

The Life Cycle: Marriage, the First Five Years



Marriage, the First Five Years

Theology of the Body 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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Marriage, the First Five Years

What the Church Says

561 During the first five years of marriage, an emotional atmosphere is established within the family home that will profoundly affect the development of infants and young children. The Church stresses the importance of a couple's balance, mutual understanding, serenity, prayer, and the importance of their affectionate physical presence to one another and to their children, as they build up love, trust and confidence (Cf. The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 50).

562 The Church further emphasizes the need of young married couples and young families to become fully integrated members of a parish family: "Especially in the first five years of married life, it would be desirable to follow up the young couples through post-marriage courses, to be carried out in parishes or deaneries" (Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, Conclusion [May 13, 1996]). On the subject of parish involvement, Pope John Paul II said:

This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children. Young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus, within the ecclesial community – the great family made up of Christian families – there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help

among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care (*Familiaris Consortio*, 69).

Wisdom of Parents

563 The first five years of marriage can be an intensely joyful and intensely painful time as a man and woman forge a union of two wills, bodies, minds, hearts and souls into one. Christ desires this intimate marital union but clearly revealed that the one way to obtain it was by way of the cross. It is through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ that true love is consummated by the total sacrifice of self for the beloved. This "way of love" is revealed in the Mass, where the pain of sacrifice always precedes, but ultimately leads to, the joy of communion—the fusion of two hearts and souls into one.

564 The ideal joy of total self-giving love shines at first in mutual politeness, patience, respect, and love, each generously bending and adapting to their new life together. But after long work hours, little sleep from infants crying throughout the night, the house getting messy, meals harder to prepare, physical needs going unmet, financial trouble, and in-laws interfering too much, husbands and wives can hit a breaking point. The feeling or thought may start to arise that they can bend no further, but

instead they must start demanding that *my* will be done, that *my* opinions be clearly expressed and understood, and that *my* needs deserve to be filled first, if there is ever to be peace and happiness.

565 The intensity of the first years of marriage is why the Church emphasizes that the parish family and extended family be ready with positive and wise Catholic assistance to help the young couple learn how to create and maintain a serene atmosphere of love in the family home. Promoting daily family prayer and the support of family associations, frequent confession, parent-centered catechesis, training and sacramental preparation, and marriage assistance are essential in helping a young couple get started on the right path during these critical first five years. Creating a loving and affectionate home environment through daily family prayer, mutual forgiveness, and the support of other families will establish the emotional climate that infants and children need to feel secure. The first five years of marriage, and of a child's life, establish deep patterns that will last a lifetime.

566 Attitudes toward modesty and privacy are developed in these early years, and on this subject the Catholic Medical Association wrote: "Child psychiatrists have long been teaching the need for modesty in family interactions. It is important for parents to avoid nudity and to refrain from dressing and undressing in front of their children, to refrain from taking baths or showers with their children. Parents can model privacy and modesty, and instruct children in the importance of both, while dressing, bathing and using the toilet: 'I want to be private while I am dressing'; 'Your sister wants to be private while she uses the toilet.' These practices of modesty should begin in the first months of an infant's

life and progress as the toddler is capable of using the toilet, and later of bathing, himself. Obviously all overt marital sexual interactions must be conducted in both spatial and auditory privacy. The practice of modesty and privacy sets the tone for respecting the dignity of the human body, respecting proper bodily boundaries, regulating appropriate interactions with others and aids in the development of self-mastery. 'If children and young people see that their legitimate privacy is respected, they will know that they are expected to show the same attitude towards others.' 'The practice of decency and modesty in speech, action and dress motivated by respect for one's own body and the dignity of others is very important for creating an atmosphere suitable to the growth of chastity.' Formation in modesty and privacy are invaluable in developing the child's power to discern what is normal versus abnormal behavioral interactions between him and older children and adults" (Task Force Report on the Sexual Abuse of Children and Its Prevention, To Protect and To Prevent, Pages 31-32.).

