

World Kids

Fun for kids! true stories!



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In the **United States** and many other Western countries, this cold winter month is brightened up by the celebration of Saint Valentine's Day on February 14th. Many schoolchildren give small cards or candies to their friends, and it is traditionally the time when young men and women send a gift or card to a boy/girlfriend or one they admire and would like to get to know better. It is a time for "romance" - which means "a feeling of excitement associated with love." In the West, most teenagers and unmarried people spend a lot of time and effort thinking about romance and "falling in love" - which usually includes dating different people until they find the "right one", then get engaged and finally married. Many movies include stories of romance and in fact even "fairy tales", told to little children from an early age, usually end up with a princess or girl who meets and finally marries her prince and they all "live happily ever after".



[#1 - Can you think of a bible story where a poor young girl WAS picked from among many others to be the queen of the nation?]



But the preparations for marriage are not always like this in many countries around the world! In fact, for MOST people in the world, "falling in love" is NOT considered part of the process! Often a marriage partner is decided upon "for convenience" or out of necessity. In many poor countries, a man whose wife has died and left him with 7 or 8 small children will soon HAVE to marry again if his children are to be cared for! There may not be many women willing to take on that burden, and so he may have to choose a lady who is rather ugly or has some physical problem and so has not already been chosen as a wife! People who live in remote areas where they do not travel much or have much contact with others, meet few people and so have little choice of a marriage partner. A stranger who comes to the village may quickly find that several families invite him to visit for dinner and then try to get him to choose their daughter!

[#2 - Can you think of a bible story where a man was wandering through the desert, met up with a family and was given the daughter as his bride?]

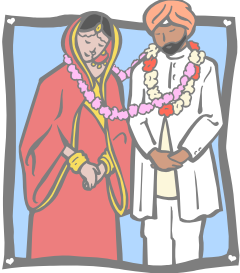


How many children can you count with their parents in the house above?

In some parts of the world, life is so hard that girls are thought beautiful or to be sought-after as a wife for different reasons than WE might think. In some tribes in **Africa**, where women frequently die in childbirth or of other sickness because there is no doctor or medicine nearby, the "perfect bride" is considered to be one who is very FAT! In fact in one area, for several months before the tribes meet together for the purpose of picking marriage partners, the young girls are made to stay inside all day resting and drinking GALLONS of milk so that they get very fat, and so will be chosen quickly to be married!! Where we lived in **Mexico** about 10 years ago, in the Aztec Indian villages, men often married at the age of 30 or 40 and they usually chose a young girl of only 13 yrs old to be their blushing bride! The wife had a very hard life, collecting wood to cook with, carrying water long distances, and of course having babies so that later the children could help with the tough job of harvesting corn and beans on the steep hillsides. Sadly it was quite common for these young women to die in childbirth or early in life through sickness and being worn out, and then when the husband remarried, he usually picked another very young bride!

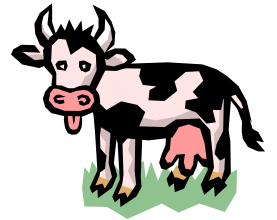


But actually in many cultures, love or personal choice do not enter into the decision at all and the marriage partner is picked by the parents or family of the young person. This tradition is very common and although the idea would be considered terrible by many western youth today, it often produces "good marriages". Because many parents love and know their son or daughter so well, they feel they can best choose someone to be a good spouse and be a good addition to the family. The two sets of parents meet and discuss the marriage, decide on the terms (if any gifts or money are to be exchanged) and then inform the bride and groom, who usually agree. To disagree and refuse the match would be considered great disrespect of both their parents and the community. When I lived among Arabs on the **West Bank of Israel** years ago, quite frequently a young girl of 17 or 18 would come in to



work and say that it would be her last day as she was leaving to get married the next day. She would travel to neighboring **Jordan** for her wedding, at which time she would meet her husband for the first time! Her parents had arranged everything and sometimes she would only have been given his name and his photo!

Our friend in **India**, Saroj, is planning to marry soon and because he has no parents there, his ministry friends have helped pick his bride. There are many different customs in India, and in some places the bride's parents give a "dowry" to the groom (such as a car, large sum of money, or furniture) which is to help secure that their daughter will be well taken care of. In some parts of Africa, such as **Sudan**, the man must pay his bride's family in sheep or cattle for the loss of their daughter's labor in the family. Some brides are considered to be worth 30-40 cows! In **Japan**, much emphasis is placed on education, and so most girls are not considered ready for marriage until they are about 25 years old. Their parents then prepare an information package about their daughter, her school record, work history, hobbies etc and a photo, and this information is then passed around among friends and associates in order to find a suitable husband.



[#3 - Can you think of a bible character whose wife was picked for him by his father's servant?]

Sadly there are still some parts of the world where marriages are not just arranged but actually "forced" and the bride or groom has no choice in the matter! In some rural villages in **Egypt** and **Ethiopia**, many young girls are not allowed out of their home except to work in the fields or marry. They do not attend school and if the family is poor with too many younger children to feed, a girl may be married off when she is only 11 years old - or even as young as 7!! Often the man is a lot older and already has several wives - and is willing to PAY for his new bride. The poor girl really just becomes a slave to work and serve her "husband" in return for her parents getting some money! In **Somalia** in East Africa, men often have four wives and a girl is often engaged even before she is born!! In the rugged, desert country of **Afghanistan** it is believed that 60-80% of marriages are forced! (We must also remember that in such countries divorce is impossible for a woman.)



[#4 - Can you think of a man in the Bible who fell in love and wanted to marry a woman, but then also was forced to marry her older sister?]

Marriage is one of the most important decisions in our life, because it will determine a lot about our future. As Christians, no matter in which country or culture we live, we should not just be led by "romance" or the excited feelings in our heart. We should consider the comments of our family and those who love us and want the best for us - and above all, we should seek GOD's will in this decision of great consequence. The Bible has lots of good advice for us and will help us obtain peace and joy even if our marriage does not turn out to be as in the fairytales - "happily ever after". Let's pray especially for those girls and boys who live in countries where they are FORCED into marriage at an early age - that even when things are beyond their control, they will come to know the love of Jesus Christ and feel His presence helping them through each day.

Have a Happy Valentine's Day!

'Til next time,

Your friend, Shirley

Answers: There are 12 children in the house with their parents.

#1 - Esther (Esther ch. 2), #2 - Moses (Exodus 2), #3 - Abraham (Genesis 24), #4 - Jacob (Genesis 29)

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