



2008-2009

Syllabus Handouts

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Daddy's Letters	5
Our Journey in Faith.....	7
What kind of marriage did you parents have? What kind of memories are you leaving your kids?.....	9
Our Relationship with our Peers	13
Family Relationships	14
Love thy Neighbor.....	19
Relationships with Other Men	24
Evangelizing.....	30
Our Relationship with God	46
Do you have a living relationship with God or are you just practicing religion?	47
Who is God for me?	50
If you want a relationship with God, you must make space in your life for the Spiritual	61
What does Jesus' Sacrifice mean to you?	64
Our Relationship with our Children.....	68
How does my childhood relationship with my Father affect my parenting?	69
No regrets - 10 ways to make time for your children.....	71
Help define a vision for your children - are you helping the invisible become visible for your kids?	75
Kids and substance abuse preteen years when they are really exposed for the first time.....	77
Bullies: a serious problem for kids.....	79
Unselfishness - how to teach it.....	82
Our Relationship with the Church.....	84
Eucharistic Adoration.....	85
Changes in the Mass	87
Cafeteria Catholics	92
Supporting your Parish	96
Supporting your Pastor	99
Our Relationship with Ourselves	101
Dealing with Emotions	102

Living Our Strengths & Best Version of Ourselves	106
End of Life Issues: Caring for Sick Parents & Death of a Family Member	109
Children off to School	114
Our Relationship with our Spouses	119
How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?	120
Emotional Infidelity	128
Blaming - Holding Grudges and Forgiving	131
Remember the Power of Humor & Communication	139
How to talk about and manage money with your spouse	142
Don't Forget the Simple Things	149
Stages of Marriage - where are you - what can you expect ?	158

Introduction

Daddy's Letters

Objective

Help the Fathers to learn a new affirmation technique and also better understand what their kids are thinking, what their kids enjoy and want to do with Dad and where the Dad can improve.

Your daughter had loved the "bike rides" that you went on together, just the two of us. Your son loved to shoot hoops with you, while your youngest wanted you to sit and watch her dance around our living room as Beauty and the Beast music played in the background, over and over again. Unfortunately, that was last year, not this year, and like the songs says, "The times, they are a changin'."

Are your Kid's interests changing much faster than you imagined? Does your daughter still love the bike rides, your son outgrown shooting hoops and what new interest does your youngest want you involved in ? More importantly, how do you know? Do you find your self guessing and just as often wrong?

As preparation (two week preparation is suggested) for this topic, the small group should do the Daddy's letters in advance with their own children and receive the responses prior to sharing this topic with the Fathers Team. During the large group discussion, introduce the concept of Daddy's letters then share the personal examples of what happened when the child received the affirmation and what were the "a ha" answers to questions from their children that the Fathers received back.

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 18:10

"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven".

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2228

Parents' respect and affection are expressed by the care and attention they devote to bringing up their young children and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. As the children grow up, the same respect and devotion lead parents to educate them in the right use of their reason and freedom.

Small Group Questions

1. How would you affirm your child in a letter, e-mail or tell them directly ?
2. What questions do you want answered from your children in a Daddy's Letter?
3. How do you think your children will answer the questions, what do you expect will be the biggest surprise?

Recommended Resources

1. www.danschaeffer.com - Daddy's Letters

Example of a Daddy's Letter:

Dear (child's name),

Hi! I wanted to write you a letter and also ask you to do something that will really help me.

First, I wanted to tell you just how proud I am of you. You have done so many things that have made a difference in our lives. (Share a few examples of the positive things that your child has done and how proud you are of them). Dad really loves you and wants so much for you to realize your dreams in life.

You see, I want to be a good Daddy, but sometimes I don't always know what to do, so I wrote out some questions that I put in this letter. Would you do me a favor and spend some time thinking about the questions, and then answering them for me? I would really appreciate it. I want to spend more time with you and I want you to enjoy it as much as me. But I want to do things that you would really like.

You are a great (son/daughter), and I am proud to be your Dad. As soon as you get done with your answers, give them to me and I will read them. Then we can begin to plan this next year! I'm looking forward to it!

Sincerely,

Dad

On a separate piece of paper write questions that you want answered. Samples questions might be:

What one thing (or several things) have you wanted to do with Dad, but have never done?

What one thing would you really like Dad to teach you, or tell you, that he never has?

What have you done with Dad in the past that you really enjoyed, but don't get to do enough?

What one thing is really on your mind that you want me to know about?

You may use an email instead of a letter, or even a text message. Or, if you aren't a writer (or your children are too young to read), you may just ask the questions of your kids in person.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Our Journey in Faith

Objective

This topic presents a natural opportunity for the men to get to know one another spiritually. The large group presentation should be kept shorter than normal to allow more intimate sharing within the small groups. One or two men can share their witness to the large group to help establish the format and tone of the small groups.

Tell about some of the significant people and events (successes, failure, growth experiences) in your life.

Bible Readings

1. 2 Timothy 1:8

So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.

2. Mathew 18:16

If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1816

The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it: "All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks." Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

2. Paragraph 2087

Our moral life has its source in faith in God who reveals his love to us. St. Paul speaks of the "obedience of faith"⁹ as our first obligation. He shows that "ignorance of God" is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations.¹⁰ Our duty toward God is to believe in him and to bear witness to him.

3. Paragraphs 2471-2472

Before Pilate, Christ proclaims that he "has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." The Christian is not to "be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord." In situations that require witness to the faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation, after the example of St. Paul before his judges. We must keep "a clear conscience toward God and toward men."

The duty of Christians to take part in the life of the Church impels them to act as witnesses of the Gospel and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. Witness is an act of justice that establishes the truth or makes it known.

Small Group Questions

1. Why did you start coming to the FATHERS Team?
2. Are there certain spiritual milestones in your life?

Reminders

1. This is an important segment. It can help establish to new members that this is a “safe” zone and they can openly share with their peers.

What kind of marriage did you parents have? What kind of memories are you leaving your kids?

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting – call his wife on the way to work and make a date to talk about the memories they are leaving their kids – and he will go home and be very demonstrative in his love and respect for his spouse.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 5:25

I will love my wife and Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

2. Ephesians 6:4

I will not provoke my children to anger but will bring them up in the discipline and discipleship of the Lord Jesus Christ

Small Group Questions

1. Think back to when you were young – what are your memories of your Mom and Dad's relationship – was your dad affectionate – respectful and appreciative of your mother?
2. Do you remember them more for them hugging and kissing or fighting and yelling?
3. Remember you kids don't get what you 'pitch' them – they 'catch' you in whatever you are doing – whether you intend it or not – what are your kids catching?
4. What will your kids remember of your marriage?

Recommended Readings

- 1.

Recommended Resources

1. Is marrying someone from divorced parents a risk?

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/column.php?n=372>

A book I read discusses the choice of a potential spouse, and a section on childhood talks about whether the person's parents are divorced. This concerns me because my parents are divorced. The man I'm seeing is reading the same book and I wonder if I should bring up the subject with him.

There are a lot of well-intentioned people out there writing books to try to help people. But unfortunately some advice given does cause some confusion for people, and as in this case, can cause undue concerns about oneself or another person.

Divorce is a tragic reality for so many families, including Catholic families. There are many reasons why two people divorce. Sometimes there is domestic violence and/or abuse, physical or mental. Sometimes it is because of infidelity or pornography or alcoholism, or some other damaging actions of one of the two partners that makes living with the other unbearable or impossible. The many declarations of nullity granted by the Catholic Church proves one very startling reality; namely, that many Catholic persons go into marriage without the intention of making it permanent, or are incapable of living the consent due to some aspect of immaturity.

Some may say that this is an excuse and the Church is handing out annulments too loosely. That's not for me to judge, but I have studied the annulment process and explored it deeply, and I am convinced that the Church is right on target with annulments. I'm sure there are abuses here and there, but by and large, annulments are granted because there are serious impediments in one or both persons. There is a serious

What kind of marriage did you parents have? What kind of memories are you leaving your kids?

crisis of preparation for marriage, and also with formation of individuals for marriage. It's not the Church's fault there are so many people who get married and are incapable of keeping the vows.

But you did not ask me about annulments, so I will stop right there. It was, however, important to spell that out a bit about annulments because there are too many enemies of annulments: those who want to assume the worst of the Church in granting them, and who wish to look at those who have annulments as somehow being less in the eyes of God for having gone through divorce and annulment. The fact is that those with annulments granted by the Church can be sure that in the eyes of God, they never had a marriage take place. Those who granted the annulment will have to answer to God, not those granted the annulment.

Now, having said all that, I will say that there are many, many, many marriages that end in divorce that should NOT have ended in divorce, and the two people involved were completely careless in not doing everything possible, to the point of the very act of the will to change things to make the marriage work.

To get back to your question now, you are concerned about coming from divorce and a book you read stating that a person should beware of, or even stay clear of, a person who has divorce in their background. This kind of advice is based on some very popular scientific studies that end up in a marriage preparation topic that addresses a person's origin, which primarily means family background. They have found that those who come from divorced parents are likely to have problems in their own marriage.

That may have truth to it, but that cannot be seen as an "absolute," and it's certainly not the end of the story. There is so much that must also be considered, and a person should never just simply discount someone for marriage only on the basis of knowing that their parents divorced. Coming from divorced parents does not automatically make someone a risk in marriage. I come from divorce and Bridget seems pretty happy.

Children have a way of adjusting, and once an adult, the key is confronting and dealing with anything that is an issue from the past. But most of all, we must believe in the power of God's grace above all things. A person living a sacramental and prayerful life, loving God and desiring to follow Him in every way, can receive grace that helps them rise above anything of their past.

It's a shame your parents divorced, but that does not mean your marriage will end in divorce, nor that you are going to be the cause of problems in your marriage. I assume you have a handle on the divorce of your parents and have long since come to terms with it. I also assume you have a very good understanding of what marriage is and what it means to be married. I also assume you are a sinner and you plan on marrying another sinner, which means you will both be quite capable of hurting each other due to the effects of original sin. And I also assume you are a woman who relies on God's grace to help you live your life, and not your own power, right?

If there is a marriage of two people with a solid direction (both knowing they are meant for Heaven and that life is about walking that road) and having a firm sense that their life and commitments and decisions have a direct effect on our relationship with God, anything else can be overcome. For Catholics, it also means that we are people who work to follow Christ and His example, and the Church's teachings, and we grow in grace to give us God's life and power in us, which will overcome our own weaknesses and issues (if we are open and working to overcome them). If both people know how to forgive and to ask forgiveness, they will have MUCH going for them in their marriage.

There is no marriage out there that is without problems due to issues of each person at some level. You have divorced parents, which means perhaps you have some trust issues.

Marriage will always be between two sinners who cannot make the other person totally happy in this life. It is about two people helping each other through this life on the path to Heaven, along with their children. That requires a sacrifice of self in order to serve the other. These people who fear future marriage because of issues and what have you, as well as these books that tell you to watch out for this and watch out for that, don't seem to understand that they are doing a disservice by giving people a false impression that they can find someone who will never hurt them.

Just because a person makes a choice in marriage and it does not work out as they had hoped, it does not mean they failed at marriage, nor that there really is no marriage. It just means that their marriage is what it is, and you have to work very hard to do your part, and pray very hard the other will do their part to strengthen the marriage and make it better. That is what love is.

What kind of marriage did your parents have? What kind of memories are you leaving your kids?

Okay, so some marriages don't have the blissful feelings of love they once had or that are desired. Does that mean single people should keep putting off marriage because they need to ensure they will always have that? No!

Marriage is a total risk! So if you are not up for the risk, then never marry. But don't fool yourself into thinking you can avoid a bad marriage because you do all this analysis and inspection.

Don't listen to the advice that says to avoid a person whose parents are divorced. That's nonsense. God's grace does wonders to help any person who is walking the path of God. It is a person who relies on God's grace that you want to marry, despite their background. Then you have a person who can not only overcome their past, but someone who is really going places, and capable of moving mountains. And certainly a person who will know how to love.

Yes, you have to do some due diligence to see if the person's issues are unresolved to the point of making them incapable of marriage. But that means it has to be serious, and it will be, obviously. Again, the key to a great marriage is when both people know their own weaknesses, faults, past issues, etc., and that they accept each other's weaknesses, faults, past issues, etc. Then they can really be an exceptional "helpmate."

But because people are human beings, and human beings are always growing and changing, no one should enter marriage with the expectation that a person is always going to remain as they are, or (God forbid) make them happy at all times.

So take from the book only what makes sense, and never let anything make you feel uneasy. As far as bringing up the subject of divorce, I don't see why not. If you want a good "in" to talk about it, just say you were reading the book and noticed that it talks about divorce in one's background, and ask what he thinks about it and what he thinks about your having divorced parents. He should be sensible enough not to discount you because your parents are divorced. But it is a good conversation to have.

2. Your Companion Will Bring to the Marriage Habits and Attitudes Learned from His/Her Family and Friends.

<http://www.gospelway.com/family/marriage-friends.php>

Even if your mate's family or friends make no direct efforts to interfere in your marriage, your companion will come to the marriage with patterns of thinking, acting, and speaking that he/she developed from parents, relatives, and acquaintances. Observing his/her family and friends may help you understand him/her and know what to expect.

The effect of family influence

Ezekiel 16:44 - Like mother, like daughter. Or, as we sometimes say it, "Like father, like son." All of us are influenced by what we grew up with. We tend to continue to relate to people according to the habits we established growing up and according to the role models we observed.

1 Kings 15:3 - This and many similar verses describe people who were good or bad like their parents were. When children grow up with parents who have a good marriage, treat one another well, and are good parents, their children tend to act the same way in their marriage. But if the parents are alcoholic, abusive, or negligent, the children may act that way, even if they hated the way their parents acted. They lack a good role model to follow and may simply not know how to act differently.

It is possible to be different from what a person experienced while growing up, but this is difficult. If you do not like the way your future spouse's parents act in their home, or if you do not like the way your future spouse treats his family, then take care. It will be very difficult for your spouse to change these patterns, and you need to spend lots of time making sure he/she is determined and able to be different.

Nehemiah 13:23,24 - Both parents influence children. If you have conflict with your spouse's family, this needs to be dealt with thoroughly, preferably before marriage. If you marry this person, you will not only have to deal with their family themselves, you will also have to deal with their influence on your mate.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.

What kind of marriage did you parents have? What kind of memories are you leaving your kids?

3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

What kind of marriage did you parents have? What kind of memories are you leaving your kids?

Our Relationship with our Peers

Family Relationships

Objective

“Family” stretches beyond your wife and children. It includes parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and extends to all in-laws. Each is part part of your family. Sometimes these are difficult relationships to maintain and conflicts are inevitable. What is our mission as fathers to nurture, lead, and be the role model in family relationships?

Each man should leave the meeting looking to implement one or two ideas that will better relationships in his family. We should commit to being a good Christian leader at family gatherings, heeling conflicts that will no doubt arise, and work to have all family members share in the love that can exist in a family.

Bible Readings

1. Luke 12:50 – 53

There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

2. Luke 15 11-32

Then he said, "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast,

because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.

The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.

He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.

But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'

He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.

But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2206

The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The family is a privileged community called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing."

2. Paragraph 2208

The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. There are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It devolves then on other persons, other families, and, in a subsidiary way, society to provide for their needs: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

3. Paragraph 2211

The political community has a duty to honor the family, to assist it, and to ensure especially:

- the freedom to establish a family, have children, and bring them up in keeping with the family's own moral and religious convictions; the protection of the stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family; the freedom to profess one's faith, to hand it on, and raise one's children in it, with the necessary means and institutions; the right to private property, to free enterprise, to obtain work and housing, and the right to emigrate; in keeping with the country's institutions, the right to medical care, assistance for the aged, and family benefits; the protection of security and health, especially with respect to dangers like drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.; the freedom to form associations with other families and so to have representation before civil authority.

Small Group Questions

1. When have you taken the lead to ensure family conflicts are not inflamed? When have you made them worse?
2. Who is the antagonist in your family and what can you do to reach out to them.
3. When is it best to step in to mediate family problems and when is it better to let conflicts run their course?
4. How is prayer part of enrichment in your family relationships?

Recommended Readings

1. No One's Family Is Normal

<http://www.revolutionhealth.com/healthy-living/relationships/friends-family/inlaws-extended-family/normal-family>

No One's Family Is Normal Date updated: May 07, 2007 By Allison Stacy

Content provided by Revolution Health Group

My cousin Monica and I have a saying: We're the "nontraditional" members of our family. Unlike other kin, we didn't run off and elope at 16, skim funds from the cash register at work or have babies during our teenage years. We don't hide in the basement during family gatherings or leave 47 consecutive rambling messages on our relatives' answering machines.

Which just goes to show — when it comes to families, "normal" is a relative term.

The truth is every clan has its quirks. Some, of course, are harder to deal with than others (I, for one, lose my patience by the 23rd voice message). So how do you get past your family's idiosyncrasies and build healthier relationships with your relations? Try these five tactics.

Normalize your expectations

Whether you're a teenager mortified by your dad's falsetto crooning of disco hits or a grownup grappling with the overbearing aunt who still treats you like a 15-year-old, you've likely found yourself wishing you belonged to a nice, regular family.

Cheryl Dellasega, Ph.D., a professor of humanities and women's studies at Pennsylvania State University and author of the forthcoming *Forced to Be Family* (Wiley, 2007), says that's your first mistake. "Abnormal is the new normal," she says.

Your road to better relationships begins with the realization that sure, maybe your family's messed up — but so is everyone else's.

As Leonard Felder, Ph.D., author of *When Difficult Relatives Happen to Good People: Surviving Your Family and Keeping Your Sanity* (Rodale, 2005) explains, mixed feelings, resentments and emotional baggage are all typical issues in families.

"Once you realize you're not alone in having some difficult family issues, you can stop wasting time wishing you were the Brady Bunch," he says.

Accept your lot

Next, realize your relatives are who they are — and their idiosyncrasies aren't a conspiracy to make your life miserable.

New York psychologist Karen Sherman, Ph.D., co-author of *Marriage Magic! Find It, Keep It, Make It Last* (Authorhouse, 2004), says to remember nobody's perfect: "People's imperfections come out of their limitations. Have compassion."

Dellasega advises managing your expectations. "We expect so much of our families: They should always be there to support us, never question our behavior and welcome everyone connected to us. That's a pretty big request," she says. "Figuring out what you really need and want from the relationship, then trying to make it happen, leads to acceptance."

For example, try writing down five expectations for each relative — then cross off three from each list and focus on the remaining two items. "Maybe you can put up with your mother-in-law's well-intended toilet-training advice if she's a reliable babysitter," Dellasega says.

Social psychologist Susan Newman, Ph.D., author of *The Book of No* (McGraw-Hill, 2005), agrees: "You need to focus on the positive, not dwell on the things that drive you crazy. Acceptance takes the friction away."

Practice proven coping techniques

OK, so you can't pick your relatives, and you can't change them, either. But you can change your own responses to behavior that drives you berserk — which can change the whole dynamic.

"Most people can write the script of the fight before it happens," says marriage and family therapist Karen Gail Lewis, Ed.D., author of *With or Without a Man: Single Women Taking Control of Their Lives* (Bull Publishing, 2001). That means you have the power to revise it: "You can not respond, respond in a different way, change the subject or be humorous about it. You're prepared."

How should you alter your script? Newman suggests these four strategies for dealing with relatives who drive you nuts:

Stay away as much as possible.

Be with them in groups.

When they hit a hot button, refuse to discuss the issue.

Ask another relative to bail you out.

Felder also advocates alliance-building. "Find at least one other family member you talk to ahead of a family event to say, 'Let's back each other up at this next gathering, either by making eye contact or by speaking up when the other person is getting slimed.'"

Whatever you do, don't invite the behavior that bothers you, says Sherman: "The more you pick up the rope, the more you fuel that situation."

Avoid embarrassment

Dad may initiate his public displays of tone deafness without encouragement. So what's the best way to react to your relatives' humiliating behavior?

You can ask your kin — especially a parent or someone you're close with — to stop: They often don't realize they're embarrassing you, says Newman, and if you politely request they don't do it, most will respect that.

Of course, Dad might be the type who, knowing you're ashamed, will just sing louder. If that's the case, Lewis says not to egg him on: "The less you say, the better." Either way, "Tell yourself, 'It's not a reflection on me,' " she says. "If you can walk away, do."

Help yourself through humor

How many times have you thought, "If I weren't laughing, I'd be crying"? When my family's at its craziest — from my aunt's free-associating phone conversations to more serious mental health issues — comic relief can seem like my only ticket out of the funny farm.

But is it healthy to make fun of your family? "Absolutely," says Sherman. Humor helps you detach from emotion and maintain objectivity.

"I encourage creative game playing," she says. "Our family would set up a pool: 'How many times will Aunt Susie say so and so?' "

Just don't let amusement turn into derision. "It's not healthy to ridicule your family or use sarcasm, because these are forms of aggression that hurt another person's feelings," Dellasega says.

Instead, follow Felder's advice: "Silent humor is a great tension release that helps you feel adult and powerful, rather than trapped and powerless," he says. "For example, at a family dinner where people are getting on your nerves, you might say silently, 'Isn't it wonderful that we don't do this too often?'"

I'll be sure to give my cousin the message.

2. Three Against Two, Two Against Three

<http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1998/9809up.asp>

By Karl Keating

"How to win friends and influence people" has a flip side: "How to lose friends." One of the easiest ways is by sticking to one's convictions—or, at least, by sticking to them while making them known. There can't be many readers who have never lost a friend or, at least, annoyed someone dear by maintaining a principle and conforming their actions to it.

Uncle Filbert abandoned his wife, got a civil divorce, and now is intending to marry to someone else. Do you attend the wedding to please him, even though, by doing so, you may give others the impression that you see nothing wrong in what he is proposing to do (enter a state of adultery)? Or do you decline to attend on principle, knowing that your relationship with him may be damaged? If people were as open-minded as they profess to be, Uncle Filbert would take no offense at your staying away. He would receive gratefully your explanation of why you will be unable to attend his wedding. While disagreeing with your calculus, he would respect you for abiding by your convictions, and your relationship with him would suffer long-term damage. Of course, it almost never works out this way. He will conclude that someone who doesn't approve of each of his actions doesn't approve of him at all.

Some people, in flipping open the New Testament, have a way of finding no verse other than John 17:11: "that they may be one, even as we are one." For them, the chief message of Scripture is oneness, commonality, agreement, unity. The impulse is understandable; most of us wish to avoid contention and the uneasiness that even shallow disagreement can bring. We want to get along with everyone, and we want everyone to get along with us. We recognize that there will be a multiplicity of opinions. We may have little hesitancy in highlighting our own opinions when it is a matter of disagreeing with strangers, but it seems another thing altogether when the disagreements may be with friends or family. When that prospect looms, we want to focus on unity, even if that means never alluding to some things.

But other verses round out the picture. "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). "Henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided . . ." (Luke 12:51). Why a sword, why divided? Because of principle. Living by principles would result in no division if everyone agreed to the same principles, but the fact is that they don't. The only way to effect unity is for one side or the other to convert. Normally this does not happen, which leaves two alternatives, if one wants to try to save a relationship: Learn to live with the disagreement or pretend there is no disagreement, which means to live a fiction, at least with respect to this subject and these persons.

The sword, in cutting, unavoidably cuts both parties.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

Love thy Neighbor

Objective

At a time when we rarely see neighbors or we think of them as nuisances can we possibly love our neighbors? What does “love thy neighbor” really mean today?

“It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not to feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder if the first thing shouldn’t be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them.”

- Henri Nouwen, Catholic priest, author, educator and social activist

After the meeting everyone should feel appreciation for the people they are surrounded by, even the ones they aren’t close to. Find an opportunity to reach out and act to show love for the people around you, even if you don’t know them.

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them [a scholar of the law] 20 tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

2. Romans 13:8-10

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, (namely) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

3. Luke 10:29-37

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2196

In response to the question about the first of the commandments, Jesus says: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your

soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The apostle St. Paul reminds us of this: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

2. Paragraph 2208

The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. There are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It devolves then on other persons, other families, and, in a subsidiary way, society to provide for their needs: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Small Group Questions

1. Do you know your "neighbors"? Are you aware of the people around you who are hurting?
2. Tell us about the last time you received a "Random Act of Kindness". How did you feel?
3. How do you teach your children about caring for others around them?

Recommended Readings

1. "Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American Community", Robert D. Putnam (544 pages)

Recommended Resources

1. How To Love Your Neighbor by David Delk
<http://www.maninthemirror.org/alm/alm12.htm>

We all know people with stories like these:

Even though Tom and John work together, they have not said a civil word to each other for over two years. Susan and her family no longer have any contact with her parents or siblings because of a feud that began over which restaurant to go to for Christmas dinner.

Bob has worked 70 hours a week for the last ten years, so his wife Sally has taken the kids and left. She says she just doesn't love him anymore.

We live in a world of broken relationships. Adam and Eve's sin had two primary results: broken relationships between men and God, and broken relationships with one another. In a sense, the whole message of the Bible is the story of God restoring our relationship with Him and our relationships with other people.

When God created Adam, He made him in His image. A part of God's "image" is the fact that He is a trinity -- the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in an eternal love relationship with one another. I believe this is why God says it was not good for Adam to be alone -- he could not fully reflect the image of God unless he had relationships with others.

Paul brings out the same truth when he develops the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11-16). Each individual in the church is to develop deep relationships with other members so that the body can grow and "build itself up in love" (Eph. 4:16). To be mature Christians who reflect God's image, we need vital relationships with others.

When the lawyer answered Jesus's question about the key to eternal life (Luke 10:25), he addressed both effects of the fall in what is known as the Great Commandment. "And he answered and said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). The first part of his answer deals with our separation from God, the second, our separation from one another.

In response to the lawyer's query about who is a neighbor, Jesus sets forth a standard of sacrificial love by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, Jesus provides a living example of the kind of love that restores relationships between men.

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE

Love thy Neighbor

1. Love feels compassion.

Unlike the priest and Levite, when the Samaritan saw the hurting man, "he took pity on him" (Lk. 10:33). Jesus shows compassion for the people of Jerusalem, and us as well, when he says that he "longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Lk. 13:34).

My own tendency is to only love when the need is so obvious that it is the equivalent of driving up on a ten car pile-up. But Christ calls me to open my eyes and see the needs of the people around me. Are you aware of the hurting people around you? Who at your office is suffering? What about people in your church? How about your spouse and children? Love notices and enters into the suffering of others.

How can we grow in compassion? By prayerfully considering the great love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ. We were broken and bleeding beside the road, left for dead. But Jesus came along, picked us up, bandaged our wounds, and healed us. If we build into our schedule a time to remember what Christ has done for us, we will grow in our compassion for others.

2. Love is intentional.

In the parable, the Good Samaritan carries out a "plan" to help the hurting man - he goes to him, bandages his wounds, puts him on his donkey, and takes him to an inn (Lk. 10:34-35). Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" who is remaking us in His image.

True love has a goal in mind -- the healing, redemption, and transformation of the one being loved. This means that we need to be proactive in our love, actively seeking ways to meet the needs of the people God brings into our lives.

Perhaps you need to schedule "dates" with your spouse and children. It may mean making a point to find out the needs of an elderly neighbor, or the single mother across the street. Love doesn't just happen -- it requires energy, passion, and a strong sense of purpose.

3. Love denies self. Jesus intended for us to realize that the Samaritan would not have been just strolling down this road. This was the road to and from Jerusalem, so the Samaritan was on a journey and probably had places to go. In order to meet the needs of the hurting man, he had to lay aside his own schedule and interests. If we are to love, we must change from a focus on ourselves (schedule, plans, dreams, etc.) to a focus on others.

Jesus illustrates this in his willingness to become incarnate and give his life for men. He "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8). Like Christ, we must consider others as more important than ourselves.

4. Love acts. Consider the contrast between the priest and Levite on the one hand and the Samaritan on the other. Jesus doesn't say whether the priest and Levite had good intentions, he only tells us that they didn't do anything to help the man. In contrast, the Samaritan acted to meet the real needs of the hurting man.

In the midst of our broken world, good intentions don't count for much. When we see the devastation that sin has wrought in the lives of people around us, we must go beyond good intentions - we must act.

When I was in college, the bathroom stalls often contained "interesting" reading material. However, one statement that I found there rings true -- "Love is a Verb." For every hundred people that think or talk about doing something, only one will do it. It is not enough to just feel compassion for someone else, true love takes action to meet their needs.

5. Love gives.

In the parable, the Samaritan gives of both his time and money to help the man. Jesus knew that it would cost something if we choose to love others.

As a matter of fact, it cost Jesus everything to love us. In the last supper, Jesus taught his disciples that he was giving his body and blood - the essence of his physical life for them, and for us (Lk. 22:19, 20).

Tom has been visiting a young mother who is dying of AIDS. Recently, she told him the one thing she wanted was a dresser to put her clothes in. He told her he would pray about it and see what he could do. Tom asked around to find someone who might want to donate a dresser. But as Tom prayed, he became convicted by the Holy Spirit. "It was as if God was saying to me, 'Here you have all the things you ever need, and you won't even buy this woman a dresser.'" Three days later, they went together to a nice used furniture store and bought a dresser for her bedroom.

APPLICATION

Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). If we know Christ and his love for us, we must love the people around us. Fill in four boxes of the following chart with specific things you can do this week.

Consider keeping it handy to review your progress at the end of the week.

Example: pray for each morning and evening

Example: Speak to your neighbor the next time he is in his yard

CONCLUSION

God has made you for fellowship with others it is part of the very essence of who you are as His image. Without deep relationships with other people, you will never find the lasting satisfaction that your heart desires.

One of the things that Christ came to do was to restore relationships between people. Love is the key to that task. Yet, too often, we are like the priest and Levite, living "religious" lives that are empty of love. We need to reflect daily on Christ's love for us. Then we will reach out in love to those around us. The pleasures of this life satisfy for a moment, but the rewards of giving ourselves in love last for eternity.

2. Acts of Kindness/Wonderful Neighbors

<http://www.americanprofile.com/acts-of-kindness/article/25476.html>

God was smiling on me the day He placed me in this neighborhood next to two of the nicest people I've ever met. How significant they would become in my life, I could not have imagined. In the eight years I've lived next to Betty Murphy & Sheila Kilbane, I've always enjoyed their company. They have always been the ideal neighbors: helpful, friendly, never intrusive, just all-around good people. They get my mail and papers when I am out of town, are always available to take care of my dog, Ginger, at a moments notice. I always feel secure when I'm away from home that they are keeping an eye on the house. It's a comforting feeling.

When I was going through my divorce, they were always a source of comfort and support. Complicating matters during an already trying time, I proceeded to break my foot and had to be on crutches for six weeks! I lived alone in a house with two sets of stairs, a yard that needed mowed, a dog that needed walked. All of my family live out of the area, and my close friends live a good half hour to 45 minutes away, with jobs and kids they needed to attend to. WHAT was I going to do? I need not have worried. Without my asking, Sheila and Betty stepped in. Sheila mowed my yard. Every evening when I would get home from work, one of them would come over with my mail and newspapers (my mailbox is at the end of driveway) and sometimes bring supper or goodies from their garden. They'd leave a short while later so I could unwind from work and come back to walk Ginger every evening. They took my garbage out every week. If something needed fixed, they immediately came over to help me (they are VERY handy with all kinds of mechanical things!!). I would drive to my parents' house every weekend and either Sheila or Betty would come over to help me load my car, and watch for my return on Sunday to help me carry in my stuff and the groceries my parents would get for me while I was home with them. I can't express enough the sense of relief for both me and my parents knowing that Sheila and Betty were here to help me and Ginger providing support, companionship and a sense of security. They wanted nothing in return. Their neighbor needed help. There was no hesitation in their minds to provide it.

People are always so impressed when they hear how wonderful my neighbors are. They don't have to tell me. We've all heard the horror stories of bad neighbors. I don't see how I could possibly ever repay them for being, well, THEM. I'll always be grateful beyond what I can express and will do my best to pay it forward.

3. Bless Your Neighbors

<http://www.cor.org/missions/kcmissions/blessyourneighbors/>

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...

Love thy Neighbor

2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

Relationships with Other Men

Objective

In society males often have guarded attitudes about sharing religious, marriage, and family details with another male due to the machismo. Often times there are hints of how someone might be looking for input or guidance that we miss and hence miss the opportunity to help a person in need. Fathers team affords us the ability to share many of these issues in our group setting and often we can have a great impact on a fellow father in how they might deal with a situation either through sharing similar experiences, offering guidance, or just listening and helping someone air out their issues to someone they can trust and relate to.

How can we make a difference in someone's life where we see them struggling to get through an issue?

Bible Readings

1. Job 33:14-30

For God does speak, perhaps once, or even twice, though one perceives it not.
In a dream, in a vision of the night, (when deep sleep falls upon men) as they slumber in their beds,
It is then he opens the ears of men and as a warning to them, terrifies them;
By turning man from evil and keeping pride away from him,
He withholds his soul from the pit and his life from passing to the grave.
Or a man is chastened on his bed by pain and unceasing suffering within his frame,
So that to his appetite food becomes repulsive, and his senses reject the choicest nourishment.
His flesh is wasted so that it cannot be seen, and his bones, once invisible, appear;
His soul draws near to the pit, his life to the place of the dead.
If then there be for him an angel, one out of a thousand, a mediator, To show him what is right for him and bring the man back to justice,
He will take pity on him and say, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found him a ransom."
Then his flesh shall become soft as a boy's; he shall be again as in the days of his youth.
He shall pray and God will favor him; he shall see God's face with rejoicing.
He shall sing before men and say, "I sinned and did wrong, yet he has not punished me accordingly.
He delivered my soul from passing to the pit, and I behold the light of life."
Lo, all these things God does, twice, or thrice, for a man,
Bringing back his soul from the pit to the light, in the land of the living.

2. Joshua 10:6-10

Thereupon, the men of Gibeon sent an appeal to Joshua in his camp at Gilgal: "Do not abandon your servants. Come up here quickly and save us. Help us, because all the Amorite kings of the mountain country have joined forces against us."

So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his picked troops and the rest of his soldiers.

Meanwhile the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your power. Not one of them will be able to withstand you."

And when Joshua made his surprise attack upon them after an all-night march from Gilgal, the LORD threw them into disorder before him. The Israelites inflicted a great slaughter on them at Gibeon and pursued them down the Beth-horon slope, harrassing them as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

3. 2 Samuel 2:1-7

and as she worshiped the LORD, she said:

"My heart exults in the LORD,
my horn is exalted in my God.

I have swallowed up my enemies;

I rejoice in my victory.

There is no Holy One like the LORD;

there is no Rock like our God.

"Speak boastfully no longer,

nor let arrogance issue from your mouths.

For an all-knowing God is the LORD,

a God who judges deeds.

The bows of the mighty are broken,

while the tottering gird on strength.

The well-fed hire themselves out for bread,

while the hungry batten on spoil.

The barren wife bears seven sons, while the mother of many languishes.

"The LORD puts to death and gives life;

he casts down to the nether world; he raises up again.

The LORD makes poor and makes rich,

he humbles, he also exalts.

4. Proverbs 19:1-29

Better a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked in his ways and rich.

Without knowledge even zeal is not good; and he who acts hastily, blunders.

A man's own folly upsets his way, but his heart is resentful against the LORD.

Wealth adds many friends, but the friend of the poor man deserts him.

The false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will not escape.

Many curry favor with a noble; all are friends of the man who has something to give.

All the poor man's brothers hate him; how much more do his friends shun him!

He who gains intelligence is his own best friend; he who keeps understanding will be successful.

The false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will perish.

Luxury is not befitting a fool; much less should a slave rule over princes.

It is good sense in a man to be slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, but his favor, like dew on the grass.

The foolish son is ruin to his father, and the nagging of a wife is a persistent leak.
Home and possessions are an inheritance from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.
Laziness plunges a man into deep sleep, and the sluggard must go hungry.
He who keeps the precept keeps his life, but the despiser of the word will die.
1 He who has compassion on the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his good deed.
Chastise your son, for in this there is hope; but do not desire his death.
The man of violent temper pays the penalty; even if you rescue him, you will have it to do again.
Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may eventually become wise.
Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the decision of the LORD that endures.
From a man's greed comes his shame; rather be a poor man than a liar.
The fear of the LORD is an aid to life; one eats and sleeps without being visited by misfortune.
The sluggard loses his hand in the dish; he will not even lift it to his mouth.
If you beat an arrogant man, the simple learn a lesson; if you rebuke an intelligent man, he gains knowledge.
He who mistreats his father, or drives away his mother, is a worthless and disgraceful son.
If a son ceases to hear instruction, he wanders from words of knowledge.
An unprincipled witness perverts justice, and the mouth of the wicked pours out iniquity.
Rods are prepared for the arrogant, and blows for the backs of fools.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2401-2402, 2404-2407, 2414

ARTICLE 7

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal.

seventh commandment forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbor and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods. It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity.

I. THE UNIVERSAL DESTINATION AND THE PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF GOODS

In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. The appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men.

"In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself."¹⁸⁸ The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family.

Goods of production - material or immaterial - such as land, factories, practical or artistic skills, oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. Those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for guests, for the sick and the poor.

Political authority has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership for the sake of the common good.

Relationships with Other Men

II. RESPECT FOR PERSONS AND THEIR GOODS

In economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of temperance, so as to moderate attachment to this world's goods; the practice of the virtue of justice, to preserve our neighbor's rights and render him what is his due; and the practice of solidarity, in accordance with the golden rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake . . . became poor so that by his poverty, you might become rich."

The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian - lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord."

Small Group Questions

1. Why is it that men typically can communicate better with each other than they do with women?
2. Do you feel that you have the trust and privacy in Fathers team to allow you to share issues that you are or have dealt with?
3. What can our small groups do to encourage the trust needed for men to bring their problems to the small group?
4. What topics would you rather talk to the Fathers about than to any woman?

Recommended Resources

1. Helping men to help themselves
<http://www.apa.org/monitor/jun05/helping.html>

Research aims to understand why men are less likely than women to seek mental health help, and what psychologists can do to change that.

BY LEA WINERMAN

Monitor Staff

Print version: page 57

Try to imagine the Marlboro man in therapy. The image just doesn't compute, does it? The Marlboro man wouldn't admit to needing help. The Marlboro man wouldn't talk about his emotions. For that matter, the Marlboro man might not even recognize that he has emotions.

That, in a nutshell, is the problem with convincing men to seek help of any kind, including therapy, according to Jill Berger, PhD, a recent psychology graduate of Nova Southeastern University who studies the psychology of masculinity. Traditionally, she says, society demands that men emulate a Marlboro man ideal--tough, independent and unemotional--that just isn't compatible with therapy.

Indeed, dozens of studies and surveys over the past several decades have shown that men of all ages and ethnicities are less likely than women to seek help for all sorts of problems--including depression, substance abuse and stressful life events--even though they encounter those problems at the same or greater rates as women. In a 1993 study published in *Psychotherapy* (Vol. 30, No. 4, pages 546-553), for example, psychologist John Vessey, PhD, reviewed several epidemiologic surveys and found that a full two-thirds of mental health outpatient visits were made by women. This inability, reluctance or straight-up unwillingness to get help can harm men's own mental and physical health, and can make life more difficult for their friends and families, says Berger.

Of course, not all men are the same. And recently, some researchers have begun to delve more deeply into men's help-seeking behavior, to try to parse the societal and personal factors that make some men, in some situations, more likely to reach out to a psychologist or other source of aid.

"I don't think that it's biologically determined that men will seek less help than women," says University of Missouri Counseling Psychology Professor Glenn Good, PhD, who studies men and masculinity and also has

a private practice that focuses on men. "So if that's true, then it must mean that it's socialization and upbringing: Men *learn* to seek less help."

