

Unleash the power of marriage

Begin the lifelong journey of realizing the spiritual fullness of married life

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What's the point of marriage? Do we even need it anymore? If so, what for?

If you ask a dozen people these questions, you may get a dozen answers, but the Catholic answers to these questions reveals a depth and spiritual power to marriage that many people don't fully appreciate. Simply put, Catholics believe that when a Christian couple gets married they are promising to be each other's best hope for becoming everything God created them to be in this life and getting each other to heaven in the next. When you say, "I do" in church, you are not just saying that you have warm-fuzzy feeling for someone and like hanging out with them. You are agreeing to play an essential and active role in God's plan of salvation for your spouse, second only to the saving power of Jesus Christ. The following three tips from "[For Better ... FOREVER!](#)" (OSV, 19.95) can help you unleash the spiritual power of your marriage.

1. Be apprentices

Christians are called to spend their lives learning how to love as God loves. For Catholics, marriage is an apprenticeship in loving another person in the free, total, faithful and fruitful way God loves us. When a couple gets married in the Church, they willingly surrender their right to love each other as they might naturally prefer. Instead they say, "I want to love this person with the love that is in God's heart. I don't know how to do that on my own, so I promise to spend the rest of my life learning." Getting married in the Church is meant to communicate that you believe that there is something unique and truly beautiful about the Catholic vision of love and that you promise to spend your life apprenticing and living out that vision of love in your home, both so that you can fulfill the deepest longing of your heart for a love that doesn't fail and so that you can be a physical sign to the world of the kind of passionate, faithful, intimate love that God has for the world. Unleashing the spiritual potential of your marriage begins by recognizing that you are on a lifelong apprenticeship in the art of godly loving and by making an ongoing commitment to developing

the parts of yourself that enable you to be a more communicative, more intimate, more passionate, more generous mate.

2. Pray together

Recent studies suggest that only about 15 percent of Catholic couples pray together, but we can't be true apprentices to the art of godly love if we don't sit at the feet of the Master and ask him to teach us how. Every day, sit with your spouse and ask God to give you the courage to be the husband or wife he wants you to be, the husband or wife your spouse needs you to be. Pray for the courage to grow, stretch and change in any godly way this loving effort requires of you.

Don't worry. It's not all work. Research by Baylor University shows that couples who pray together are up to 30 percent happier than those who don't.

3. Invite God into your bedroom

Too many people think that God and sex don't mix, but research consistently shows that couples who are able to connect with the spiritual dimensions of their sexual relationships have deeper, more passionate and more frequent sexual relations. That's because these couples don't see sex as a nice thing to do at the end of the day if you have time or energy. They see it as a way of communicating their love for each other in a language that goes beyond words. A language that says, "See how well we work for each other's good all day long! Even our bodies have learned to work for each other's good!"

To this end, the Church's teaching on Natural Family Planning isn't just about having an ethical way to space children. It is a blueprint for creating a physical relationship that is rooted in communication, prayer and generosity. True, NFP isn't always easy, and if you only see NFP as a technique for avoiding pregnancy, you will probably find it more frustrating than not. But if you embrace NFP as an invitation to deeper communication, prayer and generosity, you will discover how to walk the sacred path allows sex to become (as Pope Benedict put it) "an ascent in ecstasy toward the divine."

Marriage isn't just a guaranteed date for bowling night. It communicates real spiritual power that enables Christians to become something remarkable: living, breathing signs of God's own loving heart.



Dr. Greg Popcak is the author many books including “For Better ... Forever! The Catholic Guide to Lifelong Marriage” and the host of More2Life Radio on SiriusXM 130. Learn more at CatholicCounselors.com.