

A marriage preparation program



A Decision *to* Love

{ COUPLE'S BOOK }

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Our Decision to Love

They would have celebrated their second anniversary today. But instead, Sherry finds herself alone. It's hard to figure what went wrong. Somehow, after the wedding everything changed. She discovered so much she hadn't known about Tom. And when it came to the important things, like sharing the chores or having a baby, she realized they hadn't talked about them or agreed upon anything at all. It had felt so wonderful to be in love, who wanted to talk about things that might create hard feelings or cause a fight? She hoped that everything would just kind of work itself out later.

Thinking about it, Sherry remembers the married team couples at her marriage preparation class saying again and again "...engagement is the time to make sure you are ready to marry. It is never too late to wait or to take more time. Be honest with each other. Don't hold anything back. Relationships take work." With a sad smile she remembers how she used to imitate them, to Tom's great amusement, mocking the advice she suspected might be right. Maybe she hadn't been ready. Maybe Tom wasn't her Mr. "Right." But what was she to do after all those years of dating, be alone again? Anyway, the wedding had been planned for months. She wanted to get married.

Now it was clear she had been wrong. If she had known then what she knew now about Tom, herself, and their marriage, she would have taken the advice of those couples and taken a harder look at their relationship before they got married. She would have been more honest, less afraid to talk about what was really bothering her. Maybe Tom would have done

the same. Maybe they could have worked it out. Maybe, maybe, maybe, Sherry thinks. Maybe they could have been celebrating their second anniversary now, together and in love, instead of waiting, each of them alone, for their divorce to be finalized.

Finding Mr. or Ms. “Right” is something we all hope for. Children are raised with “Snow White” or “Cinderella” stereotypes firmly in mind. The Princess-in-distress is rescued by a stunning young Prince who loves her, after which they live happily ever after.

While these images are indeed fairy tale ones, most people unconsciously expect their lives to go in a similar way. When we ask couples in marriage preparation classes what happened when they fell in love, most say it just kind of happened, that it was magical, and that it happened when they weren’t quite looking. It was wonderful, a time filled with excitement over plans and the future. These feelings and thoughts about falling in love and about engagement are important to every couple who experiences them. But they need to be balanced with a little reality and some concrete conversations about what your marriage will be like. Excitement and plans don’t carry a relationship through the challenges and hard times. Only love with a solid foundation can do that.

Common among engaged couples is an unrealistic expectation we refer to as the myth of marital determinism. It presupposes that the success of your marriage is determined by finding that one right person for you. If you don’t happen to find that special partner, then a life of unhappiness and/or divorce is inevitable. But if you do find Mr. or Ms. “Right,” a life of joy and peace is sure to follow. One of the many problems with this deterministic view is that when rough times do occur in your marriage, you may be more inclined to view your marital troubles as an indication that you did not find the “right” person. And instead of trying to work together on your relationship, you’ll simply agree to break up because “it was a big mistake from the start.”

The truth is that there is not just one person in this world for you. There are obviously many people with whom you could be married. But you have chosen this one person. A lifetime of happiness together is not based on chance or on a sort of predetermined cosmic blueprint; rather it is based on the two of you making a mature, Christian decision to love each other...on the day of your wedding, and every day of your married life.

The decision to marry is a decision to love. It’s not magic. It’s not a roulette game of chance. It’s not always easy. Some days

PRE-NUPTIAL AGREEMENTS

A Pre-Nuptial Agreement is a legal contract between two individuals engaged to marry each other, which states in detail how assets will be divided if they divorce in the future. Some see such an agreement as a good insurance policy. But in reality, it may be more of a self-fulfilling predictor of doom. For a couple about to marry in the church, who are about to make a lifelong decision to love in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, Pre-Nuptial Agreements may be seen as courting disaster.

The Catholic church has no official teaching regarding such premarital contracts. But, as one priest who works with couples seeking annulments stated, such an agreement at the time of engagement can be construed as a lack of seriousness by the couple toward the permanence of their commitment. There is a sort of “bail out of it if it gets too hot” mentality behind it, and it undermines the need for the engaged couple to seriously consider the commitment they are about to make.

If your partner approaches you with a request to sign such an agreement, especially if it’s right before the wedding... Beware! “Honey, I’ll love you forever, but please sign on the dotted line.”

COHABITATION

"The overall association between premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability is striking," states a 1987 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research. More recent studies continue to show that couples who live together before marrying are 50% more likely to divorce than couples who don't cohabit. These findings, substantiated by other independent studies, point to a reality in sharp contrast to commonly-held beliefs of "trial marriages." The fragility of the post-cohabitation marriage was the surprising result of the research for demographers, sociologists, economists, and therapists.

There are many reasons why couples cohabit. Many couples do it for financial reasons, others do it for the convenience. Some couples are engaged to be married, others are attempting to see if they're compatible. Some couples who live together are not sexually active with each other. And others live together as a trial marriage.

