

100 | Prayers for Dating  
and Engaged Couples

The  
*Ready*  
or  
*Knot*

Prayer Guide



**SCOTT KEDERSHA**

Foreword by Jonathan “JP” Pokluda

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**SCOTT KEDERSHA**



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Scott Kedersha, *The Ready or Knot Prayer Guide*

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## Foreword

The Lord made it very clear I was to go into vocational ministry. Then, as He often does when He makes something clear, He showed me where I was to work. The church my wife and I attended called and offered me a job. There were a few challenges with this plan. I'd never considered working for a church, so I had zero formal ministry training. We were newly married, and my sweet wife had entered into a covenant with someone in business development committed to worldly success, not a minister. She was willing to go wherever the Lord took us, but working at a church would mean some major lifestyle adjustments. We'd have to sell our new house, eat out much less, and consider many shifts to adhere to a new budget.

I'd been walking with the Lord for less than five years. What did I know about ministry? It felt like I was closing my eyes and jumping off a cliff into the unknown. I had so many questions. And it wasn't only that I *felt* unqualified; I was, in fact, very unqualified. How would I learn to do ministry? My first day came,



and I moved from my high-rise office in the city to Watermark Community Church, in Dallas. The church was rapidly growing and adding to their staff. I had somehow snuck in, but they didn't really have a place to put me. There was a closet on the seventh floor. That's not a metaphor—it was an interior closet with no windows. It was a large closet, and I learned I'd share it with someone else who was starting on staff about the same time. That was when I met Scott Kedersha.

Scott was a kind, down-to-earth man, raised on the East Coast. His shoulders bounced when he laughed, and he asked open-ended questions with a deep sincerity. Those are the two expressions he would alternate between: sincerity and laughter. His journey to ministry couldn't have been more different from mine. He interned at a large church, graduated from a well-known seminary, and knew that he wanted to work for a church. His background, however, was like mine. Before getting serious about his faith, he drank deeply from the world. There we were, two new pastors, each having our own desk but sharing a closet. We affectionately called it the cloffice.

Scott would become my go-to source for answers, and I had a lot of questions. “Who wrote Genesis?” “How do we reconcile predestination and free will?” “Is cussing a sin?” These are not questions pastors should ask, but Scott was not afraid of them. He was patient with me. We got to know each other quickly, sharing such a small space five days a week. Scott became one of the greatest pastors I have ever known.

The thing that stood out most to me about Scott was his marriage to Kristen. My wife, Monica, and I had lots of problems in communication and conflict resolution. Scott's marriage

seemed almost too good to be true. As I got to know him better, I learned how hard they worked for that reality. It wasn't too good to be true. It was a reality, but it was hard fought for. They loved each other and their family. I admired this most about Scott.

Fast-forward seventeen years, and it's not surprising that Scott has become one of the most renowned marriage pastors on the planet. As for me, Scott's answers laid a foundation for me to pastor a church. When I was looking for someone to help me with marriages, you better believe I called Scott. He moved his family to partner with us here in Waco, Texas. His writing on marriage has helped people around the world. He, along with the research of many others, has discovered that prayer is key to a successful marriage. In the pages ahead, Scott is going to guide you toward praying for the marriage you've always dreamed of. Whether you're ready or (k)not.

Jonathan "JP" Pokluda, lead pastor of Harris Creek Baptist Church; author of *Why Do I Do What I Don't Want to Do?* and *Outdated*

# Introduction

## What I Wish I Knew before I Said “I Do”

The two questions I’m most often asked as a marriage pastor are, “What’s something you’re glad you did from day one of marriage?” and “What’s the one thing you wish you’d started from day one of marriage?” There are a bunch of answers to the first question, including the fact that I’m grateful that as newlyweds, Kristen and I walked through life with other couples in our church’s small group community, we served together in our church, and we each read our Bibles daily. But there’s only one answer to the second question: I wish Kristen and I had prayed together every day, even before we said “I do.”

Too many Christian marriages end up like the marriages of the world. Between high divorce rates and couples who seem bored and stuck, it’s easy to look around and wonder if it’s possible to be happily married. During my almost two decades

of full-time marriage ministry, I've sat with many struggling or divorced couples who wished they'd handled their marriages differently. The good news is that I've also worked with thousands of couples who have thriving, healthy marriages. I've seen over and over that the habit of praying together daily can draw spouses closer together and help them become more like Jesus Christ.

