



MARRIAGE

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.

When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Draw some out now and take it to the

headwaiter.” So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.”

Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

- John 2:1-11 ^[1]

CLASS DISCUSSION: QUALITIES OF A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR MARRIAGE

CHECKLIST: QUALITIES OF A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR MARRIAGE

A successful and happy Christian marriage requires that each spouse cultivates certain characteristics and habits. This checklist gives a general overview of the qualities which are important, and can help you determine what you should work on in your own life, as well as what you should look for in a potential spouse if/when you discern marriage.

On each of the items, rate yourself on a scale of 0 – 5. A rating of 0 means you do not possess the quality at all. A 5 indicates that the quality is very evident in your life. At the end, total your score. The highest possible score is 100. Be completely honest with yourself and rate yourself fairly. Don't be too lenient or too hard on yourself; remember that most candidates for marriage lack some of these qualities, at least initially.



Reflecting on each of these points will take you a long way down the road of self-discovery. Finding the areas that need strengthening, then actually taking steps to improve, will make you a much better Catholic, even if you are not called to marry.

[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/>



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CLASS DISCUSSION: QUALITIES OF A GOOD CANDIDATE FOR MARRIAGE *continued*

1. ____ I find that it is good for my mind and my soul to interact with members of the opposite sex; their advice and spiritual point of view really benefit me.
2. ____ I try to do what is right and avoid sinning.
3. ____ Prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture leads me to believe I might be called to marriage.
4. ____ People who know me would say I am a Christian gentleman/ a Christian lady.
5. ____ I would be open to children, however many God willed, and caring for their physical and spiritual needs, even if they had major problems or disabilities.
6. ____ I am working on strengthening my Catholic faith and living it out.
7. ____ I think that I have the physical, emotional, and psychological stability to be married.
8. ____ I have had others tell me that I would make a good husband & father/wife & mother.
9. ____ I would be able to put the happiness, health, and holiness of my spouse and children above my own preferences, if needed.
10. ____ I am not a “people-pleaser;” I am able to stand up for myself and work problems out; I don’t let people walk all over me.
11. ____ I have a good sense of humor and take joy in life.
12. ____ I am trying to help other people, and I would like my daily life to involve helping other people.
13. ____ I am usually able to accept both success and failure without losing my peace.
14. ____ I have pretty good self-control—I can keep my temper, handle stress, and keep my promises and commitments.
15. ____ I am basically dependable.
16. ____ I am trying to pray regularly, and I want prayer to be an important part of my life and the life of people I care about.
17. ____ I believe that I have a healthy psycho-sexual development and orientation.
18. ____ I like being with people, especially families, but I can also handle being alone.
19. ____ I want to know God’s will for me and be able to do it.
20. ____ I love God and would like to share my love for Him with someone else.

____ **TOTAL**

After completing the Checklist, answer the following questions:

1. In which areas did I score the lowest? Are these things that I could work on—just to be better prepared, whatever my vocation is?
2. Which of these qualities are necessary for all vocations? Give an example of how religious life or the priesthood requires these qualities.
3. If you could imagine the best and holiest spouse, which 5 of the listed qualities would be the most important for him/her to have?
4. In your opinion, which qualities are the most necessary for a good marriage? Why?



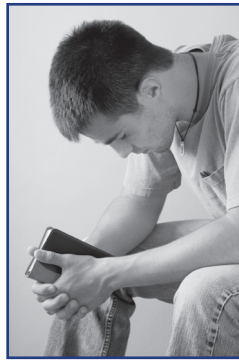
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ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: GETTING MARRIED

Discerning a vocation to marriage is like discerning any vocation – it takes a lot of time and education to do it correctly. Unfortunately, a lot of people jump into marriage assuming that they know everything they need to, or that things will just “work out”, and don’t expend effort on understanding the important things and getting them right.

The following is a basic explanation of what goes into getting married, a sort of “how-to” from the Catholic perspective:

1. Prepare Yourself. Just as with other vocations, a good marriage is preceded by some discernment. People research, contact, and visit religious orders before they choose one. They pray and strive to be the kind of people worthy and ready for their vocations. Likewise, people considering marriage should follow a similar pattern of discernment:



- A. *Pray.* Prayer is key to knowing God’s will, both in your general vocation and in the particular context he wants you to live it (in other words, whom you should marry). If you do not pray, it will be impossible to know God’s plan.
- B. *Serve.* If you cannot serve others generously and selflessly, your marriage will be very difficult. Marriage is about getting your spouse and yourself to heaven, and this requires self-sacrifice. If your view of marriage is selfish (“all about me”), it will not be a good marriage.
- C. *Examine your soul.* You should ask yourself the kind of questions found on the Checklist activity frequently and work on the areas with which you have difficulty.
- D. *Cultivate great friendships.* You should interact purely, as a friend, with members of the opposite sex. If you can develop good friendships with members of the opposite sex which are completely chaste and maintain them over time, then you are well on your way to being able to live very happily in a marriage.
- E. *Get advice* from trusted adults about what makes a good or bad spouse. Just as you would ask advice from trusted adults about joining a particular religious order, you will also ask advice about dating or continuing to date a particular man or woman. Consider their advice, even if it isn’t what you want to hear.

