



Dear Life Coach Alex, considering the high number of divorce in today's societies, even in the African community that was once known for strong family values, what should I pay close attention to before choosing a potential spouse?

Dear reader, thank you for asking this question. This is another very popular marriage question that I am often asked – what should I look for in a future wife or husband, how should I choose a compatible spouse to ensure a lifetime marriage?

First and foremost, let your potential spouse be attractive to you, and I just don't mean physical attraction alone. If you are planning to spend the rest of your life with him, he better be relatable to you, accommodating of you, and considerate towards you. While it is very necessary to find someone who is compatible with you, someone who is equally educated like you are, who likes sports and politics like you do, and who likes the same type of food, music, colours and fashions like you do, the topmost decision of your life should not be based on these alone, but more importantly, on the innermost being of the person.

Who is he, really? How does he think, communicate and react? What matters most to him in life? What were the childhood experiences that would have shaped his attitudes and behaviours? What does he like about you? And the answers lie within his or her heart, in his or her upbringing, and in the outlook of his or her close friends. Thus, in the words of Apostle Paul, "Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporal, but what is unseen is eternal." When seeking the person whom you wish to spend the rest of your life with, it is imperative that you pay attention to the follow 3 areas of her life:

1. His/Her Heart

The main difference between physical beauty and inner beauty is that the first is visual while the latter is experiential. Physical beauty eventually fades away, while experiences of inner beauty are lifetime memories. Therefore, date your potential spouse long enough to experience her heart, her inner beauty. Spend most of your dating time to determine her level of selflessness versus selfishness, compassion versus aggression, and determination versus laziness.

Since love often blind the lovers from reality, you should allow sufficient time for reality to be exposed so that you would be able to better determine his or her level of hospitality, servitude, openness, unity, grace and humility. There is no specific level to look out for, but rather look out the level that would work for you and your close family members and friends. If hospitality matters a lot to you, find out if it does to her. This is not a question and answer exercise, but rather you creating opportunities to determine her levels in the areas of life that matter most to you. Does she desire children like you do?

Based on your frequency of seeing each other, you should date your potential spouse (for at least) up to two years before drawing conclusions. This is because the first year of dating is always so overwhelmed with exhilarating emotions that you would barely find any questionable behaviour in each other. In addition, the heart of a person is a deep well; it requires time, patience and tact to understand it.

2. His/Her Upbringing

One reason why marriages of old lasted until death did them part was because the bride and groom spent lots of time acquainting themselves with each other's families before getting married. But these days, dating couples barely or never even meet each other's families before tying the knot! And of course, the impact is reflected in the astronomical rate of divorce in today's societies.

Not meeting each other's family is the riskiest oversight before marriage. When you take the time to get acquainted with the parents or guardians and siblings of your potential spouse, you would be able to determine if they would be able and willing to provide the necessary family support during marital trials. You would be able to better understand the beliefs, morals and values that would likely guide the decisions of your potential spouse. If your potential spouse is not self-aware, meaning if

he is not consciously aware of his thoughts, words and actions, as well as their associated impacts, then he would often treat you in the same manner that he saw his parents treat each other. If his parents are divorced, tactfully find out why without coming across as interfering in matters that do not concern you. You will learn a lot from it.

As they say, the apple does not fall far from the tree. But even if it did, does that make it an orange? Unless your potential spouse consistently fosters the humility and willpower to continuously deal with the detrimental character traits in her childhood baggage, she is a by-product of her upbringing like everyone else. If you find yourself uncomfortable with the behaviours of her parents, you will likely find yourself uncomfortable with her behaviours somewhere along the line.

3. His/Her Friends

In the words of Apostle Paul, "Don't be fooled; bad company corrupts good character". The friends of your potential spouse would end up being his special advisers in your marriage. Therefore, don't you think that it is absolutely necessary to pay close attention to them? If they are unspiritual, they can help you to build a great marriage; but if they are unspiritual, well, sooner or later your marriage may disintegrate on account of the advises that they give to her.

Before proposing to her, make sure that you are comfortable with the beliefs, morals and values of her best friends. In fact, another reason that we suggest multiyear dating before marriage is to allow you enough time to better know her friends. They do not have to be perfect, for none of us are, but they should be respectable and full of integrity – not busybodies, slanderers, gossipers and those who are full of envy, jealousy, malice, discord and the likes.

The dating period should also be used to build common friends between you and her, advisably, a mixture of younger and older married couples who would become your support group post marriage. I must add that marriage is full of challenges, especially in the earlier years, so you need a strong, spiritual support group in place before getting married to avoid you or your spouse relying on your still single friends for advices on marital matters. If her friends are always taking her side or your friends are always taking your side, their advices will be biased thereby putting your marriage at risk.

In retrospect, before choosing a potential spouse, focus on what is unseen rather than what is seen. Focus more on her heart than her academic achievements, more on her friends than her social status. Befriend the parents or guardians, listen to them very carefully, and watch how they treat each other. Make every effort to not be blinded by love but to be conscious of his inner beauty, his level of spirituality, his willingness to change. Learn to communicate in ways that both of you understand. This is key.

Attend premarital class together and learn what it really means for two of you to become one in marriage. Learn how to meet the marital expectations of companionship, support and intimacy. Do not be yoked with unbelievers, but rather worship the Lord together, fervently and consistently. Learn how to be respectful of each other, and keep yourselves pure until the knot is tied! Agree on where to buy your first home, when to start trying for children, and how many of them you would like to have.

Be open with your debts, assets, and investment plans for the future. Build a band of spiritual supporters and leverage their wisdom and knowledge as much as possible. Discuss your character traits with humility and how your strengths complement her weaknesses and her strengths, your weaknesses. Look into each other's eyes as much as possible and enjoy silence together.

Finally and most importantly, commit your desire to God and ask him to direct you. If you would pray to get a job and enough money to buy a home, you should pray harder for God to reveal your lifetime partner to you. According to the Book of Proverbs, "Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife (or husband) is from God. If you rush into marriage, sooner or later, you would be rushing out of it.

The greatest blessing is to marry a spouse that is very spiritual because spirituality is the key to having a lifetime, harmonious marriage. But then, you have to be what you desire in others. Are you spiritual?



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While all questions will be responded to by the Life Coach, yours may be the next topic for Our Life Coaching Corner!