

CHARACTER TRAITS TO LOOK FOR IN A POTENTIAL SPOUSE

The following characteristics are essential to make a marriage. You can't expect a twenty-two-year-old to possess all of them in their full mature form, but you should see the foundations of these elements. The degree to which they are not present is the degree to which you'll have difficulty building intimacy with this person and the degree to which you're going to struggle in the early years of marriage.

1. **Is Humble:** Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking less *about* yourself. It is someone who, like Jesus, believes he has come "not to be served, but to serve." A humble person is someone who has experienced and is experiencing conviction of sin: they are aware that they fall short, every day, and that they have much to work on, and biblical grace is the only place they put their hope.
2. **Is Able to Forgive:** The person recognizes his or her own need for forgiveness, understands God's love and acceptance, and not only believes the gospel but has it woven into every fiber of his or her being: we are all sinners saved by grace who depend on God's mercy and initiating grace every hour of our lives.
3. **Handles Conflict in a Healthy Way:** Because both of you stumble in many ways, you need someone who can not only forgive but can work through conflict in a healthy way. *There will be conflict.* You want to find someone humble enough to admit personal failings, wise enough to recognize yours, and courageous enough to hold his or her ground if you are acting arrogantly and refusing to see your sin.
4. **Communicates:** Intimacy is built through sharing, listening, understanding and talking through issues. If someone doesn't like to talk, refuses to talk, or resents your desire to talk, intimacy building is going to hit a stone wall.
5. **Prays:** Since marriage is something you make, and since marriage is going to be difficult, you want to marry someone who knows how to pray, practices prayer, and who is growing in prayer.
6. **Makes and Keeps Friends:** Does your future spouse have friends? You want to be with someone who is skilled at building intimate friendships, because you want them to put the same work and effort into their relationship with you.
7. **Will They be a Spectacular Parent:** You're not just choosing your future husband or wife; you're choosing your kids' future dad or mom. It's impossible for you to imagine how much you'll love your children; they will pull emotions out of you that you didn't even know you had. And on the day you bring them home, you'll be so glad you picked someone who will be a fantastic parent, or you'll grieve that they have to put up with someone who is neglectful or, even worse, abusive.
8. **Are They a Giver or a Taker:** The sad reality is, some people are givers and some people are takers. Givers don't always mind being in a relationship with a taker because they *like* to give; it brings them joy. But marriage is a long journey and there will eventually be seasons when the giver needs to receive. In those instances, can your taker learn to give? In most cases, sadly, the answer is no. When a taker has to give, he feels sorry for himself even more than he feels empathy for you. "Ask yourself, when you spend time with your partner, do you feel drained or invigorated?" suggests Gary Thomas, *The Sacred Search Study Resource* DVD. "Would you describe the relationship as healing and supportive, or exhausting and combative?"

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