

SESSION 1

CHRIST AT THE CENTER



*Marriage
Preparation*

Living Marriage

Beloved™



Nihil obstat: Derek Barr, Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

January 2015

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SESSION 1

CHRIST AT THE CENTER

INTRODUCTION

Putting Jesus at the center of your life, and at the center of your marriage, is the key to establishing and maintaining a strong marriage. Your beloved will not be able to meet your every need—only Jesus can do that. Only Jesus can fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart. The more you put Jesus at the center of your life and your relationship now and in your future marriage, the more Jesus is able to work in and through you to help you give yourself fully and sacrificially to your future spouse.

OPENING PRAYER

Pray together the following Prayer of Spouses to the Holy Spirit:

O Holy Spirit,
Spirit of unity, love and goodwill of Father and Son,
you make us one in the sacred union of marriage.
Grant that, like the first Christians, we may be one heart and one mind.

Make us respect one another,
help one another in our striving for holiness,
and support one another.

Be our Guide,
our Counselor,
and our Consoler.

Make us bear one another's burdens during our journey to heaven,
where we hope to live forever as adopted children of the Triune God.

Amen.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

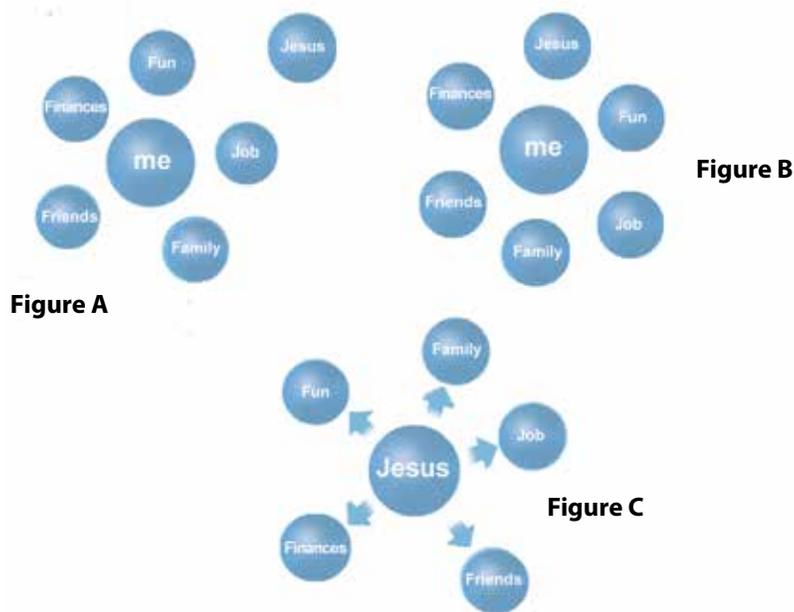
—Ephesians 5:25



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you." That is, our hearts are restless until Christ is the center of our lives. Describe a time in which you experienced a restless heart in your life or in your relationship.

2. Look at the following three diagrams. How would you describe each diagram as it pertains to priorities and who is at the center of your life?



• In all honesty, which diagram most accurately reflects the way you are living out your relationship with Christ right now?

• What can you do to put Christ more at the center of your life?

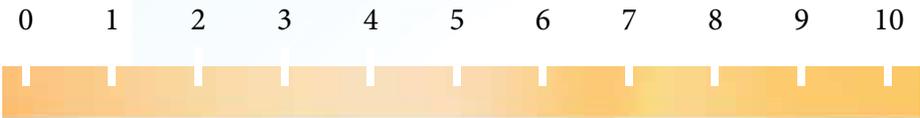
"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." —Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (1) 2006



3. What qualities might be exhibited by a couple who has Jesus at the center of their relationship? What clues would you look for?

COUPLE'S DISCUSSION

God in Your Daily Life



1. On a scale of 1–10, how much do you bring God into your relationship on a daily basis? (10 being “very often” and 1 being “We don’t ever talk about God.”)

2. What are some things we can do together as a couple to put God more at the center of your relationship?

3. The video makes the point that having Jesus as the center of your relationship takes the pressure off both of you because it frees you from having to worry about meeting one another’s every need. What difference will that freedom mean for your future marriage?

