

Preparing for a Life Together

Seven Conversations Before Marriage

Resource Overview

Seven conversations for couples preparing for marriage, drawn from the life Denise and I have shared. Explore faith, character, family, friendship, and the everyday choices that shape a home. Couples already married can also use these conversations to deepen their understanding and strengthen their life together.

Why I Wrote This

I married my best friend. More than thirty-eight years later, I remain grateful for the life Denise and I share.

Along the way, we have learned to listen, take responsibility, value each other's strengths, and work through differences. We still have opportunities to practice those lessons.

I wrote this to open discussions that can deepen your friendship and prepare you for the life ahead. I hope you will find encouragement here, along with a few things worth talking about together.

Our Preparation for Marriage

Thirteen years had passed since I came to Christ, and I was still single. I had wanted to be married for a long time. Eventually, I placed that desire before the Lord.

I prayed, "Father, I want to be married, but I am willing to remain single if that is what You have for me."

I did not know that Denise had reached almost the same place in her own walk with God. About six months later, we met.

We became friends first. We enjoyed talking, spending time together, and getting to know one another. Neither of us had seen many marriages we wanted to imitate, so we moved carefully. As our friendship deepened, we began wondering whether God was leading us toward marriage.

We asked a trusted woman to counsel and disciple us. Over the next six months, we talked about our faith, our families, our histories, and our expectations. We wanted to address what we were carrying into the relationship. She taught us to take responsibility for our own lives and began showing us how to work through things together.

Alongside those meetings, we continued building our friendship and getting to know each other's families. We sought God both together and separately. There was room to ask hard questions and consider honestly what we were doing.

When we stood together on our wedding day, our pastor expressed his confidence that God had brought us together for His purposes. We stepped into marriage with gratitude and much still to learn.

Over the decades, many people and resources have contributed to our lives. We attended conferences, read books, received counsel, and learned through experience. Each has deepened our understanding of how to love and care for one another.

No resource can promise a good marriage. These seven conversations offer a place to begin. They bring together lessons from our preparation and the years since. My hope is that they will help you know one another more deeply and begin learning how to navigate life together.

How the Conversations Fit Together

1. Marriage as a Covenant Before God
2. The Person I Am Becoming

3. The Stories and Relationships We Bring
4. Listening, Taking Responsibility, and Repairing Hurt
5. The Home We Hope to Build
6. Children, Intimacy, and Our Future Together
7. What We Have Learned and Our Next Step

A Simple Way to Use This Resource

This guide supports thoughtful conversation and discernment but does not replace qualified premarital counseling or other professional care when serious concerns are present.

Read — Reflect — Talk Together — Pray

Read each conversation and spend a little time with its questions before you meet. Make a few notes if that helps. For Conversation 2, complete the Personal Character Assessment in Appendix A and bring your responses.

The questions are conversation starters. Follow what they bring to the surface. You may spend an evening with one question or return to something later. Take turns, give each other room to finish, and stay curious about what you are hearing.

Privacy Note

This page does not collect, store, or transmit your answers. Any responses you write or print remain with you.

Choose a pace that gives you room to think and enjoy being together. Before you finish, share something you appreciate about each other, consider any next step, and pray. The printable version provides space for notes, or you may prefer a separate notebook.

If you are already married, begin wherever the discussion feels most timely. Adapt questions about preparation to the life you share now.

I encourage you to invite a mature Christian couple to walk with you—people you know, whose marriage you respect, and who listen

well. Their experience and perspective can enrich your discussions. Look for people who are honest about their own growth and willing to share what they have learned.

When Additional Support May Be Wise

Some concerns deserve care from someone with appropriate training and experience. Abuse, addiction, trauma, persistent dishonesty, uncontrolled anger, or significant health concerns may call for professional support alongside pastoral care. Legal or financial complications may also require specific advice.

If you are afraid to speak honestly because of your partner's anger, control, threats, or retaliation, seek confidential individual support before continuing these discussions together. Allow serious concerns the time and attention they deserve. Honoring someone includes recognizing when a situation needs more care than a resource like this can provide.

