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# 1. Engagement

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord.

*Proverbs 18:22*

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.

*Proverbs 31:10*



Lord, You are aware that I do not know what is good for me, and now that I am about to start ..... how can I know if it is right unless You guide me with Your grace? O Lord, I beseech Your guidance in this matter, do not let me follow my tendencies, lest I be confused and fall. Keep me from slipping, help me and let it be according to Your will. If You see fit, grant me Your blessing to complete it. If not, remove this desire from my heart. You know all things and nothing is hidden from You.

Lord, I am Your servant, deal with me as You see fit, since I realize that I will have neither success nor peace unless I submit myself to the grace of Your will. Teach me to say in every occasion, "Let it be according to Your will, O Lord, not according to mine". For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever more, amen.

*Agbia: Prayer for God's Guidance Before Making A Decision.*

Getting married is one of the biggest decisions a person can make in their life. You are, forever, limiting yourself to the most intimate of relationships with just one person – so you need to be sure it's the right one! This is the purpose of engagement. In this section we will examine the purpose of engagement and look at how to do it right!

## A. The Purpose of Engagement

Engagement is a period for finding out whether or not two people are suitable to marry one another. Because marriage is meant to be for life, it is critically important that the couple do everything they can to make the right decision.

Unlike dating, engagement is a formal agreement that involves the couple and their families and is usually blessed by the Church. Unlike marriage, and engagement may be broken without any feelings of guilt or regret – it simply means that the couple were not suitable for each other. It is far better that they discover this before they enter into the serious sacrament of marriage.

In the engagement ceremony, the priest announces the engagement of the couple, blesses the rings three times in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and prays the Prayer of Thanksgiving. Each of the couple then places the ring(s) on the right ring finger of the other. This differs from the marriage ceremony where the priest is the one who places the rings on the couple's fingers. In engagement, the couple put the rings on, so they have the right to take them off again (i.e. break the engagement). In marriage, the priest (representing God and His Church) puts the rings on, so only he (representing God and His Church) has the right to take them off – the couple cannot choose to dissolve their marriage by themselves, for it is a Holy Sacrament (Matthew 19:6).

During the engagement period, the couple should gradually try to get to know one another. It is important that both parties try their best to be themselves, not putting on an 'act' or pretending to be different to their true nature. Engagements should be neither too short nor too long. Short engagements can lead to the wrong decision being made, since the couple did not have enough time to really get to know one another well. This can lead to regrets and serious problems in later life. Excessively long engagements can also lead to problems, whether due to the stress of waiting too long, growing physical temptations or disagreements between the families. Generally, an engagement period of between one and two years seems to work best.



Icon depicting the Holy Sacrament of Marriage

It is important that they maintain a strong spiritual life during their engagement. This will help them to build the pattern of their future life together. It will also serve to protect them from temptations, particularly of the physical nature. Each person should maintain his or her own personal spiritual canon, of course, but with guidance from the Confession Father, a joint canon should also be introduced. This may include praying together whenever they meet, attending liturgies and Youth Group together; reading the Bible and discussing it together, serving together or even memorising a passage from the Bible together (1 Corinthians 13 is a popular one!)

Each couple should discuss with their Confession Father what are the reasonable limits of their physical interaction with one another during the period of engagement. Having a third party keeping an eye on this encourages them to maintain the purity of heart and body until after marriage. Keep in mind that until the last moment before marriage, an engagement can be broken, so maintaining one's purity is very important. Once married, physical interaction becomes a holy and blessed expression of the unity between husband and wife, but before marriage, excessive physical interaction is a grave sin.

It is also very dangerous since physical desire can lead to the couple not realising that they can't really get on. Once they are married and the urgency of physical desire dies down, they sadly discover that they are stuck with the wrong person! It is far wiser to keep one's mind unclouded by desire during the period of engagement.

Finally, it is important to emphasise once again that marriage is not a decision to ever be rushed. All parties concerned should take their time and do things right, seeking God's true will. If serious doubts remain, it is far better to delay a marriage until they can either be resolved, or until it becomes clear that this marriage is not meant to be.

The concepts in the Bible and long experience have lead to a certain way of going about making this important decision. HG Bishop Moussa often quotes his simple recipe for getting it right:

- 1) *Pray a lot.*
- 2) *Think a lot.*
- 3) *Feel a little.*
- 4) *Seek spiritual guidance.*

We will use this recipe as the basic framework for what follows. It is a good idea at this stage to take some time to think about the wisdom behind it, and discuss it with your fiancé/e.

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**Exercise:**

Explain in your own words what each of the four 'ingredients' of HG Bishop Moussa's recipe (above) actually means, and why each one is important.

