



**St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church
Heliopolis, Cairo - Egypt**

**A B C
Christian
Marriage**

Father Daoud Lamei

Introduction

Marriage in Christ (Christian Marriage) is a God-given Gift to those who experience it as our dear Lord meant it to be from the first day He created Man and Woman. Holy Matrimony (marriage in Christ), one of the main sacraments of the Church, is a true “miracle” whereby two people become “one” IN and WITH our Lord Jesus Christ by means of the Holy Spirit that unites them during the Church Wedding Prayers. So when the Christian couples realize this, they are able to enjoy all the spiritual fruits of the Holy Spirit and live a state of Heaven on earth in love, joy, peace and righteousness.

Marriage in Christ is a Holy Bond that is meant to be a life-long pledge and commitment. It is a Bond that binds the couple together and that binds the couple to Christ in an endless communion of Holy Life and Companionship.

Marriage in Christ is a narrow gate to the Kingdom of Heaven by which the husband and wife give up all the negative attitudes of pride, hypocrisy, selfishness, greed and inequity. Marriage in Christ is an enormous school of Christian virtue where each of the united couple get a chance to learn all about patience, respect, humility, self-denial, meekness, faithfulness, wisdom and forgiveness.

Marriage in Christ is totally different from any other “away from Christ”. Those who marry “in Christ” get an amazing opportunity of plunging into the endless ocean of

love, grace and blessings; while those who marry outside Him live in a continuous futile struggle against the waves of anxiety, fear, lust and hatred.

Marriage in Christ is a Holy Life where kids grow to cherish such an incredible blessing so that they may grow to look forward to a similar life and to be the perfect bride and groom to be.

I am indeed honored to dedicate this book to my dear wife, Sherin who has been a true Heavenly blessing and gift to me as a real Christian wife and a real **“a suitable helper”** (Genesis 2:18). She has taught me a lot about the virtues that a marriage partner should possess. I am indebted to our Lord Jesus Christ for granting me such a precious wife!

I am also grateful to Dr. Inas Barsoum for her help in developing this book and arranging its material.

May our Lord Jesus Christ continue to bless all our homes making of them houses of prayer, purity & blessings for His Glory forever and ever through the prayers of our dear father and Pope, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. Amen

F. Daoud Lamei

Attitude

The first key to happiness in marriage is the “Attitude” of each of the partners.

Attitude depends on how each one views the other, how each views himself or herself, and how both of them see their life and the people around them.

Developing a positive Christian attitude towards oneself, one’s partner, the relationship that binds us and our whole life is a key to the success of our marriage.

- When a man considers his wife to be the life-partner that God granted him as a personal gift, his attitude will be one of extreme gratitude, love, caring and giving. Whereas if he regards her as a competitor, opponent or someone who is there to serve his desires and requests, his attitude will be full of pride, aggression and may even develop into hatred.
- When a woman views her husband as the person that God gave her to be able to pour her great energy of love and sacrifice on him and her family, her attitude will be one of love, devotion, support and sacrifice.

But if she thinks of him as a person who is there to give her orders and make her serve him and the rest of the family

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members, her attitude will be resenting, antagonistic and may even develop into rebellion.

- If both man and woman regard themselves as children of God willing to fulfill His plan for their lives in Him, they will both develop an attitude of closeness to Him and try hard to help one another get closer to Him and therefore gain all the virtues needed to live a happy satisfied life full of Joy and Peace.
- If the couple considers money and material belongings as the most valuable things, their attitude towards one another and to people and circumstances will be full of selfishness and enmity.

But if they think of their existence and their marriage bond as one of the means whereby our Lord Jesus Christ wishes to show His love to all humanity, their attitude will be one of willingness to serve and help all around them to know our Lord more closely and their home will be a Church and a Home for Him.

So, to start with, it is very important to check your ideas, your vision and your values in order to develop a new attitude which will help you face the many challenges that will surely come your way along your married life in order that you lead a much happier and fully satisfied life.

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It is also important to remember that “attitude” is usually contagious. So, if your partner’s attitude is not very positive or is quite negative, be sure that you can change this through your earnest prayers and through maintaining your positive, patient, loving and cheerful attitude.

Don’t think that if you face a negative partner by acting negatively you will win anything.

Contrarily, you will lose every chance to make things better and even more importantly you will lose your internal peace and ruin your relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ who asks us "**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good**" (Romans 12:21)

If you haven’t started yet, I advise you to reconsider changing your attitude towards your partner and your life before it is too late. I am afraid many people flunked the chance and regretted it dearly when their spouses left to heaven before they had started being serious about developing a positive attitude towards them.

Boundaries

In order for your marriage in Christ to be secure, you should be able to put boundaries to your relationship with the outside world/others.

Many marriages get into trouble because they fail to put the necessary boundaries with their families, in-laws, friends, co-workers, and even with one another.

The only one that you and your partner should never put any boundaries with is our Lord Jesus Christ!, Otherwise, you should view yourselves as ONE UNIT that should be safe from any kind of penetration from any person/entity.

Obviously, I do not mean that you should cut yourself off from the whole world and live a life of seclusion. What I mean is that you should be very careful not to allow relationships with any person to impose itself on your married life.

It is by no mere chance that our Church chose to remind the couple of the following...

❖ **"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"** (Matthew 19:5)

❖ **"Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father's house" (Psalms 45:10)**

So, if the Holy Spirit gives us this advice considering our own families or close parents, then it is obvious that we should do the same with any other person.

But what does it mean "to forget one's father's house" or "to leave ...father and mother"?

The meaning is simply to be "weaned" from the relationships upon which one depended before marriage. It is really very interesting that the Holy Spirit says "leave father and mother" and then uses the verb "join wife" to stress the fact that the relationship with one's wife is now as strong as it used to be with one's father and mother all along the life of man ever since he was born. But now there is a different bond and one that is meant to be life-long.

Weaning

“Weaning” is a word that indicates the transition of a baby from one stage of his/her life where s/he was totally dependent on getting his/her food from his/her mom’s breast to a more developed stage where s/he is independent of his mom’s nursing (breast-feeding).

“Weaning” indicates some kind of “freedom” as it includes the ideas of independence and individuality. But it is not an easy process. It can be very painful especially at the beginning – not only to the child but also to the mother that starts feeling that she has stopped being totally attached to her child and that in a way her child doesn’t depend on her as s/he used to.

“Weaning” also takes place when a child goes to Kindergarten or school for the first time. S/he cries bitterly that s/he has to leave his/her parents and stay for long hours without them. Similarly, as a person starts getting into a relationship of marriage with the other, another kind of “weaning” is up to happen.

Within our eastern culture, “weaning” is usually delayed. Mothers sometimes insist on nursing their kids till they are above 2 years of age. This unfortunately may cause the child to grow more slowly and may even affect him/her psychologically as they continue being dependent

personalities even after they grow and may even develop bad habits such as carelessness or irresponsibility.

More serious negative effects can happen if a couple is not timely weaned from their parents to the point that the couple may never be able to enjoy a healthy mature independent relationship.

This kind of “weaning” may be difficult and even hurting at the beginning like any other, but it is mandatory for the growth and development of the life of the individual and that of the couple. This is why each couple should be aware of this matter and be ready to face all kinds of challenges that may come their way as they decide to live an independent life of their own ever since they get engaged.

“Setting boundaries” means that the privacy of the relationship with one’s partner should not be intruded upon by any human being except if an advice is needed from the father of confession or a professional family counselor. Details of one’s married life should not be subject of talk amongst parents, family members, friends or acquaintances.

It is unfortunate that some parents are not aware of the negative effect of their interference or even their comments about the married life of their children. Some parents resist the boundaries that their children put in protection of their married life and they start complaining of their children’s disloyalty and carelessness towards them. It is

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also unfortunate that many husbands and wives fall in the trap of feeling guilty towards their parents and try to satisfy them on the expense of their responsibilities and duties towards their new relationship in marriage.

It is important to be able to strike a balance between your loyalty towards your parents and your responsibility towards the success and development of your married life. It is important to know how/when to tell your mom or dad “no” politely and to decide that the priority goes to your new relationship with your spouse as well as your top priority to obey our Lord Jesus who asked you “to forget your parents and cling to your spouse”.



Communication

A philosopher once said: "Communicate with me so that I am able to see you or even realize that you exist"

Our Lord Jesus Christ is "**the Logos**"... He is the Father's method of communication with human beings. He is the First and Foremost Communicator!

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life. The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (1John 1: 1-2)

- Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Church... The Christian Icon... continuous communication.
- Prayer and Reading the Bible is communication with our Lord.
- Quiet time is communication with oneself and with our Lord.
- Praising the Lord is communicating our Love to our Lord.
- Service is another method of communicating our Love to our Lord.

Christianity is a continuous conversation of love between our Lord and Man, our Lord and the Church, between Man and the Church & between Man and Man.

Marriage in Christ starts with “communication” taking place between two human beings that decide to unite for life.

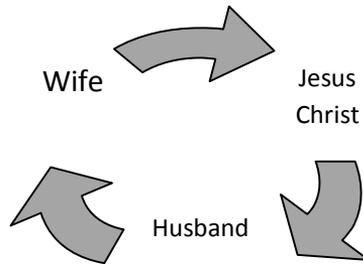
Marriage in Christ is a Holy relationship that is governed by love which is nurtured through an ongoing process of communication.

The communication process between the married couple starts before they get engaged, develops during engagement and matures continuously all along their married life.

However, communication is an art that a child learns ever since his early childhood; s/he then develops this art and masters it... Blessed is the person who educates himself/herself to be a “Good Communicator”.

Communication between husband and wife:

We should always remind ourselves that communication within a married couple is not between two people only. It is a communication process that involves “three” persons: husband – wife – our Lord Jesus Christ. If we remember this fact, I think a lot of what ruins our communicative efforts will be gone.



This is why it is highly recommended that we keep track of this Holy relationship by developing our communication (the three of us) through the following:

1. Praying together on a daily basis.
2. Reading the Bible together at least twice per week (if possible everyday).
3. Going to mass and having Holy Communion at least once a week.

Successful Communication takes place when:

- You are a good listener.
- You are ready to admit that you are mistaken.
- You respect the "other's" opinion.
- You start the communication with a smile and a gentle hand touch (even if you are 80).
- You are frank and express yourself with freedom but courtesy.

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- You are ready to devote enough time to the conversation.
- You do not interrupt the speaker.
- You are tolerant of the other's point of view when it is different from yours.
- You are ready to accept criticism.
- You are not sarcastic of the other's viewpoint.
- You are sincerely willing to understand the other's feelings and opinions.
- You are sympathetic and empathic.
- You consciously intend that the conversation ends with a note of acceptance and love.
- You insist on having an intimate conversation between you and your partner at least half an hour daily (only the two of you).
- You insist on spending at least half a day every week with your partner alone somewhere.

Communication breakers:

Dear son... Dear daughter, if you wish to keep up the communication flowing between you, your husband/wife and our Lord Jesus Christ, here is a list of things you need to avoid...

