We have many important choices to make in life, such as where to live, what to do for a living and how to spend our money. But the most important decision we make is who to marry. This decision has a profound effect on our happiness, our future children and on society. Yet when it comes to choosing a spouse, most of us believe the lyrics from the Beatles’ song: “All you need is love, love; love is all you need!” Let’s dispel that and a couple of other myths.

**All you need is love.**
The Beatles’ song aside, the kind of love that gets us “hot and bothered” about a person of the opposite sex is not a good basis for marriage. Indeed, research on love has shown that romantic love is one of the least important aspects of love needed for a successful marriage. The love found in happy, long-lasting marriages consists primarily of expressions of caring, kindness and commitment.

**He/She will change when we get married.**
Ya, right! The fact of the matter is, most of us don’t change very much or very fast.

**I’ll be different when I get married.**
We often hope our marriage will offer a completely new beginning, especially if our childhood and adolescent years weren’t that great. For better or for worse, we bring a great deal of “baggage” with us when we marry. The happiness of our home life, how well we get along (and still get along) with our parents, and how good a marriage our parents had, all effect our ability to find happiness in our own marriage. So how do you choose wisely?

**Get your own house in order.**
Take care of any unfinished business with yourself and your feelings about your family. If you struggle with depression, anxiety, impulse or anger control, being “easily offended,” or frequent mood swings, get help before getting in a serious relationship. Do all you can to get over any anger or hurt you feel about real or perceived wrongs committed against you in your family. Work on building your relationship with your parents.

**Go into marriage with both eyes open, after marriage keep them half closed.**
We tend to do it the other way around; closing our eyes to our own or our partner’s faults before marriage and then noticing every fault after marriage.

**Resolve as many problems and reach agreement on as many issues as you can before marriage.**
It is always best to take care of as many things as possible before you get married. Talk to each other about your desires, your fears, your expectations, your challenges and your dreams.

To help identify areas in need of further discussion, the Marriage Study Consortium at BYU has designed a questionnaire you and your partner can complete. It is called the RELATionship Evaluation, or RELATE. After you and your partner complete the RELATE questionnaire, a RELATE Report is generated. The RELATE Report is a summary with over a dozen tables and graphs giving information on over 60 facets of your relationship! It is best if you then sit down with someone like a clergy, counselor or therapist and have them help you go over your results. If you are interested you can take RELATE by going to the website www.relate-institute.org. The cost is only $5/person.

However you do it, put some time, effort and thought into the most important decision of your life!

*Thomas B. Holman is an associate for the BYU Family Studies Center*