

BEFORE YOU KNEEL

The seven questions *before you propose.*

A ring doesn't make a proposal. A story does. Before you think about the beach, the candles, or the date, there are seven questions that decide whether the moment will mean what you want it to mean.

The "yes" doesn't begin *on the knee*.

I've planned hundreds of proposals. Over time I learned something almost no one says out loud: the hardest part of proposing isn't the nerve of the moment, or the logistics, or even the ring. It's having truly understood the person you love before you ask them to change their life with you.

Anthropology has studied this for more than a century. In nearly every human culture, marriage was never just a contract between two people. It was a rite of passage: a threshold that separates one stage of life from the next. And rites of passage work when the person crossing them is ready to cross, not just when someone decides to push them.

Relationship science adds the other half. Decades of research on lasting couples point to the same thing again and again: what holds a marriage together isn't the intensity of infatuation, but the quality of the friendship, the way differences get resolved, and the security that the other person will stay. A beautiful proposal on a fragile foundation is still a proposal on a fragile foundation.

This guide isn't meant to make you doubt. It's meant to give you certainty. If you answer these seven questions honestly, you'll reach the knee knowing, not hoping.

Take your time with each one. There are no right answers, only honest ones. Some will feel easy. If one is hard, that's precisely the one most worth looking at.

01 Are we crossing the same threshold, or just me?

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL LENS · THE SHARED RITE OF PASSAGE

In every culture, marriage marks a before and after. But a rite of passage only transforms when both people cross the same threshold at the same time. If one lives it as the natural end of a path and the other as a surprise they haven't yet digested, they aren't crossing together: one moves forward and the other reacts.

This doesn't mean the proposal can't be a surprise. The surprise lives in the **how** and the **when**. What shouldn't be a surprise is the **where to**. If you've already talked about building a life together, the proposal confirms a threshold you were both already seeing.

ASK YOURSELF

If someone asked my partner tomorrow, "where is your relationship going?", would their answer resemble mine?

02 Do I love who they are, or who I imagine they'll be?

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LENS · ACCEPTANCE VS. A RENOVATION PROJECT

Research on stable couples shows a clear pattern: those who last aren't the ones who found someone perfect, but the ones who accepted someone real. Many relationships are built on a silent fantasy that the other person will change "once we're married." They almost never do. And they shouldn't have to, in order to deserve your commitment.

To propose is to say: I choose you exactly as you are today, not the upgraded version I'm hoping for in five years. If your internal "yes" depends on the other person no longer being who they are, that isn't a threshold, it's a condition.

ASK YOURSELF

What is it about my partner that I struggle to accept? Can I live with it for a lifetime, or am I secretly betting it will disappear?

03 How do we fight when we fight?

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LENS · REPAIR, NOT THE ABSENCE OF CONFLICT

A stubborn myth says good couples don't argue. The research shows the opposite: every couple argues. The difference between those who last and those who don't is what happens **after** the conflict. Healthy relationships repair. They come back, they reach for each other, they apologize, they resume.

Before you propose, look at your history of repair, not your history of calm. A couple that knows how to return from disagreement holds what a marriage needs. One that avoids all conflict to keep from breaking is often more fragile than it looks.

ASK YOURSELF

After our worst argument, who took the first step to come back, and how did that return feel?

04 Do our families and worlds fit at the same table?

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL LENS · MARRIAGE AS A UNION OF WORLDS

For most of human history, marrying was never joining two individuals: it was joining two networks, two families, two ways of understanding money, faith, celebration, grief. We choose with more freedom today, but those networks are still there. They don't have to be identical. They have to be able to coexist.

This isn't about your families being alike, or everyone adoring each other. It's about whether you've already seen how they are together in the ordinary and the difficult, and whether that gives you calm or sets off an alarm you've been ignoring.

ASK YOURSELF

When I imagine our lives entwined with our families', do I feel calm, or do I feel I'm postponing a conversation?

05 Do we want the same life, or just the same today?

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LENS · SHARED LIFE DREAMS

You can love someone deeply and still want different lives. Kids or no kids. Putting down roots or moving through the world. A career that consumes everything or a slower life. These aren't differences in taste, they're differences in direction, and love alone doesn't resolve them.

The strongest couples don't agree on everything. But they know each other's big dreams and have consciously decided to make room for them. Before you propose, make sure you aren't mistaking a happy present for an agreed future.

ASK YOURSELF

If each of us wrote separately how we imagine our life in ten years, how much would the two pages match?

06 Is this proposal for us, or for everyone else?

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL LENS · THE RITE VS. THE SPECTACLE

Rites of passage always had witnesses: the community was present to recognize the change. But there's a difference between witnesses who celebrate something real and an audience that expects a show. When a proposal is designed for other people's reactions, it stops being a rite and becomes a performance.

The honest question isn't "will it look amazing?". It's "does this represent us?". A proposal that speaks to the two of you moves people forever. One copied from a trend is forgotten when the trend passes.

ASK YOURSELF

If no one were ever going to see a single photo, would I still want to propose exactly this way?

07 Am I ready for what comes after the yes?

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LENS · COMMITMENT AS A DECISION, NOT A FEELING

The proposal moment lasts minutes. The marriage lasts decades. The psychology of commitment distinguishes between the emotion of wanting to stay (which comes and goes) and the decision to stay (which holds even when the emotion dips). Lasting commitment rests on the second.

To propose isn't to promise you'll always feel what you feel today. It's to decide that, even on the grey days, this is the person you want to build with. If you can answer this question with calm instead of euphoria, you're ready.

ASK YOURSELF

Do I want to propose because I can't imagine my life without this person, or because I can't imagine the moment without today's excitement?

WHEN YOU HAVE YOUR ANSWERS

Now the story *begins.*

If you made it this far and your answers left you at peace, you've already done the hardest part. You know who you love, you know you want the same life, and you know why. That's what no décor can give you, and it's exactly where my work begins.

I don't design proposals around a beach or a bouquet. I design them around the answers you just gave yourself. That story, the one that belongs to the two of you, is what I turn into the moment you ask.

— *Olivia Ortiz*

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TELL ME YOUR STORY

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