



PRE-CANA COUPLE'S BOOK

*"This is my beloved, this is my friend."
Song of Songs 5:16*



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Opening Prayer:

Prayer for Understanding

*Lord, help us always to seek first to understand each other,
to lead with compassion,
to walk a while in the other's experience.*

*Help us walk the road of marriage together,
trusting that when we doubt,
you will give us faith,
that when we criticize,
you will give us the courage
to seek and to give forgiveness.*

*Make our love for one another burn in our hearts
in tough times as well as in the easy times.
May your Spirit renew our love again and again,
so that we may give witness
to your saving presence in our lives.*

Amen.

Segment 1 – Your Dreams for Marriage

Exercise 1A: God's dream is for each of us to have a healthy, holy loving marriage because our marriage is meant to be a reflection of God's love for us. God wants us to help each other to be the best version of ourselves – to be *Better Together*.

Take a few moments to finish the following statements and discuss some of your thoughts: My future spouse makes me a better person by.... (3 minutes)

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Video 2.0 – Wisdom from Sarah and Andy – What Are Your Dreams (3:31) (Jot down your thoughts as you watch each video)

Exercise 1B: This is a great point in your marriage preparation to stop and ask yourself: What are my dreams? This could be the most important moment of your marriage preparation. People who dream are simply more engaged in life. People who dream are more interesting. Period. And couples who learn to dream together have marriages that are longer, fuller, and happier. Now is your time to dream.

Spend ten minutes answering the question for yourself. What are your dreams? Begin a dream list and write them down. Use the ten dream categories to give clarity to your process. There are no right or wrong answers. Write quickly; don't think too much. Don't analyze or edit yourself as you make your list. Write everything down, even the things you feel are foolish. Your answers don't have to be definitive; they will change over time. In fact, some of them will probably change by the time you finish marriage preparation. But it is still important to write them down now. It will help you as you venture through the rest of your life. So write your list, and when you are done, date it and share it with your future spouse (at lunch, later today or this evening).

Here are ten categories of dreams to help spur your thoughts and get you started:

1. **Adventure:** If you could travel to any three places in the next ten years, where would you go?
2. **Creative:** What hobby or sport would you like to pursue?
3. **Physical:** What aspect of your physical health and wellness would you like to improve?
4. **Legacy:** What ministry, cause, or charity would you like to start supporting or increase your support for?
5. **Emotional:** What one relationship would you like to improve or grow?

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- 6. **Psychological:** If you could suspend fear, what activity would you try?
- 7. **Professional:** What's your dream job?
- 8. **Intellectual:** If you could speak an additional language, what would it be?
- 9. **Spiritual:** What's your dream for how you might develop a greater sense of inner peace? Who does God want you to be?
- 10. **Character:** What character qualities do you notice in other people that you would like to expand in your own life?

Your responses: _____

Segment 2 – Seven Levels of Intimacy

Video 4.0 – Wisdom from Dominick and Rebecca (jot down your thoughts for these videos and discuss)

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Video 4.1 - Cliché's, Facts and Opinions

Video 4.2 – Hopes and Dreams

Video 4.3 – Feelings

Video 4.4 – Faults, Fears and Failures

Video 4.5 – Legitimate Needs

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Exercise 2A: There are five aspects to the fifth level of Intimacy – Feelings:

1. Knowing our feelings
2. Being comfortable expressing our feelings
3. Expressing them at the right time
4. Expressing them in the right place
5. Expressing them to the right person

Discuss the five aspects of this level. Where are you strong? Where are you weak? When you are upset, how do you like to be approached? Do you make each other feel accepted or do you constantly strive for understanding? How do you like to be approached when you are experiencing bad feelings? Do you want to be comforted? Do you want to be left alone? Do you want a silent, kind gesture? Do you want to be distracted? Write this one thing down and share it with your partner.

Segment 3 – Prayer and Spirituality

Video 6.0 – Wisdom from Married Couples (Jot down your thoughts and discuss for these videos)

Video 6.2 – World-Class Help

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Exercise 3A (To be done on your own time; discuss with your priest or deacon and a couple you admire)

Prayer is one of those important things. Prayer helps us identify what matters most and strengthens our hearts and minds to give priority to those things in our daily lives.

Without prayer, over time we forget the qualities that make us uniquely human (compassion, generosity, humility, fortitude). Prayer leads us to catch a glimpse of the-best-version-of-ourselves. It helps us develop the virtue necessary to celebrate our best selves.

In marriage, prayer fortifies our love for our spouse; it encourages us to collaborate with God for a dynamic and healthy relationship. Most crucial of all, prayer sustains us when marriage gets difficult.

Look at a healthy marriage and you will find men and women of prayer. Is it enough for them just to pray? No. Life is complex and difficult, and at times we will need to turn to resources like books, mentor couples, marriage events, and marriage counselors. But the best action springs forth from a vibrant prayer life. The best place to start is an honest assessment of where you are. This is going to help you and your future spouse get a real sense of where you are in your spiritual journeys.