A National Council on Family Relations study of over 300 newly-married couples found a higher level of dissatisfaction among those couples who lived a trial marriage before their wedding. Women, in particular, were more unhappy with the quality of communication with their spouses after they married. But why is this the case? And, more importantly, why do couples who live together before marriage have a higher divorce rate?

No one knows for sure. But probably one of the main reasons is that those couples who view premarital cohabitation as a trial marriage are deceiving themselves. As someone once said, living together before marriage in order to prepare for marriage is like taking a bath in order to prepare to swim the English Channel. The best way to prepare for marriage is to talk with each other about every aspect of your relationship, your own personalities, and your future goals. Oddly enough, it seems that premarital cohabitation actually inhibits such basic communication.

the last thing in the world you will want or feel like doing is loving your partner. But those are the days that you say to yourself, "Today, I decide to love my partner." A decision to love demands maturity, selflessness, and a true sense of self-respect.

No couple is 100 percent compatible or perfect for each other. To make your marriage work, you will have to work on it, some days more than others.

This first chapter will focus on your being together and your decision to stay together. Your stories of how you met, and all the details surrounding it, are important because they are the first bricks in the foundation of your relationship and upcoming marriage.

It's important to reflect on the fact that you chose one another and to share with each other the thoughts and feelings associated with it. It is also just as important to look at how those initial feelings and thoughts will affect your future together and your ability to make a lifelong commitment.

In all the chapters of this workbook, we challenge you to challenge yourself and your partner. We encourage you to take this time seriously, to be honest and patient with each other. It is our hope that through these exercises you will discover new things about yourself, your partner, and your relationship which will strengthen your bond and commitment. But since there are some sensitive and often difficult questions, we also realize that there may be times when you will feel shaky and unsure about one or more of these topics. That's O.K. Your engagement is supposed to be the time during which you look at your relationship, discovering those areas that aren't perfect and may require some work. So take your time with this and allow yourselves the opportunity to start your marriage off on the right foot.

His Page

Answer these questions by yourself and then share your answers and reflections with your partner.

1. What did I like about you when we first met?
2. What did I dislike about you?
3. How did I feel about myself when we were first together?
4. What did I first like about us as a couple?
5. What did we decide about living together before marriage and why? How do I feel about our decision?
6. What made us decide to marry? How do I feel about that?
7. Going from being single to being married requires a change in lifestyle. In which of these areas do I think I will need to make changes? In which do I think you will need to make changes?

	ME	YOU	WHY?
Time spent with friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
How money is spent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Hours at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Leisure time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Time spent with family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

8. What have we decided about a pre-nuptial agreement?

How do I feel about that?

How will our decision affect our relationship?

9. Who are the people that I feel have helped and supported us as a couple?

Who do I think have exceptionally good marriages? Why?

10. When I dream about our future, this is what I see in 3 years:

in 10 years:

Her Page

Answer these questions by yourself and then share your answers and reflections with your partner.

1. What did I like about you when we first met?
2. What did I dislike about you?
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in 10 years:

Group Section

Answer these questions as a couple and then discuss your answers with other couples in your group.

1. When we hear the phrase “love at first sight” what do we think of? Do I/you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. Do you or I believe that “opposites attract”? Why?
3. What is our definition of “commitment”? How do each of us feel about making a commitment? What are the conditions for making a commitment?
4. What qualities or characteristics have we each seen in other couples who have made a commitment? What are some of the ways a commitment can strengthen or weaken a relationship?
5. How do we feel about pre-nuptial agreements? Do they affect a couple’s ability to make and keep a commitment? Why?

Issues of Special Focus

If you have lived together before marrying in the church:

1. We originally decided to live together because...
2. Since we have lived together, how has each of us changed? (Positive/Negative)
3. These are areas which might be beneficial to change...
4. Why do we want to get married now and not just continue to live together?
5. (If you have already been married by a Justice of the Peace or in another church...) Why are we coming to the Catholic church to have our marriage convalidated?
6. What are some of the feelings we have about our upcoming marriage in the church?
7. Will getting married change our relationship? If so, how?

If one or both of you are bringing a child or children into the marriage:

1. How will our marriage affect our child(ren)? How do I think they feel about me? you? Will they feel a part of our new marriage?
2. How do I feel about your child(ren)? How do I feel when I am with them?
3. Have we discussed adopting each other’s child(ren)? Do I think that I will feel like a real mom/dad to them? What do we expect from each other as parents?

Please discuss the following questions if they pertain to you.

1. If there is more than eight years difference in our ages, how do I feel about this? How will this affect our relationship?
2. How has it felt to be an interracial couple? How have we dealt with those feelings?
3. How have our ethnic and/or cultural differences affected our relationship?
4. Given some of these differences, how have we been received by each other’s families, friends, and communities?

Relationship Check

Each of you should circle the number that best represents how you feel about your relationship after discussing these topics. Remember, you each need to select your own number.

1. very close 2. somewhat close 3. somewhat distant 4. very distant

What do I want to discuss further with you?