

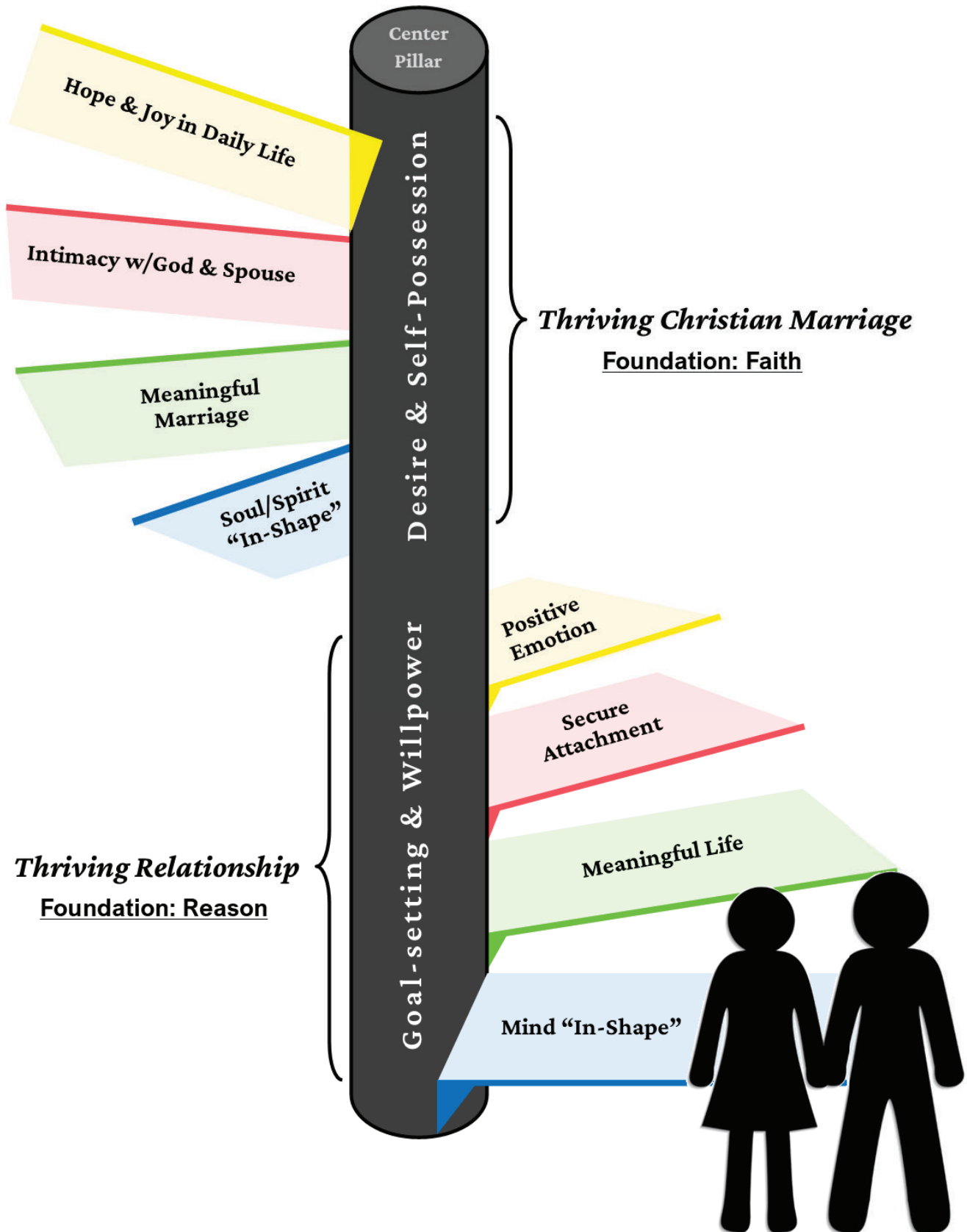


Chapter I

Get a Life with Perspective

Mutual goal-setting is part of the center
pillar of a THRIVING marriage.

Spiral Staircase to a Thriving Marriage



Part One

The Spiral Staircase of a Thriving Love

Empowering Couples
to build and sustain an amazing
Relationship

What is *THRIVE!* Together for Life?

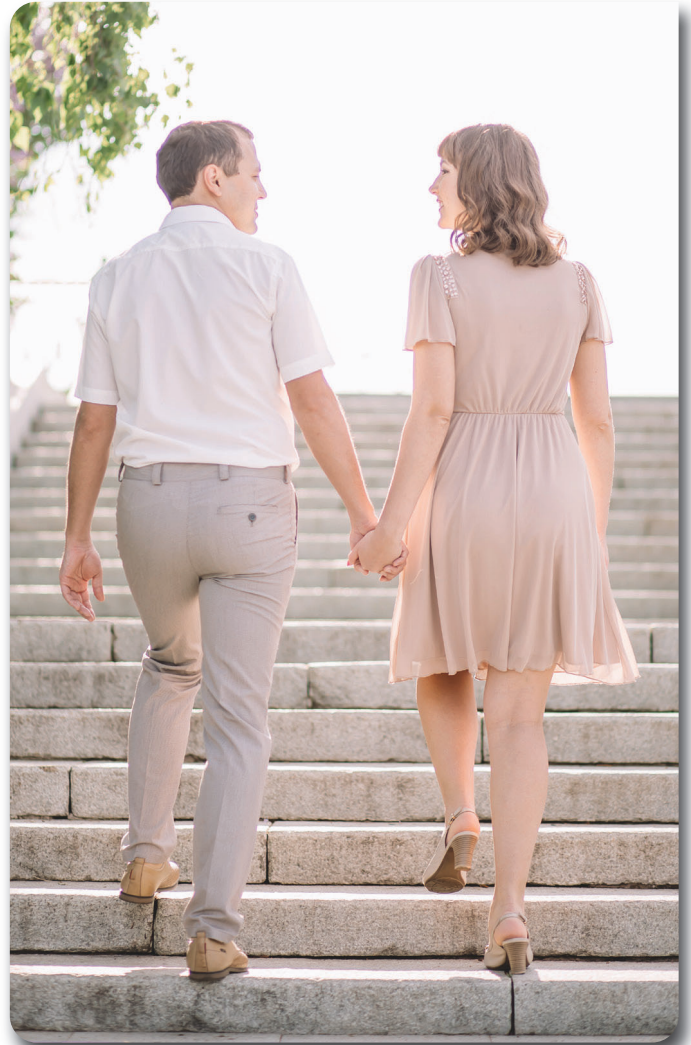
Thrive Marriage Preparation has two parts and is built around the visual representation of a spiral staircase with a central pillar to provide the structure for each step to promote upwards movement. Each step represents a significant aspect of the human formation needed to develop a thriving marriage. *Part One* covers formation in natural aspects of a healthy marriage relationship. *Part Two* covers the spiritual (or supernatural) aspects of marriage as a sacrament of the Church and gift of God that “aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values.” (Catechism 1643) Unpacking all of this is the aim and goal of this course to empower couples with the knowledge and skills they need to form the wonderful, awesome, gets better-and-better-every-year marriage everyone wants!

The Staircase of a Thriving Marriage

Using the staircase analogy, we outline the elements of Part One below.

The Center Pillar

The center pillar of thriving relationships is effective, mutual goal setting and the willpower to accomplish them. We can learn all kinds of fabulous information but may never bring it to life unless we can set goals together and have the willpower to make those goals happen. Mutual goal setting helps



get a couple on the same page with short-term and long-term life vision. According to scientific studies the amount of self-regulation, the term psychologists use for willpower, is directly proportional to the amount of success a couple enjoys in their relationship. Self-regulation, *not* communication (though still essential), is the most important skill needed for a happy marriage, and most of our conflicts can be traced back to one or both spouses' failure to self-regulate.



Step One: Discover the Powers of Your Mind

Our capacity to focus, live a balanced life, and communicate are three keys to success in life and in love. However, we live in a distracted, stressed-out, fast paced world! Focus, balance and communication don't happen naturally anymore. But we don't need to go back to the way we lived 100 years ago to regain focus, etc. We can proactively develop these three necessary skills. Step one in the spiral staircase will introduce you to three mental strengthening exercises that will enhance your focus, increase balance in your mind and body, and help you communicate well with your future spouse.

Step Two: Authentic Happiness and Living a Meaningful Life

Step two focuses on debunking some common myths on what makes us happy. According to psychologists, we will find satisfaction in life and love if we are living a meaningful life, rather than just a pleasant one. We need to focus on developing the characteristics of happy people and form a couple's mission statement to infuse happiness and meaning into all of our goals and shared interests. An essential part of a thriving love revolves around a mutual meaning and mission in life!

Step Three: Secure Attachment Style

How we connect as a couple has a particular style. That style affects the amount of happiness and satisfaction we experience in our relationships. We

get this style from how we were raised by our parents and by our experiences in past dating relationships. In step three, couples will learn about each other's style and how to either change this style (if needed) or maintain it to increase intimacy and satisfaction in their relationship.