The couple who prays together stays together. It might be cliché, but it's true. A recent study showed the divorce rate for couples who pray together on a consistent basis is less than 1 percent.<sup>1</sup> Can you believe that? Less than 1 percent of couples who pray together consistently end up divorced. While praying together does not guarantee a perfect, joyful marriage, it certainly provides some protection against the painful consequences of divorce. Not only that, but praying together will also grow your relationship with each other and, even more importantly, with the Lord. I've seen many couples establish a healthy and consistent prayer life from day one of marriage.

I wrote my first book, *Ready or Knot? 12 Conversations Every Couple Needs to Have before Marriage*, because I wanted couples to have an authentic, biblical, practical guide to help discern the best next step in their relationship and to strengthen their future marriage.<sup>2</sup> *The Ready or Knot Prayer Guide* picks up where my first book left off by providing one hundred daily devotions to guide you and your future spouse in having these conversations with the Lord through prayer.

This book is designed to help you begin praying daily for your future marriage. It might even lead some of you to realize you or your significant other aren't ready for marriage

together—and trust me, that’s a good thing to know *before* you say “I do.”

### **Green Light, Yellow Light, or Red Light?**

In *Ready or Knot?* I discussed the comparison between a traffic light and a dating or engaged relationship. When we’re driving, a green light tells us to keep moving forward, a yellow light warns us to slow down, and a red light tells us to stop. In the same way, a green light in your relationship tells you to move forward toward engagement or marriage. A yellow light tells you that you need to slow down and figure out next steps. A red light tells you that you should end the relationship.

As you work through this prayer guide with your significant other, I want you to keep this stoplight analogy in mind. While you read about and pray through the Christlike traits needed for a successful marriage, evaluate how you’re doing in your relationship. Does each of you possess the attributes discussed in this book? Does your significant other desire to grow in these characteristics to become more like Jesus Christ? If outsiders looked at your relationship, would they see you model these traits together?

I’ve heard it said that the best predictor of future behavior is current behavior. In other words, if you want to be humble in the future, then examine your life and ask yourself if you’re humble today. If you want to be resilient in your marriage, then ask yourself if you’re resilient in your life right now. This book is not about your hopeful aspirations but about current reality in your life, your significant other’s life, and your relationship.

I'm hopeful that as you pray through these devotions together, the Lord would make it clear to you if you have a green, yellow, or red light in your relationship. While red lights are painful and scary, they can prevent you from entering a marriage you want no part of. A yellow light alerts you to areas you need to discuss and prayerfully consider. And a green light will hopefully help you move forward to the next stage of your relationship.

I want your wedding day to be filled with joy and excitement. Marriage is scary enough for most couples, but it becomes flat-out terrifying if you choose to marry the wrong person. Use the next one hundred days of going through this prayer guide to help you determine next steps.

### **The Purpose of This Prayer Guide**

A few years ago, a friend reached out to me via email and asked, "Scott, I'm getting married in seven days, and I'd like to be intentional in how I use my time and prayers the next week. What are some specific character traits and Scriptures I could pray over the next week (my last as a single man!) that would help strengthen me to be a loving, caring, and godly husband?"

I was encouraged by my friend's email and responded to him with several traits and Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> When I hit send, I immediately knew this could be a great resource for premarried couples. His question helped lead to the origin of this prayer guide, which encourages seriously dating couples and engaged men and women to pray together as they prepare to say "I do."

The *Ready or Knot Prayer Guide* covers ninety-six attributes you will pray for yourself, for your significant other, and for your marriage. These traits revolve around the twelve conversations in the *Ready or Knot?* book. Each devotion features a daily Bible verse, as well as other verses throughout the discussion. I've started with four entries that will help you discern how to pray together as a seriously dating or an engaged couple. These one hundred devotions are designed to help you establish a pattern of praying together that will propel you into a prayer-dependent, Christ-centered marriage.

The traits you'll pray through in this prayer guide are the ones that stick out in a Christian marriage. These are not some random traits that may or may not help a marriage. These are characteristics that, when possessed by both husband and wife, lead to thriving, attractive marriages. I encourage you to pray through each of these essential traits. My hope is that you and your significant other will live out these Christlike attributes in your lives and future marriage. No one can do so perfectly, but you can ask God to help you grow these traits more and more in your lives.

