

What Is Best Age for Marriage?

WHY so many unhappy marriages? WHY is the divorce rate increasing? What are the chances of a teen-age marriage succeeding? Is there a BEST AGE for marriage? Here are the answers, from a wealth of counseling experience.

by Herbert W. Armstrong

"I THOUGHT I couldn't live without Archi," said Gloria. "So I got my mother to sign for the license. I am 16, and Archi is 19. Of course my folks didn't want me to get married. But I threatened Mom that if she didn't sign, I'd run away or get pregnant. Now we've been married two months, and nothing is like I thought it would be.

"I thought Archi was a big, strong man. But as soon as we were married, it seems like he changed. And he was so good-looking and so nice. But now he's so afraid, such a coward. He's lost his job and doesn't know how to get another one. He says I've got to get a job and help. All of a sudden, instead of being so big and strong and handsome, he's just chicken. He's like a scared baby — a child. And he says *I'm* immature!

"Marriage isn't a bit like I supposed. I don't know just what I supposed it was — but more fun — more romance — different. The day after the wedding I knew it was all a big mistake. And it's only been getting worse. Archi's mad at me, and swears at me because I don't know how to cook; I never made a bed in my life till we were married, and then I found I didn't know how. You know how it is. My Mom did everything for me — washed my clothes, ironed them — even bought them. I never had any responsibility at home. And now all Archi and I do is fight. He scolds me because I don't know how to do anything, and he's all frustrated and says there's nothing in life to live for because he wants sex all the time, and I don't. I get mad at him, because he isn't a bit considerate, and he gets mad at me and says I'm frigid, and he's hit me a few times. He wouldn't give me any money when he had a job, and he doesn't have any

now. He leaves me alone evenings, and he runs with his boy friends; and he's even dated some old girl friends. I don't want to tell my folks what a mistake I made. What shall I do? Nothing's like I thought it would be!"

Fifty-Fifty? No, Less Than That!

What are the chances of such teen-age marriages being happy and succeeding?

They are LESS than fifty-fifty! The actual records prove it! More about that a little later.

Is there a BEST AGE for marriage? THERE IS! More about that later, also.

But first, WHY are so many marriages failing today? WHY the alarming increase in UNHAPPY marriages, broken homes, divorces?

No one reason — there are SEVERAL causes. One of the greatest is marrying TOO YOUNG! The actual RECORDS — the actual FACTS — show that slightly fewer than half of such marriages last successfully.

Primary Causes

Whatever happens, there was always a cause. There has been a cause for every effect. In the matter of unhappy and broken marriages there are many causes, but certain ones are primary and basic.

Probably the number-one cause of all is the same as the cause for all wars, and all the troubles of humanity — HUMAN NATURE!

Human nature is VANITY. Vanity is self-love — self-centeredness. Human nature is a PULL in the direction of vanity. It tends to consider *self* first, and therefore elevate the self *above* all else. This, in turn, exerts the pulls of lust, greed, envy, jealousy and hatred.

Many times I have explained that SELF is, in a larger sense, what I call empirical — that is, like an empire. It

includes what belongs to self, and that to which self feels compatibly allied.

A young man and young woman "fall in love" — or at least *think* they do — and marry. In his mind, she *belongs to him*, is allied to him and, as long as things go well, like part of him. He is the same to her.

But just as soon as things go wrong — perhaps she denies him his desires — perhaps he doesn't give her any money, or fails to be considerate — just as soon as one steps on the other's toes — then the sense of alliance is broken. Then SELF wells up *against* the other. Then the other is no longer PART of self.

Then what?

Then she says, in bitter resentment, "All men are BRUTES!"

Then he says in equally bitter and frustrated resentment, "She's a frigid woman."

In other words, just what is this thing they usually mistake for LOVE?

It is NOT really love. It is, rather, a sort of sense of being enamored — captivated (taken captive by), inflamed with passionate desire, blinded by unreasoning ardor. It is a being impassioned with anticipated rapturous delight. In plainer language, it is an aroused anticipation of what one expects to GET, RECEIVE, to HAVE from the other.

Real and *true* love is basically an OUTGOING CONCERN. It is OUT-going, not IN-coming. When it is IN-coming — as "love" falsely so-called is in almost every romance, it is in actual fact, LUST, not truly LOVE!

Regardless of the age at marriage, surely more than 99 percent of all marriages are based on this FALSE "love."

Just as long as she pleases him — as long as she gives him that delightful sense of enamorment, of luscious enjoy-

ment — he thinks he loves her deeply. In reality, he loves what he receives from her. This, in turn, gives him the feeling that she is a PART of his empirical SELF. He loves SELF — and as long as she is able to remain, in his sight, that allied part of SELF, he will feel that he is in love with her. This works both ways. As long as she is pleased with him — receiving FROM him what she desires — retaining the sense of alliance — she will feel she is in love with him.