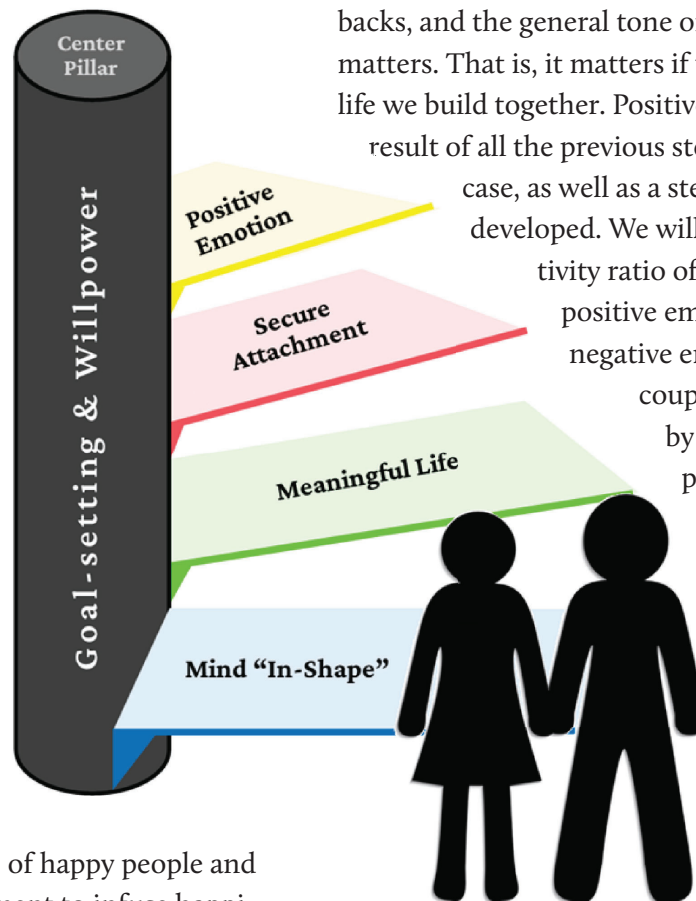
Step Four: Positive Emotion

How we view situations, how we respond to setbacks, and the general tone of our attitude and home matters. That is, it matters if we want to enjoy the life we build together. Positive emotion is both a

result of all the previous steps in the spiral staircase, as well as a step that can be actively developed. We will discuss how a positivity ratio of approximately three positive emotions to every one negative emotion is self-fueling! A couple can boost this ratio by first knowing the ten positive emotions so that they can be tapped at any time.

The spiral staircase, with its center pillar and four steps, is the road map to continual growth as a couple. The thriving relationship model is in the form of a

spiral staircase because with each step, you will grow and develop a different aspect of life. Eventually, you circle back around but are at a higher level than you were before—so you start again! This is a case in which even the sky is not the limit. So don't settle for ordinary. Choose to become a thriving couple! With each turn around the staircase you will discover new and exciting ways to develop as individuals and as a couple.





Get a Life with Perspective

Forming a Life List & Goal Setting

Mutual and holistic goal-setting is a part of the center pillar of a thriving marriage. Thriving is how we feel when we are growing and developing together as a couple. It is an ongoing process rather than a state we achieve and complete at one point in time. We can't put "satisfying marriage" on our to-do list, and then check it off as accomplished. The center pillar of the spiral staircase to your thriving relationship—meaning the support that keeps the whole thing from crashing down—is made up of effective goal-setting and the willpower to make those goals happen. We need a steady flow of goals and achievement to make "We feel AWESOME!" happen in the day-to-day, and even moment-to-moment, of life.

If we want to set effective goals, we need to start with *perspective*. This means we need information on how to give goals a certain *personality* and *accountability*. Let's begin by brainstorming your thoughts and dreams in order to lay out a road map to your best, gotta-have-it life and relationship!

Make a Life List

Most people have heard of a Bucket List. What do you want to do in life before you "kick the bucket?" We put things like go sky-diving, travel Europe, run a marathon, etc. on a bucket list. This is a helpful perspective in some ways because we tend to think big and check any inhibitions or fears at the door. It is unhelpful in other ways because the focus is on our impending death, rather than a life lived to the fullest, and many of the bucket list goals do not enhance daily life. So we are going to begin to brainstorm on what psychologists call a Life List.



Life lists include everything you want to do before you "kick it," but it goes deeper than that! When you start a life list, you look at major areas of importance (love, finances, education, recreation, etc.) and view these areas from different perspectives to determine your goals. Gaining perspective means taking time to consider our own mortality and how fear affects the dreams we have for our life—both in the long-term and the short-term.

Reflect

When will you take time as a couple to work on your Life List?

Forming a Life List

Looking At Life From Different Angles

Gaining perspective by looking at the different areas of your life from various angles is important to a meaningful Life List. Viewing goals while considering your mortality is helpful to motivation. It gives you a sense of timing and urgency. It also enables you to prioritize your Life List to ensure the maximum effect on well-being.

Ask yourself and each other, “What would I do in each of the following areas of life if I knew I only had one day to live?” Then change the perspective to one year, and finally consider your goals in light of the idea that you only have 10 to 20 years left.



This is not to depress or scare you, but psychologists have found that looking at our lives from the perspective of “We only have a limited amount of time!” drives us to act in

a way that is the best version of ourselves.

The second angle from which to look at your goals relates to conquering your fears. Looking at life and asking the question, “What would I do if I were not afraid?” is another perspective that can be highly illuminating as well as motivating. We have many fears: of change, of being wrong, of telling the truth, of being different, of thinking for oneself, of disappointment, of disapproval, of looking stupid, of pain or discomfort or stress in the near future, of one’s real motives, of standing up for one’s values, of failure, of something new, of being vulnerable,

and of so many other things. Some of these fears are reasonable and some are not so reasonable. Unfortunately, all of them can hold us back unless we put them aside while setting up our Life List. But don’t let them! Check your fears at the door as you begin to brainstorm what you want for your lives together.

Another way of gaining a bold and brave perspective is to ask yourself, “If I was a superhero, what powers would I have, and how would I save the world?” Also answer, “If my fiancé was a superhero, what superpowers would he/she have, and how would he/she save the world?”

Researchers did this superhero exercise with a group of college students to test the effect of fear on behavior. The experimental group was asked to write down what they would do if they had superpowers...how would they save the world? The control group was simply asked to write about how they would like to help the community. In the months following the exercise, the superhero group became more involved in community outreach and charitable organizations than the control group (Nelson & Norton, 2005). In another study, researchers looked at participants’ helping behavior within a virtual reality game. The participants who were given the superpower of *flying* in the simulation (versus simply *riding* in a helicopter to complete the task) subsequently exhibited more prosocial behavior in the real world (Rosenberg, Baughman & Bailenson, 2013). This is the power of perspective in changing how we act. By imagining something without limits, like being a superhero, people acted more like one in real life!

The First Step to a Thriving Marriage

Enough theory. Now it's time for action! So, are you ready to put pen to paper and get started with your Life List? Come up with some goals for these ten categories. Make your *his* and *hers* lists separately, and then we will take some time to combine them into joint goals.

Health/General Self Improvement: This category is a way for you to break down your fitness and health goals, such as, "I will exercise at least three times per week," or "I will only eat pizza on the weekends." Mental strengthening exercises and general self-improvement goals also fall under this category. You will discover some goals to put in the general self-improvement category as you ascend the steps of the spiral staircase in this book.

Finances: It is smart to start understanding and setting financial goals while young and/or just starting out together. Do you have financial goals for earning and saving money? Do you want to own _____ by the time you are _____ years old? Do you want to pay off your student loans by the time you are _____?

Recreation and Hobbies: Do you want to learn a new sport, visit a new place, become better at playing an instrument, or spend more time with friends or family?

Learning: Do you want to attend a certain graduate school, take time to study something just because it interests you, or develop new skills in your professional field to make you more competitive in the job market?

Volunteer Work and Charities: Do you have a cause that you are passionate about or a certain problem you would like to help solve in society? Where and how can you use your talents to make the world a better place?

Home: Do you want to get more organized? Do you want to redecorate a room or certain space in your home or apartment to make your environment more pleasant and relaxing? Do you want to change the tone of your home by changing your attitude?

Friends: Do you want to increase your circle of friends or perhaps get closer to a fewer number of people? Do you want to try and be a better friend by taking more time to just hang out? By being more thoughtful and considerate? Or perhaps being less guarded and more open with the friends you already have?

Love: How will you invest time, energy and focus on your relationship to make it better every year? Do you need to learn to be more trusting and secure? Do you want to be more considerate, sincere, open or loving?

Family: Do you want to be a better wife, mother, daughter, or husband, father, son? Express more gratitude and show more appreciation? Do you take members of your family for granted, or do they need your help, love or attention in any way? How can you make sure your family knows how much you care for them?

