



“What does it mean to say, ‘I do’?”

(Marriage, a Sign of God's Love)



Opening Prayer

“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full.”

—*John 3:29*

“On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples.”

—*John 2:1-2*

“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready ...’”

—*Revelation 19:6-7*

Dive In: Wedding Bell Blues

Imagine you are at your best friend's wedding, standing there, decked out in your tuxedo (or bridesmaid's dress). What would you do if you heard the bride and groom make the following vows to one another? Would you object?

Bride: "I take you, *(name)*, to be my husband. I promise to be true to you for as long as you are romantic and give me everything I want, like taking me out to dinner every week plus birthdays and month-a-versaries. I promise to honor you ... when you deserve it. You WON'T deserve it if you: leave the toilet seat up; snore or chew with your mouth open; say another woman is cute; or watch football every weekend.

"I promise to love you, except when I'm tired or stressed out. I will always tell you exactly what I think ... unless I'm too mad to talk to you. Then you'd better read my mind!"


Groom: "I take you, *(name)*, to be my wife. I promise to be true to you and love you as long as you don't nag me too much. But not if I have to work a lot of

overtime and not when you are cranky and tired. When that happens, I will love you from a safe distance. If that.

"I promise to honor you, except when you fail to keep the house clean or forget to make snacks when I watch football with the guys. I will be faithful to you all the days of my life ... so long as we both shall feel like it."

Obviously, most people don't go into marriage thinking this way. Most couples believe they will beat the odds—that *their* marriage will last forever. And yet, we live in a broken world, full of broken people. Sadly, far too many marriages end in **DIVORCE**. Families are destroyed, hurting everyone involved. Maybe that's happened in your own family.

Despite all these things, God's high call (and our high hopes) for a love that is authentic and true remains. Today we're going to take a deeper look at that beautiful vocation (calling) that most of us have and at God's plan for man and woman.



"If a marriage is to preserve its initial charm and beauty, both husband and wife should try to renew their love day after day, and that is done through sacrifice, with smiles and also with ingenuity."

— St. Josemaría Escrivá





Segment 1: What Is Marriage?

- The commitment of each spouse in a marriage must be: free, total, faithful, and _____.
- Which of these is a "purpose" of marriage?
 - The procreation of children
 - The mutual sanctification of the spouses
 - The education of children
 - A, B, and C

Segment 2: Tough Questions

- Those who cohabit before marriage have higher rates of _____.
 - divorce
 - infidelity
 - abuse
 - A, B, and C
- T or F?** An annulment is a decree that states that the relationship in question was not a valid marriage.

Segment 3: Free. Total. Faithful. Fruitful.

- Jason says that fidelity is something we do with our _____.
 - heart
 - eyes
 - imagination
 - A, B, and C
- You shouldn't enter into a relationship looking for the kind of love only _____ can give you.
 - your parents
 - your puppy
 - God
 - chocolate



TO THE HEART with

In her book, *Girls Gone Mild*, Wendy Shalit recounts:

I once traveled by car with some elderly friends going to a family event, and it was a humbling experience. The wife was suffering from Alzheimer's, and every twenty seconds she would ask somewhat fearfully, "Where are we going?" ... Her husband would always respond gently and cheerfully, as if for the first time, "We're going to a party!"

Years later, I heard from my grandparents about this couple, and how the husband gallantly continued to care for his wife during her mental degeneration. By the time she died, she no longer recognized her husband of fifty years. But she did tell him, offhand, something very beautiful: "You know, I don't know who you are, but you're the best."¹

What woman does not want to be loved like this? What man does not wish to lose himself so fully in his beloved? We are drawn to such love for a

reason: Our hearts are made for it. Because we are made in the image and likeness of God—and God is love—we are made in the image and likeness of love.