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## B. Things to Consider

The first step to making your decision is obviously that of prayer. But the second step is that as you get to know the person you are considering marrying, you need to think about whether or not you are **compatible**. A married couple needs to be compatible in many areas, not just one or two. For example, a couple who both strongly share a common interest (e.g. they are both Olympic athletes) but cannot have a peaceful discussion together for longer than five minutes without having a big fight are not likely to be successful!

“...when you marry, you should not expect your spouse to change ... if they don’t change, what happens then?”

An important principle that cannot be stressed strongly enough is that when you marry, you should not expect your spouse to change. You must be willing to live with them as they are today, for the rest of your lives. If they have any faults today, do not think that you will change them! Of course, if they do change, that is a bonus, but the important thing is that you must not expect them to change, but be willing and happy to take them as they are (after all, they also have to take you as you are!) This in no way

cancels our responsibility as Christians to grow, progress, improve and repent, but in the setting of marriage, it is a disaster for a person to marry someone on the assumption that they will change. If they don’t change, what happens then?

Let us then look at the areas of compatibility that must be considered by any couple thinking of getting engaged or married:

### i. Spiritual Compatibility

As we saw earlier, one of the main aims of marriage is for the couple to lead one another to the Kingdom of Heaven. As they spend time together with God, they will find out if they have the same understanding of God. Since marriage is the deepest unity that can occur between two human beings, it is essential that the couple be united in their faith and practice. Many problems arise when the partners are on different spiritual wavelengths. For example, a husband may become jealous of his wife for spending too much time at Church, feeling that he should have the right to that time. If both the husband and wife held the same view, they would instead be serving together happily! Or a wife may get angry with her husband for continuing to pay his tithes during a period when money is a little bit tight.

Spiritual compatibility also becomes important where moral decisions arise. If both partners agree to hold the Bible as their final source of truth, then many problems that depend on individual opinions can be quickly solved. For example, if one partner feels it necessary to not be completely honest in what they put down in their tax return, the other can lead him/her back to the right path with some well-chosen verses from the Bible about honesty.

Marriages between people from different Christian Churches have an added obstacle to their success, since the two partners will have been brought up with very different approaches. When one of the partners is from a non-Christian background, the differences become too difficult to contemplate! St Paul emphasised this point in no uncertain terms: “*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For*

### *Areas of Compatibility:*

- i. Spiritual**
- ii. Social**
- iii. Educational**
- iv. Emotional**
- v. Physical**
- vi. Financial / Material**

*what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.""* (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). This is why the Coptic Church insists on non-Christians accepting Christ and being baptised before they can marry in the Church.

*Some Questions:*

- Do both partners put God as their first priority?
- Does the couple share this goal with the same strength and conviction?
- What are their attitudes to prayer, the Bible, going to the liturgy early and regularly?
- What are their attitudes to service in the Church or to giving tithes?
- How would each partner classify themselves: conservative, moderate or liberal?
- What is the role of the Confession Father in each partner's life?



When is the next time this couple will come to church?

## ii. Social Compatibility

A married couple cannot live in a vacuum! They have to interact with family, friends, neighbours and workmates. Each of them has been brought up to deal with people in a certain way. If their ways are very different, this can cause a lot of problems. During engagement, each partner needs to discover how the other interacts with people and find out if their different ways can work together.

Different families have different levels of interaction. In some families, one member's problem is everybody's problem, and the whole family is actively involved in solving it. In other families, members tend to keep to themselves. Engaged couples need to find out about each other's families, take the time to study their family dynamics in action and come to understand them. Only then can they make a proper decision as to whether they can fit in.

They also need to know if they approach life the same way. If one partner is very relaxed about problems whilst the other is constantly worrying, there could be friction. As time goes on and they grow older, it is important for them to have common interests that can keep them together and maintain their sense of unity and sharing their life together. Marriages where each partner is living in a world of their own are soon going to fail.

*Some Questions:*

- Do the couple have the same kind of friends?
- Do they enjoy the same interests or hobbies?
- Do they have many topics of common interest that they can talk about?
- Do they like to socialise with friends or just stay at home?
- How often do they feel it important to visit parents or siblings?
- How involved in their life do they want their in-laws to be?

## iii. Educational Compatibility

If both partners are not on roughly the same sort of intellectual level, the relationship may be an unbalanced one. This does not necessarily mean that it will fail, but it can add extra pressures. Consider the extreme situation of a couple where one is highly intelligent and the other well below average. What sort of problems could they face? Might the intelligent partner be tempted to look down on the other, perhaps ignoring their input into discussions and decisions and even putting them down at times? Could that less intelligent partner be tempted to feel inferior, lose their self-esteem or develop resentment towards their partner whom they might see as being arrogant and proud?