“The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving.”
—Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* 13



CLOSING PRAYER

The following is an excerpt of Pope Francis from the homily of the Holy Mass for the conclusion of the Year of Faith, November 24, 2013:

“Christ is the center of the history of humanity and also the center of the history of every individual. To him we can bring the joys and the hopes, the sorrows and troubles which are part of our lives. When Jesus is the center, light shines even amid the darkest times of our lives; he gives us hope...”

PRAYER OF ST. PATRICK

Christ with me,
 Christ before me,
 Christ behind me,
 Christ in me,
 Christ beneath me,
 Christ above me,
 Christ on my right,
 Christ on my left,
 Christ when I lie down,
 Christ when I sit down,
 Christ when I arise,
 Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
 Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
 Christ in every eye that sees me,
 Christ in every ear that hears me.



COUPLE'S ACTIVITY

Think about the number you gave yourself (on a scale of 1–10) when it comes to bringing Christ into your relationship and daily life. In fact, you might want to write that number in a place where you'll see it often. Your goal is to increase that number by at least 1 in the coming week.

Think about the steps you can take to involve Christ more intimately and significantly in your relationship this week. In addition to obvious strategies such as attending Mass together, you might consider these ideas:

- Schedule a short time to pray together daily.
- Find a program at the parish to attend together (such as a Bible study, a retreat, or a lecture).
- Go out with another couple who shares your faith and priorities in life.
- Identify other priorities that keep Christ on the outside, and take steps to reduce their influence.

After a week of these and other strategic fixes, you should be able to say with confidence, “Our relationship is more Christ-centered now than it was a week ago.”

SESSION 2

A DEEPER UNITY

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SESSION 2

A DEEPER UNITY

INTRODUCTION

The rush of first love is like the taste of grape juice: exciting, bold, and slightly overpowering. Given the right amount of time and circumstances, though, that love can mature into something like a fine wine: complex, flavorful, and far superior to grape juice. The key to eventually enjoying such a relationship is to endure the “fermenting” process—the difficulties and challenges that God uses to mature and strengthen you through marriage. As you prepare for marriage, God is already working in your relationship to prepare you for a beautiful and lasting marriage, but that takes your commitment to prepare and deepen your bond of love for marriage.

OPENING PRAYER

Pray together the following prayer:

We thank you, O God, for the guidance found in your Word, for the timeless wisdom contained in these passages:

“Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” —Philippians 2:3-4

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” —Matthew 20:28

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” —Ephesians 5:21

Move in our midst today, Lord. Guide our efforts to deepen our relationship with one another, as well as our relationship with you.

Amen.

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.”

—Song of Solomon 8:6-7

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What connection do you see between God's relationship with the Israelites and your relationship with your beloved? How might this be played out in your future marriage?

2. Describe the difference between a "grape juice" love and a "fine wine" love.

3. If marriage is an adventure that couples are called to share in Christ, what's the best way to approach that adventure?

4. Agree or disagree: If you don't regularly experience conflict or challenge with your beloved, your relationship is not maturing at a healthy rate.

"The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for 'the wedding-feast of the Lamb.'"

—CCC 1612

COUPLE'S DISCUSSION

1. How do you and your beloved complement one another or balance each other out?

2. How does it change your outlook on your relationship as you prepare for marriage to know that struggles and "wilderness experiences" are part of God's plan?



3. What are two challenges or situations that God has used to deepen your relationship?

• How has your relationship stretched, grown, or matured as a result?

• How did your past challenges or situations prepare you for future challenges?

*“Two such as you with such a master speed
Cannot be parted nor be swept away
From one another once you are agreed
That life is only life forevermore
Together wing to wing and oar to oar.”*
—from “The Master Speed” by Robert Frost

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together the following prayer:

Almighty God,

We praise you for the model of selfless, sacrificial love you demonstrated in your relationship with the Israelites. We thank you for the wilderness experiences that you use to deepen our relationships—for the challenges and dark times that ultimately produce maturity, appreciation, and fulfillment. Bless our efforts to understand those experiences, to survive and thrive in the midst of them.

Your Word tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We give thanks to you for the opportunity...

- to examine the crowning work of your creation in our beloved every day,
- to study the intricacies of your design, and
- to use our knowledge of that design to express love to our beloved in a meaningful way.

Guide us as we work to plan a marriage that will honor you and reflect your grace for the rest of our lives.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COUPLE'S ACTIVITY

Regardless of how long you've known your beloved, you've probably become somewhat of an expert on his or her likes, dislikes, favorite foods, proudest moments, and biggest pet peeves. It's time to take inventory of what you know and put it to good use.