567 Continuing education in the Catholic faith will help parents maintain and strengthen a well-formed conscience. This period of life demands great acts of sacrificial love by husbands for wives, fathers for children, wives for husbands, and mothers for children. Daily life will be full of opportunities to sacrifice selfish desires or even basic needs for the sake of one's spouse and family. Self-mastery and the exercise of virtue involve tempering one's emotions and physical needs, correcting one's faults, fasting and periodic abstinence. Right order and peace are the fruits of a man who takes responsibility and is accountable to God for leading his wife and family by protecting, providing and praying for and with them; and a woman who helps him by showing respect and

obedience to her husband in all things but sin. In this complementary way, as one head and heart united physically, spiritually, intellectually and emotionally, they will generate that love which will last forever and be absorbed into the secret depths of their children's hearts. On the other hand, disorder, disrespect, lack of self-control, physical, emotional and verbal abuse will destroy love and can crush the heart and soul of a child.

568 During the first five years of a child's life, the primary objectives of chastity formation involve the formation of conscience; learning self-mastery or self-control of the body, emotions, temper, and speech; and learning obedience and right order. Children establish emotional patterns, learn behaviors, and develop attitudes toward authority in these years that will remain for life. Parents must be authoritative, consistent, and loving in discipline and correction so the child will want to obey the voice of his father and mother in order to please them and experience the reward of being good.

569 Since this is the same method God the Father uses to correct His children, parents will want to develop a well-formed conscience in their child, so the child is predisposed to respond to the voice of the Father within his heart as he matures. Parents are the first image of God to their children so it is important that they are not inconsistent, vague, neglectful, abusive, lacking authority, winking at faults, smiling at misbehavior, letting the child rule the house, allowing them to disrupt mealtimes, giving in to temper tantrums, permitting rudeness, etc. In addition, if they do not help the child understand that there are consequences for bad behavior and a need to make reparation, they will have failed to teach their children that God is a loving but just Father who is attentive to each and

every sin. Scripture says that God the Father disciplines and reproves His children because He loves them, whereas a lack of discipline within the family reveals an absence of true fatherly love and concern (Cf. Heb 12:5-11).

Putting this Knowledge to Work

570 Recommendations from parents who are seasoned veterans

- The most important thing you will ever do as parents is to firmly establish your marriage and family on the rock foundation of your personal relationship with Jesus Christ, by living the official teachings of the Catholic Church and actively practicing your faith every day.
- At all times look to the Sacraments and Sacred Scripture for support.
- Establish daily prayer in the home the day you get married.
- Cultivate and sustain a loving and trusting relationship with one another.
- Either establish or maintain strict moral boundaries for yourselves in modesty, speech, media usage, etc.
- Your spousal relationship is primary and must not be overshadowed by your relationship with your children.
- If you need to limit the size of your family, learn about natural family planning as soon as possible.
- Be willing to sacrifice time, money and energy for the welfare of your spouse and family.

- Once married, you must place your spouse above extended family and friends.
- As a couple, you will need to agree on what your standard of living will be and then stick to it.

- Mutually decide on how you will budget your money and live within your means; avoid using credit cards and begin to save every month.
- Honor God by tithing the first fruits of your labor. The traditional tithe is ten percent of your gross income. God is good and cannot be outdone; even in difficult times make this a priority and you will always receive His blessings.
- As parents, you must establish a home that feels safe to your children—one that is full of love, kindness, compassion, peace, happiness and joy.
- Together, you need to decide how you are going to educate your children (home-school, private or public schools, tutors, etc.).
- When children are present and conflicts arise, you need to resolve your differences in an appropriate and peaceful manner; it is important that your children see you resolve conflicts in a Christ-like manner so they, too, can learn how to handle their conflicts constructively.
- Serious disagreements should be worked out privately but not avoided.
- Children need to see and experience authentic unconditional love and unconditional forgiveness in the home, especially between parents.
- As parents, each of you must be available to your children and display appropriate signs of affection and love.
- As parents, together you need to set rules and boundaries for your children and then stick to them.
- As parents, you must mutually agree upon how you will discipline your children and then be consistent when discipline is needed.
- Disciplining your children should always be done in a spirit of love and not out of anger or as an uncontrolled reaction.
- Together, you must agree on the degrees of physical punishment and when to apply them.
- Always remember that you are your child's parent, not their friend; in other words, you have authority over them.
- Be sure that your parents (your children's grandparents) understand *your* rules and enforce them when they are alone with *your* children.
- Look for and associate with people of like mind: people who live their faith and who respect, honor and build up marriage and family life.
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571 Parenting your children

