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Nine Discussions to Have Before Marriage

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First Edition

This pamphlet surfaces topics that all healthy marriages must deal with from time to time. They come from men and women who know married life from the inside and are passed on to you because they want you to know that while your marriage will have “good times and bad,” you will experience growth and joy when you walk these times with charity and humility. The work of making a marriage—two becoming one—will be new. No one expects you to have all the answers, but solutions will emerge as you learn to live into your relationship as husband and wife. Blessings as you go forward.

1. How to Use and Manage Money

To guarantee that your marriage gets off on the wrong foot, be sure to presume that your future spouse has the same understandings you have about money matters. By the way, what do you believe money is for? How much of it is enough? (Go back and answer those two questions honestly.)

Money and how it's used can be a dynamo of energy; it brings power, the potential to invest and build something, and stability. It can dominate a person's life and destroy trust. Spending it on possessions can display wealth and promote one to a social class. Of the many tangible goods that a husband and wife have at their disposal, money is maybe the one most prone to incite distrust and lingering resentment.

Jesus preached the coming of the kingdom to life, and we can't ignore the influence that money, and the pursuit of it, has. Most of us have seen firsthand that

disordered attachments to money will throw any relationship into disarray. Maturity calls both parties to examine and share their motives about money and how as a couple they need to forge a new understanding and stewardship of this powerful resource.

Yes, someone needs to pay the bills, but is there a shared understanding of what the limits are regarding how much either one of you can spend before speaking with your spouse?

2. How to Relate to Each Family of Origin

A husband once remarked to his wife, “This isn’t how my mom made meat loaf.” From that day on, if he wanted meat loaf, he made it himself.

Some families are great for hugging and expressing affection in word and deed; other families are as expressive as Quakers at a prayer meeting. *It’s a really smart idea to:* get a read on how your intended spouse’s family decided matters, talked with each other, fought, shared responsibilities at home, and other important real-life issues. Both of you learned patterns of relating in your homes, and because you spent most of your time at home, you bring presumptions about home life and what is valued (and what’s not). Without intending to, there’s a good chance you’ll find yourself clashing as soon as the first holiday comes around.

The Scriptures say that Jesus was not recognized as the Messiah by those who

grew up around him. He was incapable of being anyone other than who they knew years earlier. Yet God's family was essential to Jesus and the coming of God's kingdom. The invitation you have from the Lord to care for his family reminds you to go beyond the families who nurtured you and prepared you for this next chapter of life. As you start anew, be sure to talk through, not once but regularly, how your reconciliation, compassion, and service to the abandoned and poor are marks of God's spirit alive today.

3. How to Handle Housework and Chores

“Honey, there’s a leaky pipe under the bathroom sink. The bottom of the cabinet is soaking wet.” Yuck! Whose problem is it to fix?

Dirty clothes don’t belong on the bedroom floor. Just how long can dirty dishes stay in the sink before one of you will blow your top? Marriage gives couples many opportunities to look at things through their spouse’s eyes. Yet it’s amazing how long it takes to learn that small acts of charity and extra effort expended without complaining fuel the transition of turning a house into a home. And this doubly goes for men pitching in with such domestic duties as washing clothes, vacuuming, and taking care of what is not explicitly theirs.

The fancy word for this is “stewardship,” and it’s part of many Catholics’ vocabulary. It comes from the role of a steward who was responsible for overseeing all affairs of the

manor. Even though he wasn't the owner, he was accountable. It's not a stretch to extend that understanding with the help of our faith, and note that all we have is on loan to us. Taking care of people, places, and things is an obligation of every faith-filled person. Can you name what is most special to you about taking care of the home? What is the most difficult household duty for you?

4. How to Spend and Celebrate the Holidays

Well, the weather outside is frightful, and the fire is so delightful....When the holidays roll around, you'll only have so much time away from work. Your friends from before you were married still want time with you, yet the number of your connections has grown, and you have new expectations to manage. What's a married couple to do?

How we spend time says something about our priorities, and if we neglect core commitments, we're going to be told to get our act together. But saying "yes" to spending time with our new family is bound to create tension. The good news is that with shared values you'll be able to explain to others why you won't be with them on, for instance, Mother's Day. I remember my aunt telling me that she realized it wasn't fair that she expected her son and his family to spend Christmas with her. She summed

it up by saying, “They need to start their own traditions.”

Time away from work over the holidays should not be just idle time. It should be restorative, whereby we find in play, hobbies, and exercise a rejuvenation of our spirits and strengthening of our familial bonds.

How much time should you spend visiting the family over the holidays? What’s the right way to celebrate? You’ll need to be prepared to have some answers to these questions, because your families don’t want to lose touch with you after you’re married.

5. Sexual Feelings and Expressions

Sex is an element of your marriage that you'll return to time and time again. When you do, you can bring all of yourself or none of yourself.

Sex is one of the most powerful ways to express intimacy and affection toward your spouse. If there's scant attention to the small ways, words, and gifts that communicate love, then the physical act of making love falls short of its generative and healing potential. Yes, that's right: healing. What is said in words can also be captured in gesture and touch. Just as body language transmits openness or rejection, the deep connections and desire to be physically united are made more special because you share other acts together: working, cooking, cleaning, deciding, sleeping, and much more.

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks about the closeness he shares with his Father, and he desires that same kind of unity with his

disciples. All of creation has emerged from the loving act of God, and since we were made in God's image and likeness, we, too, participate in God's creative work. While we come to our understanding of ourselves as sexual creatures in different phases, our faith frames our sexuality and our sexual expression in ways that help alleviate any ounce of shame and give it a focus as a way of producing life and expressing love.