For your activity this week, your first step will be to spend some time creating a “bio sheet” for your beloved. Make a list of the things you’ve learned about him or her, such as likes, dislikes, noteworthy accomplishments, important events, talents and abilities, favorite songs, movies, tasty treats, relaxation spots...and anything else you can think of.

BIO SHEET

Likes

Dislikes

Noteworthy
Accomplishments

Personal Highlights

Talents

Abilities

Favorite Songs

Favorite Movies

Favorite Restaurant

Favorite Snacks

Favorite Relaxation Spots

Other Relevant Bits
of Information

SESSION 3

CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION



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SESSION 3

CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is inevitable in any relationship, but it doesn't have to be damaging or hurtful. In fact, if approached in the right way and handled well, conflict can actually be a healthy thing in a relationship. However, sometimes in a conflict, your perspective gets shifted from your beloved to the conflict itself. Instead of working together to address the situation, you work in opposition. The key to resolving conflict in a healthy manner is to address not only the conflict itself, but also the underlying factors that are causing it.

OPENING PRAYER

Read together the following prayer:

In Proverbs 27:17, we read, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."

Almighty Father, the conflicts that we resolve in our relationship sharpen us and make us keener instruments of your grace and glory. Bless our efforts to understand conflict better, to work through our conflicts together with our beloved in order to strengthen and deepen our understanding of one another. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

—Mark 11:25



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In your relationship so far, what are the top two or three areas of conflict? What other areas of conflict do you possibly foresee in your future marriage?

2. What does it mean to “lift up the hood” on your relationship?

• Why might some people be reluctant to lift up the hood of their relationship?

3. What do you think most married couples would tell you about conflict?

“The love of Christ can restore to spouses the joy of journeying together. This is what marriage is all about: man and woman walking together, wherein the husband helps his wife to become ever more a woman, and wherein the woman has the task of helping her husband to become ever more a man.”

—Pope Francis, Homily on June 14, 2014

COUPLE'S DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the underlying issues in your relationship that might make conflict difficult for you, and how have your conflict-resolution skills developed over the course of your relationship?

2. How much more work do you have to do in refining your conflict-resolution skills?



“In an epoch marked by hatred, selfishness, the desire for false happiness, by the decadence of customs, the absence of father and mother figures, instability in numerous young families, and by widespread frailty and hardship to which many young people fall prey, we look to you, Jesus in the Eucharist, with renewed hope.”

—St. John Paul II, Message to the young people of Rome and Lazio, March 15, 2005



CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together the following words from Pope Francis and the Our Father:

“We all know there is no such thing as the perfect family or a perfect husband or wife. I won’t even mention a perfect mother-in-law... It’s us who do exist, sinners. Jesus knows us well and he tells us a secret: Never let the day end without apologizing.”

—Pope Francis, to engaged couples on February 14, 2014

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

COUPLE'S ACTIVITY

Set aside some time this week to create a “Geneva Convention” for your relationship. In international terms, the Geneva Conventions are protocols for the humane treatment of combatants during armed conflict. They are intended to prevent cruelty. That’s your goal as well.

Conflict, if not worked through properly, can bring out the worst in people. Otherwise loving and caring people find themselves saying or doing things in the midst of heated conflict that would have seemed unimaginable to them in any other situation. In some cases, this may be attributed to a competitive nature run amok. The desire to “win” the conflict at any cost becomes irresistible. In other cases, it may be attributed to a traumatic (and perhaps even abusive) upbringing.

When conflict is worked through properly—when couples feel safe in “looking under the hood” together—it can produce profoundly positive results. Proverbs 27:17 compares it to iron sharpening iron. The key is to create a healthy dynamic in your relationship in which conflict can be discussed and worked through with no damage to your relationship. That’s where this exercise comes in.

Choose a comfortable setting for your discussion, one that offers intimacy and privacy. Ideally you’ll want to do this when there’s no active conflict between the two of you. Otherwise your attempts to create your own Geneva Conventions may get caught up in the conflict.

This is the place for transparency and openness. Talk about the things that bother you when you argue. Talk about the things that hurt your feelings or push your buttons. Talk about the sensitive topics and issues that should never be used as ammunition.