Conversation 1: Marriage as a Covenant Before God

When Denise and I met, our shared love for Christ gave us common ground. We had each placed our desire for marriage in His hands. As we grew closer, we wanted to understand whether He was leading us to build a life together.

I loved being with Denise. I enjoyed her friendship and wanted to share life with her. Scripture speaks of finding a wife as finding something good and receiving favor from the Lord. I have experienced marriage as a wonderful gift from God.

Marriage begins with a promise made before God and to one another. That covenant gives a lasting foundation to friendship, intimacy, service, and the ordinary days a husband and wife share. Denise and I wanted Christ at the center of that life. Our faith has given us a place to return when we see things differently or face circumstances we do not understand.

Scripture speaks of marrying “in the Lord” and warns believers about being unequally yoked. If you are preparing for marriage and one person follows Christ while the other does not, I believe you should pause and seek wise pastoral counsel. Two Christians may also come from different churches, hold different convictions, or express their faith differently. Talk about those differences, including where you hope to worship and how you want to grow in the Lord together. If you are already married, seek support for living faithfully within the covenant you have made.

Denise and I also agreed on safeguards that helped us wait until marriage for sexual intimacy. We wanted to honor God, each other, and the promise we were preparing to make.

If sexual intimacy has already become part of your relationship, you can make a fresh commitment to wait. Seek God’s forgiveness and agree on safeguards that support that decision. If pressure or harm has been involved, seek confidential individual support.

Genesis 2:18–24; Proverbs 18:22; Malachi 2:14; Matthew 19:4–6; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:21–33

Questions for Your Conversation

1. What does making a marriage covenant before God mean to me?
2. How would I describe my relationship with Christ, and what do I hope our shared life with Him will become?
3. What differences in our beliefs, church backgrounds, or spiritual practices would I like us to understand more fully?
4. What boundaries and practices would help us honor God and each other as we prepare for marriage?

Conversation 2: The Person I Am Becoming

The promise we make in marriage is carried by the people we are becoming. The way we tell the truth, keep commitments, handle pressure, and treat others will shape the life we share.

Getting to know each other allows us to see many good qualities in each other. Spend time around each other's friends and families and, where possible, see something of each other's working life. Notice how the person you love treats a parent, a coworker, or someone serving a meal. Pay attention to what happens when plans fall apart or disappointment comes. Those experiences give you opportunities to know one another more deeply.

Our counselor listened to our answers and watched how we lived. She noticed whether our words matched our choices and whether we were willing to face the places where we needed to grow. Her questions sometimes brought things to the surface that we had not recognized ourselves.

We are all still growing. Sanctification is a lifelong process. After thirty-eight years of marriage, I continue to discover things about myself that need God's attention. Humility, honesty, and a willingness to receive correction have served us throughout that journey.

The assessment in Appendix A gives you a way to share what you have observed. Notice strengths as well as differences in your ratings. Ask about the experiences behind those responses. A recurring concern—such as dishonesty, uncontrolled anger, or refusal to accept responsibility—deserves thoughtful attention and, when needed, outside counsel.

Questions for Your Conversation

1. What did I notice when we compared how we rated ourselves and each other?

2. What do I appreciate about your character, and where have I seen it in everyday life?
3. What difference in our observations would I like to understand better?
4. Where do I see a need for growth in my own life, and how am I responding to it?

Conversation 3: The Stories and Relationships We Bring

Marriage brings two family stories into a new home. We carry memories, traditions, loyalties, and ways of relating that began long before we met. During our preparation, Denise and I spent as much time as we could with each other's families. We wanted to know the people who had helped shape us.

Before I asked Denise to marry me, I spoke first with my father and mother. Then I had the same discussion with Denise's parents. I told them, "I am asking for more than your permission. I want your blessing. If you cannot give it, I will receive that as a reason from God to wait." Their blessing mattered to me before we entered into a covenant together.