Spiritual Goals: If you are a spiritual person, are you trying to grow spiritually? Are you plugged into a higher purpose for your life? What is your mission, and what legacy do you want to leave behind on this world? If you belong to a certain religion, are you trying to grow in your knowledge and understanding of it? What are you doing for your soul/spirit?

Key Concept

Share your list with your fiancé or spouse. Use your individual lists to form a joint Life List.

Making a Life List

Where do we begin?

Sometimes the idea of sitting down and brainstorming an entire Life List is overwhelming and prioritizing goals is difficult. A helpful exercise to narrow your focus and concentrate your efforts towards growth is to do a Life List index card shuffle.

Here's how it works:

- 1) Tear out the Life List card pages in the back of this book (see Appendix) and cut them apart horizontally. You should each do your own set. See the sample card at the bottom of this page.
- 2) Organize the Life List cards into three piles:
 - Pile one: Areas of life that you feel are going really well! You have some clear goals you are accomplishing and that are bringing you satisfaction.
 - Pile two: Areas of life you feel are going ok, but with a little effort and focus have the potential to shift to pile one.
 - Pile three: Areas of life that are frustrating or that you are neglecting and could use some work or attention.
- 3) Next choose one area of life from each pile. It is helpful to capitalize on an area that is going well, invest in an area of life with potential to go from ok to great and then address one area that is a void or frustrating to you.
- 4) Set one short-term goal and one long-term, big-picture goal (that reflects the ideal you are going for in this area of life) for each of the cards you have chosen.
- 5) Share your cards and goals with each other, discuss how you will support each other's goals, and set some mutual goals in this area. You may also choose to summarize your choices on the following pages.

Sample Life List Card (front and back); see back of Appendix for card pages

LOVE
What is the long-term ideal I am going for?
What is a short-term goal I can set today or this week?
What strengths will I use to accomplish my goal?
What is my reward for achieving my goal?

Are these goals intrinsic, approach, high, meaningful, leveraged and specific?
What are some specific steps we need to take to reach these goals?

A Life List for Her

Come up with some goals in each of these ten categories for yourself.

Do not forget to consider different perspectives as you look at these areas of life.

1) Health/General Self-Improvement:

6) Love and Family:

2) Finances:

7) Home/Physical Environment:

3) Profession:

8) Friendships:

4) Learning and Education:

9) Volunteer Work and Charity:

5) Recreation and Hobbies:

10) Spiritual Goals:

A Life List for Him

Come up with some goals in each of these ten categories for yourself.

Do not forget to consider different perspectives as you look at these areas of life.

1) Health/General Self-Improvement:

6) Love and Family:

2) Finances:

7) Home/Physical Environment:

3) Profession:

8) Friendships:

4) Learning and Education:

9) Volunteer Work and Charity:

5) Recreation and Hobbies:

10) Spiritual Goals:

Our Life List

Combine your individual goals into a Couple Life List.

This couple Life List should be something you revisit together and often over time. As your relationship grows and develops, so will your goals. Comparing these lists is a good way to assess whether you have a compatible mission in life. If you are already married, make sure you look at different perspectives (especially that of your spouse) to see how you can fit your individual goals.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Health/General Self-Improvement: | 6) Love and Family: |
| 2) Finances: | 7) Home/Physical Environment: |
| 3) Profession: | 8) Friendships: |
| 4) Learning and Education: | 9) Volunteer Work and Charity: |
| 5) Recreation and Hobbies: | 10) Spiritual Goals: |

Life lists are adapted from the book *Creating Your Best Life* (Miller & Frisch, 2009).



Chapter 5

Look Out World, Here We Come

Developing a mission for your marriage
gives you meaning and satisfaction.

A Meaningful Life

When you describe the kind of life you want, is the word satisfaction a part of it? Life and relationship satisfaction is what thriving is all about. In order to have the satisfaction you want as a couple, you must set mutual goals, have the willpower to achieve them, and be able to effectively communicate. These skills are necessary to be equal and cooperative partners in life! They should sound familiar because we have already covered how to develop these essential components of your thriving relationship.

Recall we also pointed out that all goals are not created equal. Unfortunately, this kind of “spinning our wheels” happens a lot. There are many assumptions in life leading us to set goals that are either futile or even detrimental to well-being.

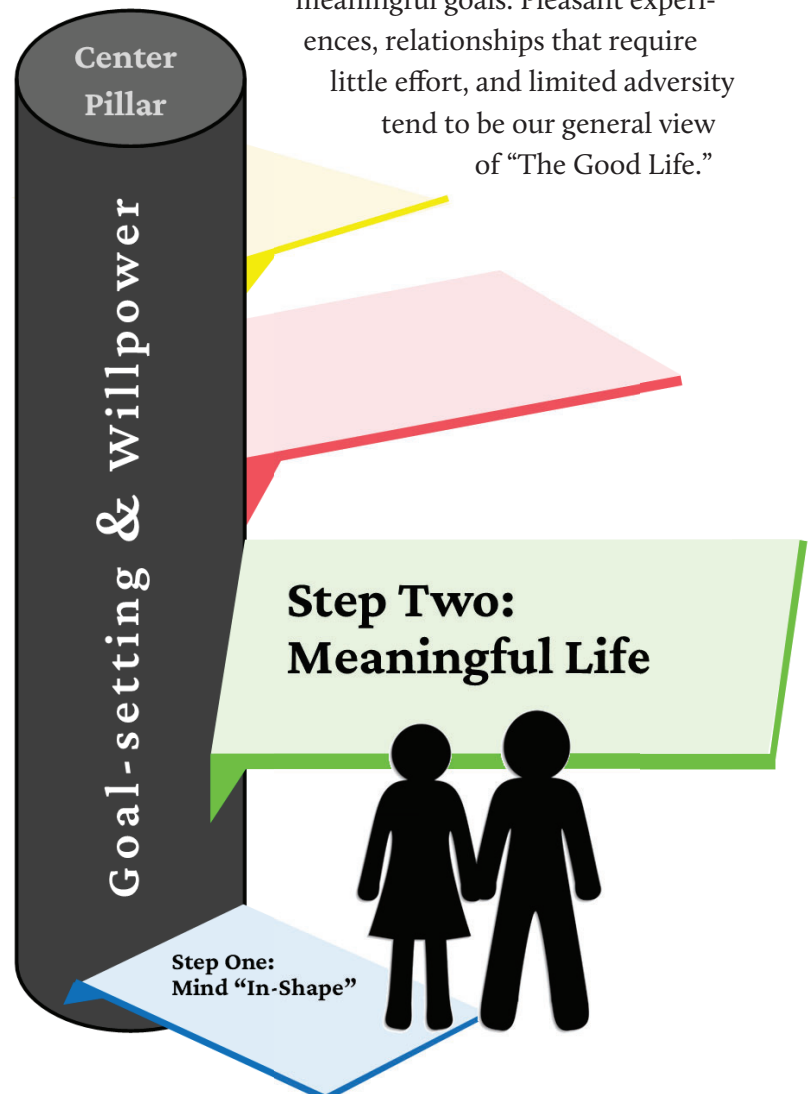
Climbing the Staircase: Authentic Happiness & Living a Meaningful Life

The purpose of step two in the spiral staircase to your thriving love is to empower couples with the knowledge to make sure they are chasing dreams that result in life satisfaction and fulfillment. This step is also imperative to having an oxytocin-rich relationship. A brain that is generally stressed or depressed from pursuing goals that lead to dissatisfaction (or obsessed with hedonic treadmills) cannot produce oxytocin. But a balanced, authentically happy brain can produce more and more oxytocin as time goes on. So, step two is all about creating lasting happiness, in love and in life!

Define your picture of “The Good Life:”

Contrast this with how you would define a meaningful life:

According to psychologists, a meaningful life is what leads to satisfaction, however, our personalized picture of an ideal life frequently excludes meaningful goals. Pleasant experiences, relationships that require little effort, and limited adversity tend to be our general view of “The Good Life.”





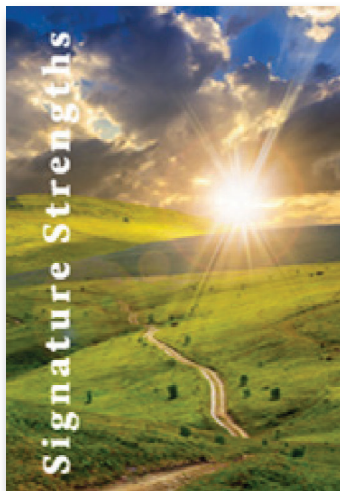
Character Strengths

So, what is a meaningful life, and how do we establish a life that is *fully*, rather than *partially* meaningful?

We start by identifying your go-to strengths, so that you can use them in service to that “something bigger” you are called to do. Let’s look at all the character strengths.

The six main categories of character strengths contain 24 total strengths. It is interesting to take a look at all of them. The sub-characteristics will help you look at the major categories from different angles.