Draw up a list of resolutions based on your discussion. You may want to phrase them as promises. For example:

- I promise not to use the words “always” and “never” (as in “You always do this” or “You never do that”) during a conflict. Instead, I will stick with specifics.
- I promise not to bring up past conflicts that have already been resolved.
- I promise not to raise my voice.
- I promise not to confront you about something until after I’ve prayed about it.
- I promise not to share the details of our conflict with other people.

RESOLUTIONS

X _____ X _____

Sign the sheet together—not as a legally binding document, but as a sign of your good faith and your desire not to hurt one another in the midst of conflict.

SESSION 4

BUILDING A THRIVING MARRIAGE



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SESSION 4

BUILDING A THRIVING MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a high calling. You must be willing to do the little things to keep moving closer to God's ideal. You must be aware of yourself. You must do the necessary work. You must find ways to be together with your beloved. You must pursue virtue. You must be patient with each other.

Woundedness presents a challenge to the ideal of marriage. A wound is an experience of unlove—one that can have far-reaching effects. The wound causes pain, which causes fear, which causes managing behaviors to avoid the pain. Woundedness must be countered with an authentic experience of love—a blessing from God or another person. The blessing triggers feelings of being loved, which trigger gratitude and security, which trigger expressions of love.

OPENING PRAYER

Pray together the following prayer:

We stand before you, Holy Spirit, gathered in your name. Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts. Give us light and strength to know your will, to make it our own, and to live it in our lives.

Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power, for you are God, sharing the glory of Father and Son. Unite us to yourself in the bond of love, and keep us faithful to all that is true. You live and reign with the Father and the Son, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

“Love is the prime gift. Whatever else is freely given to us becomes a gift only through love.”

— Anonymous by Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What’s the most impressive thing you’ve ever accomplished? Explain.

• Where does your relationship rank among your most impressive achievements? Explain.

2. Of the five things couples can do to pursue God’s ideal for their relationship—be aware of yourself, do the work, be together, pursue virtue, and be patient—which one would you say is most difficult? Explain.

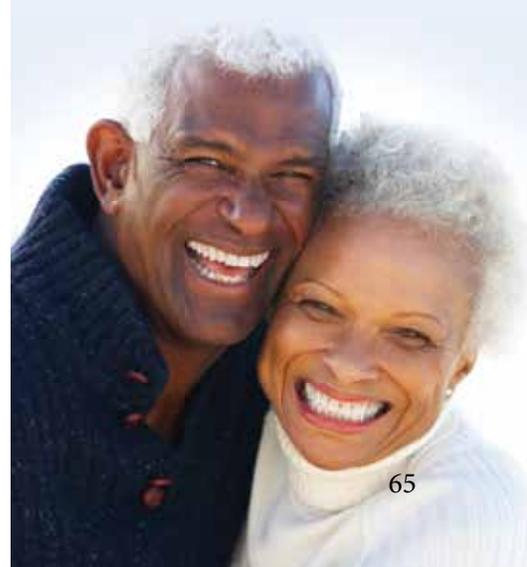
3. Describe a relationship you’ve seen struggle because of woundedness.

“May you be torches that burn in the middle of the world: where there is a night of unbelief, may the light of your faith cast a strong light; where there is the soot of hatred and despair, may the glow of your optimism and hope shine in; where there is the darkness of selfishness and violence, let the fire of your love burn bright.”
—St. John Paul II, Speech to Youth, Imola, Italy, May 9, 1986

COUPLE’S DISCUSSION

1. What would happen to your relationship if you became more aware of yourselves, did the work of relationships, made a point of being together more, pursued virtue more passionately, and learned to be more patient with each other? How good could you be together? What might be some of the results?

2. What impact has woundedness—that is, past experiences of “unlove”—had on your relationship?



“It is risky to get married: it is risky! It is this egoism which threatens it, because we each have within us this possibility of a dual personality: the one that says, ‘I am free, I want this ...’ and the other which says, ‘I, me, to me, with me, for me’”

—Pope Francis, meeting with the young people of Umbria, October 4, 2013

CLOSING PRAYER

Read together the following quote by St. John Paul II and the following prayer:

“The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do...Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility. Family, become what you are.”

—St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17

Go with us, Father, as we depart from here. Bless our efforts to build relationships that approach your ideal. Work in our hearts and in our minds to refine us and make us better instruments of your grace.

Amen.



