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12 QUESTIONS EVERY FATHER SHOULD ASK HIS FUTURE SON-IN-LAW

BY GREG SMALLEY 📅 DECEMBER 21, 2021

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What questions should you ask a young man who wants to marry your daughter? Answers to these 12 big, important, overarching questions might hold the key to your daughter's future happiness.

Your daughter's boyfriend has asked you for her hand in marriage. What questions should you ask him before giving your blessing? Listen as Dr. Greg Smalley discusses this topic: [Asking the Right Questions of Your Child's Future Spouse](#).

Murphy isn't just my daughter: She's my princess.

I knew it the day she was born. I took her in my arms and rocked her. I looked into her eyes. And in that nanosecond, I knew I'd do anything and everything I could to protect her. Always.

I was the first man in Murphy's life, and over the years we've experienced plenty of "firsts." Her first birthday party. Her first bloody knee. Her first day of school. Her first broken heart. I've watched my little princess grow into a beautiful, godly young woman.

And then, before I knew it, I was faced with another first: a young man asking me if he can make my princess his queen.

Jordan asked for my permission before he even proposed — a wonderful gesture. But when he posed the question, I was filled with a jumble of emotions: happiness, gratitude and, yes, a little sadness. I also remembered that very first moment with Murphy — when I knew I'd do anything to protect her. And that included asking Jordan some very tough questions.

But what do I ask? It's not like fathers or mothers are handed a set of questions in the maternity ward to ask a future son-in-law. We're not given a standardized pamphlet. In [Ephesians 5:32](#), the Apostle Paul calls this union between husband and wife "a profound mystery."

And of course, it is. The bonding of two souls together will always be mysterious. But the questions you ask beforehand don't need to be. Whether you're the parent, grandparent, sibling, extended family member, mentor or close friend of this potential bride-to-be, I want to help take the "mystery" out of what to ask the man asking for her hand.

Before you open this critical conversation with this young man, you should — if possible — talk with three people.

The bride-to-be

Make sure she has peace about the young man. Does she want to marry him? Does she have any concerns? Does she feel tense, confused, uneasy or pressured to get engaged? You want to know that she's paying attention to her *gut* and feels that getting married is the right decision.

If she feels she's ready, ask her to put those emotions on paper and write what I call a "blessing letter" to her boyfriend.

Murphy's letter to Jordan unpacked her own journey, from being a prayerful little girl to a purposeful young woman — one who spent years wondering what her future husband would be like. "You're the one. You are the man that I've prayed for relentlessly throughout my life," Murphy wrote.

She continued:

You are everything that I have ever wanted and so much more than I ever thought I could find. Falling in love with you has been the greatest adventure of my life and getting to be your wife will be my greatest honor. I want to spend the rest of my life laughing, crying, and growing old right next to you. I choose you. Forever.

Your daughter's mother

Many women seem to have an incredible intuition for people. They can often sense underlying issues — especially when it comes to someone's character and maturity. It's uncanny how they can discern deception and manipulation in ways that men often fail to notice. What does *she* think about this young man? Does she support this engagement? Does she have any concerns? Accept her influence, and if she raises some issues, discuss them with the man when you talk with him.

And if she doesn't have serious concerns, ask her to write a letter of blessing, too. My wife, Erin, wrote one to Jordan, offering her unconditional support:

I wanted you to know that I 100% give you my blessing in asking for Murphy's hand in marriage. I see what a good fit you are for our daughter and that not only are you good for her — but she is also good for you. I love how you care for one another and how you love one another. I love your sense of humor and that you fit right into our family. I especially love that you have loved not only our daughter, but also our entire family.

His parents

Even if your family is on board, is his? You want to make sure they are. What do they think of your daughter? Do they support this engagement? Do *they* have any concerns? If they do, pay attention and discuss these issues with your daughter's potential fiancé.

If his parents are not in the picture, ask him for the name of his pastor, mentor or a close friend — someone he trusts and confides in, and someone who knows him well.

If daughter, mom and his parents all offer their blessings, you're ready to talk with the young man.