He and other researchers hope that by understanding what drives men toward or away from therapy and other types of help, they'll be able to encourage more men to get help when needed, and to make that help more effective. Their research so far suggests two key solutions: Make men understand that many other men face mental health issues like depression, and adjust the description of therapy itself to make it more appealing to men.

Why men don't seek help

The first hurdle some men face is that they may be so out of touch with their emotions that they do not even realize that they are, for example, depressed. APA President and Nova Southeastern University psychologist Ronald F. Levant, EdD, has coined the term "normative male alexithymia"--literally "without words for emotions" ([see page 60](#))--to describe this phenomenon.

Many boys, he says, learn from their parents and from other children that they are not supposed to express vulnerability or caring. They learn to suppress their emotional responses--like crying or even sad facial expressions--so much that, by the time they are adults, they are genuinely unaware of their emotions and how to describe them in words.

In his book "New Psychotherapies for Men" (Wiley, 1997), Levant gives the example of a father stood up by his son for a father-son hockey game. When asked his feelings on the subject, the father said "He shouldn't have done it!" It wasn't until the therapist prompted him again that he managed to say he was upset.

Even when men do realize that they are depressed, abusing alcohol or have some other problem, they are still less likely than women to see a psychologist or other mental health professional, says psychologist and masculinity researcher James Mahalik, PhD, of Boston College, who gives a thorough overview of the evidence in a 2003 article in the *American Psychologist* (Vol. 58, No. 1, pages 5--14). In the article, he and co-author Michael Addis, PhD, also outline some of the factors underlying men's reluctance:

- **Masculine role socialization.** To benefit from counseling, a man must admit that he needs help, must rely on the counselor and must openly discuss and express emotion. These requirements, says Mahalik, conflict with traditional ideals of what it means to be male: toughness, independence and emotional control.

"What we're finding is that the more men 'do their gender' and define themselves by traditional roles in our society, the less they tend to get help," Mahalik says.

In a study published this January in the *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* (Vol. 6, No. 1, pages 73--78), for example, Berger, Levant and their colleagues found that men with higher levels of traditional masculinity ideology also tended to have a more negative opinion of seeking psychological help.

And in a 1995 study in the *Journal of Counseling and Development* (Vol. 74, No. 1, pages 70--75), Good found that men who scored higher on a test of male gender role conflict--a conflict between rigid learned gender roles and the healthy expression of emotion--were more likely to be depressed *and* more likely to have a negative opinion of psychological counseling.

- **Social Norms.** Some men may also worry that society will look down on a man who can't "tough it out" on his own, and that seeking--or even needing--help is not "normal" male behavior. Even men who do seek counseling may worry about what others think of their choice, including Tim (a pseudonym), a client of Good's in his 50s who began therapy after he ended an extramarital affair.

"I was not afraid of counseling," he says, "maybe because I'm not a very typical male--I tend to be pretty open with my emotions."

He did, however, have one concern--telling his boss why he needed to take time off work. Although his boss ended up being relatively understanding, Tim says, he's not sure that would be the case with everyone.

"I have to be very careful with whom I discuss the issue of being in therapy--I think there is a stigma," he says. "People expect men to be 'strong.'"

And indeed, Mahalik notes, a man who is surrounded by a supportive group of other men--say, a church group that encouraged members to share problems and seek support--might be more likely to seek help than a man whose only social network discouraged such sharing.

In general, Mahalik says, men are more likely to seek help for problems that they think are normative--that is, problems that many other men share.

"If men perceive that being depressed is not 'normal,' then if they do try to get help they may feel dysfunctional and aberrant," Mahalik explains. "So instead they might try to keep the depression quiet, and maybe self-medicate with drugs or alcohol."

What can be done?

One way to convince more men to seek help, then, is to convince them that the things they need help with are "normal." In this regard, Mahalik says, psychology could take a cue from the erectile dysfunction drug industry.

"Men are going in to see their doctors much more about erectile dysfunction now, after the ads for Viagra and other drugs, because there's so much more awareness," he explains.

And in fact, psychology is beginning to do just that. In 2003, for example, the National Institute of Mental Health launched a national media campaign called "Real Men. Real Depression." to raise awareness that depression affects more than 6 million men annually ([see page 66](#)). And the National Football League's "Tackling Men's Health" campaign--which aims to convince men to visit their doctors and proactively manage their health--includes a Web site section on mental health, with a link to a depression self-screening test (see www.nfl.com/tacklingmenshealth).

Psychologists can also work to make the terminology they use to describe therapy more palatable to men, says John Robertson, PhD, an emeritus professor at Kansas State University. In a 1992 study in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (Vol. 39, No. 2, pages 240–246), for example, he created two brochures for a campus counseling center and distributed them to community college students in auto mechanics, welding and other mostly male areas. One of the brochures described the center's counseling services in traditional terms, the other used terms like "consultations" rather than "therapy" and emphasized self-help and achievement. He found that the men who received the second brochure were more likely to say they'd seek assistance at the center than men who received the traditional one.

Robertson also has a private practice that focuses almost entirely on men, and he says that in his advertising he emphasizes skills--like parenting skills or anger control skills--much more than, say, personal development.

"It's not a particularly surprising or brilliant notion," he says, "that you want to match the client to the service."

And as psychologists continue to study men and help-seeking, they'll be better able to do just that.

"What are the contexts that may influence men to seek help, and why?" asks Mahalik. "That's the challenge for us to figure out, in terms of both clinical research and outreach. Right now we have some beginnings of the answers."

2. Definitions of Brotherhood

http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&defl=en&q=define:brotherhood&sa=X&oi=glossary_definition&ct=title

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

Evangelizing

Objective

The intention of most evangelism is to effect eternal salvation to those who do not follow the Christ; others believe it is to inform others about the kingdom of God and is done in obedience to a command from Jesus to his disciples to proselytize, as recorded in the New Testament.

How are we evangelizing in our everyday lives to our families, our parish, at work, and in our communities?

Each man should leave the meeting feeling the need to respond to the call to evangelize. He will need to assess his "call" and use his strengths to bring Christ's message to those he touches. He needs to identify one thing he will do that will press his "borders of comfort" as he shares Christ's message of love and the message of the catholic faith to others.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 2:17–20

He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,
for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God,

built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.

Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord;
in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

2. Matthew 28:16–20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them.

When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted.

Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to e.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. 13 And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 449

By attributing to Jesus the divine title "Lord", the first confessions of the Church's faith affirm from the beginning that the power, honor and glory due to God the Father are due also to Jesus, because "he was in the form of God", and the Father manifested the sovereignty of Jesus by raising him from the dead and exalting him into his glory.

2. Paragraph 848

"Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men."

3. Paragraph 1122

Christ sent his apostles so that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations." "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The mission to baptize, and so the sacramental mission, is implied in the mission to evangelize, because the sacrament is prepared for by the word of God and by the faith which is assent to this word:

The People of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God. . . . The preaching of the Word is required for the sacramental ministry itself, since the sacraments are sacraments of faith, drawing their origin and nourishment from the Word.

Small Group Questions

1. Who do you know that evangelizes? How do they do it?
2. What can you be doing to better be an evangelist in your family, your school, your church, at work, and in your community?
3. What is the most powerful experience you have in your faith experience that will enable you to evangelize your catholic beliefs?

Recommended Readings

1. Pamphlet - Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth
<http://www.catholic.com/library/pillar.asp>

WHETHER or not you are Catholic, you may have questions about the Catholic faith. You may have heard challenges to the Catholic Church's claim to be the interpreter and safeguard of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Such challenges come from door-to-door missionaries who ask, "Are you saved?", from peer pressure that urges you to ignore the Church's teachings, from a secular culture that whispers "There is no God."

You can't deal with these challenges unless you understand the basics of the Catholic faith. This booklet introduces them to you.

In Catholicism you will find answers to life's most troubling questions: Why am I here? Who made me? What must I believe? How must I act? All these can be answered to your satisfaction, if only you will open yourself to God's grace, turn to the Church he established, and follow his plan for you (John 7:17).

AN UNBROKEN HISTORY

Jesus said his Church would be "the light of the world." He then noted that "a city set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14). This means his Church is a *visible* organization. It must have characteristics that clearly identify it and that distinguish it from other churches. Jesus promised, "I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). This means that his Church will never be destroyed and will never fall away from him. His Church will survive until his return.

Among the Christian churches, only the Catholic Church has existed since the time of Jesus. Every other Christian church is an offshoot of the Catholic Church. The Eastern Orthodox churches broke away from unity with the pope in 1054. The Protestant churches were established during the Reformation, which began in 1517. (Most of today's Protestant churches are actually offshoots of the original Protestant offshoots.)

Only the Catholic Church existed in the tenth century, in the fifth century, and in the first century, faithfully teaching the doctrines given by Christ to the apostles, omitting nothing. The line of popes can be traced back, in unbroken succession, to Peter himself. This is unequalled by any institution in history.

Even the oldest government is new compared to the papacy, and the churches that send out door-to-door missionaries are young compared to the Catholic Church. Many of these churches began as recently as the

nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Some even began during your own lifetime. None of them can claim to be the Church Jesus established.

The Catholic Church has existed for nearly 2,000 years, despite constant opposition from the world. This is testimony to the Church's divine origin. It must be more than a merely human organization, especially considering that its human members— even some of its leaders—have been unwise, corrupt, or prone to heresy.

Any merely human organization with such members would have collapsed early on. The Catholic Church is today the most vigorous church in the world (and the largest, with a billion members: one sixth of the human race), and that is testimony not to the cleverness of the Church's leaders, but to the protection of the Holy Spirit.

FOUR MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

If we wish to locate the Church founded by Jesus, we need to locate the one that has the four chief marks or qualities of his Church. The Church we seek must be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

The Church Is One (Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 10:17, 12:13, CCC 813–822)

Jesus established only *one* Church, not a collection of differing churches (Lutheran, Baptist, Anglican, and so on). The Bible says the Church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23–32). Jesus can have but *one* spouse, and his spouse is the Catholic Church.

His Church also teaches just one set of doctrines, which must be the same as those taught by the apostles (Jude 3). This is the unity of belief to which Scripture calls us (Phil. 1:27, 2:2).

Although some Catholics dissent from officially-taught doctrines, the Church's official teachers—the pope and the bishops united with him—have never changed any doctrine. Over the centuries, as doctrines are examined more fully, the Church comes to understand them more deeply (John 16:12–13), but it never understands them to mean the opposite of what they once meant.

The Church Is Holy (Eph. 5:25–27, Rev. 19:7–8, CCC 823–829)

By his grace Jesus makes the Church holy, just as he is holy. This doesn't mean that each member is always holy. Jesus said there would be both good and bad members in the Church (John 6:70), and not all the members would go to heaven (Matt. 7:21–23).

But the Church itself is holy because it is the source of holiness and is the guardian of the special means of grace Jesus established, the sacraments (cf. Eph. 5:26).

The Church Is Catholic (Matt. 28:19–20, Rev. 5:9–10, CCC 830–856)

Jesus' Church is called catholic ("universal" in Greek) because it is his gift to all people. He told his apostles to go throughout the world and make disciples of "all nations" (Matt. 28:19–20).

For 2,000 years the Catholic Church has carried out this mission, preaching the good news that Christ died for all men and that he wants all of us to be members of his universal family (Gal. 3:28).

Nowadays the Catholic Church is found in every country of the world and is still sending out missionaries to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

The Church Jesus established was known by its most common title, "the Catholic Church," at least as early as the year 107, when Ignatius of Antioch used that title to describe the one Church Jesus founded. The title apparently was old in Ignatius's time, which means it probably went all the way back to the time of the apostles.

The Church Is Apostolic (Eph. 2:19–20, CCC 857–865)

The Church Jesus founded is apostolic because he appointed the apostles to be the first leaders of the Church, and their successors were to be its future leaders. The apostles were the first bishops, and, since the first century, there has been an unbroken line of Catholic bishops faithfully handing on what the apostles taught the first Christians in Scripture and oral Tradition (2 Tim. 2:2).

These beliefs include the bodily Resurrection of Jesus, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the sacrificial nature of the Mass, the forgiveness of sins through a priest, baptismal regeneration, the existence of purgatory, Mary's special role, and much more—even the doctrine of apostolic succession itself.

Early Christian writings prove the first Christians were thoroughly Catholic in belief and practice and looked to the successors of the apostles as their leaders. What these first Christians believed is still believed by the Catholic Church. No other Church can make that claim.

Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth

Man's ingenuity cannot account for this. The Church has remained one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—not through man's effort, but because God preserves the Church he established (Matt. 16:18, 28:20).

He guided the Israelites on their escape from Egypt by giving them a pillar of fire to light their way across the dark wilderness (Exod. 13:21). Today he guides us through his Catholic Church.

The Bible, sacred Tradition, and the writings of the earliest Christians testify that the Church teaches with Jesus' authority. In this age of countless competing religions, each clamoring for attention, one voice rises above the din: the Catholic Church, which the Bible calls "the pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).

Jesus assured the apostles and their successors, the popes and the bishops, "He who listens to you listens to me, and he who rejects you rejects me" (Luke 10:16). Jesus promised to guide his Church into all truth (John 16:12–13). We can have confidence that his Church teaches only the truth.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

Jesus chose the apostles to be the earthly leaders of the Church. He gave them his own authority to teach and to govern—not as dictators, but as loving pastors and fathers. That is why Catholics call their spiritual leaders "father." In doing so we follow Paul's example: "I became your father in Jesus Christ through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15).

The apostles, fulfilling Jesus' will, ordained bishops, priests, and deacons and thus handed on their apostolic ministry to them—the fullest degree of ordination to the bishops, lesser degrees to the priests and deacons.

The Pope and Bishops (CCC 880–883)

Jesus gave Peter special authority among the apostles (John 21:15–17) and signified this by changing his name from Simon to Peter, which means "rock" (John 1:42). He said Peter was to be the rock on which he would build his Church (Matt. 16:18).

In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Simon's new name was *Kepha* (which means a massive rock). Later this name was translated into Greek as *Petros* (John 1:42) and into English as Peter. Christ gave Peter alone the "keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19) and promised that Peter's decisions would be binding in heaven. He also gave similar power to the other apostles (Matt. 18:18), but only Peter was given the keys, symbols of his authority to rule the Church on earth in Jesus' absence.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, called Peter to be the chief shepherd of his Church (John 21:15–17). He gave Peter the task of strengthening the other apostles in their faith, ensuring that they taught only what was true (Luke 22:31–32). Peter led the Church in proclaiming the gospel and making decisions (Acts 2:1–41, 15:7–12).

Early Christian writings tell us that Peter's successors, the bishops of Rome (who from the earliest times have been called by the affectionate title of "pope," which means "papa"), continued to exercise Peter's ministry in the Church.

The pope is the successor to Peter as bishop of Rome. The world's other bishops are successors to the apostles in general.

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

As from the first, God speaks to his Church through the Bible and through sacred Tradition. To make sure we understand him, he guides the Church's teaching authority—the magisterium—so it always interprets the Bible and Tradition accurately. This is the gift of infallibility.

Like the three legs on a stool, the Bible, Tradition, and the magisterium are all necessary for the stability of the Church and to guarantee sound doctrine.

Sacred Tradition (CCC 75–83)

Sacred Tradition should not be confused with mere traditions of men, which are more commonly called customs or disciplines. Jesus sometimes condemned customs or disciplines, but only if they were contrary to God's commands (Mark 7:8). He never condemned sacred Tradition, and he didn't even condemn all human tradition.

Sacred Tradition and the Bible are not different or competing revelations. They are two ways that the Church hands on the gospel. Apostolic teachings such as the Trinity, infant baptism, the inerrancy of the Bible, purgatory, and Mary's perpetual virginity have been most clearly taught through Tradition, although they are also implicitly present in (and not contrary to) the Bible. The Bible itself tells us to hold fast to Tradition, whether it comes to us in written or oral form (2 Thess. 2:15, 1 Cor. 11:2).

Sacred Tradition should not be confused with customs and disciplines, such as the rosary, priestly celibacy, and not eating meat on Fridays in Lent. These are good and helpful things, but they are not doctrines. Sacred Tradition preserves doctrines first taught by Jesus to the apostles and later passed down to us through the apostles' successors, the bishops.

Scripture (CCC 101–141)

Scripture, by which we mean the Old and New Testaments, was inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). The Holy Spirit guided the biblical authors to write what he wanted them to write. Since God is the principal author of the Bible, and since God is truth itself (John 14:6) and cannot teach anything untrue, the Bible is free from all error in everything it asserts to be true.

Some Christians claim, "The Bible is all I need," but this notion is not taught in the Bible itself. In fact, the Bible teaches the contrary idea (2 Pet. 1:20–21, 3:15–16). The "Bible alone" theory was not believed by anyone in the early Church.

It is new, having arisen only in the 1500s during the Protestant Reformation. The theory is a "tradition of men" that nullifies the Word of God, distorts the true role of the Bible, and undermines the authority of the Church Jesus established (Mark 7:1–8).

Although popular with many "Bible Christian" churches, the "Bible alone" theory simply does not work in practice. Historical experience disproves it. Each year we see additional splintering among "Bible-believing" religions.

Today there are tens of thousands of competing denominations, each insisting its interpretation of the Bible is the correct one. The resulting divisions have caused untold confusion among millions of sincere but misled Christians.

Just open up the Yellow Pages of your telephone book and see how many different denominations are listed, each claiming to go by the "Bible alone," but no two of them agreeing on exactly what the Bible *means*.

We know this for sure: The Holy Spirit cannot be the author of this confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). God cannot lead people to contradictory beliefs because his truth is one. The conclusion? The "Bible alone" theory must be false.

The Magisterium (CCC 85–87, 888–892)

Together the pope and the bishops form the teaching authority of the Church, which is called the magisterium (from the Latin for "teacher"). The magisterium, guided and protected from error by the Holy Spirit, gives us certainty in matters of doctrine. The Church is the custodian of the Bible and faithfully and

accurately proclaims its message, a task which God has empowered it to do.

Keep in mind that the Church came before the New Testament, not the New Testament before the Church. Divinely-inspired members of the Church wrote the books of the New Testament, just as divinely-inspired writers had written the Old Testament, and the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit to guard and interpret the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

Such an official interpreter is absolutely necessary if we are to understand the Bible properly. (We all know what the Constitution *says*, but we still need a Supreme Court to interpret what it *means*.)

The magisterium is infallible when it teaches officially because Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles and their successors "into all truth" (John 16:12–13).

HOW GOD DISTRIBUTES HIS GIFTS

Jesus promised he would not leave us orphans (John 14:18) but would send the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us (John 15:26). He gave the sacraments to heal, feed, and strengthen us. The seven sacraments — baptism, the Eucharist, penance (also called reconciliation or confession), confirmation, holy orders, matrimony, and the anointing of the sick—are not just symbols. They are signs that actually convey God's grace and love.

The sacraments were foreshadowed in the Old Testament by things that did not actually convey grace but merely symbolized it (circumcision, for example, prefigured baptism, and the Passover meal prefigured the Eucharist. When Christ came, he did not do away with symbols of God's grace. He supernaturalized them, energizing them with grace. He made them more than symbols.

God constantly uses material things to show his love and power. After all, matter is not evil. When he created the physical universe, everything God created was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). He takes such delight in matter that he even dignified it through his own Incarnation (John 1:14).

During his earthly ministry Jesus healed, fed, and strengthened people through humble elements such as mud, water, bread, oil, and wine. He could have performed his miracles directly, but he preferred to use material things to bestow his grace.

In his first public miracle Jesus turned water into wine, at the request of his mother, Mary (John 2:1–11). He healed a blind man by rubbing mud on his eyes (John 9:1–7). He multiplied a few loaves and fish into a meal for thousands (John 6:5–13). He changed bread and wine into his own body and blood (Matt. 26:26–28). Through the sacraments he continues to heal, feed, and strengthen us.

Baptism (CCC 1213–1284)

Because of original sin, we are born without grace in our souls, so there is no way for us to have fellowship with God. Jesus became man to bring us into union with his Father. He said no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is first born of "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5)—this refers to baptism.

Through baptism we are born again, but this time on a spiritual level instead of a physical level. We are washed in the bath of rebirth (Titus 3:5). We are baptized into Christ's death and therefore share in his Resurrection (Rom. 6:3–7).

Baptism cleanses us of sins and brings the Holy Spirit and his grace into our souls (Acts 2:38, 22:16). And the apostle Peter is perhaps the most blunt of all: "Baptism now saves you" (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is the gateway into the Church.

Penance (CCC 1422–1498)

Sometimes on our journey toward the heavenly promised land we stumble and fall into sin. God is always ready to lift us up and to restore us to grace-filled fellowship with him. He does this through the sacrament of penance (which is also known as confession or reconciliation).

Jesus gave his apostles power and authority to reconcile us to the Father. They received Jesus' own power to forgive sins when he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are

forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:22–23).

Paul notes that "all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation. . . . So, we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us" (2 Cor. 5:18–20). Through confession to a priest, God's minister, we have our sins forgiven, and we receive grace to help us resist future temptations.

The Eucharist (CCC 1322–1419)

Once we become members of Christ's family, he does not let us go hungry, but feeds us with his own body and blood through the Eucharist. In the Old Testament, as they prepared for their journey in the wilderness, God commanded his people to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts, so the Angel of Death would pass by their homes. Then they ate the lamb to seal their covenant with God.

This lamb prefigured Jesus. He is the real "Lamb of God," who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Through Jesus we enter into a New Covenant with God (Luke 22:20), who protects us from eternal death. God's Old Testament people ate the Passover lamb. Now we must eat the Lamb that is the Eucharist. Jesus said, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life within you" (John 6:53).

At the Last Supper he took bread and wine and said, "Take and eat. This is my body . . . This is my blood which will be shed for you" (Mark 14:22–24). In this way Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal Catholics consume at each Mass.

The Catholic Church teaches that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross occurred "once for all"; it cannot be repeated (Heb. 9:28). Christ does not "die again" during Mass, but the very same sacrifice that occurred on Calvary is made present on the altar. That's why the Mass is not "another" sacrifice, but a participation in the same, once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Paul reminds us that the bread and the wine really become, by a miracle of God's grace, the actual body and blood of Jesus: "Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor. 11:27–29).

After the consecration of the bread and wine, no bread or wine remains on the altar. Only Jesus himself, under the appearance of bread and wine, remains.

Confirmation (CCC 1285–1321)

God strengthens our souls in another way, through the sacrament of confirmation. Even though Jesus' disciples received grace before his Resurrection, on Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to strengthen them with new graces for the difficult work ahead.

They went out and preached the gospel fearlessly and carried out the mission Christ had given them. Later, they laid hands on others to strengthen them as well (Acts 8:14–17). Through confirmation you too are strengthened to meet the spiritual challenges in your life.

Matrimony (CCC 1601–1666)

Most people are called to the married life. Through the sacrament of matrimony God gives special graces to help married couples with life's difficulties, especially to help them raise their children as loving followers of Christ.

Marriage involves three parties: the bride, the groom, and God. When two Christians receive the sacrament of matrimony, God is with them, witnessing and blessing their marriage covenant. A sacramental marriage is permanent; only death can break it (Mark 10:1–12, Rom. 7:2–3, 1 Cor. 7:10–11). This holy union is a living symbol of the unbreakable relationship between Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:21–33).

Holy Orders (CCC 1536–1600)

Others are called to share specially in Christ's priesthood. In the Old Covenant, even though Israel was a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6), the Lord called certain men to a special priestly ministry (Exod. 19: 22). In the New Covenant, even though Christians are a kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 2:9), Jesus calls certain men to a special priestly ministry (Rom. 15:15–16).

This sacrament is called holy orders. Through it priests are ordained and thus empowered to serve the Church (2 Tim. 1:6–7) as pastors, teachers, and spiritual fathers who heal, feed, and strengthen God's people—most importantly through preaching and the administration of the sacraments.

Anointing of the Sick (CCC 1499–1532)

Priests care for us when we are physically ill. They do this through the sacrament known as the anointing of the sick. The Bible instructs us, "Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. . . . Is any one among you sick? He should summon the presbyters [priests] of the Church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven" (Jas. 5:14–15). Anointing of the sick not only helps us endure illness, but it cleanses our souls and helps us prepare to meet God.

TALKING WITH GOD AND HIS SAINTS

One of the most important activities for a Catholic is prayer. Without it there can be no true spiritual life. Through personal prayer and the communal prayer of the Church, especially the Mass, we worship and praise God, we express sorrow for our sins, and we intercede on behalf of others (1 Tim. 2:1–4). Through prayer we grow in our relationship with Christ and with members of God's family (CCC 2663–2696).

This family includes all members of the Church, whether on earth, in heaven, or in purgatory. Since Jesus has only one body, and since death has no power to separate us from Christ (Rom. 8:3–8), Christians who are in heaven or who, before entering heaven, are being purified in purgatory by God's love (1 Cor. 3:12–15) are still part of the Body of Christ (CCC 962).

Jesus said the second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Those in heaven love us more intensely than they ever could have loved us while on earth. They pray for us constantly (Rev. 5:8), and their prayers are powerful (Jas. 5:16, CCC 956, 2683, 2692).

Our prayers to the saints in heaven, asking for their prayers for us, and their intercession with the Father do not undermine Christ's role as sole Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). In asking saints in heaven to pray for us we follow Paul's instructions: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone," for "this is good and pleasing to God our Savior" (1 Tim. 2:1–4).

All members of the Body of Christ are called to help one another through prayer (CCC 2647). Mary's prayers are especially effective on our behalf because of her relationship with her Son (John 2:1–11).

God gave Mary a special role (CCC 490–511, 963–975). He saved her from all sin (Luke 1:28, 47), made her uniquely blessed among all women (Luke 1:42), and made her a model for all Christians (Luke 1:48). At the end of her life he took her, body and soul, into heaven—an image of our own resurrection at the end of the world (Rev. 12:1–2).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

Old catechisms asked, "Why did God make you?" The answer: "God made me to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next." Here, in just 26 words, is the whole reason for our existence. Jesus answered the question even more briefly: "I came so that [you] might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

God's plan for you is simple. Your loving Father wants to give you all good things—especially eternal life. Jesus died on the cross to save us all from sin and the eternal separation from God that sin causes (CCC 599–623). When he saves us, he makes us part of his Body, which is the Church (1 Cor. 12:27–30). We thus become united with him and with Christians everywhere (on earth, in heaven, in purgatory).

What You Must Do to Be Saved

Best of all, the promise of eternal life is a gift, freely offered to us by God (CCC 1727). Our initial forgiveness and justification are not things we "earn" (CCC 2010). Jesus is the mediator who bridged the gap of sin that separates us from God (1 Tim. 2:5); he bridged it by dying for us. He has chosen to make us partners in the plan of salvation (1 Cor. 3:9).

The Catholic Church teaches what the apostles taught and what the Bible teaches: We are saved by grace alone, but not by faith alone (which is what "Bible Christians" teach; see Jas. 2:24).

When we come to God and are justified (that is, enter a right relationship with God), nothing preceding justification, whether faith or good works, *earns* grace. But then God plants his love in our hearts, and we should live out our faith by doing acts of love (Gal. 6:2).

Even though only God's grace enables us to love others, these acts of love please him, and he promises to reward them with eternal life (Rom. 2:6–7, Gal. 6:6–10). Thus good works are meritorious. When we first come to God in faith, we have nothing in our hands to offer him. Then he gives us grace to obey his commandments in love, and he rewards us with salvation when we offer these acts of love back to him (Rom. 2:6–11, Gal. 6:6–10, Matt. 25:34–40).

Jesus said it is not enough to have faith in him; we also must obey his commandments. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' but do not do the things I command?" (Luke 6:46, Matt. 7:21–23, 19:16–21).

We do not "earn" our salvation through good works (Eph. 2:8–9, Rom. 9:16), but our faith in Christ puts us in a special grace-filled relationship with God so that our obedience and love, combined with our faith, will be rewarded with eternal life (Rom. 2:7, Gal. 6:8–9).

Paul said, "God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work" (Phil. 2:13). John explained that "the way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3–4, 3:19–24, 5:3–4).

Since no gift can be forced on the recipient—gifts always can be rejected—even after we become justified, we can throw away the gift of salvation. We throw it away through grave (mortal) sin (John 15:5–6, Rom. 11:22–23, 1 Cor. 15:1–2; CCC 1854–1863). Paul tells us, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Read his letters and see how often Paul warned Christians against sin! He would not have felt compelled to do so if their sins could not exclude them from heaven (see, for example, 1 Cor. 6:9–10, Gal. 5:19–21).

Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that God "will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life for those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness" (Rom. 2:6–8).

Sins are nothing but evil works (CCC 1849–1850). We can avoid sins by habitually performing good works. Every saint has known that the best way to keep free from sins is to embrace regular prayer, the sacraments (the Eucharist first of all), and charitable acts.

Are You Guaranteed Heaven?

Some people promote an especially attractive idea: All true Christians, regardless of how they live, have an absolute assurance of salvation, once they accept Jesus into their hearts as "their personal Lord and Savior." The problem is that this belief is contrary to the Bible and constant Christian teaching.

Keep in mind what Paul told the Christians of his day: "If we have died with him [in baptism; see Rom. 6:3–4] we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:11–12).

If we do *not* persevere, we shall *not* reign with him. In other words, Christians can forfeit heaven (CCC 1861).

The Bible makes it clear that Christians have a moral assurance of salvation (God will be true to his word and will grant salvation to those who have faith in Christ and are obedient to him [1 John 3:19–24]), but the Bible does not teach that Christians have a guarantee of heaven. There can be no absolute assurance of salvation. Writing to Christians, Paul said, "See, then, the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who fell, but God's kindness to you, provided you remain in his kindness, otherwise you too will be cut off" (Rom. 11:22–23; Matt. 18:21–35, 1 Cor. 15:1–2, 2 Pet. 2:20–21).

Note that Paul includes an important condition: "provided you remain in his kindness." He is saying that Christians can lose their salvation by throwing it away. He warns, "Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall" (1 Cor. 10:11–12).

If you are Catholic and someone asks you if you have been "saved," you should say, "I am redeemed by the blood of Christ, I trust in him alone for my salvation, and, as the Bible teaches, I am 'working out my salvation in fear and trembling' (Phil. 2:12), knowing that it is God's gift of grace that is working in me."

THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE

All the alternatives to Catholicism are showing themselves to be inadequate: the worn-out secularism that is everywhere around us and that no one any longer finds satisfying, the odd cults and movements that offer temporary community but no permanent home, even the other, incomplete brands of Christianity. As our tired world becomes ever more desperate, people are turning to the one alternative they never really had considered: the Catholic Church. They are coming upon truth in the last place they expected to find it.

Always Attractive

How can this be? Why are so many people seriously looking at the Catholic Church for the first time? Something is pulling them toward it. That something is truth.

This much we know: They are not considering the claims of the Church out of a desire to win public favor. Catholicism, at least nowadays, is never popular. You cannot win a popularity contest by being a faithful Catholic. Our fallen world rewards the clever, not the good. If a Catholic is praised, it is for the worldly skills he demonstrates, not for his Christian virtues.

Although people try to avoid the hard doctrinal and moral truths the Catholic Church offers them (because hard truths demand that lives be changed), they nevertheless are attracted to the Church. When they listen to the pope and the bishops in union with him, they hear words with the ring of truth—even if they find that truth hard to live by.

When they contemplate the history of the Catholic Church and the lives of its saints, they realize there must be something special, maybe something supernatural, about an institution that can produce holy people such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Mother Teresa.

When they step off a busy street and into the aisles of an apparently empty Catholic church, they sense not a complete emptiness, but a presence. They sense that *Someone* resides inside, waiting to comfort them.

They realize that the persistent opposition that confronts the Catholic Church—whether from non-believers or "Bible Christians" or even from people who insist on calling themselves Catholics—is a sign of the Church's divine origin (John 15:18–21). And they come to suspect that the Catholic Church, of all things, is the wave of the future.

Incomplete Christianity Is Not Enough

Over the last few decades many Catholics have left the Church, many dropping out of religion entirely, many joining other churches. But the traffic has not been in only one direction.

The traffic toward Rome has increased rapidly. Today we are seeing more than a hundred and fifty thousand converts enter the Catholic Church each year in the United States, and in some other places, like the continent of Africa, there are more than a million converts to the Catholic faith each year. People of no religion, lapsed or inactive Catholics, and members of other Christian churches are "coming home to Rome."

They are attracted to the Church for a variety of reasons, but the chief reason they convert is the chief reason *you* should be Catholic: The solid truth of the Catholic faith.

Our separated brethren hold much Christian truth, but not all of it. We might compare their religion to a stained glass window in which some of the original panes were lost and have been replaced by opaque glass: Something that was present at the beginning is now gone, and something that does not fit has been inserted to fill up the empty space. The unity of the original window has been marred.

When, centuries ago, they split away from the Catholic Church, the theological ancestors of these Christians eliminated some authentic beliefs and added new ones of their own making. The forms of Christianity they established are really incomplete Christianity.

Only the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus, and only it has been able to preserve all Christian truth without any error—and great numbers of people are coming to see this.

YOUR TASKS AS A CATHOLIC

Your tasks as a Catholic, no matter what your age, are three:

Know your Catholic faith.

You cannot live your faith if you do not know it, and you cannot share with others what you do not first make your own (CCC 429). Learning your Catholic faith takes some effort, but it is effort well spent because the study is, quite literally, infinitely rewarding.

Live your Catholic faith.

Your Catholic faith is a public thing. It is not meant to be left behind when you leave home (CCC 2472). But be forewarned: Being a public Catholic involves risk and loss. You will find some doors closed to you. You will lose some friends. You will be considered an outsider. But, as a consolation, remember our Lord's words to the persecuted: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:12).

Spread your Catholic faith.

Jesus Christ wants us to bring the whole world into captivity to the truth, and the truth is Jesus himself, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Spreading the faith is a task not only for bishops, priests, and religious—it is a task for all Catholics (CCC 905).

Just before his Ascension, our Lord told his apostles, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20).

If we want to observe all that Jesus commanded, if we want to believe all he taught, we must follow him through his Church. This is our great challenge—and our great privilege.

2. Pope Chart

<http://www.popechart.com/stories.htm>

Recommended Resources

1. 12 Painless Ways to Evangelize Copyright © 2000, Catholic Answers.

http://www.catholic.com/library/12_ways.asp

Introduction

Why not face it? Most Catholics shy away from publicly engaging in evangelization. Even those who know their faith well hesitate to discuss it with strangers, and those who don't know their faith as well as they should usually find themselves running for cover when they think they may be asked to engage in evangelization.

Not to fear. This booklet explains twelve ways you can spread the faith—at very little expense, often with complete anonymity, and even "from the comfort of your own home," as the old phrase puts it.

But first of all, what's "evangelization"? It's the spreading of the Good News of Jesus Christ, as it has been entrusted to the Church he established. When we evangelize, we explain the truths of the Catholic faith and invite people to consider them and to consider becoming Catholics. We offer them a welcome into the house that God built for them.

Many lay Catholics still think evangelization is a task just for priests and religious. "Let Father or

Sister do it," they say. But it's really a task for every baptized Christian. Nowadays, with a decreased number of priests and religious, it's especially important that lay Catholics get involved in spreading the faith.

How to begin? Most parishes don't have effective evangelization programs, so you might be forced to fall back on your own resources.

But don't worry. In the following pages we present twelve easy (and usually cheap) ways to get the Good News out. Some of these methods are best done by several people together, so you might consider asking your friends over to your home to discuss techniques. Which method best fits your budget? Which makes best use of your time? Which makes best use of your talents? As you will see, you won't need much of a budget, you won't need much time, and you won't need to be a theological whiz.

Now roll up your sleeves, read on, and choose the techniques that are right for you. Who knows--one of them just might launch you as a full-time Catholic evangelist!

1 Stuff bill payment envelopes with Catholic tracts.

Everyone pays bills, and each remittance envelope is handled by someone at the other end. Opening envelopes is a tedious job. (Imagine going through a few thousand a day.) The contents of the envelopes never vary, except for the amount remitted.

Why not give the person who opens your envelope a little variety by including a tract that explains a Catholic belief? You can be sure the opener will take the tract home.

Of course, you do not need to restrict yourself to remittance envelopes. You can stuff tracts or booklets into every envelope you mail. Tracts can be obtained for as little as four cents apiece. Booklets may cost you a little more.

Either way, you can reach a hundred people for the cost of a fast-food lunch. Best of all, you won't have to pay anything extra for packaging or postage--you'll be using the envelope and stamp you would have used anyway.

Do you want responses to come to you or to your group? Purchase an inked address stamper at an office supply store, and stamp your name (or your group's name) and address onto the back of each tract or booklet. You'll get replies in no time.

2 Volunteer to take charge of your parish's literature rack.

Most parishes have vestibule literature racks. For the pastor they can be a source of modest income and regular headaches. You can accomplish two things if you volunteer to oversee the rack. First, your pastor or his secretary will be relieved of the burden. They won't have to worry about keeping the rack neat and filled.

Second, you can be reimbursed for the cost of the rack's literature if there's a donation box next to the rack. (If you receive more than enough to cover your costs in buying the literature, donate the excess to the parish--a great way to make yourself well-liked.)

But what should go in the rack? If you look at racks in neighboring parishes, you'll see that some literature seems neat, while other is dog-eared. Skip the latter: Tracts and booklets become dog-eared when many people pick them up, but few people take them home.

Most Catholics--and most non-Catholic visitors to Catholic churches--would like to know more about the Catholic faith, so your best bet is literature that explains Catholic beliefs in a clear, straightforward way, one topic per item. A prominent sign asking for donations should bring in enough to cover your costs.

3 Play a video or audio tape for door-to-door missionaries.

The last thing you should do, when missionaries ring the doorbell, is to tell them to go away. This gives them a bad impression of you and, if they know you're a Catholic, of the Church. Instead,

invite them in to view or listen to a tape.

You won't have to do anything except be friendly. Whether they're Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons or "Bible Christians," ask them to sit down and tell them you'll be happy to take and read their literature, but say that first you'd like them to see a videotape or listen to an audio tape.

A few missionaries will excuse themselves at this point, but most, even those who won't accept Catholic literature, will be willing to sit through a tape. When the tape is through, ask them their impressions of it. Have on hand Catholic literature, in case they want more information. Invite them back for another visit (at which you'll play another tape).

Don't get into an argument or a deep discussion. What you want to do is have them listen to the truths of the Catholic faith as spoken by experts. Those truths will settle in their minds and, over time, will affect them.

4 Place tracts or booklets in the pews at your parish.

For this one you'll need your pastor's permission, of course, but that shouldn't be hard to obtain if you offer to supply top-quality materials.

You'll be doing your pastor two favors: He won't have to purchase the tracts or booklets (you and your friends will do that), and he'll end up with a more educated parish--especially welcome to a pastor who is frustrated because he has to start at "square one" each time he gives a homily.

To ensure that parishioners take your literature, consider taping a little note that says "Free: Please take me home!" to the top of each one. You don't want folks to think the tracts or booklets, like the missalettes, should be left in the pews after Mass.

A general distribution of literature, especially in a large parish, can be a drain on your wallet, so you might want to team up with other parishioners.

In fact, you can go to the rectory as a group to present your plan--the pastor will be impressed that several of you are willing to dig into your own pockets to help others in the parish.

5 Write and answer messages on your online service.

If your home computer has a modem, subscribe to an online service. Among the commercial services are America Online, CompuServe, Prodigy, and the Catholic Resource Network (CRNET information by modem: (703) 791-4336), and there are thousands of subscription-free bulletin board systems (BBSs).