Although modern western society is supposed to be ‘classless’, many people still think in terms of social classes (e.g. upper class, lower class, working class etc.) Such class distinctions are often related to a person’s educational level. Would a person with a PhD in neurosurgery live happily with a spouse who never finished high school? Would they be embarrassed to introduce one another to their workmates? To some people, class distinctions are important, whilst to others, they mean very little. If the couple are from different educational or class backgrounds, then they and their families need to work out how important education and class are to them, and how much the incompatibility is likely to affect their marriage.

*Some Questions:*

- How well does each partner get along with the other partner’s family and friends?
- How does each partner feel about the other’s abilities and achievements? Do they see them in a positive light or do they see them as a threat?
- What are each partner’s views on ambition?
- Would you support your partner if they wished to pursue further education after marriage (with all the sacrifices that might require from you)?

#### **iv. Emotional Compatibility**

Many girls are looking for a romantic Prince Charming who will ride up on a white horse and sweep them off their feet. In real life, successful marriages almost never begin with a white horse! Sure, it’s important that the couple has romantic feelings of love towards one another, but it is not the *most* important thing. Our great grandparents commonly saw their spouses for the first time on their wedding day, yet they had extremely successful marriages. The reason is that the energy of ‘romantic love’ is very hard to keep going over a long period of time. But the more moderate love that develops between two people who are truly compatible and live together for many decades just keeps growing and growing. This love is closer to friendship than to romance.

The couple must then share the same approach to emotions. Men and women are different in their make up in the emotional area, and each partner too must understand this, and make allowances (see section 3). Engagement is a time to discover how the emotional make up of each partner will interact with the emotional make up of the other. Some people even go as far as to recommend that every couple should have at least one big argument before they get married. Although this is not really compulsory (don’t go and manufacture an argument!) it does make sense, since in an argument the couple will learn whether their particular personalities enable them to resolve disagreements easily.

*Some Questions:*

- Are the partners hot headed or calm and rational?
- Are they able to work their problems out, or are they constantly misunderstanding each other and seeing the worst in each other?
- How does each one deal with problems or failures?
- How much emotional support does each one expect from their partner? How much support is each able to actually give?
- Does each of the partners easily feel hurt, jealous and proud or look down on themselves? What about other emotions?
- Does each partner prefer to confront problems head on and solve them, or to quietly and patiently find compromise solutions?



How different are the fiancé and fiancée in their emotional make-up? Will these differences work well together, or will they cause a lot of friction?

## v. Physical Compatibility

You will notice that this one rates fairly low on the list – there is a good reason for this. It is certainly important to choose someone whose appearance you are comfortable with – after all, you will have to look at them every day of the rest of your life! There is nothing wrong in marrying someone who is very good looking so long as they are compatible in all the other important ways.

However, good looks should be one of the last things you base your decision on. St Peter taught us that true beauty is not to be found in physical appearance, but in *“the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”* (1 Peter 3:4).

Remember that good looks never last. The day will come when even the prettiest or most handsome of people will be frail, bent and full of wrinkles!

Will you still love them then? Unfortunately, some marriages in western society break up because they married on the basis of looks. When these looks start to fade, the other partner divorces and looks for someone younger and nicer looking. How shallow is that!!! We often see this in the lives of the rich and famous (ex-Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke is a notorious example).

### Some Questions:

- How important is physical appearance to me?
- Do I have any major problems with my partner’s appearance?
- Do I ever catch myself criticising him/her, whether silently or to others?



In the traditional fairytale, “Beauty and the Beast”, the beast’s rough exterior hid a noble and gentle nature. Looks can be deceiving!

## vi. Financial / Material Compatibility

Money matters cause a surprisingly high number of problems between married couples – surprising, because they are not that hard to avoid. Each partner’s approach to money and material things need not be identical to the other, but they must be compatible. For example, in some couples, one partner is extremely organised in budgeting and paying the bills; whilst the other just spends whatever money they happen to have in their pocket today. If they come to agreement to let the organised partner look after the finances, they will probably live happily ever after! The organised partner will bring much needed order to their spouse’s life; while their spouse will appreciate the extra ‘spending power’ this order gives them. The two complete one another.



What role does money play in each partner’s life?

### Some Questions:

- How would each partner describe themselves: thrifty, a big spender or somewhere in between?
- How much does each partner worry about finances?
- How does each partner feel about using credit? Is it better to borrow and pay later, or to save up first and then spend?
- Does each partner have expensive tastes or simple tastes in things like food, clothing, cars and houses etc?