Some people are unable to give and receive this kind of love because of wounds from the past. Some people think they don't deserve to be loved this way; their ability to receive love needs healing. Others are trapped in vices that have impaired their ability to give authentic love. Still others wonder if real love even exists. Perhaps they have never known a marriage like the one Wendy Shalit describes in her book.

We all struggle to overcome obstacles to love, but if we want to experience love that truly satisfies, we can't just wait and hope this love will simply "happen" to us when the time is right. We need to prepare ourselves for it, receive healing for our

wounds, and battle our imperfections. This might be a frightening or daunting task, but St. John Paul II has reassured us: “Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice.”² He also said, “Real love is demanding. I would fail in my mission if I did not clearly tell you so.”³

People spend countless hours preparing for their wedding day. But how many hours are these couples spending preparing for *marriage*? While marriage may not be on your immediate radar, the choices you make today about your relationships and God’s place in them can help you prepare for the love that should last a lifetime.

Jason Evert

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Find It!

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Hero of the Week



Born:

July 7, 1207

Died:

November 17, 1231

Memorial:

November 17

Patron Saint of:

- nurses
- bakers
- brides

St. Elizabeth of Hungary

Imagine you wanted to impress a certain girl in your English class (if you're a guy) or get a certain football player to notice you (if you're a girl).

How would you go about it? Would you come up with a clever text, slip a note or rose or bag of homemade cookies in that person's locker, or do something really crazy to get that person to notice you?

Chocolate chips and love poems are great, of course. And if you really love someone, you look forward to spending time with that person—taking long walks on a beach or even just around the block. But real love—married love—is much more than a few tender moments captured in a photograph. It involves a lifetime of loving and serving one's spouse, as a pathway to holiness. We see this in the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary and her husband, Louis IV of Thuringia.

Both Elizabeth and Louis were raised to rule. The creature comforts of courtly life could have insulated them from the suffering of the poor. Elizabeth, however, had a soft spot for the poor ... and Louis had a soft spot for *her*. He not only accepted but encouraged her loving, charitable works, sharing his wealth as a way to grow in love.

Sometimes that love worked in miraculous ways. St. Elizabeth was in the habit of taking food from the royal coffers to feed needy families, even

though the royal household disapproved. One day, she came across her husband, who happened to be out in the woods. When he gently asked her to reveal what was hidden in her cloak, she opened it to show him the bread and cheese she'd hidden there—and out came a bouquet of roses!

On October 20, 2011, in his weekly audience, Pope Benedict XVI said, "Elizabeth's marriage was profoundly happy: she helped her husband to raise his human qualities to a supernatural level and he, in exchange, stood up for his wife's generosity to the poor ... A clear witness to how faith and love of God and neighbor strengthen family life and deepen ever more the matrimonial union."

Sadly, Louis died young. St. Elizabeth made arrangements for the care of their three children and devoted the next few years of her life to charitable works, including building a hospital for the poor. She, too, died very young. And yet her legacy of married love continues to this day.

St. Elizabeth, pray for us. By your example, show us the fruits of a loving, authentic marriage.

Challenge of the Week

- What makes a happy marriage?** What does it mean to love someone “heroically”? Poll some of the adults in your life to get their thoughts; add a few of your own ideas; and write about it in the space below.
- Prayerfully inventory your wardrobe.** Is there anything that doesn’t reflect the dignity of a child of God? Think of one way you exercise the virtue of modesty this week, and write it in the space below.
- Ask your parents or grandparents about their wedding day.** Discuss what their plans were at the time, and how they feel “God’s plan” has worked out in their marriage. Write about it in the space below.

✝ Closing Prayer

“The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”

—1 Corinthians 6:13

Heavenly Father, you have made us in your image and likeness. Thank you for the dignity and beauty of our sexuality. The world tells us that promiscuity is freedom and then enslaves us to the emptiness of sin, loneliness, and despair. Help us to repent of any impurity that has taken hold of our lives and to make a gift of ourselves to you, knowing that when we trust you, our lives will become abundant and beautiful. Amen.