both share a biblical view of God's sovereign providence over our suffering? Sickness:* romanticized, fairy tale view of relationships that love will thwart all problems to live happily ever after. *Health:* Accepts and learns

through sickness and death in this fallen world. Knows that dating can be filled with frustrations (fears, conflict, disappointments, sorrow, temptations, no available prospective partners), failures, and loneliness. Also learns to live as a stranger and pilgrim in the non-Christian world seeking the indestructible kingdom, and not accept the modern immoral dating and sex-enslaved culture. Prepares for rejection by those in this culture.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> C *omni-covenantal* Lord recreates us *pro-covenantal*

*Are all our important decisions guided by the Bible and wise Christian counsellors?* *Sickness:* Guided by tradition, parents opinions, cultural expectations, false religious superstitions about luck and prosperity. *Health:* Everything in the relationship and in the wedding plans and the life after marriage show that we observe all that Jesus commanded. He is Lord of our relationship and our daily decisions. We seek advice from mature Christians who know the Bible better than we do.

*Do we see marriage as a temporary earthly institution reflecting the eternal wedding of Christ to the church?* *Sickness:* Only an earthly view of marriage. *Health:* Seek things which are above, not things which are on earth (Col. 3:1-2). Earthly dating relationships and earthly marriage are shadows of the eternal relationship of Christ as bridegroom and the church as the bride (Eph. 5:25-33), so we won't make an idol out of the earthly shadow (Rom. 1:20-25).

*Do we share the self-discipline to guard the brother-sister holiness of our relationships until marriage?* *Sickness:* Using the physical body of the partner in ways that exceed brother-sister fellowship. *Health:* Boy-girlfriend relationships consistently model and set rules based on moral-law clarity (they honour and obey the new covenant) and show how true holiness comes by heart change through the Gospel in a covenant-keeping community. True love waits until marriage, then offers a body holy to the spouse, pure from all lustful and immoral defilements.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> C *omni-blessed* Lord recreates us *pro-doxological*

*Do we demonstrate God's grace to each other?* *Sickness:* One partner makes demands (about non-crisis desires that relate to his/her own preferences or cultural standards) that are coupled with threats to end the relationship if the demands are not met. *Health:* There is evidence of mutual "as is" acceptance of the partner (with a real knowledge of sin areas) with a patient, long-term view of the potential to be used by God to influence the future spouse toward godly change in Christ. Each is able to maintain thankful joy (guards against presumptive negative interpretations of behaviour, will ask about/check for facts) for the power of God seen at work in the partner's life. Areas of personal preference are not imposed on the partner as

requirements for change, but are given as requests that seek “win-win” solutions. Knows and applies Gospel to self and others. Know we are both saved and changed by grace alone, through Christ alone, by faith alone. Fruits of the Spirit are evident by practicing constructive conflict & emotion management: give grace and minister to hearer when feeling offended, ignored or sinned against. Learns how to speak positively: this would be the best if you did it this way . . . (Phil. 1:3-6).

*Do we honour God's name by faithful and reverent use of his Word in the contexts that we live? Sickness:* Misuse Scripture to destructively criticize, point out faults, attack and accuse each other or others with no purpose to build other's up. *Health:* They know Scripture, historical context, laws, logic, culture, language, themselves, and the each other in order to biblically describe what they see and constructively define how change needs to take place. They have biblical theological skill and gracious gentle wisdom to apply various Bible texts to the challenges of encouraging each other to grow in the Lord.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> C omni-temporal Lord recreates us pro-theosynchronous**

*Do we make a conscious effort to think, speak and live under God's determinations of our times? Sickness:* Chronos-chaos is the normal pattern, with little time set aside for each other, little flexibility to adapt to other's times and needs, no consideration of God's interpretation of their own histories, memories and futures. Proud boasting about future plans as if they would surely come true. Disorders patterns of 6 days labour and 1 day rest. Unable to enjoy leisure time. *Health:* Boy-girlfriend relationships sacrificially synchronize significant portions of their daily and weekly schedules to be together to bless each other. The memories of both boy-girlfriend are shaped by God's providential involvement with their past, present and joyful hope in his promises for the future. They both are alert shepherds with historical and social awareness to be alert to and flexible enough to respond at appropriate times to moods, teachable moments of conflict, disobedience, and life challenges in each other. They make plans with humility. They make wise use of time and live within the six days of labour, one day of rest cycle that God has established for their own refreshment. They enjoy leisure time together having fun in God's created world.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> C omni-harmonious Lord recreates us pro-unity**