Follow the steps for the card shuffle below. Take out your Signature Strengths cards contained in your materials. They look like this:



Wisdom

Creativity: Thinking of different (novel) and productive ways to think about and do things; originality, ingenuity.

Curiosity: Taking interest in what is going on around you; finding information and other people fascinating; openness to new experiences.

Judgment/Critical Thinking: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one’s mind in light of evidence; open-minded.

Love of Learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and information either on one’s own or in school; enjoying adding systematically to one’s knowledge.

Perspective: Being able to provide wise advice to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people; wisdom.

Courage

Bravery: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right; acting on conviction even if unpopular.

Card Shuffle

Lay out your cards and choose what you think are your top 5-7 strengths as well as your fiancé or spouse’s top 5-7 strengths. Use this list of descriptive statements to help you determine your signature strengths:

- This strength gives me a sense of “This is the real me!”
- I get a feeling of excitement when displaying or using the strength.
- It is easy to use the strength.
- I feel energized, not tired, after using the strength.
- I feel joy, pride, happiness and zest when doing something that uses the strength.

Chapter 5: Look Out World, Here We Come

Perseverance: Finishing what one starts; persisting through obstacles; enjoys completing tasks.

Honesty: Acting in a sincere way; speaking the truth; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions.

Zest: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; excited to be alive!

Humanity

Love: Valuing close relationships with other people, being close to people; caring for others and being cared for by others; promoting the good of other people.

Kindness: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them, taking care of them; compassion.

Social Intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of others people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.

Justice

Teamwork: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share.

Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving others what is owed to them.

Leadership: Encouraging a group to get things done and at the same time maintain good relationships within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen; having a positive influence on other people.

Temperance

Forgiveness: Letting go of hurt or anger when someone has done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not seeking revenge.

Humility: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is; modesty.

Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking big risks; not doing or saying things that will later be regretted; cautious.

Self-Regulation: Controlling what one feels and does; willpower.

Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in different domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science—and people's moral goodness.

Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen, taking time to express thanks.



Hope: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.

Humor: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side of things and situations.

Spirituality: Having consistent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; having beliefs about the meaning of life that influence behavior and provide comfort in bad times; faith; religiousness.

Dr. Martin Seligman and his colleagues have developed a self-assessment, called the virtues-in-action questionnaire, to measure these 24 character strengths in an individual person. This test will rank these characteristics from strongest to weakest.



You can visit authentichappiness.com to take the VIA (virtues-in-action) questionnaire at no cost. It is a good way to discover where you have the most opportunity for growth and development (which characteristics could use some work) as well as

identify the strengths you most easily access. The test takes 15-20 minutes. Don't overthink the questions, but simply go with your initial response. Once you have completed the survey, compare the list of your top strengths according to the scored online assessment with the list you created yourself. The online VIA survey is not foolproof, so consider both lists to finalize your true five to seven signature strengths. As a couple, you can then explore how your go-to strengths fit together and do what positive psychologists call *strength work*.

Strength Work Builds the Foundation of a Meaningful Life

In order to live a meaningful life, we need to know our strengths and foster a transcendent outlook. Psychologists define a meaningful life as *using your signature strengths in service to something bigger than yourself* (Seligman, 2012). According to this definition, there are two essential components to a life full of meaning—an understanding of how to use our signature strengths and a clear picture of “something bigger than ourselves” to guide us. This something bigger is reflected in our core values. Values are aspects of life that guide the direction of our goals.

To establish a meaningful life, we will:

1. Introduce the concept and process of strength work. We began this step by taking the VIA to discover our signature strengths list.
2. Determine our own personal set of core values.
3. Form value-guided, strength-fueled goals on our Life List.



Strength Work

We need a basic competence in all seven main categories of character strengths, but we have identified that each person has their own signature strength list. This list is composed of those strengths we identify with most, come easy to us, and energize us when used (Niemiec, 2018). We have already determined this list by taking the VIA survey. Now, we are going to dive a little deeper into the strength research and systematically begin to incorporate these qualities into daily living through strength work.

Niemiec (2018) describes strength work as a three-step process—Aware-Explore-Apply (AEA):

1. Become aware of your top strengths and a few of your lower strengths.
2. Explore how you have used your strengths in the past.
3. Apply your strengths in new ways and different areas of life.

Aware

It is helpful for well-being to spend time becoming more aware of our go-to strengths and exploring how we use these strengths in daily life. You have

already begun this process by solidifying your signature strength list.

Once you have taken the VIA, you can increase awareness of strength use by creating a name plate or strengths frame to display in a place you frequently work (or several different areas at work and home). Simply take a blank sheet of paper, write your name surrounded by your signature strengths, and pop it into a frame. Keep it simple with a black marker or get creative if it's a signature strength for you (use photoshop or different colors and images). Place this frame on your desk or in a visible place, and you have a prime reminding you to recognize these characteristics throughout the day. You can also set an alarm on your phone or display a sign (perhaps in a drawer you open frequently) that asks you, "What strengths have I used in the last hour?"

Explore

The second phase of strength work involves exploring how you use your strengths, where you use each signature strength in your current routine, as well as how you have habitually utilized them in the past. When exploring personal strength use, ask and answer the question: Am I underusing or overusing this particular strength? Overuse and underuse of signature strengths can cause us problems or distress. For example: overuse of curiosity can result in nosiness or intrusiveness into other people's lives. Zest can be an inspiring attribute or annoying when overused. Underuse of perseverance at home might manifest itself as giving up instead of resolving a conflict with your loved one; overuse of perseverance at work might mean you are obsessive and perfectionistic about tasks until they are completed, putting you behind.

Keep some notes in your phone, on your computer, or on signature strength cards about when, where,



and how you used your strengths during the day. Jot down how you felt when you were using the strength. Reflect on any conflicts or problems that arise and examine whether overuse or underuse of a strength contributed in any way.

Apply

The third phase of strength work involves applying strengths in new ways and aspects of life. After boosting awareness of your top strengths in day-to-day living, expand where you apply your strengths, cross-pollinating your Life List to maximize goal striving and engagement.

We tend to compartmentalize certain strengths. We may generously use zest at home but check this strength at the door when we walk into the office. We may be creative at work projects but focus in on perseverance at home.

Take a look at your Life List and glance through your notes on exploring strength use. Choose one or two strengths to use in a new area of life or in a new way. Keep choosing new strengths and new areas of the Life List until you work through all your signature strengths. This ongoing process of growth leads to greater and greater satisfaction.



Discovering and Discussing Your Core Values

Which Direction to Grow?

The second part to a meaningful life involves clearly defining the “something bigger than yourself” that will challenge you to use your strengths and give life a sense of integration with other people, your community, and the world. This “something bigger” is typically reflected in your core values. We choose charities to volunteer for because these organizations align with one or more of our core values. Values are not destinations, goals, or personal attributes.

Rather, values are directions, guiding the choices we make and the direction we choose to grow (Hayes & Smith, 2005). When we make decisions, moving toward our values, then we feel good about our lives (the best kind of natural reward for the brain).

Values not only guide personal growth but typically drive us to promote other people’s growth in a positive direction, including those closest to us, as well as those within the greater community/world. Values have the potential to guide and give meaning to the micro-experience each day and the bigger picture we are continually working toward. When we see problems that violate our values—we get angry or indignant. When we see our values promoted or lived, we are elevated, inspired, and united with other people.

Reflect Before we look through a list of values, answer the following questions:

- What causes are you passionate about?
- Who do you find inspiring?
- What problems or adversity do you see on the news or in other people’s lives that you would like to help alleviate?

Core Values

The following is a list of possible core values—you can add to it or subtract from it, as you see fit. You will notice some overlap between strengths and values. For instance, love is both a strength and a value. We want to exercise the strength of love in our relationships, and we want to see love manifested in the world around us, guiding our own actions and the actions of other people.

Selflessness/Self-Giving: Concern more for the needs of others than one’s own.

Autonomy: Self-directing freedom.

Health: The state of well-being in body, mind, or spirit.

Freedom: The right to act, speak, or think as one wants without extrinsic control or restraint; the ability to choose what is good.

Altruism: Selfless concern for the well-being of others.

Equality: The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

Liberty: The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one’s way of life, behavior, or political views.

Compassion/Empathy: Sympathetic concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.

Love: To promote the good of another.

Acceptance: The action or process of being received as adequate or suitable.

Knowledge: Facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education.



Understanding/Complete Intelligibility: The power of comprehending.

Morality: Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior.

Excellence: The quality of being outstanding, extremely good, or accomplished.

Wisdom: The quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment.

Truth: That which is in accordance with fact or reality.

Progress/Innovation: The process of improving or developing something over time.

Purposefulness: Having meaning and significance.

Transcendence: Sense of a higher purpose, higher being, or higher power.

Safety/Security: The state of being free from danger or threat.

Justice/Common Good: The quality of being fair and reasonable.

Responsibility/Fulfilling One's Duty: The state of living up to expectations and being accountable for one's actions.

