SESSION 1

Does Marriage Matter?

Beloved

Couple’s Guide

The Mystery and Meaning of Marriage
INTRODUCTION

Long before governments and societies ever discussed marriage, God put on the human heart a longing for the unique lifelong commitment and total self-giving love found in the Sacrament of Matrimony. We’re going to see how marriage corresponds to this human desire for a lasting love and how it’s also good for our happiness and good for a flourishing society.

But even more than that, we’re going to see that underneath this ancient institution known as marriage, there’s something much deeper at work. Marriage is bound up with God’s plan for the entire world. In our marriages we participate in something much greater than our human affection for each other or the wonderful desire to be with the one we love. We are caught up into something so much bigger than our own human love. We are caught up into God’s love.

OPENING PRAYER

*Pray together the following Marriage Prayer:*

Heavenly Father,

Through the intercession of the Holy Family, help us treasure the gift of marriage that reflects the love of Christ for the Church, where the self-giving love of husband and wife unites them more perfectly and cooperates in your plan for new life created in your image.

Help us support men and women in their vocation of marriage, especially in difficult times when they join their sufferings to the Cross. Help us uphold the institution of marriage in our society as the place where love is nurtured and family life begins. Help us acknowledge that our future depends on this love and your providential care for us.

Amen.
SESSION 1 VIDEO

Watch the video for Episode 1, which will last for approximately 29 minutes.

"Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa."

—Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Deus Caritas Est, n. 11, 2005

DISCUSSION

1. If we are hardwired to desire the faithful, permanent, and exclusive love of marriage, why can marriage be so difficult sometimes?

2. Imagine that you’re having lunch with a single friend who claims that marriage is overrated and challenges you to prove otherwise. What would you say in response?

3. How is your relationship influenced or informed by the people and culture around you?


"Today, there are those who say that marriage is out of fashion... They say that it is not worth making a lifelong commitment, making a definitive decision, forever because we do not know what tomorrow will bring. I ask you, instead, to be revolutionaries. I ask you to swim against the tide; yes, I am asking you to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes you are incapable of responsibility, that believes you are incapable of true love."

—Pope Francis, World Youth Day on July 28, 2013

4. Which of the following hopes and expectations might you have about marriage (or might you have brought into your marriage)?

- "My spouse will change for me."
- "I can change my spouse."
- "My spouse will help equally with the house and yard work."
- "We will make love every night."
- "We will make love only when my spouse wants to."
- "My spouse will let me make all of the financial decisions."
- "I don't want to have children."
- "I want to have a lot of children."
- "I want our marriage to be just like the marriage my parents had."
- "I don't want our marriage to be anything like my parents' marriage."
- "I want to spend all my free time doing things with my spouse."
- "I expect to have free time by myself—or doing things with my friends without my spouse."
- "I expect us to attend church faithfully."
- "Church is an option we can take or leave."
- "I like overt displays of affection in public."
- "I think affection should be shown in private only."
- "I expect us to have conflicts, and to fight loud and hard, but make up at the end."
- "I don't like to argue and tend to get quiet when faced with conflict."
- "I expect to be protected by my spouse."
- "I expect to be respected by my spouse."
- "I like an orderly and clutter-free house."
• "I don’t really care about clutter, as long as the place is reasonably clean."
• "I’m inclined to take most comments about how I look or what I do as criticism."
• "Decisions should be made quickly, based on gut instinct."
• "Decisions should be made carefully, with a lot of thought and collecting of information."
• "Our parents will be a key part of our lives."
• "I want to keep a reasonable distance from our parents."
• "I like holidays at home."
• "I like holidays with our extended families."
• "It hurts me when...[fill in the blank]"
• "The best way to show me love is by...[fill in the blank]"

5. What expectations do you have about your relationship that you haven’t really talked about?


6. What challenges or problems have you had in your relationship so far—and how might these reflect both realistic and unrealistic expectations about marriage?


"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."
—Genesis 2:24
COUPLE'S ACTIVITY

You saw in the video how marriages are integral to God's plan for the entire world—the Sacrament of Matrimony as an expression of our human love as a reflection of God's love for us.

Take some time to explore the question: "What is God's plan for marriage?"

Some key aspects of this plan can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1601–1605. (If you do not have a *Catechism*, there is an online version that you can find at: www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/.)

Discuss how the Church's understanding of God's plan for marriage might change the way you envision your marriage. Do you find these truths challenging, or comforting, or difficult to grasp? Share your thoughts openly and honestly with each other.

Consider starting a journal (or using the sections provided in this book) to record passages that have special meaning to you and your beloved.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Pray together the following prayer:*

Almighty God,

We aspire to the ideal of marriage that you established long before any other cultural or governmental statutes existed. Your Holy Scriptures say, "From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female'; 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'; So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." Bless our efforts to protect and nourish the union you have ordained.

Amen.
Your Journal Thoughts