*Have we developed a casual freedom to enjoy relationships with the opposite sex as equals? Sickness:* Make initial meetings too serious as to try to determine whether to marry or start courtship on the first meeting. Josh Harris *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, is too strict in advising total avoidance of dating. Parents and youth leaders panic or create lots of new rules if the teenager starts to show interest in the opposite sex or gets asked out on a date. *Health:* Youth need to develop ability to comfortably relate to the opposite sex, have curiosity about

others, make new friendships as equals until married. Parents and youth leaders need to encourage, ask questions and develop honest rapport, listen and support and let the teenager or young adult learn.

*Are we both willing to marry?* (1 Cor. 7:36-39) *Sickness:* Avoid pushing the relationship too fast with you own agenda if the partner is not showing much interest. Pushing becomes manipulative. Emphasis on “I want” shows selfishness. Talking about marriage immediately will usually scare off the partner, thinking you are desperate or mentally unstable. Unsubstantiated, personal “spiritual” convictions about “God’s will for the relationship” without verifiable relational compatibilities are usually a sign of mental instability and desperation to move the relationship to a deeper level rather than a mutually shared interest in moving forward. One person dumps all the history of past troubles, abuse or sexual sins early on in the relationship in hopes of developing honesty and connection, scaring the other person away. *Health:* A relationship that has mutual agreement and attraction develops a “win-win” desire to move the relationship forward. Speak first about common interests, shared vision, religious and family backgrounds. Both partners need to feel a calm steadiness about the forward-motion of the relationship, not being manipulated into the marriage commitment without full agreement, not overloading with past negative history.

*Do we know how to relate to each other in Christ as equals and express submission or authority that creates flourishing in our own areas of responsibility?* *Sickness:* chaotic inability to relate as equals or submit to authorities or exercise authority in relevant areas of stewardship. *Health:* Boy-girlfriend relationships discuss, compromise, and use gracious persuasion of each other. As priest-ambassadors of reconciliation, boy-girlfriend relationships pray for, counsel, and engage their gifts and relationships to seek the peace and welfare of their own relationship and home. They bring order to and submission of the creatures (pets, animals) and aspects of material creation under their authority (house, car, garden, yard, tools, toys, gadgets, and so on.

*Do we know how to knowledgeably bless others and one another according to their preferences/desires?* *Sickness:* Ignorance of the other’s preferences and inability to understand and communicate one’s own preferences, creating many painful experiences. *Health:* Boyfriend-girlfriend relationships should show healthy evidence of presence to bless, since marriage means a husband and wife leave father and mother and make covenant promises to be present with one another to bless, enjoy, protect, and maintain peace (Num. 6:24-26). Each one needs to learn how to cultivate enjoyment, protection and peace and learn the specific personal preferences that make such presence possible. In marriage only, a healthy sexual relationship is the most intimate form of blessed presence.

*Do we accept the biblical roles designed by God after marriage?* *Sickness:* egalitarian view of submission to each other, or woman dominates the man , or man dominates the woman. *Health:* The man desires a godly exercise of

authority and the woman desire a humble submission to godly authority, patterned after Christ and the church (Eph. 5:23-33; Ezek. 16; Hosea). Both share a vision for using godly authority to parent children.

### 6<sup>th</sup> C omni-living Lord recreates us pro-life

*Do we show sacrificial love for each other and for others outside our relationship?* (Rom. 12:9; Acts 20:35) *Sickness:* A relationship that begins with or quickly moves to a focus on taking what you want (kissing, touching, sex, money, job connections, promise of visa through marriage) does not develop trust or respect. If a couple is already very physical or is having sex, as a counselor or parent, I will tell them to stop/repent of the mutual “using” and start showing mutual respect and love as Christian brother and sister. If an individual has poor relationships with others, and shows little concern for others apart from the romantic partner, this is a dangerous sickness that will likely reveal the true character of the person. If an individual is too attached emotionally, without a sense of independent identity or emotional stability without the partner, unable to separate when many signs of sickness are evident, this is not a true love relationship, but emotional dependence. *Health:* A relationship that has developed based on friendship, giving, caring for the other (without a sexual relationship prior to marriage). A partner who demonstrates love, respect and patience to others outside the relationship (parents, family, friends, missions service, evangelism efforts) without obvious personal benefits, is also showing good evidence of the character fruit of love, not just trying to please (or possibly manipulate) the romantic preferences of the partner. Some couples may be so focused on serving others in ministry that they neglect developing their own relationship. As a counsellor or parent, I would tell them to make sacrifices now to make the relationship a priority, establishing a pattern for the future. Ministry in the church should not take priority over each other, as church leaders must manage their own households well, before they are qualified for church service (1 Tim 3:2, 4-5; Titus 1:6).

