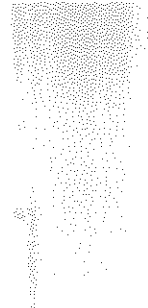


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Called to Married Life

Opening Prayer

O God, your greatest command is to love you and love each other. You've given marriage as a holy relationship that reflects our relationship with you. Show us how to follow your example and humbly serve each other and the world. In the midst of our busy lives, help us to love each other deeply from the heart, as you have loved us. May the love we have for each other be an example to the world of how you love them. Amen.

Scripture Theme

Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2-4).

Introduction

Love is the fundamental calling for all persons. In the authentic love of spouses, we find, perhaps, the best human expression of God's unfailing and unconditional love for the world.

Your vocation is a personal call. It must be offered freely by you and accepted freely by your beloved. In the article, "The Vocation of Marriage" the author writes:

Attraction to a certain way of life or to a specific person can be a good sign of being called. Most often a person comes to recognize and accept a vocation gradually. This process, sometimes called discernment, is an opportunity for growth. It can be helped by prayer and guidance from trusted mentors, friends and family.

However, what begins as attraction must deepen into conviction and commitment. Those who are called to the married life should be ready to learn what their vocation means and to acquire the virtues and skills needed for a happy and holy marriage.

The vocation to marriage is a call to a life of holiness and service within the couple's own relationship and in their family. As a particular way of following the Lord, this vocation also challenges a couple to live their marriage in a way that expresses God's truth and love in the world.

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/the-vocation-of-marriage>

If you are newly married or engaged to be married, congratulations. Your interest in this program shows that the two of you recognize your marriage as a vocational call. If you have been married for some time, then congratulations to you as well for seeking to deepen your

vocational call as a couple. God has good ideas for the two of you together. We pray that this program will reveal those ideas to you with clarity.

This reflection will help you discern God's call for you as a couple at this time in your lives. As that call emerges, place your trust in God, say 'yes' as best you can, and give it your all.

What's Changing?

In his book *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges writes that transitions always start with an ending. Seems odd, yes, but he maintains that the first step toward a life change is identifying what you are losing and learning how to manage the losses.

As you embrace the call to married life, you may wonder what you may be losing, or giving up, when committing to this one person, and this one particular lifestyle. You may feel as though you are losing your freedom, and that may cause some confusion, anxiety, and doubt. It's all normal. But pay attention to those feelings. They are indicators of a life change that you (and your beloved) must now navigate.

Consider

In her article, *From ME to WE: Tips for Adjusting to the First Year of Marriage*, Sharise Nance writes:

Most married couples would agree that the first year of marriage can range from bliss and excitement to adjustment and transition. Blended families, first time married couples, previously married couples and family history can have a huge impact on the first year of marriage. Each couple will experience their unique share of successes and obstacles. (<https://www.marriage.com/advice/relationship/tips-for-adjusting-to-the-first-year-of-marriage>)

Take a moment to read the entire article. You'll see that she offers practical suggestions to "help you adjust and enjoy a successful first year of marriage" under these headings:

- ✦ Create your own tradition
- ✦ Discuss dreams and goals
- ✦ Keep lists of all the good moments and successes
- ✦ Communicate often
- ✦ Create a technology free evening
- ✦ Set aside "Me time" or time with friends

Write and/or Discuss

Jot some notes or share with others your responses to these questions:

- ✦ What has been the hardest adjustment for you since getting married?
- ✦ What do you think has been the hardest adjustment for your spouse?
- ✦ What has been your most pleasant surprise? For your spouse?

- Which of Nance's suggestions for marital adjustment resonates most for you right now?
- What would you add to her list?

Reflect

As you embrace your call to married life, take a moment to complete these reflection statements . . .

- ◆ One thing I really love about being married . . .
- ◆ One thing I really need to pray about . . .
- ◆ About myself, I am learning that . . .

Finding concrete answers for how to align your life with God ideas for the two of you is a process that takes time. So, all your wonderments and anxieties are normal and part of the process. Acknowledge them and recognize that God is present in them. And pray for trust that God will mold you and your beloved into the authentic couple you are called to be.

Take heart

"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mark 10:6-9)

What's Emerging in My Life?

Let's consider what might be emerging in your life as a result of these changes. As we do so, let us remember a few things that others have discovered about God's callings in their lives. We can say that responding to God's call will likely . . .

- ◆ Lead to happiness in the long run. If it makes you depressed, it's likely not God's call. Although it won't make you immune to all other emotions such as sadness, frustration, resentment, guilt, etc. But if there is no happiness whatsoever, somehow you are not aligned with God's desire.
- ◆ Not be easy. It will probably stretch you toward something you never thought you could do or be. But you can do it, especially if you have some help.
- ◆ Benefit others besides yourself. If it only involves the two of you, it's not God's call, and in the long run, likely not good for your marriage.
- ◆ Not be overly complicated. You'll be able to explain it to others in just a few words.

Consider

Let's consider the third bullet point: benefit others besides yourself. You have surely learned by now that marriage requires considerable giving, self-sacrifice, and a whole lot of kindness and consideration of your beloved. You are called to be with and for the other. Indeed, your happiness lies in giving of your whole self to your beloved. The vocation of marriage also calls the two of you beyond yourselves for the sake of others.

