

November 20, 2007

Hello Young Man-

I want to tell you that I really admired your style in San Diego... well-played in every respect. My precious daughter is blessed to get a man who knows how to romance her and lead her. I know it sounds trite but this won't be the last time that I tell you that I have prayed for your own Godly development and character since you and Gina were younguns. I didn't know you then but I knew the priceless role that you would win in my daughter's life. And He has shown Himself faithful to all those years of awkward prayers I offered up for a person I hadn't even met yet.

So, now that the offer has been made and accepted, I am going to impose on you a bit. You have to give me credit- I've given you a pretty easy pass up until now. I never had a rifle out on the coffee table when you came to visit or threatened to remove your genitals with my hunting knife if you ever de-flowered my little girl. But years of anticipation for this upcoming marriage have given me time to develop a couple of questions and exhortations to pass along to you.

To be honest, I didn't know whether or not I was entitled to this. I never found a book that explained the rights/privileges that a father-of-the-bridal party was allowed to expect. So, I appealed to a higher authority: my daughter. Seriously, nearly a year ago we had the opportunity for a long talk about this big step. I told her in detail where my head was at and how I was inclined to approach my future son-in-law and she was in eager agreement. So here goes...

I have a couple of questions that I would like to ask you to give some prayerful thought to, and then come back to me (written or spoken) with whatever you've come up with. This isn't an eligibility test or a qualification exam- you've already passed and gotten your 'A'. So I guess I'm saying that you can't screw this up - you're already in the 'circle of trust', as Gaylord Faulker's father-in-law would say. Maybe this is more for yours and Gina's benefit than mine, but I feel very strongly about following through with this so I figure God Himself laid it on my heart.

The first question comes from having known so many couples through the years who have been in youth ministry. Aside from having to do without some of the finer material luxuries of life that a higher salary might afford, the other thing that those couples all struggled with was 'priority'. Just because ministry is spiritual doesn't mean it's polite. What I'm trying to say is, your calling as a Youth Minister will always demand more than you can rightfully give, and when you say 'no' to it, it won't always let you walk away with a light heart. So my question is this: how do you intend to maintain your balance between family and ministry going forward? No Sunday school answers, please- I want you to think this through and tell me practically how you're going to deal with this eternal struggle.

Still standing? Okay- then I'll ask you my other question. In fairness, I have to tell you that I was in NO WAY ready to answer this one during my engagement to Michele. In fact, I didn't even appreciate the weight of the question itself (much less the ANSWER) for about the first 10-15 years of our marriage. The question is, what does it really look like for you to love Gina like Christ loves the church? This is another one of those questions to which it would be very easy to give a churchy response. Unacceptable. I want you to wrestle with this one and discover some insights that didn't originate in your own mind.

Two questions down, two exhortations to go. The first one is a no-brainer but you both need to have it tattooed on the front of your minds for the next five months. You have both waited this long to present yourselves pure to each other and to God on your wedding day. So did Michele and I. But I can assure you that Satan will now begin to tempt you to think that since you're already engaged, you are practically married in God's eyes and that a piece of legal paper shouldn't be the one thing that stops you from progressing sexually. I faced this temptation and wrestled with the rationalizations myself and I can tell you as I wipe the sweat off my brow that we did not compromise the wedding bed. However, we did let the making out go further than it had during pre-engagement and it was flirting with danger. All I can tell you is that you are still reflecting your character to each other, and what you are made of, even during these waning months of your pre-marital relationship. I can't tell you how many couples we have known who waited until engagement before having sex and then mutually consented. All was fine for awhile, maybe even years. But the rotting carcass of compromise will eventually begin to stink and more likely than not, it will be the wife who digs it up many years later. Unfair as it may be, that compromise will become the basis for future doubts about fidelity or commitment. That's enough about that- I'm just sayin'...

Finally, I want to share some disappointing news with you. That is, when it comes to understanding women, we (the male of the species), seem to be mentally-retarded. On the one hand, God commands us to love the woman. On the other hand, He created her with a complexity that makes that command virtually impossible to fulfill. If only she were as logical as a

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man, we could love her intuitively. After 26 years of marriage, I think I may have figured something out- the sheer challenge of learning how she thinks, anticipating how she will respond, is by design. God created her that way to give us a challenge. Man needs to be in the hunt. So, you will spend the rest of your life trying to understand this illogical woman to which you have cleaven(?). The girl who seems so sweet and precious to you now will at times exasperate and frustrate you. But the Apostle Paul said it best: "He who loves his wife loves himself." In this pursuit you will find your greatest joy.

So that's it. Think about this stuff, chew on it, pray over it, and get back with me. I look forward with wild enthusiasm toward the days/months/years ahead, getting to know you and enjoy you, and watching you and my daughter becoming one. I hereby give you my full blessing to marry Gina and in the words of Solomon, "May your fountain be blessed and may you enjoy the wife of your youth." (Prov 5:18)