*Do we desire children and living a family centred life?* *Sickness:* Believe earth is overpopulated or that family size needs to be limited to “save the earth” from more resource consuming, global-warmth-producing humans. The woman has very definite career goals that she is not willing to change for the sake of raising children (and has no other medical reasons for not being able to bear children). *Health:* Men desire to marry someone who will be a good mother, who loves kids and who sees raising kids as one of life's highest callings. Of course women are very capable of having fine careers and earning money inclusive of family and children (Prov. 31:10-31). Most governments of the world see more children as their country's greatest resource, and countries with very low birth rates see impending economic problems due to the aging of the population and the lack of an income earning population to fuel the social welfare systems for the elderly (Taiwan & Japan, somewhat in the USA).

*Do we prepare to use our authority, language, knowledge, skills, and spiritual gifts to do productive work?* *Sickness:* work is all about making money to buy things like cars and homes at the expense of family dynamics (no plan for daily time together, or for one primary parent to work, one primary parent to care for children at home until they are in school). *Health:* They prepare to exert active, consistent, gentle, godly rule and discipline over their families and engage with the world as king-stewards of the cultural mandate to produce wealth, goods and services that bless the family, the created world, and their social communities. They prepare to bear children to extend godly rule over the earth. They evidence stewardship of body to know and develop his/her bodily health: self-controlled in sleep, eating, exercise; no addictions to created things.

### 7<sup>th</sup> C *omni-beautiful Lord recreates us pro-marriage*

*Do we have a shared definition for the biblical definition of gender, marriage and family?* *Sickness:* Strong disagreements about the createdness of male-female gender, each with their own sexual orientation to the opposite sex in God's timing and binary gender identity (SOGI), the purposes of marriage and family, roles and leadership. Insisting on other cultural viewpoints and denying the biblical view. The Bible forbids generalized *hetero sexual* attraction (looking at any potential opposite sex person with sexual thoughts) and *homosexual* attraction (looking at or desiring any forms of sexual contact with same gender people). Propensity to same sex attraction (SSA, defined as desire for sexual activities with the same sex), even when not dwelling on it in the mind, is also a creation disorder and for those not united to Christ, part of the condemned sin-package. SSA for those in Christ is illegitimate and disordered, and this whole set of lusts needs to be put to death through Christ and the Gospel: the propensity to be sexually attracted, any sexual arousal of the imagination, any masturbatory practices associated with those attractions, and any sexually arousing behaviours toward people of the same sex. "Opportunities" that present as temptations are outside the individual and thus the opportunity doesn't equal sin. Disordered attractions are what make us susceptible to temptations that lead us to sin, and that disordered attraction of coveting breaks the 10th commandment (Jas. 1:14-15) and any *sexual* attraction to any person other than a single hetero spouse breaks the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment. Any illegitimate attraction is itself part of the sin package. If a Christian is attracted to any forbidden lust (hetero oral sex with a prostitute, bribery to get a political position, gossip to put others down), that "attraction" is also disordered, part of the old man, sinful flesh package, and needs to be renewed. *Health:* Share a common understanding of the Bible's framework for male-female gender, each with their own sexual orientation to the opposite sex in God's timing and binary gender identity (SOGI). Christian marriage is a reflection of Christ's marriage to the Church (Eph. 5:22-31). God's rule is one-hetero-spouse-sexual-attraction (OH-SSA) and permits no other sexual attractions. As part of the preparation for marriage, I believe Scripture permits a *gradual* shift towards sexualized

attraction after engagement, as intention to exclusively be set apart as holy for the other has been personally agreed on, as usually this comes with parental agreement and public announcement with a symbol of the engagement ring for the woman. For example, premarital counselling usually includes a reading and discussion on loving sexual technique and ethical birth control methods, and the couple begins to prepare mentally and physically for the wedding and honeymoon. The couple's growing affection and closeness should start to shift to a holy sexual attraction, but must still honour the fiancé(e) as a brother or sister until after the full matrimonial commitment of the wedding. "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases" (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