Instructions for Part 1: Write down your spiritual history in one page. Include:

- How did your family practice the faith?
 - What do you remember as an important tradition in your family's faith life?
 - When did the faith become important to you? Why?
 - If it is not important to you, why is that?
 - What are your spiritual habits?
 - Describe your prayer life.
 - When was the last time you read a good Catholic book?
 - Describe your giving habits.
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2. As you seek to move toward the-best-version-of-yourself individually and as a couple, start with a short self-evaluation. How would you rank yourself in each of these areas? Circle the number that corresponds to how much you see this area prospering in your life, with a score of 1 being very little and 10 being the fullest abundance you could ever imagine. Doing this will help you envision where and how you will grow as you seek to become the-best-version-of-yourself.

LOVE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

JOY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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PEACE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

PATIENCE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

KINDNESS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

GENEROSITY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

FAITHFULNESS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

GENTLENESS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

SELF-CONTROL

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

PRAYER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

SPIRITUALITY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Once you know where you are, you can take a look at three areas of your life to help you know where to go.

First, where can you shore up your own spiritual life? As you conducted your honest self-assessment, you probably noticed an area or two of potential growth. That is only a good thing. Ask God to show you the best next steps in grasping those opportunities to grow spiritually.

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Second, decide your spirituality as a couple. What is your prayer life going to look like? When life happens and things start to slip, how will you give each other permission to hold the other accountable? Don't be vague here. Get specific. When, where, and how will you pray? How will you incorporate reading Scripture or other spiritual books? Leave no stone unturned when it comes to planning your spiritual lives together.

Third, decide how you will engage and pray with your community. Do you belong to a parish? When and where do you go to Mass? How are you getting to know the people in your parish? How are you supporting them and letting them support you? When you are married, how will you serve the community?

These three areas of your spiritual life will build the spiritual bedrock of your marriage.

The following prayer process was developed with some of the Church's most ancient wisdom regarding prayer. The result is a process that is fully adaptable to your state in life and your experience with prayer. You can use this process any time to pray *for* your spouse, pray *with* your spouse or just to feel more grounded and closer to God. The process goes like this:

1. **Gratitude:** Begin by thanking God in a personal dialogue for whatever you are most grateful for today.

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2. **Awareness:** Revisit the times in the past twenty-four hours when you were and were not the best-version-of-yourself. Talk to God about these situations and what you learned from them.

3. **Significant Moments:** Identify something you experienced today and explore what God might be trying to say to you through that event (or person).

4. **Peace:** Ask God to forgive you for any wrong you have committed (against yourself, another person, or him) and to fill you with a deep and abiding peace.

5. **Freedom:** Speak with God about how he is inviting you to change your life so that you can experience the freedom to be the-best-version-of-yourself.

6. **Others:** Lift up to God anyone you feel called to pray for today, asking God to bless and guide them.

7. Finish by praying the ***Our Father***.

Exercise 3B: There are two game-changing resources that God gives us for marriage. The first is prayer and the second is finding a mentor couple. What a gift to gain encouragement and wisdom from an experienced couple who embodies the kind of marriage you dream of.

If you are not already working with a mentor couple, find a Catholic married couple you admire and ask them these two questions, then share those responses with your priest or deacon:

1. In what ways has your prayer life helped you get through difficult situations in your marriage?
2. How has your spiritual life changed or developed since you were first married?

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Segment 4 – Conflict is Inevitable

Video 5.2 – Common Purpose (Jot down your thoughts for these videos and discuss)

Video 5.4 – Keys to Healthy Conflict

Exercise 4A:

When conflict arises, husband and wife must have a plan for how to navigate through the conflict for the good of the team:

1. **Remember purpose:** You have agreed on your common, unchanging purpose as a couple (for instance: to help each other be the best version of themselves)
2. **Breathe deeply:** Slowing the process can help you focus on your partner, creating space in the conversation that prevents you from taking things personally.
3. **Listen attentively:** By listening attentively, you are de-escalating the situation and communicating acceptance even in disagreement.
4. **Accept responsibility:** Healthy people accept at least partial responsibility for the issue.
5. **Speak respectfully:** Respect will remember that sometimes it is more important to be loving than to be right. Selfless love sacrifices for the good of the other. When both spouses embrace the selfless, sacrificial love embodied by Jesus, the marriage gains supernatural, divine strength.

Discuss: Decide together on a topic that has caused some recent conflict in your relationship. Now go through each of the five steps above and discuss the ways each step might be helpful in resolving this issue for the good of your relationship.

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Segment 5 – Sexuality

Video 7.1 – How to Have a Great Sex Life (jot down your thoughts)

Exercise 5A: The sexual relationship in marriage is one of God’s great gifts. Sex is good because God created it – he made us for each other. A good sex life with your spouse will deepen and enhance your marriage and relationship.