Once we married, Scripture's call to leave father and mother and be joined to one another became very practical. We continued to love, honor, and bless our parents. Under God, we now gave first priority to each other. We welcomed their counsel and accepted responsibility for making the final decisions for our own home.

Friendships also find their place within that shared life. Good friends, family, mentors, and a church community can bring great strength to a marriage. Together, you will learn how to nurture those relationships while protecting the attention, loyalty, and privacy your

marriage needs. That takes discussion and adjustment as circumstances change.

Sharing your past also calls for wisdom. Trust and understanding grow over time. You can speak honestly about experiences that affect your life together without recounting every painful detail. If something still has a hold on you, seek wise pastoral care, prayer, and appropriate professional support. Anything that could affect your future spouse's health, trust, or shared responsibilities deserves honest attention before marriage.

Genesis 2:24; Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 15:22

Questions for Your Conversation

1. What experiences in my family have most shaped the way I relate to those closest to me?
2. What would I like you to understand about my story as our trust grows?
3. What counsel or blessing have I received, and how am I weighing it?
4. How can we nurture our relationships with family and friends while giving our marriage first priority?

Conversation 4: Listening, Taking Responsibility, and Repairing Hurt

Being best friends has given Denise and me a foundation for working through differences. We knew we wanted good for each other. When we disagreed, we wanted to reach a good decision together. I still reacted at times, failed to listen, or assumed I understood her motives. I am still learning to slow down and hear what she is actually saying.

During one of our premarital meetings, our counselor raised something about me that I did not want to see. I became defensive and walked out. After God dealt with my heart, I returned with flowers, apologized, and took responsibility for my part. Even when I believed I was 95 percent right, I needed to own my 5 percent. That lesson has followed me through marriage and leadership. I explore it further in the chapter on ownership in *Lighthouse Leadership*.

Listening means giving the other person room to finish and seeking to understand. I am still learning to ask Denise whether she wants to think through a solution or simply wants me to listen. Hearing her heart makes a difference. So does remembering the good I know about her before deciding what she meant.

Honor has meant learning to celebrate the treasure in Denise and give grace where she is still growing. She has done the same for me. One way I recognize progress in my own life is how quickly I return after reacting. Am I still brooding for days, or am I beginning to recognize my part and remember that my best friend wants what is good for me? Some hurts take longer to heal. We keep learning how to take responsibility, ask forgiveness, and rebuild trust where it has been damaged.

Denise later carried these lessons into our family through the Peacemaking Couch. Our children learned to explain what happened, listen to each other's hearts, take responsibility, ask forgiveness, and pray together. We wanted to address little hurts before offense took root. Denise tells that story and describes the process we learned in *When Relationships Are Wounded*.

Questions for Your Conversation

1. What tends to happen in me when I feel hurt or misunderstood?
2. What helps me feel heard, and what am I learning about listening to you?

3. When we disagree, what helps me recognize my part and come back and talk?
4. What would I like us to understand or repair so we can move forward with greater trust?

Conversation 5: The Home We Hope to Build

Most of marriage is lived in ordinary days. Money, work, meals, household responsibilities, church, rest, and time together gradually shape a home. The pastor who married us told Denise and me to be “at war to outserve each other.” Over the years, we worked to make that a way of life. Serving mattered especially when we were tired, under pressure, or simply did not feel like it.

We agreed to make important decisions together—such as taking a job, moving, making a significant investment, or assuming a major financial obligation. We listened, prayed, and worked toward agreement. I describe more of our experience seeking God’s direction in *Learning to Hear God’s Voice*.

We also learned to give weight to each other’s strengths. I brought more experience in finances, repairs, and property decisions, and Denise often relied on my judgment in those areas. I learned to do the same where she had greater experience. We continued talking things through and adjusting as we grew.

Before we married, we spoke honestly about our finances and agreed on how to handle money. We entered marriage with debt and a shared plan for paying it off. We used an envelope budget, lived within our means, and worked steadily toward becoming debt-free. Our small manufactured home between two trailers in Los Alamos gave us room to pay down debt, give, and enjoy what God had provided. We loved that home. I tell more of the story in *The Freedom of Enough*.