We could develop a comprehensive list of biblical SOG\_\_'s to disenfranchise the cultural debate about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) as if it were an isolated issue:

5<sup>th</sup> C : SOGR "soul orientation to godly roles"

6<sup>th</sup> C : SOGL "soul orientation to godly life"

8<sup>th</sup> C : SOGI "soul orientation to godly income"

9<sup>th</sup> C : SOGR "soul orientation to godly reputations"

10<sup>th</sup> C : SOGC "soul orientation to godly contentment"

Each of these categories could develop its own set of specific dysphorias, showing how humanity has lost its proper orientation to the truth and moral flourishing in each category. Gender dysphoria is symptomatic of 7<sup>th</sup> C disorientation, while we can easily explore multiple disorienting categories to truth and proper righteousness related to other commandments. Mankind, by losing proper orientation to the fear of God (1<sup>st</sup> C) and contentment (10<sup>th</sup> C), has lost proper orientation to stewardship of roles, life-sustenance, sexuality, resources, and reputations.

With this enlarged set of acronyms, Christians would be in a better position to rename the current culturally dividing SOGI with another phrase, "*soul orientation to gender interactions*" related to the 7<sup>th</sup> C.

*Do we have a shared definition for the biblical definition of marriage as leaving parents?* *Sickness:* Defer to parents to solve all emotional and financial problems. Parents' advice is accepted as correct by wife (or husband) and undercuts the authority of the husband (or valuable input of the wife). *Health:* Both are prepared to leave the single life of freedom, leave financial dependence on parents, emotional dependence on parents. This

also assumes you are biblically free to marry, without previous relational entanglements or an unbiblical divorce. Though it has been done by some newly married couples with beneficial results, it is not normally wise to live with either sets of parents after marriage unless there are serious health problems or other emergency factors. Saving money on rent does not seem to be a good enough reason to live with parents.

*Do we have a shared definition for the biblical definition of marriage as cleaving to each other?* *Sickness:* continue to spend excessive free time with friends, family or the opposite sex. *Health:* One spouse mentality, ready to shift from seeking relationships to steadiness with one spouse. You agree that investment in the marriage relationship takes the priority over the relationship to the children and that the best example you can give your children is to love each other. In non-crisis situations, you will not habitually neglect the marriage in favour of the children's desires or preferences. You share basic agreement on major life directions and goals for lifestyle, church service, denomination, financial expectations and spending habits, home ownership, future expectations for kind of relationship with parents.

*By college age, assuming we don't have the gift of singleness, are we pursuing dating as part of a search for a good life partner?* *Sickness:* Dating is more like a game or a hobby to prevent boredom and reduce feelings of loneliness, but with no desire to become attached to any permanent relationship. One or both have an alternate worldview of immoral dating and sexual hook-ups. *Health:* God as Creator and Redeemer has authority to regulate the proper expression of sexuality in his world so that people will fulfil his cultural mandate to fill the earth with godly children, rule over the earth and its creatures for the glory of his name. God ordained marriage between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-25) and its preservation from all dissolution. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate," (Matt. 19:6) includes the God-ordained institution of marriage, not just individual marriages. This is the primary way God protects his obedient children from sexually transmitted diseases and mutually abusive relationships (1 Cor. 7:2, 9).

### 8<sup>th</sup> C omni-sufficient Lord recreates us pro-stewardship

*Do we both show evidence of responsible stewardship of resources in order to fulfil the cultural mandate to rule over the earth and subdue it for the glory of Christ? (Gen. 1:28)* *Sickness:* Addictions to certain types of wasteful entertainments (computer games, TV, movies, internet) or over-indulging in permissible physical pleasures (foods, alcohol, exercise, hobbies, sports) or abusing the world's resources in explicitly sinful ways (pornography, gambling, premarital sex, gang involvement; illegal polluting or intentionally destroying physical or natural resources) *Health:* Commitment to fulfil the Great Cultural Mandate to care for the world and prosper its resources, using the gifts and resources God has entrusted to us. Nurture and use your spiritual gifts to bless others in the church, wisely use money, faithful to your promises, nurture family relationships,

concern for others, willing to sacrifice resources for other's benefit. Show habits of six days of labour (not lazy), one day of rest (not a work-a-holic). Show evidence of learning new useful skills for future employment. Show evidence of good financial stewardship (saving, controlled spending, no major debt). Evidence of proper use of the created world. As engaged couples they should be preparing to provide all that is materially necessary for spouse's body, well-being and health. Furthermore, they strive to exhibit good stewardship over their resources to enable generous provision for the family, the church, and the needy, while teaching each other to model that stewardship. They use resources to enjoy recreation. They prepare to share the marriage bed and the resources of the home to nourish and cherish each other's bodies and the children God gives them through procreation (or adoption).