The questions

When Jordan asked for my blessing, I wanted to anchor our talk in something memorable. This conversation was too important to have over the phone.

Jordan and I hiked up to an alpine lake in the mountains of Colorado. It was a perfect place to fish and talk. Plus, I figured if I didn't like what he had to say, I could always just, literally, tell him to jump in a lake. (Just kidding.)

But I wasn't going to leave this important conversation to chance. I had 12 questions I wanted to ask. And I brought a printout of them for quick reference.

If you want a list of questions for reference while you're having the conversation, you can [download a printable version of just the questions](#).

You can also [jump to a list of just the questions](#) at the bottom of this article.

Here's what I asked:

1. Are you united spiritually?

God isn't a matchmaker. He doesn't oversee the e-Heavenly dating service. There is no such thing as a soul mate or "The One" – the ideal person God picked just for you. Although [1 Corinthians 7:39](#) is talking about second marriages after a woman is widowed, it suggests we have free will when selecting a mate. But [the NIV translation of that verse](#) also goes on to say, "He must belong to the Lord." In [2 Corinthians 6:14](#), Paul stresses again that marriage partners must be "equally yoked." In other words, God expects Christians to marry other Christians.

This is the reason you want to understand this young man's relationship with the Lord, so ask some follow-up questions:

- Has he accepted Christ as his Savior?
- Is he pursuing a daily relationship with Christ?
- Is he a Christian but fallen away from his faith?

Don't be afraid to ask deep, even nosy, questions: He wants to marry your daughter, after all. You have a *right* to be nosy. "Have you had times where you felt [distant from God](#)?" you might ask. "How did you handle that season?" Or "What has God been teaching you lately?" "[What church will you attend](#) after you're married?"

Don't panic if the answer isn't just what you'd like to hear. Sometimes, our walks of faith can be pretty bumpy. When I asked Jordan this question, I really appreciated that he talked about God being his top priority and walked me through his testimony. I'm so grateful that he has a passion to love and serve the Lord.

If this man isn't a Christian, tell him that you have serious concerns about him and your daughter being unequally yoked. If it's a big deal to God, it should be a big deal to you.

2. Are you ready to make a lifelong commitment?

Again, God isn't a matchmaker, and you should emphasize that to your daughter's potential fiance. He is *freely choosing* your daughter, and because it's his decision, your prospective son-in-law needs to be prepared to do whatever it takes to make it work. You want to be sure that he believes that marriage is for a lifetime — that the word *divorce* isn't in his vocabulary. You want to be certain that he understands he is making a covenant before God.

Ask questions like:

- “What will this relationship look like when things get hard?” (Because most relationships go through hard times.)
- “Are you willing to get help from a mentor, pastor or counselor *when* your marriage becomes difficult?”
- “Are my grandkids going to be raised in an intact family?”

The man needs to be willing to fight for this marriage — that for him, it means “till death do us part.”

3. What do you see in my daughter that makes you want to marry her?

You want to know that he is drawn to your daughter's *inner* character traits (such as integrity, generosity, kindness, loyalty and spirituality) over shallow or superficial things like her looks, her taste in fashion or a shared love of a particular sports team. You want to know that he values your daughter's gifts, talents, passions, dreams and aspirations.

Make sure he knows that your daughter — as wonderful as she is — isn't *perfect*, and he should know that from the start. You want to make sure that he values their differences and sees how their individual strengths and weaknesses complement each other.

4. Do you agree on core values and big dreams?

What are the man's most important values? Does he value honesty? Commitment? Generosity? Sacrifice? Personal growth? Do he and your daughter agree on the "big stuff," such as children, career goals and the like? Do they generally want the same things out of life? Ask if they've talked about each other's passions, hopes and [dreams for what the future](#) might look like. Make sure they're both heading in the same direction.

5. How do you plan to support my daughter?

Biblically, it's critical that a man be able to support and provide for his family ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)). And as your daughter's first protector, you owe it to both of them to get a sense of the fledgling couple's financial landscape.

- What is the man's job situation? What are his career goals?
- Is he bringing debt into the relationship? If so, what are his plans for getting out of it?
- Is he financially independent now, or does he have plans to be so? What are they?