Your highest priority as a parent is to establish a close, loving and personal relationship with each of your children:

- Pray with them daily.
- Pay attention to them; be actively involved in their daily lives.
- Talk to them; learn what they are feeling on the inside.
- Listen to them and encourage daily conversations.
- Play with them, work with them, laugh with them, cry with them.
- Show them you love them with

- appropriate displays of affection.
- Praise them when they do good; encourage them when they struggle.
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- Foster deep love for your daily family prayer time together.
- Begin early to teach your children about the images of the Catholic faith with pictures of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, statues of saints and so on.
- Teach them how to use the sacramentals of the Church like blessing themselves with holy water.
- As they grow and mature, teach them the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, grace before and after meals, and bedtime prayers.
- Begin to teach your children right from wrong as soon as they understand the word “no.”
- Always let your yes mean “yes” and your no mean “no”; this will teach them to respect your initial decision, to be obedient, and to learn that you cannot be sweet-talked or charmed into changing your mind. This action is critical in learning how to live chastely.

572 Teach your children manners:

- Respect for authority: yours, and others to whom you have delegated legitimate authority in your absence like grandparents, baby-sitters, teachers, etc.
- Respect for their elders.
- Respect for their siblings and other children.
- Respect for other people’s belongings.
- To ask by saying “please” and to show gratitude by saying “thank you”.

- Teach your children to address others by their proper names or their elders as Mr. or Mrs.
- Teach them not to interrupt other people while they are talking.
- Teach your children not to be physically aggressive with other people by hitting, biting, scratching, kicking, pulling hair, spitting; instead, teach them how to master their undesirable impulses and frustrations.
- Begin to teach them responsibility by having them pick up their toys when they are done playing.
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Other Considerations:

- Do not be afraid to discipline your children when discipline is needed, always out of love not anger; be firm but fair.
- Begin to teach your children modesty as they are able to understand and comprehend: use the bathroom in private when they are old enough, take baths or showers in privacy, do not run around the house without clothes on, etc.
- Teach your children how to share what they have with other people.
- Teach your children how to give joyfully to the Church by letting them drop your tithe envelope or some money into the collection basket at Sunday Mass.
- Teach them how to reconcile their differences with another person when there is a problem by apologizing when they are wrong, by saying I am sorry, or I forgive you; depending upon the circumstance.
- Begin giving children light chores to perform without pay and praise them when they do the best they can.

- Parents should allow absolutely NO television for children under three years of age; the television should NEVER be used as means to occupy their time, or as a “baby-sitter” while you do other things.
- Set your house rules for watching television right now: TV IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT.
- After your child is more than three years old, there should be limited exposure to television programs and then only under your direct supervision.
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573 Men as husbands and fathers

- As a Christian man, you are called to continual conversion of heart in order to become more like Christ everyday.
- Develop or continue to maintain your personal prayer life apart from the family’s daily prayer time.
- God has given you the necessary graces to discharge your duties as husband and father. Never fail to bring your problems and concerns to God in prayer. He will neither leave you orphaned nor abandon you in your time of need, but you must do your part using the God-given gifts, talents and treasures that He has given to you for the welfare of your family.
- Model your life after the examples of God the Father, Jesus and St. Joseph.
- Love your wife and treat her with the utmost dignity and respect; cherish her for all the days of your life.
- Above all, you must follow Jesus’ example by always loving your wife unconditionally and by always forgiving her unconditionally (this also goes for everyone else too);

there is no room for unforgiveness in a marriage. Unforgiveness will only destroy intimacy, your love for one another, and will ultimately lead to a life of complete misery for both of you.

