

STEPS AND STAGES IN PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

Adapted from a talk by the Rev. Prescott Rogers

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Today’s topic is preparation for marriage. To begin your reflection on this topic, read the story of Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 29:1-20. This is a beautiful story about a young man who is ready for marriage searching for a wife. He was willing to search far and wide for the right person. When he found that person, he kissed her and wept for joy because he had found something so precious. She received his love, and he was welcomed into her home.

Steps You Can Take to Prepare for Marriage

1. **READ:** The first thing to do is to read the Lord’s Word for yourself. Every time we hear the Lord’s Word and think about what it says, the Lord draws near to us. And the Lord is the source of all love, including the love that is in marriage.
2. **PRAY:** The second thing we can do is to pray for true marriage love. The Lord gives us what we truly want (if it is a good thing) and the more we want something, the more He provides it for us. True marriage love, the love between an angelic husband and wife, can be given to people on earth if they pray for it.
3. **LOVE:** The third thing we can do is to love other people. We cannot learn to love the person who we will marry unless we learn to love other people in general. Getting better and better at loving others prepares us to develop a special love for one special person.
4. **OBSERVE:** The fourth thing we can do is to observe love in others. Look at people who are happily married and see how they love each other. Such people can be models and mentors for us, giving us a glimpse of something that we want for ourselves.
5. **SHUN EVILS:** The fifth thing we can do is to shun or turn away from all evils that oppose and harm marriage. Things that oppose marriage include those that make fun of it or make it seem less important and sacred, especially lust for more than one person.

Stages of Preparing for Marriage

The state of betrothal may be likened to a state of spring preceding summer, and the inner enjoyments of that state to the flowerings of trees before their production of fruit.... [T]he beginnings and progressions of true marriage love [must] develop in sequence in order for them to flow into the fruitful love which begins with the wedding... (Conjugal Love 301).

Searching for the right person at the right time is critical because there are stages in the preparation and the seeking of true marriage love. Let's look at the process of growing a special fruit tree as an analogy.

1. **SEEDS:** If you begin by planting just one seed and expect that it is going to be the perfect tree, you will probably be disappointed. So it is important to get to know a variety of people. Spending time with various people—"dating"—is like planting different seeds and watching them all grow.
2. **GROWTH:** As the seeds grow, you select one because you see that this tree has more potential than any other to become truly special, to become what you are working toward. So you nurture that tree and take care of it. You love it, and it grows and grows. That is like courtship, where you single out one person to spend time with.
3. **BLOSSOMS:** When you are ready to say, "This is the special tree I was praying for; this is the special tree I really wanted," then you make an even stronger commitment to the care of that tree. That is like becoming engaged. This commitment is further strengthened by betrothal. Then the tree blossoms.
4. **FRUIT:** That same commitment is firmly established to eternity at the wedding. Then you watch the relationship produce magnificent fruit. This is the very purpose for which the tree exists. This is goal of all the labor that has gone into selecting and nurturing one special tree. You rejoice and almost weep for joy because you see how wonderful that tree is.