

FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF FAITH FORMATION

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Introduction to Relationships: God, Love, and Marriage

One of my favorite songs as a kid was called, "Take Her in Your Arms" by Andy Stewart. The song was about a young man who fell in love and was later heartbroken. Every verse ended with the line, "If he'd gone and asked his father, I'm sure he'd set him right," then chorus would describe how the father would tell him, "Take her in your arms and tell her that you love her...If you're going to love a woman, be sure and do it right." I was probably nine years old when I first heard the song and was more interested in the bouncy tune than the advice in romance, but that chorus line stuck with me. "Go first and ask your father..."

Nevertheless, when I got a little older it wasn't my father I got relationship advice from, it was my local school. The birds and the bees were introduced in my fifth grade class, and whatever I would get on romance and ethics happened in my middle school health class. A conversation with my father probably would have benefited me, but now that I was an awkward adolescent I was quite determined to avoid it.

Looking back on what public education taught me about relationships, there's a lot that should be criticized from the point of view of Catholic morality. However, even more problematic was what it *didn't* teach. I would imagine that in an attempt to keep everything secular and non-sectarian, the public-school curriculum focused on mechanics and avoiding undesirable consequences. In the end, it boiled down to three rules: don't get pregnant, don't get diseases, and make sure it's consensual. Everything else was permissible and normal.

As you can see, this is not a high standard. I had a vague sense as an adolescent that ethics probably came into play somewhere in the picture. There were definitely things that passed the three pronged test that still seemed wrong, but I didn't have the background necessary to put my finger on exactly why. Further, it seemed there were unspoken social rules about how one went about dating, but I was left to figure out what those were from conversations with friends, 60's rock songs, and Seinfeld episodes. Fortunately, a Catholic high school education saved me from a lot of mistakes.

It turns out you need to know more than mechanics to navigate romance well. You need to know the moral rules, the importance of self discipline, what marriage is, and all the courtesies surrounding dating ("What do I do? What's expected of me?") You might figure out some of it for yourself, but this shouldn't be learned by trial and error.



[Check out Joe's God, Love, and Marriage recorded classes here.](#)

—Joe Moreshead