6. Having and Raising Children

If all the wisdom and advice about children could be captured in one quip, it might be: “Children are the game changers.” It happens that many couples choose to adopt, and oh, what blessings all receive in the process.

Everything you believed about control and serenity at home you can shelve. From little germ pots getting their hands into everything, and everything in their hands getting into their mouths, there’s nothing like the experience of giving everything you have knowing one day you’ll have to let go.

The Old Testament is clear that God has special concern for widows and orphans; the Israelite community was judged on how well it cared for these two groups. Jesus continues in that vein as he makes it clear that his kingdom is not complete unless children are welcomed into it. As we teach them their prayers, they teach us about genuine prayer. As we study the works of mercy with them,

they point out the injustice that happens at home among the family members.

Children: Yes, it's true they cause great anxiety, but they also are the source of great joy and hope. While you can't cover every aspect of having and raising children before your wedding, it's a good idea to get on the same page about such things as discipline, education, and other key matters that will affect you and the kids.

7. How to Realize Hopes and Dreams

The personal dreams you bring into your marriage don't disappear. If you try to bury them or think they can be dismissed or replaced by others, they will become a smoldering fire that breaks into fury when the least bit of opportunity is at hand and denied.

Some of the most successful couples are those who chose to unite their efforts to help each other fulfill dreams. More special are those who have locked hearts and hands and created dreams that they jointly owned and nurtured. It's normal for people to have their own dreams, but there are those who find it difficult to work toward a dream. The freedom and responsibility terrifies them, and they are content to fulfill spousal or parental roles.

The prophets tell us that dreams are crucial. They tell us to hope in the most startling images. They tell us to believe

that the desert can be the place of abundant life and that one day the lion will lie down with the lamb. They tell us to dream boldly.

If someone has no dreams and can only live in the moment, the future partner can also lose his or her dreams, as there is no buy-in or support from the spouse. Where do you stand on shared dreams and personal dreams?

8. How to Share Anger, Grief, and Disappointment

Many a boy has had to learn the lesson that his dad can't throw a curve ball or his mom can't take away the sting of being bullied. The human condition is laced with imperfections that might at first not be evident because you're so much in love.

When the luster of the wedding day has faded, and it will, the small habits of your spouse you once thought were priceless will have become irritating if not worse. The person we marry is a person-in-process, and some of our worst behaviors are saved for our loved ones. Yet charity begins at home, as Mom said, and be prepared to experience anger and disappointment at the hands of your spouse.

In dealing with those who suffer the hurts of disappointment, grief, and anger as a result of a spouse's insensitivity and thoughtlessness, our faith urges us to recall that a marriage is never perfect, nor will it

be. Because we have deep capacities to love, we have deep capacities to hurt one another. It's God's hope that we not remain focused on these pains but rather honestly confront the hurt and work to move ahead—together as a couple with the Lord's presence.

What will you do when you hit a rough patch? What skills are needed to work through times of conflict and great disappointment? What did you learn or see at home when these moments arose? There's not a vaccine that prevents you from hitting these times, and the best remedy is honesty in sharing, which if practiced can restore trust.

9. How to Integrate God, Faith, and Religious Practice

“Father, we want to get married?” “That’s great! Let’s get started; let’s see when the church is available.” “You mean we have to get married in the *church*?”

Asking many folks to marry in a church is like asking them to take a trip to Venus. It’s a place they can’t imagine as a location for their wedding, which is difficult to understand. Why is it that at a time when more and more people are linked to each other through digital services that the faith community is the last place they feel connected to? The Christian community of the Gospel and sacraments provide for some of the most engaging, life-altering experiences ever. And it’s all free.

If you’re not motivated in your heart, there’s not a chance that anyone will say anything to convince you. So listen to your heart. Look at what’s not there when you slow down and try to make a connection

between the tug you feel that is most real and the invitation to contribute to the majesty of life. What do you want to teach your children about God and leave them regarding religion and spirituality? How will your faith be a part of your marriage, and what do you need to do to engage your faith again or deepen it? Does any of your Catholic upbringing strike a strong feeling (positive or negative) that will inform how you practice your faith?

A Final Bit of Counsel

If you've been paying attention, these nine discussions all have a single theme: communication. Yes, they each have their subject of focus, but success in all of them requires both of you to feel safe when difficult conversations emerge. Check in with each other, ensuring that you are approaching the conversation with a mutual purpose.

If you're not talking to each other right now about these and similar topics in a way that is respectful, you won't be talking to each other about them after you're married.

You are starting a life of your own now, but you are not alone. Don't assume you have all the answers or skills needed to excel in all areas of your marriage. Have the humility to say you need assistance and the courage to seek it out when necessary.

Nine Marriage Resources From Liguori Publications

- “10 Tips for Married Couples: Love for the Long Haul” by Susan Vogt (*Catholic Update*, C0905A; published in 1999, updated in 2015).
- *Getting Married: Steps on the Journey * The Ideal Partner * Questions Couples Ask* by German Martinez (2007, product code 816383, also available in Spanish).
- *Money and Your Marriage* by Phil Lenahan (2015, 825880).
- “Natural Family Planning: Key to Intimacy” by Fletcher Doyle (*Catholic Update*, C0707A, 2007).
- *Prayers and Reflections for Newlyweds* by Aaron A. Del Monte (2012, 820854).
- “Preparing for Marriage: 10 Tools for the Journey” by William Urbine (*Catholic Update*, C0606A, 2006).
- “Ten Things You Should Discuss Before Marriage” by Janet Duccilli Daniel (*Catholic Update*, C7910A, 2012).
- *With This Ring: A Practical Guide for Newlyweds* by Renee Bartkowski (2007, 815799).
- *Your Wedding: A Guide to Getting Married in the Catholic Church*, a Redemptorist Pastoral Publication (1995, 438037).