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## Too Young to Marry?

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## Too Young to Marry?

### Abstract

"Take time to listen to the family, friends, and faith community that will support you—now, and, if you marry, throughout your lives together."

Posting about readiness for marriage from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/too-young-to-marry/>

### Keywords

In All Things, marriage, age, couples, covenant theology

### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# Too Young to Marry?

 [allthings.org/too-young-to-marry/](http://allthings.org/too-young-to-marry/)

Leah Zuidema

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I was 19, he was 22. We got married. We've stayed married. We're glad we did.

Now we have teenagers, and one teases us that she'll marry at 19. She laughs as we cringe. Sometimes, I can't help but give her a little sermon: "You're right: we were young. I'm not sure we realized what we were getting into. It worked out, but that was by God's grace, not because we had it all figured out."

Do I want my children married at 19? Probably not. But a good marriage [takes a lot more than starting out at the "right" age](#).

When we worry about couples getting married "too young" (or "too late in life" or "with such a difference between her age and his"), we are often worrying about bigger things. Not only: *Will they have a good marriage?* But also: *Does each of them know who they are and what they want? Will both of them be able to follow their dreams, achieve their goals, meet their potential?*

Look again at those last two questions. They can easily take on a selfish tinge, defining a "good marriage" as a relationship that gets me what I want and gets you what you want—without compromises, complications, distractions, or sacrifice. It's an unrealistic view to bring to marriage, at any age. But even when those questions are asked with an eye toward mutual benefit for each spouse, they can be problematic. They can make an idol of "us" and "what we want" instead of considering how the marriage helps the couple to love the Lord wholeheartedly and love their neighbors as themselves.

So instead of asking, "Are we old enough (or young enough, or close enough in age) to get married?" perhaps couples considering marriage should ask these questions:

1. What is a good marriage?
2. How will our ages influence what our marriage will be like?
3. How will we know when we're ready for marriage?

## What's a good marriage?

A good marriage changes both partners. We enter a covenant relationship, serving God and neighbor together as well as individually. Keeping our vows—to submit to one another and to God as long as we both shall live—means that we change together. It means that "who we really are" takes on new dimensions, including not only self, but also spouse, and perhaps children. Our [calling](#) before God becomes not only *my* calling and *your* calling, but also *our* calling. It requires that we persistently, creatively, and simultaneously seek out how to help each other be who God calls us to be—in our marriage, in our families, in the church, in our work, in our communities. Some couples, by God's grace, figure out from day 1 that *covenant* and *calling* before God are two essentials to a good marriage—despite their young ages. Others never seem to get there—despite their "mature" ages.

## So does age matter?

Of course. In recent years, I've teased my own parents: "What were you thinking, letting me get married at 19?" I know their reply before I ask. "Would you have listened if we'd said *no*?" Probably not. We all laugh.

At the time, though, my parents were not unconcerned. They knew that my fiancé was God-fearing and loving, and that our personalities and interests complemented each other well. But I was 19. So my dad said something that he

probably would not have said if I had been a few years older: “Make sure that she finishes her education.”

It might sound like an individualistic concern—the kind of worry that I flagged earlier ( *Make sure she gets what she wants, achieves her potential, realizes her dreams*). I think that it was actually related back to calling and a covenant view of marriage. You see, my dad had some insights into who I was and what my calling might be. He had been my teacher and principal in my early teen years, and he saw first-hand how much I loved learning and school.

He also knew that we were 19 and 22, that college was expensive, that my husband would be seeking his vocational calling, and that jobs in his field were in short supply in our area. He knew that early in our marriage, with little experience in solving adult problems, my husband and I would have to be creative and patient in order to respond to our individual and shared callings. He knew that to have a lasting marriage that flourished—a committed covenant relationship before God—we would probably have to work through some difficult decisions and conversations. My dad was helping us to see one of the challenges we would have to address. Had we married a few years later, he might have identified other questions for us to think about.

### **Are you ready for marriage?**

I’m no expert on knowing when is the right time to marry, or how to know that you’ve found the right person. But it seems wise that for one of the biggest decisions of your life, you would take time to listen to the family, friends, and faith community that will support you—now, and, if you marry, throughout your lives together. Include your pastor, who may be able to offer you premarital counseling sessions or point you to someone trained to do so. Use those conversations to assist you in your discernment process. (Ideally, you would do this *before* you finalize and announce your engagement.) These sessions can help you to explore how well you and your beloved share a commitment to covenant and calling, and to lay groundwork for a good marriage. Seek the wisdom of people who desire to see both of you flourish, asking them to help you consider how your circumstances, including your ages, could influence the challenges, opportunities, joys, and responsibilities that you will navigate together....now and for as long as you both shall live.