### 9<sup>th</sup> C omni-veracious Lord recreates us pro-veracious

*Do we really know each other as fellow pilgrims?* (1 Pet. 3:7) *Sickness:* Intentionally hiding serious family problems, health problems, financial obligations, debts or life-damaging sin habits that will affect normal family life in the future. Sharing or dumping all past sins in such detail that the partner must unnecessarily carry the burden of them as well as you. *Health:* If possible try to spend "enough time" getting to know each other's strengths and weaknesses in a broad range of areas and a variety of different contexts and settings prior to marriage. If possible, try to observe both sets of parents in more than one setting and ask lots of questions about the parents' personalities, character strengths and weaknesses. You should know each other long enough to have faced some arguments or disagreements to learn how each of you handled conflict. All sharing should be pro-active and honest and in talking about past, present or potential problem areas. Each partner should know who they are marrying. "Enough" has no magic minimum, but should involve several visits with parents, study and discussion based on pre-marital counselling books that examine a broad range of topics, and seeing each other in a variety of different settings. They keep their word, promises, and contracts with each other. They model self-control over inappropriate or sinful emotions, words, and behaviours to be faithful to do what they are assigned and what they promise to do. The healthy relationship is built on trust established through faithfulness, other promises and daily truthful communication. They are willing to learn from each other. They prepare to know each other's desires, and remember intimate knowledge of what pleases the spouse on multiple levels.

*Have we had enough time to know each other as pilgrims on the heavenly road?* (Rom. 14:23; Matt. 6:33-34) *Sickness:* Rushed marriages due to external pressures taking priority over worship, discipleship and stewardship tests above may add lots of post-marriage shocks and stresses that could lead to divorce. External pressures could be any of the following types of things: a) living in different countries or language groups but desperate to be married, b) pressure from parents or grandparents to get married by a certain age, c)

expectancy of near term separation that pushes up the wedding date to be married before the impending separation due to work, return to home country or military service, d) aging or health problems that threaten life expectancy or ability to conceive children. Rushed marriages due to internal pressures taking priority over #1-#2 above may add lots of post-marriage shocks and stresses that could lead to divorce. Internal pressures could be any of the following types of things: a) burning desires for sexual intimacy b) desire to leave a difficult home life to live “happily ever after” c) fearing that this will be the “last chance” to get married. *Health:* Marriage should be agreed to because of positive reasons why it would be good and right at this time. That is, marriage should be pursued in faith, not fear.

*Have we been tested over time?* (1 Tim. 3:10; 5:22; Prov. 11:15; Phil. 2:22) *Sickness:* Hasty decisions to trust unknown people leads to trouble. *Healthy:* As pilgrims on the road to the heavenly city, we need to know who we are going to walk with for the majority of our lives! We see evidence of perseverance in Christian obedience, counting the cost of following Christ. Wise people only give important responsibilities to those who prove themselves capable after careful testing. Individuals choosing a partner to marry will be entrusting important responsibilities to one another, and should also have some good evidences of maturity in their partner.

*Do any other mature Christians know us well?* *Sickness:* Your partner is isolated from the Christian community, unknown to people you trust. Someone you met online, through a friend, or visiting from a distance place. You may be in danger if your relationship is moving forward too fast. *Health:* You are both well known in a Christian community, school or church context and trusted by mature leaders in those contexts because of your years of faithful service to others. Paul's mature Christian testimony about Timothy's genuine faith, love and his weaknesses (fear, timidity) came from serving together and knowing Timothy's Christian family. (Phil. 2:20-23; 2 Tim. 1:5-7; 1 Tim. 3:10).

### 10<sup>th</sup> C omni-contented Lord recreates us pro-content

*Does our passing a majority of the above tests evidence that we have relational health built on a contented heart and thankful attitude?* *Sickness:* We have identified a majority of sicknesses above that show a covetous heart and an unthankful, grumbling, complaining attitude. *Health:* We pass a majority of the test above as evidence that we have a contented heart and a thankful attitude.