We wanted our life together to be centered on Christ, and we worked to give our marriage the attention it needed. Raising children would become a shared priority if God entrusted them to us. We also valued our parents, our church, and our work. Those commitments helped us make choices as demands changed. Cooking, cleaning, errands, and upkeep needed attention too. We learned to notice what needed doing, discuss how to share the work, and adjust when one of us needed more support.

Prayer, Scripture reading, and life in a local church helped keep us close to God and each other. A weekly practice of repentance and Communion gave us room to let Him search our hearts and address concerns while they were small. We continued learning how to build a home where both of us could contribute, grow, and enjoy the life we shared.

Matthew 6:33; Joshua 24:15; Colossians 3:12–17

Questions for Your Conversation

1. What kind of home do I hope we will build, and how would I like to contribute to it?
2. What do I need to share about my finances, and what would help us handle money openly together?
3. How could we draw on each other's strengths and share the everyday responsibilities of our home?
4. How would I like us to make decisions when our priorities or expectations differ?

Conversation 6: Children, Intimacy, and Our Future Together

Before we married, our discussion about children was fairly simple. We talked about how many we hoped to have. Much of what we learned about parenting came later. Looking back, I believe it is worth spending more time with that subject beforehand, while allowing room for all you will discover as life unfolds.

Denise brought seventeen years of experience in early childhood education. She had training I did not have, and I learned to trust and draw on her judgment. We discussed decisions together, and her experience became a gift to our whole family.

By God's grace, we raised two remarkable children. Parenting became one of our highest priorities. It brought tremendous joy and required hard work and intentional choices. We wanted to build a foundation for many godly generations. We attended marriage and family conferences, read books, and learned from people we respected. As new situations arose, we prayed, searched His Word, listened, and talked until we could move forward in agreement.

Our friendship and the way we had learned to work through differences served us throughout those years. We kept discovering what it meant to live as one—in raising our children, caring for our home, serving others, and pursuing God's purposes together. The ability to communicate honestly and receive each other's perspective mattered in every part of that life.

Your story may unfold differently from what you expect. Infertility, miscarriage, health concerns, or other circumstances can change the future you imagined. Those experiences deserve tenderness, support, and room to grieve. A marriage without children can be full of love and purpose. Affection and sexual intimacy also deserve thoughtful discussion as you prepare. Share hopes and concerns with care, including health information or experiences that could affect your life together, and seek appropriate counsel when you need it.

Psalm 127:3–5; Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Mark 10:13–16

Questions for Your Conversation

1. What hopes do I carry about children and family life, and how might we support each other if our story unfolds differently?
2. What values would I want to bring to parenting, and what would I like to learn?
3. When we disagree about parenting or another important decision, how would I like us to work toward agreement?
4. What hopes or concerns about affection, sexual intimacy, or health would I like us to understand together?

Conversation 7: What We Have Learned and Our Next Step

As you look back over these discussions, notice what you have enjoyed discovering. Where has understanding grown? What has become easier to share? The way you have listened and responded to each other may tell you as much as the answers themselves.

At one point during our preparation, Denise and I wondered whether we should remain just friends. We were already considering a wedding date. Our counselor listened and said simply, “Then you should call it off.” We went away separately to fast and pray. Each of us came to the same conclusion: we did not want to live without each other, and we believed God was leading us toward marriage.

We returned with a deeper understanding of the covenant we were preparing to make. Having the freedom to consider the decision honestly mattered. Wedding plans can gather momentum quickly, so give yourselves room to respond wisely to what you are learning. You may be ready to move forward, or something may deserve more time and counsel.

Thirty-eight years later, I remain grateful that I married my best friend. God has used our life together to shape both of us, and He continues to do so. There have been mistakes to work through and much to celebrate.