COUPLE'S ACTIVITY

A relationship is work—the most rewarding work you will ever do. And when there's work to be done, one of the most helpful resources available to you is a to-do list. Set aside some time this week with your beloved to make a to-do list for your relationship.

Put some thought into the items you include on your list. Be specific. Don't settle for something vague like “Spend more quality time together”; instead, opt for something more specific like “Take a walk around the block together three times this week.”

SESSION 5

PROTECTING THE BOND

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SESSION 5

PROTECTING THE BOND

INTRODUCTION

God desires for you a marital relationship that will grow in love, grow in trust, grow in unity, and grow in closeness. Circumstances, however, can conspire to prevent such growth from occurring. Pursuing things outside the home—or things outside the interests of your family—such as social media, career advancement, or just having a good time can rob your marital relationship of its potential if you're not cautious. It is therefore essential that you and your beloved work to protect your bond of love, now and throughout your marriage.

OPENING PRAYER

Pray together the following prayer:

Our Father in heaven, we ask for your blessing and help as we are gathered together. We pray for guidance in the matters of marriage and ask that you would clearly show us how to seek your ideal with a spirit of joy and enthusiasm. Give us the desire to find ways to excel in our relationship. Help us to work together and encourage each other to excellence. We ask that we would challenge each other to reach higher and further to become the best spouses—and vessels of your grace—that we can be.

Amen.

“A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.” —Proverbs 31:10-12



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Explain how a married couple could go from the intimacy of their early days to living parallel lives, as described in the video. What can you do in your relationship starting now to prevent this from happening?

2. Think about the woman's description in the video of the family in the airport focusing on their individual phones and personal devices and not talking to one another. How close to home did her description hit in your relationship? In other relationships you see?

3. Gale Sayers called his book *I Am Third*. What are some of the challenges and drawbacks to making that title a reality in your own life right now? In your future marriage?

“The human person is a special gift of the Creator and the Redeemer together. Indeed to be a bridegroom is to be aware of the gift. This awareness creates a new mentality, a new attitude, a new behavior when we see the gift in the works of creation and above all in people.”

—St. John Paul II, speech to youth of Civitavecchia, Italy, March 19, 1987

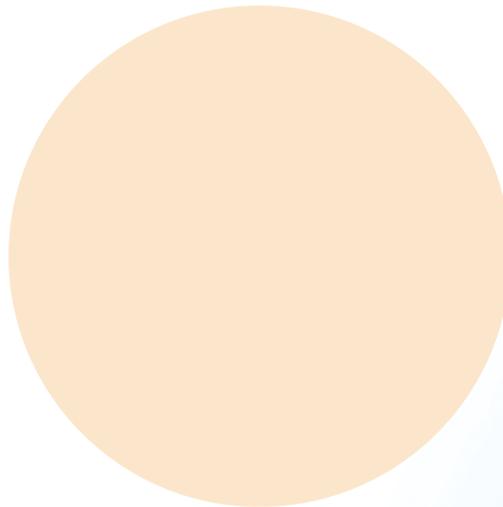
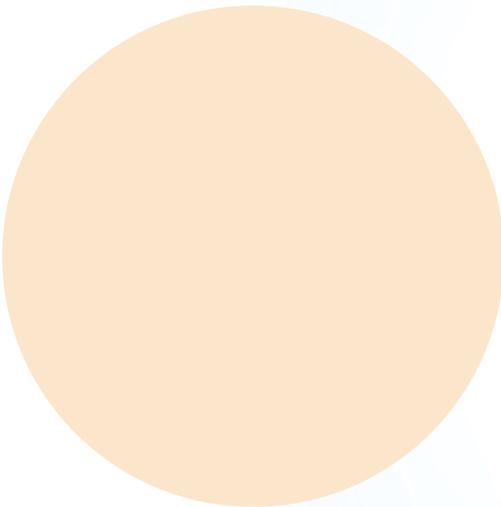