Most services include public message forums in addition to private e-mail (electronic mail). A message in a public forum might be read by tens, hundreds, or thousands of people. This can be a cost-effective way to explain Catholic beliefs and to overcome common misconceptions about the Catholic faith.

Some local BBSs share messages with other BBSs around the country. This means that what you write tonight can be read tomorrow in hundreds of cities. (The Catholic Information Network [CIN information by modem: (619) 449-6030] operates this way.) Your cost: no more than a local phone call.

Online messages, unlike printed literature, allow for immediate responses. You can keep up continuing dialogues with people far away. Plus there's good news for the shy: Most systems allow you to use a "handle" instead of your real name.

6 Go door to door, hanging leaflets from doorknobs.

If you want to saturate your neighborhood with good Catholic literature, there's no better way than going door to door--and you never have to ring a doorbell.

Leave tracts or booklets hanging from the doorknob by means of cheap plastic bags. (Look in the Yellow Pages for manufacturers of such bags.) Or slip your literature under the doormat, or prop it

against the door. But be sure you don't put your literature in anyone's mailbox. Mailboxes are for mail only, and it's a federal offense to put anything else in a mailbox.

If you feel up to face-to-face encounters, bring along other material, including tapes, for those times when you run into someone as you're leaving your tract or booklet. If you want to avoid such encounters, skip houses with open front doors or with people standing outside.

Going door to door is most enjoyable when you walk with a friend. Each of you can cover one side of the block. If one of you gets into a discussion with a resident, the other can cross the street and help guide the conversation.

7 Write to the editor when the press misrepresents the faith.

We all have seen anti-Catholic bias in the media. Sometimes it is a function of simple ignorance. Sometimes it is evidence of a deep-seated hostility. Either way, don't let misrepresentations about the faith go by without composing a quick answer.

Every opinion page editor wants lively letters to the editor. (He keeps his job only if he keeps this section popular.) The editor may not be a Catholic--he may not even like Catholics or their beliefs--but he'll print your letter if you write charitably, succinctly, and with verve.

The chief rule: Keep it short. An editor reserves the right to shorten long letters, but he usually doesn't want to use his time doing that. It's easier to throw long letters away. Your chances of getting your letter printed are greatest if you stay within 200 words, if you type your letter neatly, and if you include your name, address, and telephone number (so the editor can check that it was you who wrote, not someone using your name).

Many folks have their letters printed regularly. So can you. Remember: By writing just one short letter, you can influence thousands.

8 Place Catholic literature on windshields.

Two cautions: Don't do this on private property without getting permission from the owner. And, if you're going to place literature on windshields of cars parked along streets, check with your city about regulations. In most cities there's no problem at all, so long as the cars are on public property, including public parking lots, but some cities have restrictions. It's always good to check.

That said, this is an easy way to grab people's attention. After all, who can drive with a tract or booklet staring him in the face? Drivers have no choice but to remove your literature from their windshields. Few will toss your tract or booklet on the ground (being a litterbug is pass today), so even most of those who might not welcome the message will take your literature home, where it may sit for a day or two until it's read.

The key to getting your material read is to restrict yourself to topics that many people are interested in. Good examples: the Eucharist, the papacy, salvation. Even non-Catholics want to learn more about these.

9 Give away photocopies of articles from periodicals.

Again, you'll need permission for this one. Write to the publisher and explain that you want to make photocopies of a particular article and will give them away at no charge. (Most publications will refuse permission if you intend to sell the copies.) Be sure to include, on the last page of the article, the publication's name and address and the date of the issue in which the article appeared.

Passing out photocopies is a good way to distribute "I-wish-I-had-written-that" articles--you know, the kind that say just the right things in just the right words, but that probably never will appear in leaflet or booklet form.

If you take an article to a copying service, and if you order a large number of copies, prices can be less than four cents per magazine page. A hundred copies of a five-page article would run you \$20--an inexpensive way to reach a hundred people.

These photocopied articles can be used as envelope stuffers, can be left in pews, or can be placed on windshields. If you want to receive responses, stamp your or your group's name and address on the last page.

10 Send a friend (or a stranger) a book or a tape.

Few people can resist a gift, especially one that has "perceived value," as the marketing phrase has it. Whether or not the intended recipient of your largesse likes books or tapes, he'll probably feel obliged to read or listen to whatever you give him.

Don't restrict your giving to friends. Preaching to the choir is often necessary, but you also should preach to the people in the pews and to the people who never even make it to church. Besides, there's no better way to overcome a lack of friendship than to give a gift that says, "Please accept this. I'm interested in having your opinion of it."

If you purchase a single title, whether a book or a tape, in quantity, you usually can receive a substantial discount from the supplier--anywhere from twenty to forty percent, sometimes more. If one or two friends will join you in underwriting the costs, you'll be able to give a book or tape to someone for as little as a dollar or two. This is an effective way to spread the good news about the Catholic faith.

11 Call radio talk shows.

Most talk shows on "Christian radio stations" are hosted by Protestants. Inevitably the Catholic Church and Catholic beliefs are discussed--but not necessarily with sensitivity or understanding. Here's where you come in.

All you have to do is call these shows--most of them advertise a toll-free number or a local number--but do a little preparation first. Since you'll have only a few moments on the air, you must know what you're going to say and how you'll say it. Before dialing, pencil a list of "talking points" so you won't become tongue-tied or lose your train of thought.

On most stations you maintain anonymity, with only your first name and city being given over the air. (You may have to give your full name and other information to the station's program engineer, but all that will be kept confidential.)

When you finally get on the air, make sure you speak constructively, even when you need to correct the program's host, his guest, or another caller. Don't say, "The guest on today's show doesn't know what he's talking about." It's better to say, "The guest on today's show seems to have a misconception about Catholic teaching on such-and-so. Let me explain what the Catholic Church really believes"

12 Leave Catholic tracts and flyers in conspicuous places.

Do you take a bus to work or to school? If so, leave Catholic literature on the seat as you exit, and the next person no doubt will read it. After all, what else is there to do on a bus?

If you find yourself waiting at a bus stop or on a train platform, leave a few copies of a tract or flyer on the bench--provided it's not a windy day, of course.

Before leaving your house, stuff a dozen pieces of Catholic literature into your pocket or purse. Make it a point to distribute that many pieces each time you go out. You can leave literature nearly anywhere, but be careful not to leave it where it likely will fall to the ground and be trampled underfoot.

If someone sees what you're doing and expresses interest, smile broadly and offer him samples. There's no need to argue about the contents of the literature. Just say, "Why don't you take one? You might find it helpful."

2. Evangelization

<http://www.silk.net/RelEd/evangelization.htm>

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

Our Relationship with God

Do you have a living relationship with God or are you just practicing religion?

Objective

Read the “Titanic Dilemma” in *How Big is Your God?* (p. 29) up to “Who would you Save?” Have the large group respond to it.

Then read the Bible passage on “Who is my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters?” Mark 3: 31-35.

Then read the rest of the passage from *How Big is Your God?* (pp. 29-30) starting with “Now, if you save the children...” and ending with: “This is when I know I am in a living relationship with the Divine. . . .”

See if there are any more large group responses or reactions. The objective of the exercise is to get us thinking whether we have a living relationship with God or are we just going to church on Sundays.

Bible Readings

1. Mark 3: 31-35.

His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him.

A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers 12 (and your sisters) are outside asking for you." But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and (my) brothers?" And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. (For) whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2196

In response to the question about the first of the commandments, Jesus says: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The apostle St. Paul reminds us of this: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

2. Paragraph 1825

Christ died out of love for us, while we were still "enemies." The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself.

The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: "charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Small Group Questions

1. Do you agree with the distinction the author makes between “charity” and “compassion”?

Do you have a living relationship with God or are you just practicing religion?

2. What do you see as being the difference between having a living relationship with God and just practicing religion?
3. Will you present the “Titanic Dilemma” to your family this coming week?

Do you have a living relationship with God or are you just practicing religion?

Recommended Readings

How Big is Your God? by Paul Coutinho, S.J., Chapter 9, pp. 29 – 30.

Do You Have a Living Relationship with God, or Are You Just Practicing Religion?

Here is a little test to determine whether you have a living relationship with God or you just practice religion: Imagine yourself as a passenger on the *Titanic*, and it is sinking. Then see yourself in a lifeboat all by yourself, safe and secure. Around your lifeboat are little children struggling to stay afloat. You can reach out to them and save them all. But a little off in the distance are your loved ones—your father, your mother, your brothers and sisters, your children perhaps, maybe your spouse or the love of your life. If you do not try to reach out to them, they will all certainly drown and die. Unfortunately, you cannot save both the children and your loved ones. Who would you save?

Now, if you save the children who are physically closest to you and painfully watch your loved ones die, you have the compassion that comes from a deep relationship with the Divine. Your God is an infinite God connecting and unifying all. Who is my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters?

Everyone is. And if you reach out to your loved ones because they have supported you and cared for you and you have a relationship with them of mutual dedication and commitment of some kind, this is good, but you practice charity that comes from religion and has the self as motivation. This act of charity is good, but we need to strive to attain the ideal of compassion.

So let us pray for the grace of being compassionate. In a living relationship with God, we are connected to and affected by what happens to *anyone* in life. With an infinitely big God, color fades away, creed fades away. Good and bad fade away. We can see beyond color, beyond religion, beyond a person being morally good or bad. As Jesus said, "I condemn the sinner but never the sinner." The sinner is also me. I praise virtue, but again that person who

In a living relationship with God, we are connected to and affected by what happens to anyone in life.

I know I am in a living relationship with the Divine: when I can relate to another person's interior being, and I care about the world as much as I care about myself.

When I put this case to my students at the university, one of them challenged, "So in compassion you do not have any freedom!" But as I told this student, freedom comes with response plus ability. The ability to respond is freedom. In charity, my ability to respond is limited to the people I choose to help, the time I choose to give, and the price I'm willing to pay. In compassion, the ability to respond is total.

Do you have a living relationship with God or are you just practicing religion?

Who is God for me?

Objective

The Divine is so great, so wondrous, so unfathomable that any image or metaphor we use to try to understand or describe God is at best only a partial fit and quickly limits our ability to experience other aspects.

There are four main traditions in the Old Testament: the Yahwistic, the Elohist, the Deuteronomist, and the Priestly. Is my God the Yahwistic God, with whom I feel broken, weak, imperfect, sinful, and yet loved? Is my God the Elohist God, for whom I try to make myself perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect? Is my God the God of Deuteronomy, for whom I focus on observing God's law, doing good deeds, and keeping track of the balance of my account in heaven? Or is my God the Priestly God, whom I try to please and connect with through the rituals and traditions of my faith?

It is important to know that each one of these traditions is a good tradition. Each one has produced saints. Who is God for me?

Bible Readings

1. Exodus 3: 1-6, 13-14

Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the LORD appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, "I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father," he continued, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

"But," said Moses to God, "when I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?" God replied, "I am who am." Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 203 – 221

God Reveals His Name

God revealed himself to his people Israel by making his name known to them. A name expresses a person's essence and identity and the meaning of this person's life. God has a name; he is not an anonymous force. To disclose one's name is to make oneself known to others; in a way it is to hand oneself over by becoming accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally.

God revealed himself progressively and under different names to his people, but the revelation that proved to be the fundamental one for both the Old and the New Covenants was the revelation of the divine name to Moses in the theophany of the burning bush, on the threshold of the Exodus and of the covenant on Sinai.

The living God

God calls Moses from the midst of a bush that burns without being consumed: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." God is the God of the fathers, the One who had called and guided the patriarchs in their wanderings. He is the faithful

Who is God for me?

and compassionate God who remembers them and his promises; he comes to free their descendants from slavery. He is the God who, from beyond space and time, can do this and wills to do it, the God who will put his almighty power to work for this plan.

"I Am who I Am"

Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'. . . this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

In revealing his mysterious name, YHWH ("I AM HE WHO IS", "I AM WHO AM" or "I AM WHO I AM"), God says who he is and by what name he is to be called. This divine name is mysterious just as God is mystery. It is at once a name revealed and something like the refusal of a name, and hence it better expresses God as what he is - infinitely above everything that we can understand or say: he is the "hidden God", his name is ineffable, and he is the God who makes himself close to men.

By revealing his name God at the same time reveals his faithfulness which is from everlasting to everlasting, valid for the past ("I am the God of your father"), as for the future ("I will be with you"). God, who reveals his name as "I AM", reveals himself as the God who is always there, present to his people in order to save them.

Faced with God's fascinating and mysterious presence, man discovers his own insignificance. Before the burning bush, Moses takes off his sandals and veils his face in the presence of God's holiness. Before the glory of the thrice-holy God, Isaiah cries out: "Woe is me! I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips." Before the divine signs wrought by Jesus, Peter exclaims: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But because God is holy, he can forgive the man who realizes that he is a sinner before him: "I will not execute my fierce anger. . . for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst." The apostle John says likewise: "We shall. . . reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything."

Out of respect for the holiness of God, the people of Israel do not pronounce his name. In the reading of Sacred Scripture, the revealed name (YHWH) is replaced by the divine title "LORD" (in Hebrew Adonai, in Greek Kyrios). It is under this title that the divinity of Jesus will be acclaimed: "Jesus is LORD."

"A God merciful and gracious"

After Israel's sin, when the people had turned away from God to worship the golden calf, God hears Moses' prayer of intercession and agrees to walk in the midst of an unfaithful people, thus demonstrating his love. When Moses asks to see his glory, God responds "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'the LORD' [YHWH]." Then the LORD passes before Moses and proclaims, "YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"; Moses then confesses that the LORD is a forgiving God.

The divine name, "I Am" or "He Is", expresses God's faithfulness: despite the faithlessness of men's sin and the punishment it deserves, he keeps "steadfast love for thousands". By going so far as to give up his own Son for us, God reveals that he is "rich in mercy". By giving his life to free us from sin, Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that "I AM"."

God alone IS

Over the centuries, Israel's faith was able to manifest and deepen realization of the riches contained in the revelation of the divine name. God is unique; there are no other gods besides him. He transcends the world and history. He made heaven and earth: "They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. . . but you are the same, and your years have no end." In God "there is no variation or shadow due to change." God is "HE WHO IS", from everlasting to everlasting, and as such remains ever faithful to himself and to his promises.

The revelation of the ineffable name "I AM WHO AM" contains then the truth that God alone IS. The Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and following it the Church's

Who is God for me?

Tradition, understood the divine name in this sense: God is the fullness of Being and of every perfection, without origin and without end. All creatures receive all that they are and have from him; but he alone is his very being, and he is of himself everything that he is.

GOD, "HE WHO IS", IS TRUTH AND LOVE

God, "HE WHO IS", revealed himself to Israel as the one "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness". These two terms express summarily the riches of the divine name. In all his works God displays, not only his kindness, goodness, grace and steadfast love, but also his trustworthiness, constancy, faithfulness and truth. "I give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness." He is the Truth, for "God is light and in him there is no darkness"; "God is love", as the apostle John teaches.

God is Truth

"The sum of your word is truth; and every one of your righteous ordinances endures forever."
"And now, O LORD God, you are God, and your words are true"; this is why God's promises always come true. God is Truth itself, whose words cannot deceive. This is why one can abandon oneself in full trust to the truth and faithfulness of his word in all things. The beginning of sin and of man's fall was due to a lie of the tempter who induced doubt of God's word, kindness and faithfulness.

God's truth is his wisdom, which commands the whole created order and governs the world. God, who alone made heaven and earth, can alone impart true knowledge of every created thing in relation to himself.

God is also truthful when he reveals himself - the teaching that comes from God is "true instruction". When he sends his Son into the world it will be "to bear witness to the truth": "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true."

God is Love

In the course of its history, Israel was able to discover that God had only one reason to reveal himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as his special possession: his sheer gratuitous love.³⁸ And thanks to the prophets Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their unfaithfulness and sins.

God's love for Israel is compared to a father's love for his son. His love for his people is stronger than a mother's for her children. God loves his people more than a bridegroom his beloved; his love will be victorious over even the worst infidelities and will extend to his most precious gift: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

God's love is "everlasting": "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you." Through Jeremiah, God declares to his people, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

But St. John goes even further when he affirms that "God is love": God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.

Small Group Questions

1. What is your sense of God from the New Testament?
2. Who was my God of childhood? Of Adulthood?
3. What can I do this week to teach my children/family some deeper aspect about God?

Recommended Readings

1. How Big is Your God? Chapters 12 – 16, pp. 36 – 50.

Pleasing God—the Priestly Experience

The first experience of God in the Pentateuch is in the first chapter of the book of Genesis—the first creation story. In the beginning, there was chaos, there was confusion, there was a void, there was darkness on the face of the earth. Out of that chaos and confusion, God brought forth a good and beautiful creation. On the sixth day, God said, “Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness,” and he created them male and female. And God saw that what he created was very, very good. God was pleased with what he created. On the seventh day, God rested and made it holy and called that day the Sabbath.

This is the God of the priestly tradition. Let me explain:

In the experience of God found in the first chapter of Genesis, God is the Great Other and the creator of all things. There is order and a hierarchy in creation. Humans are the pinnacle of God’s creation, and God shares his dominion over the whole of creation with them. The Sabbath is the axle that holds everything together in this tradition. On the Sabbath, you came to the temple, and in the temple was the priest, who mediated between you and God. People approached God through the priest, the ritual, and the temple.

In the priestly tradition, God’s love must be merited by pleasing the Divine through prayer, good works, and obedience to the rituals of the church. And pleasing God is an effective way of growing in relationship with God.

How do you know if your God is a priestly God? If you believe that you need a priest to be the bridge to help you connect to God, then your God is a priestly God. If you believe that the priests and the rituals of the church guide you toward grace, then your experience of God is in the priestly tradition. If you live with fear that God will withdraw his love if you do not please him enough, then your God is a priestly God. If, when you reflect on your personal life from childhood onward, you find that you have lived to please everyone, then your God is likely a priestly God. If you believe that reverently following the creed and the traditions of your religion is what God desires of you, and that if you do so throughout your life God will bless you with entry into his heavenly kingdom, then you are relating to God in the priestly tradition. If your vision of heaven is of angels singing “Holy, Holy, Holy,” of incense and candles—then your God is the priestly God, the Great Other.

The God of Brokenness—the Yahwistic Experience

In the second chapter of Genesis, God starts creating all over again. What happened? Did he forget that he had created the world? Was he disappointed with what he had created? No. This is an expression of another experience of God. This is another way of answering the question, who is God? It is another mode of relating to God, of seeking God.

In the second chapter of Genesis, we are told that God created man and woman out of clay. We find God not out there, not up there somewhere, but down in the clay and playing with the clay. He has his fingers, his hands, himself in that clay, and he molds that clay into the shape of a man and breathes into that clay his own breath of life. He breathes himself into that clay. That man becomes a living being, and out of that man, God creates woman. When he creates this man and this woman, he does not give them dominion over the whole of creation. He sends them as companions to work. He sends them to till the ground. He makes them co-creators. They have to complete what God has started, so they become co-creators with God.

This second experience is called Yahwistic. Yahweh is a name for God, a proper name. Yahweh talks to Adam and Eve. He walks with them in the cool of the evening. He will eat with Abraham. This God is intimate. And having breathed himself into man, he has become one with humanity. This God has become one with brokenness. What is clay? Clay stands for weakness, imperfection, and sinfulness—that which has no structure, no integrity of its own. God becomes one with broken humanity when he becomes one with the clay.

I would like to explain further what I mean when I say that God has become one with brokenness, one with clay. We see this in the story of Abraham's call (Genesis 12). God calls Abraham and tells him that he will become the father of nations. Our father in faith, Abraham, in the Yahwistic tradition, is a liar. And yet he is blessed by God and a channel of God's blessing. When Abraham goes into Egypt, Pharaoh's men ask him about the beautiful woman who is traveling with him. Although it is Abraham's wife, Sarah, he replies, "She is my sister." Why did he say that Sarah, his wife, was his sister? Because if Abraham had said that Sarah was his wife, they would have killed him and taken Sarah to Pharaoh and made her one of his concubines. Our father in faith, to save his life, tells a lie. But in the Yahwistic tradition, God continues to bless Abraham, and God blesses Pharaoh and Pharaoh's household through this liar, because the Yahwistic God never forgets that Abraham is clay, Abraham is weak, imperfect, and sinful.

Similarly, in the story of Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban (Genesis 30), we are told that Jacob was taking care of

Laban's sheep, and Jacob's sheep began to multiply. How did his sheep multiply? He stole them. Our great father Jacob was a thief—and yet Jacob was a channel of God's blessing. Jacob was God's chosen one, because in the Yahwistic tradition, God never forgets that Jacob is also made of clay—weakness, imperfection, sinfulness.

In the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19–34), Esau comes home hungry, goes to his brother, Jacob, and says, “Give me something to eat, for I am dying of starvation.” Jacob demands the firstborn Esau's birthright in exchange for something to eat. Poor Esau says to himself, *What is the use of my birthright if I am going to die anyway?* He says to Jacob, “Take my birthright, and give me food to eat.” In the Yahwistic tradition, this man who takes advantage of his brother's situation is still God's prophet, is still blessed by God, because God never forgets that Jacob, like Abraham and all of us, is made of clay: weak, imperfect, and sinful.

How do you know if your God is a Yahwistic God? If your God is intimate with you, with humanity, then your God is the Yahwistic God. If you can accept yourself in your brokenness and experience God's love in your weakness, imperfection, and sinfulness, then your God is the Yahwistic God. If you can accept others in their brokenness, then your God is the Yahwistic God. In every family, for example, there is someone who just does not turn out right. The one with a Yahwistic God will find a way to stay connected with this person. In every religious community, there will be someone who is despised by the rest—the Yahwistic person will seek out this alienated one. In many work situations, there will be a co-worker who is the topic of gossip—the Yahwistic person

will befriend that person. If, however, you are content with God loving you unconditionally and you do not reach out to broken humanity, then your God may not be the Yahwistic God. But if your image of God is the father of the prodigal son, who simply says, “Finally, you have arrived!” more than likely your God is the Yahwistic God.

The God of Perfection—the Elohistc Experience

The third experience of God found in the first five books of the Bible is Elohistc. Elohim means “the Great God” but is not a proper name like Yahweh. You cannot see this Elohistc God face-to-face. If you do, you will die. So the Elohistc God does not walk and talk intimately with people. The Elohistc God appears in dreams. The Elohistc God appears in a cloud. The Elohistc God moves as a pillar of fire—but you cannot see this God face-to-face and live. In the Elohistc tradition, God does not become one with humanity’s brokenness, because God can never be less than God, the pure Great God.

The relationship between the Elohistc God and people is one of perfection. You have to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. You cannot be weak and yet be blessed by God. You cannot be sinful, insincere, or unholy and yet be God’s prophet. You cannot have imperfections and expect to receive God’s gifts and blessings. So what do you do? You overcome your weakness by willpower and through grace. You have to be perfect as God is perfect, pure as God is pure if

you want to be blessed by God and have God enter you so that you can be God’s channel, God’s prophet, God’s witness.

The Elohistc tradition tells some of the same stories that are told in the Yahwistic tradition—but with its own twist. In the Elohistc version of the story of Abraham going down into Egypt (Genesis 12), as in the Yahwistic version, Pharaoh’s men come up to Abraham and say, “Who is this woman?” and Abraham says of his wife, “She is my sister.” But the Yahwistic tradition stops there, while the Elohistc tradition continues and says that Abraham did not tell a lie. Abraham and Sarah were brother and sister. They had the same father but different mothers, because it was the cultural tradition of that time, such marriages were not unusual. Now, why does the Elohistc tradition want to insist on this? Because Abraham cannot willfully tell a lie and be blessed by God or be a channel of God’s blessing. This tradition will also tell the story of Jacob and the sheep (Genesis 30), but it will say that Jacob’s sheep multiplied not because he was stealing but because God blessed the sheep, and therefore they multiplied. Jacob cannot be a thief, cannot be weak, imperfect, and sinful and yet be a channel of God’s blessing or God’s witness. Elohistc will tell the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25), but in this tradition their mother becomes the villain. She is the one who influences Jacob to steal the birthright from his brother, Esau. Jacob cannot be weak, unjust, and sinful and yet be God’s prophet.

The Elohistc tradition continues right into the New Testament. In the Gospel of Mark, we are told that one day when Jesus was walking along the road, the sons of Zebedee—the disciples James and John—went up to him and said, “Jesus, when you establish your kingdom, put one of us on your right

and the other on your left. We will do great things for your kingdom.” These were ambitious people, and yet they were pillars of the church; they were the apostles of Jesus. This is one Gospel version, and this account could be understood to be in the Yahwistic tradition. In the Gospel of Matthew, we are told the same story, but again there’s a twist. It is not the disciples James and John who go up to Jesus, but their mother. Why this change? Because the apostles had to be perfect and holy, so the mother becomes the ambitious one. This is the Elohist tradition, in which you have to be perfect in order to be God’s witness, in order to be a channel of God’s blessing, and in order to receive blessings from God.

How do you know if your God is the Elohist God? If you are concerned about the weaknesses, imperfections, and sinfulness in your own life and devote yourself to cleansing your soul, your God is the Elohist God. If you are distressed over the weaknesses and sinfulness of others, your God is the Elohist God. If you see God as transcendent and unknowable to the human mind—or if you seek through God’s power to transcend the human condition—then your God is the Elohist God. If you are constantly straightening pictures, putting things at right angles, or trying to bring things into order and harmony, then your God may be the Elohist God. When you think about life after death, if you expect servants of God to say, “You know, those imperfections of yours—you haven’t really worked on them. You have to go to purgatory, get purified, and come back,” you might believe in the Elohist God.

The Pathway of the Law—the Experience of Deuteronomy

The fourth experience of God that we are shown in the Hebrew Scriptures is that of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the tradition of the law. It is a simple tradition: If you keep the law, you will be rewarded. If you break the law, you will be punished. God established the law when God created the universe. The law is simply the way things are. The Deuteronomic tradition is the tradition that talks about the Last Judgment, the book of life, and the scales. How we live out eternity will be determined by the scales; it will depend on what is written in the book of life.

This fourth experience of God is expressed best in the book of Deuteronomy, which begins by exhorting the people to obey the divine decrees and warns them against abandoning the God of their fathers (1–4:40). The motivation offered is the intimate covenant that God made with the people at Mount Sinai (5–26). The book then goes on to spell out blessings on those who obey the law and curses on the rebellious. Faithfulness to the Sinai covenant would earn the people blessings not only on themselves but on their descendants (27–30).

Whenever I think about the Deuteronomy experience, I always think of Marilyn Monroe.

When Marilyn Monroe goes up to heaven, Peter opens the book of life and says, "My, my, Marilyn, I do not think I can take you into heaven. You have to go to hell. You have lived such a riotous life that heaven is not the place for you." Marilyn Monroe says, "Peter, all that you have written is true, but my heart is pure, my heart is clean." Peter continues to insist that she go to hell, and Marilyn Monroe continues to insist all the more that she was good and deserves to go to heaven.

So Peter goes to Jesus, and Jesus says, "Oh, give her the simple test." Peter comes back and tells Marilyn Monroe, "Well, Marilyn, this is a test to see if what you are saying is true or not true. Heaven is across on the other side, and down is hell. You must walk across this rope to get to heaven, but if you have one sexual thought, you will go straight down to hell. Are you ready to do this?" Marilyn Monroe says, "Sure, Peter, my heart is clean, my heart is pure." So Marilyn Monroe starts walking, and Peter is walking behind her with the book of life. Three-fourths of the way there, Marilyn turns around. There is no Peter! Where did Peter go? Keep the law, and you will be rewarded. Break the law, and you will be punished.

So how do you know if your God is the God of Deuteronomy? If you are counting how many sins you have committed, how many virtues you have, the number of good things you have done, and the number of bad things you have done because everything in this universe balances out, then your God is the God of Deuteronomy. If you believe that creation is the way it is because God set the foundations of

the universe, and that no one or nothing or no discovery is going to change how things are, then you may have a God of Deuteronomy. If you believe that there is a code to be followed, a how-to for life, then your experience of God follows the Deuteronomic tradition. When you are at the point of death, if you expect a particular judgment based on the book of life when you stand before heaven, then your God is the God of Deuteronomy.

Disposable Images of God

In the Indian tradition, there are 330 million gods. No one believes that any one of these gods is divine. They are expressions of human experiences of the Divine, images that point to deeper aspects of the Divine. Spiritual growth happens when one is constantly experiencing and transcending these images until one reaches the Divine with no images. Beyond images, beyond manifestations, beyond mediators, one experiences the Divine as divine.

In a similar fashion, the Christian mystics tell us—and I've come to understand through personal experience—that if we want to get deeper into the river of divine life, if we want to know an infinitely big God, then we too will have to transcend the images of God that we might have. The Divine is so great, so wondrous, so unfathomable that any image or metaphor we hang on God is at best only a partial fit and quickly limits our ability to experience other aspects.

So let's reflect for a moment on our lives and ask ourselves, Who is God for me? How have I been experiencing God? Is my God the priestly God, whom I try to please through the rituals and traditions of my faith, the Mass, my prayer, sacrifices, the church, or the temple? Is my God

the Yahwistic God, with whom I feel broken, weak, imperfect, sinful, and yet loved? Is my God the Elohist God, for whom I try to make myself perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect? Or is my God the God of

If we want to get deeper into the river of divine life, if we want to know an infinitely big God, then we too will have to transcend the images of God that we might have.

Deuteronomy, for whom I focus on observing God's law, doing good deeds, and keeping track of the balance of my account in heaven?

It is important to know that each one of these traditions is a good tradition. Each one has produced saints. Sometimes we need priests or the temple as an intercessor to help us connect to the Divine or guide us toward grace.

Sometimes we need to experience God in our brokenness, in our weakness—and other times we need to see God as so holy, ultimate, and pure that if only we were to remove our sin, God would elevate us beyond our human condition. And at times, we need to accept that what we do to others we ultimately do to ourselves, that we reap what we sow, because this is God's interconnected universe, and God doesn't play favorites.

Whatever way you relate with God, it is good; it is right. Once you recognize your way of relating with God, find ways of deepening this relationship and of integrating the best of all four traditions. By doing so, you will begin to transcend the traditions and move deeper into the river of divine intimacy. One way to start is by asking, who was the God who

was introduced to me as a child? How and when did my God change? Who is God for me now, and what is a deeper expression of my relationship with the Divine?

If you want a relationship with God, you must make space in your life for the Spiritual

Objective

Fr. Paul Coutinho, S.J. suggests: "Becoming free in order to make room for the spiritual (for the Holy Spirit) in our lives begins with getting rid of the material possessions that weigh us down. When we look carefully and objectively at our lives, we see that we do not need that much to make and keep us happy." "I am not saying that we should give away everything. There are some things we do need. But how much of what we have in our lives is really necessary? Asking and responding to this is the beginning of our freedom."

Bible Readings

1. Parable of the Rich Young Man in Matthew 19: 16-22.

Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?"

He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, " 'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother'; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2012 – 2016:

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him . . . For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified."

"All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity." All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that . . . doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.

Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called "mystical" because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments - "the holy mysteries" - and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God calls us all to this intimate union with him, even if the special graces or extraordinary signs of this mystical life are granted only to some for the sake of manifesting the gratuitous gift given to all.

The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes:

He who climbs never stops going from beginning to beginning, through beginnings that have no end. He never stops desiring what he already knows.

The children of our holy mother the Church rightly hope for the grace of final perseverance and the recompense of God their Father for the good works accomplished with his grace in communion with Jesus. Keeping the same rule of life, believers share the "blessed hope" of those whom the divine mercy gathers

If you want a relationship with God, you must make space in your life for the Spiritual

into the "holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Small Group Questions

1. What would you be willing to give up materially or behaviorally to make more space for God in your life?
2. Would you be willing to ask your family this question as you gather around the dinner table this week?
3. One suggestion: Have a "BAD" Sunday (Basement-Attic Disposal Sunday). Bring something from your basement or attic to church, or Goodwill, or St. Vincent de Paul for those less fortunate than ourselves.

Recommended Readings

1. How Big is Your God? Chapter 26: Lightening Our Load along the Journey, pp. 87 – 89.

Lightening Our Load along the Journey

A college professor who was nearing retirement decided to clean out his basement. It was filled with boxes of notes and lesson plans for his classes that he had collected for decades. Box after box went out of his house and to the recycling center. One day, his wife went down into the basement and saw that it was still full of boxes. "What's going on?" she asked. "I thought you were cleaning out the basement." "Well," the professor said, "I made copies of everything I gave away, just in case."

Becoming free in order to make room for the spiritual in our lives begins with getting rid of the material possessions that weigh us down. When we look carefully and objectively at our lives, we will see that we do not need that much to make and keep us happy. For example, when people come for retreats, I ask them, "Are the things that you have brought with you meeting your needs and giving you comfort?" They say yes. Then I ask, "How many of the things that you have left at home do you really need? How much more than what you take on vacation, business trips, and retreats do you really need?" I am not saying that we should give away everything. There are some things we do need. But how much of what we

If you want a relationship with God, you must make space in your life for the Spiritual

have in our lives is really necessary? Asking and responding to this is the beginning of our freedom.

When I look at my life, I see that I collect things from time to time, and at some point I'll say, "Where did all this stuff come from?" That is when I know that I have to get rid of it. Get rid of it! If you haven't used something for six months, give it away. If you haven't laid eyes on it in ages, pass it on to another. Yes, you work hard for the things you have, but I would like you to review very seriously the material things that you have in your home and your office and your life—the "extra" things first, then the "essential" things. Start with the basement and the attic. What do you *really* need? Consider this carefully.

If you want a relationship with God, you must make space in your life for the spiritual. In a church where I once served, we would call the last Sunday of every month "BAD Sunday." What was BAD Sunday? It was Basement-Attic Disposal Sunday—and it was wonderful. Everyone was invited to go into their basement and their attic and bring something they found there to church.

I used to say to my older parishioners, "Unless the angel Gabriel visits, you will probably not need the baby things that you have stored in your basement. There are young people getting married, having their babies. These baby things are expensive. Bring them to church so that the young people can use them. What else do you have in your basement—the refrigerator that your mother-in-law

gave you that you've always hated and never used but don't know how to get rid of? Mother-in-law is gone, but the refrigerator is still there. Bring it to church! It has never worked right, you've never used it, and so we'll get rid of it for you. If it needs to be thrown away, we'll do it for you. But get rid of it." And the people who participated would feel lighter and happier.

It will be good to think about the things you have collected and give them away. You have Goodwill, you have St. Vincent de Paul stores, you have recycling centers, or you can just throw these things in the trash. You will be lighter and happier. One of the members of my parish community, who is the director of religious education for the diocese, introduced BAD Mondays into the elementary schools. On the last Monday of every month, the children bring to school something they no longer use. In this way, they are put on the pathway of spiritual freedom early in life.

If you're looking to jump-start your spiritual growth, you can start by getting rid of the material things that you possess. How did Jesus respond to the first temptation in the desert? He said, "Man does not live by bread alone." He is telling us that material things are unimportant and that the only thing that matters is our relationship with God, our life-giving, all-sustaining experience of the Divine. That is what matters. Get rid of the material anchors in your life, and your journey into the river of the Divine will be lighter and freer.

What does Jesus' Sacrifice mean to you?

Objective

We often hear that Jesus died for our sins. What does that mean? Did God the Father demand Jesus' death as a ransom for our sins? Mel Gibson, in his movie "The Passion of the Christ", emphasized the physical suffering that Jesus endured. Is there a deeper meaning to Jesus' Passion? Fr. Ron Rohlheiser views Jesus' Passion as a drama of the heart more than an endurance test for his body. "What made Jesus' sacrifice so special? We have, I think, focused too much on the physical aspects of the crucifixion to the detriment of what was happening more deeply, underneath. What the Gospels and Jesus emphasize is his moral loneliness, the fact that he was alone, betrayed, humiliated, misunderstood, the object of jealousy and crowd hysteria. . . . Despite all this, Jesus held out, he gave himself over, without bitterness, without self-pity, holding on to his ideals, gracious, respectful, forgiving, without losing his balance, his meaning or his message. That's the ultimate test, and we face it daily in many areas of our lives."

We will probably not be scourged, crowned with thorns, or nailed to a cross, but how do we make sacrifices to keep our ideals, our beliefs, our sense of mission to do God's will in our daily lives?

Bible Readings

1. Mark 14: 32 – 42

Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed.

Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Withdrawing again, he prayed, saying the same thing. Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open and did not know what to answer him. He returned a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 606 – 618

Jesus freely embraced the Father's redeeming love

The Son of God, who came down "from heaven, not to do [his] own will, but the will of him who sent [him]", said on coming into the world, "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God." "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work." The sacrifice of Jesus "for the sins of the whole world" expresses his loving communion with the Father. "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life", said the Lord, "[for] I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."

The desire to embrace his Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation. And so he asked, "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour." And again, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?" From the cross, just before "It is finished", he said, "I thirst."

What does Jesus' Sacrifice mean to you?

"The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world"

After agreeing to baptize him along with the sinners, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and pointed him out as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". By doing so, he reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover. Christ's whole life expresses his mission: "to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus freely embraced the Father's redeeming love

By embracing in his human heart the Father's love for men, Jesus "loved them to the end", for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men. Indeed, out of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." Hence the sovereign freedom of God's Son as he went out to his death.

At the Last Supper Jesus anticipated the free offering of his life

Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve Apostles "on the night he was betrayed". On the eve of his Passion, while still free, Jesus transformed this Last Supper with the apostles into the memorial of his voluntary offering to the Father for the salvation of men: "This is my body which is given for you." "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The Eucharist that Christ institutes at that moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice. Jesus includes the apostles in his own offering and bids them perpetuate it. By doing so, the Lord institutes his apostles as priests of the New Covenant: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."

The agony at Gethsemani

The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father's hands in his agony in the garden at Gethsemani, making himself "obedient unto death". Jesus prays: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. . ." Thus he expresses the horror that death represented for his human nature. Like ours, his human nature is destined for eternal life; but unlike ours, it is perfectly exempt from sin, the cause of death. Above all, his human nature has been assumed by the divine person of the "Author of life", the "Living One". By accepting in his human will that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."

Christ's death is the unique and definitive sacrifice

Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the "blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".

This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.

Jesus substitutes his obedience for our disobedience

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who "makes himself an offering for sin", when "he bore the sin of many", and who "shall make many to be accounted righteous", for "he shall bear their iniquities". Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father.

Jesus consummates his sacrifice on the cross

What does Jesus' Sacrifice mean to you?

It is love "to the end" that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life. Now "the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all.

The Council of Trent emphasizes the unique character of Christ's sacrifice as "the source of eternal salvation" and teaches that "his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us." And the Church venerates his cross as she sings: "Hail, O Cross, our only hope."

Our participation in Christ's sacrifice

The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men". But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him]", for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps." In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.

Small Group Questions

1. What was a time in your life that you had to make a real sacrifice?
2. Does Jesus' sacrifice give you moral courage and solace in the face of life's challenges?
3. How can you teach sacrificial love to your spouse and children this week?

Recommended Readings

1. Commentary by Fr. Ron Rolheiser: "A Drama of the Heart—Jesus' Sacrifice".

What does Jesus' Sacrifice mean to you?

A drama of the heart — Jesus' sacrifice

It is one thing to love when you feel love around you, when others understand you and are grateful for your person and gifts; it is quite another when everything around you speaks of misunderstanding, jealousy, coldness and hatred.

It is one thing to maintain your ideals when they are shared by others, when the Gospel works for you, when principle works out in practice; it is quite another when it seems you are alone in some ideal and when the Gospel appears to be deliverting more death than life.

It is one thing to keep your balance when the rhythms of life support it, when there is a healthy give and take to things, when life is fair; it is quite another when things are unfair; when you are unjustly criticized, when everyone else seems to have lost balance, when, like on Good Friday, it gets dark in the middle of the day.