Goodness: The quality of being morally good or virtuous.

Harmony/Integration: A consistent, orderly, or pleasing arrangement of parts; congruity.

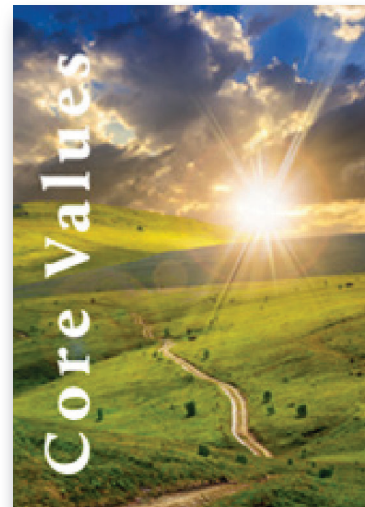
Simplicity: Being natural, sincere, plain or easy to understand.

Order/Beauty: The arrangement or disposition of people or things in relation to each other according to a particular sequence, pattern, or method that is pleasing to the aesthetic sense.



Card Shuffle

Locate the blue Core Values cards included in your materials. They look like this:



Core values typically correspond to causes you care about and people you find inspiring. You may need to make several passes through the cards to narrow down the values you are most passionate about promoting for the benefit of yourself, of others, and of the world. You may also group values together. For example, love could be grouped with altruism and selflessness. Excellence could be grouped with responsibility and wisdom. Try to narrow it down to 5-7 values or groups of values.

Card Shuffle

When defining your core values, flip through the value cards and group them into three groups:

- Strongly held value
- Moderately held value
- Weakly/not at all held value

You strongly hold a value when you want to:

- manifest the value more in your own life.
- see it more as a part of the lives of others.
- facilitate it within your family, company, community, and world at large.

Other questions to ask yourself as you narrow down your list:

- Why did you choose your particular degree or profession?
- What do you value most? What is worth living for?
- What are you passionate about?
- What are three things that truly matter to you in life?
- If you had to choose one value from your core value list as the theme for your daily life— what would it be?

Value-Guided, Strength-Fueled Goals on your Life List

Establish a life full of meaning, rather than one restricted by partial meaning, by populating your entire Life List with value-guided, strength-fueled goals. You have your list of signature strengths and have decided on a set of core values. Now, let's apply these to some goals on your Life List.

Record your core values below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Record your signature strengths below:

- 1.
- 2
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Forming goals in this way boosts satisfaction in moment-to-moment living, ensuring we head in a worthwhile direction. You will also feel good about yourself in the process because these goals require you to use your signature strengths—the facets you esteem most about yourself.



Card Shuffle

Steps to forming value-guided, strength-fueled goals:

1. Choose three areas of the Life List as your focus for meaningful goal-setting. Just as we did in the initial goal section, it can be helpful to choose one area you are highly satisfied with, one area you are somewhat satisfied with, and one area in which you are experiencing frustration. You may discover particularly high satisfaction in categories where you already have some meaningful goals in place.
2. Set one short-term goal and one long-term goal in each area.
3. Look at your core value list, and pair them with the goal(s) that promotes or reflects each value. If you do not see any of your core values promoted by or reflected in your goals, modify the goal to align with one or more of your core values.
4. Try to add more values to your goals by re-wording the goal or set a new goal that reflects more of your core values.
5. Now look at your strength list. What strengths will you use to achieve these goals? Pair the strength cards with the value and Life List cards. Can you modify each goal to challenge you to use additional strengths?

Here's an example of this process from my corporate coaching experience:

One participant had a common goal to get in better shape. However, he had tried for many years to increase exercise and make a healthy shift in eating habits to no avail. He wanted to focus on getting more active and felt that the biggest obstacle to change was lack of time.

His core value list included love, selflessness, altruism, morality, health, excellence, responsibility, and purposefulness. His strength list included love, leadership, appreciation of beauty and excellence, perseverance, creativity, bravery, and fairness.

Although health was on his core value list, he didn't feel the goal was aligned with his core values of love, selflessness, responsibility and purposefulness—which were stronger held values than health itself. We discussed with him how he felt in the evening after working out versus when he didn't. He recognized that working out reduced stress and aided his general sense of well-being. However, he felt guilty taking the time away from his family (a very common sentiment for parents trying to juggle work and family life).

So, we got creative. His present point of view on working out was—I have to hit the gym on the way home from work for an hour. This aligned with his core values of health and excellence but seemed to contradict his core values of love, selflessness, responsibility, and purposefulness. But, could he find a way to work out with his teenage son part of the time? In our sessions, he had frequently expressed a desire to model good behaviors for his kids—was this any different?

We discovered he had always wanted to get into cycling/biking—but never did because of the time it would take from his family. He also liked the idea of



learning to lift weights, and both activities would be something that might interest his son.

We revisited the goal from this perspective. If he were to explore cycling and lifting with his son whenever possible, it would align with his values of love, responsibility, purposefulness, health, and excellence using the strengths of love, bravery (trying something new) and leadership as he demonstrated for his son new habits to live a healthier life. We also discussed shifting his overall perspective on exercise, as a personal energy booster and stress reducer (especially the resistance training/weight lifting).

With more energy and better stress management, he had more to give at home. He could be more present and available to his children and wife, even when his son couldn't join him at the gym. He also wanted to be around for his children and grandchildren—as well as be healthy rather than a burden on them as he aged. From this vantage point, exercise really did align with his core values of responsibility, love, and purposefulness and incorporated his strengths of perseverance, love, and fairness. Through the lens of core values, exercise shifted from a constant struggle to an integrated part of daily life.

By forming these value-guided, strength-fueled goals on your Life List, we infuse meaning into the micro-

moments of daily living. Incorporating meaning this way is important, but we also need a macro-picture of transcendence that acts as a compass. You can foster transcendence by asking and answering existential questions that have to do with your overall worldview as well as proactively trying to grow in the different character strengths.

Existential Questions and Worldview

Evaluate your overarching perspective on life by contemplating the following “existential questions” (Wong, 2012):

- Who am I?
- What should I do with my life to make it worthwhile?
- What can I do to find happiness and life satisfaction?
- How can I make the right choices in an age of moral ambiguity and conflicting values?
- How do I determine what is right and what is wrong?
- Where do I belong and where do I call home?
- What is the point of living in the face of suffering and death?
- What happens after death?

Answer these questions as a couple to learn about each other's world view and life philosophy. Scientists have traditionally held the only thing we should believe in is what we can concretely sense and prove through experimentation. However, developments in quantum physics, astrophysics and psychology are making many scientists question this premise. Many contend it is both reasonable and beneficial to believe in God and the presence of a soul.

Directing the Compass

Part two (of step two in our spiral case to your thriving relationship) is finding your purpose together. The second part of Dr. Seligman's definition of a meaningful life requires plugging into a picture "bigger than" yourselves. So, where do we look to discover that "something bigger" to build a mission around?

How will you make a difference? What will give your life meaning and purpose? As we become more aware of how values and strengths fuel and guide daily life, a central idea will emerge. Ultimately, we need to form a personal mission statement that ties together and integrates the goals we set for day-to-day life and the big-picture ideal we hold. A clear mission gives your life transcendence, which brings resilience in adversity (Frankl, 1979, 2000), durable life satisfaction, and joy (Seligman, 2002).

In order to begin to discover this central idea or theme, consider the following questions:

- ☐ What do you admire or what fills you with a sense of awe?
- ☐ What makes you go, "Wow, that is amazing!"?
- ☐ What books or movies, based on a true story, inspire you?
- ☐ What do you do that elicits gratitude and admiration from others?
- ☐ What do you do that makes other people go, "Wow, you are amazing!"?



- ☐ Have you experienced any adversity in your life that you could help others avoid or overcome?
- ☐ Have you seen other people suffer from a big picture problem in our world—that you would like to fix?
- ☐ What do you believe makes life worth living?
- ☐ What do you want to live for?

A mission statement combines your own interests, talents, strengths, and values, giving you a theme to incorporate in both personal and professional life.

I will share my personal mission statement as an example:

I am interested in and have a talent for understanding different areas of behavioral neuroscience and psychology, and I want to align with my core values of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, love, selflessness, and excellence using my signature strengths of love of learning, bravery, creativity,



social intelligence, judgment, and perspective in order to empower others with the knowledge and skills they need to live a thriving, integrated life.

I typically shorten this to “I am all about empowering people to live a thriving and integrated life”—and the rest is implied or kept to myself. This applies to empowering my husband, children, and friends who are interested, as well as any and all people I come into contact with through speaking and coaching in my professional life.

Focusing in on what you are “all about” helps you to prioritize your time, guide volunteer work, and set clear and integrated goals. It is all too easy to get swept away by the inertia of daily life in today’s world. The daily drill of meeting the immediate needs of others and fulfilling duty commonly results in disengagement. Sometimes, we keep waiting to live the life we really desire until a certain circumstance changes. I will do what I really want when I retire or when I get my graduate degree or a different job. We end up putting life on hold instead of making the most out of each moment.