I think that newlyweds should be financially independent from their parents. An important part of marriage is God's command to "leave your mother and father" ([Genesis 2:24](#)). A newly married couple cannot "leave" Mom and Dad if the couple still depends on them for housing or financial support. If the husband and wife can't financially support themselves or live at their own place, I would question their readiness for marriage.

6. Would you marry ... you?

This question surprised Jordan. Like studying for the SAT or ACT, Jordan had tried to prepare for our meeting. He read some of my online articles and perused a book that Erin and I had written for engaged couples called [Ready To Wed](#). But he hadn't anticipated this question. (I loved his surprised look!)

This question gets at maturity level. A healthy marriage requires two healthy individuals. Obviously, you're not looking for perfection. He might be pretty young and still has to mature. Instead of perfection, you

want to see if he's aware of his weaknesses and areas of potential growth areas. You want to better understand how he has dealt with his personal "junk." (We all have junk.)

- Is he growing and moving forward in dealing with his weaknesses?
- What are his experiences with pornography, alcohol, abuse or any other ticklish issues that many of us grapple with?
- Is he still emotionally entangled with a past romance?
- Does he have children from a previous relationship?

Help him understand that the question of whether he'd marry himself isn't "pass" or "fail." You aren't asking for him to defend or rationalize his past mistakes. You aren't going to judge him or repeat what he shares. He needs to feel safe to open up and deal with this question honestly and directly. To help facilitate that safe space, I'd encourage you to first share some of your struggles that you dealt with at his age.

Always be respectful. And then, when that safe space is created, start asking him those difficult questions:

- "What area of your life needs the most improvement?"
- "What are some of your weaknesses or growth areas?"
- "What are some ways that you frustrate my daughter?"
- "What do you guys fight about?"

And then, as you hear him out, gauge his willingness to *grow* from his mistakes. Has he gone to counseling? Is he willing to get help with his personal baggage?

7. What do you like about your relationship with my daughter?

Obviously, you'd like to assume that your daughter and the man who wants to marry her "like" each other and that they like spending time together. But why? Ask him if your daughter is one of his best friends.

Just as important, ask him if they allow each other space, too – to be sincerely transparent with each other and reveal who they are inside.

8. Do you have meaningful communication?

Communication is the lifeblood of a marriage. How well do they communicate? Ask him *what* they talk about. Are their conversations mostly about “to-do” lists and schedules? Or do they talk about deeper emotional issues?

This is one of Jordan’s strengths. When I first met him, he asked me and Erin such meaningful questions. He is a great conversationalist and is genuinely interested in getting to know people at a deep level. I love that for my daughter – he emotionally pursues her through curiosity and asking questions.

Focus on whether he’s committed to being open and known. Are there off-limits topics that they can’t talk about? If they *can’t* talk about certain things – past relationships, personal struggles, finances – that might be a red flag.

9. How do you manage conflict?

The Apostle Paul tells us in [1 Corinthians 7:28](#) “[T]hose who marry will have worldly troubles.” Does your daughter’s potential fiance understand this?

More importantly, how do he and your daughter manage conflict? Is he respectful and loving when they disagree? Does he value her point of view and emotions? Are they able to repair their relationship after a fight? Do they find solutions that feel good to *both* of them – as teammates?

There is no such thing as a win-lose situation in marriage. A couple will either win together or lose together. Your goal is to better understand how they function as a team and to encourage your future son-in-law to always treat your daughter as an equal partner.

10. Do you and my daughter agree on biblical roles and responsibilities?

When I talked Jordan through this question, I pointed to [Ephesians 4:22-33](#), and the 214 words Paul uses in it. Of those words, Paul spends 162 of them (76%) on a husband's responsibilities to his wife. A husband needs to love his wife like Christ loves the church, Paul writes. And that means that a husband's role is all about sacrificial leadership. But what does that mean?