It is one thing to be gracious when those around you are respectful, warm and fair; it is quite another when everyone seems bitter, disrespectful, jealous and cold.

It is one thing to bless others when they want to receive that blessing, when they hang on to your every word, when they want to be in your company; it is quite another when their very glance speaks of loathing and when they avoid you when you come into a room.

It is one thing to forgive others when that forgiveness seems fair, when it isn't impossible to swallow the hurt, when the wound dealt you is not mortal; it is quite another to forgive someone when it isn't fair, when the wound dealt you is mortal, when

the life being murdered is your own.

It is one thing to give your life over to family, church, community and God when you feel loved and supported by them, when they seem worth the sacrifice, when you get a good feeling by doing it; it is quite another thing when you do not feel support, when it doesn't seem worthwhile, and when you feel no other reason for doing it except truth and principle.

IN EXHIBIT



Father Ron Rolheiser

These contrasts capture, in essence, what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. His passion was a drama of the heart, not an endurance test for his body.

What made Jesus sacrifice, his handling himself over, so special? We have, I think, focused too much on the physical aspects of the crucifixion to the detriment of what was happening more deeply, underneath. Why do I say that? Because none of the

Gospels emphasize the physical sufferings, nor indeed, in the fears he expresses in conversations before his death, does Jesus. What the Gospels and Jesus emphasize is his moral loneliness, the fact that he was alone, betrayed, humiliated, misunderstood, the object of jealousy and crowd hysteria, that he was a stone's throw away from everyone, that those who loved him were asleep to what was really happening, that he was unanimously-minus-one.

And this moral loneliness, mocked by those outside of it, tempted him against everything he had preached and stood for during his life and ministry. What made his sacrifice so special was not that he died a victim of violence (millions die as victims of

violence and their deaths aren't necessarily special), nor that he refused to use divine power to stop his death (as he himself taught, that would have proved nothing). What made his death so special is that, inside of all the aloneness, darkness, jealousy, misunderstanding, sick crowd hysteria, coldness and murder, he held out, he gave himself over, without bitterness, without self-pity, holding his ideals intact, gracious, respectful, forgiving, without losing his balance, his meaning or his message.

That's the ultimate test and we face it daily in many areas of our lives.

Some years ago, I was participating in a forum debating a book on chastity. The book, written by a woman still in her early 20s, was a very idealistic one and it urged young people to not have sex before marriage, but to keep their virginity as a special gift for their partners in marriage. One of the panelists, a very sincere woman, had this reaction: "I like what this young woman says and when my daughters are in their teens I'll have them read this book but what she says makes a lot more sense when you are 20 years old and know what you're waiting for than when you're 39 years old and no longer know what you're waiting for!"

Jesus' sacrifice was so special because, long after the clock had run out on everything and there seemed no reason left to wait for anything, he still held on, to his ideals, his balance, his gracious, his forgiveness and his love.

The struggle to do that, to remain faithful, is the real drama inside the death of Jesus and in the end it is a struggle of the heart, not the body.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser, theologian, teacher, and award-winning author, is President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Tex.

Our Relationship with our Children

How does my childhood relationship with my Father affect my parenting?

Objective

Help the Fathers continue to reapply their positive Father-son memories, while using their Father's shortcomings to motivate themselves to be a great father.

It's a common reaction. When our children reach the same age we were during significant events in our lives, often the memories and emotions coming flooding back in. When they get their driver's license, you recall getting yours. When they graduate, you can almost feel your own cap and gown from 25 years ago. This phenomenon seems especially apparent when linked with father-son memories.

Maybe your dad helped you with your pitching motion when you were twelve, or spent hours working with you on a seventh grade science project. As your child faces similar challenges at a similar age, use your father's example to inspire you.

But, we also need to be ready for the dark memories. If your father left your family when he was forty-two, watch out when you reach that age. Be careful not to use your father as an excuse to take the easy way out of your commitments.

It is recommended that the presenting small group first spend the larger group time by sharing you're a few examples of your team's personal experiences/examples on how the positive Father-son memories have been reapplied with your children. Share one to two examples of the "dark memories of Dad and what your motivation technique has been to overcome this so it is not passed on to your children, then encourage the group to break into small groups for further discussion.

Bible Readings

1. Deut 5:16

'Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD, your God, has commanded you, that you may have a long life and prosperity in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you.

2. Mark 7:10

For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and 'Whoever curses father or mother shall die.'

3. Proverbs 4:1

"Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding"

4. Proverbs 17:6

"Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children"

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2247

How does my childhood relationship with my Father affect my parenting?

"Honor your father and your mother"

Small Group Questions

1. What are the memorable milestones that you have created with your children that they'll look back on with fondness and joy?
2. How are you reapplying the fond memories from your father-son relationship with your children?
3. What are the dark memories of your father and how are you motivating yourself not to pass these examples on to your children?

Recommended Resources

1. All Pro Dad.com – *Dealing with Father Memories*

Dealing with Father Memories key points:

If your father was a positive influence, use your memories to honor him and pass them on with your children. Follow-up with your Father and share your memories over the phone, in a letter, or in person and tell him, "Thanks."

If your father caused you mostly pain, then be ready to face the facts head-on; claim ownership of how you feel, and don't deny his profound impact on you. Then use your father's shortcomings to motivate yourself as a father. If you missed some hugs or never heard the words "I love you," don't make your children pay for your deficit. Make a firm commitment that says, "It stops here. I refuse to pass these cycles on to my children."

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

How does my childhood relationship with my Father affect my parenting?

No regrets - 10 ways to make time for your children

Objective

Help the Fathers to understand “How to Live a life of no regrets with your family” by learning how to spend more time with their children and family.

Many Fathers understand the phrases “live every day as if it were our last” and “make more memories – not just more money” however, continue to struggle with work & family life balance to achieve these ideals. As Fathers, we want to do our best at home and at work. Providing for our family is a significant part of being a good father, and we can't deny that much of our identity and sense of accomplishment comes from our career. However most fathers struggle with the same questions: Do I put in more time at work to pursue career advancement? Do I drop what I'm doing and head home to be with the family? Should I begin looking for a more father-friendly job?

It is suggested for the presenting small group, to focus the larger group time by sharing your team's personal experiences/examples on how you each have changed your life in some way to spend more time with family and your children, in order to “live a life of no regrets.”

Pass out a “10 ways to make more time for your Children” and/or the “10 Tips for Better Family Time” hand-out(s) as the large group discussion ends and breaks into small group discussion. The hand-out examples are is provided below, feel free to add/change

Bible Readings

1. Psalm 112 *“His children will be mighty in the land”*

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2223

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones."

Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them:

He who loves his son will not spare the rod. . . . He who disciplines his son will profit by him.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Small Group Questions

1. Do you regularly come home on time from work to your family and children?
2. Are your children's birthdays, recitals, soccer games, plays, etc. on your work calendar?
3. Do you schedule breakfast dates with your daughter/son?

Recommended Readings

1. Working Fathers: Jim Levine
2. 7 Habits of Highly Successful Fathers : Ken Canfield

Recommended Resources

1. www.mightyintheland.com (Robert Rogers Website)
2. 10 ways to make more time with your Children

1. Sign-up for some organized activity together-chess club, a sports league, church groups, and so on as your free time activity That way, you can use the structure of the activity to help you spend time with your child..

2. Put birthdays, recitals, soccer games, plays, etc. on your work calendar. Tell co-workers that you wouldn't miss those events for the world, and ask them to help remind you.

3. Create regular rituals to connect with your kids with phone calls from the office, special "daddy" time when you walk in the door, or other weekly events that keep you in touch.

4. Discuss your priorities with your boss. Be candid with him or her about times when you need to flex your schedule for family events. Make it clear that you are dedicated to doing your best at work, but that family is also very important to you. Suggest your own "win-win" solutions or ask for his ideas to help reach a workable balance.

5. Create a "Next Year's Vacation" planning session with your children by having them share with your pictures/places of where they want to go and how they want to spend time with Dad on vacation!

6. Create a family devotional time. This is a time set aside during a time where all members of the family are required to be there. Then you as a father take the lead in sharing important things with your family. Read passages in Holy Scripture and pray together; share thoughts on certain historical events (Memorial Day) and what they should mean to us; talk about current events; peer pressure the kids are facing or how to look forward to an uncertain future with confidence.

7. As the Father, make the weekend Saturday or Sunday breakfast and have your kids help out as appropriate. Talk as you all prepare the meal about what was their "favorite thing" that happened in their life during the week

8. Car Time. When traveling to the next sporting or activity event, instead of listening to the radio, try spending time with your kids by discussing with them: 1) What was the best part of today?; 2) What was your favorite thing that happened to you this week; 3) Tell me about something really cool that you saw today/this week?

9. Have a Breakfast time with Daddy with your children individually. No agenda's, just go out to breakfast and spend time with your child 1 on 1. Do you know their favorite song, favorite teacher, who they think is the coolest kid @ school, who are the coolest parents, etc?

10. Support your company's "Take your children to work day". If your company does not have it, consider starting one. Many Cincinnati based companies like P&G, Kroger, Macy's have established "Take your children to work" programs.

3. 10 TIPS TO BETTER FAMILY TIME

Parents and their children are spending less time interacting with each other. As a result, many children are getting less personal love and attention than their parents did. American Demographics reported that parents today spend roughly 40 percent less time with their children than did parents a generation ago. To help families stay connected, below is a list of helpful family time tips. Keep in mind, quantity and quality time is important when choosing activities. So build memories around exciting events by keeping your family time creative and enjoyable. Print out the following tips as daily reminders.

1 Eat together & listen to each other

Most children today don't know the meaning of a family dinnertime. Yet the communication and unity built during this set-ting is integral to a healthy family life. Sharing a meal together allows the opportunity to talk about each other's lives. This is a time for parents to listen, as well as to give advice and encouragement.

No regrets - 10 ways to make time for your children

Attentive listening conveys a message that a person is really interested in another. It also imparts a sense of worth and helps develop trust. Therefore, listening is a critical link in successful parenting

2 Read often

It's important for parents to read to their children. The latest research indicates that reading to your children cultivates an interest for knowledge and stimulates language development. It also increases their attention spans and helps them become more curious. Look for books that your child would enjoy reading. After reading, ask questions about the content.

3 Do chores together

Part of what goes on in the home is the development of teamwork. Functional family life depends on the contribution of everyone. Assigning chores is the most productive way of teaching responsibility and accountability to your children. Doing chores with your child will help foster good communication skills.

4 Help with schoolwork

A great way to spend quality time with children and light a fire of learning is to help children with their schoolwork. A parent's eagerness to help will cause a child to become more interested in school thus improving his or her grades. Regular trips to the library for school projects are an inexpensive and enjoyable way to spend time with children. Helping should begin with an understanding that children are responsible for homework. Parents are there to help their child get organized and to encourage them when they get stuck.

5 Start a hobby or project

Choose a fun activity that your child is interested in. Activities like cooking, crafts, fishing or biking will make great hobbies that can open the door to exciting family time. Once a child learns a new recipe or is able to cast a lure accurately, let him or her take the lead with your supervision.

6 Play games

New technology has made video games more prevalent. As a result, many children are spending long hours in front of the TV playing computer programs. Parents should find creative ways to spark an interest in family-oriented contests such as board games or card games. This will give parents additional time to talk and nurture their relationship.

7 Plan a family outing

Sometimes getting out of the house is important. Hop in the family car and go for a drive. Prepare a picnic lunch and visit a local park. Take time to play catch or ride a bike. A stroll in the woods will help parents interact with their children. Also, a visit to the zoo or museum will spark a child's enthusiasm and lead to lengthy discussions.

8 Encourage athletic activities

It is vital for children to exercise. Sports not only strengthen the body, but also build character and determination. Whether it's a father pitching a baseball to a son or a mother and daughter nature walking, finding time for athletic events is important for a child's emotional and physical development. This is a great opportunity for a family to interact.

9 Create a Family Time calendar

Since many parents have hectic schedules, time with children often becomes a low priority whether intended or not. Post a calendar on the refrigerator and have parents and children pencil in special events. Knowing when you're going to meet may also help you think of creative activities. Commit to keeping this schedule free from interruptions.

10 Pray together & attend a house of worship

Nothing is more special than taking a few minutes each day to pray with a child before bedtime. By explaining the purpose behind prayer, children will learn the importance of faith as the foundation for the family. Also, when parents go to religious services, they instill in their children a reverence for God. Churches can also offer invaluable support to families.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Help define a vision for your children - are you helping the invisible become visible for your kids?

Objective

Help the Fathers to understand that one of the greatest things a father can do for their children is to help define a vision for their child's life.

The author Jonathan Swift once noted, "Vision is the art of seeing what's invisible to others."

One of the greatest things a father can do for their children is to help define a vision for their life; a destination. The key is helping the "invisible become visible for our children." We live in an age where there's more to look at, view, and be entertained by than at any other time in history. But without a positive vision for their lives, and a positive place for that vision to grow and flourish, kids can get lost in the storms their childhood & adolescence and lose any sight of a bright future.

Bible Readings

1. Proverbs 22:6

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2252

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith, prayer, and all the virtues. They have the duty to provide as far as possible for the physical and spiritual needs of their children.

Small Group Questions

1. How do you connect into your child's life and give them hope for a future they cannot see?
2. What are your children's goals and how did they share them with you?
3. What are your children's strengths...are you helping them explore positive ways to use these talents to discover their life vocation?

Recommended Resources

1. Tom Peters:

Leadership guru Tom Peters shares an analogy about a flight crew setting a destination and following through with their flight plan. After the flight plan is set, the crew may have to make adjustments to the plan because of wind changes, obstacles, or storms. But the one element that always guides the crew is their destination. Too often instead of giving kids a destination - clear goals in life and relationships - we give them emergency procedures. They are being trained in schools to "just say no." Kids are getting more instructions on how to avoid negative relationships and behavior, but have we failed to give them a destination? Have we given them anything to say yes to?

2. Helen Keller and Erik Weihenmayer

Helen Keller was someone who understood the importance of having vision. Although her parents never saw much hope for her, Anne Sullivan had a vision for Helen's life - a vision that she could become a productive woman in society. The accomplished and nationally known speaker was once asked, "Is there anything possibly worse than being blind?" Miss Keller responded, "Oh yes! It would be much worse to have

Help define a vision for your children - are you helping the invisible become visible for your kids?

your sight, but to not have vision." Or consider Erik Weihenmayer, who lost his eyesight at the age of 13 to a rare eye disease. Though blind, his vision involved goals to climb some of the world's highest peaks. Through hard work and persistence, this blind mountain climber has reached three of the world's highest summits and even climbed to the top of Mount Everest.

The troubles and misfortunes our world throws in front of us often distract us from having a meaningful vision for our lives, for our families, and for how we can love others. But as Helen Keller and Erik Weihenmayer have so powerfully demonstrated, a vision for the future can overcome even the most daunting obstacles.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Help define a vision for your children - are you helping the invisible become visible for your kids?

Kids and substance abuse preteen years when they are really exposed for the first time

Objective

Help the Fathers talk openly about their concerns and fears about their children's substance abuse and learn new tips that will help their children live healthy and drug-free.

The preteen years. It's such a great time in kids' lives. They start to consider their place in the world. They become champions of justice. They begin to use complex problem-solving skills, value their friends' opinions much more, and begin to get curious about drugs, alcohol, tobacco, love and sex. But for a parent, it can also be a bit of a scary time as preteens also begin to question their parents' messages.

In fact, when it comes to the issue of drug use, this is one of the most important times in a child's life. In a recent survey, more than 100,000 ten- and eleven-year-olds admitted getting drunk once a week. Also, increased exposure to the "gateway drugs" of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana put children of this age group at immediate risk. Sure, your advice may be challenged—but it's also heard. Yes, your word is no longer law—but it stays with your child much more than he or she is willing to let on.

As preparation for this topic, During the large group discussion, introduce the concept of substance abuse and share the facts/statistics of national substance abuse. It is recommended that more time spent to share personal examples of how your children are living a healthy and drug free life. When breaking into small groups, suggest passing out the "Tips that will help your child live healthy and drug-free"

Bible Readings

1. Isaiah 28:7

And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions".

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2290

The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. Those incur grave guilt whose drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others' safety on the road, at sea, or in the air.

Small Group Questions

1. What are your family rules about substance abuse? Have you had to enforce them?
2. What have been your "teachable moments" about substance abuse with your children?
3. Do you know all of your child's friends and their families? How do you plan to get to know them?

Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.drugfreeamerica.org>
2. When You Suspect Your Child Is Using Drugs by Drew Edwards, Ed.D., M.S.

Kids and substance abuse preteen years when they are really exposed for the first time

3. TEEN SMOKING SCREENING QUIZ by Denise Witmer
4. Tips that will help your child live healthy and drug-free

- Make sure your child knows your rules— and that you'll enforce the consequences if rules are broken. Preteens can understand the reason for rules and appreciate having limits in place. This applies to no-use rules about tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs — as well as bedtimes and homework. Research shows that kids are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs if their parents have established a pattern of setting clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules.
- Act out scenes with your child where people offer her drugs. Give her the tools that help her out of a sticky situation and it's more likely that she'll actually get out of that situation. Kids who don't know what to say or how to get away are more likely to give in to peer pressure. Let her know that she can use you as an excuse and say: "No, my mom [or dad, aunt, etc.] would kill me if I smoked a cigarette." Make sure she knows she shouldn't continue friendships with kids who have offered her drugs.
- Tell your child what makes him so special. Puberty can play nasty tricks with a child's self-esteem. At times, your child may move from having good feelings about himself and his life at home and school to some feelings of insecurity, doubt, and pressure. He needs to hear a lot of positive comments about his life and who he is as an individual—not just when he brings home an A.
- Give your children the power to make decisions that go against their peers. You can reinforce this message through small things such as encouraging your child to pick the sneakers he likes rather than the pair his four friends have.
- Base drug and alcohol messages on facts, not fear. Kids can't argue with facts but their new need for independence may allow them to get around their fears. Also, kids love to learn facts—both run-of-the-mill and truly odd. Take advantage of their passion for learning to reinforce your message about drugs.
- Let your kids know about the here-and-now problems associated with alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. Preteens aren't concerned with future problems that might result from experimentation with tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. They are concerned about their appearance—sometimes to the point of obsession. If they believe drug use will impair their looks and health, they are unlikely to be tempted by these practices. Tell them about the smelly hair and ashtray breath caused by cigarettes. Make sure they know that it would be hard to perform in the school play while high on marijuana.
- Get to know your child's friends—and their friends' parents. Check in by phone or a visit once in a while to make sure they are giving their children the same kinds of messages you give your children about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- Help children separate reality from fantasy. Watch TV and movies with them and ask lots of questions to reinforce the distinction between what is real and what is make-believe. Remember to include advertising in your discussions, as those messages are especially powerful.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Bullies: a serious problem for kids

Objective

Help the Fathers understand the realities of bullying, including the role of the bully and victim and proactive ways to spend time understanding if their children are involved in bullying and how to stop it

Bullying behavior may seem rather insignificant compared to kids bringing guns to school and getting involved with drugs. Bullying is often dismissed as part of growing up. But it's actually an early form of aggressive, violent behavior. Statistics show that one in four children who bully will have a criminal record before the age of 30.

Bullies often cause serious problems that schools, families, and neighbors ignore. Teasing at bus stops, taking another child's lunch money insults and threats, kicking or shoving -- it's all fair game to a bully. Fears and anxieties about bullies can cause some children to avoid school, carry a weapon for protection, or even commit more violent activity.

It is recommended to spend time in the larger group by first sharing examples of bullying behavior that have happened to our children (or share personal examples if necessary). Next spend time on 1) identify that in bullying there is the bully and the victim and 2) Discuss/share of examples of what Fathers can do about bullying behavior.

Small group time should be spent further discussing proactive ways that Fathers can spend time understanding if their children are involved in bullying (as the bully or the victim).

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 4:29

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2319

Every Human life from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God

Small Group Questions

1. How are you listening to your children to know they are involved in bullying, even cyberbullying?
2. How are you helping your children to grow their social skills and broaden their friendships?
3. What are your “teachable moments” that you connect with your children on bullying?

Recommended Resources

1. All Pro Dad.com – Bullying Today

Bullying Today

Bullies: a serious problem for kids

Page 79 of 162

A Word About the Victim

Although anyone can be the target of bullying behavior, the victim is often singled out because of his or her psychological traits more than his or her physical traits. A typical victim is likely to be shy, sensitive, and perhaps anxious or insecure. Some children are picked on for physical reasons such as being overweight or physically small, having a disability, or belonging to a different race or religious faith.

A Word About the Bully

Some bullies are outgoing, aggressive, active, and expressive. They get their way by brute force or openly harassing someone. This type of bully rejects rules and regulations and needs to rebel to achieve a feeling of superiority and security. Other bullies are more reserved and manipulative and may not want to be recognized as harassers or tormentors. They try to control by smooth-talking, saying the "right" thing at the "right" time, and lying. This type of bully gets his or her power discreetly through cunning, manipulation, and deception.

As different as these two types may seem, all bullies have some characteristics in common. They:

are concerned with their own pleasure

want power over others

are willing to use and abuse other people to get what they want

feel pain inside, perhaps because of their own shortcomings

find it difficult to see things from someone else's perspective

What FATHERS can do

Listen to your children. Encourage your children to talk about school, social events, other kids in class, the walk or ride to and from school so you can identify any problems they may be having.

Take your children's complaints of bullying seriously. Probing a seemingly minor complaint may uncover more severe grievances. Children are often afraid or ashamed to tell anyone that they have been bullied, so listen to their complaints.

Watch for symptoms that your child may be bullying victims, such as withdrawal, a drop in grades, torn clothes, or needing extra money or supplies.

Tell the school or organization immediately if you think that your children are being bullied. Alerted caregivers can carefully monitor your children's actions and take steps to ensure your children's safety.

Work with other parents to ensure that the children in your neighborhood are supervised closely on their way to and from school.

Don't bully your children yourself, physically or verbally. Use nonphysical, consistently enforced discipline measures as opposed to ridiculing, yelling at, or ignoring your children when they misbehave.

Help your children learn the social skills they need to make friends. A confident, resourceful child who has friends is less likely to be bullied or to bully others.

Praise your children's kindness toward others. Let children know that kindness is valued.

Teach your children ways to resolve arguments without violent words or actions. Teach children self-protection skills -- how to walk confidently, stay alert to what's going on around them, and to stand up for themselves verbally.

Provide opportunities for your children to talk about bullying, perhaps when watching TV together, reading aloud, playing a game, or going to the park or a movie.

Recognize that bullies may be acting out feelings of insecurity, anger, or loneliness. If your child is a bully, help get to the root of the problem. Seek out specific strategies you can use at home from a teacher, school counselor, or child psychologist.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Unselfishness - how to teach it

Objective

Help each father to see his children grow in character and relate well to others.

Teaching our children to be unselfish is an important lesson in accomplishing these goals, but it's also one that many fathers struggle with how to teach.

Unselfishness means becoming more “extra-centered and less self-centered.” Unselfishness means helping our children learn to “feel with and for others” through empathy, tolerance, brotherhood and demonstrating sensitivity to needs in people and situations.”

Bible Readings

1. Isaiah 58:7

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter--when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

2. Matthew 7:35

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 713

The Messiah's characteristics are revealed above all in the “Servant songs.”

Small Group Questions

1. How do you as the Father, role model empathy, tolerance, and brotherhood to your children?
2. When was the last time you heaped praise on your children for doing a “random act of kindness”?
3. Do your children know what “Pay it Forward” means, when was the last time you role modeled it with your children present?

Recommended Resources

1. Teaching Your Children Values, Linda and Richard Eyre. The authors give the following guidelines in developing these traits and character values in your children:

Heap Praise: If you notice your child doing something unselfish, heap praise on them to reward them. Let them know that what they are doing is a good thing.

Give Responsibility: A Harvard study showed a correlation between the amount of responsibility children have and their tendency to think of others. The Eyre's caution that a child with no responsibility may become spoiled and begin to lose his sense of caring and concern.

Teach by Example: Show children this attitude of empathy in your own actions, by modeling the same behavior and values you want to instill in them. Actively listen to your children by hearing what they have to say, then paraphrasing it back to them so they know you understood it and are concerned with their thoughts and feelings.

Say, "I'm Sorry": If you have made a mistake or were insensitive to your child, let your child know you are sorry for this.

Share Your Feelings: If your children say or do something that hurts your feelings, let them know. And if your children do something good and helpful, let them know that too.

Remember the Process

According to the authors, becoming unselfish is a process that "takes thinking and practicing and a certain amount of maturity to develop." Do not expect your children to naturally always think of others first or know how to be empathetic to those who are suffering. It is a character virtue that you as a mother must help them learn.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Our Relationship with the Church

Eucharistic Adoration

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting with the understanding that the Eucharist is the physical presence of God. We as Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ.

The challenge is to take time out of your schedule for Eucharistic Adoration and to develop in your children a true devotion to the Eucharist.

Bible Readings

1. John 6:48-51

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

2. 1 Cor. 11: 23-34

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, 13 and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment 14 on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. If we discerned ourselves, we would not be under judgment; but since we are judged by (the) Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that your meetings may not result in judgment. The other matters I shall set in order when I come.

Catechism Readings

1. Article 3 THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

I. The Eucharist - Source and Summit of Ecclesial Life

II. What is This Sacrament Called?

III. The Eucharist in the Economy of Salvation

IV. The Liturgical Celebration of the Eucharist

V. The Sacramental Sacrifice Thanksgiving, Memorial, Presence

VI. The Paschal Banquet

VII. The Eucharist - "Pledge of the Glory To Come"

Small Group Questions

1. Do you take time out for Eucharistic Adoration?
2. Is it okay for non-Catholics to receive communion during a Catholic Mass. Why not?

3. What is Eucharistic Adoration? Why do we do it?

Recommended Readings

1. Jesus Present Before Me, Meditations for Eucharistic Adoration, Fr. Peter John Cameron, O.P.
2. Holy Communion: A Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass

Recommended Resources

1. www.catholic.com
2. www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/a.html

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Changes in the Mass

Objective

Discuss recent changes in the mass:

- Bow during the creed
- Bow before receiving communion

Discuss upcoming changes in the liturgy:

- Changes to Mass to reflect Latin translation and Biblical origins

Bible Readings

1. Luke 2:39-52

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced (in) wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

2. Mark 11:12-19

The next day as they were leaving Bethany he was hungry. Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf, he went over to see if he could find anything on it. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves; it was not the time for figs. And he said to it in reply, "May no one ever eat of your fruit again!" And his disciples heard it. They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, "Is it not written: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'? But you have made it a den of thieves." The chief priests and the scribes came to hear of it and were seeking a way to put him to death, yet they feared him because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.

3. Serenity Prayer

God

Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change...

Courage to change the things I can and Wisdom to know the difference

Catechism Readings

1. PART TWO: THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY, SECTION TWO THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH ,
2. CHAPTER ONE THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION,
3. Article 3 THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST.
4. IV. The Liturgical Celebration of the Eucharist

Small Group Questions

1. What changes have you noticed in the Mass?
2. How do you feel about changes in the Mass? Do you embrace them? Do they make you uncomfortable?

Recommended Readings

1. General Instruction of the Roman Missal

Recommended Resources

1. www.catholic.com
2. Changes to Mass to reflect Latin translation and Biblical origins

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new.php?n=6970>

Following Thursday's approval of a new translation of the Mass in English, by the Bishops of the United States, several Catholics are wondering how the Mass changes will affect their experience. Below are listed a few of the more notable changes to the words the congregation prays:

One of the most commonly used exchanges between priest and people during the Mass is currently translated "The Lord be with you" / "And also with you". The new translation would read, "The Lord be with you" / "And with your spirit". Bishop Arthur Roche, Bishop of Leeds (England) and Chairman of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, briefly explained this change yesterday.

The translation of the phrase "et cum spiritu tuo," Bishop Roche said, "cannot be understood without reference to St Paul, who will often address a person, for example Timothy, by referring to 'your spirit' rather than simply to 'you.' What is the significance of this? Well, he is addressing someone close to God who has God's spirit. So when we reply, 'and with your spirit,' we are indicating that we are part of a spiritual community, it is God's spirit that has gathered us together.

The prayer Catholics say prior to communion, which currently reads, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you," would now be translated, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof." This response, Roche said, is supposed to be reminiscent of the Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant. (found in Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6).

During the praying of the Nicene Creed Catholics would together profess their own personal faith, saying "I believe," instead of "We believe."

The penitential rite at the beginning of Mass would be expanded to mirror more closely the Latin translation. Whereas Catholics currently say, "I have sinned through my fault," they would eventually say, "I have sinned greatly through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault."

Additionally, the wording of the "Sanctus" or "Holy, Holy" would change slightly, from, "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might," to, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of hosts."

Bishop Roche emphasized that the translation changes not only reflect more precisely the Mass in Latin, but also aim at faithfulness to the origin of the prayers. "The prayers of the Mass, Bishop Roche said, "are mainly inspired and formed from Sacred Scripture, and the Commission of ICEL has accepted one very important point found in Liturgiam authenticam and accepted it as being crucial, namely the significance of the language of Sacred Scripture in our translation of the Mass."

3. Changes in the Mass: The New General Instruction

<http://www.americancatholic.org/newsletters/CU/ac0703.asp>

A number of changes in the celebration of the Mass are being introduced in Catholic parishes. The reason is a new edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, published in Latin in 2001. Now translated into English and other languages, it has been slightly adapted for various cultures and is now working its way into our parishes.

This document, which forms the preface to the Roman Missal, contains the rules and rubrics for the celebration of the Eucharist. Beyond listing the rules, however, the *General Instruction* also expresses an understanding of the Mass. The directions given reflect various theological perspectives. Because the document was created by several different committees at different times, it contains perspectives that sometimes seem to conflict with one another.

The *General Instruction* was first issued in the late 1960s and has been revised several times since then. In addition to the revisions made at the Vatican, the document is also adapted by the bishops of each country. Recent decisions made by the U. S. bishops are included in the version of the *General Instruction* that is now in use in the United States.

Recent revisions to the *General Instruction* often reflect different perspectives from those that shaped the original text itself. A good way to understand the revised document is to look at it as a search for balance. No single viewpoint can adequately express the full mystery of the Eucharist, so varying viewpoints can give us a broader and deeper understanding of the Mass.

The implementation of this latest version of the *General Instruction* offers all Catholics a good opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Mass. It also offers parishes an impetus to evaluate their usual patterns of worship and to improve areas that do not reflect the basic vision of the *General Instruction*.

Take Your Places, Everyone

One of the concerns reflected in the recent revisions is a desire to clarify the roles of various participants in the liturgy. Some actions that have commonly been done by extraordinary ministers of Communion, for example, are now designated as tasks proper to the priest or a deacon. If you look only at these changes, they seem to be an attempt to highlight the differences between ordained ministers (bishops, priests and deacons) and non-ordained liturgical ministers (lectors, Communion ministers, servers, etc.)

It is important to view these revisions, however, in the context of the whole document. The *General Instruction* takes great pains to encourage the full participation of the whole assembly in the celebration of the liturgy. While some rubrics stress the role of the clergy, others strongly emphasize the proper and indispensable role of the whole body of Christ gathered for worship.

It is therefore of the greatest importance that the celebration of the Mass—that is, the Lord's Supper—be so arranged that sacred ministers and the faithful taking part in it, according to the proper state of each, may derive from it more abundantly those fruits....This will be best accomplished if, with due regard for the nature and the particular circumstances of each liturgical assembly, the entire celebration is planned in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active and full participation of the faithful both in body and in mind, a participation burning with faith, hope, and charity, of the sort which is desired by the Church and demanded by the very nature of the celebration, and to which the Christian people have a right and duty by reason of their Baptism. (GIRM, #17-18)

The goal is not, then, to return to the era when we thought of the Mass as something the priest did while everyone else watched and prayed their own prayers. The Mass is the action of the whole body of Christ, which is formed by all the members of the assembly, including the priest and other special liturgical ministers. Only when everyone does his or her part fully will we create liturgy that is truly worthy of the God we worship.

The implementation of these latest changes, then, is a good time for all of us to deepen our understanding of the importance of our own roles in the liturgy. The balance we seek does not exalt any one role above the others but values the diversity of roles in the liturgy and treasures each as an irreplaceable part of the community at worship.

Sing Out and Be Quiet

Another emphasis that recurs frequently in the revised text of the *General Instruction* is the importance of singing in the liturgy. Many Catholics remember a time when singing by the assembly was not part of our Sunday experience, and many still see such musical prayer as an optional element for those who like to sing.

The *General Instruction* reveals a very different view of things:

Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (cf. Acts 2:46). Thus St. Augustine says rightly, "Singing is for one who loves." There is also the ancient proverb, "One who sings well prays twice."

Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly. Although it is not always necessary (e.g. in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are of themselves meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. (#39-40)

Notice that this passage assumes that some parts of the Mass are meant to be sung by their very nature. Just as reciting "Happy Birthday" at a party rather than singing it makes little sense, so, too with reciting elements like the Holy, Holy or the Great Amen. Some things are just meant to be sung. Notice, too, that the text recognizes that the assembly at a weekday Mass might not sing all the parts that are normally sung, but it presumes that some singing will be part of every Mass. On Sundays and holy days, this is really obligatory. Notice finally that the text speaks of singing rather than of instrumental music. Even when a trained musician is not present, the assembly of the faithful can and should sing

some parts of the Mass. All it takes is one person with some sense of music to start the singing (or perhaps to strike one key on a piano or organ to get the right note on which to start).

Singing is important for a sense of celebration. As the document notes, it expresses the heart's joy. Singing lifts up the words we use and gives them a heightened dignity and beauty, often making them more memorable in the process. Singing also expresses and fosters the sense of unity among those gathered for worship, since all sing the same words at the same time on (at least roughly) the same notes. Singing is the primary way that a group of people can speak with one voice.

A balance to this emphasis on singing in the *General Instruction* is found in the document's attention to silence in the liturgy.

Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. Its purpose, however, depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus within the Act of Penitence and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; but at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what has been heard; then after Communion, they praise and pray to God in their hearts. (# 45)

The rite calls for silence during the penitential rite, before the opening prayer, before the first reading, after the first and second reading, after the homily and after all have received Communion. Taking these directives seriously and allowing enough time for real silence to take hold would do much to help the assembly experience a deeper sense of prayer and a greater awareness of the divine mystery. The *General Instruction* stresses this goal in speaking of the Liturgy of the Word:

The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. For this reason, any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be clearly avoided. (# 56)

The *General Instruction* also encourages silence before Mass begins, which may seem at odds with the need to foster hospitality at worship and to connect with those who are assembling to worship together. Both values can be preserved if hospitality is encouraged as people gather, with a few moments set aside before the opening hymn during which people are invited to enter into reflection as the liturgy begins.

The liturgy described by the *General Instruction* maintains a balance between singing and other verbal participation and times of silence and reflection. For too long, many Catholics have seen these components of the liturgy as opposed to one another. Properly celebrated, silence complements and supports the other elements of worship. The need for some silence within the liturgy should not lead to less active participation. Singing is essential at its proper times, spoken responses are integral to the liturgy, and silence also deserves its place.

The Body of Christ for the Body of Christ

Some of the more obvious changes in the revised *General Instruction* concern the Communion rite. Extraordinary ministers are no longer supposed to help break the bread or pour the cups for distribution. Communion under both species of bread and wine is strongly encouraged. The document also strengthens the long-standing insistence that Communion is to be shared from the altar of sacrifice rather than from the tabernacle. Obviously exceptions can be made if distributors run short of bread, but normally the Eucharist reserved in the tabernacle is intended for the sick and for other occasions where Communion may be distributed outside of Mass. During Mass all are supposed to receive the Lord's Body and Blood from the actual celebration,

so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated. (# 85)

All communicants are now supposed to make a bow of the head as a sign of reverence before receiving the Body and the Blood of Christ. In the past, our bishops decided that no special act of reverence would be used at the reception of Communion. Now they have specified that this simple bow will be the proper gesture of reverence. Those who have been kneeling, genuflecting or making the sign of the cross should now join the rest of the assembly in expressing reverence in the same way.

Another dimension of the Communion rite is not new to the *General Instruction*, but it has often been ignored in practice. The ritual indicates that the assembly is to remain standing throughout the Communion procession. Local bishops have been given leeway, however to permit kneeling or sitting after a person has received Communion.

The general U.S. norm is for kneeling after the Lamb of God (for praying "Lord I am Not Worthy"), though local bishops can indicate otherwise. Then all should stand as the Communion procession forms. Maintaining a common posture while the whole assembly shares in Communion expresses with our bodies the unity that Communion creates among us. For the same reason, the *General Instruction* notes that the Communion song should begin when the priest receives Communion and continue until all have received. Here again singing expresses and fosters our unity at this moment of our deepest communion with one another in Christ.

These changes in the Communion rite provide a balance in our awareness of the Body of Christ. Some of them remind us of the reverence that is appropriate toward the sacramental elements of bread and wine transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord. Others remind us that Communion unites us not only with Christ but also with all the members of his mystical body, the Church. Some people want to concentrate only on Communion as a time of connection between the individual and Christ. Others may focus too exclusively on their union with other members of the worshipping assembly. It is never adequate to focus on only one of these dual dimensions of Communion. Proper understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist maintains the clear connection between our union with Christ and our union with the other members of his body, between the sacramental Body of Christ and his mystical body.

Finding Balance in the Parish

The balance of complementary emphases in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* suggests a healthy approach for all members of the church who gather to worship together. It is no secret that there are many different opinions and attitudes toward the liturgy in the Church today. Often disagreements over parish liturgy lead to harsh words and alienation among parishioners or even splits in the parish membership.

The liturgy should be the place where all come together rather than a cause of disunity. Differing opinions and attitudes are not likely to disappear soon, nor is it reasonable to assume that they will ever be absent from Church life. Every family has its arguments and varying perspectives. There is no reason to think the Church family should be any different. The challenge is for us to find a way to worship together and embrace our unity in Christ despite our differences and disagreements.

When we come to worship, we are all required to put aside our own preferences and wishes in order to enter into the worship that Christ himself offers to the Father. Every one of us must surrender to the requirements of the liturgy itself. Here Christ invites us to set aside whatever divides us in order to unite with him in offering his sacrifice to the Father. Here those who hold opposing viewpoints must rediscover what they hold in common if they are to take part in this sacred action.

The Catholic Church has always sought to be broad enough to encompass people of “every race, language and way of life” (see Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation, II). It is a Church that embraces a wide variety of styles and spiritualities and customs and opinions. No matter what our background or preferences, the liturgy is the place where we must be able to embrace one another. If we keep our focus on the real meaning of the Eucharist, no matter what differing perspectives may exist among us, we will find the way to be one body.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Cafeteria Catholics

Objective

Educate yourself on the things you have trouble accepting. Research the Catechism or ask a priest to explain the Church's position on things find hard to accept.

Do you still disagree? Is the Church's reasoning what you thought it was?

Bible Readings

1. John 6:60-66

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.

2. 1 Corinthians 1:23-25

but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

3. John 20:29

Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Small Group Questions

1. Are you a cafeteria Catholic?
2. What things about the Catholic faith do you have trouble accepting?

Recommended Readings

1. *Render Unto Caesar: Serving the Nation by Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life,* the book will be published by Doubleday in August 2008.
2. *Humanae Vitae*

Recommended Resources

1. http://www.gotoquiz.com/are_you_a_cafeteria_catholic - Fun Quiz
2. CAFETERIA CATHOLICS
<http://www.pacifier.com/rosary-center.org/1146n4.htm>

Most of us, at one time or another, have enjoyed a meal in a cafeteria. Customers pass down the line of a great variety of foods, picking this or that according to their taste, and passing up other things they do not want. You might say it is a "pick and choose" kind of eating house.