COUPLE'S DISCUSSION

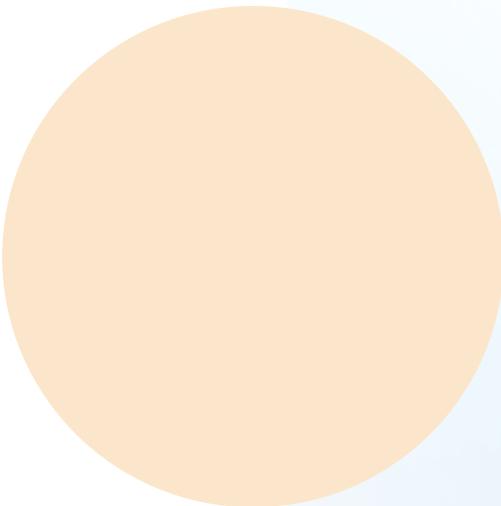
1. Create some visuals. In the first circle, make a pie chart that represents the way you spend your time during your waking hours. In the second circle, make a pie chart that represents the way your beloved spends his or her waking hours.

Use any or all of the following categories for your charts, as they apply:

- **Your Relationship**
- **Career**
- **Church**
- **Personal Devices (Internet, social media, online games, messaging)**
- **Hanging Out with Friends**
- **Sports/Workouts**
- **Hobbies**
- **Watching TV**
- **Any other categories that apply**



2. With input from your beloved, draw a pie chart that represents a reasonable, more marriage-friendly way of spending your waking hours.



“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” —1 Corinthians 13:1-3

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together the following prayer:

Our Father, may everything we do begin with your inspiration,
continue with your help,
and reach perfection under your guidance.
With your loving care, guide us in our daily actions.
Help us to persevere with love and sincerity.
Teach us to judge wisely the things of earth
and to love the things of heaven.

Amen.

COUPLE'S ACTIVITY

Based on the pie charts you filled out, identify the biggest current threat to your relationship. Is it your careers? The time you spend hanging out with friends? Your hobbies or workout schedules?

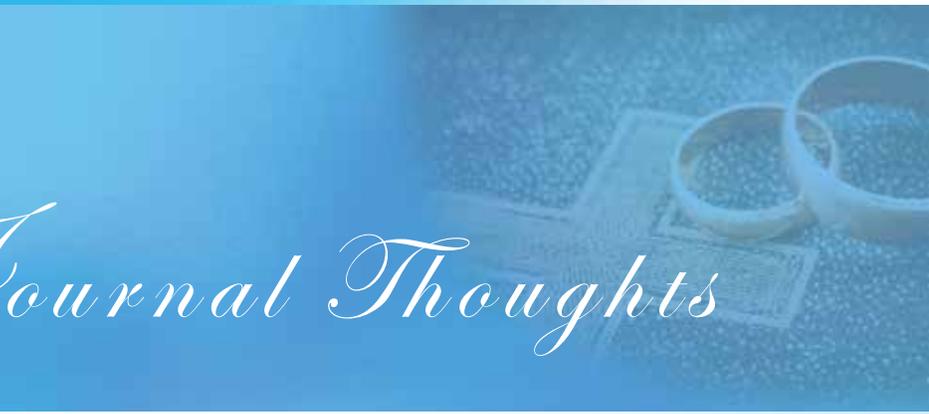
After you identify the threat, ask yourselves two questions. The first question is, *How deeply has this threat infiltrated our relationship?* Let's say, for example, that like many couples you identify Personal Device Time—time spent in social media or online—as your biggest threat. Take a clear-eyed look at your daily habits and routines to see how big of a role Personal Device Time plays in them. Try to be as objective and honest as you can. Don't try to downplay or dismiss what you see. Don't grade yourselves on a curve or compare yourselves to other couples who seem to have it worse. Acknowledge the extent of the problem and take responsibility for it.

The second question is, *What steps can we take to battle it together?* Work up a strategy that is both effective and doable. In the case of Personal Device Time, your strategy might look something like this:

1. Redefine terms. Many people claim that they *have* to be on their personal devices for their jobs or other reasons. Talk about what constitutes a “pressing” need. What *is* important? Does fantasy football count?

2. Talk about the needs that drive your Personal Device Time, whether it's the fear of being excluded, the desire to be the first to know when something happens, or boredom—the need for constant stimulation.
3. Set limits. Agree to check your devices, say, once while you're on a date or spending time together. At all other times, they stay (turned off—or at least muted) in a location where they can't be easily accessed.
4. Hold one another accountable. You both have a vested interest in the strength and potential of your relationship. If you see something potentially harmful creeping into it, you have the right—and the responsibility—to speak up. If you see one another falling back into old habits, you must say something.