F. *Look for the right person.* Someone discerning religious life looks for a community which seems likely to help him spiritually, one which provides real ways to live up to his talents, skills, and desires. Likewise, a person discerning marriage should look for similar things in a potential spouse: does this person help me spiritually? Does this person influence me to be a better person, more creative, more virtuous, more thoughtful, more compassionate with or without him/her around? Or does this person influence me to be less than I should be? Before dating someone, you should have a good idea of what the person is really like, and how he/she affects you, positively or negatively.

G. *Date with a purpose.* If you feel mature enough to pursue marriage more actively, and if, with the advice of others, and your own judgment, you find a suitable person, you can try to initiate a deeper friendship. It is good to keep this light at first—good marriages are built on plain old goodwill, charity, and friendship. If either of you move too quickly towards a very serious, exclusive relationship, it can push either partner into continuing a relationship that should be stopped. However, a good friendship can be the beginning of a great dating relationship which leads to a wonderful marriage.

H. *Continue a great friendship.* While dating, continue to pursue chastity. If you have developed healthy habits, they will help you now to be chaste and in control of your sexual desires according to your state-in-life. If you can show this tremendous level of respect to each other while dating, one of two things will likely happen: either you will determine that you are not called to marry each other, and will be able to continue having a great friendship because you did not destroy it with unchastity; or you will go on to marry each other and have a great start to the rest of your married life.

2. Applying for Marriage. In the Church, a marriage must be applied for an approved.

A. *Contact your parish priest.* When you and another have made up your mind to marry, and made it formal with an engagement and plans to set a date in the near future, your priest who will guide you through the next steps. Church weddings must take place in the territorial parish church of bride or groom, unless you get special permission from the bishop. Most parishes require that one of the spouses be a registered member of the parish.



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ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: GETTING MARRIED *continued*

B. *Expect an interview with the priest or deacon*, who- ever will preside over your exchange of vows, to receive approval for your marriage. He will ask whether there are any impediments to marriage, such as a previous marriage, or any special circumstances that would make it extremely difficult to marry. Usually, this is not a problem. However, if a serious issue is found (an unresolvable impediment), it is God letting you know that this marriage is not right for you. While this may be difficult to accept, remember that God knows best what is good for you and what will make you happy.



C. *Arrange a date*. Before you make any other plans, it is important to find out whether the date you have in mind works with the parish schedule and reserve that date. There may already be a wedding planned the same day you would like, so prepare several possible dates, and remain flexible. (Some parishes require that you are approved for marriage or complete marriage prep before reserving a date.)

D. *Complete marriage preparation* (see the next part).

3. Marriage Preparation with your Future Spouse

- A. *Attend marriage preparation* required by the parish. This usually involves classes, testing, and counseling to make sure the couple knows all that is entailed in a Catholic marriage.
- B. *Cover costs*. Some parishes have small fees to cover the expenses of the staff helping the couple prepare, usage and cleaning of the church, etc. Where there is no fee, it is customary to donate a small amount. This amount may vary by parish or diocese. If there is financial difficulty, most parishes will waive any fees. (In Christian justice, these should be paid before any other unnecessary expenses, such as a fancy reception, since this is the essential part of the wedding!)
- C. *Submit documents*. Commonly required are: Baptismal Certificate, Certificate of Holy Communion and Confirmation, Affidavit of Freedom to Marry (usually filled out and signed by parents or other witnesses that you are free to marry), Civil Marriage License (if applicable; obtained through state and local governments), Certification of Completing Marriage Preparation.

D. *Work with the priest* to choose the liturgy options and music. This includes specific prayers and readings. The parish often has a prepared list of music which the parish musicians can play/sing, which will have many choices. (Liturgy options will be different depending on the rite used. For two Catholics marrying, the marriage rite usually takes place within the context of the Mass; there are also rites for a Catholic marrying a baptized non-Catholic, or a Catholic marrying a non-baptized person.)

E. *Choose witnesses* – two people, besides the priest/deacon presiding, are required to witness the exchange of vows. (These are usually the “maid of honor” and the “best man”.) Ask for their consent to officially witness this exchange.