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- **Avoid** taking your partner for granted and saying to yourself: “S/he knows that I love her/him, so there is no need to say it!!!”
- **Avoid** being extra busy to the point that you have no time to spend with your partner. Remember there are three enemies that can eat your time up: the computer, the television and excess social commitments (friends’ visits, mobile calls, social responsibilities, even too much service, etc...).
- **Avoid** your relationship with your partner being restricted to the physical. This is very dangerous and can cause the relationship to be looked upon as lacking any depth or meaning.
- **Avoid** substituting your communication with your partner to conversing with a friend or parent.
- **Avoid** feeling desperate that your partner will never listen to you. Keep praying and trying and trying and trying. If you fail to get him/her to talk, try sms, email or any other communicative method. But don’t ever give up!

Be careful my dear children and remember that if there is an absence of communication between you and your partner, there will be an absence of love which in turn will eventually lead to an absence of the whole relationship.

Also remember that communication with your partner is not only verbal through words; but more importantly as you grow you learn to communicate through the language of the eyes.

Needless to say of course there is a great importance on communicating through delicate physical touches like hugs and holding one another's hands besides your deep revelation of love through sexual relation.

Remember to communicate through little gifts like flowers or greeting cards which can make a lot of difference with your partner.

Do remember to continuously tell your partner that you love him/her. It is very important for both of you to verbally say it on and on. It makes a whole difference to continuously feeding the feelings inside both of you and making them grow.

Sweet Communication:

"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24).

Most wives complain that their husbands stop saying sweet words to them when they get married after having been pampering them with loads of sweet words during the time they were engaged. Some husbands claim that they were not educated to say sweet words.

However, saying sweet words to one's partner is extremely important for any love relationship... this is true even with our Lord who says "**Take with you words and come back to the Lord**" (Hosea 14:2).

It is mentioned in the Bible that "good words" (i.e. praying) is considered by our Lord more important than sacrifices or gifts. The Bible calls those words: "**the sacrifice of praising that is the fruit of the lips professing His name**" (Hebrews 13:15).

What is meant by sweet words between husband and wife?

1 - Words of Gratitude and Appreciation

What do you have to lose my dear if you tell your wife a word of thanks when she does something for you?! Do you think that this is her duty and therefore you don't have to thank her?! Alternatively, isn't it the case that if she doesn't do it you would blame her?! Wouldn't it be more logical that you express your gratitude and appreciation for whatever she does to you?!!

2 - Words of Encouragement and Praise

Both man and woman are always in need of encouragement no matter how old they are and no matter how much achievement they have done along their lives...

none of us are not in need of encouragement "**encourage the timid...**" (1Thessalonians 5:14).

Words of encouragement and praise are the fuel that keeps the marriage vehicle going and going non-stop.

3 - Words of Love

Some people consider it taboo to express their love to their partners. Others claim that they haven't been used to speaking words of love.

We need to remember that no one develops a habit unless after repeatedly doing whatever that habit is on and on until it finally becomes a habit. So, if you need to get a new job that needs you to wake up at 5am – something you had never ever done in your life - you will need to train to do so. It may be hard at the beginning but as you insist on training again and again, it will be a habit and you will find that you are waking up at 5am even on your days off. Isn't it worth the effort to train to express your love to the life companion that the Lord granted you!!!

Why don't you express your love to your partner? Why don't you tell her/him how much you love him/her? Why don't you tell him/her how much you are grateful to the Lord that He gave him/her to you? Why don't you tell him/her how proud you are of him/her, how much trust and confidence you have in him/her and how great s/he is to you?!!

4 - Words of Prayer

How about your getting into the habit of telling your partner brief words of prayer, like “May God bless you... May God fill your heart with joy... May God protect you from any harm... May God grant you a lot of success.....etc”, these words may not be very common in English but they are very much used in the Arabic Language and they keep the relationship between you, your partner and the Lord alive and in continuous development.

5 - Words of Apology

How great is a word of apology that is timely said especially if it is governed with a true sense of humility and regret... How great it is when you admit “I'm mistaken... I'm sorry... don't be angry with me... I know I have done you wrong... but I will earnestly try not to do it again... what can I do to make it up for you?... how can I make you forgive me?... how can I make you happy again?!!!”.

6 - Words of Gentle Reproaching

Reprimanding (strongly blaming someone for something that s/he did/said) is not always destructive... on the contrary; gentle reproaching can be an expression of true love and can be very sweet. But it needs art in order to make of reproaching an act of love... it needs a lot of wisdom and humility... it needs the person to start off with an apology,

then finding pretexts to the wrong that was done. Finally, you can approach the subject matter very politely, quietly and with a lot of tact and with a nice smile on your face. If you do this, you will surely end in a win-win situation with your partner.

7 - Written Messages

Do you know my son that all wives simply love receiving letters, emails, messages, cards, etc..., and each sms you send to your life partner does make a lot of difference with him/her. And the more expressive your message is, the lovelier the effect it has on him/her.

So, don't be miserly with this very quick but extremely effective method of communication.

8 - Words of Longing and Need

Some people think that expressing their longing for their partners or their need for them belittles their dignity. They refuse to say things like "I need you.... I need you to listen to me... I need to share with you my feelings". But the truth of the matter is that when you say such things to your partner you are giving him/her more value and telling him/her that s/he is of utmost importance to your life so you are always sharing with him/her every feeling, need, worry you have.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself shared His need with the Samaritan woman when He asked her "**Give me a drink**" (John 4:7), and He also asked Peter in great humility "**Do you love me more than those?**" (John 21:15).

9 - Warm Touches

Warm touches in a marital relation are like electric shocks to a dying body. Placing your arms on your partners shoulders, looking at him/her with admiration, hugging and kissing are all very important means of communication between married couples.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was always keen on showing compassion through gentle touches, With People..."**Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out [His] hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed"** (Mark 1 : 41), and with children "**And he took them in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them**" (Mark 10:16).

Finally my dear... watch out and evade using words of... criticism – sarcasm – insult – blaming – comparison – pride – anger.

Remember

- ❖ **"A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver"** (Proverbs 13:11).
- ❖ **"Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue"** (Song of Solomon 4:11).

Communication - the way to Understanding:

Lack of mutual understanding between husband and wife is usually the result of lack of communication or miscommunication and both are the main reasons behind marital conflicts.

Be keen on understanding what is going on in your partner's mind and heart so that you are better able to reach out to her, to know the reasons behind his/her behavior, to be able to provide for his/her emotional and psychological needs, share his/her dreams and aspirations.

Devotion

The dictionary meaning of the word “devotion” is “profound/deep dedication; consecration”.

We all know that we Christians should be first and foremost fully devoted to God. **"You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men"** (1Corinthians 7 : 23), **"For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"** (1Corinthians 6 : 20).

Since our Chrismation we have become temples of the Holy Spirit, so we are supposed to spend the whole life targeting the will of God, **"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"** (1Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Yet, by choosing a wife or a husband “IN CHIRST” both partners are expected to be fully devoted to one another and to our Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, if each of them is devoted to our Lord, they can easily become devoted to one another. This kind of devotion is not against the will of God, because both are focusing on the goal of eternal life and helping one another reach this goal.

When a person is devoted to someone, s/he is totally dedicated to him/her. It is interesting also that the word

indicates “consecration” or “making sacred”. In other words, marriage in Christ is an act whereby each of the couple promises a total lifelong holy dedication to the other IN Christ. **"Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This [is] now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh"** (Genesis 2:22 - 24).

The rule goes as long as both man and woman keep devoted to our Lord Jesus Christ, their devotion to one another will remain solid.

A married person may be exposed to temptation but s/he will stand firm and not allow his/her devotion to his/her partner to decrease one second as long as s/he keeps his/her promise of faithfulness and honesty first with our Lord Jesus Christ and secondly with his/her partner.

Dear son/daughter, don't allow yourself to give in to any temptation of developing an intimate relationship with anyone other than your life partner. Friendship is holy but you have to watch out for yourself and put strict boundaries to any relationship that may take a dangerous turn and develop into one that may threaten your Holy Marriage in Christ. Run for your life from any evil or shadow of evil.

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Your devotion to your partner should be a non-negotiable matter. So you have to be very strict with yourself if you feel that this devotion is being threatened in any way. Remember that our Lord warned us saying "**But I say to you that whosoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**" (Matthew 5:28).

If a time comes when you feel your marriage is being endangered, act speedily to renew your vows to one another in a practical way. Make an effort to arrange for a nice vacation where you can both renew your love relationship and enjoy one another's intimate company; spend time in prayer, meditation and reading the Bible together; go to mass and get Holy Communion; contemplate and evaluate your married life and make decisions that would help you evade falling in similar dangerous situations in the future.

So the happy Christian married couples who care very much to please one another all the time in Christ feel they belong to one another and to God. They can say "**I'm my beloved's and my beloved is mine**" (Song of Solomon 6:3).

Encouragement

As we mentioned earlier, there is no human being who is not in need of encouragement. We all need to be encouraged when we do something good and we also need to be encouraged in order not to do something bad.

There are two ways of behavior when your partner does something that you do not like or that you consider wrong. You may start severely blaming her/him for having done such a thing. You may have very good intentions and say to yourself that I have to be honest with my partner and warn him/her not to behave in this wrong way.

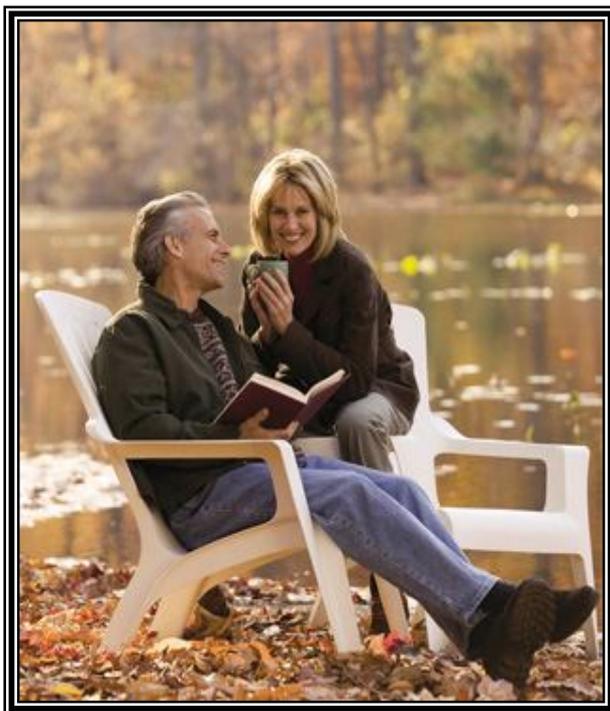
Or you may do as the Holy Spirit advises us through St. Paul "**And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else**" (1Thessalonians 5: 14 – 15).

I assure you that encouraging your partner is the best way to help him/her change for the better. Encouragement has proved much more effective than negative criticism, blaming or reprimanding. For it passes a message of love, care and support on the part of the speaker and accordingly

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creates in the spoken to a sincere desire and motivation to change.

Dear son and daughter, learn how to see the positives in your partner and overlook/accept the negatives. It needs a lot of training and focusing but most importantly, it needs a lot of praying, great love, and strong will.



Forgiveness

"He who covers over an offense promotes love..." (Proverbs 17:9), Forgiveness is a major characteristic of a true and a wise Christian **"A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense"** (Proverbs 19:11). **Forgiveness** is a gift granted from God to those who ask for it eagerly and continuously in their prayers.

You always need to remind yourself of two main facts:

- 1** - That "to forgive" is a commandment given by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.
- 2** - That in forgiving others you are paying your debt to our Lord whose forgiveness to you is an ongoing process that continues as long as you are alive.