The SELF is simply carnality. It is human nature.

What chance, then, does the average marriage have? There are more factors than this one involved. But, so long as each *receives* from the other what satisfies his or her SELF, the marriage will last.

Another basic factor has been religion. Up until World War I the religious teachings of the Western world injected a sort of in-bred conviction that marriage MUST be maintained “until death do us part.” A large portion of marriages *endured*, due to this conviction, which today would end in divorce.

Another factor, very prominent as a CAUSE today, is the economic one. Formerly women were mainly dependent on their husbands for economic security. The very factor of SELF-PRESERVATION held them to their husbands — drove them to try to “satisfy him” under circumstances in which the modern wife would rebel. Today, with so many wives being employed, being independent, they are far less impelled to satisfy their husbands against their own desires, and far more ready and willing to leave them and break up their homes. They probably weren't real HOMES, anyway, with the wife employed outside the home.

Another prominent factor is this modern “50-50” idea about “who wears the trousers.” When the husband abdicates his responsibility, the wife takes it over. Men were intended, by nature, to take the lead and the responsibility. Today, the poor hen-pecked, woman-ruled, “chicken” of a man — more mouse than man — is a ridiculous creature. Today boys grow up more like girls than he-men!

All these — and more — are CAUSES of broken families today. And they are the BAROMETER of the CRASH of civilization — the HANDWRITING ON THE WALL forecasting a death-sentence on modern society!

Of course another MAJOR cause is “the new morality” which is simply mis-naming cess-pool immorality!

When society begins to accept pre-marital sex relationships, as promiscuous as participants desire, and adultery is pronounced “good” by psychologists, and when millions “enjoy” the sport of husband-and-wife-swapping parties, marriages are bound to be breaking down — and society is sounding its own death knell!

But put all these factors together with the immaturity, the unpreparedness, the inexperience of teen marriages, and one should have little difficulty understanding that a teen marriage has less than a 50-50 chance of surviving!

A BEST AGE for Marriage?

Is there, then, a BEST AGE for marriage?

There is!

Some time ago I officiated at a wedding in stately Memorial Hall at Ambassador College in England. My next-to-youngest grandson, Richard David Armstrong II, then age two and a half, thought the ceremony so very nice, he said,

“Mommie, I want to get married!”

“Well!” answered his mother, a little shocked, a little amused, “and whom do you want to marry?”

“Karen,” replied little Dicky promptly.

“But Karen has just been married. She can't marry anybody else, now.”

“Well then,” decided Dicky, “I'll marry Sheila.” Sheila is a very nice Irish colleen, and was then a student in the college.

“But Sheila is grown up now, and in college,” protested “Mommie.” “What if she won't have you?”

“Then I'll marry you, Mommie,” came the quick decision.

Marriage Is Not for Children

We may smile at the idea of two- or three-year-olds getting married. It

would be a bit irregular! Marriage is not for children! Marriage is for ADULTS. Marriage is pretty serious business!

Marriage entails the assuming of very serious responsibilities. Children do not realize this, of course. Marriage is a lot more than romance. It is more than day-dreams about a “Prince Charming,” or floating around on cloud nineteen, or being in a lover's arms.

But when do we become adults?

Are not boys and girls adults at around age 14? No. Far from it! Let's understand WHY!

Age for Acquiring Knowledge

Human beings know *nothing* at birth. We have to learn, or be taught — EVERYTHING! Without any knowledge, or with erroneous knowledge, we are helpless — as newborn babes. But there are some things many fail to learn. One of these is the right age for marriage.

Whatever an adult knows, true or false, has come into his mind since birth.

It may sound surprising or incredible, but a person actually learns more during his first year of life than in any succeeding year. If a one-year-old baby could talk plainly with complete and adequate vocabulary, you'd be completely amazed at how much he has learned that first year!

The second year he learns a trifle less than the first, and the third year a little less than the second. Gradually, his capacity for learning decreases year by year, if only slightly. This is hard to believe for the simple reason that a two-year-old *adds* his second-year acquisition to what he learned the first year, the third to that, and so through the years his *total* store of knowledge increases continually.

But a person past 60 cannot learn something new in a field new and strange to him as readily as a young person of 22 or 23. Does this mean that a well-educated man of 60 knows less than a young man of 22? Of course not. Other things being equal, he knows infinitely more — because he has the accumulated knowledge of all those years since age 22 *added* to what he knew then — and he has learned much

by *experience*. That is one reason wisdom comes with age!

But a two-and-a-half-year-old cannot delve very deeply into the study of advanced mathematics, philosophy, nuclear fission, business administration, economics, or child rearing. He would have very different ideas on the latter than he probably will have when he becomes a parent!

The first five or six years of life are, so we believe from experience, most profitably spent in learning the basic things of infant and child learning — how to walk, talk, eat, run, and play — knowledge about lots and lots of things. The little child learns what is an automobile, an airplane. He learns about animals — many things.

He may even be taught to count, and part or all of the alphabet. However, the kind of knowledge taught in school (kindergarten excepted) seems most effectively taught beginning age 6. At this age the child can learn to write, to read, and to spell simple words. In some countries he begins to learn a second language at that age. For the next ten years he acquires gradually all the foundational elementary knowledge, and during the last two of the ten perhaps a bit of preparatory knowledge for higher education.

All these years the normal individual has been learning rapidly. There is a great deal to know before maturity, and he is not mature *yet!* Of course, by age 16, the juvenile may think he *knows it all*. Many, in their own minds, know more than Dad or Mom. You see, what they do not yet know, they don't *know* what they don't know! But there is still much to learn.

But by age 16 the average normal young person of good mind is ready to *begin* a little more advanced study into more solid fields.

When Bodies Mature

But along in these early and mid-teen-age years, usually 12 to 14, the physical body suddenly speeds up its growth and development. The teen-ager at this point sprouts up much taller within a single year, with *bodily* changes from child to man or woman.

Suddenly the young person feels "grown-up" — adult. He usually does

not realize that at this stage the body makes a rather sudden leap toward maturity, *while the mind makes no corresponding advance!* The mind continues on at only the same year-to-year *gradual* development. *The mind is still more child than adult.* Its interests are still mostly "having fun," games, entertainments. Sexual maturity is suddenly reached, long in advance of mental, emotional and spiritual maturity.

A human being is not a mere body. The married state needs maturity of mind, emotions, and spiritual qualities as much as physical adulthood.

A boy or girl is physically able to become a father or mother years before he or she is qualified to assume the *responsibilities* of parenthood.

But, suddenly becoming taller and physically developed, the boy or girl *feels* mature. A new awareness of the opposite sex is present. What the child of this age does not yet know, I repeat, he usually fails utterly to realize.

The attraction of the other sex acts as a magnet. The girl dreams of her Prince Charming, desire is awakened in the boy to hold an attractive girl in his arms.

The girl often falls in love with love, a certain boy being the focal point of her fantasy. Of course she only sees this particular boy as she imagines him to be, not as he really is. She is dead sure she is in love. And no one can awaken her from this entrancing dream. There are many facts of reality about this puppy-love affair of which she is totally unaware.

But, again, what she doesn't know that her parents see so plainly, she simply doesn't know that she doesn't know! She simply has to outgrow it! The very *fact* that she is not mature enough to recognize her immaturity is proof that she is still too immature for marriage.

At this stage, the parents have a problem on their hands, and need great wisdom to deal properly with it.

I repeat, marriage is not for children.

The Preparatory Years

But when does a child become an adult? When is one ready for marriage?

Marriage is in itself a career. One is not ready to enter upon any profession

or career until after full preparation. This *preparation* may be divided, roughly, into three stages. First, that of infancy, preparing the child for school. Second, elementary and preparatory schooling prior to, thirdly, more advanced education and specialized training for the adult life's work.

There are really three stages, roughly, of mental development that parallel these stages of preparation. First, the change from babyhood to boy- or girlhood around age six. Then the mind as a rule has absorbed enough elementary and semi-mature knowledge by age 16 to *begin* more mature thinking and learning. Age 16 is a crucial year in mental development.

Prior to age 16 the average youth has little awareness of the seriousness of life, or world conditions, of human problems or the purposes of life. In our American public school system, he enters senior high school, or the last two years of preparatory school at about this age.

But the mind does not really mature, on the average, until age 25. At age 25 a more definite adulthood of mind, attitude, interests, is reached. The mind becomes more "set" in its ways.

The years between ages 16 and 25 are the *vitally important* years of adult preparation for life's work. These are the *crucial* years of *PREPARATION*. During these years the mind is capable of *acquiring* faster than at any other stage of life the advanced knowledge needed *before beginning* one's adult career — whether it be business, profession, occupation, or marriage. Before age 16 the mind has not acquired the basic elementary knowledge needed as a foundation for entering more advanced study — and the mind has not developed in serious comprehension to the level of advanced knowledge. After age 25, the mind which has stagnated since age 16 finds it difficult to enter upon more mature study.

Before age 16 the mind simply is not mature. At age 16 it is merely prepared to *begin* acquiring the more mature *preparation* for either career, business, or marriage.

It should be borne in mind I am speaking of average ages. There are, of course, exceptions to all rules — but in

my experience about 99 in 100 follow this pattern.

Another stage of maturity seems to be reached at about age 30. I have noticed that, although most young people reach a certain mental maturity at age 25, a far more complete maturity of mind, personality, performance, and influence on others is reached at age 30.

By age 30 the man or woman has added five years of practical *experience*, in addition to further study, to the preparatory knowledge and final reaching of mental maturity attained at 25. Prior to 25, the young man is often called just that — “young man” — by older men. I can remember how, in my carnal preconversion vanity, I smarted under being spoken to as “young man” by business executives I dealt with. This expression simply meant they did not accept me, yet, as a fully mature man, and I knew it.

Somehow, the vanity in a young man of 18 and older makes him want to be considered *mature* — as a completely adult, fully experienced MAN. He wants to be considered older than he is. But as soon as young women are past 20 to 25, female vanity usually causes them to want to be considered *younger* than they are!

The Right Age for Marriage

The fact that man attains a more complete maturity of personality, leadership and influence by age 30 seems fully recognized by the Eternal God. In ancient Israel the Levites were ordained to full priesthood at age 30 — although they were put into physical *service* at age 20.

Jesus Christ, our Example, did not begin His active ministry until age 30. All years prior to that were years of learning and preparation.

Yet in ancient Israel men *began* actual service, adult work, and even military service, at age 20. This, however, does not mean that they were fully and completely educated at that age. Actually, their first years of service were those of apprenticeship — training, preparation. They probably were not accounted fully prepared for adult responsibilities until 25, though the exact facts are not given.

Apparently God has not given spe-

cific and direct instruction or command as to the proper age for marriage. God did not even count people in the census, as adults, until age 20. While there appears to be no punishable prohibition against marriage prior to age 20, there is every indication that on God's instruction juveniles were considered children until 20. At 20 they were considered “of age.” *This by no means implies they were expected to marry by age 20!* Rather that they were expected not to marry *until* at least 20 — OR MORE!

Based on actual experience, my judgment — and I think it is sound judgment guided and approved by God — is that until out of the “teens” a boy or girl is too young to marry! And it is also my judgment — and I think it is sound and approved by God — based on lifelong experience counseling on marriage problems of hundreds of people — that even 20 is too young to be *the best age for marriage*.

Two factors are the major causes of broken marriages, or of unhappy problem marriages, in the hundreds of cases that have come to me for advice and counsel: sex ignorance and marriage prior to age 20. Quite often these two are merged in the same case. A majority of all unhappy or broken marriages that have been brought to my attention were those of people *who married too young!*

Only too well I know that teen-agers who *think* they are in love will not listen or heed. *That very FACT proves* they are too young for the responsibilities of marriage. Marriage is so much *more* than romance, necking, love-making and immature emotional bliss. Thousands of young people have gone ahead heedless, and been sadly disillusioned to learn that lesson TOO LATE!

But in my judgment, except in rare cases or circumstances, even twenty is too early an age for marriage. I can only give my judgment. But it is based on experience. It is based on facts and knowledge. It is based on what Biblical revelation God has given us. It is based on hundreds of case histories.

But here it is, and young people will

do well to heed it — and later be glad they did! The *best* age for a man to marry is around 24 to 26, after he has devoted those *top aptitude years* between 16 and 25 for mature education, experience, and preparation — *after* he has acquired the knowledge, preparation and preliminary experience to assume adult responsibilities — *after* he is able to assume the responsibility of supporting a wife — and family! And the *best* age for a girl to marry is between 23 and 25, when she has utilized those top aptitude years for preparation, and is prepared to assume the *duties* of wifehood and motherhood — the responsibilities of planning, decorating, arranging a home, keeping it, and being a help and inspiration to her husband.

I sincerely believe, in view of what God has developed, that He brought about circumstances and influences to shape my early life, and also my wife's, as a preparation for a very great worldwide Work He willed to accomplish. I believe I was steered and guided by His unseen Hand in ways I did not realize then. And Mrs. Armstrong and I were married when we were both 25. We were mature enough to assume the responsibilities.

Our marriage was *happy*, and blest beyond words to describe. And, during all those years during which God blest us with four fine children, equally fine sons- and daughters-in-law, and eleven fine grandchildren, our marriage continued to be happy beyond words to describe. In fact it was happier after age 70 than ever before, because it had grown constantly more and more happy. WHAT A BLESSING!

Wouldn't you like yours to be equally so? Then heed! Use wisdom! □

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