Test your strategy to see how well it works, and then make any necessary tweaks or changes.



Your Journal Thoughts

SESSION 6

SEXUALITY AND AUTHENTIC LOVE



*Marriage
Preparation*

Living Marriage

Beloved™



Nihil obstat: Derek Barr, Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver

January 2015

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SESSION 6

SEXUALITY AND AUTHENTIC LOVE

INTRODUCTION

Sexual intimacy, as intended by God, is unitive—a total gift of self, holding nothing back. It is more than just a biological union; it is a union of body, soul, and emotions. Sexual intimacy is also procreative. In the act of sex, spouses must always be open to the possibility of creating new human life. If the unitive or procreative dimension of sex is thwarted, genuine intimacy cannot occur. As we will see, the Church’s teachings on sex are not a “no” to this or a “no” that, but actually a “yes” to authentic love—the love that we are all ultimately looking for.

OPENING PRAYER

Pray together the following prayer:

Almighty God,

We gather today to answer the call of St. Paul to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to you. Open our hearts to the wisdom of your plan for marital intimacy. Transform us by the renewal of our minds so that we may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect to you.

Amen.

“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

—Romans 12:1-2



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Catholic author Frank Sheed said, “Modern man practically never *thinks* about sex.” Why is it important for us, as preparing-to-be-married couples, to think about the true meaning of sex?

2. God reveals to use the true meaning of sex. How is God’s plan for sexuality good news—a “yes” to the fullest expression of intimacy and love?

3. What are some of the benefits a marital relationship might experience when the couple fully embraces God’s plan for sex?

“Seeing God’s covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People’s conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage... Tradition has always seen in the Song of Solomon a unique expression of human love, insofar as it is a reflection of God’s love—a love ‘strong as death’ that ‘many waters cannot quench.’”

—CCC 1611

COUPLE’S DISCUSSION

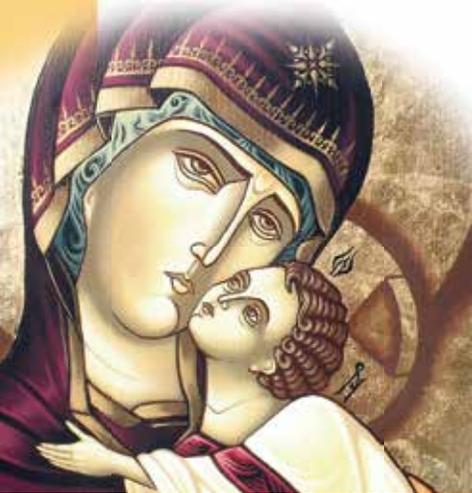
1. Take an honest look at your relationship now. Are you as individuals and as a couple living God’s plan for sexuality as you prepare for marriage? What are some things that you might do or change now to prepare for sexual intimacy in marriage?

2. How open are each of you to having children? Do either one of you have any fears or anxieties about having children? Do you see children as a blessing to your marriage?



“In destroying the power of giving life through contraception, a husband and wife are doing something to self. This turns attention to self, and so it destroys the gift of love in him or her.”

—Blessed Teresa of Calcutta,
speech at the U.S. National Prayer Breakfast on February 3, 1984



CLOSING PRAYER

Pray together the Collect for Purity:

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

COUPLE'S ACTIVITY

Each of you should put some thought into this question: *What may prove to be the biggest obstacle to genuine sexual intimacy in our marriage?* Don't reveal your answers to each other right away. Instead, set a time this week to sit down and share your thoughts.

Depending on your circumstances, you may say your biggest obstacle is...

- your attitude toward the possibility of having children
- an interest in pornography that isn't as harmless as it seems
- an inability to track your fertility cycle

...or something else entirely. Be open and honest in your assessment.

If you and your beloved identify the same obstacle, your job is obvious: to work together to remove the obstacle. If, on the other hand, the two of you identify two very different obstacles, it may be an indication that the challenge ahead of you is more formidable than you thought. Either way, you have the opportunity to brainstorm workable solutions for eliminating those obstacles from your relationship.

For example, to realign your attitude toward having children, you might talk about the concerns that make you reluctant and find workable solutions to them. To address the issue of pornography, you may need to discuss the behaviors associated with it and plan strategies for counteracting them. To learn to track your fertility cycle more accurately, you may schedule an appointment to take an NFP class through your local parish or diocese.