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14 - 15), **"Forgive, and you will be forgiven"** (Luke 6:37).

But we should also admit that "forgiveness" is not an easy thing. That is why praying has a major role in gaining this attribute which is one of our Lord's main characteristics.

When you feel you have been hurt by your partner, or anyone else for that matter, don't leave your mind to take over or your heart to get troubled and feel pain and anger. Just kneel down and cry to God for help in order that He may grant you the blessing of forgiving the other's mistakes and wash from your heart any grudge, anger, desire to revenge or any other bad feeling.

It is also very important that you learn and train to "forget" and not only to forgive. For if you forgive and keep remembering the hurt you may very easily fall in continuous self-pity which will do you no good at all.

The best practical way that allows you to forgive is to remember your own sins and how generous has the Lord been with you that in spite of all the wrong you keep doing Him, He is still standing there with His arms wide open for you the very moment you call on Him.

You also need to remind yourself that our Lord never stops loving us in spite of all the wrong we do. Again, it is very important to keep up a deep and close relationship with our Lord Jesus in order to be able to gain this blessing and grace of forgiving and forgetting. Remember what our Lord tells us **"I'm the wine you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing"** (John 15:5).

It is very important that the couple exchange forgiveness and seek excuses for one another. For one always finds excuses for oneself for whatever wrong s/he has done. So how come do you not do that with your partner who is actually part of you!

Aren't you now one soul and one body! So how could you hurt yourself and cause pain to yourself in any way!

While training to forgive and forget, you should always be ready to apologize when you feel you hurt your partner in any way. You may say that you shouldn't apologize as long as you didn't intend to hurt him/her. But remember that we always repeat in our Aghbya prayers "**Forgive us our sins that we committed knowingly and unknowingly, intentionally and unintentionally, the hidden and the apparent...**"

So even if you hurt your partner without knowing or without intending you should be ready to express regret that you caused him/her any kind of pain or suffering.

Humility is a very important trait that each one of the couple should have so that they can forgive one another. If you are not humble, your ego will not allow you to forgive or to forget that you have been hurt; while if you look at yourself as a sinner, it will be much easier for you to forgive others whatever wrong they have done you.

A person who lives a life of continuous repentance is better able to handle situations that need him/her to forgive or to ask for forgiveness from his/her partner. Such a person will be always willing to apologize and regret having caused the other any kind of pain or suffering.

Reproaching It is also good to be able to have an intimate conversation of gentle reproaching when you feel that something has gone wrong between you and your partner. Our Lord advised us **"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over"** (Matthew 18:15).

It does help clear up any misunderstanding if you sit together and discuss the matter in a gentle manner. It would be great if you say a little prayer before you start this discussion.

Start by expressing your love to your partner and asserting to him/her that whatever happens your love remains solid and firm. You may also want to start with a gentle statement like: "I am sure you didn't mean to hurt me but I want you to know that I got hurt coz I know you will be keen not to do that again...", Or "I really couldn't understand what you did/said", Or "I want you to know that I felt down when you said/did this"

Keep your voice low and choose your words carefully:

"A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

Avoid pointing at your partner or saying things like: "you were very rude" or "you shouldn't have said such a bad thing" or "how could you ever say/do such a thing". Such statements are very intimidating and could cause your partner to take a defensive or aggressive stance from the beginning of the conversation which may most likely end in a quarrel.

Dear son and daughter, if you train yourself to forgive and forget it will be easy for you to apologize when you hurt your partner. Words of apology can melt any ice between you when they are spoken sincerely. Train to say things like: "I'm really sorry that I hurt you – I will try always to take care never to do that again – I'm sorry for the damage I caused you – what can I do to help you forgive and forget?"

Also never listen to any advice of revenge. These are not words from God. Never give an ear to voices saying things like "he never understands – she never respects me – he never loved me – she doesn't want to do what I wish, etc"

Stop... stop... stop...

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Go to the Cross crying for help from HE who gave His life away for the sake of those who sinned against HIM and asked His Father to forgive those who crucified Him, saying "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do**" (Luke 23:34).



Generosity

The Holy Bible teaches us and instructs us to be generous and to give abundantly and happily.

- ❖ **"But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in this grace of giving"** (2Corinthians 8:7).
- ❖ **"... let him give generously"** (Romans 12:8).
- ❖ **"...remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'"** (Acts 20:35).

Giving is not meant to be to the poor only; rather, it is meant that one should be "a giving human being" and should start this act of "giving" in his own home and to the closest people to him/her.

If one is not used to practicing this act of giving to the closest people to him/her, s/he will never be able to give the poor or the needy.

Marriage in Christ is very different from any other in this very important quality, i.e. "**Giving**". According to worldly standards, a man or a woman marries in order to **take**; but in Christianity, one marries in order to "**GIVE**". One marries in

order to give love, care, support, appreciation..., **One marries to GIVE ONESELF TO THE OTHER IN CHRIST.**

Just as our Lord loved us (His church) and accordingly He gave us everything: He created us, He gave us the whole world to be at our service and for our happiness, He gave us salvation when we sinned, and He gives us His own Body and Blood every day on the altar to eat and drink to unite with Him.

Our Lord Jesus Christ loves us so He gives us forgiveness, love and His promise of Eternal Life of Joy and Peace with Him in His Kingdom. **Similarly, the relationship between husband and wife in Christianity is one of ongoing GIVING!**

If the couple is leading a true Christian life, they should realize that all they possess is a gift from the Lord. They should therefore not think of their possessions as “personal” any longer; there should not be “mine” or “yours”. Everything should be thought of and treated as “ours”.

My dear son and daughter, live a life of “giving” and enjoy the blessing of feeling you are indeed ONE in everything. Compete in giving one another and not the contrary. **Give your emotions, Give your love, Give your full attention, Give your support, Give your trust, Give your confidence.**

Gifts

Gifts are the simplest language of love spoken by anyone anywhere anytime **"A man's gift makes room for him"** (Proverbs 18:16).

Gifts mean a lot... they speak out loud what you may not be able to verbalize. A gift is one way of saying "I love you... I care for you... I want to make you happy... I want to get you anything you need... I'm thinking of you... I like to see you happy... I wish to express my love to you..."

It is not important how much the gift cost... It could be a very simple gift but it is an indication that the person who got it made an effort to think, plan, act in a way that expresses his/her love to the other. No matter what the gift is, be it a bunch of flowers or a piece of jewelry, the important thing is the attitude behind it.



Here are some tips:

- You need to put some thought as to what to get your partner. You need to think of getting him/her something that you know will make him/her happy; for example something that they mentioned that they needed or wanted very much, or something they really like even if it is a particular kind of flower. This proves that you are not just getting a gift because you have to; but rather that you are doing it out of a sincere wish to please your partner.
- Wrapping the gift also reflects care and love. It may be a very simple gift but a beautiful wrapping makes all the difference. It also expresses care and appreciation.
- A little card with a sweet phrase expressing your love makes all the difference in the world to your partner.
- Presenting your gift with a nice smile and a kiss of love makes it the most precious gift in the world no matter what it is.
- Gifts should not be restricted to particular events but are always welcomed especially if they are totally unexpected. Surprise gifts are always appreciated and have a great effect on the receiver. They are simple expression of care, thoughtfulness and love.

My dear son, it is no secret that gifts are usually much more appreciated, needed, expected and demanded by

women. So, my advice to you is not to ignore this need and find excuses that this is not something important or that your wife has everything or that you are too busy.

My dear daughter, my advice to you is not to look for the material value of the gift but rather to the meaning behind it and to appreciate whatever your husband gets you no matter what they are. Remember that most men do not realize the importance of this matter so if your husband gets out of his way to bring you a gift, you should be very grateful and show appreciation for his love and care.



Humility

"... learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"
(Matthew 11:29).

Why do many couples lack peace and why can't many souls find "rest"?

Probably the main reason is that they lack this extremely precious quality, i.e. being "humble in heart"... for the person who is humble in heart lives a life of gratitude, joy, peace and satisfaction!, a person who is humble in heart rejoices at the very least thing and accepts everything in great simplicity.

The person who is humble in heart:

- Considers everything to be good
- Is aware of his/her weaknesses and drawbacks and therefore doesn't blame anyone or condemn anybody
- Serves everyone
- Praises everyone
- Smiles at everyone

A husband or wife who is humble in heart is a true gift from God.

The husband who is humble in heart accepts with gladness whatever his wife prepares for him... encourages her even if she does something that turns out to be not that good... accepts her weaknesses and encourages her to be better... is ready to help in the housework whenever needed... is ready to forgive her no matter what mistake she does... is ready to learn from his wife... rejoices at his wife's achievements and successes... is ready to blame himself for any misunderstanding that may occur between them... doesn't always point at his wife's mistakes and hurries to whatever makes her happy.

A wife that is humble in heart doesn't overburden her husband with loads of demands... doesn't compare herself to other wives in terms of what their husbands got them... is supportive and encouraging... is forgiving and forgetful... is ready to accept her husband's fits of anger and find pretexts for him (that he may be undergoing some tension or trouble at work)... is ready to accept her husband's advice in a condescending manner... hurries to whatever pleases her husband ... is ready to give up her own comfort for the sake of making her husband happy... accepts her husband's forgetfulness of some important dates in their lives (like her birthday, engagement anniversary, wedding anniversary) and realizes that in general men are not very good at such matters... expresses admiration, encouragement and support for whatever achievements her husband does.

But how can we gain this great quality and become “humble in heart” if we are not?

There are at least three exercises that we can train to do in order to gain this great blessing that is definitely one of the key secrets of true happiness and peace of mind and heart. These are:

1 - Continuous Gratitude and Thankfulness

If the couple makes it a point to live in gratitude, accepting everything that comes their way and keeps thanking the Lord for all they have, for everything and in all circumstances, our Lord Jesus Christ will surely grant them the great blessing of being humble in heart and would therefore live in great peace of mind and rest of heart on earth and also gain eternal life. **"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"** (1 Thessalonians 5: 17 -18).

2 - Self-examination

If each of the couple: husband and wife keep examining themselves and the wrong things that they do and put their mistakes, wrong-doings and sins at the legs of our Lord Jesus Christ asking Him to correct these mistakes and forgive their sins in true repentance, they would surely acquire the great blessing and virtue of true humility.

H in Christian marriage

Tears of repentance and regret cleanse the spirit and soften the hard heart transforming it into a pure humble heart. "**A broken and a humble heart, these O God you will not despise**" (Psalms 50: 17).

3 - Obedience

When the couples exert a lot of effort to gain the virtue of succumbing to one another, they receive from our Lord the grace and blessing of the virtue of humility.

This is why we need to be careful not to fall in the sin of pride, which is considered the mother of all sins and all evil.

Alas... how many marriages were totally ruined because of this horrible sin, i.e. pride!!!

You can easily discern it when you hear the husband or the wife who is full of pride saying things like "I'm never mistaken... I did all I should have done... I did my part completely... I 'm always right... you simply do not understand". Pride brings about many other sins like: condemning, anger, insulting, violence, etc...

