

Are You Ready for Marriage?

Bishop Clarence B. Harris · An excerpt from *Divine Order*

Executive Summary

PURPOSE

A biblical, historical, sociological, and psychological guide to help Christians make wise, God-centered decisions before entering marriage. The author argues that choosing a spouse is one of the three most consequential decisions a person will ever make — alongside choosing to serve God and choosing a pastor.

CORE THESIS

Marriage is not merely a romantic or social arrangement — it is a spiritual covenant modeled on God's relationship with His church. As such, being "equally yoked" in faith, doctrine, and spiritual maturity is the non-negotiable foundation of a healthy marriage. Love is framed as an act of the will, not an emotion, requiring commitment, patience, and ongoing choice.

"It takes more than love to make a successful marriage ... it takes commitment, willful consent, patience, forgiveness, resisting pride, and the honoring of one's vows."

KEY WARNINGS

The author identifies several patterns that increase the risk of marital failure:

- **Unequal yoking:** Marrying outside one's faith or doctrinal alignment
 - **Premarital sex / cohabitation:** Dramatically raises the statistical risk of divorce
 - **Dead-end relationships:** Pursuing incompatible partners wastes time and causes lasting emotional damage
 - **Unresolved trauma:** Childhood abuse, sexual violation, or addiction must be addressed before marriage
 - **Decision under pressure:** Rushing due to loneliness, age anxiety, or desperation leads to poor mate selection
-

THE 10-KEY COMPATIBILITY FACTORS

The book introduces a scored compatibility framework. Each of the first 7 areas carries up to 10 points based on similarity; items 8-10 are penalty deductions. The more factors a couple shares, the higher their probability of success.

Core compatibility areas (up to 10 pts each):

1. Religious background and doctrine
2. Educational attainment
3. Economic and social background
4. Racial and cultural heritage

5. Childhood experiences and family of origin
6. Parents' marriage model
7. Cultural traditions and expectations

Penalty factors (deductions if applicable):

8. (-) Stepchildren involved
9. (-) Sexual compatibility and health history
10. (-) Prior divorce or serial relationships

COMPATIBILITY SCORE BENCHMARKS

100 pts Perfect alignment	75 pts Average — 5-7 sessions	< 60 pts High risk — 7-10 sessions
-------------------------------------	---	---

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

The author recommends a minimum of 10 hours of premarital counseling, six months to one year before the wedding. Couples are urged to vet each other thoroughly — including background checks if warranted — observe how each partner relates to their family of origin, and prioritize becoming individually whole in Christ before seeking a spouse.

BOTTOM LINE

Preparation, not passion, is the author's central prescription. A person should focus on becoming their best self spiritually and emotionally before marriage, choose a partner with clear eyes and sound doctrine, and build the marriage on a shared covenant with God — not feelings alone.