It seems that some Catholics look upon their Church in the same way, that is, as regards the doctrines of the Catholic Church. They are sometimes referred to as "Cafeteria Catholics." They feel they can "pick and choose" among the various doctrines and laws of the Church, some of which they accept, others they feel they are not obliged to obey. More and more today there are those who call themselves Catholic, who feel they can, and must, decide for themselves which of the teachings of the Church they will accept, and which they will not. How many, for example, do not accept the clear teaching of the Church in regard to such basic things as birth control, or premarital sex, or divorce and remarriage, etc. They look upon these teachings not as laws, but, at best, as ideals that they may not be able to live up to. Many things have changed in the Church, they say, since the second Vatican Council.

Yet, Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated clearly and emphatically in the book *"The Cardinal Ratzinger Report,"* that it is absolutely incorrect to refer to **Pre-Vatican Council II** and **Post-Vatican Council II**, as if there were changes in the Church's position in matters of faith and morals. The only changes in that respect have sprung from erroneous interpretations of the Council.

As regards the *"picking and choosing"* of what teachings of the Church some will follow or not follow, Pope John Paul II stated in his talk to the Bishops in Los Angeles in 1987:

"It is sometimes reported that a large number of Catholics today do not adhere to the teaching of the Catholic Church on a number of questions, notably sexual and conjugal morality, divorce and remarriage. Some are reported as not accepting the clear position on abortion. It has to be noted that there is a tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence to the Church's moral teaching. It is sometimes claimed that dissent from the magisterium is totally compatible with being a "good Catholic," and poses no obstacle to the reception of the Sacraments. This is a grave error that challenges the teaching of the Bishops in the United States and elsewhere."

If we can believe the polls, we are experiencing in the Church at the present time a considerable amount of dissent from the teaching of the Church. However, if we would call this dissent what it really is, it is a crisis of one's Catholic faith. We have several times in past issues examined the virtue of faith, and we feel we must do so again because of the topic we are examining. We will see what that gift demands of us, and how we can lose it, if we reject the light and guidance given us by the Church.

THE GIFT OF FAITH

The first Vatican Council which ended in 1870 defined the gift of faith as follows:

"Faith is a supernatural virtue whereby, under the inspiration and assistance of grace, we believe those things revealed by God to be true, not because the intrinsic evidence of those things has been perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Himself revealing who can neither deceive nor be deceived."

The above definition explains **why** we believe when we are motivated by the virtue of faith. The Council continues explaining **what** we must believe when motivated by supernatural faith.

*"All those things are to be believed, on divine and catholic faith, which are contained in the written and unwritten word of God, and which are proposed by the Church as divinely revealed, whether this is accomplished through her **solemn pronouncements** (ex cathedra definitions), or through her **ordinary and universal teaching power**." (Encyclicals, decrees of S. Congregations, etc.)*

We notice that the Vatican Council does not make any distinctions (in relation to the virtue of faith) between the *"solemn pronouncements"* and the *"ordinary universal teaching power"* of the Church, i.e. between her **solemn magisterium** and **ordinary magisterium**; nor does it refer to one as **infallible** and the other as **non-infallible**.

THE FIRST DISSENTERS

Today's dissenters from God's revealed truth, as handed down by the Church, are similar to some of the first disciples of Jesus who refused to accept His veiled words regarding the Eucharist long before the Last Supper (Jn.6:28-59). *"This is a hard saying,"* they said. *"Who can accept it?"* Jesus was aware that they were murmuring in protest at what He had said. Yet, He made no attempt to soften or modify his words. He was testing their faith in Him.

"Does it shake your faith," He said to them? "The words I spoke to you are spirit and life. Yet there are some among you who do not believe ... No one can come to Me (i.e. believe Me, accept My word) unless he is enabled to do so by my Father." (Jn.6:63f)

St. John tells us that from that time on those disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer. Faith is a gift of God, and only those who have received it (and retain it) can accept His word in its entirety when put to the test. Our Lord had given them plenty of evidence of His divine power by His miracles. They should have accepted His words, even though they did not comprehend what He was saying. When they rejected it, it was because they were relying on the light of **reason alone**, and not on **reason enlightened by faith**. It was too much for them.

But note the language referring to those who believe: *"No one can come to me.."* One *"comes"* to Him, not by approaching Him physically, but by believing in His word, believing even when it is hard to believe ... for He is TRUTH.

TODAY'S DISSENTERS

There are many in the Church today who are similar to those who walked away, and would follow Christ no longer. Included in that category are some who still come to Mass ... still receive Holy Communion. You might wonder: How can that be ... if one comes to Mass.. and receives Holy Communion? Isn't that following Christ...isn't that being His disciple?

To come to Jesus, to accept Him in the deepest sense, it is not enough to receive Him sacramentally, for one can receive Him in Holy Communion and not accept His word in its entirety. We must accept not just **most** of what the Church teaches as divinely revealed, but **all** of it.

Let us suppose I tell someone about five incidents that happened to me on a trip (all of which are true), and this person says to me: *"I believe the first four, but I can't believe the fifth."* The fact that he will not believe one of the incidents related - in spite of my word as to its truth - means he no longer believes I always tell the truth. My credibility (for him) is shattered.

We have a parallel to this in regard to the Church. Christ still speaks through His Church when it makes official pronouncements in faith and morals for all the faithful, declaring something to be divinely revealed. If an adult Catholic rejects just one of those official teachings, that in effect is saying: *"The Church cannot always be relied on to teach the true interpretation of God's revelation."* What happens, in that case, to the gift of divine faith? It is no longer one's guiding light. St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of this centuries ago:

"If, of those things taught by the Church (as divinely revealed), one holds what he chooses to hold, and rejects what he chooses to reject, he no longer adheres to the teaching of the Church as an infallible guide, but to his own will." Such a one may accept other teachings of the Church, but he does so not out of divine faith, but *"only by a kind of opinion in accordance with his own will."* (II II,5,3)

Pope Leo XIII, who relied much on St. Thomas, expressed the same idea in his Encyclical on the Unity of the Church:

"If it be certain that something be revealed by God, and this is not believed, then nothing whatever is believed by divine faith....He who dissents even in one point from divinely revealed truths absolutely rejects all faith, since he thereby refuses to honor God as the supreme truth."

There are some today, not only among the laity, but even some of the clergy, who cry out like the first disciples: *"This is a hard doctrine. Who can accept it?"* When some of His first disciples said that, Our Savior did not soften His words in order to keep them from walking away. He let them go away, because they had failed the test, failed to-accept a difficult teaching on His word.

Today also, the Church does not change its teaching to fit the mentality of the times. It cannot do so, because it is based on the revealed word of God. (Vat,Coun.II, Gaudium et Spes, n.50) As Pope Paul VI revealed in an address in Jan. 1972:

"The teaching Church does not invent her doctrines; she is a witness, a custodian, an interpreter, a transmitter. As regards the truths of Christian marriage, she can be called conservative, uncompromising. To those who would urge her to make her faith easier, more in keeping with the tastes of the changing mentality of the times, she answers with the apostles, we cannot." (Acts. 4:20)

Since adult Catholics have an obligation to form their conscience under the guidance of the teaching authority of the Church, they are responsible for the weakening of their faith when they look to other sources for guidance. The Irish Bishops spoke of those *"other sources"* in a statement on Conscience and Morality.

"In practice, those who dissent from authoritative Church teaching very often give as their reason for doing so, not so much their own personal insights, as the authority of dissenting theologians. This, however, is to misunderstand the role of theologians in the Church, for their authority does not, and cannot outweigh the authority of the Pope in declaring the faith of the Church."

THEOLOGIANS AND THE MAGISTERIUM:

Without doubt the Church does rely on theologians in the expression of doctrine. Nevertheless, it is up to the teaching authority which Christ gave to His Church, authority centered in the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops in union with him, to accept or reject their explanations or conclusions.

St. Thomas Aquinas, by his writings has contributed to the expression of Catholic doctrine more than any other theologian in the history of the Church. Pope John XXII said of him at his canonization: *"He has illuminated the Church more than all the other Doctors."* Centuries later Pope Pius X wrote of St. Thomas: *"Since the death of the holy Doctor there has never been a council of the Church at which he was not present by his doctrine and influence."* And yet this great saint, whose humility was as great as his learning, once wrote that should there be a dispute between the teaching authority of the Church and a private theologian, *"we must abide rather by the Pope's judgment than by the opinion of any of the theologians, however well versed he may be in the divine Scriptures."* (Quodlibetum IX,Q.8, Quaest. Quodlibetales)

WHERE SOME HAVE GONE ASTRAY:

The great wave of dissent in the Church at the present time, seems to have been given its greatest impetus with the rejection on the part of some priests and theologians of the Encyclical of Pope Paul VI *"Humani Generis"* on the

regulation of birth in 1968. The main argument those dissenters offer to justify their action is this: The encyclical of Pope Paul VI was not an “ex cathedra” decree, therefore (they say) it is not infallible. Hence it could be reversed, and therefore one is not bound by this teaching.

This reasoning completely ignores the following declaration of the second Vatican Council (L.G. n.25):

“In matters of faith and morals...religious submission of will and mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking “ex cathedra.” That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known chiefly either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking.”

Too, the above reasoning of the dissenters was flatly rejected by the U.S. Bishop’s Committee on Doctrine, when they issued a critical statement on the two-volume work entitled “Catholicism” by Fr. Richard McBrien, who at the time was head of the department of theology at Notre Dame University. Their statement goes at the heart of the issue of dissent in the Church when it stresses the following:

*“In addition to those doctrines which have been taught by the Magisterium of the Church in the **extraordinary** way of infallible definitions, the **ordinary** teaching of the Pope and the Bishops in union with him preserves many revealed truths which have never been solemnly defined, but which, nevertheless, are infallibly true and definable. These are truths which cannot be rejected or neglected without injury to the integrity of the Catholic faith, because they are either **explicitly** contained in Holy Scripture, or, although only **implicit** in Sacred Scripture, they have been taught universally and continually, are professed in the liturgy, and are believed and witnessed by the faithful as divinely revealed.”*

There are apparently many in the Catholic Church today who outwardly live and worship as Catholics, but who do not accept in its entirety the Catholic faith. That faith is no longer the guiding light of their life. They seek the **sacraments** of the Church, but are unwilling to accept some of the **teachings** of the Church. They want the gifts God gives through the Church, but not the sacrifices He asks through the Church.

They foolishly think they do not need the guidance and protection of the chief Shepherd that Christ has provided for His flock. Yet just as the sheep that wanders off and gets separated from the fold become an easy prey to wild animals that would kill and devour it, so Catholics who wander aside from the protective guidance of the Roman Pontiff, the Chief Shepherd whom Christ has provided, become easy prey to the deceptions and wiles of the devil. Such a one may be clever about worldly things, but his vision has become clouded (without the light of faith) as to his own innate weakness, and as to the wisdom of seeking God’s will rather than their own.

Whether or not the rejection of this or that teaching of the Church (divinely revealed) causes total loss of faith, only God knows. Only a grave sin of disbelief can cause this, and only God knows when all the conditions are present. But those who deliberately reject something taught by the Church as divinely revealed, even if taught only by the ordinary magisterium, are walking dangerously close to the edge of the precipice.

The Christian life has always demanded many sacrifices of the true follower of Christ. That is a major part of the cross that His followers are asked to carry. And now the time has come when greater and greater sacrifices are going to be required in order to be a true and practicing Catholic, when more and more what we stand for, what we believe, is going to be challenged and ridiculed. It will take a strong faith, a firm hope and a courageous love to encounter all this and not accept the wisdom of the world. Without these divine helps, that cross will become a “*stumbling block*,” and will be rejected as “*foolishness*.” (1Cor. 1:23-25). Strengthen our faith, Lord, to accept and live **all** that You have revealed and made known through Your Church. “*Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed*.” (Jn. 20:29)

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Supporting your Parish

Objective

Are you supporting your parish to the best of your abilities? Are there ministries that could use your special talents?

Challenge yourself to get involved.

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 23
2. Malachi 3:10

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, That there may be food in my house, and try me in this, says the LORD of hosts: Shall I not open for you the floodgates of heaven, to pour down blessing upon you without measure?

Catechism Readings

1. PART THREE, LIFE IN CHRIST, SECTION ONE, MAN'S VOCATION LIFE IN THE SPIRIT , CHAPTER TWO, THE HUMAN COMMUNION, ARTICLE 1, THE PERSON AND SOCIETY, I. THE COMMUNAL CHARACTER OF THE HUMAN VOCATION:

2. Paragraph 2043

"The fifth precept ("You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church") means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability."

3. Paragraph 1880

A society is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them. As an assembly that is at once visible and spiritual, a society endures through time: it gathers up the past and prepares for the future. By means of society, each man is established as an "heir" and receives certain "talents" that enrich his identity and whose fruits he must develop.³ He rightly owes loyalty to the communities of which he is part and respect to those in authority who have charge of the common good.

4. Paragraph 911

In the Church, "lay members of the Christian faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this power [of governance] in accord with the norm of law." And so the Church provides for their presence at particular councils, diocesan synods, pastoral councils; the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish, collaboration in finance committees, and participation in ecclesiastical tribunals, etc.

Small Group Questions

1. How do you support your parish?
2. Do you support your Parish financially?
3. Do you have talents that you should be sharing in one of the Parish ministries?

Recommended Resources

1. Support Your Local Parish
<http://www.rosaryarmy.com/?p=776>

I didn't appreciate the difficulty of administering a parish until I became parish council president of a small military chapel community. We didn't have a permanently assigned priest at the time, so most, if not all, the major decisions of how and what we did fell to me. I was fortunate to have the mentorship of our wing chaplain, a Lutheran minister, otherwise I might have been completely lost.

The budget was the primary focus of my job, but I did take on (by default) many of the “management” aspects of leading the community in the absence of a priest...working with the religious education team, encouraging the parish volunteers and staff, interfacing with our local Knights of Columbus, and representing the parish to the wing chapel staff. Even our small “cloistered” parish (maybe 200 families) had a fairly significant budget, just under \$100,000. This without having to pay a mortgage, utilities, or the salaries of the entire staff since around half was permanently assigned Air Force employees or Airmen. The budget from our tithes also didn’t include necessary items for liturgy and education that the Air Force provides as part of the chapel program, like missalettes. I was stunned at how much everything cost.

Our stewardship campaign proved to be one of the most important things we did as a council. We began a 4 week campaign to motivate the community to support their parish with prayer, time, and money.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has something to say about providing for the needs of the Church: “The fifth precept (“You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church”) means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.” (#2043)

As I became aware of the cost of running even a small parish, I began to understand the difficulty a pastor in a “regular” parish where the cost of doing the Lord’s work and pastoring the People of God is higher. When I began to really notice the little box in the top corner of our bulletin that tallied the week’s offering, I saw something else that stunned me...the average offering of the People of God during Sunday Mass was roughly \$1 per person.

One. Dollar.

I had to check my own attitude at the door, since I had no reason to be self-righteous about the \$20 I was dropping into the collection basket each week. Twenty dollars represented a sacrifice when I was a college student, but as a 20-year military officer it was pittance. When I stopped to consider for a moment what was keeping me from giving more, I had to conclude it was mere selfish distrust of God’s Providence to care for me and my family’s needs.

So after much prayer and discussion with my wife, we agreed to begin tithing...setting aside ten percent of our income each month to return to God some of what He has provided for us. Several priests we knew suggested to me that if we chose to tithe, a good guideline was 5% to the Church and 5% to charities of our choice (the Church says “provide” not “tithe” although tithing is an old and praiseworthy custom).

In typical military engineer’s fashion...I created a spreadsheet. I entered in our income, calculated 10%, then listed the parish and all the charities we’d haphazardly sent money to during the past four or five years. We split our monthly donation evenly between our charities and the parish collection, even adding a few charities (like Rosary Army and SQPN) to our list to be sure we “spread it around” as best we could. We prayed and prepared to tighten our belts to suffer a little...and the suffering never came.

Oh, I was prepared to do without for the “sake of the Kingdom,” but that’s just not what happened. We had always lived close to our bottom line, but once we began to tithe back in accordance with the old custom, our financial problems simply evaporated. This is not to say that we had money falling from the sky...I’m paid well but the military is not a “get rich” sort of vocation...but we never went without what we needed. God was faithful to His promise, “Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.” (Lk 6:38)

Tithing, or any offering for that matter, is really not about us...like everything in the Christian's life, it's about Him. More precisely, offering is about demonstrating our love for Him by recognizing our total poverty before the King of the Universe and returning a portion of our gifts in thanksgiving for His abundant generosity to us in all things.

In our case, God didn't sign us up for some sort of heavenly Direct Deposit into our checking account...but perhaps the discipline of regular deliberate giving back to God changed our hearts. Perhaps we learned to be more satisfied with what we have and spend less on "wants" and more on "needs." Most importantly, we are learning to trust our Father God more. This discipline led to another...ensuring our investments are consistent with Catholic Social Teaching by working with the good people at www.investcatholic.com.

One last thought...if we truly want a holy priest as a pastor, offering our prayers and our resources to provide for the needs of the Church is a direct way to achieve that. Running a parish is a difficult job for our pastors, many of whom do the job without the benefit of an associate pastor. Some parish priests have little regular contact with their brother priests, isolated miles other parishes. On top of that, they have to spend time in the business of the parish: salaries for employees, upkeep of the building and grounds, inspiring volunteers, and paying the electric and water bills...oh yeah, and providing for the spiritual needs of the faithful by offering Holy Mass and administering the Sacraments.

If we provide for the needs of the Church, then certainly father can spend more time in his priestly ministry and less on his parish administering.

So when that collection basket comes around this Sunday, keep that dollar bill in your wallet...and get out your checkbook.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Supporting your Pastor

Objective

Remember that your parish priests are human. They are going to make mistakes and say things they shouldn't, just like the rest of us. In 2nd Corinthians Paul says of those who cause grief "you should forgive and encourage him instead, or else the person may be overwhelmed by excessive pain. Therefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him". (2Corinthians 2:7-8)

Bible Readings

1. 1Corinthians 12:26
If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.
2. Galatians 6:10
So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2179

"A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop."

Small Group Questions

1. How well do you know your Pastor?
2. Do you pray for your Pastor?
3. Have you had your pastor to your home for dinner?

Recommended Resources

1. Ten Ways to Support Your Parish Priest
<http://www.domestic-church.com/CONTENT.DCC/20000501/ARTICLES/supportpriest.htm>

If you've been paying attention to this year's presidential campaign news, you've heard or read some of the opinions of Bob Jones University on Catholics. Those opinions may raise our blood pressure temporarily, but they don't hurt the way the same comments would coming from a friend or neighbor. Priests aren't any different. A particular news article may annoy a priest, but the words and actions of parishioners can hurt.

In his letters, the apostle Paul repeatedly encouraged Christian communities of the time to "let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith." (Galatians 6:10), and "be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ." (Ephesians 4:32) Saint Paul never made any exceptions to his instructions on how Christians should treat each other. His instructions apply to everyone in Christian communities, from a parishioner who only shows up for Mass at Christmas to the pastor.

Most of us are not in a position to do much about media attitudes toward priests, but we can do something about the way our own parish priests are treated. Saint Paul tells us that "If one part suffers, all the parts suffers with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy." (1Corinthians 12:26) These ten suggestions can increase the joy in our parishes.

1. Pray for your parish priests on a regular basis. Encourage others to do the same.
2. Tell your parish priests when you like something they do, or that you found a particular homily helpful.

3. Remember that some things are beyond a parish priest's control or authority. The diocese a parish is located in sets many parish policies. Sometimes decisions are made based on confidential information.
4. If you volunteer to do something, do it faithfully and to the best of your ability. If your work seems unnoticed, it means you are doing such a good job your parish priest no longer has to think about that area; he knows he can count on you.
5. If your parish does not have a parish administrator or financial manager, encourage your parish counsel to hire one if it is possible. A parish with a \$40,000 budget has as much paper work as a business with a \$400,000 budget. Priests can't visit the sick if they are filling out tax forms.
6. Be kind to the lay people responsible for the day to day business of running your parish. They make it possible for the priests of your parish to be ministers instead of administrators.
7. Remember that everyone needs a change of scenery and routine from time to time. Be gracious when a priest takes time off, whether it's for a retreat, to play golf, or to channel surf. Give him that time gladly.
8. Watch what you say to and about your parish priests in front of your children. They will model your behavior.
9. Eventually, your parish priest will do or say something you disagree with, or say "no" to a request. Before you write a letter or make a phone call, pray for God's guidance and your own understanding of what was said or done, and then wait a few days. If you still feel the need to discuss an issue, be polite. Lay people have a right and obligation to speak up on anything that pertains to the good of the Church, but also an obligation to show respect for their pastors.
10. Remember that your parish priests are human. They are going to make mistakes and say things they shouldn't, just like the rest of us. In 2nd Corinthians Paul says of those who cause grief "you should forgive and encourage him instead, or else the person may be overwhelmed by excessive pain. Therefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him". (2Corinthians 2:7-8)

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Our Relationship with Ourselves

Dealing with Emotions

Objective

Are we in control of our emotions - or are our emotions in control of us. Which one of our emotions has the greatest grip on us? What do we do or think that encourages that emotion. What have we done to control that emotion? Have we taken the time to identify the situation that elicits that emotion?

We also need to consider the emotions of others. Do we ever consider the emotional state of those around us? How often do we step outside of ourselves and consider the perspective of others? How aware are you to the other's emotions? We need to make sure that others do not transfer the emotional responses to us in a negative way.

Which one of emotional weaknesses are we reinforcing to others? For example, have we passed on the "don't cry" syndrome to our sons?? How do we emotionally treat our sons differently from our daughters?

What can we learn about how Jesus handled his emotions?

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 4:32-33, The Christian's Walk

All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling must be removed from you, along with malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ

2. John 14:1-4, Jesus Comforts His Disciples

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.

3. Matthew 5: 22-23; 48

But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar and be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 1762-177

The passions are the feelings, the emotions....of the natural components of human psychology which incline a person to act or not to act in view of what is perceived as good or evil. The principle passions are love and hatred, desire and fear, joy, sadness, and anger....They are good when they contribute to a good action and they are evil in the opposite case. They can be taken up into the virtues or perverted by the vices.

Small Group Questions

1. Are you managing your emotions or are they managing you?
2. How does the level or type of our emotions change when around different people? Our spouse? Our children? Our friends?

3. How are your emotions different than your spouse's in the same situation?
4. How do you react or respond to something or someone?
 - Reacting is quick, defensive, and instinctive
 - Responding requires slowing down, contemplation, cause and effect
5. How are your emotional responses influenced by pop-culture? Do you inhibit softer emotions to maintain a "macho" façade?

Recommended Resources

1. Scripture Dealing with Emotions:
<http://www.americanbible.org/pages/read-seasons-emotions>
2. Emotions: Dealing With Our Feelings In Light of God and the Bible
<http://www.precious-testimonies.com/Exhortations/a-e/emotions.htm>

What does the Bible say about feelings? Jesus cares about your emotional state. The Bible has many passages that deal with emotions and are able to help you face them and be healed from the hurts of life. Click on the feeling below to bring up lessons we are able to learn from the Bible and the Bible passages which talk about the feeling.

[Abandoned & Overwhelmed](#)

[Acceptance & Overcoming Rejection](#)

[Anger](#)

[Discouragement & Abandonment](#)

[Fear](#)

[Guilt & Shame](#)

[Grief & Sorrow](#)

[Loneliness](#)

Practical advice on dealing with your emotions

Don't make major decisions when you are under a lot of emotional stress. Take time to deal with the pressing matters. As time passes it will become easier to face the more difficult decisions.

Don't make major decisions when you are physically tired. Your emotions may get in the way of making the best decision.

When praying for God to heal your emotions bring them to the cross that held Jesus. In Isaiah 53:4-6 we read that Jesus took our sorrows on Himself when He died on the cross. "Lord I nail my anger to your cross" may be a prayer you pray while dealing with the hurts from anger in your life.

Forgiveness is key in a breakthrough with your emotions. Unforgiveness leads to bitterness and gives Satan a foothold in your life. As well unforgiveness leads to health problems. Placing the pain on Jesus releases it from your life. He took our pain when He went to the cross for us. "Lord I forgive Jacob for hurting me when He gossiped about me" is a prayer you may use. Exchange the name and event for the situation you are facing. The Lord will deal justly with the other person. You are responsible for your actions and you are able to forgive the person from hurting you. Without forgiving the person who hurt you will damage your relationship with the Lord. Remember the purpose of Jesus in your life. He is your Saviour and He is able to bring you through times like these. Forgiveness is the key that would allow the relationship to be restored.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding over the situation you are facing. His wisdom and insight will change your perspective on the situation. Understand that at times there is more than meets the eye going on in the person who may have hurt you. Situations in the present trip undealt with issues from the past off. We haven't fully dealt with something until we have been to the cross.

Our emotions are able to warn us that we are in danger.

Pray for your emotions that they won't run your life but that you will be guided by the Holy Spirit.

3. Managing Your Emotions:

<http://www.healthychristianliving.com/emotions.htm>

We all have emotions, and they are here to stay. I believe one of the greatest goals of every believer should be "Emotional Stability". We should seek God to learn how to manage our emotions and not to allow them to manage us. An excerpt from the definition I found in Webster's Dictionary states that *emotions* is "to excite and to move out." Think about this: You're out shopping, but you've gone for just a specific item you're in need of. You've made a commitment to the Lord to get out of debt. You've promised Him to tithe and give offerings as He directs. You've agreed to really watch your spending and not purchase things that you don't need. But now while shopping, you discovered that the stores were all having a big sale of 50 percent off the already marked down merchandise. What would you do? You get excited. The more you look around, the more excited you get. Emotions are rising higher and higher. They begin to *move out* (as the definition said), and part of the devil's plan is for you to follow your emotions.

God wants you to use wisdom. Wisdom says wait a little while until the emotions settle down and check if you really believe it's the right thing to do. The bible says in Colossians 3:15 to be led by peace in making decisions. Don't let your emotions make your decisions. A good statement to remember is this: "Wisdom says wait; emotions say hurry."

An emotional person is defined as: "*One easily affected with or stirred by emotion; one who displays emotion; one with a tendency to rely on or place too much value on emotion; one whose conduct is ruled by emotion rather than reason.*"

Be honest with yourself in this area; and if you believe that you are not managing your emotions, begin to pray and seek God about "Emotional Maturity."

In the past years of my life, I experienced a lot of ups and downs, or what we call "Mood Swings." Picture a swing, up - down, up - down, up - down. This kind of behavior was hard on me, as well as, everyone around me. I felt bad about myself. People out of control always feel unhappy about themselves. God created us to operate with a free will. We choose what we will do and what won't do. There is a God-given desire inside the believer to do the right thing. When we allow our flesh to rule, we know we are out of control; however, we are created to be operating in the fruit of self-control.

Self-control is a freedom not a bondage. You are free to use wisdom, free to obey God, free to follow the leading of the Spirit. You are free not to be pushed around by your feelings. You don't have to do what you feel like doing. You are free to do what you know is wise.

Self-control will help you feel better about yourself. When I was experiencing so many ups and downs, it also made me physically tired. It takes a lot of energy to go through all kinds of emotional changes. I noticed, as God helped me to learn to manage my emotions, I also enjoyed more energy. Maybe you should stop and ask the Lord if that's why you've been so tired lately. Do you let your emotions manage you?

My moods were hard on my family too. After I was well on my way to stability, my husband, Dave, revealed a secret. He told me that during the years I was acting up, while he would be driving down the highway after work at night, most of the time he would ponder on the thought, "I wonder what she will be like tonight?" It is really very sad to imagine a person to have to be put through that kind of situation. My husband has always been very stable, and it is very comforting to live with someone you can depend on to be level and in control all the time. He was very happy for me, and himself also, when I began getting victory in this area. Children also need a stable atmosphere to grow up in. Stability is really an important issue for all of us.

Jesus is referred to as "The Rock". That says in itself that you can depend on Him to be stable, the same Jesus all the time—always faithful, loyal, true to His Word, and mature, not one way one time and another way the next time.

Jeremiah 17:8 and Psalm 1:3 both instruct us to be like trees firmly planted. I Peter 5:8-9 (Amplified) teaches us to be well-balanced, temperate (self controlled) to keep Satan from devouring us. To withstand him, it says to be rooted, established, strong, immovable, and determined. Philippians 1:28 tells us to be constant when Satan comes against us. Psalm 94:13 says God wants to give us power to stay calm in adversity. All of these are referring to being stable. Make "Emotional Maturity" a priority goal in your life.

I'm going to close with these statements for your consideration:

1. He who lives by emotions lives without principle.
2. We cannot be spiritual (walk in the spirit) and be led by emotions.
3. Emotions won't go away, but you can learn to "Manage Your Emotions."
4. You can have emotions, but you can't trust them.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Living Our Strengths & Best Version of Ourselves

Objective

God endows all of us with innate talents. His purpose for us is to use these to become the best person that we can be. We honor God by using our talents.

When we are put into situations that cause us to leverage skills that are not our strengths, how does this affect our well-being, effectiveness, our happiness, etc.? How does recognizing and utilizing the strengths of the people around us improve our relationships and productivity?

We make hundreds of choices every day. Each choice should be decided in the context of “will this make me the best version of myself?” Discipline is the faithful friend who will introduce you to yourself.

Bible Readings

1. Mathew 25:14-30

It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them.

To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one--to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately

the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five.

Likewise, the one who received two made another two.

But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them.

The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.'

His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.'

(Then) the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.'

His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.'

Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter;

so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.'

His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter?

Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return?

Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten.

For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'

2. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1880

A society is a group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them. As an assembly that is at once visible and spiritual, a society endures through time: it gathers up the past and prepares for the future. By means of society, each man is established as an "heir" and receives certain "talents" that enrich his identity and whose fruits he must develop. He rightly owes loyalty to the communities of which he is part and respect to those in authority who have charge of the common good.

2. Paragraphs 1936-1937

On coming into the world, man is not equipped with everything he needs for developing his bodily and spiritual life. He needs others. Differences appear tied to age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and the distribution of wealth. The "talents" are not distributed equally.

These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular "talents" share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods; they foster the mutual enrichment of cultures

3. Paragraph 2429

Everyone has the right of economic initiative; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his labor. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.

Small Group Questions

1. Stewardship comes from people offering their time, talent and treasure. What are you most likely to give?
2. How do you lead by example for your family?

Recommended Readings

1. Living Your Strengths by Winseman, Clifton & Liesveld
2. Building Better Families: A Practical Guide to Raising Amazing Children by Matthew Kelly
3. Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren

Recommended Resources

1. Are you becoming the-best-version-of-yourself?
http://www.matthewkelly.org/mkf_index.html

People are always asking me questions like, "When will I know that I have become the-best-version-of-myself?" and "Do I ever become the-best-version-of-myself, or is it one of those things we strive for but never achieve?"

Well, it isn't like we wake up one day and say, "The job is done. I am the-best-version-of-myself!" Everyday we have to celebrate our best self. In every moment we choose between the-best-version-of-ourselves... and a myriad of second-rate-versions-of-ourselves.

In some moments we actively celebrate our best self and in that moment we know that we are indeed the-best-version-of-ourselves. But in the next moment we can lose our best self once again to laziness, impatience, anger, envy, gossip, greed, thoughtlessness, selfishness...

Living Our Strengths & Best Version of Ourselves

The-best-version-of-ourselves isn't something we strive for and never achieve. It is something we achieve in some moments and not in others.

Your essential purpose is to become the-best-version-of-yourself. This one principle brings clarity to everything else in our lives.

What makes a good book, friend, marriage, job, or movie? A good book, friend, marriage, job, or movie, is one that helps us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves!

Everything makes sense in relation to our essential purpose. The people, experiences, and things we fill our lives with either helps us to become the-best-version-of-yourself... or they don't.

In every moment we simply need to ask ourselves, "Which of the options before me will help me to become the-best-version-of-myself?"

Welcome to The Matthew Kelly Foundation. You have been placed here in this place and at this time to celebrate your best self and to make a contribution. What will your contribution be? I hope that the materials and programs we provide here at the foundation will help you discover the-best-version-of-yourself...

Reminders

1. Remember our priorities in life
2. Encourage men to take the strengths test if they haven't already.
3. Habits are root of change, not magical events. Encourage each man to identify one change they will enact in the next week that will either make him a better version of himself or to make use of his strengths.

End of Life Issues: Caring for Sick Parents & Death of a Family Member

Objective

This topic has three general themes to explore:

- Stress as a caregiver
- Death and grieving
- Personal choices and planning

Coping with the pressures of being of the caregiver for a spouse or parent can be stressful. Today's society has complex medical, financial, legal, and spiritual problems to wade through. Faith becomes a fundamental part of caregiving. Adult children can love and serve their aging parents by deepening their own spiritual lives.

Dealing with a death in the family is never easy. Leading your family through the grieving process helps everyone.

Making your wishes clear legally will give you a voice when you have none.

Bible Readings

1. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.

2. Psalms 6:3

Have pity on me, LORD, for I am weak; heal me, LORD, for my bones are trembling.

3. Isaiah 53:11

Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 1013

Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When "the single course of our earthly life" is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: "It is appointed for men to die once." There is no "reincarnation" after death.

2. Paragraphs 364

The human body shares in the dignity of "the image of God": it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit:

Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.

End of Life Issues: Caring for Sick Parents & Death of a Family Member

3. Paragraphs 1500-1505

Illness in human life

Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.

Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.

The sick person before God

The man of the Old Testament lives his sickness in the presence of God. It is before God that he laments his illness, and it is of God, Master of life and death, that he implores healing. Illness becomes a way to conversion; God's forgiveness initiates the healing. It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life: "For I am the Lord, your healer." The prophet intuits that suffering can also have a redemptive meaning for the sins of others. Finally Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offense and heal every illness.

Christ the physician

Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that "God has visited his people" and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of. His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: "I was sick and you visited me." His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.

Often Jesus asks the sick to believe. He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands, mud and washing. The sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all." And so in the sacraments Christ continues to "touch" us in order to heal us.

Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the "sin of the world," of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.

Small Group Questions

1. How have you lead your family through the grieving process when a family member has died?
2. Have you cared for a spouse, parent or grandparent in their final days? How did you family cope with the extra stress?
3. Do you have your will prepared? Have you made choices about DNR or Living Wills?

Recommended Readings

1. Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis
2. A Catholic Guide to Caring for Your Aging Parent By Monica Dodds

Recommended Resources

1. National Catholic Ministry to the Bereaved
<http://www.griefwork.org/>
2. Grief Resources
<http://www.catholicmemorials.com/grief-resources.asp>
3. End-of-Life Decisions
http://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/end_of_life_decisions.htm

The death of Terri Schiavo raises a number of issues moral, legal and constitutional, about the *right to life* and the so-called *right to die*. Most coverage of the case focused on the question of her guardian's right to decide according to her alleged wishes and the *due process* of the judicial proceedings. However, at base the question was a moral, not a legal, one: under what conditions, if any, may a patient, a guardian, medical personnel or civil authorities, withhold or withdraw nutrition and hydration.

Catholic Teaching on Extraordinary Means

The natural law and the Fifth Commandment¹ requires that all ordinary means be used to preserve life, such as food, water, exercise, and medical care. Since the middle ages, however, Catholic theologians have recognized that human beings are not morally obligated to undergo every possible medical treatment to save their lives. Treatments that are unduly burdensome or sorrowful, such as amputation, or beyond the economic means of the person, or which only prolong the suffering of a dying person, are morally *extraordinary*, meaning they are not obligatory.

The many advances in medicine during recent decades, however, has complicated the decision whether to undergo or forego medical treatment, since medicine can now save many people who would simply have been allowed to die in the past. Further, having saved them, many people continue to live for long periods in comatose or semi-conscious states, unable to live without technological assistance of one kind or another. The following Questions and Answers will address some of the complexities of this issue.

Q. When may medical therapies, procedures, equipment and the like be withheld or withdrawn from a patient.

A. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states,

2278. Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of "over-zealous" treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected.

The key principle in this statement is that one does not will to cause death. When a person has an underlying terminal disease, or their heart, or some other organ, cannot work without mechanical assistance, or a therapy being proposed is dangerous, or has little chance of success, then not using that machine or that therapy results in the person dying from the disease or organ failure they already have. The omission allows nature to take its course. It does not directly kill the person, even though it may contribute to the person dying earlier than if aggressive treatment had been done.

Q. Does this also apply to artificially provided nutrition and hydration?

A. Yes, when the moral conditions noted above are met. We must, therefore, ask the question "will the withdrawal of nutrition and hydration allow the person to die, or kill the person?" When it will allow a person to die from an underlying condition, rather than unnecessarily prolonging their suffering, it may be removed. So, for example, in the last hours, even days, of a cancer patient's life, or if a sick person's body is no longer able to process food and water, there is no moral obligation to provide nutrition and hydration. The patient will die of their disease or their organ failure before starvation or dehydration could kill them.

However, when the withdrawal of nutrition and hydration is intended to kill the person, or will be the immediate and direct cause of doing so, quite apart from any disease or failure of their bodies, then to withdraw food and water would be an act of euthanasia, a grave sin against the natural law and the law of God.

Q. What about the case of Terri Schiavo?

A. In Terri's case, while there was some disagreement as to her exact medical condition, she was not dying. The withdrawal of her food and water directly caused her death, and thus was a violation of the natural law and the law of God.

Q. You mention the natural law, what is it?

A. The natural law is morality which reason can determine from the nature of man, without the assistance of God's revelation. An example is the right to life. Almost all human societies throughout history, both religious and non-religious, have recognized that it is wrong to kill an innocent person. This is a conclusion which reason can easily come to, since all human beings have an inborn desire to live. From this natural law principle we can easily see that any action that directly and intentionally kills an innocent person is an unjust taking of a human life. Therefore, withdrawing food and water from anyone who is not about to die and who can still tolerate it, has no other reasonable name than murder.

Q. What does the Church say about this?

A. The Pope addressed this issue in an address to a group of physicians who were in Rome in March 2004 precisely to discuss it. Note how he both uses the language of the natural law and the language of faith, which also tells us what we may do and not do.

I should like particularly to underline how the administration of water and food, even when provided by artificial means, always represents a natural means of preserving life, not a medical act. Its use, furthermore, should be considered, in principle, ordinary and proportionate, and as such morally obligatory, insofar as and until it is seen to have attained its proper finality, which in the present case consists in providing nourishment to the patient and alleviation of his suffering.

The obligation to provide the "normal care due to the sick in such cases" (1) includes, in fact, the use of nutrition and hydration (2). The evaluation of probabilities, founded on waning hopes for recovery when the vegetative state is prolonged beyond a year, cannot ethically justify the cessation or interruption of minimal care for the patient, including nutrition and hydration. Death by starvation or dehydration is, in fact, the only possible outcome as a result of their withdrawal. In this sense it ends up becoming, if done knowingly and willingly, true and proper euthanasia by omission.

In this regard, I recall what I wrote in the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* making it clear that "by euthanasia in the true and proper sense must be understood an action or omission which by its very nature and intention brings about death, with the purpose of eliminating all pain"; such an act is always "a serious violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person" (n. 65). [Pope John Paul II, *To the Congress on Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State*, 20 March 2004]

(1) Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Iura et Bona*, p. IV)

(2) cf. Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", *Dans le Cadre*, 2, 4, 4; Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, *Charter of Health Care Workers*, n. 120

Q. What can a person do to ensure that their wishes and their religious beliefs are respected by their family, medical personnel and the courts?