The goal of this guide is not primarily that you would have a great marriage. That might seem like a strange statement. *Why doesn't the marriage guy want us to have a great marriage?* I do, but that's not the primary goal. The main purpose of this prayer guide is to help each of you become more like Jesus Christ. I believe the key to a healthy Christian marriage is for a man who wholeheartedly loves Jesus to marry a woman who wholeheartedly loves Jesus.

I hope and pray this resource will strengthen your relationship as you seek the Lord together. I pray it will tune your heart

## *Introduction*

to His and help you establish a pattern of prayer you will follow for the rest of your days as husband and wife. And I pray you will seek the Lord together as a couple all the days He gives you breath.

Ready or knot? Let's pray.



## DAY 1

# *Are We Allowed to Pray Together before Marriage?*

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:12–13

Can you pray together before marriage? Of course you can. Unless someone shows me a Bible passage that says otherwise, I strongly encourage you to pray together before you say “I do.” That's the whole point of this prayer guide, that you would

take the time to start the habit of praying together before you get married.

When you and your significant other pray together, you gain great insight into each other. You learn more about how you each are growing and where you're each struggling. You get to see each other come before the Lord and pour out your heart to Him. You can learn a lot about someone's spiritual maturity by the way they pray. So, yes, please do pray together before you get married.

But I want to offer a few warnings and encouragements about praying together as a premarried couple:

- *Don't put yourself in a position where you can be tempted to fall into sexual sin.* Praying together is an intimate act. Be careful of where and when you pray. In other words, don't pray in a quiet apartment with no one around, snuggled up on the couch together. The intimacy of prayer can lead you to cross boundaries physically with each other.
- *Determine your motive in praying.* Why are you praying together? Is it to come to the God of the universe and communicate with Him? Is it to pray for your relationship and future marriage? Or are you putting on a show to impress your significant other? Check your motive before you pray together.
- *Don't attempt to manipulate each other through your prayers.* For example, "Lord, please help my partner not to be selfish all the time" is not a prayer I recommend praying. Rather, change the way you pray: "Lord, will You please help us not to be selfish? We're both tempted

*Are We Allowed to Pray Together before Marriage?*

at times to put our own needs first, but we want to serve and celebrate each other. Please help us, Lord.”

Ready? Let’s give it a shot!

*Lord, please help us to pray together with the right motives and with the right heart posture. Help us to work on ourselves first, and help us not to manipulate each other. Please protect our purity, and help us to honor each other and honor You when we pray together. Thank You that You see us, hear us, and love us.*

## DAY 2

# *Why Should My Significant Other and I Pray Together?*

You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

James 4:2–3

Prayer gives us the opportunity to commune with the Lord and with our significant other. A heart aligned with God's seeks what He wants and desires for us. The problem is, almost everything we do in life is tainted with selfish motives. In James 4:1, James said we fight and quarrel because of selfish desires that wage war within us. We argue, complain, and whine when there's something we want and we don't have it. In verse 3, James said even our prayers are tainted by our selfish motives.

We can't even pray to the Lord without seeking our pleasures and desires.

Therefore, we need to figure out how to align our prayers with what would most honor the Lord. Praying together with your significant other gives you the opportunity to seek the Lord's best for your lives and for His own glory.

There's not much on this planet that will strengthen a relationship and draw a couple closer to the Lord and each other more than prayer. Prayer builds resilient marriages, grows intimacy between a husband and wife, and draws each spouse closer to Christ. The couple who prays together recognizes the greatness of God and His lordship over their lives. When you and your significant other pray for specific Christlike attributes, you acknowledge you fall short but are aware He desires to help you grow.

We all go through ups and downs, and prayer is inconsistent at best for most couples. To build the habit of daily prayer into your lives from day one of your life together, I strongly encourage you and your significant other to start praying for your marriage before you say "I do!"

*Lord, sometimes we don't know how or why to pray. But we want to. We want to honor You, and we want our prayers to honor You, not to win Your favor but so that we can grow in intimacy with You. We realize we often pray with selfish motives, so help us align our prayers with Your desires. Thank You that You hear us and see us, and You always know what we need before a word is even on our lips or hearts.*

## DAY 3

# *How Should We Pray Together?*

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.

Matthew 6:5–6

If you're like most Christians, you're used to praying by yourself, all alone. It's also possible that you've prayed with groups, such as your community group or Bible study group. But you may not have prayed very often with just one other person, especially someone of the opposite sex. Praying with another

person can be awkward or even clunky, so how should you and your significant other pray together?