As the husband, what does it mean to be the "leader" of the family? Do they both agree on the wife's role within your marriage? [What does biblical submission mean](#) to them? In [Ephesians 5:22-33](#), Paul instructs a wife to *voluntarily* follow her husband's lead in response to her commitment to the Lord. She is *accepting* her husband's role as the leader of their family; it isn't mindless obedience.

It all gets back to the concept of being a relational *team*. The husband may lead, but that never means that he unilaterally makes decisions for his family. This would be a gross misuse of biblical leadership. Yes, husbands and wives have different roles and different gifts. But remember, they were created as "equals"—both made in the image of God and are joint heirs in the gracious gift of life ([1 Peter 3:7](#)).

11. Have you had a range of experiences together?

Experience is an important key to navigating anything life throws at you, and that's especially true if you're part of a team. To truly see how a couple works together, they need to see each other handle a variety of experiences and challenges, which allows the couple to see each other as real individuals and to learn how they cope with stress and crises.

Has your potential son-in-law seen your daughter when she's stressed? Has she seen him when he's grieving or frustrated? Ask if they've had a wide range of relationship experiences — if they've seen each

other around family and friends, during day-to-day errands or big nights out, at weddings and funerals, and just sitting at a dinner table. Are they compatible in all those various situations?

Jordan had a great story when I asked him this question.

He and Murphy love to hike, but serious hiking in Colorado requires dedication. When they were set to hike up 14,275-foot Mt. Antero — a 16-mile hike with a 5,000-foot elevation gain — they woke up at 3 a.m. (Hikers try to polish off their hikes on these high mountains early, before the afternoon thunderstorms roll in.)

But just as they began to climb, a screw fell out of Jordan's glasses. They searched for it for a while, but finding a tiny screw on a mountain trail is way more difficult than finding a needle in a haystack. So, after looking for a while, they decided to go on — Jordan pocketing his glasses and hiking with blurred vision.

At one point, they were crossing a rushing river, where Murphy placed her trust on the wrong rock and stumbled right into the frigid water. Thankfully, the water wasn't deep, but that didn't make it any more comfortable: She sloshed to the other side and sat down to empty the water out of her boot.

Jordan, being the gentleman he is, offered to wring out her stinky sock. (That's when Murphy says she knew he loved her.) And the rest of the hike up the mountain went off without a hitch. Jordan couldn't see that well and Murphy's shoes still squished, but they made it to the top — talking and laughing along the way.

But the mountain wasn't done with them yet.

At the top, while reaching into her pack for her "summit sandwich," Murphy somehow deployed a can of bear spray all over her body. Now, any spray designed to repel bears isn't that fun for humans, either, and it turns out the aerosolized cayenne pepper really *burns*. Murphy started tearing up.

Then the swelling, the stinging and the temporary blindness set in. And as my daughter was in a lot of discomfort, Jordan swallowed hard and admitted that the accident was kinda, sorta, maybe his fault. He had misplaced the bear spray's safety cap. Turns out, they call it a "safety cap" for a reason.

After a few minutes of crippling fear that she was permanently injured, and a few choice words hurled at Jordan, Murphy determined that she would regain her sight and they laughed off the close call. (Here's a bonus relational tip: Never douse your fiancée with bear spray!)

12. Are there any relational red flags?

Ask to hear their "love story" from his perspective. How did they meet and fall in love? This isn't just an opportunity for him to walk down memory lane. You're looking for negative themes that might crop up. For instance:

- Have they broken up and gotten together multiple times?
- Has there been any abuse or violence?
- Do they [live together](#)?
- Are they simply "sliding" into marriage (because they feel like they should)?
- Is he trying to get away from his parents?
- Are they hiding a pregnancy?
- Does he think that marriage will fix the problems they're already experiencing?

The list goes on. A proposal could hide any number of important issues. And while a red flag doesn't necessarily mean a marriage is doomed before it even begins, it does mean that all parties should be extra cautious going forward. Encourage him to initiate individual and couples counseling before you give him your blessing.

Your blessing

I asked Jordan all my questions. He answered them all honestly and respectfully. I didn't tell him to jump in the lake. In fact, I was ready to give him my blessing then and there.