The purpose of deliberately focusing on the development of meaning is to foster your uniqueness, potential, and strengths in everyday life. We want to do this in the here and now, rather than in some distant, far-off future.

We have begun to define your personal mission statement, increase awareness of your signature strength use in daily activities, and focus on setting goals that align with your core values. Let’s continue with more self-reflection—on what you value and what are the objective limits and givens in your life.

Mission Statement

Give your personal mission statement a go by filling in the blanks:

- I am interested in _____
- and have a talent for _____
- I want to align myself with the core values of _____
- Using my signature strengths of _____
- in order to _____.

Grab a few blank sheets of paper to write out your personal mission statements, and keep them folded in your book here:

Discussion Questions

You will not submit these answers online to your mentor. They are only for couple discussion. Discuss the questions on the following pages to begin forming your joint mission statement.

- ☐ When all hell breaks loose in life...what really matters to you?
- ☐ Write your ideas on what you think a “meaningful marriage” looks like:
- ☐ List 5 things you want to do before you die, or look at your life list and pick out your top five goals:
- ☐ Are these things oriented towards a meaningful life or a pleasant life?
- ☐ Are any of your top five goals conflicting with your fiancé’s top five goals? Can you resolve the conflict?
- ☐ What is your personal mission in life?
- ☐ Is your personal mission compatible with his/her personal mission? (Does he/she have a personal mission, and if not, is he/she willing to talk about one?)
- ☐ What are your mutual areas of interest?
- ☐ What comes naturally to each of you?
- ☐ What causes are you both passionate about?
- ☐ What big picture problems do you see in the lives of people around you that you both want to help solve?
- ☐ On a blank sheet, write down a few ideas for your joint mission statement based on your answers above.
- ☐ Share with each other how you inspire each other. What are the qualities your fiancé possesses that fill you with awe?
- ☐ Take a look at your top five character strengths from the VIA survey. How do your strengths match up, and how do they complement each other?

His

Hers

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

- ☐ What characteristics from the VIA questionnaire would you like to strengthen?
Come up with goals to target these areas.

His

Hers

1)

2)

3)

- ☐ Now, craft your marriage mission statement.
- ☐ What, when, where and how will you work towards your mission together?

Discussion Notes:

Part Two

*Continuing Up
the Spiral Staircase*

Marriage is a Call
to Become Something Greater
T o g e t h e r

The Spiral Staircase of Thriving

Imagine the possibilities when we are aiming for the same goal and have God's help!

We continue to ascend our spiral staircase of thriving by building upon what you have already learned about your own desires and the goals you think will best help you achieve them.

Your desires for fulfillment and happiness - for a thriving life together - are all directed towards being able to become a good gift to each other. In fact, God has written this into the hearts of every man and woman. Being a gift- to God and other people- is the essence of spiritual development for the Christian. Today is a day for you to consider ways that you can make more intentional decisions about your spiritual life and your marriage planning.

If we are not satisfied by the results of the ordinary way of doing things... physically, mentally, emotionally... then we make intentional decisions to do things differently. The same is true for your marriage. You plan for your wedding, right? So, doesn't it make sense to be just as intentional as you plan for your marriage and your spiritual life?

To continue rising on the spiral staircase we have some very deep and important questions to consider and discuss.

So, we begin with an invitation. We invite you to ask the most important question there is...



What does God want for you?

Asked another way, is it possible that God has a plan for your life? For your marriage? And, if He does, how do you find out what it is and how do you know when you've found it?

Jeremiah 29:11-14

I alone know my purpose for you, says the Lord: prosperity and not misfortune, and a long line of children after you. If you invoke me and pray to me, I will listen to you: when you seek me you shall find me; if you search with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord. I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations.

-New English Bible, Oxford Study Edition



Chapter 10

Your Marriage Mission

A Mission for a Meaningful Marriage



Vocation: Marriage is a Call to Become Something Greater Together

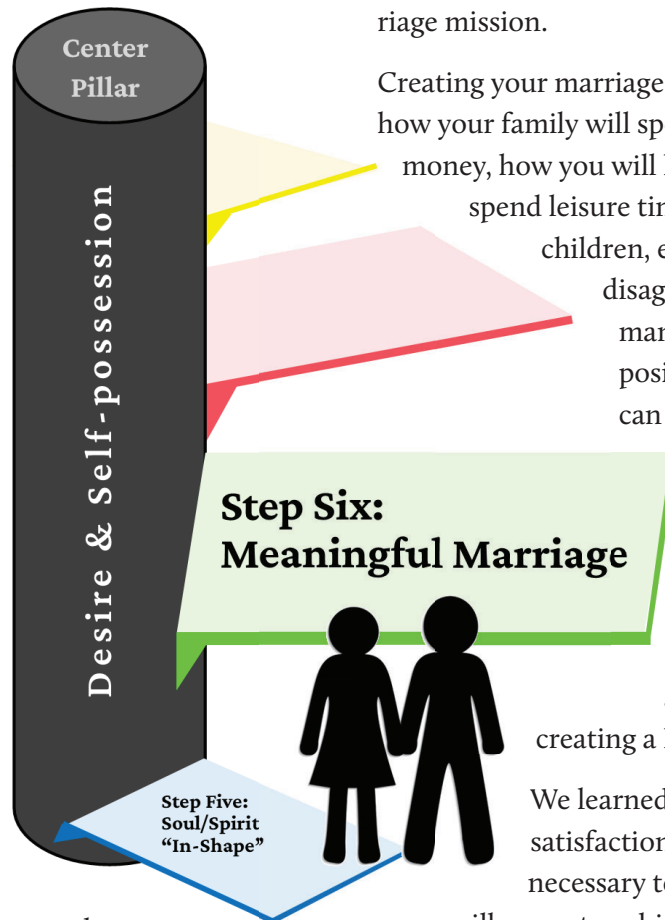
If marriage is a calling, to what are we called?

Catholics call marriage a vocation because it is a calling from God to a specific and new way of life. It is a natural vocation because God made us man and woman and calls us to form a family. It is built into the way we were made. In his public ministry, Jesus took the natural meaning of marriage and made it a sacrament. This supernatural calling, or vocation, is a call to a lasting and unbreakable covenant through which the spouses are given grace to enable them to love and serve one another and any children they are given.

Marriage has this general mission to love and serve and help one another to live in such a way that their life together corresponds to the gift and calling they have received from God. The creation of a personalized marriage mission is a way to establish a particular and meaningful description of your own decisions about how you will live your vocation in the details. The details matter. As you

look to make decisions about goals and principles that you want to live in your marriage, you will arrive at the creation of your own, personal, marriage mission.

Creating your marriage mission involves deciding how your family will spend its precious time and money, how you will live faith in your home, spend leisure time, education options for children, even how you will approach disagreements; these things, and many others, will add to the positive impact your marriage can have in the world!



Your Marriage Mission

Recall the discussion earlier in this course about goal setting and creating a Life List.

We learned that in order to have the satisfaction you want as a couple, it's necessary to set mutual goals, have the willpower to achieve them, and be able to effectively communicate, so that you can be equal and cooperative partners in life. However, all goals are not created equal!

You may wish to take a few moments to review the mutual Life List you created on page 18 of your workbook. We provide space below for you to summarize the main elements of your Life List and list a few of the goals you developed together.

The Spiral Staircase of Thriving: Marriage Mission

Building More Into Your Personal Marriage Mission statement

Having reviewed your goals let's consider some additional questions. With all that you have learned so far in this course...

- ☐ What do you think about the things you've heard?
- ☐ Were there teachings that have challenged your own "conventional wisdom"?
- ☐ Of all the things you learned what surprised you the most?

Review the mission statement you created and rework it according to some of the new insights you may have discovered here.

Our Marriage Mission:



The call of marriage is a call to love as God loves.

God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. (see Genesis 1:27; 1 John 4: 8, 16)

Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes. and this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: "and God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.'"

Genesis 1:28

-Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1604



The Story of God's People is a Love Affair

Jesus is the full revelation of God's love.

The most beautiful thing God made – so the Bible tells us – was the family. He created man and woman. And he gave them everything. He entrusted the world to them: “Grow, multiply, cultivate the earth, make it bear fruit, let it grow.” All the love he put into that marvelous creation, he entrusted to a family... A family is truly a family when it is capable of opening its arms to receive all that love. The garden of Eden is long gone; life has its problems; men and women – through the wiles of the devil – experienced division... God's love, beauty and truth, and on the other hand the destructiveness of war: we are poised between those two realities even today. It is up to us to choose, to decide which way to go.



The Flight into Egypt,
Murillo

When the man and his wife went astray and walked away from God, God did not leave them alone. Such was his love. So great was his love that he began to walk with mankind, he began to walk alongside his people, until the right time came and then he gave the greatest demonstration of love: his Son. And where did he send his Son? To a palace, to a city, to an office building? He sent him to a family. God came into the world in a family.