Here are a few suggestions:

- *Don't try to use big, overly religious words.* Talk to the Lord as you would with any other person. He already knows what you're thinking and every word about to come out of your mouth, so keep it real.
- *Keep it short.* There are times when you and your significant other will pray for longer periods of time, but most of the time you can keep it brief. Ping-pong back and forth as you pray.
- *Pray about anything.* Remember, you're speaking to the God of the universe! Nothing is too big for Him to handle, and nothing is too small to pray about.
- *Don't try to impress each other.* As Jesus said in Matthew 6:5–6, don't pray to be seen and praised. You don't have to literally go into your room, close the door, and pray. But make sure you're not praying to receive the praise of your significant other instead of to connect with the Lord.
- *Add some variety to your prayer posture.* At times you may pray standing with your arms raised. Other times you may find yourself flat on your stomach. However you sit or stand doesn't matter near as much as the posture of your heart. (But keep in mind the caution I mentioned on day 1 to avoid praying together in positions that might tempt you to sin sexually.)

- *Pray the Scriptures.* Sometimes we don't know *what* to pray. I'd suggest praying Scripture back to the Lord. The Psalms, in addition to this prayer guide, are a great place to start doing so.

As you pray with your significant other, ask God to direct your conversations with Him and to guide your words.

*Lord, help us not to be awkward with each other as we pray together as a couple. This is new to us, and we don't want to pray to impress each other or try to impress You. We just want to be faithful to seek You and become more like You. Help make praying together a daily practice and discipline for us as a couple. We want to honor You in every way.*



## DAY 4

# *What Happens When We Pray?*

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

1 John 5:14–15

What happens when we pray? The short answer is that I don't know. It blows my mind how the Lord can handle listening to billions of prayers at the same time. His ability to listen to and know everything proves that He is both omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful). It's hard enough for me to listen to one person at a time, let alone billions!

Some people think God works like a vending machine—you put money in, and you know exactly what will come out. Put in

four quarters for some Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, push the button, and out comes your delicious combination of chocolate and peanut butter. Push the Kit Kat button, and out comes a Kit Kat.

But God doesn’t work that way. If He did, when we ask for something like millions of dollars, it would show up in our bank accounts. We’d no longer struggle with sin, and the world would be filled with peace. Part of the problem is that we don’t make requests that align with the heart of God; rather, our prayer requests are marked by our own selfish desires.

One of the hopes in prayer is that our desires would align with His. John captured this concept well in 1 John 5:14: “If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.” John encouraged us to pray with God’s will in mind, not our own. And therein lies the problem, since our requests tend to be self-centered.

In marriage, part of the reason you pray together is to align your hearts as husband and wife. In the process, your desires begin to align with God’s. When you ask Him together for the desires of your hearts, your hearts will hopefully become increasingly aligned with His. Then you know that He will hear you and that you and your future spouse will have whatever you ask of Him—when you ask according to His will.

*God, we need Your help as we pray. We know that our prayer requests often reflect our selfish desires. We know You hear every one of our prayers, but it’s our desire that our prayers become increasingly aligned with Your heart. We need You, and we need Your help. May we always be dependent upon You.*



# The Purpose of Marriage

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## DAY 5

# Holy

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

1 Peter 1:14–16

The goal of this book is not just to give you tips and tricks for a better marriage. My deepest hope is that you would become more like Jesus Christ. Over and over in the Bible we read that the Lord is holy. And since we’re to be like Him, as Peter said, we are to be holy as He is holy.

We’re not capable of being perfectly holy and blameless like Jesus. He’s the only perfect human in the history of the world. You and I can’t go even a few moments without sinning in thought or deed, but we’re still called to pursue holiness. That means, as we’re faced with thousands of decisions every day, we should aim to choose what honors the Lord.

Gary Thomas, in his excellent marriage book *Sacred Marriage*, asks a profound question: “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?”<sup>1</sup> While many people get married because they think it will make them happy, the greater goal of marriage is holiness and becoming more like Jesus Christ. There’s nothing wrong with the desire to be happy; it’s just not the greatest, ultimate desire. In *Ready or Knot?*, I said, “When you marry someone, God intends for you to grow in holiness and to become more like Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

There’s something deeply profound that happens in healthy marriages. When you pursue Jesus together, you see areas in which you don’t reflect Christ. Marriage helps expose areas of struggle and weakness and shines a spotlight on ways you can grow in holiness and become more like Christ. This is a beautiful part of Christian marriage that we don’t often discuss. God gives us a spouse to help us become more holy and more like His Son, Jesus.