A. The best way is by means of an Advance Directive which states the patients wishes with respect to aggressive medical treatment. There are two basic kinds, a Living Will by itself or an Advance Directive with a Durable Power of Attorney (or Proxy) for Health Care Decisions. The merits of each are as follows:

1. Living Will. By this document a person decides completely in advance whether they want to be kept alive by technology. It is a "yes" or "no" statement, which then places the matter in the hands of the medical

End of Life Issues: Caring for Sick Parents & Death of a Family Member

community. Many Catholic bishops and moralists consider this an unsatisfactory approach, as it does not provide for unforeseen circumstances. Despite the enthusiasm of the media, many medical professionals, and sadly even some Catholic institutions, Living Wills are NOT the way to go!

2. Advance Directive with a Durable Power of Attorney or Health Care Proxy. These documents give to a friend or family member the authority to make health care decisions according to one's mind as expressed in an Advance Directive. By appointing an agent, or giving someone durable power of attorney, the patient allows for unforeseen circumstances. By stating in an Advance Directive that one wants Catholic teaching adhered to, one can ensure that neither the agent or the medical institution will disregard that teaching. Together they ensure that a trusted person, rather than strangers, will make circumstantially appropriate decisions, in keeping with the Faith.

Reminders

1. Encourage fathers to do a document inventory for himself and his family, including parents and in-laws. Identify missing documents and make a plan to get them in order.
2. Challenge men to have a heart to heart with spouse about each person's wishes.

Children off to School

Objective

The sharp change of children busy at home to a quiet house can be dramatic. This life event may be depressing or joyful to you and your wife; but more important, it is critical for your child. Off to Kindergarten or to college, this situation happens to rookie and veteran fathers, alike. Learn ways to cope and adjust. Learn ways to reach out to your children while still encouraging their independence.

This change might present opportunities for a stay at home spouse to return to work. This may change the priorities and routine of the family.

Bible Readings

1. Luke 2:39-52

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced (in) wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2206

The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The family is a privileged community called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing."

Small Group Questions

1. How do you describe your feelings when this happens? Elation or depression.
2. What ways can you keep in touch/involved with your child?
3. What added stress has this life event caused your family?

Recommended Readings

1. Lauer RH and Lauer JC. How to Survive and Thrive in an Empty Nest: Reclaiming Your Life When Your Children Have Grown. New Harbinger Publishing; 1999.
2. Schaffer L and Wasserman SF. 133 Ways to Avoid Going Cuckoo When the Kids Fly the Nest: A Parent's Guide for Surviving Empty Nest Syndrome. Three Rivers Press; 2001.

Recommended Resources

1. Empty Nest, Full Life

<http://www.catholic.net/index.php?id=498&option=dedestaca>

“Good-bye, little pig. Go build your house of brick,” Patty Easton murmured to herself when the last of the Eastons’ three children moved out of the house. Patty and her husband, Dick, have three grown children, ages 27 to 33. Dick is an English professor and Patty is an adjunct professor of children’s literature at Washington-Jefferson College in Pittsburgh.

“If you let them go, they come back,” she explains. “But if you try to hold on to them, they’ll be gone for good. Parenthood is one of those jobs you’re meant to work yourself out of.”

Eventually every set of parents faces the day when the last child ventures out to make his or her way in the world. At which point Mom and Dad join the ranks of the “empty nesters.”

After devoting decades of their time and energy to their kids, a couple can find themselves needing to redefine relationships and priorities. The transition can be a traumatic one for all involved, but it doesn’t have to be. The key is in the praying — and the planning.”

“Pat and I became very conscious when the kids reached the age of 10 or 11 that parents have to become separate identities,” recalls Dick. “We came to realize that the couple is the primary relationship and, if the couple isn’t happy, the kids won’t be happy.”

Dick and Patty began working on their relationship as spouses, taking time out for one another, making dates and getting a sitter so they could have time alone, and fostering common interests that didn’t involve the kids.

“You’ve got to find balance,” Dick says. “This is especially true once the kids are out of the house, but it starts when they’re still around. The couple has to rediscover each other, to make time for each other. We needed to know ourselves as Pat and Dick, not Mom and Dad.”

Indeed, empty nesting includes the pain of letting go, but it also the joy of growth and discovery.

Most empty nesters find themselves with more time on their hands than they’ve had in the past. They may also experience a surge of new energy as they’re relieved of the responsibilities of day-to-day childcare.

This can be a great time to take advantage of the opportunity to explore interests and abilities that had been undeveloped before.

“This can be a very exciting time of life,” says Father Dick Mirsberger, pastor of St. Rita Catholic Church in West Allis, Wis. “For some, this is the first time in their lives that they’re discovering how to reach out to others besides their children, and they find new and fulfilling ways to serve the Church.”

“There’s a spiritual dimension that wasn’t there in the workaday world,” adds the priest. “In the process, they grow personally and spiritually. It’s their gift to the community, to their God and, ultimately, to themselves.”

Of course, Father Mirsberger advises, the relationship between the husband and wife is always primary. He suggests the couple sit down together and assess their gifts as individuals and as a tandem. Then evaluate how much time and what kind of time you’re able to commit to new activities. Think about where you feel comfortable serving and in what capacities you excel.

Then ask your pastor where the greatest needs are and discuss with him how you might be able to fill those needs.

“Since we’re less focused on the kids, our horizons have broadened,” says Leisa Thigpen. Leisa and her husband, Paul, have two grown children ages 19 and 25. “We don’t ever forget about the kids, but now our attention span is broadened. We don’t talk about the kids so much. Instead, we talk about politics and culture. We do more for the Church than we ever have. We’re doing a lot of things that we never had time to do before.”

The Thigpens co-authored *Building Catholic Family Traditions* (OSV, 1999); Paul has also written numerous other Catholic titles.

Certainly the Thigpens miss their grown children, they allow. They spend plenty of time catching up with their progeny by phone, e-mail and instant messaging — not to mention face-to-face during home visits.

Still, they note, the relationships have changed. They see and treat their children like mature individuals rather than youngsters in need of care and supervision.

“We have to remember that children are the fruit of the marriage,” says Paul, “not the root of the marriage.”

New Mission, New Meaning

Cultivating a relationship with your grown children takes some doing at first. Some simple steps can get your relationship moving in the right direction and, gradually, growing by its own momentum.

According to Greg Popcak, Catholic family therapist and director of the Pastoral Solutions Institute in Steubenville, Ohio, there are three pillars on which the couple relationship must rest in order for it to thrive and become a blessing not only for the couple but also for others to whom they reach out.

The first pillar is meaningfulness, which incorporates the gifts, talents and abilities held by the couple individually and as a unit. These can be tapped and expanded to enrich present days and plan future doings.

The second is intimacy, which includes healthy vulnerability and inspiration.

The third is virtue, which emphasizes the attributes that make one a stronger, holier disciple of Christ.

Popcak recommends forming a mission statement based on these three pillars and encompassing the qualities, aspirations and inclinations of the couple in light of their new, empty-nest lifestyle. He suggests asking, “What qualities are being called out in me at this point in my life?” followed by, “What would I have to do in order to follow this call?”

Says Popcak, “The most important question to ask is, ‘Lord, what are you doing in me?’” This cultivates an attitude of service and surrender to God’s will.

And what about the “kids”?

“Parents at this stage of life don’t want to just wash their hands of their grown children,” says Ellen Thorp, former assistant dean of students at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Thorp recently left her position to spend more time raising her own small children. “On the other hand, you want to enjoy this time. Over involvement isn’t beneficial to your children anyway.”

“Sit back and enjoy this time,” adds Thorp. “Enjoy the accomplishments of your children and be confident that you’ve raised them as best as you could and take advantage of this exciting time.”

May your empty nest be filled to overflowing with faith, hope and love.

2. Empty Nest Syndrome: How to Cope When the Kids Leave Home

<http://www.upmc.com/HealthManagement/ManagingYourHealth/PersonalHealth/Children/?chunkiid=13475>

With all the trials and tribulations that come with raising children, many parents joke that they can't wait for their kids to grow up and get out of the house. But when that time finally comes, some parents find themselves feeling sad, lonely, and even [depressed](#). Here's how to prepare for and cope with your feelings when the kids fly the coop.

Living With an Empty Nest

When the older of Nancy Hebert's two daughters left for college, it was a relatively easy transition for Nancy, because her daughter attended a local college, just minutes away.

"I missed her, but it wasn't a very big lifestyle change," says the 49-year-old legal secretary from Rhode Island.

But when her younger daughter left a few years later to join the Air Force, Nancy's whole world seemed to turn upside down. "I fell apart," she says. "I was surprised by how hard it hit me."

Because empty nest syndrome is not a clinical medical diagnosis, it's hard to find statistics on how many people experience it. But as the children of baby boomers grow up and leave home, it's clear that millions of parents may identify with Nancy's story.

Children off to School

Learning About the Symptoms

While specific circumstances vary from family to family, the feelings parents experience also vary. These may include:

- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Emptiness
- Uselessness, or no longer having a purpose in life
- Guilt (for example, if the relationship with the child was strained before he or she left)

In some cases, parents may experience symptoms associated with clinical [depression](#) or adjustment disorder, including:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue or lack of drive
- Inability to seek or derive pleasure
- Changes in eating patterns
- Excessive worry or [anxiety](#)
- Indecision

People experiencing any of these symptoms should see their doctor.

Accepting the Grief

One of the first and most important things parents must do if they're having difficulty with the empty nest, say the experts, is to acknowledge that they've experienced a loss and that it's okay to grieve that loss.

"It's a real form of loss," says Sandy Wasserman, co-author, with Lauren Schaffer, of *133 Ways to Avoid Going Cuckoo When the Kids Fly the Nest*. Wasserman and Schaffer, both mothers who have gone through empty nest syndrome, contend that "the amount of time you invested in the relationship [with the children] is proportional to how much you suffer once they leave."

Seeking Support

An equally important step parents must take to cope with their loss is to seek out support, says Robert L. Smith, PhD, executive director of the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors. Dr. Smith recommends engaging the assistance of friends, family, or community or religious groups.

And "if someone is really down in the dumps and maybe shows signs of clinical depression, they should definitely seek the help of a counselor," says Dr. Smith.

Preparing While the Nest Is Still Full

One way to potentially lessen the blow when the kids leave is to prepare for it before it happens.

"It's helpful to start preparing and acknowledging in advance," says Dr. Smith, who recommends that all family members communicate with each other about their feelings regarding the impending lifestyle changes.

Wasserman recommends that parents get particularly involved in their kids' senior year in high school and try to "enjoy the process of the child *starting to leave*."

It's also important, Dr. Smith says, for parents to have activities or interests in addition to those related to the children. Wasserman and Schaffer put it more bluntly: "Have a life." This may mean a job, volunteer work, or hobbies or activities unrelated to child-rearing, so that when the kids leave, it's not as if the parents' *entire* lives are walking out the door.

Shifting the Focus

Focusing on the positive aspects of an empty nest can also help parents deal with their sadness.

One such positive aspect is having more time to devote to activities you may not have had enough time for before, such as travel, paid or volunteer work, or a new hobby. For example, when Wasserman's kids left, she seized the opportunity to pursue a lifelong passion—learning to play the mandolin.

Hebert has even enjoyed some "benefits" of an empty nest, including not hearing the phone ring all the time and not worrying what time her daughters will be home.

Perhaps most importantly, Schaffer and Wasserman want parents to remember that if their kids are ready and willing to fly the coop, it's usually a reflection of good parenting.

"If they're ready to leave," Wasserman says, "then we've done a good job."

Reminders

1. Talking about “empty nesters” is natural for this topic but make sure to include the younger fathers.
2. Encourage the men to send a care package to write a hand written letter to their college age student.
3. Recommend younger fathers to sign up for field trips or volunteer at the school.

Our Relationship with our Spouses

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting and have a plan to work this topic into a discussion with his wife. He should consider first what he is doing to encourage, promote, and grow in a holy life with his spouse. This includes talking and praying, not just actions!

Bible Readings

1. Genesis 2:18-24
2. Ephesians 5:21-33

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2331 - 2336
2. Paragraphs 2363 - 2365

Small Group Questions

1. If she was asked, how would your wife say you are helping her get to heaven?
2. Who do you know that seems to be the most supportive spouse? What do they do that you could?
3. How do you pray together with your wife?

Recommended Resources

1. The Sacrament of Marriage

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0979.asp>

Before a candlelit altar, a young groom takes the hand of his bride and vows: "Today I commit my body and spirit to you. I promise to try always to make our relationship grow through openness in communication; through trust in your willingness to work toward our mutual good; through faith in our love for each other even when that love seems hidden for the moment.

"Today I promise you the freedom to grow and develop your talents and capabilities. I promise to rejoice in your personal growth and to work out with you any problems this growth entails.

"Today I pledge to join with you in a union that is meant to be fruitful. I promise to join with you in establishing a household that is open to the needs of others, where we can, so far as we are able, provide a place of warmth and belonging to those who have none."

As this example shows, many Catholic brides and grooms today write their own marriage vows. The vow presented above covers three important areas for union and growth in the Sacrament of Marriage: mutual commitment, personal freedom and fruitfulness. We will explore these elements further as we probe more deeply into the nature of Christian marriage.

What is Christian Marriage?

Traditionally people have thought of marriage as a legal contract. On one level, it is that, but there are some essential differences. Unlike other legal contracts, the marriage contract is based on love. Marriage is not, as the German theologian Father Bernard Haring reminds us, a business contract for the purpose of getting a job done.

Marriage differs from a legal contract in that it is an open-ended contract, "for better, for worse." A legal contract attempts to spell out all possible conditions which might arise in the given situation. A decade or so ago, some couples attempted to write just such contracts for marriage. Most married people laughed. In marriage you make an unconditional promise, not knowing where the promise will lead, what the promise will entail. The unconditional promise is the essence of Christian marriage.

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Unlike trial marriage partners who hedge their bets and say "maybe," Christian marriage partners take a great risk and give an unconditional, resounding "yes!"

Who can make such a total, unconditional promise, not knowing what the future will bring? Christians do, and Father James Burtchaell, theologian at the University of Notre Dame, suggests that Christians must therefore be considered a little bit crazy. Who can make such a promise? Only those people who were crazy enough to make another unconditional promise—to commit themselves to Jesus Christ in faith, again not knowing what faith will demand or where faith will lead. For in their relationship with each other, they are likewise daring to trust in the power of Christ's love shared in and through the Christian community.

Formerly Catholics often thought of the Sacrament of Marriage as a one-time blessing given at the wedding. Indeed the sacrament has a special significance on the wedding day itself but the sacrament and its power continue. Today there is more emphasis on the lifelong graces of marriage and on the couple's response to those graces. Sacramental marriage is not a one-time magic shot to see couples through life. Rather it is a lifelong blessing available to those couples who pledge themselves to fidelity, growth and service. As they continually reaffirm their "yes" to each other, they acknowledge, draw upon and witness to the power and presence of Christ in their lives.

The permanent, open-ended unconditional pledge is frequently misunderstood. Isn't the Church old-fashioned? Why insist on permanence? The promise "for better, for worse" is not made by the Church. The promise is made by the bride and groom, who believe in Christ's word and in the kind of love he reveals. The Church witnesses and affirms their promise, and takes it literally—assuming people mean what they say.

What is Christian marriage, then? The Church's understanding of marriage, after reflection on God's word, can be summed up in this way:

Marriage, as a Christian sacrament, is a lifelong and faithful union of a man and a woman mutually committed to sharing their life and love together. Modeled after and strengthened by God's own love for his people, it's an intimate partnership in which each person gives the other freedom to grow and which is directed toward bearing fruit.

Now let us take a closer look at the three important aspects of marriage mentioned earlier and incorporated into this definition.

Mutual Commitment and Growth

The total pledge of Christian marriage is a promise of faithfulness in body and spirit. Faithfulness does not mean a complacent "settling in," a resigned sense that now we are stuck with each other whatever we become. Rather, faithfulness is commitment to grow *as a couple* in mutual support and affection.

- *Mutual growth demands a concentrated effort to develop communication skills.* Good communication is neither a matter of luck nor a natural endowment. It is a skill that can be learned. When partners share goodwill, mutual trust and the desire to communicate, they develop these skills by practicing them in their life together. When communication is difficult or becomes blocked, they might turn to one of the many books on communication such as *The Intimate Enemy: How to Fight Fair in Love and Marriage* by George Back and Peter Wyderi (Avon paperback books). Partners in a Christian marriage are committed to try throughout life to improve communication.
- Openness is an essential part of communication. Many marriage differences are so trivial that partners are ashamed to face their own pettiness. She plans a busy weekend when he would prefer to sleep late and relax. He leaves clothes, towels and newspapers lying around while she struggles for neatness and order. When faced with such differences, some people flare up in anger, others withdraw into pouting or silence. Neither action promotes understanding. Mutual growth demands the open expression of feelings precisely at the times when openness seems most difficult and withdrawal seems most attractive.
- *Mutual growth demands a delicate balance between assertiveness and surrender.* Each partner must learn when to assert his or her own needs and wants and when to yield graciously to the wants and needs of the other. In that delicate balance, perhaps more than anywhere else, lies the secret of living together in lasting love.

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

- *Mutual growth demands a positive outlook.* On the wedding day, the bride or groom is seen as the best possible choice for a lifetime partner. No matter how many differences arise, no matter how many negative qualities appear, people retain good qualities.
- For example, a methodical, highly organized woman chooses a partner whose spontaneity and impulsiveness charm her. Later, when his impulsive decisions frighten and irritate her, she may want to attack him for his decisions. If she is wise, she will recognize that she chose this man and continues to need him precisely because his personality balances her own. In a marriage committed to mutual growth, partners do well to keep their sights firmly focused on the positive and lovable qualities in each other.
- *Mutual growth demands renewal.* Marriage enrichment programs recognize a couple's need to get away together, to examine and renew their love. A special date with a spouse, a late dinner together, a weekend getaway for two all renew and deepen the affection which makes marriage not a business contract, but a union based on love.
- *Mutual growth demands trust in the love a couple shares, even when that love seems to wane.* All marriages face dry spells. Pressures from the outside world intrude. One becomes preoccupied, the other is away from home a lot. Weariness dulls the homecoming. The energy necessary to renew the marriage is just not available. Sometimes both can face the problem squarely and begin to plan positive alternatives. Sometimes they have only trust, the simple, quiet conviction that they will weather this dry spell and continue to grow because they took each other "for better, for worse," and meant it.

Personal Freedom

Paradoxically, the permanent, unconditional pledge of Christian marriage makes possible a *personal freedom* unknown in other unions. Christian marriage says two people are committed to each other, not merely under certain circumstances, but totally. They are partners and helpmates.

Sometimes people view marriage as the end of personal growth, something to "settle into" after they have developed their personal talents and achieved their personal goals. On the contrary, in a vital marriage each partner continues to develop individual gifts and to discover new abilities.

Total commitment enables Christian marriage partners to say to each other: "You will grow and change, and so will I. We know that; we expect it. Growth and change are not things to fear but are part of the adventure that is our life together. If growth leads you to success in paths I cannot follow, I will rejoice in your victory. If change means loss of health or disappointment, I will still be there. If change brings differences between us, we shall work them out. You do not have to be afraid to grow. You do not have to fear what growth will do to our marriage. Before all else, we are committed to working out our life together."

'Directed Toward Fruitfulness'

In *Marriage in the Modern World*, Father Bernard Haring tells us that marriage is a union based on love "directed toward fruitfulness." In that rich phrase lies sufficient challenge to make a marriage vital for a lifetime. Lovers about to be married often see only themselves in the marriage commitment. Marriage seems to involve just two, the cozy cottage, lovin' all the time.

However, love does not work that way. Love expands outwards. Mature lovers also love the world. That love for the world and everything in it is not merely a good feeling. It is part and parcel of the marriage commitment. Christian married love is necessarily directed outside itself toward others. Married couples live not only for personal growth, not only for mutual growth, but for something which is greater than themselves.

Raising children is the usual and natural expression of fruitfulness in marriage. Too often legalism has clouded our whole attitude toward children. Catholics have to have children, don't they, while non-Catholics do not? The more children you have the better Catholic you are, because, after all, you sacrifice everything else for the sake of children.

The Church has a consistently positive view on the bearing and raising of children because Christian marriage is directed toward fruitfulness. Married love expands to embrace others. Never has the Church set numerical quotas on children, nor has the Church ever claimed parents of large families were already

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

canonized. There can be loving large families, loving small families, and loving childless couples. But never can Christian marriage be loving and at the same time unfruitful.

Father James Burtchaell affirms that it is not the number of children people bear but a generous attitude toward life and sharing and fruitfulness that marks Christian marriage. Outdated as it may sound to some, it is still very Christian to desire children, provided that desire is a generous expression of love made fruitful.

Most couples today will not have all the children biologically possible. In a truly fruitful union, their choice will not reflect relief at being spared this burden, but rather, regret that human finiteness prevents an unlimited expansion of their love.

A Larger Fruitfulness

Children are not the only expression of fruitfulness in Christian marriage. The couple that does not yet have children, the couple that will never have children, and the couple whose children are raised are all still called to fruitfulness. For Christians, marriage leads to family and family leads to household. A household involves more than a single set of parents and children; a household welcomes and shares with others on a temporary or permanent basis.

Formerly people turned to family throughout life to meet their basic needs. There they sought food and shelter and love. There they were born, educated, nursed when ill, cared for when old and buried at life's end. Today institutions have taken over almost all of these functions. Theologian and writer Rosemary Haughton suggests that families need to involve themselves anew in these traditional functions because institutional care is inadequate. Our systems of education, health care, care of the aged, welfare and prisons are not meeting all personal needs.

Family is the one institution that provides its members with a sense of belonging, of feeling related and having a heritage. Today, many people are cut off by distance or family breakdown from their family of origin. They have nowhere to turn for a sense of belonging. Christian couples and families therefore face the tremendous challenge of becoming households: to furnish a place of belongingness for the homeless child, the cast-off elderly person, the pilgrim seeking a way back to the world after a stay in a prison or a mental hospital, the teen who needs a breathing spell away from his or her own family.

For some families fruitfulness will mean permanent commitments to some people over a lifetime. For others fruitfulness will mean making room briefly and occasionally. For still others fruitfulness will mean a home perpetually marked by openness, hospitality and sensitivity to the needs of others.

A commitment to fruitfulness stretches a couple's embrace to many people. Commitment to others makes permanence in marriage not only an ideal but a practical necessity. On the practical level, if marriage involved only two people, and they discovered significant incompatibilities between themselves, their going separate ways might seem sensible. The scars incurred would only disfigure two. But when two people promise themselves to the world beyond their private lives, a network of interdependence is formed. Each needs and is needed by many others. The breakup of a couple is truly regrettable. The breakup of a household, however, is an upheaval which affects the very existence of all the members.

Because their marriage and the household they create are so vital, committed lovers learn to work out individual differences with each other, to weather dry spells, to subordinate their own needs to those of others. They are more than individuals, more than sharers in love. They are partners in an essential common task. In reaching out to others they can create a beautiful oasis and do the job which family does best: establishing a place of belonging, relatedness, stability and love in an unstable, lonely world.

Accepting the Challenge

Faithfulness to a shared relationship, freedom to develop as a person, fruitfulness through giving themselves to others—while these three areas for growth exist throughout marriage, their distribution is frequently uneven. Balancing the various aspects may be a problem. A person, occupied with several preschoolers, a seriously sick child, an aged, helpless parent or a teen who is a living challenge on every front, may wonder what ever happened to self-development.

At other times personal development seems to crowd out mutual affection and growth. He becomes president of the Jaycees. She takes up art classes when the youngest child enters school. He prepares to run a marathon. She becomes absorbed in a part-time job. While their lives are full, they have no time for each other.

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

The demands of a common task, while satisfying, may stretch both partners and lead more to fatigue and irritation than to deepening love.

Marriage is an open-ended commitment. No one knows where faithfulness to another, freedom for self-development and commitment to the outside world will lead. The one certainty is that both partners will change as time passes. If they accept challenges in all three areas, they may have arguments, they may grow tired and sometimes be overwhelmed, but they will never be bored with marriage or with each other.

Moreover, they will know that the grace of the sacrament, which is the presence of Christ himself, will remain with them and lead their faithful love to greater and greater fullness.

2. Easier Said Than Done

<http://becomewhatyouare.wordpress.com/2007/08/05/easier-said-than-done/>

A girl I know is struggling in her marriage right now. I don't know all of the details, but my heart aches for her.

She said:

I truly love my husband and can't imagine life without him. He is my everything... I just wish I was his everything.

She hasn't confided in me about the specifics of the situation and she hasn't asked for advice. I have been wondering what I would say to her if she did ask. Here are some of the things I'd like to share with her:

- Remember or understand what marriage is really about: getting your spouse to heaven, being and example of the faithfulness and love of God to the world, bringing each other happiness and love. And, very importantly, marriage is for family.
- Love is a decision. It is a choice. Love is a verb. It is something you do, not just something you feel. Often the feelings only follow our action.
- Love requires sacrifice for the other. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friend." (John 15:13)
- Marriage is work!
- It only takes one..... to **start** to make things better, but it may require loads and loads of patience. It is not necessary to have your spouse "on board" in order to begin to make things better.
- The first, last and best thing for any marriage is prayer. Loads and loads of prayer. Prayer for your spouse that they become who they have been created to be. Prayer for yourself for the courage, strength and wisdom to choose to love, even when your spouse is being difficult. Prayer to know at each moment how to act, how to respond, how to love

All of this is easier said than done, though. It is hard, even painful sometimes, to lay down our own will, wants and whims to think of and choose for our other when things are going well. It is in our (fallen) nature to be selfish and to desire what is easiest for ourselves. It's even harder when things are not going so well. It is a lot easier to just do what we feel like doing, to seek our own comfort or preference and to cut off those who bring us pain. But that is precisely why the Church requires a commitment, a vow, to enter marriage. We need the strength of that commitment and the grace of the sacrament to follow through when the going gets tough.

I love how the Catechism, paragraph 1601 sums up marriage:

"The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."

That one sentence is jam packed with meaning, isn't it? Maybe part of marriage prep should be requiring a 5,000 word essay on the meaning of this sentence. I think it would be harder to stop at 5,000 words than it would be to find 5,000 words!

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

My friend is not Catholic. She may not understand all that marriage **really** entails yet. I hope that I get a chance to share with her. I would like to tell her that even with the grace of the sacrament, living a good, solid, happy marriage can be easier said than done sometimes.

There are many who would love to give advice. One woman who has “been married twice and [is] going through a divorce now,” offered to give her advice based on the fact that she “knows something” about marriage. I only hope that if my friend listens to her at all, she listens in order to find out what not to do.

For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel,

Malachi 2:16

While living authentic married love is easier said than done, it is more than possible by the grace of God. If the Lord hates divorce, he will absolutely provide a way for those in a valid marriage to heal and to have a healthy and happy marriage. Won't you join with me in praying for my friend and for all couples who are struggling right now?

Let us not forget in our prayer all of those who have truly tried to do the right thing, who have tried to do what they ought to make a good marriage and who have found themselves divorced anyway. In the end, free will belongs to both spouses. If one is not of good will or good disposition toward the marriage, things may not go as they should. Sometimes a marriage is invalid from the beginning and lacks the grace of the sacrament. These, too, need our prayer as they learn to accept their situation, learn to forgive, learn to move forward with the hand they have been dealt and go on to live holy lives in spite of their sufferings.

For those in a good, solid marriage, remember to pray in thanksgiving for it. A good marriage and a good spouse are tremendous blessings. Pray for the grace to nurture that love and grow in grace and love for one another.

I thank God for my good husband. And I thank you, dear husband, for being so good to me.

3. Sanctity of Marriage

<http://www.catholic.net/index.php?option=dedestaca&id=172>

What is the fundamental attitude in married life order to achieve sanctity? What can motivate us to become saints within marriage?

I think the secret is this: to be always there for your spouse!

When someone becomes a Franciscan, the person embraces poverty. When someone becomes a Jesuit, he embraces obedience. When someone becomes a Schoenstatt Father, he embraces the Marian apostolate, and when people marry, what do they embrace? Their spouse, they are to embrace each other for eternity. Being there for the other, although it may seem beautiful, is most difficult in life. To be there for the other means that I no longer have the right to think of my comfort, that I have to forget myself, that I have to be there for the other just as Christ is there for the Church.

My mission is, then, to support my spouse, to complement my spouse, to lead my spouse to heaven. This is not easy – you know it better than I do – because we are often selfish and narrow-minded.

If someone is able to maintain this attitude throughout one's married life, “I am only there for the other,” this person becomes a saint. If it deals with canonizing a married spouse, then it will always be looked into if he/she was there for the other.

To be there as Christ is for the Church is to be there with noble and transparent love, not with love which asks that the other be there for me but that I may be there in return. The marriage will be a happy one according to the measure in which spouses live out this norm.

I should then know how to limit myself in my likes for my spouse. What if I like noodles and my spouse likes French fries? Am I condemned to eat French fries all my life!

I will bear it for one week. But will I bear it for 20 years, 30 years? What if God has given me the joy of 60 years of marriage? Perhaps you are laughing, nevertheless, here is the key to marital happiness or to marital tragedy:

See the positive qualities always

Being there for the spouse means to always be disposed, to always be conscious of the other, of the good qualities the spouse has. Never become accustomed to your spouse's qualities however.

Be accustomed to many things, but you must not become accustomed to the good qualities of your spouse. On the contrary, every day you should learn to appreciate them more. I think this must be something which

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

makes sanctity in marriage so difficult. One soon becomes accustomed to the good qualities the spouse has, and later only focuses on the bad qualities. It seems that the bad qualities increase and the good qualities decrease.

Therefore, marital happiness depends on the spirit of sacrifice, on the ability of letting oneself be crucified for the other. It is the way of true love which is really what is most difficult in this human existence. The German poet, Rilke, said it: "The most difficult, the most difficult task man has to learn is love." Why? Because the hardest thing we can do is to forget ourselves and to seek the other's best interest.

Questions for Meditation

1. Do I often sacrifice my likes, or do I insist on them?
2. Do I continue to see the qualities of my spouse or have I become accustomed to them?
3. Is it easier for me to see the short comes or the virtues of the other?

4. Reading Aloud with Your Spouse

<http://www.catholicexchange.com/2008/07/15/113041/>

About eight years ago, my husband and I decided to relegate the use of the television to a very minor part of the family's entertainment — mostly for sports or for use with the VCR to watch a movie, about once a week. Instead of watching television in the evenings, we decided to start reading aloud together.

We have found reading a loud to be a great way to spend quality time together; it fosters intellectual growth for both of us, it stimulates interesting conversations, and it sets a good example for the children. During the day, of course, I read books of varying levels to my children and supply them with great selections of books to read to themselves, rather than letting them sit and passively watch the TV all the time. Why should my husband and I spend our evenings together any differently?

The choice of the book is crucial. Even though part of our motive is to improve our minds, it's better to choose a book that we'll enjoy enough to finish rather than to choose one that improves our minds the first night and is never picked up again. Also, it can be a mistake to always try to pick a book both of us will like equally — we end up with a book no one likes at all. Instead, we often take turns picking a book, while avoiding books that either of us will actually hate. Some books that I was sure my husband would like we had to stop because they took so long to get into. It's hard to tell. A book that's great to read by yourself can seem awfully long and tedious to read a loud. Books with a lot of description generally don't do well, unless both reader and listener love descriptive books. On the other hand, some of the books that my husband really didn't want to start he ended up thoroughly enjoying. "*Miss Bunce's Book?*" he repeated unbelievably. "That's the name of a real book? And you think I'll like it?" Well, despite its odd title, this light novel by D. E. Stevenson had us laughing for weeks. (Her other books are generally too feminine to appeal to men, but this one is a sure winner.) *The Unexpected Mrs. Pollifax* by Dorothy Gilman was another title that my husband balked at, and my description didn't help much. "It's a book about an old lady who becomes a spy for the CIA," I told him. "It's supposed to be funny and suspenseful." Well, it was, once he self-sacrificially agreed to try it.

But we didn't start out with those questionable ones. First we tried some adventure novels like *Treasure Island* by Stevenson and *The Prisoner of Zenda* by Anthony Hope that I was sure would appeal to my husband. In fact, we've read the latter aloud twice, and then watched the fabulous movie version with Ronald Colman and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Next we went through some religious books. Unfortunately Chesterton's fiction, we've found, is very difficult to read out loud because he uses so much description, although *The Man Who Was Thursday* has less than some of his others. We've read some of his non-fiction aloud with more success, however. Since my husband likes both theology and science fiction, we read *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra* by C.S. Lewis. Those had more description than I prefer, and since I do not like science fiction, they were a little tough for me, but I did enjoy the allegorical meaning behind them. We also read some of his Narnia books, too. When my sister lent me *The Little World of Don Camillo* by Giovanni Guareschi, I recognized in the aggressive but humble title character a person that my husband would relate to, and we ended up reading all of the books in the series that have been translated into English. We both got to like Don Camillo and the equally aggressive, communist Mayor Peppone so much that we couldn't imagine going to the hospital to have our fifth child without bringing a volume! (We never did get around to reading it there.) *The Left Hand of God* by William E. Barrett was another fun choice. Then we got into a mystery phase, reading the works of Agatha Christie and Rex Stout (although we had to be careful to avoid his more risqué novels).

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

I can't say how much my husband and I have enjoyed our time reading aloud together. Much as I dislike the phrase, it is truly a bonding experience. As we listen to each other read, we hear each other's voice and envision in our minds the scenes the author is painting for us. Because we have time to read only a few chapters a night, we live through each plot together over the course of several weeks, the characters and storylines lending a unique flavor to our days. We find our readings spark conversations and jokes and all sorts of wonderful memories that watching television can never do.

For spouses reluctant to spend their leisure time way, I suggest starting out with one night a week for reading out loud. Then, as you find yourselves wondering what will happen next - long before the reading night comes - you may discover you're reading a little more often than you planned. It's something of an acquired taste. There's no immediate gratification like when you're watching TV. Even reading silently to yourself gratifies curiosity much more quickly. Yet there is a uniquely satisfying joy in slowly but surely making your way through some favorite books with the person you love.

I highly recommend it!

Reminders

6. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
7. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
8. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
9. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time.
10. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

How are you going to get your spouse to heaven?

Emotional Infidelity

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting with a broadened perspective of what true fidelity is ...and what emotional infidelity is. He should thoughtfully consider how his behavior, whether at home, at work, or otherwise, stands up to the commitment of fidelity he made with his wedding vows. Is he treating his spouse respectfully and as his equal partner at all times?

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 5: 22-33
2. Romans 12: 1 - 5

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2331 - 2336
2. Paragraphs 2380 - 2381

Small Group Questions

1. What are the signs of emotional infidelity in your life? How do you avoid them?
2. Consider ways that you can assist your fellow fathers from emotional infidelity.
3. Is the "litmus test" (Walt) for emotional infidelity real for you?

Recommended Resources

1. 10 Rules for Avoiding Emotional Infidelity

<http://love.ivillage.com/Insproblems/Inscheating/0,,fmf6,00.html>

Keeping members of the opposite sex out of your intimate way is crucial to the success of marriage. In today's world, it takes focus and planning. Consider the following ten rules of avoiding potentially damaging relationships with members of the opposite sex.

Rule 1: Keep It All Business at the Office

What's integral to your job and what's not? You certainly want cordial relationships with all your colleagues. However, being cordial means inquiring of a colleague how her sick mom is doing and how her daughter's birthday party was. It doesn't mean chatting for a half hour and laughing about his recent trip to Egypt. Keep conversations that aren't strictly related to business short and sweet. A person rarely talks to you for any length of time unless you hold up your end of the conversation.

Rule 2: Avoid Meetings with Members of the Opposite Sex Outside of the Workplace

If you have to work together through lunch or dinner, order food into the office rather than go out. Restaurants are far more intimate than your office, and you are much more likely to discuss issues outside of business when you're on the outside. When you do finish a project, avoid the celebratory coffee, drinks, or dinner. Celebrate with your husband or wife at home instead. Share with your partner how much energy this project took. Let your mate into your life more rather than cutting him or her out by bonding a little more with your colleague. You don't owe your colleague dinner or the reward of friendship because you worked together. If someone at the office cracks open the champagne for the group, by all means, join in the toast, but don't linger. Congratulate everyone on a job well done, but make it clear where your attention and allegiance lie by explaining that you have a date with your spouse.

When you do have to meet outside the office, make the meeting in a public place that isn't conducive to intimacy. Avoid long car rides, as the close physical proximity and inability to leave one another begs for idle chatter and potential intimacy.

Rule 3: Meet in Groups

When meeting with members of the opposite sex, try to avoid meeting alone. The addition of even one extra person greatly minimizes any potential for intimacy. Even if it means asking a coworker to tag along

Our Relationship with our Spouses

for no other reason but to make sure the meeting stays focused on business, it's worthwhile. Group meetings also send the message to others that we're here for a particular goal and then we're through. People hold back from intimacy in a group both because they're naturally more cautious about sharing and because they're not sure if what they have to say will interest the whole group.

Rule 4: Find Polite Ways of Ending Personal Conversations

Learn to bow out gracefully from conversations that you feel are too intimate for comfort. If you feel someone is sharing [personal information](#) that is likely to draw you into a more intimate relationship, end the conversation politely. For example, say something like, "This sounds very serious, and I just don't know what to say. I surely don't feel comfortable giving advice on such an important issue. If I were you, I'd talk to someone who really knows me well, or even consider talking to a clergy person or counselor to air out my thoughts." In this way you've referred the person to others who could be more of help and made sure you won't become the shoulder to lean on.

Rule 5: Avoid Consistency in the Relationship

You'd think from these rules that I've never carried on more than a forty-five-second conversation with a female since my marriage. Yet I've had plenty of conversations with personal content. I just don't have them consistently. To tell a colleague about the great time you had on your vacation or to listen to her go on about hers for a while is fine, as long as it ends there and as long as such conversations unrelated to business are inconsistent. What you want to avoid are regular, ongoing personal conversations in which you're developing themes, favorite topics, or a continuing dialogue. Relationships need time and consistency to build. Having an occasional laugh is safe, as long as it stays rare.

Rule 6: Don't Share Your Personal Feelings

When you do find yourself engaged in conversation with a member of the opposite sex, share little of your personal experience or feelings. This curtails the other person's ability to relate to you. This doesn't mean you can't be polite or helpful. If your colleague shares with you that he's learning to scuba dive, you could ask him how it's going and if he's enjoying it without sharing that it's been your personal dream to do the same for years. If you feel the need to share that feeling, tell your spouse that night instead about how you were talking to someone who's begun lessons and that you're frustrated that you haven't found the time to do it.

Rule 7: Be Unflinchingly Honest with Yourself

Sometimes people convince themselves that it can even help their marriage to express some sexual energy through "innocent" flirtatious conversations: "Hey, I'm not going to do anything, so where's the harm?" However, ask yourself how uncomfortable you'd be if your spouse found a similar method of "improving" your marriage. Be aware of whether you are ever feeling the slightest twinge of intimacy or attraction, whether sexually or emotionally. Consider honestly why you're looking forward to the next time you meet up again with that person. Be truthful if you have a little bounce in your step as you walk away from a conversation with him or her, or you suddenly have a little more energy after it. Think your flirtation is so innocent? Test yourself: Would you tell your spouse? If you tell yourself that your interaction with a certain person of the opposite sex is fine, ask yourself if your spouse would agree.