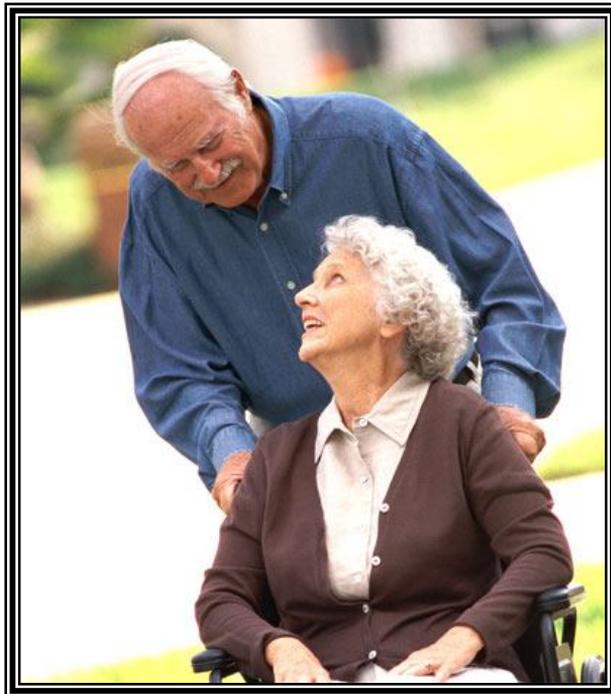
"Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 26:12).

Pride can never be treated except through developing the virtue of a humble heart ...

H in Christian marriage

This is not impossible... It all comes by an earnest desire and sincere heart that is keen on earning this great virtue through continuous effort and unfailing prayers.

Eventually, my dear children, it may not be acquired except after a tribulation that is used by the Lord in order to help you gain it!!!



Intimacy

Marriage in Christ is the most intimate among all human relationships. It should be viewed as the most intimate after the relationship between Man and God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has talked about this unique relationship and the great intimacy involved in it saying **"Haven't you read that He made them at the beginning 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let not man separate"** (Matthew 19: 4 – 6).

Our Lord pointed to a very important fact, namely that the state of marriage takes man and woman (husband and wife) to the original state that Adam and Eve were like in Heaven before the fall. Our Lord Jesus Christ is referring to the passage from the Book of Genesis where He was giving Adam and Eve the promise of joy and unity in Him.

This is a lovely indication that through the Sacrament of Matrimony/Marriage IN Christ, husband and wife are given the sacred blessing of becoming one with each others and with our Lord Jesus Christ like they used to be in Heaven

I in Christian marriage

before sin entered the world. Isn't it a great unique relationship that should be very much cherished!!!

St. Paul also goes on to compare the intimate relationship of husband and wife to that between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Church. He thus calls on the husband to be always ready to give his life away for the sake of his wife **"Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband"** (1Corinthinas 7:3).

He also reminds the wife to be succumbing and loving to her husband like the Church is obedient and loving to her Savior and Lord Jesus Christ **"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord"** (Ephesians 5:22).

Intimacy in a Christian marriage translates itself in practical terms in different kinds:

1 - Intellectual Intimacy

Many couples think that marriage involves only physical intimacy, thereby ignoring a very important fact, i.e. human beings are first attracted to one another's attitudes and not just their looks. In order to be happy and satisfied, a couple should work on developing their intellectual intimacy. They may wish to read a book and discuss it or watch a movie and talk about it. They may find out what their common interests are and work on developing an ongoing bridge of

understanding between them. It is also recommended that they share with one another sermons that one of them heard or spiritual contemplations/meditations. Such activities help nurture the intellectual intimacy and make it grow.

The couple should always work on further understanding one another. They should be ready to explain one another's motives in liking or disliking certain things. They should also develop a strategy of upbringing their children, continuously evaluate their outcomes and be flexible to change and accept one another's varying opinions.

2 - Emotional Intimacy

An emotional intimacy is usually the way that a couple starts their lives especially during the first months of their married life. This intimacy may undergo some fluctuation as they get their first child and it may even stand the risk of disappearing as life moves the couple away from one another towards different busy directions even if this involves their own children.

However, working on keeping up this emotional intimacy is of vital importance to the success of any marriage in Christ. Just like it was mentioned that the relationship between husband and wife is similar to that of man with God, we can think of the emotional un-involvement that may happen as the same that happens between us and God. For it

is often the case that our relationship with the Lord undergoes a state of coldness and un-involvement. Our prayers are not as intense, our fasting takes a routine like attitude, our service is not as whole-hearted as it used to be at one point.

The same happens sometimes between husbands and wives where their relationship becomes very impartial and uninvolved and it looks as if they are two people living under the same roof but with no real emotions.

But this is quite normal and should not be viewed as some kind of disaster or that this is the end of the relationship.

The intelligent thing to do if this happens is to start finding ways of re-injecting emotions and energy to that failing battery of emotions. There are many ways of doing this but the first and foremost is to involve our Lord Jesus Christ in your efforts. If both of you realize and admit that that your relationship is getting cold, then it would be great if you start praying together that the Lord guides you to re-vitalize your emotions for one another. If one is in a state of denial and one of you only has this feeling, then you'd better start putting it in your prayers and you may ask your partner to pray for you even if s/he is not convinced of the whole matter.

Another very effective way of reviving your emotional intimacy is by taking time away with one another only the two of you. A vacation somewhere away from the normal environment is a good way to affect a positive change to your life. It may be a good idea if you go to a place where you had good memories at one point in your relationship, like the place you spent your honeymoon or simply a place that witnessed some nice memories.

It is usually the case that women take up this role since men are most of the time too much involved in taking care of the practical concerns of life. So, my dear daughters, I advise you to take the initiative of preparing such time away but of course in accordance with your husbands' schedules.

If you put this in the hands of the Lord, be sure that He will arrange everything for you in the best way that you may not have dreamed of.

3 - Physical Intimacy

Some may think that I have put this last to imply that it is the least important. That is not true!

Physical intimacy is of extreme importance to the success of any marriage IN Christ. Our Lord has insisted on making it clear that "He" has "united" man and woman and made them "one flesh" and He repeated that "they are no

longer two but one flesh and one spirit” and “that which the Lord united cannot be separated”.

Our Lord Jesus’ Holy will is that man and woman enjoy a holy physical relationship where they become “one body and one spirit”! This is how you should view the physical intimacy of your relationship with your partner.

Physical intimacy includes the warm touches that we talked about earlier but it surely goes on to the full sexual intercourse between husband and wife.

It is a pity that sometimes sex is underestimated, overestimated or totally mis-estimated. In the first case, the couple or one of them think sex is something that is just complementary to marriage and that it should not be given any care or understanding – a misconception that brings about a lot of challenges. On the other hand, some think that the main aim of marriage is to practice sex which again may put to danger the married life of the couple.

The Bible asserts the holiness of sex in marriage as St. Paul teaches us "**Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure**" (Hebrews 13:4).

Misconceptions about sex may have come from the fact that the Bible repeatedly warns against the abuse of sex, i.e. adultery. However, the Bible always speaks approvingly of this relationship as long as it is confined to married couples. God

created sex and He meant it to be for human beings to enjoy just like he created all things for man's joy and satisfaction.

It is quite clear that God gave this grace to Adam and Eve while in Paradise as he ordered them "**Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it'**" (Genesis 1:28). Later on we find in the Book of Proverbs the same idea repeated "**May you Rejoice in the wife of your youth**" (Proverbs 5:18)

The clearest and most explicit advice about sex in Christian marriage is the following "**Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her won husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.**" (1Corinthians 7: 2-5).

4 - The Spiritual Intimacy

All human beings want happiness for themselves and for those they love, but they will never be able to reach

complete happiness unless they feel they satisfy the spiritual void inside them. We are empty unless we enjoy the oneness of fellowship with God. The only truly happy Christian marriage is the one controlled by Christ. Spiritual intimacy occurs when the couple willingly gives their life's steering wheel to our Lord Jesus Christ to lead it. When Christ controls the married couple's life, each partner will seek to do the things and think the thoughts that please the Lord, who in turn will grant the couple's life an abundance of love, joy, and peace that guarantees the happiness that every couple hopes for.

This spiritual intimacy will be maintained if the couple prays together, read the Bible and other spiritual readings together, serve together, go to mass and share in the body and blood of Christ regularly together.

Joy

God created man to be the crown of all creation "... **The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden... and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name...**" (Genesis 2: 15 – 20).

God then crowned His many gifts to man by giving him "a helper" of his kind "**It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him..... So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man**" (Genesis 2: 18 – 22).

God meant for man and woman (Adam and Eve) to live in joy with one another and with Him "**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh**" (Genesis 2: 24).

But sorrowfully, Adam and Eve sinned and were separated from the Lord, the source of Joy. They lost the joy of paradise and of eternal life. They also lost the unique holy relationship that united them to one another and to God. This is why they started "feeling naked and ashamed" – a feeling

they never ever experienced before they sinned "**The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame**" (Genesis 2: 25). But after they sinned "... **they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves...**" (Genesis 3: 7) (these fig leaves are symbols of everything man tries to do in order to gain happiness away from the Lord).

The conversation that took place between Adam and God is very significant and interesting. For when the Lord saw that Adam sinned and was hiding from Him, He looked for him and when He asked him where he was, he replied "**I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid**" (Genesis 3:10).

The words that Adam uses in this very first statement which he utters right after his fall are words that he never used before and feelings that he never felt before. Those are: "fear, nakedness and hiding" which are the exact opposite of his state before he sinned.

The conversation goes further as the Lord inquires "**Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?**" (Genesis 3: 11). The Lord could see that man sinned and therefore negative feelings of shame fear and will to escape start getting into his world. But our Lord Jesus Christ came to us on earth to save us from that eternal shame

and to restore to us all the gifts that we gave up when we sinned.

Our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay our debts and to overcome the power of sin and evil that robbed us of our "joy" on earth and eternal Joy in the life to come. As soon as our Lord Jesus Christ was born, the angels started singing happily "**Glory be to God in the Heavens, peace on earth and JOY to all His people**" (Luke 2:14).

And the very first miracle the Lord Jesus Christ performed was blessing the Wedding in Cana of Galilee as if He insists on telling us that with His Holy Incarnation and Salvation to human beings, the first Joy that Adam and Eve enjoyed in Paradise is restored. They (those who get married IN Christ) can now live in a Holy Unity with one another and with the Lord like they did in Paradise. This is the Holy Sacrament that they get as they get wedded in Church. They become one body and one spirit as they get married in Christ.

Therefore, **marriage IN Christ** is the one and only way to gain family joy as was originally planned by God in Creation and now after Salvation.

This is also why it is impossible for a married couple to enjoy that unique kind of joy and peace if their marriage is outside Christ; for example, if one of them is Christian and the other not. They may have emotions for one another. They

may have emotional, intellectual or material riches, but they will never be able to enjoy the Lord's Joy and Peace that is found in marriage IN CHRIST! For these are the fruits of the Holy Spirit "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**" (Galatians 5: 22-23). This is why only men and women who have been baptized and who have taken the Holy Spirit in Chrismation are able to unite and enjoy this holy life.

My dear son and daughter, remember that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are there inside you; but you need to work hard on "kindling" the Spirit and not "dimming It". So, don't say "why am I not living this kind of holy life", while you are not nourishing the Spirit that is inside you by continuous and joint prayers, fasting, Bible reading and contemplation, service and partaking of the Holy Communion alone and with your partner IN Christ.

Wearing a nice smile on your face will help your life become cheerful. In order to live a married life of Joy and Peace you need to train to have this smile on your face as long as possible "**A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken**" (Proverbs 15:13).

