

were you
raised
by wolves?

and seven other
crucial questions
to ask the one
you just
might
marry

TOBEN HEIM

 Kregel
Publications

*Where You Raised by Wolves? And Seven Other Crucial
Questions to Ask the One You Just Might Marry*

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Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Introduction | 0 |
| 1. Were You Raised by Wolves? <i>Families of Origin</i> | 0 |
| 2. Are You Talkin' to Me? Are You Talkin' to ME? <i>Communication</i> | 0 |
| 3. Do You Fight Dirty? <i>Conflict Resolution</i> | 0 |
| 4. Do You Take Plastic? <i>Money and Finances</i> | 0 |
| 5. Why Aren't Your Friends Normal? <i>Friendships and Community</i> | 0 |
| 6. What the Heck Is a Yoke? <i>Faith and Religion</i> | 0 |
| 7. Is "Barista" a Profession? <i>Career and Calling</i> | 0 |
| 8. Minivan or Mini Cooper? <i>Children and Family Life</i> | 0 |
| Conclusion: Are You Seeing What I'm Seeing? | 0 |

Introduction

I was nineteen years old when I got engaged. I asked Joanne to marry me when she was eighteen, the night before her high school graduation. (Don't worry, her parents have since recovered.) At the time, I thought I knew everything I needed to know about Joanne in order to make an informed decision to ask her to spend the rest of her life with me. Beyond that, I thought we both possessed the necessary stuff to produce a successful marriage. After all, we really loved each other, we had fun together, we had lots in common, and our families were similar enough to make us think that we had models in common that would serve us well.

Now, we were a bit of a unique case (as most engagements are) because we were so young. And because we spent almost two years as an engaged couple before we tied the knot. In those two years, what we didn't know about each other and about relationships became clear. Fortunately for us, we committed to working through a lot of these shortcomings before we walked down the aisle. I'd love to say that the process was easy and that we stepped into marriage and bliss followed. But the truth is, it was a lot of work. And it took consistent vigilance on our part to continue to learn and grow together.

WORK AT IT

Work is a natural part of all relationships, at almost every stage. It takes work to figure out how to be a good friend. It takes effort to be a good child to your parents or a good sibling or a good employee. It takes concerted effort in almost any relationship that counts to help it be all that it could be. Without that effort relationships grow stagnant, get stale, and sometimes even fail.

And why is that? Why aren't relationships easier? After all, God has made it clear that he desires us to live in all kinds of relationships. He wants us to live in community. He desires for us to be involved in a church, to have close friends, and to maybe even marry. But at the same time, we are hardwired to have difficulty in most of these relationships. Here's why: most of us, way down deep, are selfish. And if you want to know the source of that, well, you are going to have to go back to the fall (not the season, but the fall back in the garden of Eden). Remember that story? It takes place in Genesis 3. Eve is tempted by the serpent and eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then she takes the fruit to Adam and he does the same. In doing so they created separation from God and took on all kinds of human characteristics that stay with us to this day . . . including selfishness.

Difficulty in relationships is a real bummer. After all, if we are hardwired to desire relationships, why can't we also be wired to make them easy, rewarding, and beneficial? Well, difficulty is a reality in our lives, and that's never more evident than in our primary relationship—the one with God. You are likely familiar with the idea of the God-shaped void in our lives, and that we have a compulsion to fill that void with something, anything.

Even when we realize that God is the only one who can truly fill us up, we often continue to try and fill that void with things that will never satisfy.

So if we are hardwired to need God, but, since the fall, determined to try and replace him with something else, how much more likely is it that even though we need relationships, we will be innately unable to do them right? And the tough news is that this is especially true of our primary relationship here on Earth—the one with a potential or eventual spouse. Same reasons mentioned above apply here: our desire to serve ourselves outweighs our desire to serve another.

But there is hope! Among all that God has given us, he has blessed us with the ability to learn. We have the capacity to learn how he can come into our lives and fill that empty space. And likewise we have the ability to learn how to have a healthy, productive, and meaningful relationship with another significant person in our lives.

THE TARGET

Helping readers to have healthy, productive, and meaningful relationships is the ultimate purpose of this book. But I'll come at it from a different angle—offering you the questions instead of the answers. A number of books out there will bluntly tell you what you need to do in order to have a good relationship. I shy away from that approach, opting instead to ask questions to get you thinking about what you need to know, how you need to act, and what you need to learn to put your best foot forward in the most important earthly relationship you will experience.

Sure, there may be a little teaching along the way, but each person who reads this book is unique, so coming up with a single set of instructions won't meet everyone's needs. Yes, the end target is the same for all of us, but the way each of us get there might look a little different. So I will give you questions to consider, and a justification for why these questions are important. You can choose to answer these questions by yourself, you can go through them with a significant other, or you can tackle this content in a small-group setting. Maybe you'll want to get a journal where you can capture some of your thoughts and answers.