My hope is that these conversations will give you a good beginning—or a fresh beginning in the marriage you already share. Keep seeking God, enjoying one another, receiving wise counsel, and making room to grow.

Questions for Your Conversation

1. What have I enjoyed discovering about you through these conversations?
2. What am I learning about the way we listen and work through differences?
3. What would I like to explore further, perhaps with someone we trust?
4. What next step do I believe God is inviting us to take together?

End by sharing something you are grateful for in each other and praying about what lies ahead.

Companion Resources

Learning to Hear God's Voice — Further reflection on seeking God's direction through Scripture, surrender, prayer, wise counsel, and obedience.

When Relationships Are Wounded — A deeper discussion of hurt, forgiveness, healing, and trust, including Denise's account of our family's Peacemaking Couch.

The Freedom of Enough — Our experience learning contentment, handling money, and making room for what mattered most.

Lighthouse Leadership — The chapter on ownership explores taking responsibility for our own choices, attitudes, and growth.

Appendix A: Personal Character Assessment

Complete your own copy before Conversation 2. For each statement, record one rating for yourself and one for your partner. Base your responses on what you have observed. Choose 0 when you have not seen enough to know.

When you meet, compare how you rated yourself with how your partner rated you. Then make the same comparison for your partner. Share examples where they would clarify what you mean. Pay attention to strengths, places where you see things similarly, and differences you would like to understand. Be ready to listen when your partner sees something differently, and ask what experiences led to that response.

The ratings are a starting point for discussion. Leave them as individual responses rather than adding them into a total score. They describe what you see today and may open useful conversations about growth.

If a mature couple is walking with you, invite their perspective where it would be helpful. If you feel afraid to respond honestly, seek individual support.

Rating Scale

- 0 — Not enough experience to know*
- 1 — Rarely true*
- 2 — Sometimes true*
- 3 — Usually true*
- 4 — Consistently true*

1. Shared Faith and Spiritual Direction

Shows a genuine desire to know and follow Jesus.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Engages sincerely in prayer, Scripture reading, church life, and discussions about faith.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

2. Integrity and Truthfulness

Tells the truth, including when honesty may be uncomfortable or costly.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Shares important realities that could affect a marriage with honesty and appropriate care.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

3. Humility and Teachability

Listens to correction and thoughtfully considers what was said.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Acknowledges mistakes, takes responsibility, and asks forgiveness.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

4. Responsibility and Follow-Through

Keeps commitments and follows through on responsibilities.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Owens personal choices and takes steps to address their consequences.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

5. Emotional Maturity and Self-Control

Expresses anger, disappointment, and frustration with respect.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Can pause a heated discussion and return to it with a willingness to listen.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

6. Respect and Care for Others

Treats family members, friends, coworkers, service workers, and strangers with kindness and respect.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Respects boundaries and gives others room to speak and make choices freely.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

7. Conflict, Forgiveness, and Repair

Works through disagreements honestly and respectfully.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Takes responsibility for hurt caused and participates in making things right.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

8. Stewardship and Readiness for a Shared Life

Handles money, time, work, health, and possessions responsibly.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Considers how decisions affect others and welcomes their perspective.

Myself: _____ My partner: _____

Recommended Reading

Emotionally Healthy Relationships — Peter and Geri Scazzero

Practical guidance for listening, clarifying expectations, speaking honestly, and handling conflict, with an emphasis on emotional and spiritual growth.

The Meaning of Marriage — Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller

A biblical exploration of covenant, friendship, sacrificial love, and the ways marriage can shape a husband and wife over a lifetime.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work — John Gottman and Nan Silver

A research-based complement to the Christian resources above, with practical attention to friendship, conflict, receiving each other's influence, and building a shared life.

Acknowledgments

Denise has lived these lessons with me and continues to teach me through her love, wisdom, and friendship. I am also grateful for the woman who counseled and disciplined us before marriage, and for the many mentors, pastors, authors, and conference teachers who have contributed to our family over the years. These reflections draw on that continuing journey of learning together.

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