Here are some tips that may help you put a gentle smile on your face all the time:

- ❖ Live a life of gratitude to our Lord for having given us the opportunity to live this life of joy IN Him.
- ❖ Remember that your smile is God's gift to your spouse.
- ❖ No matter what circumstances you are facing, believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is in control and He makes sure that all things are working for your good.
- ❖ Share your inner feelings and thoughts with your partner. Remember that the Lord put him/her for you to help and support you.
- ❖ Remind yourself that the Lord loves you and is living inside you and your partner all the time.
- ❖ Smiling is the natural result of spending time with the Lord whether in prayer or reading the Bible or mass. When you spend long hours with the Lord, your faith becomes stronger and when your faith is strong you will be able to conquer any hard circumstances and face all challenges in gratitude and perseverance.
- ❖ When you feel the smile is disappearing from your face, try to get some rest or even a vacation. You may be overloading yourself with too many worldly concerns.

- ❖ When you find it hard to smile, you need to spend more time in prayer as you will be reinstalling the energy of joy inside you.
- ❖ Remember that when you meet your partner with a smile on your face, you are communicating your love to him/her.
- ❖ When you notice that the smile has disappeared from your partner's face, you have to do all you can to bring it back to him/her. This is the role that the Lord demands of you as "a helper" and life partner.
- ❖ Keep in mind that Joy is a commandment that the Lord gives us via St. Paul's teaching as the Holy Spirit inspires him to write "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice**" (Philippinas 4:4).

Keeness

(Keeness is eagerness and enthusiasm), Our Lord Jesus Christ has always been keen on all human beings. He is keen on teaching us what to do in order to live happily on earth and to gain eternal joy in the life to come. His keeness caused Him to give up His glory in Heaven and, in great humility and love, to come to us on earth to grant us salvation and Eternal Life once more.

Our Lord's keeness makes Him continue loving us in spite of our being sinners, ready to forgive and forget our sins as soon as we repent and long and rejoice at our re-union with Him in Holy Communion.

Our Lord's keeness on dwelling inside us made Him offer us the chance to re-unite with Him as He offers us His body and blood every day on the altar.

Now our Lord asks us to have the same keeness on one another as partners in Christian Marriage. He asks us to be keen on our partner's joy whether in our life on earth or in the hereafter.

As partners IN Christ, we have a huge responsibility towards one another and this is why we should be always keen on our partner.

Keeness to fulfill the needs of one's partner:

Each one of us should be worried as to how to best fulfill any of my partner's need. Each one should exert every effort to find out what his/her partner's needs are and try to fulfill them as best as could be

Some people think that they get married so that their partner fulfills their needs. In other words, marriage for them is "taking"; while the truth of the matter is that marriage IN Christ is and should always be thought of as "**an act of giving**".

There are five main needs that should be fulfilled in any marriage in Christ:

1 - Psychological Needs

Both husband and wife should always be conscious of their partner's psychological needs. Every human being is in need of understanding, compassion, attention, trust, self-esteem and companionship.

Dear son and daughter, if your partner does not find that his/her needs are satisfied through your holy relationship IN Christ, s/he may get frustrated and disappointed or, God forbid, look for it elsewhere. This is why it is very important that you work hard on satisfying those needs in your partner.

2 - Emotional Needs

It has been discovered that the TEN most important emotional needs that a married person looks for in his/her partner are: admiration, affection, conversation, domestic support, family commitment, financial support, honesty and openness, physical attractiveness, recreational companionship and sexual fulfillment. It has also been noted that of the 10 emotional needs, the five listed as most important by men were usually the five least important for women, and vice-versa. This is all the more reason why each should exert a lot of effort in trying to please “the other” rather than find out how to please or satisfy oneself.

I think we cover most of those along the chapters of this book and I do pray that each one makes an effort to try to find out the best way to satisfy his/her partner’s emotional needs.

3 - Social Needs

Every person has a need to feel a sense of belonging, acceptance and value, to be respected and to have self-esteem and self-respect.

Dear son and daughter, your partner’s main concern is to feel s/he belongs to you and is accepted and valued by you.

4 - Physical needs

It is understood as we noted earlier that physical intimacy is a need and a commandment by our Lord Jesus Christ who from the very beginning asked man and woman to unite and to be careful that they have become “one” and no longer “two entities”. Physical need is to be respected by both husband and wife and it is referred to in the Holy Matrimony ceremony in the commandments given to both. For the wife advised “And you blessed daughter... Do not ignore any of his rights upon you and fear God in all your deeds with him...”; and to the husband, it is said “And you, blessed brother, should hasten to satisfy her and work toward her welfare, fulfilling the saying of St. Paul: **“And you men, love your women as your own bodies...”**”

5 - Spiritual Needs

As woman was primarily created in order for man to have “a helper” and a companion, it is expected that the couple support one another in realizing their spiritual needs of moral direction, inspiration, love, and connection with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Marriage IN Christ has the main goal of staying connected IN Him; therefore, a married couple should work hard on achieving this great aim, to stay in continuous unity with our Lord and with one another.

Loyalty

Loyalty is a characteristic that one develops as s/he grows starting at a very early age and developing all along one's life. One should be loyal to God and to the Church. One should be loyal to one's parents, friends, one's country and above all to one's beliefs and promises.

Marriage IN Christ means that one should be loyal and faithful to one's partner all through.

Loyalty may be easy as long as all circumstances are going on fine, but it can develop into a challenge when trouble and problems come along. So, you need to ask yourself the following question:

Can you continue being loyal to your partner if...

- S/he is depressed, sick or facing serious troubles?
- S/he undergoes some personality changes like becoming rigid or harsh after having been kind-hearted and loving?
- Someone tries to intrude on your life and expresses some liking for you that your heart tends to respond to?
- Your relationship undergoes some kind of boredom and falls into a monotonous routine?

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- Your partner stops showing affection and expressing his/her love to you?
- You feel that you have done a lot of achievements along the years of your married life while your partner's career has been static?
- Your life is full of people who praise you as being very special and smart while your partner is not expressing any admiration for you?
- You feel your partner is not responding to your needs and is thinking of fulfilling his/her needs only?
- You feel that your partner has stopped being interested in you and is leading a life of his/her own?
- You feel that your partner is cheating on you and betraying your trust in him/her?

If you find a big challenge in replying positively to any of the above questions, you need to re-evaluate your attitude towards your commitment to your marriage. You need to remember a very important fact that may change your response.

The fact is that our Lord Jesus Christ is in the midst of this relationship. If you think you have any right to be disloyal to your partner then you need to be aware that this disloyalty is involving a disloyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and not just to your partner.

Meekness

Meekness is sometimes misunderstood or misinterpreted as "weakness", which is totally incorrect.

A meek person is gentle...

- S/he is not willing to argue or state her/his opinion in a forceful or violent way.
- S/he always thanks God, accepts all circumstances, focuses on the positive side of things, is always ready to serve, is encouraging, appreciates others' help and is very easy to satisfy.
- S/he is the best partner to share life with.
- A meek wife never overburdens her husband.
- A meek husband is happy with whatever efforts his wife does or doesn't.

Our Lord Jesus Christ showed this characteristic while He was on earth very clearly. He even said about Himself **"learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"** (Matthew 11 : 29)

A meek Christian learns from our Lord to put everybody's interest above his/her own.

Meekness is a mother virtue which gives birth to most other great virtues that make its owner and those around him/her enjoy a life of gratitude, satisfaction, peace and joy.

Meekness brings about many positive characteristics like patience, endurance, humility, kind-heartedness, love and agreeableness.

Meekness is the expression of a heart full of humility. Some people are gentle by nature. Meekness is one of their personal characteristics.

But it is always a possibility to work hard in order to earn meekness. It can be acquired through a sincere will and through pleading our Lord Jesus Christ in prayer to grant us this grace.



In order to train yourself to earn this precious virtue, here are some tips:

1 - Thanksgiving.

Train yourself to thank God all the time. Repeat in your prayers and along the day the words: "Dear Lord Jesus Christ, thank you". Train yourself to appreciate anything that your partner does to you, to the children or to anyone else.

Remind yourself to show your appreciation and thanks using words or little signs of thanks, like a mobile message or a bunch of flowers. **"in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"** (1Thessalonians 5: 18).

2- Wearing a smile.

Remind yourself that smiling is a real gift to people around you. So train yourself to put on your face a nice gentle smile even during times of trouble. A smiling face is always pleasant, supportive and encouraging on all occasions.

3- Being slow to wrath (anger).

When you are faced with a situation that makes you and those around you full of anger, try to be as composed as you can. Control your temper and silently say a prayer. You can even repeat to yourself silently: "Dear Lord Jesus Christ have mercy! Dear Lord Jesus Christ, help us! Dear Lord Jesus Christ, grant us wisdom! Dear Lord Jesus Christ we thank you!"

Try not to give quick responses when you are asked for your opinion. Give yourself time to think before replying and ask the Lord to grant you wisdom and patience. **"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"** (James 1:19).

4- Avoid complaining.

People who are in the habit of complaining are of two types, the first type is people who are pessimistic by nature and the second is those who tend to be perfectionists. The pessimistic people need to train to think positively about whatever happens in their lives. They need to continuously remind themselves of our Lord's great promises to us. They are advised to carry along with them some verses that include some of those promises and indeed they are many, for example "**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose**" (Romans 8:28).

As for perfectionists whose eyes always fall on the mistakes and wrong things, they need to work on themselves to have a lot of tolerance. They need to continuously remind themselves of their own mistakes, which our Lord disregards and forgets as soon as we repent. They need to put in front of themselves instances when they committed mistakes and needed forgiveness from people and from God.

5- Avoid arguing (as much as possible).

If you are by nature argumentative, you need a lot of training in order to hold yourself from getting involved in arguments especially ones that may cause you to express your opinion forcefully, lose your temper, fall in the sin of condemnation or even that of using bad language.

Give a little silent prayer before you are dragged into an argument. Consider quickly whether it is really important to get involved in such an argument or it would be much better if you just refrain from it. Pray for guidance and for wisdom.

Don't doubt that our dear Lord will grant you your heart's wish as soon as you ask for it. If needs be, try not to allow your voice to go loud. Wear a gentle smile all the time. Express appreciation of the "other's" point of view even if it is different from yours.

Put yourself in the other person's shoes and be as empathic as you can. Try to express your opinion in a composed humble manner and not in an assertive proud attitude.

Remind yourself that your difference is with the opinion expressed and not with the person expressing it. This will make you respect him/her and understand his/her position. "**I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing**" (1Timothy 2:8).

Never-ending Love

"Love never fails (ends)" (1Corinthians 13:8). **Marriage in Christ** is a never-ending relationship. It starts on the day the couple receive the Sacrament of matrimony and continues with them forever and ever. **"It is because the Lord is acting as your 'third party'[the witness] between you and the wife of your youth"** (Malachi 2:14)

Actually, the wedding ceremony starts with a prayer that is called "An ownership contract" which means that both the bride and groom voluntarily give themselves up to one another vowing to belong to one another from that moment onwards (until death parts them on earth).

This great sacred moment has a great significance. It means that both the bride and groom as saying to one another: "I'm all yours. I can't ever let my heart go to any other person. I can't look for any other person to be the closest to my heart. I can't enjoy my life with anybody else but you".