In her article "Qualities of a Christian Marriage" Susan Vogt writes,

When a couple enters into a Christian marriage . . . they choose to add a dimension of purpose beyond the couple themselves. The church blesses this union and calls it a sacrament because it is a sign of God's love made real in this world through the couple's generous love and sacrificing for each other and for the world.

(<http://www.susanvogt.net/PDF/PDF%20MQualities%20of%20a%20Christian%20Marriage.pdf>)

Vogt goes on to describe the following qualities of a Christian marriage: covenant, risk, prayer, unconditional, permanence, fidelity, fruitfulness, and forgiveness. Read the entire article together as a couple.

Write and/or Discuss

Choose one of the eight qualities described the article "Qualities of a Christian Marriage." Discuss together the reflection questions offered by the author. For example, under **Covenant** you are invited to "Reflect on when your relationship has not always been fair or 50/50. When has one of you been called to give more than your fair share?"

Take heart

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1 John 4:16).

How Should We Live?

Now we seek to turn the corner and fully embrace the call. We seek to develop fruitful patterns of behavior and action that bring fulfillment.

Marriage is a vocation to holiness. From your first days as husband and wife through your golden years, you have the awesome task of witnessing to God's faithful love to each other, your children, and society. No couple does this perfectly, and everyone needs help when love feels strained and the going gets tough. All marriages can grow in knowledge, faith, joy, and love.

Consider

In her articles "Common Values" Susan Vogt writes:

Early in my career, when I taught high school or college students about marriage, I'd say that communication was the key in choosing a mate and keeping a marriage healthy. I've changed my mind. . . . Yes, communication is vital, and if couples don't have good communication skills, learning them can be a marriage saver. But if the values are significantly different, it's unlikely that even the best communication will be enough.

(<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/common-values/>)

Vogt goes on to offer a "Common Values Assessment" that is designed to show how your values are aligned with each other. Read the article together and do the assessment now.

Write and/or Discuss

Jot some notes and share with your beloved responses to these questions:

- ◆ Which of the fourteen values is most important to you?
- ◆ Which ones can fudge a bit?
- ◆ What values would you add that are crucial to the two of you?

Consider

Here are links to helpful practices and strategies for responding to the call of married life.

- ◆ *Discerning the Call to Marriage* by Sara and Justin. I've been asked how Justin and I knew we were called to marriage. It's hard to describe, because there was never really a huge "aha!" moment.
<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/blogs/discerning-the-call-to-marriage>
- ◆ *Marriage and Parenthood: Vocation, Communion, and Mission*. In June 2015, Pope Francis spoke to the crowd in Saint Peter's Square where he specifically addressed parents, meditating on three aspects of marriage – vocation, communion, and mission.
<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/blogs/marriage-and-parenthood-vocation-communion-and-mission>
- ◆ *The Vocation of Marriage*. Marriage involves a call from God and a response from two people who promise to build, with the help of divine grace, a lifelong, intimate and sacramental partnership of love and life.
<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/the-vocation-of-marriage>.
- ◆ *From ME to WE: Tips for Adjusting to the First Year of Marriage* by Sharise M. Nance. Transition, compromise, bliss, difficult, exhausting, work, exciting, stressful, peaceful and amazing are some of the words used to describe the first year of marriage.
<https://www.marriage.com/advice/relationship/tips-for-adjusting-to-the-first-year-of-marriage>
- ◆ *One Marriage, Two Careers, and a Cross Country Move* by Sarah Otto. Andy and I just finished a couple months of serious discernment. In less than a week, we'll be moving from Massachusetts to California. And while we can say that with much joy and excitement now, the process itself was really difficult.
<https://bustedhalo.com/blogs/one-marriage-two-careers-and-a-cross-country-move>

- ◆ *The One?* By Andy Otto. The chances of meeting “the one” is a calculation we love to romanticize. The downside to this romantic number crunching is that it can leave us in an endless search for Mr. or Ms. Perfect.
<https://bustedhalo.com/blogs/the-one-2>
- ◆ *Who Me, Pray? . . . with Her?* By Jim Vogt. Down to earth questions and answers about praying as a couple.
<http://www.susanvogt.net/PDF/PDF%20M-Who%20Me%20Pray%20With%20Her1.pdf>

Take heart

*The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord,
Our soul is waiting for the Lord,
He is our help and our shield,
in him do our hearts find joy.
We trust in his holy name.
(Psalm 33:12, 20-21)*

Blessing for those Called to Marriage

This blessing may be used with a small group or with the entire congregation.

Introduction

Today, the couples before us recognize that their marriage is a call to reflect God's love for the world, and to be of service to the world. They ask for our support and blessing as they strive to respond to God's call. Please extend your hands over them.

Prayer

Almighty and eternal God,
You have so exalted the unbreakable bond of marriage
that it has become the sacramental sign
of your Son's union with the Church, as his spouse.

All: Amen.

Look with favor on these couples,
whom you have united in marriage,
as they ask for your continued help
and the protection of the Holy spirit.

All: Amen.

We pray that in good times and in bad
they will continue to grow in love for each other;
that they will resolve to be of one heart in the bond of peace.

All: Amen.

O God, in their struggles
let them rejoice that you are near to help them.

All: Amen.

In their needs
let them know that you are there to rescue them.

All: Amen.

In their joys
let them see that you are the source and completion of every happiness.

All: Amen.

We pray all this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.