Rule 8: Avoid Cordial Kisses and Hugs, or Dancing with Members of the Opposite Sex

This may sound extreme, but with even one kiss comes a certain intimacy. Even a cordial hello kiss can be quite a sensual experience. Most often, a simple handshake will do. In the psychoanalytic community, there are clear guidelines that prohibit physical contact, even with same-sex patients. This is not only because of the fear that a sympathetic hug might lead somewhere sexually but because a simple hug immediately changes the [relationship](#) and can confuse the perception of both parties. If you ever need a polite excuse for avoiding a kiss or dance, explain that you have a cold and fear it's contagious. You can always clasp the shaker's hand with both hands to indicate extra warmth without introducing intimate touch. I realize that it's become common to hug and kiss even business associates. I join with Miss Manners in disapproving of this unnecessary intimacy.

Rule 9: Don't Drink Around the Opposite Sex

When we drink alcohol, we lose our inhibitions and clarity. I'm not talking just about the kind of dead drunk that'll get you into bed when you don't want to, or aren't thinking straight (although I'm skeptical how much decision making we lose from drinking--after all, I've never heard a heterosexual husband say, "Really, honey, I don't remember anything except waking up the next morning to find him in my bed"). Even a single

Our Relationship with our Spouses

glass of wine or shot of scotch is enough to relax you and lead to a more personal conversation that may be damaging to your marriage at a later time. It's these conversations that leave a door open for later intimacy. If you're at a party and really want to join in the festivities, plant yourself next to your spouse.

Rule 10: Show Your Commitment to Your Spouse Daily

Do something thoughtful for your spouse every single day. This could be a lovely note, a phone call, or a more elaborate effort to plan a getaway. Doing something for your spouse reminds you throughout the day how special this person is to you. Focus on the kind things your spouse has done for you, and remember that relationships take effort and time to grow. Have lots of photos of your spouse, kids, and pets around the office as a visual reminder to you and others of your priorities. Even when I'm staying in a hotel for one night, I place two or three photos of my wife and family around the hotel room. I don't need the photos to avoid an affair. But I do need to be cloaked in love, and photos can help me focus on how much love I have in my life even when my family is far away.

2. 10 Red Flags of an Emotional Affair

<http://blog.beliefnet.com/beyondblue/2008/05/ten-red-flags.html>

1) Thinking or saying, "We're just friends."

If you have caught yourself thinking or saying, "but we're just friends," you are probably already in trouble. "But we're just friends" are four of the most dangerous words for a relationship. These words are usually said to rationalize something you know is wrong. Rationalize is also spelled "rational lies."

2) Thinking and daydreaming about the person more and more often

This should be a loud, screaming clue. Do you think and day dream about your regular friends in this way?

3) Looking forward to the next time you can see and/or talk to the person

If you feel excitement and anticipation, a quickening of your pulse, as you get ready to see this person, watch out.

4) Wanting to tell them first when something happens in your day

This means that this person has become your primary emotional confidant.

5) Sharing intimate emotions

This flows naturally from this person being your primary emotional confidant. Because emotional affairs can be harder to break than purely physical ones, you can get trapped right here.

6) Sharing intimate problems

Especially dangerous if you are sharing problems in your marriage or relationship with this other person.

7) You believe that this person understands you much more than your spouse

Of course it looks like they do. That is part of the illusion of the affair. This belief draws you away from your partner and toward the other person.

8) Keeping secrets and covering up

Secrets bond two people together against a third person.

9) Giving gifts you would not normally give to a friend

Things to wear, jewelry, and other intimate gifts come with a message: we are very close.

10) Spending more and more time alone

I've heard so many people tell me that this was the one that pushed them over the edge. They had promised themselves that nothing would happen, but the temptation and availability of time alone was too much to resist.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Blaming - Holding Grudges and Forgiving

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting able to reflect on the state of his marriage and have plans to initiate a discussion with his wife about working at fighting fairly – forgiving more quickly and not holding grudges.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 4:31-32

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

2. Colossians 3:12-13

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

3. Colossians 3:18-22

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service, as men pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

Small Group Questions

1. Think back to your last fight with your spouse – how long did you stay angry – did you give her the silent treatment? What did it accomplish?
2. Did you ever look in the mirror at yourself while you are holding a grudge or giving her the silent treatment – did you like what you saw? How tense were you?
3. Did you just want to get a hug during these fights?

Recommended Resources

1. Blaming, Holding Grudges and Forgiving

<http://www.broadcaster.org.uk/section1/scenarios/stopdivorce.html#forgiveness>

Strike an average between what a woman thinks of her husband a month before she marries him and what she thinks of him a year afterward, and you will have the truth about him.

--H.L. Mencken, (*A Book of Burlesques*, 1916)

More marriages might survive if the partners realized that sometimes the better comes after the worse.

--Doug Larson

When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.

--Catherine Ponder

True love is when you put someone on a pedestal, and they fall - but you are there to catch them.

--Author Unknown

The author of this book sounds a bit like me, in that she says she really wanted to divorce her husband at one point. I'll see what made her change her mind. ...

Oh. She says that what really changed her mind was that she realised that the problems in her marriage weren't all her husband's fault by any means, and that there were things she could do about them. She says that now, she's glad she didn't divorce her husband, because they fell in love again, and after she learned to do things differently, their marriage became a lot better.

Well, perhaps I'll have to admit that I've been partly responsible for some of the problems in the marriage. ... Well, at least one or two. ... Maybe. What she says sounds interesting. I'll read on and see if I think what happened to her could happen for me.

The book says the author describes some of the things that happened in her marriage and how she's improved it, to help others experiencing similar things.

Well, that sounds good.

Blaming Her Husband for All the Marriage Difficulties

The author says that at the time when she was thinking about divorcing her husband, she would blame him for all the problems in the marriage. She says she had a long list of changes she wanted him to make, and blaming him for the difficulties felt more satisfying than recognising her part in the problems. She even read self-help books and underlined the bits she thought he should take notice of, and gave them to him, without considering that she needed to change.

But she says that now she knows that part of the problem was that she'd grown hard-hearted because she didn't feel he showed enough love towards her, and she became critical of him, and was sarcastic about any efforts he made to improve things, as if he just couldn't do anything well enough. Now she realises that her attitude was ruining their relationship more than anything he did.

Not Forgiving Him for Anything

She says she would get angry with her husband for the smallest things, and so they often argued. She would say nasty things to him. Besides that, she'd lose her temper easily with her children and snap at other people like shop assistants for trivialities as well. And she mulled over little spur-of-the-moment comments that others made until they seemed like major upsets.

She says there were several reasons for that, but one of the most important was that she'd never learned to forgive.

Why She Hadn't Learned to Be Forgiving

She says she thinks there were four reasons why she found it difficult personally to forgive:

One was that she thought of herself as a nice person who didn't show unpleasant emotions like anger, thinking that not showing anger would keep the peace better; so she stored up petty resentments rather than commenting on them until there were so many that she was furious, and so her husband just needed to say one little thing, and she'd explode with a torrent of accusations that were nothing to do with the issue. And the arguments would go on for hours.

She says a second reason she couldn't forgive was that she often felt hurt about things and she thought someone ought to pay for that. Letting go of all the hurts and disappointments would mean that that wouldn't happen.

But when she started to reflect on all the things she'd done wrong herself, she realised she had no right to demand that others forgive her if she wasn't willing to forgive them. She realised she had actually done more than her husband to make herself and her marriage miserable, and that she wanted him to be someone who'd forgive her unconditionally and accept both her good and bad qualities as part of his love for her, since that was part of her idea of what an ideal husband should be like; but she was holding him to a different standard from the one she wanted him to hold her to. She wouldn't forgive him for the things he'd done wrong.

But she realised the relationship would never get better unless she changed. She came to think that mistakes and misdemeanours ought to be forgiven even when the person doesn't deserve it.

Our Relationship with our Spouses

She says another reason she didn't forgive her husband is that he never asked her to.

And she says a fourth reason is that she wanted to feel like the victim in the failing marriage so she wouldn't have to take partial responsibility for its failure. She didn't have a problem with guilt as long as she could feel like the aggrieved victim and think that it was her husband who needed to change, not her.

But she says that this kind of attitude won't make a marriage healthier or make the person who holds the attitude any happier really.

She says there's actually a lot of power in thinking of yourself as the victim, because it frees you from any responsibility for what's happened and gives you justification to do what you want in retaliation. She says she was once told by a recovering alcoholic that while he was drinking, he would always look for things to get angry about, like the dinner not being ready or the television being too loud, because then he didn't have to feel guilty about drinking, since he could say he only did it because his wife and children did so many annoying things. He would tell them that if only they would do everything right, he wouldn't have to drink, so it was their fault.

She says she was doing a similar thing, thinking of herself as the victim so she could feel justified in being unpleasant and didn't have to feel guilty about her anger problems or the way she treated her husband. It meant she didn't have to look at what she was doing and take some responsibility for the state of her marriage.

The Problems that Being Unforgiving Can Cause

She says that some of the symptoms of an unforgiving attitude include:

Losing your temper over seemingly trivial things.

Making sarcastic remarks that are meant to hurt.

Complaining about your spouse behind their back.

Negatively criticizing or correcting them.

Crying for no apparent reason.

Unexplained headaches, stomach problems or fatigue.

Of course, those symptoms won't always be caused by an unwillingness to forgive. But it's interesting what she says. She says she couldn't become a nice person no matter how hard she tried until she resolved to be more forgiving, because she was full of resentment, disappointment, pride, bitterness, anger and hurt, and that showed in her behaviour. She says she was being hurt by her unwillingness to forgive more than her husband was. And she says she couldn't see the potential in their marriage and the person her husband really was, because she was so consumed with bad feelings about his past mistakes. It stopped them enjoying what there was still left in the relationship and was destroying what love was left.

She says when someone with an unforgiving attitude leaves a relationship, they'll carry their unforgiving attitude into any future relationships they have, so even if the new ones seem better than the previous one for a while, the old problems will start recurring. And friendships will suffer in the same way, because a bitter person will not only make themselves miserable, but they will have a negative attitude that others find unattractive.

One or Two Things That Can Make Forgiving Easier

She says that forgiveness won't always be easy and may take time, but when people forgive, they benefit themselves as well as the person they're forgiving, because the anger and hurt can be like a weight they're carrying around, and when they let go of it, they can feel it's lifted.

She says that one aid to forgiveness is thinking about the childhood of the other partner, which often won't excuse their behaviour, but it might sometimes make it more understandable. She says she was often angry with her husband for not showing greater love towards her. But when she thought about his childhood, she realised his parents hadn't shown a particularly loving attitude towards him, so he didn't have a loving person to model his behaviour on while he was growing up, so it wouldn't have come naturally to him to have been all that loving.

Our Relationship with our Spouses

She says that at first, letting go of her husband's offences was difficult, since she'd grown used to cherishing hurts and bringing them up later as ammunition. And she says she still finds it difficult to forgive sometimes and it can take time, but it's worth doing, for her own well-being as well as for the marriage and her husband.

She says it's harder to forgive a misdemeanour if it keeps being repeated, but she finds it easier if she first thinks about how often she does the same old things herself and needs forgiveness for those.

A Few Qualities of Genuine and Fake Forgiveness

She says forgiveness is like cancelling a debt. When someone forgives, it means they let go of the right to bring the offence up to make the other person look bad in the future.

And she says real forgiveness is done freely, not with strings attached, such as the expectation of a lot of gratitude for having done it.

She says it can be nice to tell a husband or wife they've been forgiven, especially if they might feel guilty over something.

But she says that on the other hand, forgiveness shouldn't be used as a weapon. For instance, if someone said, "I forgive you for being inconsiderate yet again!", they would probably really be implying a criticism of the other person for supposedly being inconsiderate, rather than genuinely forgiving them. Even if they'd only thought the bit about the other one being inconsiderate rather than actually saying it, their real attitude would probably have come through in their tone of voice.

She says forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting. It might be difficult to forget. But she says she finds it difficult to remember many of the things she once thought it was worth divorcing her husband over.

But she says the important thing is that people don't allow themselves to become preoccupied with resentful and other negative thoughts, but when they notice they're thinking them, they stop themselves and turn their attention to more productive things.

She says it was when she recognised that she was as much a part of the problem in her marriage as her husband, if not more so, that the marriage began to heal.

Ways of Going About Forgiving

She says that some people might feel a bit daunted by the fact that they've got resentment about so many things stored up that they think forgiving everything might take forever; but a good way to go about forgiving all the misdemeanours in the past is to forgive them all at once, rather than thinking of them one by one, maybe by doing something symbolic to represent forgiving them all altogether.

She says people she knows have come up with different ideas for symbolic things to do. She says one person destroyed a bit of paper to symbolise getting rid of a mental list of unforgiven things. She says someone else imagined her husband imprisoned in chains of her unforgiveness, and imagined cutting each link in the chain one by one to set him free. Someone else imagined drawing a line in the sand to represent a divide between the past unforgiveness and the future, and imagined stepping over it.

She recommends that after people have forgiven their husband or wife, they ask their spouse to forgive them for their own misdemeanours. She says using the word sorry probably won't mean much, since it may have been well over-used. She says that certainly her and her husband used to say sorry a lot when they didn't mean it; they were often just tired and said it because they wanted to end the argument and go to bed. So she recommends people ask, "Will you forgive me?"

She says people shouldn't have any expectations of being forgiven immediately, since their husband or wife might need to think about it for some time before they can decide whether to forgive them. The husband or wife might feel as much hurt because of things that have happened in the past as the one asking for forgiveness, and not trust the one who wants forgiveness until they've seen evidence that they mean to change their ways and be more loving. That shouldn't be seen as a problem. What's important is the long-term welfare of the marriage.

She says that after the person who's decided to become more forgiving and loving has resolved to change, sometimes, it might help if they do even radical things to help preserve the marriage. She says she changed jobs because she was tempted to flirt with a couple of people and wanted to take herself out of the way of temptation in case things got worse. And she stopped reading romantic novels, since she realised they gave

Blaming - Holding Grudges and Forgiving

Our Relationship with our Spouses

her an unrealistic impression of what marriage should be like that was making her more dissatisfied with her own marriage.

2. Married Couple's Communication / Conflict Resolution

<https://www.archindy.org/family/files/marriage/MarCplsComConflict.pdf>

"Suggestions for developing balance and wholeness in your work and in your family"¹

1. Be There – be present to the task at hand, if at home or at work. Be present to spouse and children.
2. Mutual Respect – 'Golden Rule' ... "respect is contagious" ... "Change first principle": "I will not wait for you to change. I will change first."
3. Trust – both family and coworkers ... give plenty of second chances ... don't be easily discouraged by others
4. Maintain a sense of humor – don't let yourself get easily "bent out of shape" ... There is humor in most situations, and most situations are not "life or death."
5. Be truthful – "Honesty is *still* the best policy" ... Easier not to have to remember what you said if it is not the truth
6. Be appreciative – criticism received better when immersed in a "steady diet" of "applause"
7. Keep your priority relationships current – "keep your valued relationships growing"... Be realistic about relationships that change after your marriage / new stages of life
8. Be consistent in your faith – spiritual health = essential to being WHOLE and WELL

"4 Ways to Sabotage a Marriage"²

Definition of "Sabotage"

Noun:

1. Destruction of property or obstruction of normal operations, as by civilians or enemy agents in time of war.
2. Treacherous action to defeat or hinder a cause or an endeavor; deliberate subversion.

Sabotage #1 – *Abbreviate your communications*

"Problems of poor communication" are usually present in the relationship *before* marriage

"Abbreviating" = withholding feelings and thoughts 'distorts the truth,' often with the best of intentions

Negative Result: Alternative behavior / "acting out" chosen over direct confrontation of issue = implied message of 'acting out' is then lost on partner

Bottomline: "Just tell it like it is."

Sabotage #2 – *Keep track of your mate's faults in case you want to fight dirty*

Building up "resentments" / "laundry list," versus "overlooking shortcomings"

"insurance or ammunition" = "cash in" and "unload" at time of argument

"spouses can be made to feel like they have criminal records" / with "regular reminders"

Bottomline: "Like in court, if an issue has already been resolved, it should not be admissible as evidence."

Sabotage #3 – *Withhold sex and love*

Instruments of "rewards and punishments" / "conditions for receiving ... are rarely clear, making it impossible to succeed."

Love-making should serve as "bridge"

Blaming - Holding Grudges and Forgiving

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Bottomline: "Making love does much to restore and maintain a marriage."

Sabotage #4 – *Grow old before your time*

'Seven year itch' is real / birth of a second child can present equivalent issues

Partner #1 = experiences sense "of growing apart" = discomfort with constraints, loss of identity, mellowing of early stage "fun" in marriage

Partner #2 [reaction to #1]= "Sense of abandonment, the lack of equal responsibility, and be outraged by mates immaturity"

Roles may switch at different times = tension between fading youth and adult search for stability

Bottomline: "The truth is, every relationship needs maintenance and improvement on a regular basis."

"How to Fight Fairly in Your Marriage"⁴

"The way a married couple fights can often tell psychologists more than what they fight about. If done correctly, conflict and healthy, fair fighting, can strengthen a marriage."

Here's How:

1. Don't let little things that bother you build up until one of you explodes the issue into a large fight.
2. If you are angry about something and don't try to talk about it with your spouse within 48 hours, let it go.
3. If your spouse doesn't want to discuss the matter, set an appointment within the next 24 hours.
4. Know what the issue is. Then, both of you stick to the subject.
5. Keep your fight between the two of you. Don't bring in third parties like your mother-in-law or his best friend.
6. Don't hit below the belt. [No cheap shots]
7. Don't bring up past history.
8. No name calling. Even endearing terms and pet names can be hurtful when you are using a sarcastic tone.
9. Be careful how you use humor. Laughter is good, but teasing can be misinterpreted and can be hurtful.
10. Listen to one another fully while you fight. This includes watching body language. Look at one another while you speak.
11. Don't interrupt during your fight.
12. Don't blame one another and don't make accusations.
13. Try to use 'I' sentences instead of 'you' sentences.
14. If the two of you aren't extremely angry, try to hold hands while talking during your fight.
15. Be open to asking for forgiveness and being willing to forgive.

Tips:

1. Even though it may be hard to forgive your spouse, not forgiving can cause more harm both emotionally and physically to yourself and to your marriage. Holding a grudge is letting someone else live in your head rent free.
2. Remember to not fight to win, but to fight for your relationship.
3. Conflict is not the problem. All married couples have disagreements. It's not knowing how to effectively argue that creates difficulty in a marriage.

What You Need:

- Conflict management skills
- A sense of fairness

Blaming - Holding Grudges and Forgiving

Our Relationship with our Spouses

- Putting marriage first
- Willingness to forgive
- Ability to listen

“Making Marriage Work by Fighting Fairly”

“Some couples claim that they never argue. That’s next to impossible in marriages where both partners feel free to express their differences. Other couples have frequent arguments that sometimes get very loud. However, the volume and frequency of fights aren’t very telling — nor are the issues that a couple fights about. The most important question is: Are the fights fair?”

“In marriage, you and your spouse have to referee your own disputes without help from a third party, so you need to hammer out rules and limits that work for you. The two of you can set flexible boundaries that suit your individual personalities and your marriage — as long as you follow the rules of fair fighting.”

Understand what’s really going on

“Different strategies are effective for handling different kinds of arguments ... When you sense that a fight is about to erupt between you and your partner, try to scope out the underlying cause of the argument:

“Are you or your spouse just letting off steam?” If so, “it’s sometimes a good idea to say nothing and let him or her cool down.”

“Is there something specific that you want your partner to do?” If so, “a direct approach often works best.”

“Are your angry words an expression of serious differences or conflict in your marriage?” If so, “consider seeking out professional help.”

Stick to the issues

“You’re more likely to get your partner to see things your way if you avoid personal attacks and concentrate on what you’re trying to accomplish. For example, if you’re upset because your wife is late, don’t say, ‘You have absolutely no consideration for other people.’ Instead, try saying: ‘I feel more relaxed and have a much better time when we get to places a few minutes early. Can we do it that way next time?’ Your partner is likely to respond to your needs if she doesn’t feel attacked and forced to defend herself.”

Look for ways to bend without breaking

“In a successful marriage, both partners must be able to compromise and negotiate. Sometimes, the two of you can find a middle ground. If, for example, you want to spend your two-week summer vacation at the shore and he wants to spend it at a resort with a golf course, you can work it out in several different ways:

- You can both spend a week at the shore, then a week at the resort.
- You can each spend a portion of your vacation time apart.
- You can agree to go to the shore this summer, and to the golf resort next summer.

“Figure out what’s at stake for each of you — and defer to the partner whose needs are stronger. For example, if your wife has had a particularly stressful year and you know that she finds spending time near the ocean relaxing, consider taking the kind of vacation she wants this summer.

“In the long run, it’s most important that the outcome of your disagreement doesn’t leave one of you feeling like a loser. If you yield on an issue that’s important to your partner, it’s likely that your partner will do the same for you on another occasion.”

Use strategic timing

“Be sensitive to your partner’s shifting moods. Is your husband rushed and frazzled most mornings? If so, don’t raise difficult issues when you wake up, especially if they’re going to require a long discussion. Instead, pick a time when he seems more relaxed and positively disposed.

“Timing your request doesn’t mean that you’re walking on eggshells or that you’re afraid to speak. It simply means that if your partner is in a negative frame of mind, he may say no to something that he’d agree to at another time.”

Blaming - Holding Grudges and Forgiving

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Don't garbage-bag

"When people get into an argument, they often start with one issue, segue into another, and wind up throwing in everything but the kitchen sink. They then bring up a host of past grudges and resentments.

"Discuss only one issue at a time. If you're arguing about household finances, don't throw up her tendency to be late, or that he burned the chicken when preparing last night's dinner. When you do that, you're sure to wind up fighting about personalities — not issues.

"Don't try to fix your partner. Marital arguments often give husbands and wives an excuse to practice a little dime-store psychology. Someone will say things like, 'The problem is that you're just like your mother,' or, 'We're not going to get anywhere until you get over your neurosis.' Your spouse needs to feel loved and respected for who he or she is!"

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

Remember the Power of Humor & Communication

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting and decide how he will bring some humor into his marriage when he goes home tonight. He should develop a plan and use it during the weekend.

Bible Readings

1. Psalms 33:1-4

Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise. For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth.

2. Acts 2:28

Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

Small Group Questions

1. Can you remember the last time you laughed with your wife – just the two of you without the kids or a TV?
2. What brings joy to both of you – can you name 3 things?
3. Can you make fun of yourself and get her to laugh
4. What do you plan to inject some laughter tonight?

Recommended Readings

- 1.

Recommended Resources

1. A Time to Laugh

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/mp/2004/002/15.48.html>

Why having fun keeps the joy in our marriage.

By Erin Smalley

I'm married to a joker. Greg can see the funny side of anything, even in the dead of night, or when disaster strikes. He's always playing practical jokes on me. So I was delighted the day I finally got "pay back."

My plan was simple: hide in a dark corner and ambush Greg as he walked in the house from the garage. It was perfect! While some people don't like to be scared, my husband thrives on it. I knew he'd find it hilarious—and I'd get him back for all his practical jokes.

The garage door lifted slowly as Greg's Honda Civic approached after a long day at work.

He'll never expect this, I thought, and laughed as I anticipated the look on his face.

I giggled as I hid in the corner awaiting his arrival. I remained perfectly still as the door opened. Greg took two steps in and then noticed a dark, sinister figure standing near his left shoulder. At that exact moment I leaned in toward him. Startled, Greg let out a shrieking yelp and flew back into the door.

"Sweet revenge!" I yelled as Greg massaged his pounding heart. We exchanged high-fives and embraced.

"Welcome home!" I said, as we both laughed.

After Greg and I settled into a quiet evening, I began to reflect on the fact that one of my favorite things about our marriage is the fun we have together. I smiled as I remembered Greg's scream and the joy it gave me to scare him. The best part was when, later that evening, he told me how my little practical joke actually helped him feel connected to me. Who knew that my prank could turn into emotional intimacy?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

During our 12 years of marriage, Greg and I have discovered that laughter is healthy, both emotionally and physically. Having a sense of humor helps keep our relationship fresh.

One of the first things that attracted me to Greg was his ability to make me laugh. Laughter brought me joy during our courtship, and it continues to bring me happiness all these years later. Often in the midst of life's chaos, a simple smile or a giggle can lighten tense situations. It creates a relaxed kind of intimacy. Greg claims that after a long day at work, coming home to an environment filled with laughter significantly eases his stress level.

Humor in marriage has always fascinated me. As I researched what the experts had to say about fun in marriage, I was overwhelmed by its importance. In his book *Fighting for Your Marriage*, marriage researcher Dr. Howard Markman reports that the amount of fun couples had together emerged as the single strongest factor in their overall marital happiness. Other positives were occurring in these relationships—but good relationships became great when they were preserving both the quantity and quality of fun times together.

But the sad truth is that many couples no longer share the type of fun they had when they were dating or newly married. It's almost as though the daily grind of life has zapped their ability and/or desire to have fun together. It certainly makes sense: keeping up with jobs, kids, church, and friends makes it increasingly difficult to find time together. Throw conflict into the pot, and you have the perfect environment for removing the fun from life.

Greg and I made a commitment that our relationship would never lose that sense of fun. So we've made it a priority—we even schedule it on our calendars! And we protect that time. We don't talk about difficult topics or bring up subject matter that may lead to conflict.

Over the years I can recall how laughter and fun have influenced both stressful and joyful times in our home. From recovering after a C-section delivery (although that did hurt to laugh!) to roaring at the hilarious things our kids say to planning our practical jokes, laughter has continued to bring Greg and me closer in our relationship. And that, of course, has been great fun!

2. Laughter and Humor in Your Marriage

<http://marriage.about.com/od/humor/qt/laughter.htm>

One of the great joys of marriage is the time that you, as a couple, spend laughing together and enjoying your sense of humor. Here are the benefits of laughter and humor, and ways to increase laughter in your marriage.

Laughter is a marvelous gift. It releases chemicals in your brain which can enhance your day and reduce your stress. Additionally, laughter and humor are vital to good health. Laughter is healthy for a marriage, both emotionally and physically.

Benefits of Laughter

Reduction of stress and tension.

Stimulation of your immune system.

An increase of natural painkillers in your blood.

A decrease in systemic inflammation.

Reduction of your blood pressure.

Lifts your spirits.

Laughter and humor relieve tension, lift spirits, and bring couples closer together.

Having a sense of humor as a couple can help keep your relationship fresh.

Ways to Increase Laughter in Your Lives

Be aware of the humorous moments in each day.

Make it a habit for everyone in your family to share at dinner something funny that happened to them.

Take delight in comedies on television and at the movies.

Remember the Power of Humor & Communication

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Watch classic funny movies and television shows.

Share funny jokes and cartoons with each other.

Create funny Halloween costumes as a couple.

Reflect on funny times in your past together.

Together, work on building your sense of humor. Couples who can laugh at themselves or at their situation usually feel stronger when problems arise. Laughter can sometimes release negative tension both physically and psychologically.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

How to talk about and manage money with your spouse

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting and have a plan to discuss finances and the management of money with his wife. We need to share with our spouse how money is best handled in our house. Reach agreement on how it is managed, what our priorities are, and how we will not make money divisive in our relationship.

Bible Readings

1. Proverbs 8:12, 18-21

"I, Wisdom, dwell with experience, and judicious knowledge I attain.

With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity.

My fruit is better than gold, yes, than pure gold, and my revenue than choice silver.

On the way of duty I walk, along the paths of justice,

2. 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Indeed, religion with contentment is a great gain.

For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it.

If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that.

Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.

3. Matthew 25:14-30

"It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them.

To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one--to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five.

Likewise, the one who received two made another two.

But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them.

The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.'

His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.'

(Then) the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.'

His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.'

Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.'

His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return?

Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten.

For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2402-2406

In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. The appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men.

The *right to private property*, acquired or received in a just way, does not do away with the original gift of the earth to the whole of mankind. The *universal destination of goods* remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise.

"In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself." The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his

Goods of production - material or immaterial - such as land, factories, practical or artistic skills, oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. Those who hold goods for use and consumption should use them with moderation, reserving the better part for guests, for the sick and the poor.

Political authority has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership for the sake of the common good.

2. Paragraph 2429

Everyone has the *right of economic initiative*; everyone should make legitimate use of his talents to contribute to the abundance that will benefit all and to harvest the just fruits of his labor. He should seek to observe regulations issued by legitimate authority for the sake of the common good.

Small Group Questions

1. Have you openly discussed and agreed with your spouse the management of money?
2. How can we avoid using money as an unfair influence in our relationship?
3. Does having more money fix the problem?
4. What are the steps you can take to agree on spending, donations, savings, etc?

Recommended Resources

1. A Couple's Guide to Managing Money
<http://biz.yahoo.com/pfg/e39couple/>
2. How to Stop Fighting With Your Spouse About Money
<http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/2008/01/23/how-to-stop-fighting-with-your-spouse-about-money/>

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Many sources cite money as the number one cause of marital strife. Some of you probably know this from first-hand experience. I can relate, too. My wife and I are very close, but money has always been a touchy subject, and unfortunately has led to a more than a few “disagreements”.

Last year, we decided to [get control of our money](#) instead of allowing our money to control us. I did extensive reading and research, and we began to [put some changes into place](#). Since then, we’ve learned what works for us and what doesn’t. We are not experts, but I will say this: since we began this journey, we haven’t once fought over our money.

Here are seven actions you can take today to stop fighting with your spouse about money. They worked for us, and they’ll probably work for you.

Be a team: There is no “I” in “Team”

Between talking with people and listening to callers on [The Dave Ramsey Show](#), I’m surprised by the number of married people who talk about their finances and converse as if their spouse doesn’t even exist: “When I do the budget”, “When I pay the bills”, “I am working two jobs to provide extra income”, “I...I...I”.

Shouldn’t they be saying “We”? With so many “I”s everywhere, it’s no wonder couples are fighting — they aren’t communicating! The best way to manage your finances is *together*. Create your financial plan together, do the bills together, review your net worth together. If you do anything related to your finances, make sure your spouse is involved *and* has a say so in the decision process.

Develop a budget — together!

From personal experience, one cause of fights (or “fussing”, as we call it in the South) is one spouse spending what the other spouse considers too much money. This is generally a problem when the couple is already fairly tight on finances, or when one spouse is far more frugal than the other.

To resolve this issue, [create a budget](#) together. It’s not important how you do it or what method you use, but that you *create the budget together*. If both spouses don’t have input in the budget, they won’t “have any skin in the game”. Both should provide input on the numbers and be part of the process.

Hold weekly budget review meetings

If one spouse is doing all of the finances, it’s very difficult for the other spouse to know the current financial state. Even with a budget, a lack of communication can make it difficult to know how much is left in the “grocery category” or the “entertainment category”.

To solve this problem, pick one night of the week to review your finances. Pick a time when you and your spouse can devote 15-30 minutes without interruption. For us, this is after our younger children are in bed. I generally update our finances daily, but I always make sure the budget is updated before our meeting.

I print a copy of the budget that shows the amount we allocated for each category and how much we have remaining. We review each category and discuss the amounts remaining and any expected expenditures for the week. If we are short in one area and over in another, we move the money around. If we are just short, we either decide to cut back and not spend, or we pull the funds from the emergency fund.

Review your finances frequently. Communicate. You’ll be amazed at the difference a little communication makes.

Establish an emergency fund

The most important thing you can do to keep your finances under control — and to avoid using credit cards and going into debt — is to establish an emergency fund. Nothing stresses a couple more than running out of money before all the bills are paid. Even worse is having the air conditioner or the car break down without money to get it fixed.

Establish a \$1000-\$2000 emergency fund and put it in a [high-interest savings account](#). The emergency fund will cover those unexpected expenses. The key is that each spouse must agree to not touch these funds without the other’s agreement. This keeps the emergency fund from being used to buy big-screen TVs or designer pocket books.

It’s okay to make mistakes

Being the detailed geeky type that I am, when we first started budgeting, I wanted the budget to be perfect. I wanted us to follow it perfectly. While discussing our finances one night, I found that my wife hated the budgeting process. After some discussion, I realized it wasn’t the budgeting process she hated, but how I handled it.

How to talk about and manage money with your spouse

Our Relationship with our Spouses

The budget isn't going to be perfect. It should get better as you do it more, but it will never be perfect. That's okay. If you are off, just move the money around. If you overspend, tap the emergency fund — just be sure to put the money back. You'll find that the longer you follow a budget, the easier and more accurate it becomes.

Like everything else, it's a journey. If you're like us, just having a budget will be a *huge* leap in the right direction.

Agree to hold each other accountable

After we agree on the budget for the upcoming month, my wife and I do a pinky shake. Is this a little silly? Sure, but it works for us. Every time I am in the store and see some new shiny electronic gadget I want, that pinky shake reminds me of the commitment I made. That little shake makes me question if I need the item or not. I can't tell you how many times I've walked out of a store empty-handed because of that little shake.

The point is to think of something both of you can do to commit to each other. That little reminder is worth its weight in gold.

Get out of debt

Debt is a dark cloud that follows you constantly. Debt puts pressure on your finances, and ultimately on your marriage. Getting out of debt will give you financial freedom and peace of mind. If you are in debt, stop getting further in debt right now. If you have credit cards, shred them. Is your car payment way too high? Sell it and buy something you can afford. Is your mortgage beyond your means? Sell the house.

Once you have stopped going further into debt, begin aggressively paying what you owe. My wife and I started this process about six months ago, and it's brought us closer together.

What do you do to keep from fighting over your finances? Have you used any of these ideas? Have they worked for you? Kris and I mostly keep separate finances, so our approach is different. I'm curious to hear what works for people with joint accounts.

3. Money and Marriage -- Persuading Your Spouse to Save

<http://www.passionsaving.com/money-and-marriage.html>

She loves you.

Now you know that can't be bad.

--The Beatles, "She Loves You"

Marriage and Money: Suggestion #1 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Keep Your Expectations in Check.

Understand that your spouse has a different personality than you and takes in information in different ways. Don't expect what works for you to work for your spouse.

It will probably take some for you to figure out what works for your spouse. Try to exercise patience.

Managing your money well is in many ways akin to managing your diet well. All of us who have tried to lose weight have had moments when we wished that results could be obtained more quickly. When I have one of those moments, I remind myself that weight isn't usually put on quickly either, and that that reality will help lock things in after the weight is taken off. It's like that with saving. Learning to save effectively takes time, but provides benefits for a long time to come. Approaches that generate quick results are suspect.

Marriage and Money: Suggestion #2 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Keep Money Issues in Perspective.

Saving is important. I wouldn't have devoted so many years of my life to studying it if I didn't think it were a topic of great importance. I learn all the time of still more reasons for seeing saving as important.

It's not the only important thing, however. Don't let your desire to help your spouse learn how to save more effectively cause a rift in your marriage. Do not do this. Do not do this. Do not do this.

You are asking your spouse to change. That's difficult. Always keep in mind that you are asking something hard of your spouse.

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Don't quit, though. Pushing too hard is a mistake. Pushing too soft is a mistake too. When you find yourself pushing too hard, remind yourself what the marriage means to you. When you find yourself pushing too soft, remind yourself what the marriage means to you.

Huh?

You will hurt the relationship if this matters and you drop it because you encounter some resistance. You have a need to have a spouse that manages his or her money more effectively. And your spouse has a need to have a spouse that pushed him or her to manage his or her money more effectively. Helping your spouse is part of the deal. Giving up isn't helping.

Apply only so much pressure, but do apply some pressure. I mentioned that this improvement project is hard on your spouse. It's hard on you too. The hard part for you is knowing just how much to push.

You need to rely on all of your knowledge of what makes your spouse tick to figure that one out. There is no such thing as a pure money topic. Successful money steps are money steps taken with an appreciation of how the money issues in question relate to other aspects of your quest to make something meaningful out of your life.

Money questions matter. Non-money questions matter too.

Marriage and Money: Suggestion #3 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Watch for the Miscommunication That Goes With Being in Love.

Everyone wants to manage his or her money effectively. I mean, come on.

The reason why you are hearing resistance to your ideas is that your spouse hears the words you say as signifying something other than what they signify for you.

You say: "I want to know that we will have enough money to be able to retire." Your spouse hears: "I want you to give up on some of your crazy dreams and start being more responsible and boring."

You say: "Do you really need to pay \$3 for coffee everyday?" Your spouse hears: "I don't think of you as being so special that you deserve extravagant treats just for showing up at work."

You say: "I'm worried that we have so little to fall back on if you lost your job." Your spouse hears: "I don't have confidence in you."

Does the fact that your spouse hears things in such scrambled-up ways mean that he or she is a doofus? Oh, no. It means that this guy (or gal) is in love with you!

A guy (or gal) who is in love with you can't stand to think that he (or she) is letting you down in any way. It's often not possible to talk with a spouse with as much ease as you can talk to a friend because your spouse is so much more than a friend. The more caring that is there, the more delicate is the communication issue.

Marriage and Money: Suggestion #4 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Let Your Spouse Do it His or Her Way.

Some people cannot tolerate the idea of being given a set amount of spending money for the month. Some people are just fine with the idea. Don't assume that because you cannot stand it your spouse cannot stand it either. If that is what works for him (or her), use that.

Some people save by cutting out luxuries. Some people really enjoy luxuries and cannot bear the idea of giving them up. Perhaps your spouse can listen to pleas to spend less on luxuries, but not to pleas to give them up altogether. Perhaps you could frame your saving arguments in such a way as to persuade your spouse that saving effectively allows you both to enjoy more luxuries over the course of your lives.

You're trying to change your spouse and that's always a delicate business. Make the changes being suggested as palatable as possible by designing them in ways that makes sense to your spouse.

Marriage and Money: Suggestion #5 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Make It Romantic.

The saving quest is a romantic quest.

There was something I read about divorce once that made an impression on me. The author of the book I was reading noted that couples that divorce can never look at their photo albums in the same way again. All of the pictures have that person in them, or some friend or relative of that person, or were taken in a place you went to with that person.

How to talk about and manage money with your spouse

Our Relationship with our Spouses

The photo album problem is hardly the biggest problem that comes with divorce. There's a sense in which it is a very big deal, though. We look at photo albums to review our progress through life. We feel weepy when we look at our high school yearbooks because we think back to the challenges we faced back then with the knowledge that we have overcome some of them that we thought we would not be able to overcome and we have failed to overcome some others that we thought we would be able to overcome. Our lives are a story. Every day we write the book on our romantic quest to make our lives mean something.

The point of saving is to become able to do more exciting things with your life. So many money advisors miss this. It's a point of critical importance. It's the reason why saving, properly understood, is not at all a boring business. It's exciting stuff.

Your spouse is your partner in your romantic quest and you are her (or his) partner in her (or his) romantic quest. Use this.

Budgets are sexy. True fact. Spend three hours going through each item in your budget and talking over how that money could be put to different uses so that both of you can make more of your lives and you are going to close the budget binder turned on about the idea of spending some quiet time with your spouse.

Please do try this at home. Budget sex is great sex.

Marriage and Money -- Suggestion #6 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Celebrate the Victories.

Each step forward creates momentum. Saving effectively gets easier and easier and easier over time. It's like running. It's boring the first time because you are out of shape. It's fun after you get good at it.

Don't get greedy when your spouse makes progress. You don't want to be a nag pushing for more. Remember the importance of patience. Let your spouse enjoy the satisfaction that comes with having made some progress. Have confidence that the wheels will begin to turn on their own power if you give them a chance.

At some point, your spouse will be asking questions about ways to save even more effectively. That will happen when he or she begins to think of the saving idea as his (or her) idea. If you nag, this never happens. If it happens, the wagon starts picking up speed quickly.

Marriage and Money -- Suggestion #7 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Don't Let It Become a Chore

The single biggest reason why many people are not able to save effectively is that saving has come to be viewed in such negative terms. Saving is for tightwads. Saving is for misers. Saving is for losers. Saving is for the timid.

Don't sell it that way.