- Begin immediately to assume your duties as the leader (not ruler or controller) of your wife and family.
- Always be mindful that you also have been commissioned by God the Father to be the spiritual leader of your family; you must take this duty seriously for one day you will have to give an accounting.
- As a man and head of your family, you have the God-given duty to protect your wife and children from danger, even to the point of giving up your life for them, if necessary.
- You are the primary breadwinner of the family. Do not depend upon your wife to carry the load for you; there may be times when she might need to help, but those times should be the exception rather than the rule.
- Live a modest life within your financial means, avoid the trap of materialism, and keep focused on getting your family to heaven.
- Balance the need to provide for your family with the need to be available to spend quality time with your wife and with your children.
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574 Women as wives and mothers

- As a Christian woman, you are called to continual conversion of heart in order to become more like Christ everyday.
- Develop or continue to maintain your personal prayer life apart from the family’s

daily prayer time.

- God has given you the necessary graces to discharge your duties as wife and mother. Never fail to bring your problems and concerns to God in prayer. He will neither leave you orphaned nor abandon you in your time of need, but you must do your part using the God-given gifts, talents and treasures that He has given to you for the welfare of husband and children.
- Model your life after the example of the Blessed Mother and other godly women.
- Above all, you must follow Jesus' example by always loving your husband unconditionally and by always forgiving him unconditionally; there is no room for unforgiveness in a marriage. Unforgiveness will only destroy intimacy, your love for one another, and will ultimately lead to a life of complete misery for both of you.
- Begin immediately to assume your role as wife, and later as mother if God blesses you with children.
- Respect your husband and support him as he assumes his God-given leadership role as husband and father; give him your advice but never manipulate, control or try to usurp his authority as your head and head of the family.
- Demonstrate your love for your husband through obedience to him in all things but sin; through your example, your children will learn how to be obedient and respectful of you, their father, and other people in positions of authority outside the home.
- There may come a time when a major decision will have to be made for the welfare of the family, but your husband and you will disagree on what to do (for example, your husband concludes that the family may have to move to another town or city, so he can find adequate employment to

provide for your family's needs). If both of you are acting in good faith and truly have the family's best interests in mind, you must yield to his authority even if his decision turns out to be wrong. Pray and trust that God will lead and guide him.

- Be supportive of your husband physically, spiritually and emotionally.
- There is a saying that behind every successful man there is a good woman. Be his confidant, his friend, his ally, his cheering section and you will propel him to achieve his very best. Be none of those things and either watch him wither and fail, or begin to spend more and more time away from home.
- As a wife, you should try to make your house a home, a place of warm welcome for your husband no matter how rich or poor you may be.
- Be a good and cheerful homemaker for your husband and family.
- Live a modest life within your financial means, avoid the trap of materialism, and keep focused on getting your husband and children to heaven.
- Balance the need of caring for your home and children with the need to be available to spend quality time with your husband.
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575 Parents working together

- Agree on the needs and wants of the children.

Communicate a consistent message to your children:

- What you expect from them.

- Application of family rules.
- Punishment for disobedience or misbehavior.
- When you say “no” mean no.
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Demonstrate charity as a team:

- Model service to the community, etc.
- Help out at the parish.
- Give to the poor.
- Establish a measured discipline and be united in carrying it out.
- Support one another’s decisions as they are made. If you disagree, do it later in private.

- Have good recreational time together.
- Model forgiveness.
- Model love and affection.
- Procure education of the children.
- Provide for the temporal needs of your children.
- Have a shared understanding of house rules.
- Have ongoing spiritual formation.
- Work together on projects.
- Worship and pray together.
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