F. *Note rules and regulations of the diocese and parish concerning your wedding*. Since marriage demands the mature, full, well-thought out, free consent of both man and woman, many parishes have set up basic rules to be sure that this happens. For example, since exchanging vows while intoxicated can make a marriage invalid, some parishes forbid consumption of alcohol on parish property prior to the wedding. (In addition, these rules are usually just common sense!)

G. While most people will have a reception, remember that the most important thing is the wedding itself. Preparation for other things should not distract the bride and groom from preparing for the Sacrament, especially by prayer and the Sacraments. It is advisable to go to confession frequently in the months and weeks preceding the wedding so that both can approach the sacrament joyfully.

4. The Wedding

- A. On the day of the wedding, the bride and groom exchange their vows before the witnesses, presider, and others. They are married; the beginning!





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OPTIONAL READINGS

INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE (ST. FRANCIS DE SALES)

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) studied law before becoming a priest and later Bishop of Geneva, Switzerland. He wrote numerous letters of spiritual advice to laypeople and penned *Introduction to the Devout Life* specifically for them, saying: *“It is an error, nay more, a very heresy, to seek to banish the devout life from the soldier’s guardroom, the mechanic’s workshop, the prince’s court, or the domestic hearth.”* In Ch. 38, he speaks of the good of marriage.



Excerpt from *Introduction to the Devout Life*

“Marriage is a great Sacrament both in Jesus Christ and His Church, and one to be honoured to all, by all and in all. To all, for even those who do not enter upon it should honour it in all humility. By all, for it is holy alike to poor as to rich. In all, for its origin, its end, its form and matter are holy. It is the nursery of Christianity, whence the earth is peopled with faithful, till the number of the elect in Heaven be perfected; so that respect for the marriage tie is exceedingly important to the commonwealth, of which it is the source and supply. Would to God that His Dear Son were bidden to all weddings as to that of Cana! Truly then the wine of consolation and blessing would never be lacking...”

Above all, I would exhort all married people to seek that mutual love so commended to them by the Holy Spirit in the Bible... “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church. Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as unto the Lord.” It was God Who brought Eve to our first father Adam, and gave her to him to wife; and even so, my friends, it is God’s Invisible Hand Which binds you in the sacred bonds of marriage; it is He Who gives you one to the other, therefore cherish

one another with a holy, sacred, heavenly love. The first effect of this love is the indissoluble union of your hearts.... The second effect of this love should be an inviolable fidelity to one another.... The third end of marriage is the birth and bringing up of children. And herein, O ye married people! are you greatly honoured, in that God, willing to multiply souls to bless and praise Him to all Eternity, He associates you with Himself in this His work, by the production of bodies into which, like dew from Heaven, He infuses the souls He creates as well as the bodies into which they enter.”

BY LOVE REFINED (ALICE VON HILDEBRAND)

Alice von Hildebrand (b. 1923) is a Catholic professor, philosopher, and theologian as well as wife of theologian Dietrich von Hildebrand, a powerful defender of the family. She has written a number of books; *By Love Refined* gathers a series of letters written to a young bride.

Excerpt from *By Love Refined* ^[4]

“Now your great mission begins. Together you... must weave into the tapestry of your life the many themes we discussed during your engagement: the beauty of marriage—its tasks, its joys—and love’s power to lighten its burdens and sorrows. I know how deeply you’ve understood the words of Thomas à Kempis, ‘Love is a great thing.’ Marriage is also a great thing: the most complete, the most intense, and the most beautiful relationship between two human beings. But like all great things in life, marriage is a risk—a ‘deed of daring’... That’s why a happy marriage is impossible for people who never take any step that might threaten their security. You... now have in your hands the power to create an earthly heaven or hell. It’s no secret that marriage can quickly become a hell for spouses. But remember that humanly speaking, a great love between husband and wife can also be the deepest source of happiness this side of heaven. How awe-inspiring to see the beauty of another soul, to love him, and then to be permitted to share in his intimacy, actually to become one with him! There’s no earthly experience that is greater than this unity of souls, minds, hearts, and bodies in marriage... such sublime spousal love is a gift, but a gift that must be nurtured and sheltered. Because

[4] Alice von Hildebrand, *By Love Refined: Letters to a Young Bride*, (Manchester, NH: Sophia Press, 1989, 3-5



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OPTIONAL READINGS *continued*

of human imperfections, difficulties crop up in marriage, even between people... who love each other deeply. I think you'll soon find that for this reason, although love is a gift, it must also be learned, especially as you try to relate it to your daily life which isn't loved in a fairy tale castle but in the midst of everyday pressures, problems,

and trials.... your success won't depend on exterior circumstances, but on your own inner attitudes: are you both willing to fight the good fight for your marriage, trusting that your mutual love, strengthened by grace, will achieve victory in spite of the tempests that threaten every human undertaking?"