This Christian view of belonging and total devotion is the key to the continuous feeling of security and happiness that should overwhelm the Christian married couple.

The covenant that the couple vows to one another is the same like the one that God and Man give to one another **"My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear Me; So he feared Me and was reverent before My name"** (Malachi 2:5).

God always keeps His promises **"If we are faithless, He remains faithful;"** (2Timothy 2:13). But Man usually fails in his promises **"not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day [that] I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord."** (Jeremiah 31:32). But God gave man many chances to retain his promises and He still does.

Marriage vows away from Christ are based on emotional passions and materialistic/physical desires. That is basically why so many marriages fail to continue.

Emotional commitment and physical passions can never overcome the challenges that every married life passes through. Only vows of never-ending love **IN CHRIST** can hold a married life together and see it overcome the most difficult situations that it may and definitely will face.

N in Christian marriage

Vowing... "I'm yours in Christ" means that you are ready to sacrifice your rest, your needs, your wishes and your whole life for your partner IN Christ.

Don't rush into marriage if you have any doubt that you will be able to live with and for that partner IN CHRIST forever. "**Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger [of God] that it [was] an error**" (Ecclesiastes 5:5).



Obedience

Obedience is one of the most challenging virtues to all people especially young men and women. They somehow consider obedience a sign of weakness or a kind of imprisonment. But obedience is a great virtue and a sign of love for God and also within marriage IN Christ.

- When you love God, you obey His commandments. "**He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him**" (John 14:21).
- When you love your parents you obey them. "**Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you**" (Exodus 20:12).
- When you love your father in confession you obey him. "**Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls...**" (Hebrews 13:17).
- When you are humble it is easy for you to obey.

"Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God

opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1Peter 5:5).

Let us learn from our Lord Jesus Christ, who though He is the real God and of the same nature and authority like His father, yet He chose the pattern of obedience as a son of man and son of God. "**Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him**" (Hebrews 5: 8 – 9).

When your heart is full of humility it is easy to obey others especially your partner. Of course you are not demanded to obey anything and everything blindly. You may surely discuss matters calmly and in a civilized way, always asking for the Lord's guidance and wisdom to govern your lives.

But you need to be ready to "obey" when you are demanded to, even if you may not be fully convinced of whatever it is that you are asked to obey. Sometimes the act of obedience is needed to assure your partner of your readiness to please him/her even if you are not totally convinced of what you are doing provided this is not against our Lord Jesus Christ's teachings.

Some people may consider this obedience as some sort of acting out of weakness; but when we consider what our Lord continuously advises us, we are able to see that by

obeying out of love, we are surely winning the situation to our sides and bringing joy and victory to our married lives.

Both husbands and wives should hurry to obey one another. They should not allow the evil one to win them over by causing them to sharply disagree and act stubbornly with one another.

Dear son and daughter, remember the Holy Spirit's advice to both of you especially during the challenging times when disagreement seems to take over...

To you my dear daughter... "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:24).

My dear daughter you need to be always ready to obey your husband for you are advised "**Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives"** (1Peter 1:1-2).

Dear son, submission is not to be asked for, but it is always to be given readily and happily. So it is better my son not to ask your wife to obey, but to intelligently and lovingly let us freely reach that point without feeling offended or hurt. You will do this if you follow our Lord's teaching as it comes through St. Paul's Epistle to Ephesians. "**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"** (Ephesians 5: 25).

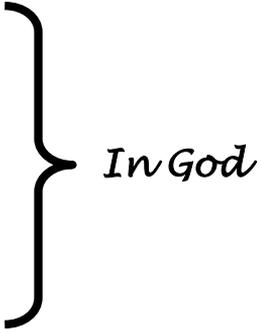
O in Christian marriage

Both of you should obey each other and not stick stubbornly to your own opinion.

Never think of who the boss is or who will win an argument. Let all your discussions be governed by love and a readiness to please the other rather than your own self.

So remember that obedience goes first to God, next to your partner, then to your parents, to others and finally to yourself.

Obedience should be...

- *First to → God*
 - *Second to → Partner.*
 - *Third to → Parents.*
 - *Forth to → Others.*
 - *Fifth to → Yourself*
- 
- In God*

Perseverance

The meaning of perseverance is “continued effort and determination”.

We are told that anyone who loves has to "persevere" in his/her love no matter what happens. **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres"** (1Corinthians 13: 4 – 7).

Our Lord loves us and therefore He perseveres in His continued efforts to lead us on to the way to His Kingdom. None has ever shown (and continues every minute to do so) perseverance as much as our Lord Jesus Christ. For He so loved the world that He gave up His only son for the sake of our salvation.

Sometimes we stand amazed by the amount of perseverance that our Lord has with us. We listen and read stories of His perseverance with the worst people ever until He brings them back to His Kingdom. How about Saul (St. Paul), St. Augustine, St. Mousse the Black, etc....!!!

And here is Jonah talking to our Lord saying "**I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity**" (Jonah 4: 3).

Likewise, anyone whose heart abounds with the Lord's love will surely be full of perseverance.

Moses was originally very quick-tempered and violent. He killed an Egyptian and fled. But years later after he spent time in the presence of the Lord, he changed and became the most patient and persevering person.

Perseverance is a key to the success of any marriage. Within marriage IN Christ, it is a commandment and a virtue that we should ask our Lord to grant us in order for our married life to be full of peace, growth and joy. Alternatively, the worst enemy for any married life is anger and nervousness.

As all other virtues, we need to persist in asking our Lord in prayer to grant us this virtue and also to continue struggling to train ourselves to earn it.

If your partner is quick-tempered, here are some things you need to do:

- Pray for her/him
- Don't expect her/him to change overnight
- Show her/him a lot of love, care and support

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- Help her/him in their efforts to change
- Try hard not to aggravate his/her anger by doing things that you know may annoy her/him.
- Don't point at her/him or reprimand her/him
- Bear up with her/his weakness
- Be understanding to their situation
- Remind yourself that most probably s/he doesn't like what s/he is doing and that they are surely trying to change.

As you persist in your efforts and prayers, be sure and have a lot of Faith that things will take a positive turn in due time.

If your partner continues doing the things that you don't like, persist in drawing his/her attention gently. Don't leave yourself to get into a rage and shout your head off. This will not help anyone and will surely not solve the problem. Remember "**A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger**" (Proverbs 15:1).

Quality Time

Time is the most precious gift that man has during his life on earth... Time is not compensated for ... the minute that passes is non-retrievable (can never be brought back). Our life on earth is limited to a number of years, whether long or short. This is why we need to be very careful how we think of time and certainly how we spend it "**Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil**" (Ephesians 5: 15-16).

Some people are experts in "wasting" time... Others believe time's most important value is "money", i.e. each minute they spend should be used to bring them more money... Others are never satisfied with themselves if every minute of their lives is not devoted to some kind of achievement... Others devote every minute of their lives to service...

Working and earning your living is not wrong; doing things that make you feel self-satisfied is very good; service is also a great blessing; achievements are highly appreciated...

But the crucial question is: while you are planning all those lovely activities are you aware that the most important target that you should use your time in reaching is realizing

our Lord's plan for your life: to love God and to love all around you with all your might and all your power and all your will?!! **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" ; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'** (Luke 10:27).

As you do all the great things you are doing, do you make it a point to devote enough "quality time" with your partner and your family?!!!

It is a pity that sometimes our partners and our families come last on our list of priorities in devoting time. We work all day and come home totally worn out and not ready to utter or hear a single word, let alone a problem that your partner is facing or a challenge that your daughter/son can't handle and needs your help in resolving.

At this time, we are not aware that if we do not give a proper "listening ear" to our partners or our children, they will definitely look for someone else to lend them this "listening ear".

It is well known that life is very challenging and that responsibility of providing for a family is getting very tough. People sometimes have to work very long hours or get two jobs in order to be able to provide for the needs of his/her family. But it is still very important to be able to strike a balance between the material needs of my partner/family and their emotional/psychological needs.

It is important for you to work but it is also as important to spend some "quality time" with your partner/family.

Many partners think that if they spend a few hours at home they have covered this need. But it is important to realize that if you are home watching TV or playing games on your computer or chatting or even receiving guests, this is not "quality time".

"Quality time" includes any kind of activity that positively develops the relationship between the family members making it stronger and deeper. It is time of conversing, advising, sharing, listening, empathizing, sympathizing ... it is time of talking, playing, laughing... it is time of talking about one's experiences with our Lord Jesus Christ... time of reading the Bible together and praying together... time of discussing a worrying issue to one of us... time of asking the other's advice about a challenging person or situation... Quality time is a great family time!!!

"Quality time" creates a lovely loving amiable atmosphere at home and makes the family members keen on staying long hours at home, looking forward to spending time with one another and running back home with their worries/thoughts/successes/challenges/stories...

Responsibility

Responsibility is a duty or obligation to satisfactorily perform or complete a task that one must fulfill.

A person with a high sense of responsibility is always keen on carrying out the errands that he has to in the best way possible **"Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest- and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man"** (Proverbs 6: 6 -11).

It is indeed a very important pre-requisite for any successful marriage that the two partners have a high sense of responsibility.

Sometimes it is thought that men should be the ones demanded to have this sense of responsibility but this is not true. Women should also be responsible people in order to carry out their roles as wives and as mothers.

An irresponsible person is a great pain to his/her partner causing a lot of trouble all along their married life.

Responsibility involves care, a readiness to sacrifice and a great sense of "keenness" on the other's happiness and satisfaction.

Our Lord assumed responsibility in planning our creation, salvation and eternal life. Our Lord Jesus Christ assumed responsibility for the whole of humanity as He took upon Himself the great role of Salvation. He cared and still does about each one of us, was ready to sacrifice His Heavenly Glory as He was keen on bringing us back to His Father once more.

Likewise, husbands and wives should care for one another, should be ready to sacrifice their own pleasures for the sake of realizing their partner's wishes and needs, and should be keen on making their partners the happiest people in the world both on earth and in the life to come.

Husbands and wives have the primary responsibility of seeing to it that their partners are living a pious life with our Lord Jesus. Both partners should encourage one another to get into a deeper relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ and consequently bring up their children to be great Christians.

My dear son, remember that women feel happy when they are able to rely on their husbands and seek their support and advice in every situation in their lives. Don't leave your wife to face troubles alone; don't leave her to face life's challenges while you just retreat and live your own life

happily. Participate with your wives in the house-duties and don't say these are women's duties not mine. Serving at home is just as important as serving outside. Don't take service as a pretext and say that I have more important things to do. If you are needed at home, carry out what you need to do before you go ahead and carry out your other services **"Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her"** (Ephesians 5:25)

My dear daughter, make sure that you are able to carry out your housekeeping responsibilities as much as possible before you decide to take up a job. Your husband needs to come home and find a good meal to eat and a lovely atmosphere waiting for him. If there is usually no food at home and the place is mostly upside down, your husband may end up not being keen at all on coming home or spending time there, which is very bad. Ask the Lord's help so that you carry out all your responsibilities as well as possible and be sure He will help you. This is how Solomon describes a worthy wife **"She also rises while it is yet night. And provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants"** (Proverbs 31:15); and **"She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness"** (Proverbs 31:27).

Sacred life

"for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (1Peter 1:16), The goal of a true Christian is to be holy, i.e. to live a "sacred life".