And he could do this because that family was a family with a heart open to love, a family whose doors were open.

-Pope Francis, Speech at the Festival of Families in Philadelphia, September 26, 2015



The Sermon on the Mount, Bloch

*You did not choose me,
but I chose you...*

-John 15: 9-17

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.

What is Love?

Love: Wanting and Choosing What is Good for the Beloved

There are several ways to define love. Generally modern culture defines love as a feeling or emotion, as something that happens to us. The ancient Greeks had a word for this kind of love: *eros*, which “somehow imposes itself upon human beings.” (Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, 3)

There is another way to define love: willing or choosing the good of the other. This aspect of love is principally defined as a choice.

The Christian view of love is taken from the revelation given to us by Jesus Christ. He tells us that God is love. This is such an all-encompassing reality that it contains both the notions of love as emotion and love as choice... and even more.

The writers of the New Testament used another Greek word, *agape*, to define the highest form of love; self-sacrificing, self-donating love. This is the love shown to us by Jesus. He died on the cross to redeem us and to reveal the love of the Trinity.

Trinitarian Love

Just as there are three persons, there are 3 movements of love in the Trinity. The *Father* wills the good for the Son expressing his fatherly love. The *Son* receives this love and comes to know that he is loved. In response, he entrusts himself completely to the Father. This is the essence of sonship. The *Holy Spirit* is the fruitfulness of their love.

This amazing love which is the very life of the Holy

Trinity is revealed by Jesus on the cross in which he offers his life, choosing to die for his bride, the Church. Every person is invited to respond with the Church by entrusting oneself to God. The Holy Spirit makes this possible as he comes to dwell in us and makes it possible for us to cry out “Abba, Father.” (Romans 8:15)



The Crucifixion, Giotto

In Christian Marriage, we seek to integrate these aspects of love. *Eros* (desire) is elevated by *agape* (self-sacrificing love) to become an icon, or image, of the love that Jesus Christ has for the Church and the world. This is only possible with the help of grace following the example of Christ. In this, the man entrusts himself, “I promise to...” and the woman entrusts herself, “I promise to...” and the fruitfulness of their love is so real that it may result in a new person, a baby.

We need to remember “that authentic love also needs to be able to receive the other, to accept one’s own vulnerability and needs, and to welcome with sincere and joyful gratitude the physical expressions of love found in a caress, an embrace, a kiss and sexual union.” (Pope Francis, *The Joy of Love*, 157)

We discover love in a family.

The family is the place where the theology of the body and the theology of love intersect... It is in the family that man discovers his relationality, not as a self-actualized, autonomous individual, but as a child, a spouse, a parent, whose identity is founded on being called to love, to receive himself from others and to give himself to others.

-Pope Benedict XVI

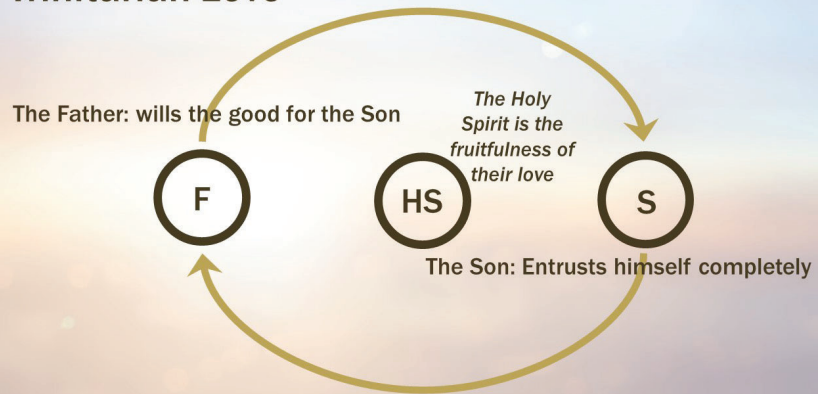
God is Love: What does Love Look Like in the Trinity?

The life of the persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is an eternal exchange of love.

Love in the Trinity

1. The Father wills the good of the Son.
2. The Son receives His love (Sonship) and entrusts himself to the Father.
3. The Holy Spirit is the fruitfulness of their love.

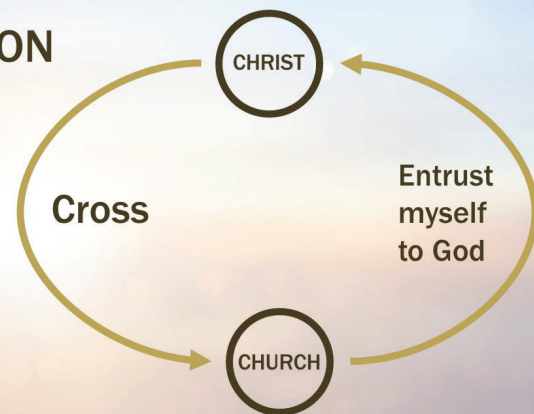
Trinitarian Love



Redeeming Love: The Cross

1. The Son offers his life on the Cross, loving as God does.
2. The Church responds to His love and mercy... "I entrust myself to God."
3. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to call God "Our Father."

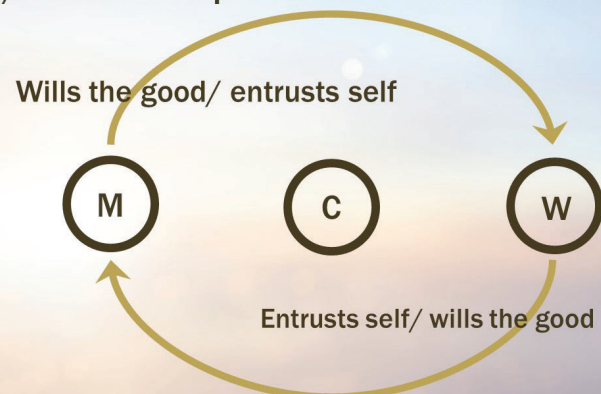
REDEMPTION



Love in the Family

1. The Man entrusts himself, "I promise to..."
2. The Woman entrusts herself, "I promise to..."
3. The fruitfulness of their love is so real that it may become another person.

Original Unity/Redeemed Spousal & Parental Love



Love in Marriage

Pope Francis invites spouses to consider St. Paul's description of love.

What is a marriage, a family without love? Can it be a family at all? Certainly, a family can exist without love, but how could it not be experienced as a poverty and a tragedy? The vision of life that Christianity proposes to all who will listen has at its core the message of love of God and neighbor. The Christian family is certainly no different and so **Pope Francis devotes an entire chapter in his letter on marriage, *Amoris Laetitia*, *The Joy of Love*, to a meditation on the famous passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 13, “Love is patient, love is kind...”** He stresses that it would be “insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to speak of love. For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love,” (*Amoris Laetitia*, *The Joy of Love*, hereafter AL, 89).

“The word ‘love’, however, is commonly used and often misused,” (AL, 105). By looking in detail at this brief passage of scripture the pope hopes to dispel misunderstandings about the real meaning of love and present the gospel understanding of this reality that impacts every aspect of the daily life of the family. Love is classically understood as both an emotion and as a choice to benefit the beloved, often phrased as “to will the good of the other.” St. Paul’s poetic description of love does not begin with this definition. Instead, he describes the qualities of real love and provides a starting point for Christians to learn the way of love, especially in the family where “love is experienced and nurtured in the daily life of couples and their children,” (AL, 90).



The passage begins with “love is patient” (verse 4) and the word patient in the original Greek refers “to the quality of one who does not act on impulse and avoids giving offense,” (AL, 91). Having the desire to bring good to the ones you love requires that thoughtfulness and care is exercised with every act to ensure that it expresses love. Often rash responses are the ones that cause offense and hurt the ones we love. Additionally, the pope gives this advice about how the ordinary life of the family can become a place where patient love is cultivated. “Unless we cultivate patience, we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds,” (AL, 92).

Love is patient and kind...

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

-1 Corinthians 13:4-7



The next qualifier, *kind*, places additional requirements upon *patient*. This Greek word for kind, *chrestéuetai*, is only used in this one place “in the entire Bible. It is derived from *chrestós*: a good person, one who shows his goodness by his deeds,” (AL, 93).

St. Paul adds “kind” as a complement to “patient” to emphasize that patience “is not a completely passive attitude.” Kind patience involves activity directed towards “dynamic and creative interaction with others,” (AL, 93). He “wants to stress that love is more than a mere feeling. Rather, it should be understood along the lines of the Hebrew verb ‘to love’; it is ‘to do good’,” (AL, 94).

Patience rooted in the truth is not tolerance of any and all behavior, specifically abuse. “Being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, tolerating physical aggression or allowing other people to use us,” (AL, 92). This dispels the common misunderstanding of the permanence of marriage as justification for remaining in harm’s way when abuse of oneself or one’s children is occurring. While the indissolubility of marriage does not mean that one can dissolve a marriage due to this horrible rift in what should be the loving environment of the family, it should never cause hesitation for the abused or the protecting parent to get help and defend their own dignity or that of their child(ren).