God wants you to experience deep intimacy in all forms – physically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. God wants you and your mate to be able to share and reveal yourselves to each other throughout your marriage. Sex is just one part of that. It can lead to and deepen intimacy you share in marriage. If you want a great sex life in marriage you need to know five things:

1. **Great Friendship:** Just like your marriage, great sex is rooted in friendship. Couples who have a great sex life nurture and sustain their friendship. They seek each other out because that’s what good friends do.
2. **Sex has Priority:** A great sex life means sex is a priority in your marriage. Both must work to make sure the sexual relationship is not set aside due to the demands of daily life.
3. **Be Transparent:** Couples who enjoy a great sex life value honest conversation. They talk openly about sex with each other – they share their needs and desires and seek mutual sexual fulfillment. They are not selfish but seek to give themselves as a gift for their spouse.
4. **Keep Dating:** Husband and wife enjoy the carefree timelessness of a date – long walks, movies, hikes, holding hands, time spent together. Dating maintains the spark and strengthens the friendship and intimacy.
5. **Show Affection:** Couples who have a great sex life show affection for each other – in public and in private. They snuggle and cuddle in private. Affection plays a central role in their marriage.

Instructions: The purpose of this exercise is to reflect on the importance of sexual intimacy in marriage, and to explore the healthiest, most life-affirming ways to express sexual love. The questions will help you identify those things that can detract and erode a strong sexual relationship, as well as those things that will make your marriage stronger.

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1. Experts agree that there is a strong connection between a great sex life and great friendship. What specific aspects of marital friendship are most important for a fulfilling sexual relationship in marriage, and why?

2. Take a few moments now to describe your hopes, dreams and expectations for your sexual relationship in marriage?

3. The Catholic Church teaches that the body, pleasure and erotic joy are good, that the sexual relationship is a way to express the deep, unconditional, indissoluble love of married persons. Married couples who appreciate the importance and sacredness of the sexual relationship are reported to have more fulfilling sex lives – why might that be so?

4. Usually couples who experience a bad sex life exhibit one key characteristic in their relationship – they fail to seek each other out. How will you be intentional about making sexual intimacy a priority in your marriage?

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5. Sexual exclusivity means that all aspects of sexual fulfillment happen within the sexual confines of the marital relationship. Pornography is in common usage but is an absolute form of infidelity, and very damaging to trust and intimacy. In what ways does the use of pornography go against exclusivity in marriage?

Segment 6 – Family

Video on Natural Family Planning – Couple to Couple League (CCLI.org) (Jot down your thoughts and discuss for these videos)

Video 8.2 – Your Family Dream

Exercise 6A:

Write down and discuss: What are some things or qualities that you definitely want in your family? What are some things or qualities that you definitely do not want in your family?

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Final Segment - On the Day

Video 12.5 – The Difference Between a Wedding and a Marriage (Jot down your thoughts and discuss)

Final Exercise:

Write a love letter to your spouse in the form of a prayer that sums up all of your feelings and insights from today. Begin by thanking God for bringing you together, then share your feelings about your future marriage – your hopes, your fears, your goals, your common purpose and your mission for your marriage. Ask God for specific blessings for your marriage and for your future spouse. Remember that prayer is simply a conversation with God.

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Final Prayer

*Lord,
Help us to answer your call
to become a living sign of your love.*

*Make our love for each other be like your love for us—
passionate, permanent, intimate, unconditional, and
life-giving.*

*May we be as present to each other as you are to us
so that all your people can see your presence
manifested in our tender love for one another.*

*Helps us to stay close to you in the Body of Christ
and continue to nourish our love
through all your sacraments.*

We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

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Prayer for Our Wedding Day:

Pray Together:

Lord at last this day of days has come. We have been preparing for days and years.

This is the day of dreams.

Thank you, Lord for the meeting of our hearts, our lives, our souls.

All is yearning. All is hope. Come bless our lives, you who see into future ways with your eternal wisdom.

Protect our nights and days. Make our home a place of joy.
When storm clouds gather let no hurt destroy.

May your angels find a home from heaven therein.
When days are sad may we hear them sing.

Bless us with children, fulfilling our dream, placed in your trusting our future unseen.

May friends young and old cross this threshold
to find a sacred embrace, a welcome in kind.

Lord of love may we know the gift of your Spirit in times of strength, in times of sorrow, when hearts are strong, when hearts are hollow.
Whisper courage to the wind.

May the harvest of our lives mellow our hearts, where silence is sacred and words can depart.
For you are there keeping watch in our twilight years.

This day is but the beginning of love in eternity - beyond, above, below.

How could we ever know the depth of your love till death do us part. . . What is death only finding love beyond the stars.

— Fr. Liam Lawton, from *The Hope Prayer*



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