Some people think that leading a sacred life is the job of monks, nuns and priests. This is a totally wrong concept.

Leading a holy life should be the goal of every human being and certainly all married couples.

First of all, marriage is a "sacrament" i.e. it makes the unity between man and woman holy; secondly, "marriage IN CHRIST" is by definition "holy" since it is not only uniting the two partners with one another but also **this holy sacrament is uniting them with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.**

In order for man and woman to live a sacred life they have to continuously work on living a life of "godliness" as it is written **"But godliness with contentment is great gain."** (1Timothy 6:6). Godliness is the continuous effort to be like our Lord Jesus Christ in everything.

While choosing your life partner you should have put into consideration this very important criterion/standard, i.e. the readiness to godliness. You should ask yourself: how much does this person seem to have a passion to lead a

sacred life? How much is this person ready to give up those things that are keeping him/her away from our Lord Jesus? How much effort does this person seem to have in order to lead a more spiritual life? What are this person's priorities and is he ready to revise those priorities in order to put our Lord on a higher position or even put Him on top of his priorities?

Sometimes the answers to those questions are negative; in which case you need to ask our Lord Jesus Christ's guidance and wisdom in deciding whether the person who will be your partner has that readiness or potential of change or not. If so, you may play a very important role in bringing this person to Christ by marrying him/her. However, this is a very critical issue and it needs to be discussed with your father of confession before making a final decision.

Many other criteria/standards can be disregarded, like money matters, beauty, standard of living, etc... but the one and only element that should be placed on top of your list of criteria in deciding on the person you will get married to is: **love and fear of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Before being committed to one another, partners should be first committed to our Lord Jesus Christ. Their commitment to Christ is the main element that will bring security and joy to their married lives.

Dear son, don't put "beauty" as a top pre-requisite in your potential wife. "**Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.**" (Proverbs 31:30). It is only a wife who seeks godliness that makes her ready to submit to her husband and fill his life with Christ's joy and peace.

Dear daughter, don't think that a rich man is a good catch. For what will money do when this person cheats on you or goes around with another woman? Do you think you will be able to watch your husband all the time? If you think so, indeed very much mistaken.

Only a husband who fears the Lord and is keen on obeying His commandments is trustworthy and keen on being faithful and loving. Even as early as the time of your engagement, you should be keen on having a spiritual program to follow together. You have to be keen on bringing our Lord Jesus Christ in your midst even before you get married.

Here are some of the practices that you should be keen on doing together:

1 - Praying.

You should make it a point to spend time in prayer better through the Agbia. Standing in front of the Lord even if it is for a short while will bring the Lord in your midst solidifying your relationship and uniting you IN HIM.

2- Bible reading and study.

Decide on reading parts in the Bible as a daily practice and make it a point to discuss your readings and share your meditations

3- Fasting.

Adhering to the Church's set fasting times and deciding to fast together as you pray for the Lord's guidance in any issue related to your life together is very much recommended.

4- Father of confession.

Continuous repentance is a cornerstone in leading a life of godliness. Get into the habit of self-assessment, repentance and confession on a regular basis. It could be a good idea if you have the same father of confession. But it is still ok if he is not the same as long as each one of you has a father of confession.

5 - Liturgy and Holy Communion.

You need to make sure to attend the Holy Liturgy and partake of the Holy Communion on regular basis – at least once a week ever since the beginning of your engagement. **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."** (John 6:56).

6 - Spiritual Meetings and Service.

Sharing the same interests in attending spiritual meetings and being keen on participating in service makes your relationship become stronger.

7 - Paying the "Tithes".

Agreeing on the blessing of getting our Lord Jesus to be a partner of your earnings by paying your "tithes" regularly makes your life blessed and holy IN HIM and makes you experience our Lord's great gifts of prosperity and abundance.

"But this [I say] He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2Corinthians 9:6).

These pillars of spiritual life will work as a real fence around your house and prevent any evil matter to approach you. Whenever you face any of life's usual or unusual challenges you will be protected from any harm and you will be able to overcome the devil's plots by your being close to our Lord Jesus Christ believing that He is fighting your battles and granting you real peace and joy.

Transparency & Trust

If you believe that the relationship between you and your partner is one of “unity IN Christ”... if you truly believe that after receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony the two of you have become “one in Christ”, then transparency and trust will normally crown your relationship. You will not be able to hide anything from your partner and you will never attempt to lie to him/her.

God’s original plan for man and woman was for them to be very transparent to God and to one another. But when they sinned, they started lying and falsely covering up for their lies and mistakes; so they lost that blessing and virtue of transparency and trust.

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth to restore man’s original holy image, and He asked all of us to live like “children” in simplicity, faith, love and transparency. **"Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds"** (Colossians 3:9).

It is a pity that these days lack of confidence, trust and transparency is prevalent in all human relationships especially among married couples. We keep hearing wives complaining that they do not trust their husbands’ behavior, friends, relationships, wisdom, etc... Likewise, we hear husbands

complaining about their lack of confidence in their wives' old relationships, being affected by other's opinions, hurried decisions, etc...

Let us first agree that trust and transparency should exist as of the time of your engagement. Be open and frank with your partner from the very beginning of your relationship.

Here are some questions that you need to ask yourself to help you decide:

- Did you discover that your partner lied to you repeatedly?
- Did you notice that s/he exaggerates when s/he discusses any matter?
- Did you notice that s/he openly brags about some evil relationships that s/he had before you got engaged?
- Did you discover at any point along the time of your engagement that there were hidden matters about your partner that s/he intentionally didn't reveal to you?
- Did you discuss with him/her why s/he hid such a thing from you and found out that s/he would do that again if given a chance?
- Did you notice that your partner is not sharing with you very important issues that may affect your relationship or your future?

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- Do you notice that lying is one of your partner's habits and that s/he readily resorts to it on a day-to-day basis to escape from a friend or a situation?
- Did you discuss with him/her this bad habit but found out that s/he was unwilling to change?

If so, why did you commit yourself to such an untrustworthy person?

Dear son and daughter, don't commit yourself and your life to someone who is hard to trust ... who likes to show off ... whose most important concern is his/her external image and not his/her true self ... who finds lying to be very easy ... whose life is full of secret dealings and weird actions.

Lying is one of the characteristics of the "fallen nature" which died as we got baptized and which continuously dies as we repent and confess.

Transparency and sincerity is a main characteristic of the "renewed nature" of man after salvation ... it is a prerequisite for any person who wishes to start a new life with a life-partner with whom s/he will unite for the rest of his/her life IN Christ through receiving the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

Transparency and trust are very important pillars for the success of a Christian Marriage.

Dear husbands and wives!

- Be honest and true to yourself, to your partner and above all to God who sees inside you and who you can never fool or deceive. **“Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also” (Luk 11:40)**
- Don't hide anything from your partner and don't let suspicion or jealousy destroy your relationship with your partner.
- Stick to our Lord Jesus Christ and He will grant you to have confidence in yourself and in your partner.
- Repent and confess your sins and have faith that they will be forgiven and forgotten.

Remember that transparency is the basis of trust ... trust the basis of companionship and partnership ... companionship and partnership the basis of continuity and settlement. **"May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth"** (Proverbs 5:18).

It's also very important that you avoid doubting or distrusting your partner. Distrust is a very dangerous phenomenon that is currently causing many married couples a lot of trouble and can easily lead them to a dead-end. Remember that **"[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres"** (1Corinthians 13:7)

Here are some of the causes of distrust between partners:

1 - Lack of Communication.

If there isn't continuous communication between the married couple they can easily misunderstand or misinterpret what is said which may cause distrust. So, if there is continuous conversation the possibility of a misunderstanding is by far less.

2 - Lack of Self-confidence.

If you lack self-confidence the possibility that you won't have confidence in your partner is much higher. A person who has no self-confidence finds it very hard to believe what others say or do. S/he usually feels that the others are making fun of him/her.

3 - Inability to Forgive.

If you can't forgive your partner, you will never be able to trust her/him and you will suffer greatly from continuous suspicion and maybe even hallucinations.

Forgiveness between the partners needs them to live a life of prayer and continuous struggle to forgive and forget. They need to go regularly to their father of confession and ask his advice as to how to attain this great gift and blessing. They should also remind themselves that they can fall in similar

mistakes and they will need to be forgiven too. They should also remember how much our Lord Jesus Christ forgives and forgets sins no matter what and how many they are.

Dear husbands and wives, train yourselves to find pretexts to one another. Struggle to gain “the simple eye” that sees everything as beautiful and expects the blessed and nice... the eye that our Lord spoke about "**Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness**" (Luke 11:34).

Stop giving your ear to the “evil one” who keeps making big stories out of nothing and whose main purpose is that you lose confidence in your partner. In order to succeed in stopping this evil voice, resort to the prayer of Jesus, repeating to yourself: “thank you my dear lord Jesus Christ” “Have mercy upon me dear Lord Jesus Christ” “Help me dear Lord Jesus Christ”... recite one of the psalms... contemplate one of the great experiences you had with your partner that proves him/her to be extremely loving and devoted...

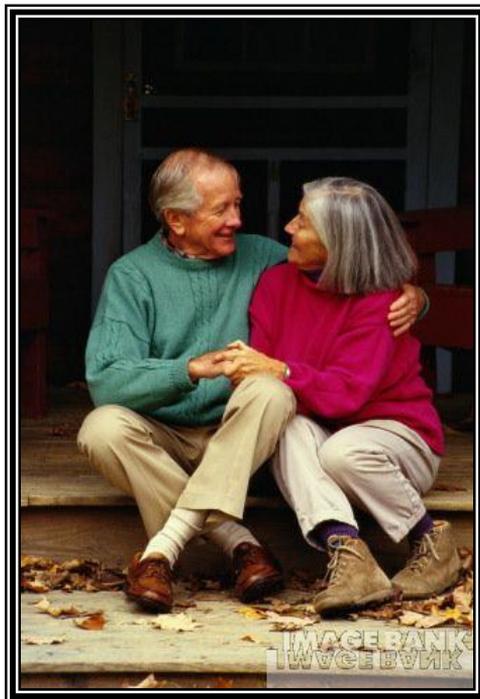
In short, don't give a chance to the evil one to ruin your lives by his wicked thoughts "**and do not give the devil a foothold**" (Ephesians 4:27).

Eventually, if you feel distrust is coming your way, give your partner a chance to explain the situation. If s/he is not mistaken, then you need to apologize for having distrusted

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him/her. In case s/he has fallen in any kind of wrong, be ready to forgive and forget.

Remember that you are **"no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate"** (Matthew 19:6).



Understanding

Understanding your partner needs a lot of effort. It doesn't just come by chance or by time. You have to make an intentional decision that you need to understand your life partner as closely as possible in order to be able to have a healthy and successful relationship with him/her.

You have to realize that both you and your partner are coming from totally different backgrounds: different upbringing, different family habits and traditions, different education, different social habits, different friends and different life experiences. You, therefore, have to be ready to probe deep in your partner's background and understand it as clearly as possible. This will make you by far better able to understand his/her drives, motives, wishes and behavior, and more importantly to accept and be ready to live with all those differences.

You also need to make an effort to understand the different motives and drives between a man and a woman accept them and deal with them. If this is a mutual effort, you are sure to make of your marriage a great success.

