

A Premarital Counseling Inventory Based Upon Proverbs 31

by Donald Ratcliff*

[Abstract: In an interesting and very suggestive format, Don Ratcliff has produced a helpful premarital inventory that he personally has found useful. Particularly impressive is its simplicity and the manner in which, from each verse, not only principles may be inculcated but also discussions may be encouraged. The genius of this approach and its format is that it holds the counselor and counselees to the Scripture at every point. The editor believes that the inventory would also be useful in post-marital counseling as well.]

The Scripture may be used profitably in every form of counseling, including preparation for marriage. Because the Word of God has been a source of understanding, behavior change, and decision making for centuries, its importance in premarital counseling is not to be underestimated.

In my marriage counseling I have found the suggested inventory helpful in isolating a number of key factors which allow couples to gain insight into the realistic demands of marriage as well as to estimate the maturity of the prospective mates. Too often couples enter into marriage without objective assessment of each other since the roles of the relationship before marriage are so different from those required afterward. Using the Bible as the basis for such an assessment helps to assure one that his insight is reality-based rather than the kind of superficial 'starry-eyed' understanding with which too many individuals, even Christians, begin marriage.

This inventory is taken from Proverbs, a book rich in wisdom and insight into many kinds of human problems. Proverbs contains statements on a wide variety of human relationships, and many such inventories could be developed on a number of topics.¹ Since an important goal of prenuptial counseling is objectifying the demands of marriage, this kind of inventory is particularly valuable.

Mr. Ratcliff is Assistant Professor of Psychology and Sociology at Toccoa Falls (Georgia) College.

Proverbs 31:10-31 should be read and discussed verse by verse by the counselor and counselees as they take the inventory. Preferably a recent translation should be used. A separate inventory should be completed by each counselee, evaluating both the prospective mate and self in these marriage related activities. This should occur with discussion limited first to the meaning of the question and then to the actual responses when the inventory is completed by both.

After the prospective husband and wife have finished, the results may be compared and discussed. Since the text speaks of the wife's role, the wife's self-evaluation and the husband's evaluation of his wife-to-be might be compared first. Afterward, the two evaluations of the husband-to-be can be compared and discussed. The counselor especially will want to determine the *basis* for the decision on each characteristic, i.e., both may feel one has a noble character, but what specific evidence caused each to assume that such noble character exists? If a lack is indicated in a characteristic, the counselor could discuss how that lack would surface within the marriage relationship.

Differences between evaluations should be noted, particularly for consistently low self-evaluations and consistently high evaluations of the future spouse. The complementary effects of a lack in one spouse and presence in the other also might be considered, although differences might suggest areas of future conflict. These should be discussed, with emphasis upon long-range relationships and how these differences in evaluations could affect the marriage over the years.

This particular form is not, of course, exhaustive of biblical content regarding marriage but can be a good beginning for further Bible analysis of the marital partners. Additional items from other passages might be added, although these might be considered more informally after the initial assessment. Some verses on subjects such as divorce and remarriage should be phrased according to the counselor's biblical understanding of these issues. After considering the verses in Proverbs, the couple generally will understand the approach and continue the assessment with other verses without need of formal test items.

The reader is granted permission to copy this inventory as needed for his or her counseling ministry.

¹This clue might be followed up by readers [Ed.]

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| 21 | able to provide comfort for family | _____ | _____ |
| 23 | builds up spouse, not tearing down the other | _____ | _____ |
| 24 | able to support family in case of death of spouse | _____ | _____ |
| 25 | has dignity | _____ | _____ |
| 25 | basically happy and optimistic | _____ | _____ |
| 28 | praises accomplishments of spouse | _____ | _____ |
| 30 | fully devoted to God | _____ | _____ |
| 31 | receives praise from family and others | _____ | _____ |