I believe every attribute in this book is essential for you to have a God-honoring, thriving marriage. Some rise toward the top in importance—this is one of them. Today, ask God to help make you *holy* as He is holy.

*Lord, thank You that You are perfect and holy. Thank You that You are without spot or blemish. And thank You that You clearly state that You desire holiness for us as well. Help us become more like Your Son, Jesus, and help us to be holy in our marriage. May we make decisions that always drive us to become more like You in every way.*

## DAY 6

# Steadfast

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast,  
because they trust in you.

Isaiah 26:3

In your marriage vows, you and your significant other will make some big promises: to stay together in sickness, poverty, and hard times. You will commit to being steadfast—firm and unwavering—to your spouse. God loves us with a steadfast love, and your marriage will require the same of you. The way to experience peace and joy in your marriage is through a steadfast love and trust in the Lord and in your spouse.

It might seem odd for a premarried couple to pray for steadfastness, but this attribute is central to all healthy marriages. I've seen the importance of this trait lived out with a friend who lost her husband of fifty-one years. For twelve years she walked

alongside him through a major stroke and related complications. She stood by his side until he passed away from cancer.

I've seen this kind of steadfastness much closer to home as I watched my mom love and serve my stepdad through his battle with Alzheimer's. For years she cared for him all day, every day, as he battled with the cognitive and physical challenges associated with his disease.

On the premarried side, you have no idea what lies ahead. You can't predict whether you'll experience financial challenges, infertility, wayward children, or struggles with addictions. All any of us know is that in this world we will have troubles (John 16:33).

As you get ready to say "I do," pray that you will be a steadfast spouse: firm, unwavering, and immovable in both the celebrations and trials of life. You won't allow the wins of life to pull you off course in following Jesus, and you won't allow life's challenges to cause you to question the goodness of God. A steadfast spouse remains faithful and unwavering in their trust in the Lord regardless of their circumstances.

During my last seventeen years in full-time marriage ministry, I've watched steadfast couples weather many storms while couples who lacked this trait crumbled under the challenges and pressures of the world. As I type these words, I'm praying that your lives and your future marriage will be marked by steadfastness.

*God, help us to be immovable and unwavering in both the victories and challenges of life. Help us to fight together as a couple for unity and strength during our day-to-day trials, both large and small. Help us to be steadfast. We pray we will remain strong in You amid the trials of life.*

## DAY 7

# Desperate for the Lord

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

The word *desperate* has a negative connotation. No one wants to be desperate for anything. It makes you sound as if you’d be willing to compromise and settle for something less. But I’d like to suggest a different meaning for this word when it comes to marriage. Couples who come to the Lord with desperation know they bring nothing to the table and must completely rely upon the Lord.

When I’m desperate for the Lord, I know I don’t come with a résumé of things to brag about. I’m not prideful of my skills,



and I realize my best accomplishments are like “filthy rags” to the Lord (Isa. 64:6). It keeps me at a place where I am dependent on God to be my strength and to be the source of hope in our marriage. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5), so we come desperate for Him to do what only He can do in our lives and in our marriages.

Paul wrote about his weaknesses in 2 Corinthians 12 when he shared about “a thorn in [his] flesh” (v. 7). In his weakness and impairment, Paul knew God’s power would be made perfect in his dependence on Him. When we humbly acknowledge our need for God to be strong in our lives, we admit our need for His help and grace. While the world values strength and independence, God values a humble, desperate dependence on Him. Once again, God works in a completely different way from the world.

I remember the days when each of our four sons was a baby, completely dependent on Kristen and me for everything. The only thing they could do on their own was cry, eat, sleep, and poop. And even in those things we had to help them! Our babies needed us for everything and desperately cried out for our help.

Early in your marriage, you will more than likely struggle at some point along the way. Instead of trying to fix it on your own, be desperate and come to the Lord to help you. As a baby cries out for his or her caregivers, so you can desperately cry out to the Lord.

*Lord, we need You. Every day, minute, and hour of our lives we need You. We think we can fix things all on our*

*own, and we think our accomplishments are a big deal. But please remind us how much we need You, that we should learn to be desperate for You. Help us to remember that when we are weak and dependent, we are strong—not in our own power but in Yours.*