Some main differences between men and women are:

- A woman usually relies on her heart while a man trusts his mind.
- A woman is very careful to details while a man may look at the matter as a whole.
- A woman needs empathy while a man needs respect.
- A woman is driven by hearing while a man moves forward by seeing.
- A woman needs hugs and a man needs logic.
- A woman expects continuous show of care and love while a man needs space.

Further understanding will surely bring about more tolerance, acceptance and readiness to sacrifice one's needs and wishes for the sake of one's partner.

Vision

The unity between man and woman in Christ is result of our Lord's vision for man. Our Lord created the whole world and then He created Man. **"The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' ... Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, for she was taken out of man. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh'"** (Genesis 2: 18-24).

God's original vision for man and woman was that they live in union with Him, to enjoy one another's company, to have many children to fill the world that He had created for them and to live happily ever after. This is the main broad vision that each man and woman who intend to get into holy matrimony IN Christ should have.

The great wedding ceremony that our Orthodox Church holds as the bride and groom walk their way down the church aisle towards the altar is a symbol of their life journey. Their marriage is a pledge that they will help one another and the children that the Lord will grant them to better know Him and accordingly to safely reach eternal life.

As they receive the Holy Spirit that unites them through the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony they are vowing to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and to one another for ever and to do everything they can so that this holy family enjoys eternal life with our Lord Jesus Christ.

This vision should be translated into a set of goals and objectives that the married couple should put for their lives and should be keen on achieving. It would be great if the couple can translate their vision into a plan of action that helps them achieve their goals. Planning and good management are needed in order for the married couple to realize their spiritual and worldly goals and dreams.

The first and foremost goal for a marriage IN Christ is to reach the Kingdom of Heaven. "**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well**" (Matthew 6:23). In order to realize this goal you should plan your life in accordance to it and give it the top priority (refer to the chapter 5 "Sacred Life")

The second main goal that a married couple usually has is: to have a settled successful happy married life. This broad goal needs the couple to sit together and break it down into timely goals that they intend to achieve along specific time frames. For example they may decide they want to plan to have a space of two years between their first and second child.

It is also recommended that the couple puts what is called in management “S.M.A.R.T goals”: S for Specific - M for Measureable - A for Achievable or Attainable - R for Realistic - T for Timely

In order to plan your life in this way, you will need to spend a lot of time with your partner, thinking, brainstorming, discussing, agreeing and making decisions, which in itself is a very positive thing that will strengthen the communication channel and mutual understanding between you.

It is also recommended that you evaluate how your plan is proceeding and maybe modify it to suit any changes that may come along your way.

Together with setting goals and planning comes role playing or assigning roles and responsibilities. It has to be clear who is doing what in order to achieve your goals. Assigning responsibilities has to be fair so that not one bears the greatest load while the other sits there enjoying its results and doing nothing of significance.

Remember that you need to strike a balance between achieving your main spiritual goal – helping one another and your children reach eternal life - and your worldly goals. It is only good planning, wise time management, continuous evaluation and re-evaluation, making wise decisions and conscious choices that would make you able to reach this balance.

Wisdom

"Through wisdom a house is built and by understanding it is established" (Proverbs 24:3).

We need to be wise... we need to think wisely... speak wisely... behave wisely... plan wisely and keep silent wisely.

We need to know what to say and when to say it... what to do and when to do it... **"To everything there is a season... a time for every purpose under heaven"** (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

We need to ask our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us this wisdom that we can never lead a successful life without it **"It any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him"** (James 1:5).

Here are some tips:

1-We need to persist and insist on asking our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us the wisdom needed for each and every situation we face in life.

2- We need to study and not just read the Bible and specifically the Books of Wisdom, like the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Psalms, Job, and the Book of Sirakh.

3 - We need to ask God to help us learn from our mistakes and contemplate the events that happen to us and those around us in life and seek wisdom from them.

4 - We need to avoid having what the Bible calls "earthly wisdom" (like being cunning), which is the evil version of wisdom, i.e. never use one's wisdom to do evil. **"But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there"** (James 3:14-16).

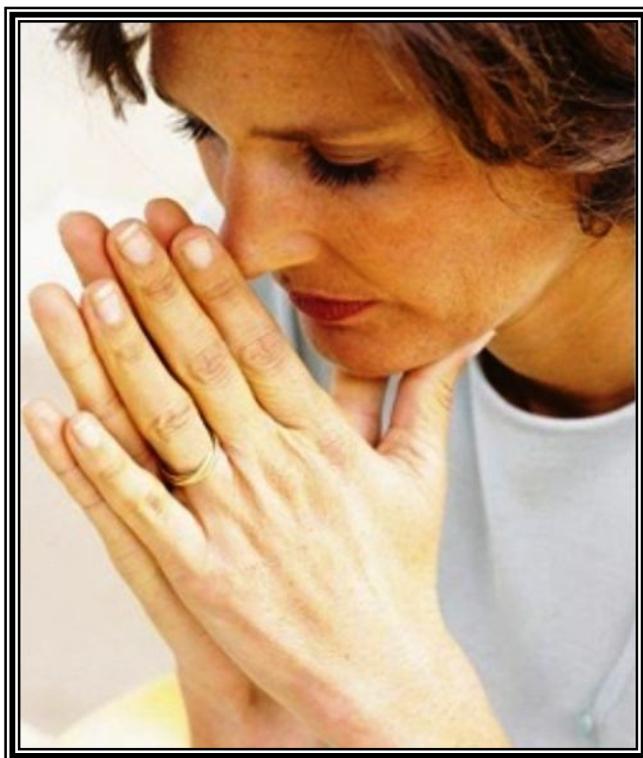
5 - Never ask the advice of those who are not living according to God's will and fear. They may think intelligently but they may not be giving you the advice that our Lord approves of. Remember that thinking right is the natural outcome of righteousness which is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

6 - Discipline yourself in accordance to the teachings of our forefathers, the life-stories of the saints, and the advice of your father of confession. Be obedient to their teachings and live by them. **"My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother"** (Proverbs 1:8).

7 - Be selective as to who your friends are. Seek friends who have a close relationship with our Lord and who are wise and

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moderate in their thought and behavior. **"Blessed is the man who walks no in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful"** (Psalms 1:1).



X-ray of the Soul

"But the Lord said to Samuel: 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearances but the Lord looks at the heart'" (1Samuel 16:7).

We need to develop an internal deep vision like an x-ray that looks through matters, in this case with the aim of perceiving one's soul – a spiritual x-ray of the soul.

Normal people are impressed with externalities: body built, rich clothes, pretty face, lovely jewelry, extravagant cars, etc... But our Lord Jesus Christ looks at the bottom of the heart and soul. This is the kind of vision you need to develop in order to be able to lead a happy life.

Dear son, you need to see through your wife's anger being caused by her hunger for your love, care and support.

Dear daughter, you need to see through your husband's nervousness being the result of your continuously ignoring his needs and requests.

Dear son and daughter, you need to see through your kids' stubbornness having been caused by your not being there for them when they needed you.

You need to develop this piercing x-ray vision in order to discover the true reasons behind any apparent strange behavior and you need to ask the Lord to help you gain the wisdom in order to be able to do this. **"Do not judge according to appearance but judge with righteous judgment"** (John 7:24).

Again, this wisdom cannot be gained except through spending a lot of time in prayer and in studying the Bible and contemplating its Holy contents. **"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal"** (2Corinthians 4:18).

Dear son, focus on your wife's heart and mind not on her looks.

Dear daughter, focus on your husband's spirit and character not on his money or position.

Dear son and daughter, focus on the quality of your life together and not on how much money you earn or what possessions you have or even how much success you achieved.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6: 24 – 26).

Yielding

A person is known to be “yielding” when s/he can change the way s/he normally behaves or deals with situations when it is helpful or necessary. It also involves a kind of readiness to submit oneself to the other person’s wishes or demands. The opposite of “yielding” is “rigidity” which is a main reason for conflict between married couples.

Yielding or submissiveness is usually rejected by many youth nowadays. They think of such attributes as signs of weakness and unpleasant constraints that they do not wish to have. They wrongly believe that sticking to one’s opinion is a sign of strong personality. But we are advised over and over: **"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"** (1Peter 5:5).

Yielding is a needed whether you are a man or a woman or a child ... We should learn how to yield – how to bend our selfish wishes first to our Lord Jesus Christ, to our parents, to our friends, to our life-partner, to the law of the country where we live, even to our own children.

Yielding is an attribute of the strong rather than that of the weak. A person may willingly “yield” to the other in order to win a situation if s/he is really very strong **“IN CHRIST”**.

Yielding is a sign of love since it involves giving up one's desires, wishes or opinions for the sake of the other's.

Yielding saves many homes... but rigidity destroys many marriages.

Yielding may be needed more on the part of the wife "**Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything**" (Ephesians 5:24). However, husbands should be always ready to submit to their wives' wishes and hopes.

Yielding needs a lot of training and it is developed as early as a child's upbringing whether in church or at home. The young man or woman who got used to submit and yield to God, the church, their parents and teachers is more liable to submit to their partners and allow their wishes to come before their own.

A yielding person finds greater joy and satisfaction in gratifying his/her partner's wishes and causing him/her to be happy rather than insisting on doing what s/he wants.

However, it is not good if one of the married couple abuses the other's continuous readiness to yield and submit. This may cause the submissive person to blow out at one point or even to get into a depression or a nervous breakdown feeling that s/he is never gratified or given an opportunity to realize herself/himself.

Dear son, do not feel proud that your wife is always submitting to your wishes and ignoring her own. You may either feel bored that there is no reciprocity in the relationship or she may break down and give up on you totally at one point. **"Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect..."** (1Peter 3:7).

Dear daughter, do not be happy that your husband fulfills your wishes and does all you insist on. This is not what marriage IN Christ is all about. Watch out for he may get fed up and walk out on you. **"Wives, in the same way, be submissive to your husbands"** (1Peter 3:1).

Dear son and daughter, make sure you do not make any decision without sharing and discussing it with your partner. You ought to keep in mind that your life is now "one IN HIM" and therefore each one of you has a say in any of your lives' decisions.

In this way, you will make sure that **"the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you"** (2Corinthians 13:14).

Zeal

Zeal is another word for enthusiasm and eagerness. Our Lord Jesus Christ's zeal on our salvation caused Him to quit His Glory and to descend to earth, to be incarnated and take our earthly bodies, to live a poor life, to work as a carpenter, to be insulted and persecuted, and finally to die on the cross to grant us Eternal Resurrection and Salvation.

Our Lord's zeal is clear in His "Passion" to save all human beings as He "**wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth**" (1 Timothy 2:4).

A zealous husband is full of enthusiasm in trying to show his love to his beloved wife. He "hurries to do what pleases her" as he is advised during the Holy Wedding ceremony. He spares no effort to find out what she needs and does it as soon as he can. He supports her in her troubles and times of pains even while she is carrying his baby inside her and while she is in labor.

Many husbands are now invited to attend the time when their baby is being delivered and share those very special moments with their wives.

A zealous wife is keen on doing all she can to make her husband happy and satisfied. She is full of enthusiasm about her husband's achievements and ambitions and never fails in

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showing him how proud she is of him and of all he does. She is always ready to support her husband during hard times and encourages him to persist in his efforts whether in service or at work.

A zealous husband and wife are full of enthusiasm to develop in their relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, to know Him more closely, to serve Him and to make of their home a “church” where He resides and rules.

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).



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