Neither is love jealous. The members of the family should give no quarter to envy because “love has no room for discomfiture at another person’s good fortune,” (AL, 95). Love makes room for the other and rejoices when the other members are able to have or accomplish something good. It “makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves,” (AL, 95).



Love is not boastful. The Greek word used by St. Paul here calls us to avoid being haughty and pushy and to avoid speaking too much about ourselves. We should think of the other first, especially in the way we “treat family members who are less knowledgeable about the faith, weak or less sure in their convictions... In family life, the logic of domination and competition about who is the most intelligent or powerful destroys love,” (AL, 98).

Love is also not rude, rather it is “gentle and thoughtful... [and] abhors making others suffer,” (AL, 99). It is generous because “generously serving others is far more noble than loving ourselves,” because, “loving ourselves is only important as a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others,” (AL, 101).

Neither is love irritable or resentful. This phrase is connected to the earlier mention of the need for patience so that one “does not immediately react harshly to the weaknesses and faults of others... to nurture such interior hostility helps no one,” (AL, 103).

The Pope emphasizes the merciful nature of love. “The opposite of resentment is forgiveness,” (AL, 105). Experience tells us that it is almost unavoidable that at times the members of a family will fail one another. However, “when we have been offended or let down, forgiveness is possible and desirable, though no one can say that it is easy. The truth is that ‘family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation...’” (AL, 106, quoting from John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*).

“The glory of God is man fully alive.” – St. Irenaeus

God’s call respects our freedom.

God wants more from us than just to be “good” people. God the Father is a loving father and he wants us to realize the full purpose of our lives. He calls us to a new life, to a mission in which we seek to live our life in service to others out of love for Him and one another. Jesus spends most of his public ministry traveling around and calling people to live a new life. To follow Him. To leave behind home and family. What does he call us to, today, in our ordinary lives?

He calls everyone to holiness. This is often misunderstood as something that involves some kind of denial of what is good about our humanity.

Follow me.

Luke 5: 27-34

After this he went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he left everything, and rose and followed him.

And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.” And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?”



The Calling of St. Matthew, Caravaggio

The things we may do that are beneath us — self-destructive behaviors — are the part of ourselves that we are called to deny. We are then called to wholeness, completeness as a gift to God and one another. “If you knew the gift of God!” (John 4:10).

This is what happens in Baptism. It makes one an adopted child of God. Having received this gift one is then called to be a good gift to others. This is the Christian understanding of marriage. Be the gift! How can we live this? It is found in freedom understood as self-mastery. With the help of grace (God’s life and help discussed on page 205) building upon self-regulation we really can become a good gift for our spouse and children! As St. John Paul II described it in the *Theology of the Body*, “self-mastery is indispensable in order for man to be able to ‘give himself’ in order for him to become a gift, in order for him to be able to ‘find himself fully’ through ‘a sincere gift of self’,” (*Theology of the Body* 15.2).

This is a foundational element of what it means to thrive in our marriages... we become a good gift to our spouse and to children received as a gift. This is the real meaning of vocation – God is calling you to something greater than yourself and this is what marriage really is!

The Ultimate Relationship

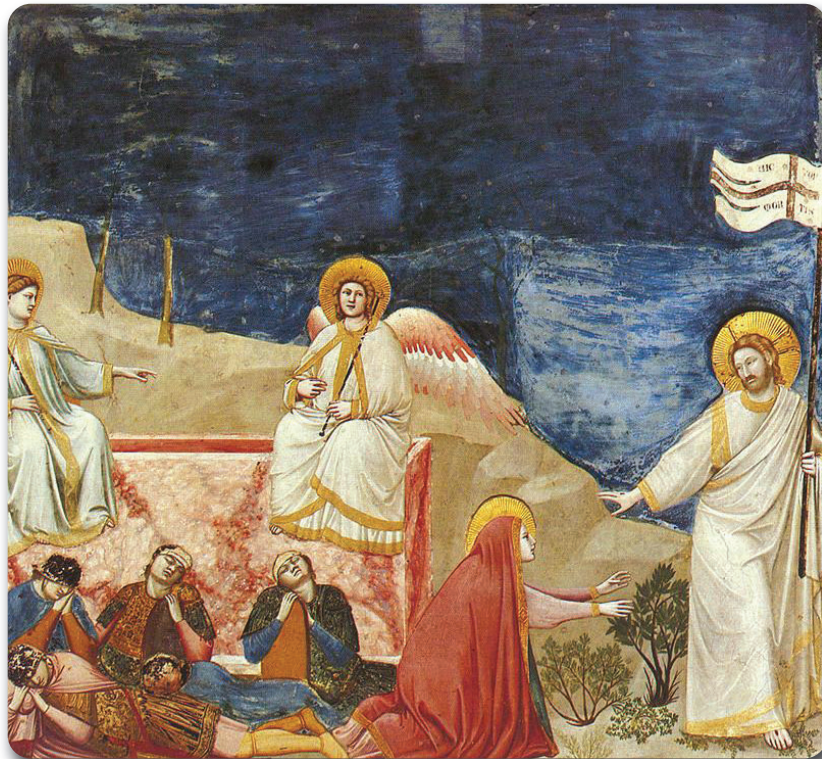
Do you ever wonder...

What is life all about? Does God really exist? What is my purpose? Why am I here?

Jesus came to reveal God's plan of loving goodness. He did this through His life and teachings and He changed the course of human history through His death and resurrection. He calls us to live as God's sons and daughters. This is the ultimate relationship, the relationship we are invited to have with God.

The Good News

1. We are created for relationship.
2. Our relationship is broken (due to sin).
3. Jesus restores our relationship.
4. Am I willing to live in this relationship? Do I wish to entrust myself to God?
5. Sealing our relationship... the Sacraments.

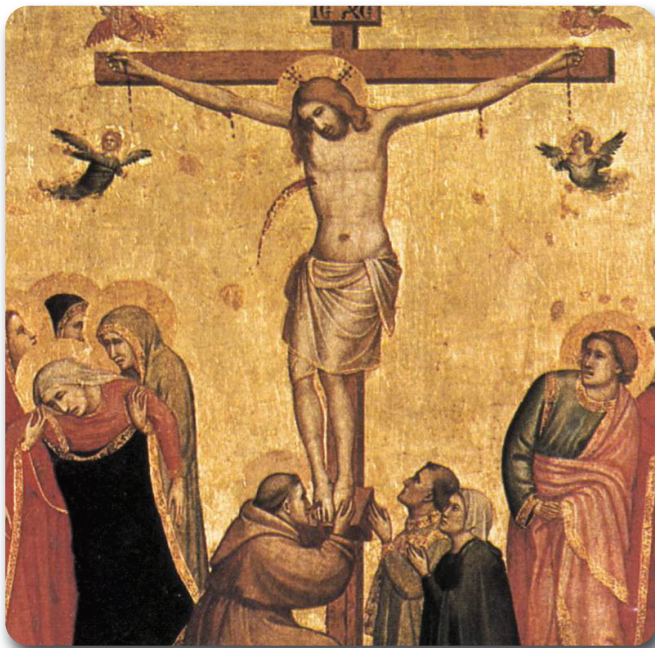


Resurrection, Giotto

Christian Marriage is a “New” Way to Live Marriage

Three ingredients for a healthy, happy, holy, and lasting marriage:

- ◇ To serve and be served.
- ◇ To love and be loved.
- ◇ To forgive and be forgiven.



The Crucifixion, Giotto

By calling on the couple to submit to one another ‘out of reverence for Christ’ (Eph. 5:21) and then by stirring their desire for ‘reverence’ in conjugal relations, Ephesians seems to highlight chastity as a virtue and as a gift... In this way, the reciprocal fascination of masculinity and femininity matures spiritually through the virtue and even more so through the gift (‘life according to the Spirit’). Both the man and the woman, provided they turn away from concupiscence, find the proper dimension of the freedom of the gift, united with femininity and masculinity in the true spousal meaning of the body.

-Theology of the Body 117b.5

The Christian call to mutual submission

Ephesians 5:21-33

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

What is OUR calling? What is OUR mission?

What is God saying through the strengths He has given each of you?

Earlier in this chapter you worked on your personal marriage mission and to think about the results of your *VIA Character Strengths* survey. You will be reviewing your previous work and adding to it here.

Transfer the top five strengths that you discovered from the VIA questionnaire.

His

Hers

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)



What is OUR calling? What is OUR mission?



What is God saying through the strengths He has given each of you?

- ☐ Discussing the results: what do they tell you about how God made you for each other?
- ☐ Review your mission statement work from page 217 and discuss what it would mean to lean on each other's strengths in order to serve one another better and to lift one another up in areas of weakness or difficult times.
- ☐ Is there anything that these strengths have in common? Are there ways that they compliment each other?
- ☐ Taken together, do your various strengths help clarify your marriage mission?

Discussion Notes: