

The Life Cycle: Engagement



Engagement

The[♂]ology
of the BO[♀]dy for families
& single people
plus Family Chastity Formation in Virtue & Purity of Heart

Universal Truths about Human Sexuality for People of All Ages
With extensive references to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church

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Engagement

What the Church Says

694 Pope Benedict XVI spoke to the engaged: “If you are engaged to be married, God has a project of love for your future as a couple and as a family. Therefore, it is essential that you discover it with the help of the Church, free from the common prejudice that says that Christianity with its commandments and prohibitions places obstacles to the joy of love and impedes you from fully enjoying the happiness that a man and woman seek in their reciprocal love. The love of a man and woman is at the origin of the human family and the couple formed by a man and a woman has its foundation in God’s original plan (Cf. Gen 2:18-25). Learning to love each other as a couple is a wonderful journey, yet it requires a demanding ‘apprenticeship.’ The period of engagement, very necessary in order to form a couple, is a time of expectation and preparation that needs to be lived in purity of gesture and words. It allows you to mature in love, in concern and in attention for each other; it helps you to practise self-control and to develop your respect for each other. These are the characteristics of true love that does not place emphasis on seeking its own satisfaction or its own welfare. In your prayer together, ask the Lord to watch over and increase your love and to purify it of all selfishness. Do not hesitate to respond generously to the Lord’s call, for Christian matrimony is truly and wholly a vocation in the Church” (Message Of The Holy Father Benedict XVI To The Youth Of The World On The Occasion Of The 22nd World Youth Day, 2007).

695 The Pontifical Council for the Family in *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* stated: “Therefore, this period should not only be for theoretical study but also for formation during which the engaged, with the help of grace and by avoiding all forms of sin, will prepare to give themselves as a couple to Christ who sustains, purifies and ennobles the engagement and married life. In this way, premarital chastity takes on its full meaning and rules out any cohabitation, premarital relations, and other practices...in the process of making love grow” (Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, 37).

Wisdom of Parents

696 Engagement is a time for couples to prepare for a sacramental marriage and lifetime together, yet it also continues to be a time of ongoing discernment and taking careful inventory to be sure that marriage is their vocation in life and that their fiancé is the right person for them. This period will also allow a person to mature in authentic self-giving love and concern for the other. It is a time of practicing purity in mind, speech and dress; a time of continuing to develop a healthy and loving relationship with each other. There are several good personality inventory and compatibility tools available through Catholic retreat and pre-marriage preparation programs to encourage dialogue on every aspect of married life. The period of engagement would be a good time for engaged couples to:

- review their personal spiritual journey and prayer life;
- begin a common prayer life with their prospective spouse;
- agree on the financial ground rules for their marriage and family;
- establish their career goals as much as possible;
- mutually agree on their expectations for the wedding, including cost, ceremony, honeymoon and so forth;
- participate in Church-sponsored or required marriage preparation programs.

697 Once they have said yes to one another, to God and to the vocation of marriage, it is time to begin planning their future and mutual lifetime goals as a couple. Couples will need to establish a “true north” for their life pilgrimage together, a point of reference that will remain unchanged and give a sense of direction in the midst of the trials and waves of adversity which are certain to come. As navigators of old used to do, they should look up to heaven for direction. First and foremost, couples need to agree to live their Catholic faith without compromise, aspire to become holy together, and make it their goal to lead one another and their family to eternal life in heaven.

698 Engaged couples can learn about Church-approved Natural Family Planning (NFP) methods, not only to increase the chances of conceiving in marriage through the study of fertility cycles, but also—if there is a serious need—to limit the possibility of conception while remaining open to life (thereby not sinning against chastity).

699 Engagement intensifies the desire for that intimate union of souls and bodies reserved for marriage, and so the cultivation of chastity

also must intensify with the clear goal of entering into the holy sacrament of marriage in the highest state of grace and purity. All seven pillars of family chastity formation are integral to the period of engagement. Right thinking and orthodoxy in faith will sustain a well-formed conscience, so that chastity or sexual purity can be practiced and true love can grow. Church teachings are not intended to prohibit joy and happiness; but, rather to lead to a couple’s temporal and eternal happiness in love—obedience to Church teachings, along with frequent confession, will help engaged couples maintain pure consciences.

700 The process of two imperfect persons becoming one demands a daily practice of sacrificial love for the sake of the other. Learning to be attentive, patient and concerned for the other—above one’s own needs, opinions, feelings and will—takes practice over time. It also demands an apprenticeship or period of growth in self-control, in acquiring virtues through self-discipline and in learning *mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ*. Young men can practice authority and leadership as loving and affectionate servants of their future spouse—just as Christ has loved his spouse and bride, the Church—by being willing to die completely to any areas of selfishness within himself. Young women, in particular, can practice respect for and obedience to their future husbands in all things but sin, so that a peaceful serenity and right order can be established in the marriage and family home. Abstinence, fasting, temperance in food and drink, prayer, frequent confession, adoration and reception of the Eucharist provide the supernatural power required for self-mastery, the practice of virtues, and perfect obedience to the will of God and one’s spouse as God designed.

701 As each one practices dying to self-will and self-love, the discovery of a serious impediment, signs of immaturity, or a need for profound conversion or deep healing could prevent moving forward to marriage at this particular time; or perhaps not with this particular person. It may be revealed that marriage is not a calling at all, but virginity for the sake of Kingdom is. In such a case, a couple should pray and ask if they are truly called by God to enter into marriage and if they are able to help one another become more holy, charitable and to attain to eternal life.

Putting this Knowledge to Work

Personal Characteristics and Qualities

702 Some questions a man should ask about himself

- Do I deserve her trust?
- Can I control my passions?
- Can I be chaste and respect her chastity before and during marriage?

Can I exercise self-control over my:

- Feelings?
- Sexuality?
- Eating?
- Drinking?
- Spending?
- Language?
- Possessions?
- Appearance?
- _____
- _____
- _____

- Am I self-giving (or selfish)?

- Am I able to put her needs ahead of mine?
- _____
- _____
- _____

703 Some questions the man should ask about her

- Is this the woman I want to spend my life with? Why?
- Is she my best friend? Give examples.
- Do we have similar interests? What are they?
- Do we have similar lifetime goals? What are they?
- Do we have fun being together? Give examples.
- Is she self-giving (or selfish)?
- What are her ten most admirable qualities?
- What are her ten most irksome attributes and can I live with them? (Remember: you cannot change her; she can only change herself with God's help and grace. If you are getting married thinking you can change her, you will be in for a great disappointment.)
- Would she make a good mother to my children?
- Will she be able to submit to my authority as husband and father? Give examples.
- Would she be a good homemaker? Why do you think so?
- Can she cook? If not, is she able and willing to learn?
- Can she perform housekeeping tasks? If not, is she able and willing to learn?
- Can she make a house a home?
- Is she industrious (or lazy)?
- Is she intelligent and engaging?
- Will her friends be more important to her than our marriage?

- Will her family be more important to her than our marriage?
- Can I integrate with her family?
- Can she handle criticism?
- Am I able to trust her?
- Is she able to love me for who I am?

Does she respect me?

- My judgment
- My feelings
- My masculinity
- My decisions
- My authority
- _____
- _____
- _____
- Is she trying to change who I am?
- Does she criticize me often?
- Does she criticize me in public?
- Can she follow my lead, or does she always want to be in control?
- Is she controlling and domineering?
- Is she manipulative?
- Is she moody?
- Can she control her emotions and feelings?
- Is she prudent?
- Does she flirt with other men when we are together?
- _____
- _____
- _____

Note from the editor: Remember, no woman is perfect; very few women will pass the test for all of the criteria listed!

704 Some questions a woman should ask about herself

- Do I respect him?
- His judgment

- His feelings
- His masculinity
- His decisions
- His authority
- _____
- _____
- _____

- Will I respect his authority as head of the family?
- If we disagree on a decision that must be made for the welfare of our family and we both have the best interests of our family in mind, can I give way to his decision and then support him whether it turns out to be right or wrong?
- Do I deserve his trust?
- Can I control my passions?
- Can I be chaste and respect his chastity before and during marriage?

Can I exercise self-control over my:

- Feelings?
- Sexuality?
- Eating?
- Drinking?
- Spending?
- Language?
- Possessions?
- Appearance?
- _____
- _____
- _____

- Am I self-giving (or selfish)?
- Am I able to put his needs ahead of mine?

- _____
- _____
- _____

705 Some questions the woman should ask

- Is this the man I want to spend my life with? Why?
- Is he my best friend? Give examples.
- Do we have similar interests? What are they?
- Do we have similar lifetime goals? What are they?
- Do we have fun being together? Give examples.
- Does he respect me? In what ways?
- Is he self-giving (or selfish)?
- What are his ten most admirable qualities?
- What are his ten most irksome attributes and can I live with them? (Remember: you cannot change him; he can only change himself with God's help and grace. If you are getting married thinking you can change him, you will be in for a great disappointment.)
- Would he make a good father to my children? Why do you feel that way?
- Can he support me?
- Can he protect me?
- Is he prudent?

Does he exercise self-control over his:

- Feelings?
- Sexuality?
- Eating?
- Drinking?
- Spending?
- Language?
- Possessions?
- Appearance?
- _____
- _____
- _____

- Is he trustworthy?
- Is he admirable?
- Is he honest?
- Is he faithful?
- Does he do what he says he will do?
- Is he a man of integrity?
- Does he have good moral values?
- Is he industrious?
- Is he modest?
- Is he able to maintain custody of his eyes?
- Does he flirt with other women when we are together?
- _____
- _____
- _____

Note from the editor: Remember, no man is perfect; very few men will pass the test for all of the criteria listed!

Common Questions and Concerns

706 Are our life priorities compatible?

- Our personal and marital relationship with God.
- Our expectations of one another.
- Our relationships with extended family members.
- The vision we have for our family.
- The expectations we have concerning friendships with other people or couples.
- Our expectations concerning money.
- The kind of home we want.
- The kind of cars we are going to drive.
- _____
- _____
- _____

About Matters of Faith**707 Sharing your gifts, talents, and treasures:**

M W (Man/Woman: Check box if affirmative)

- Do you now, or are you willing to, tithe ten percent of your gross income to the Church and other charitable causes?
- Will you support organizations or causes that violate Church teachings on morality and other issues?
- Are you interested or willing to serve your parish community in the various volunteer ministries that are available?
- Are you ashamed of your faith in public?
- _____
- _____
- _____

708 Witnessing to your faith

M W

- Do you vote for candidates to public office who oppose Church teaching?
- Do you compromise your faith for personal gain or advantage?
- Are you able to share your faith with people you meet?
- _____
- _____
- _____

709 Other faith-related Issues (You decide)

M W

- _____
- _____
- _____

710 Other Issues to Consider

M W

- Have we decided on how much time we will spend together during our engagement?
- Have we talked about what it means to build a life together?
- Am I carrying wounds or hurts from the past? Will they interfere with my marriage? Can anything be done to heal them? Have I tried? Have I failed? Why? Have I told my fiancé about them? If not, why not?
- Am I able to forgive unconditionally, no matter what?
- Am I able to love unconditionally, even during tough times or times of disappointment?
- Am I able to say I'm sorry and mean it?
- How long should our engagement last?
- Have we decided on a "true north" for our marriage?
- Have we decided on a "true north" for our family?
- Have we decided where we are going to live?

- Have we decided where we will go to church?
- Have we discussed family budgets and planning?
- Have we looked into marriage preparation courses and engaged encounter programs?
- Do we understand the concept of “communion of persons”?
- Have we discussed how many children we want to have?
- If you plan to limit your family size, have you taken natural family planning classes yet? If not, before the wedding day, make sure to enroll in some classes.

- _____
- _____
- _____

712 Some Final Comments

1. Don't think you can change a person after you marry them, you can't.
2. If it is bad now, it will only get worse later.
3. Rededicate yourselves to living chastely during engagement and marriage.
4. Commit your engagement and marriage to God's loving care and protection.
5. God is love and He is the one who called you to love in marriage.