After we returned to my car, I drove us to a nearby restaurant to celebrate. I had made a reservation at a local steakhouse near where we had gone hiking. I hadn't noticed the name of the restaurant at the time;

I was just looking for the closest steakhouse. But when we walked in, I noticed the restaurant's name: Mary Murphy Steakhouse.

It was amazing. We had gone to Mary Murphy Steakhouse to celebrate my blessing for him to ... marry Murphy.

It felt like a sign from the Lord.

At the end of the day, your daughter — not you — chooses her husband.

I've always told my daughters that I will walk them down the aisle and give them away to whomever they choose. They know that I'll be honest about my concerns, and I hope that they would accept my influence. But God has given them free will, and I will honor that.

But that doesn't mean I'll *bless* the union. And if I couldn't have given Jordan my blessing, I'd be honest with him. I'd tell him why, unpacking the details. I would encourage him to get help to deal with my concerns, and that I'd re-evaluate my position if and when he took those necessary steps. I would hope that he'd believe that my daughter was worth fighting for, and to do whatever he could to win not just her love, but mine as well. I would even offer to help mentor him if my daughter was open to that relationship.

But Jordan *did* earn my blessing. And while I had a good feeling about my future son-in-law long before I asked him those 12 questions, they not only confirmed what I saw in *their* (his and Murphy's) relationship, but they bolstered *ours* (his and mine), as well.

Remember, you're not looking for perfection in the answers to these 12 questions. But you should see a young man headed in the right direction. And asking these questions can have a positive impact on your relationship with your future son-in-law. *We can talk about anything*, they tell him. This leads to open communication and discipleship.

I love how Jordan feels comfortable to call me and that we can share a meal or hang out together — just the two of us. I believe that our hike and meal together paved the way for that relationship.

Once your daughter, her mother and his parents have given their blessing, and you've worked through these 12 questions, if you have peace about giving your blessing, then I encourage you to verbalize your affirmation or write your future son-in-law a letter. Here's part of what I wrote to Jordan:

I've been praying for Murphy's future husband for 24 years. Today, I truly believe that man is you.

In you, I see a man that has a deep passion for God and that has wholeheartedly committed his life to the Lord. I am confident that you will love Christ more than you will ever love Murphy.

In you, I see a man that recognizes my daughter's inestimable value. You see in Murphy what I've treasured since the day she was placed into my arms.

In you, I see a man that will accept my daughter unconditionally and will love her for a lifetime.

In you, I see a man that is teachable and committed to growing both personally and relationally. It takes a humble heart to admit that you don't have all the answers. Enjoy the journey as you learn more about you and Murphy throughout your life together.

I've been thinking about you for 24 years. And I can truly say that you are everything that I want for my daughter. Thank you for preparing yourself for the role of a lifetime – Murphy's husband.

Today, I give you my blessing to ask Murphy for her hand in marriage. I welcome you into our family as my son.

I still mean those words today. Their relationship is strong. My relationship with both of them is strong, too. And, whenever they celebrate an anniversary, Erin and I will take them to Mary Murphy Steakhouse.

Encourage your future son-in-law to get premarital education. Focus on the Family has a program called Ready to Wed. We developed this for engaged couples to go through with a mentor couple. You can find more information at www.ReadyToWed.com.

12 Questions Every Father Should Ask His Future Son-in-Law

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Dr. Greg Smalley serves as the vice president of Marriage and Family Formation at Focus on the Family. In this role, he develops and oversees initiatives that prepare individuals for marriage, strengthen and nurture existing marriages and help couples in marital crises.

Prior to joining Focus, Smalley worked for the Center for Relationship Enrichment at John Brown University and as president of the National Institute of Marriage. He is the author of 17 books including "[Fight Your Way to a Better Marriage](#)," "[The DNA of Parent and Teen Relationships](#)" and "[The Whole-Hearted Marriage](#)." He and his wife, Erin, co-created "[Ready to Wed](#)," a complete premarital curriculum for engaged couples and the online [Focus on Marriage Assessment](#). They also released "Crazy Little Thing Called Marriage: 12 Secrets to a..."

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