Saving is spending less on some things so that you can spend more on other things. Saving is spending less at some times so that you can spend more at other times. Saving, properly understood, is always about making better choices and obtaining greater value from a limited pool of earnings. Saving is buying freedom, and freedom is cool.

If your spouse has doubts about this, use some of the savings to finance a splurge. Make saving enjoyable. Think about diets again. You lose more weight on a diet that never again permits you to eat ice cream. Except for one thing. You don't stick with a diet that never again permits you to eat ice cream.

You want your spouse to sign on to a spending plan that will last for a long time. There's got to be some pleasure in it for that to happen.

Marriage and Money -- Suggestion #8 for Persuading Your Spouse to Save -- Do Your Part Regardless of What Your Spouse Does.

If you are denying yourself some things you would like to spend money on because you see the importance of saving and your spouse is not doing the same, you are going to feel temptations to give up the cause because it is not working out in a way that is "fair." That's mixed-up thinking.

First of all, you might persuade your spouse over time if you continue the fight on your own. If the spouse who believes in saving gives up, the battle is lost for good.

Second, you will not feel good about yourself if you go along with a spending program that you do not believe in just because it is the only way to get on the same track as your spouse. You want to lift your spouse up, you do not want to permit your spouse to pull you down.

How to talk about and manage money with your spouse

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Things change. The trick is being properly positioned when the change comes. Someday, someday, sometime, your spouse will show interest in saving. You want to be as well-developed in your saving habits as you can possibly be when that day comes.

Don't you end up being the spouse that caused the partnership's saving dream to fail.

With a love like that
You know you should be glad.
Yeah, yeah, yeah!
Yeah, yeah, yeah!
Yeah, yeah, yeah, **yeah!**

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Don't Forget the Simple Things

Objective

Over time we take things for granted. We notice and are drawn to the biggest, brightestthe best! Yet scholars, thinkers, and leaders, past and present, call us to simplify our lives and take joy in life's simplicity. Each man should leave the meeting – and think of what he is going to do to show appreciation for his wife and family by doing the simple things for them. He will live his love with small and regular acts of “unnoticeable” acts of kindness.

Bible Readings

1. Matthew 6 16-19

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.

Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 1803- 1804

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."⁶²

A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.

The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.⁶³

Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good.

The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with

2. Paragraphs 1833- 1845

Virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good.

The human virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They can be grouped around the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

Prudence disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it.

Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.

Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

Temperance moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods.

Our Relationship with our Spouses

The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them.

The theological virtues dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have God for their origin, their motive, and their object - God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake.

There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them.

By faith, we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief.

By hope we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it.

By charity, we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God. Charity, the form of all the virtues, "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (*Col* 3:14).

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Christians are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord

Small Group Questions

1. What are the simple things that add up to big things in your life?
2. What are the simple things that your spouse keeps alive in your marriage....do you let her know that you notice?
3. Who do you know that is the "master" of seeing the power of simple things?
4. What happens when you do forget the simple things?

Recommended Resources

1. Thanksgiving Should Be a Verb

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Nov1997/Editorial.asp>

Sometimes it's easier to think of all the bad things—bombings, murders, illness, misfortune—in the world than the good things. But we must realize that there are good things, even in difficult times, for which we can give thanks.

For example, Anne Frank, the young girl whose diary put a face on the Holocaust, demonstrated her ability to give thanks for the simplest of things: "I do not think of all the misery, but of the glory that remains. Go outside into the fields, nature and the sun, go out and seek happiness in yourself and in God. Think of the beauty that again and again discharges itself within and without you and be happy." Anne Frank was able to realize that, despite her own desperate situation and the fact that she could not venture out of the attic apartment, there were still things for which she could be thankful.

Now think back to the first Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims endured death, disease and numerous hardships in their quest for freedom. The Pilgrims, being unfamiliar with the New World, knew little of how to grow the crops for food that they so desperately needed. The Native Americans showed them how to grow and harvest the necessary crops. The Pilgrims, given what they had been through, could have taken that knowledge and run with it, without giving a second thought to the graciousness of the Native Americans. Instead, the Pilgrims invited them to share in their bounty as a way of expressing their thanks.

And so as we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving, let us reflect on our reasons to be thankful and resolve ourselves to give thanks—both in word and in action—even after our Thanksgiving celebration is over.

Combining the Sacred and the Secular

The Thanksgiving holiday, although particularly American in its celebration, contains many counterparts throughout the world and religious spectrum. In Judaism, for example, Sukkot is the fall celebration of thanksgiving to God for the bounty of the earth.

For Catholics, the act of thanksgiving is at the very heart of our celebrations and beliefs. Every time we share in the Eucharist (which means thanksgiving, gratitude), we thank God for the gifts God has given us.

Don't Forget the Simple Things

Our Relationship with our Spouses

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says it well: “The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all that he has accomplished through creation, redemption and sanctification. Eucharist means first of all ‘thanksgiving’”(1360).

Every time we gather for Eucharist, we celebrate the promise of the living Christ through Jesus’ resurrection, but how many of us live out that promise throughout the year? How many of us take the thanksgiving of the Eucharist and make it active in our lives outside Mass?

Mother Teresa’s recent death was a sorrowful occasion for the world over. We mourn for our loss and praise her for her work. But the irony is that Mother Teresa considered herself blessed to be able to minister to the poor. She gave thanks for the opportunity God had given her to work with the orphaned, the crippled, the sick, the dying and all those who were unwanted or unloved. To Mother Teresa, they were Jesus in disguise.

She once said, “You have to be holy in your position as you are, and I have to be holy in the position that God has put me. So it is nothing extraordinary to be holy. Holiness is not the luxury of the few. Holiness is a simple duty for you and for me. We have been created for that.”

Do we give thanks for opportunities presented to us through which we can praise God? Do we recognize the “Mother Teresas” of our own communities and give them our thanks and support?

Giving Thanks for Simple Things

Author Sarah Ban Breathnach has tapped into the importance of being grateful for things in your life. Her book *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy* is a 500-page meditation book which helps women find fulfillment by appreciating what they already have. The book is accompanied by the *Simple Abundance* journal, which calls for the owner to list things daily for which he or she is grateful.

The fact that the book has been on *The New York Times* best-seller list for 76 weeks (at the time of this writing), with 2.2 million copies in print, says something about our human need to give thanks.

But once we write down what we’re grateful for that day, what’s the next step? Is it enough simply to write things every day for a year so that we can go back later and read them? Or is it better to take those things as a starting point for action?

For example, perhaps you are thankful for being surrounded by family and friends on Thanksgiving Day, sharing a wonderful meal. But what about all those who may not have family with whom to celebrate, or will have nothing close to the meal you will enjoy on this holiday? Is there some way in which you could express your gratitude through sharing your plenty with someone who’s alone or down and out?

The “Blessing in Thanksgiving for the Harvest,” contained in the *Book of Blessings*, further reminds us “...to maintain and live in an attitude of gratitude to God. Therefore, let us now bless the Lord, who has once again bestowed on us the fruits of the earth. Abel offered his firstfruits to God; let us also learn to share our blessings for the good of those in need, so that we may be true children of the Father, who bestows his gifts for the benefit of all the peoples of the earth.”

So as we gather around the table for Thanksgiving dinner, may we be inspired to remember that truly giving thanks is more than something we say. It’s something we do. —S.H.B.

2. A Catholic Physician Talks to Engaged Couples

<http://www.catholicculture.org/library/view.cfm?recnum=8180>

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that in all we do, we seek happiness. The primary source of earthly happiness for human beings — more than work, hobbies, sports, politics or any other interest — is those who are most dear to us. For most people, these dear ones are our family members: husbands, wives, children, parents, etc. Therefore, the way we live our family lives is essential to our happiness. The prevalence of broken homes suggests that many families have not found a way to live happily together. Today we will discuss how to live marriage in a way that brings maximal happiness to both husband and wife and in turn to the children. We will address specifically those ways in which the husband and wife communicate with each other in their intimate relations.

Don't Forget the Simple Things

Page 151 of 162

Our Relationship with our Spouses

But first, a preface. When we talk about marriage, we are talking about a union of one man and one woman. Whatever other kinds of relationships we see around us, whatever they are called, and whatever people do in those relationships, they are not marriage. Marriage arises out of human nature itself. It is recognized but not created by society. Marriage always has been and always will be between one man and one woman.

The human person is both material and spiritual. The body is "animated" (vivified, made alive) by the soul. The human person, a unity of body and soul, is created in the image and likeness of God. The body, then, is not a puppet to be manipulated or a possession to be used, but an essential aspect of the person. One expression that I have found helpful in understanding the wonderful mystery of the human body is that the body is "the material expression of the soul." The immortal human soul, created by God in an act of personal love for each human being, actually makes the body what it is.

We see this nexus of body and soul in the creation of each child in his mother's womb. The sperm and egg, the matter contributed by father and mother, are transformed and elevated at the moment of conception into a new human person. From that moment on the human soul "informs" the body. This new baby boy or girl is entirely distinct from father and mother, even though he or she is very small and hidden in the mother's womb. It is that spark of life, the human soul, that makes the new child a unique human person. All growth and development from that point forward are guided and directed by that human soul, that principle of life; they could not occur in its absence. From the moment of conception, that person's sex, race, physical features and temperament are determined. (DNA, often credited with "causing" these attributes, is merely an intermediate, instrumental cause. Without life — the functioning of the body in a unified and coordinated way through animation by the soul — DNA is nothing but a complex but inert molecule.)

The marvelous action of the soul is perhaps most clearly revealed at the opposite end of life — at the moment of death. Up to that moment, a person is present; afterward, only "remains" remain. The soul, and with it the person, have "departed." At conception, the opposite process occurs: at one moment there are present merely two parts of the mother's and father's bodies, of no great loss if not united; at the next moment these mere cells have fused to become a new living human person, created by God and informed by a new human soul.

Vive la difference

Each human person is unique, but men and women express this individual humanity in different ways. As the French say of men and women, "*Vive la difference!*" The unique human soul of each individual reveals itself differently in men and women. The bodies, emotions, personalities and even thought processes of men and women have their own distinct characteristics. Neither man nor woman is superior or inferior; they are, in fact, complementary. Since these bodies, personalities, emotions and thought processes are expressions of the soul, they reveal the nature of the male or female person.

Pope John Paul II described the "nuptial meaning of the body." Nuptial of course means "having to do with a wedding." A man and a woman are made not for themselves but for each other. Now, it is hardly necessary to explain this truth to engaged couples who are deeply in love with each other. It is something they feel with all their hearts, with all their being. But this great truth has meaning that extends beyond falling in love, getting engaged and getting married. It means something about how this love is to be lived out in the long lives that, God willing, engaged couples will spend with each other.

The nuptial meaning of the body reveals the true nature of marriage: a relationship of complete mutual self-donation. Husband and wife give themselves to each other body and soul. They no longer live for themselves but for each other. This self-surrender is far from easy. You will be called upon to give more of yourself than you could have imagined you are capable of giving. You will find yourselves stretched, pulled and expanded in new and unexpected ways. If you respond with love to every demand, trial and crisis in your marriage, you will grow more mature, more generous, more patient, more kind and more selfless. You will be practicing a love that will change you into a new person who will be capable of living an eternity of love. That's what the family is for — to prepare husbands, wives and children for heaven.

Now some people might say that the sacrifice is too great, that no one can just give and give and give. But as I am sure you have heard, "It is in giving that we receive." In giving more than we ever thought we could, we receive more reward than we ever could have imagined. Marriage is, in fact, the only vocation that promises a measure of happiness, even a foretaste of heaven, on this earth.

Don't Forget the Simple Things

Our Relationship with our Spouses

I once heard a wise priest say that if married couples go into marriage with a plan to share everything fifty-fifty — all the responsibilities, all the privileges, all the give and take — that their marriage will be unhappy. Instead it is necessary to plan to give one hundred percent, even while receiving little or nothing. If each of the spouses has an attitude of total self-giving, then they will have a chance of true happiness in their marriage.

How does this play out in the practical order? Most couples work out a fair division of labor around the house, and usually this involves a fairly traditional pattern: the husband takes out the trash; the wife cooks; they do the dishes together. But these are relatively arbitrary; as long as both pitch in willingly, the jobs will get done one way or another. Ladies, since you will almost inevitably do more than your share, try to be pleased with your husband's sincere efforts, no matter how small. Gentlemen, only by striving constantly to do more than your share will you come even close to a fair share. (No, these stereotypes are not universal — they probably describe only about ninety-nine percent of marriages.)

Nature

In other areas, the roles of husband and wife are more pre-determined by nature. Women are neither the slaves nor the property of men — nor vice versa. Husbands and wives are equal partners. God created Eve as "a partner fit for [Adam]." As soon as he met Eve, Adam said with delight: "Here then is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones." But equal partnership and equal worth do not mean sameness. Rather it is the complementarity of man and woman that makes each of them perfectly suited to be the answer to the other's deepest needs, to make each other complete.

In general, men tend to be protective, women to be nurturing; men are more methodical, women more intuitive; men look at the longer view, women are more sensitive to immediate needs; men's reasoning is more cognitive, women's is more tuned in to emotions. These tendencies, of course, vary among individuals and couples, but are generally true.

Another wise priest once said, "Men and women have different strengths and different weaknesses and the strengths of one are precisely suited to fill up the needs of the other." Woman's greatest danger is loneliness; the role of her husband is to provide companionship. (A word to the guys: Forget the bowling night, or whatever other "night out with the guys" you may now enjoy, or at least make sure it's a much lower priority than spending time with your wife. Your new best buddy is sitting next to you now.)

On the other hand, a man's greatest danger is discouragement. The responsibility of earning a living, supporting a family, making one's way in a competitive and even hostile world can be daunting. Women's greatest gift to their husbands, then, is support and encouragement. Tell him how wonderful you think he is, what a great provider he is, how strong he is and how much you depend on him. Save the nitpicking and criticism for another time, preferably your prayer time. Bring your complaints to the Lord before you lay them on your husband.

The greatness of motherhood

I speak of the husband as the provider. I know that it is fashionable these days for women to have jobs, and to do them very successfully. But I think we also know deep down inside that something is missing in this modern rat race. Maybe it's that sense of complementarity: that men and women are different, yet each is wonderful and essential. I think that this is clearest when we think of men and women as fathers and mothers. As any small child would tell you if they could, mothers and fathers are not interchangeable. Children know that if you're looking for adventure, go with Dad; if you need comfort, no one will do but Mom.

Gentlemen, it is good — to use an old-fashioned word, it is manly — to take on the responsibility of providing for your family. Ladies, it is, to use another old-fashioned word, womanly to be a homemaker. What could be more loving than to make a home for those you love most? Especially when you are blessed with children, remember that, while the workplace holds many attractions, no job is more important — or more rewarding — than caring for your children.

The great English author G. K. Chesterton described the greatness of motherhood: "To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays; to be Whiteley within a certain area, providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes and books, to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology and hygiene; I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people's children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing

Don't Forget the Simple Things

Page 153 of 162

Our Relationship with our Spouses

to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? No; a woman's function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute."

Many mothers work outside the home, of course, not because they want to leave their children, but because they feel they must. No doubt, raising a family on one income is difficult. The sacrifices are great. The second car, the larger house, the vacations: all of these must be put off, perhaps for a very long time. But if the sacrifices are great, the rewards are so much greater. To see your baby's first smile, his first steps, to hear his first "Mama" — these are great joys that can never mean as much to a day care worker or even to a grandmother as they do to a mother. Children really do need their very own mothers, and no one else can replace you in this role. Other people might be perfectly good at feeding or changing diapers, but motherhood is a personal relationship. If your husband went out of town on business, you would not invite another man to take his place in your home. Yet for a young child, replacing Mom with someone else is at least as strange and unpleasant.

Most families struggle financially in the first few years of marriage but eventually achieve a reasonable level of financial security. A survey of middle-aged married couples, when asked what they would do differently, most frequently gave the response, "We should have had more children." The next response in frequency — for both men and women — was, "I wish I had spent more time with my children." Children grow up fast. Soon they will be gone from the house and on their own. Enjoy every minute with them that you possibly can — and let them thrive in the sunshine of your loving presence.

As Pope John Paul II said, and Pope Benedict repeated, "Do not be afraid!" Do not be afraid to support your family on the husband's earnings alone. Work hard and God will provide. Do not be afraid to reject the standards of the world that claim a woman can find fulfillment only outside of the home.

The nuptial meaning of the body

One area of complementarity, of mutual "fit" between husband and wife, is the body itself. What does the nuptial meaning of the body tell us about the specific act that pertains to marriage? What are some of the common misunderstandings of sexuality in marriage that can lead to unhappiness, alienation and even divorce, and how can they be avoided? I'm sure you've heard the statistic that more than fifty percent of marriages fail. And yet among certain couples who order their marriages in a certain way — that is, without contraception — the divorce rate is closer to two percent. Why such a dramatic difference?

I know a college professor who has been telling her students for years that if they do four simple things, yet still get divorced, she will pay them one thousand dollars — and no one has yet tried to collect on the wager. The four conditions are: 1) chastity before marriage, 2) daily family prayer, 3) weekly family attendance at church and 4) no contraception.

Regarding the first condition, as people in love know, chastity before marriage — that is, abstinence from sexual intercourse and from other intimate sexual contact — is not easy. Fallen human nature has its own biological imperative, and it doesn't like to wait around for the marriage ceremony. Physical intimacy is a great and wonderful gift from God, meant to glue husband and wife together, to bind them to each other so that they are much less likely to drift apart. I strongly encourage you, after you are married, to express your love for each other as often as you possibly can in the marital embrace, subject to mutual respect and the demands of daily living. This wonderful act of self-giving is both a sign and a reconfirmation again and again of the commitment that you will have made to each other in your marriage vows. Some have argued that, because of the physical pleasure involved, sexual intercourse is a selfish act and should be strictly limited or used only for the purpose of having children. This is not a Catholic understanding of marriage. St. Thomas Aquinas once replied to the question "whether there would have been sexual pleasure in Paradise if Adam and Eve had not sinned," that sexual pleasure in Eden would have been greater because of freedom from concupiscence. The union of man and woman in marriage is a great good, and the marital act is an expression of that union. In its essence it is specifically an unselfish act, an act of self-giving. Although, as sinners, husband and wife may at some times treat each other with less than perfect love, or even with unkindness, cruelty or exploitation, the essential nature of the marital act is not exploitative but nurturing. Its fruitfulness extends not merely to the begetting of children, but to a mutual "begetting" — a mutual giving of life and its increase by the spouses to each other. Traditionally the Church has viewed sexual union between husband and wife not as a mere pleasure to be indulged in only rarely and reluctantly, but as a "debt" that each owes to the other, a debt the payment of which should not be withheld without serious cause.

Our Relationship with our Spouses

On the other hand, sexual intercourse outside of marriage is a completely different matter. Yes it's fun, it's pleasurable, it even seems to bring you closer. But it's really a sham. And I think, deep down in our hearts, we really know that. It's the pleasure without the commitment, the attempt to feel oneness without the vow that makes you one. Studies show that couples who co-habitate before marriage have less stable marriages and a higher divorce rate.

What if you've already gone down that road? Well, whether you call them mistakes or sins, we all make wrong decisions. To be a Christian is not to be perfect all the time. It is falling and, with the help of God's grace, getting up — over and over again, if necessary. If you have already engaged in intimate contact, it's not too late. Many people now are discovering the beauty of what is called "secondary chastity," that is, striving anew to live lives of abstinence from sexual intimacy. Of course, it isn't easy. Those bodily urges are still very much in the picture. It will be necessary to avoid temptations, like being alone together in certain situations. It will require changing some of the patterns of relating to each other in physical ways; giving up those things that stir up passion like certain kinds of dancing, kissing, staying out too late, etc. It will require real self-sacrifice, but it will be a great preparation for the self-sacrifices that will be needed in marriage. It's also a great preparation for withstanding temptations to infidelity that may come along later. What a wonderful wedding gift for an engaged couple to give each other: to recommit themselves to sexual purity for the sake of their love for each other!

It's also important to avoid excessively long engagements. As the father of adult children, I know that education is important. But too often, I think, parents are so insistent on education and material security that they urge their children to postpone marriage too long. It's not a good idea to rush into marriage, but it can be an equally bad idea to be too afraid of marriage. If you are unsure of whom you want to marry, don't make a hasty decision. But it is not necessary to have a house in the suburbs and two new cars before you marry. Prolonged engagements almost inevitably lead to sexual temptations; or, to put it in a more positive light, your commitment to chastity can be a great motivator to clear away the fear and the anxieties that are keeping you from an early wedding. When you are yearning to be one with the person you love, material security seems just a bit less important. I suggest that you strive for a good balance of natural and supernatural prudence.

So that's the first of the professor's four conditions: chastity before marriage. The second and third, daily family prayer — together — and weekly family Mass — together — are simply ways of living the truth that we are not alone. Marriage, to be happy, must be holy. We cannot carry by ourselves all the burdens, the stresses and the temptations that will test us. We need Christ not only in our individual spiritual struggles, but also in this most intimate, most holy, most joyful — and most difficult — relationship.

What about the fourth condition, no contraception? Why not? Now we get back to the nuptial meaning of the body. If the body has meaning, if the acts of the body "say" something, what do they say? What, specifically, does the marriage embrace say about total self-giving, which a couple promises each other in their wedding vows? The marital act says three essential things that flow inexorably from the very definition of marriage and from the nuptial meaning of the body: fidelity, permanence and openness to life.

1. *Fidelity*. I see couples here, not triangles or quadrilaterals. Polygamy is not marriage. It is not total mutual self-giving. You cannot give yourself totally to one person if you are trying to give yourself to someone else at the same time. That's pretty clear to most moderns, although many people are confused about what has been called serial monogamy, or the practice of having several spouses in succession. But that brings us to the second of the three intrinsic conditions of marriage.

2. *Permanence*. Marriage lasts "until death do us part." There is no hidden clause in the wedding vow about "until death do us part (unless we get divorced)." It's really simple: until death do us part, period. Now "simple" does not necessarily mean "easy." Simple things are often the most difficult, because we cannot weasel our way out of them. Why does marriage have to be life-long? Why is divorce impossible? You notice I say that divorce is impossible, not that it's wrong. It's simply impossible. Why? Once again, as always, total self-giving! "Total" does not mean "for now," or "until things get tough," or "until I find someone else." Total means always. If it's not for always, it's not marriage.

Now we get to the hard one, or at least the hardest one for us moderns to understand. I really think it is the easiest one to practice, much easier than "fidelity" and "permanence." The third essential, intrinsic, without-which-no-marriage is:

Don't Forget the Simple Things

Our Relationship with our Spouses

3. *Openness to life*. This element is so important that, like the first two, without it there simply is no marriage. A couple who try to marry with the positive intention of avoiding ever having children have an invalid marriage, that is, they really are not married at all. If they are open to having children, they don't necessarily have to be able to have children. The elderly or the infertile, for example, can contract a valid marriage, as long as they are willing to accept the children God sends them, even if that may be only remotely possible. And even those who plan to have children someday may not use contraception. If they must postpone children, they may do so only through natural means.

But why? Why is openness to life considered so important? Again, it's a matter of total mutual self-giving. When a man and a woman promise themselves to each other in marriage, they promise every dimension of themselves — not just their bodies, but their minds, their affections, their decision-making, etc. But fertility, or fruitfulness — the ability to conceive and bear children — is not just a physical attribute; it is part of our very personalities. It is one of those essential aspects of ourselves that we give away when we marry. This capacity to procreate, to participate in God's act of love in creating a new human person, does not belong to us as individuals; it belongs to our husband or wife. A wife gives to her husband her capacity to be a mother to his children; a husband gives to his wife his capacity to be a father to her children. This most intimate and essential part of our very selves is a gift we have given away to our spouses. This fruitfulness is a sharing in the image and likeness of God, in a way that no other creature can do. Lower animals can reproduce, but they cannot procreate, i.e. bring into being a new person. Only human beings, in a voluntary act of love, can participate in God's act of creating a new immortal soul. Not even the angels are made so perfectly in God's image.

The total gift of self, which husbands and wives promise each other in their wedding vows, is made real in each expression of love in the marital embrace. If that sacramental sign — that making real — of the covenant of marriage is distorted by contraception, it is falsified; it loses its meaning. It becomes a lie.

Even if husband and wife mutually agree to this truncation of the full meaning of the marriage act, they are simply agreeing to lie to each other. Their bodies speak an irrevocable truth, the truth of total self-giving, yet with contraception the couple denies the true meaning of what their bodies are saying. With their bodies they say, "I give you everything I am and will ever be," but contraception adds, "but not my fruitfulness. I do not give you my power to be a father or mother. I do not give you myself as a procreator with you and with God of a new human soul. I refuse you this most sacred and central dimension of my being. I refuse to be the father or mother of your child. And I reject your gift of self; I reject your power to be the mother or father of my child." Their act becomes an act not of mutual self-giving, but of mutual exploitation, of merely using each other for pleasure. It is really no wonder that such marriages become strained and weakened, often fatally so.

Fear of the child

It is unnecessary, I think, to go through the whole catalog of pills, diaphragms, devices, chemicals, condoms, soups and sauces that people use to avoid children. Many of them are promoted with lies. Pills, IUDs, hormonal patches and injections, for example, can not only prevent conception, they can also cause early abortion, the death of a living child, before the mother even knows she is pregnant. They have significant risks for the women who use them, flowing through the blood stream and adversely affecting many organ systems. They cause strokes, heart attacks, blood clots, gallstones and even cancer.

As a physician, I don't call them sins; I call them unhealthful practices. I might even justifiably call them poisons. Whether or not they lead to hell in eternity, they can certainly lead to hell on earth. By driving a wedge between husband and wife, they lead to misery, pain, alienation, confusion and loneliness. As a physician, I have no problem recommending against these unhealthful practices. Medicine and theology, science and Catholic moral teaching, do not contradict each other. They are both based on the natural law, the law that is written in our hearts, the law that is revealed in the meaning and beauty of men's and women's bodies. As the late Dr. Herbert Ratner used to say, "The Author of the Book of Nature and the Author of the Book of Scripture are the same, and he does not contradict himself." When he says, "Thou shalt not," he is not trying to take all the fun out of life. He is trying to save us from actions that will harm us, that will distort our natures, that will inevitably make us profoundly unhappy.

For those who must temporarily avoid children for serious reasons (such as illness, poverty, etc.), timing sexual intercourse to avoid the fertile period of the woman's cycle is allowed by the Church. This is not contraception, because it does not contradict the true meaning of the marital act. It simply makes use of a time when conception is unlikely. Nevertheless, even those who practice this "natural family planning,"

Don't Forget the Simple Things

Our Relationship with our Spouses

must take care never to lose sight of the wonder and beauty of the gift of children, nor to forget God's loving providence. Experience eventually teaches us that his "supernatural planning" always turns out better than any planning we might do in contradiction to his.

One dimension of God's plan for families is surprisingly little known: the effect of breastfeeding on the spacing of pregnancies. The self-giving of marriage extends, once a baby comes, to meeting the needs of that baby as well as possible. The best way to nourish and care for a baby is breastfeeding. The nutritional, immunological and other physical benefits of breastfeeding are now thoroughly documented. At least as important are the emotional benefits to both mother and baby. Because of improved cognitive, neural and social development, breastfed babies even do better later on in school.

One of the beneficial side effects of nursing is that the menstrual cycle usually doesn't return for several months, often for more than a year. This natural, temporary period of infertility usually leads to a spacing between babies of 1 ½ to 2 ½ years or even longer. If a longer spacing is necessary for a serious reason, natural family planning can be used.

Mother Teresa spoke of the "fear of the child." Our modern age is afraid of the child, of God's most generous gift to mankind. It is afraid of the commitment, the difficulty, the challenge and the self-sacrifice. But we do not need to be afraid. We can trust in God. Many of the happiest marriages I know are those that are unconditionally open to children, those in which husbands and wives love each other without fear or reserve, with joyful trust in the Lord and with acceptance of all the precious children he wishes to shower upon them. Is it hard? Of course it is. Everything worthwhile requires effort. And the most worthwhile things require the greatest effort; sometimes they even require suffering. But they also bring the greatest rewards.

So marriage means self-giving, self-surrender, even self-abnegation. It is a cross as well as a comfort. But from such a marriage, lived in accordance with our natures, lived for each other, lived in God's loving care and in obedience to his loving laws, comes life, an abundance of life. And with life, joy. So enjoy your marriage. Enjoy each other. Enjoy your children. May God bless you with many.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.
3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider.

Stages of Marriage - where are you - what can you expect ?

Objective

Each man should leave the meeting understanding the stage of Marriage he and his wife are in and prepared to discuss how to take advantage of today's lesson to start getting the most out of their marriage.

Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 5:22-3

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Small Group Questions

1. Look at the stages of marriage described in the lesson – where are you and your spouse?
2. What are you doing to get the most out of the stage of marriage today?

Recommended Resources

1. Stages of Marriage

<http://www.stayhitched.com/stages.htm>

Most experts agree that marriage (and other long-term) relationships tend to evolve in common stages:

Romance or Honeymoon Stage - Couples are swept up in the excitement and romance of their relationship. Differences seem relatively unimportant (and can even be exciting), as they focus on discovering each other and sharing life together. Sexual attraction is usually strong. Many couples assume that their relationship will naturally work itself out over time with love as sufficient motivation. Sometimes this stage lasts through early marriage, but the next 'reality' stage often sets in even before the wedding and can be the source of 'cold feet'. (See article on cold feet.)

Reality Stage - Couples learn more about themselves and each other in situations they haven't faced together before. Some of what they encounter may not be congruent with their pre-existing assumptions and expectations and may be conflictual. Once married, there is a lot more to disagree about than during dating or even living together. Some feelings of disappointment, aloneness and other reactions are normal, along with a let-down after the activity and excitement of the wedding period.

Because of challenging nature of this normal stage, the first two years of marriage have the highest risk of affairs and divorce. Many couples misinterpret this normal transition for incompatibility and often worry that they've made a mistake. They're often embarrassed to admit these reactions to their spouse, especially if they don't understand that these reactions are normal.

Often sex seems more routine as 'partner novelty' diminishes. Some people begin to feel that the 'spark' has left their relationship. This is another factor that couples often misinterpret. (See article on married sexuality.)

Couples who don't intentionally strategize and plan to keep their intimacy strong can begin to feel alienated and drift apart. This is why it's so important to have marriage preparation before the wedding or immediately after, before the more demanding marriage phases begin. It's a lot easier to plan to keep up the positive momentum of your relationship during the early phases than after problem patterns and habits

Stages of Marriage - where are you - what can you expect ?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

have emerged. Unfortunately, many couples don't understand the need for this until negativity begins to be more of a factor.

Accommodation Stage - Couples work to renew their relationship on a down-to-earth basis by learning about their needs and managing their differences and areas of conflict.

Transformation or Success Stage - Couples enjoy the benefits of a marriage that satisfies their needs and provides mutual support. This leads to more profound intimacy over the years as the couple shares the experience of ups and downs. They work to keep it that way.

It is very important to the success of your marriage that you understand these normal stages of marriage development, so you will be prepared for marriage's challenges. MST helps to minimize adjustment issues by helping you to lay the groundwork for mutual understanding and realistic expectations. The skills and habits that you develop in MST will facilitate your accommodation work and assist you in transforming your relationship to reach long-term success. With these stages in mind, you can see how important it is to begin the process of preparation early in your relationship.

2. Five Stages of Marriage

<http://www.songtime.com/sbc/sbcfivestagesofmarriage.htm>

Stage 1: Passion prevails

Like people, marriages also go through different developmental stages and predictable crises.

Everyone is familiar with the infancy stage of marriage — the "honeymoon period" — but what happens after that? Because people are unfamiliar with the emotional terrain, the normal hills and valleys of marriage, predictable transitional periods are often misunderstood, causing overreactions. Those who manage to weather these universal stormy periods usually come out the other side with greater love and commitment to their spouses. That's why I want to offer you a marriage map.

The marriage map is meant to give you a broad overview' of the experiences most couples have when they negotiate the marital terrain. As you read through these stages and developmental passages, don't get too hung up on the timetable. Some couples move through these stages more quickly than others, and some bypass certain stages entirely.

Head over heels in love, you can't believe how' lucky you are to have met your one and only star-crossed lover. Everything other than the relationship quickly fades into the background. Much to your amazement, you have so much in common: You enjoy the same hobbies, music, restaurants, and movies. You even like each other's friends. You can finish each other's sentences. When you pick up the phone to call your partner, s/he is already on the line calling you. You are completely in sync. When little, annoying things pop up, they're dismissed and overlooked.

At no other time in your relationship is your feeling of well-being and physical desire for each other as intense as it is during this romantic period. The newness and excitement of the relationship stimulates the production of chemicals in your bodies that increase energy and positive attitudes, and heighten sexuality and sensuality. Never, never, have you felt this way before. 'It must be love,' you tell yourself. While in this naturally produced state of euphoria, you decide to commit to spending the rest of your lives together. "And why not," you reason, 'we're perfect together.' And marry, you do. Unless you elope or opt for a simple, judge's chambers-style wedding, your euphoria takes a temporary nose-dive as you plan and execute your wedding. Once you get past the superhuman challenges of dealing with family politics and hosting a modern-day wedding, your starry-eyed obsession with each other reemerges and takes you through the honeymoon period. And for a period of time, nothing could be more glorious. But soon, your joy gives way to an inevitable earth-shattering awakening; marriage isn't at all what you expected it to be.

Stages of Marriage - where are you - what can you expect ?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

Stage 2: What was I thinking?

In some ways, Stage 2 is the most difficult because it is here that you experience the biggest fall. After all, how many miles is it from bliss to disillusionment? Millions. What accounts for this drastic change in perspective? For starters, reality sets in: The little things start to bother you. You realize that your spouse has stinky breath in the morning, spends way too long on the toilet, leaves magazines and letters strewn on the kitchen counter, never wraps food properly before it's put in the refrigerator, and to top things off, snores. There are big things too.

Although you once thought you and your spouse were kindred spirits, you now realize that there are many differences between you. Although you share interests in hobbies, you disagree about how often you want to participate in them. You like the same kinds of restaurants, but you enjoy eating out often while your partner prefers staying home and saving money. Your tastes in music are compatible, but you prefer quiet time in the evening while your mate enjoys blasting the stereo. You have many common friends, but you can't agree on which nights to see them. You're confused about what's going on. You argue. You knew life wouldn't always be a bed of roses, but you never thought all you'd get was thorns. You feel disillusioned and you wonder if you made a mistake.

Ironically, it is in the midst of feeling at odds with your once kindred spirit that you are faced with making all sorts of life-altering decisions. For example, it is now that you decide whether and when to have children, where to live, who will support the family, who will handle the bills, how your free time will be spent, how in-laws fit into your lives, and who will do the cooking. Just at the time when a team spirit would have come in mighty handy, spouses often start to feel like opponents. So they spend the next decade or so trying to "win" and get their partners to change, which triggers stage 3.

Stage 3: Everything would be great if you changed

In this stage of marriage, most people believe that there are two ways of looking at things, your spouse's way and your way, also known as the Right Way. Even if couples begin marriage with the enlightened view that there are many valid perspectives on any given situation, they tend to develop severe amnesia quickly. And rather than brainstorm creative solutions, couples often battle tenaciously to get their partners to admit they are wrong. That's because every point of disagreement is an opportunity to define the marriage. Do it my way, and the marriage will work, do it yours and it won't.

When people are in this state of mind, they have a hard time understanding why their spouses are so glued to their way of seeing things. They assume it must be out of stubbornness, spitefulness or a need to control. What they don't realize is that their spouses are thinking the same thing about them! Over time, both partners dig in their heels deeper. Little or no attempt is made to see the other person's point of view for fear of losing face or worse yet, losing a sense of self.

Now is the time when many people face a fork in the marital road. They don't want to go on this way. Three choices become apparent. Convinced they've tried everything, some people give up. They tell themselves they've fallen out of love or married the wrong person. Divorce seems like the only logical solution. Other people resign themselves to the status quo and decide to lead separate lives. Ultimately, they live unhappily ever after. But there are others who decide that it's time to end the cold war and begin to investigate healthier and more satisfying ways of interacting. Although the latter option requires a major leap of faith, those who take it are the fortunate ones because the best of marriage is yet to come.

Stage 4: That's just the way any partner is

In Stage 4, we finally come to terms with the fact that we are never going to see eye to eye with our partners about everything and we have to figure out what we must do to live more

Stages of Marriage - where are you - what can you expect ?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

peaceably We slowly' accept that no amount of reasoning, begging, nagging, yelling, or threatening changes our partners minds. We look to others for suggestions; we seek religious counsel, talk to close friends and family, attend marital therapy, read self-help books, or take a relationship seminar. Those of us who are more private look inward and seek solutions there.

We more readily forgive our spouse for his/her hard-headedness, and recognize that we aren't exactly easy to live with either. We dare to ask ourselves whether there's something about our own behavior that could use shaping up. When disagreements occur, we make more of an effort to put ourselves in our partners shoes and, much to our surprise, we have a bit more compassion and understanding. Fights happen less frequently and when they occur, they're not as intense or as emotional as in the earlier years of marriage. We know how' to push our partner's buttons and we consciously decide not to. When we slip, we get better at making up because we remind ourselves that life is short and very little is worth the pain of disharmony. And because were smart enough to have reached this stage, we reap the benefits of the fifth, and final, stage.

Stage 5: Together, at last

It is really a tragedy that half of all couples who wed never get to stage 5, when all the pain and hard work of the earlier stages really begins to pay off. Since you are no longer in a struggle to define who you are and what the marriage should be, there is more harmony. Even if you always have loved your spouse, you start to notice how much you are really liking him or her again. And then the strangest thing starts to happen. You realize that the alien who abducted your spouse in stage 2 has been kind enough to return him/her. You are pleased to discover that the qualities you saw in your partner so very long ago never really vanished. This renews your feelings of connection.

By the time you reach Stage 5, you have a shared history. And although you'd both agree that marriage hasn't been easy, you can feel proud that you've weathered the storms. You appreciate your partner's sense of commitment and dedication to making your marriage last. You also look back and feel good about your accomplishments as a couple, a family, and as individuals. You feel more secure about yourself as a person and you begin to appreciate your differences. And what you don't appreciate, you accept. You feel closer and more connected. If you have children, they're older and more independent, allowing you to focus on your marriage again. You have come full circle. The feeling you were longing for during those stormy periods is back, at last. You're home again.

I'm certain that if more couples realized that there really is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, they'd be more willing to tough it out through the downpour. The problem is, most people fool themselves into thinking that whatever stage they are in at the moment, is where they will be forever. That can be a depressing thought when you're in the midst of hard times. And in marriage, there are lots of hard times—unexpected problems with infertility,, the births of children (marital satisfaction goes down with the 'birth of each child), the challenges of raking a family, children leaving home, infidelity, illnesses, deaths of close friends and family' members.

Also, it's important to remember that people generally don't go through these stages sequentially. It's three steps forward and two steps back. Just when you begin to feel more at peace with each other in stage 4, a crisis occurs and you find yourselves slipping back to stage 3. But if you've been fortunate enough to have visited stage 4, sanity sets in eventually, and you get back on track. The quality and quantity of love you feel for each other are never stagnant.

Reminders

1. Make sure you schedule your planning meeting early in the week so you can...
2. Consider sending a note on the Wednesday before your meeting to have the Fathers think about the topic and maybe talk about it at home.

Stages of Marriage - where are you - what can you expect ?

Our Relationship with our Spouses

3. Try to involve most/all of your team in presenting
4. Respect the small group time – we want to give them at least 20-25 minutes of small group time
5. Invest some quality time in considering the questions that you charge the teams to consider

Stages of Marriage - where are you - what can you expect ?