If you work through the book with your significant other, don't try to tackle all these topics at once. It would be overwhelming to sit down and work through this book in a weekend! That's not realistic and would put an amazing amount of strain on a relationship. Try tackling these topics one at a time over the course of a few weeks. After all, you're not in a hurry—you are learning about each other, how you're wired, and what matters to you. If you really love someone, this is a fun journey.

Keep in mind that you are going to have questions for your significant other that aren't in the book. So write down whatever additional questions you might have and ask them too. Make sure you give each other enough time to wrestle through these questions. You need to set aside a few hours of quality time so that you can really unpack the issues.

GROUND RULES

When you work through these topics and questions, make sure that you listen well—you owe your significant other that.

You can expect that they will pay you the same courtesy. After all, you're talking about important stuff here. Make sure that you ask clarifying questions so you really understand what your significant other thinks about a given topic.

Oftentimes you will get a much better and more thoughtful response if you are willing to answer questions first, even if they're not posed to you. Volunteer the information and then ask, "So, what about you?" The first person to respond sets the depth meter on the response. Say you want to ask a question about finances. If you start out by volunteering that you "have a little bit of credit card debt," you can expect a similarly shallow response. But if you go into detail about the amount of debt, the nature of it, and why you have it, it is reasonable to expect that your significant other will respond in kind. However, if you are volunteering quite a bit and your partner comes back with shallow answers to deep questions, then you have the right to push a little bit.

Some of these subjects are going to be hard for you or your significant other to talk about. For example, not everyone had a great childhood. Sometimes talking about what life was like growing up in our families is hard to do. When you run into one of these topics, take your time. Be patient. Don't push too hard. Be encouraging and gentle when you hit a sore spot. Remember that you can't expect your significant other to answer questions that you yourself are not willing to answer.

Just because topics or questions are difficult doesn't mean that they are off-limits. For example, if you are talking about faith and your significant other says something like, "That's private," that's

an unacceptable answer and requires you to gently prod to figure out what the hang-up is. Ideally, both you and your significant other will read this book and be prepared to talk about the tough stuff, but if it's just you who's reading, you might have more work cut out for you as you seek to unearth your own thoughts on these tough topics. But the reality is, if you are going to get engaged or possibly married, you deserve to have answers.

You deserve to know your significant other's thoughts on these topics because they are critical to your future and your success as an engaged or married couple. If you don't uncover potential conflicts early on, they will come up at some point in the relationship, guaranteed. You don't want to be in a serious relationship where your partner is closed off, secretive, uncooperative, or inauthentic. If you have problems discussing these topics with your significant other, don't expect a wedding ring to clear up the problem. You are going to be the same person going into a marriage as you were before the relationship got serious.

So you need to talk about the topics in this book. It may be uncomfortable to tackle issues that seem far down the road, but trust me, if you are anticipating a serious long-term relationship with the possibility of engagement and marriage, you might as well jump in with both feet.

JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

One great way to think about your relationship is that it is a journey to discovery. You have an incredible opportunity in a significant relationship to learn all sorts of things. What you may not be expecting is that you can learn all sorts of things about

yourself. So many of the questions have as much to do about how you are wired, what you are looking for, and what your needs are as they have to do with your significant other. Self-knowledge is critically important to the success of any relationship.

This book provides ample opportunity to learn about the person you are falling in love with. When you really love someone you want to know that person well, right? You want to discover what is true about them and what makes them tick. So learn about yourself and then take an adventurous spirit into your discovery of this person you care so much about.

My goal for you is simple: in considering these questions, I hope you will walk into this significant relationship with your eyes wide open, knowing what you need to discover (both about yourself and about your “other”) in order to have a great relationship, one that will stand the test of time and the travails that accompany all relationships.

A great relationship is possible, and God has given us the capacity to learn how to do it. So enjoy the questions. I hope they reveal a few things to you that maybe you hadn’t thought of before and, in that discovery, you will find a path to the happiness that can come through engagement and marriage.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS TO GET YOU STARTED

1. Do you agree that great relationships are a learned skill?
2. What do you think of the statement, “We are hardwired for self-centered relationships and other-centered ones don’t come naturally”? How have you seen this played out in your life?

3. Describe other relationships you have invested a lot of time and effort in. What have been the benefits of your investment?
4. Have you ever tried to fill your God-shaped void with anything other than God? What was the result?
5. What was something you had to work hard to learn? How might that experience of learning impact your desire to learn how to do romantic relationships right?
6. What is your expectation as you read this book? What is your desired outcome?
7. Can you identify any topics that might be challenging for you to address as a couple? What makes them so challenging?