HOMEWORK: CHASTE DATING

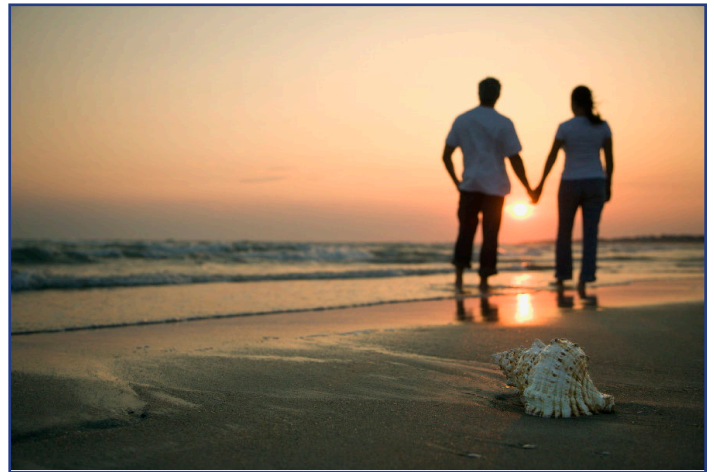
Read the following article and answer the questions at the end.

Marriage demands fidelity to one person. It demands this fidelity for life, regardless of whether an individual continues to feel physical attraction to his or her spouse. Someone out of control sexually in a single-state-in-life is not likely to become magically in control simply by switching to a married-state-in-life. We don't just **have** bodies; we are our bodies. What we do with our bodies should express the commitment of our hearts and minds. In fact, it *does* express it. If we think we love someone, but are willing to have sex without a permanent, full, self-donation, then we are actually just using that person for selfish reasons. That is not love at all.

Chaste dating is not devoid of affection. In fact, it implies physical affection *which is connected to and supports a deep shared life of the mind and soul*. This is a far more profound affection than simple physical contact. In contrast, completely physical relationships foster selfishness, even violence.

In order to protect and support each other in chastity, two people who feel the beginnings of "falling in love" need to make sure their minds and emotions can harmonize. They should seek out opportunities for good, deep conversation, for experiencing beautiful things, for common service. They should seek activities which interest and challenge both of them, using their gifts and talents and calling forth what is best in them.

Spending time in social settings – not just alone all the time – is also necessary. It's a lot easier to remain chaste in a public setting, after all! Spending time with family and friends (good friends!) can promote self-giving, which is essential to real love, and which encourages a desire to protect the one you love.



Individuals should avoid superficiality and relationships based merely on physical attraction or the feeling of being needed. Physical affection is good; in fact, it's one of the best things about being human! But remember the difference between physical affection designed to lead to sex, which is reserved for marriage, and the physical affection that all humans, as creatures with bodies, use (e.g., holding hands, hugs, putting an arm around a shoulder, a brief kiss).

Longer and more intimate forms of physical affection may arouse the emotions and hormones that are conducive to sex. Each body is different, and every person is the best judge of his/her own body. Individuals will be able to tell between plain physical affection and affection that sexually arouses them.

It is good to steer clear of physical affection which arouses; if it continues, it will become more and more difficult to remain chaste. It will also become more difficult to focus on the other



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HOMEWORK: CHASTE DATING *continued*

person. Both individuals may become “pleasure seekers,” paving the way for sex before they are ready or willing to make a lifetime commitment. That does not help either person live up to potential. It’s not a good way to foster real love, and it is definitely not a good foundation for marriage. In fact, many people realize too late that being sexually active before marriage means they will get bored easily with sex or with their spouse.

On the other hand, people who practice chaste dating can testify that sexual relations within marriage do NOT get boring, but instead get sweeter. Sexual relations become a sign of a powerful love. It makes sense that it would be more exciting and more wonderful to save yourself for one person and to make sex a sign of your pledge: “I love you, and you alone, and I will always love you and be there for you.” And how fantastic to sleep with someone who says the same thing to you!

Answer these questions:

1. Why is it important to realize the difference between physical affection which sexually arouses and that which does not?
2. What are some good ways to avoid situations which would make it easier to begin physical affection which arouses?
3. What are the benefits of chaste dating for a relationship before and during marriage?
4. Think of how difficult it can be, when you are caught up in emotion, to stop doing something you know will harm you but feels good “right now”. This can be even more difficult when you’re with other people who are encouraging you to do something. Think of yourself in a dating situation. What would be the most difficult thing about remaining chaste (especially considering the other person involved, who may or may not want to remain chaste)?

Resources

There are many good resources for encouraging chastity available. Check out Catholic Answers’ Chastity Project at chastity.com. They have great video and audio of short explanations about some of the most pressing questions concerning dating, romance, love, etc.