- What is each partner's view of wives working full time? What about mothers working full time? Are the two willing to share the housework between them?
- What is each partner's attitude to paying tithes and first fruits, or making donations?
- Will the couple put both their incomes into the one account to be used by either? Will there be any ground rules to limit how the money is to be spent?

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**Exercise:**

Can you think of at least two additional questions for each of the compatibility areas above? Are there some questions that would be more important to **you** than others? Which ones, and why?

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## C. Making the Right Decision

Do you remember HG Bishop Moussa's 'recipe'? Write it in the space below:

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

*If you can't remember it, turn back to page 3!*

Of course, there is no single magic formula that will guarantee you the right person every time! Every individual person needs to find the way of making a decision that is most suitable for his or her personality and situation. However, we can look at some important pointers to help along the way:

- ***The Right Time.***

Don't start searching for your future spouse too early, before you're really mature enough and ready. Don't leave it too late, when you may be searching under pressure and forced into accepting the wrong person.

- ***Pray, Pray, Pray!***

Prayer helps you ensure that you are surrendering the matter to God and truly seeking His will. The "Prayer for God's Guidance Before Making A Decision" (at the end of the Agbia) can be very helpful here. Praying with your fiancé/e also helps you learn about their spiritual state. Some couples like to ask their Parish Priest to offer up the sacrifice of the mass in their name.

- ***Fasting.***

Many Confession fathers recommend to their children to fast for a period of days on behalf of this decision. Often at the end of such a period of fasting, God's will becomes clearer in one way or another.

- ***Get to Know Your Fiancé/e – REALLY WELL!***

Try to get to know what they are **really like**, not just what you **would like them** to be like. You can even learn a lot about a person from the people around them. For example, many people say that you can know a person from the company they keep – so get to know their friends and observe how they interact with them. One way to 'predict' what a person will be like in thirty years time is to look at their parents. Although this rule doesn't always hold true, one can get a reasonable idea, since most children do eventually grow into something of a copy of their parents, whether physically, emotionally or spiritually.

- ***Be Honest with Yourself and Others.***

There is a great temptation during the romance of engagement to see only the good things in your fiancé/e. everything is so lovely and rosy and sweet that somehow you don't notice that they have a tendency to lie a lot or that they hardly ever go to Church. Engaged couples are also tempted to be on their very best behaviour with each other, rather than relaxing and just being their normal selves. The

danger is that once they are married, they *then* relax and discover they really don't like the true nature of the person they married.

- ***Take Advice and Take Your Time.***

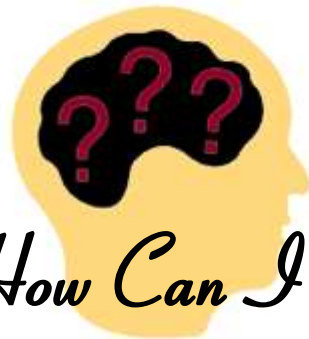
If people that you generally trust and respect give you advice that you don't like, it is dangerous to ignore it! There are many tales of couples who insisted on marrying against the will of parents, friends, and even Confession Fathers, and later regretted it! If there is any doubt, take your time – this is too serious a decision to rush into.

- ***Stick to the Rules***

If you want God to help you make the right decision and to bless your marriage, then you have to create an atmosphere where He is free to work. Engaged couples who introduce serious sins of any kind into their relationship (e.g. lying, deceit, going behind parents' backs, sexual sins, greed, substance abuse etc.) are basically telling God, 'We don't want You here'! A bit of self-control for a year or two is worth the reward of a blessed marriage for a lifetime!

- ***No One is Perfect.***

A person who waits till s/he finds the perfect Mr./Mrs. Right will almost certainly remain single all their life! We need to be realistic. A good rule of thumb is to think of all the worst things about the person you are thinking of marrying, then ask yourself, "Can I happily live with that for the rest of my life?" If the answer is yes, then you have come one step closer to finding the right person. If, on the other hand, you realise that this person has the one human flaw that you personally simply cannot stand, then clearly this is not the person for you, however many other good things there may be in them.



## *But How Can I Know!?*

God can speak to us in many different ways. Each individual couple needs to keep their minds and their ears open to the voice of God. Often, that voice will not come through just one source, but many. If a couple are genuinely surrendering their decision to God, willing to accept whatever He wills, and they find that all sources are agreeing on that decision over a prolonged period of time, then they can generally be comfortable that this is the will of God. Some ways God can speak include:

- i) ***Inner Peace:***

Having been through all the steps mentioned earlier, each member of the couple should be able to assess their feelings towards the relationship going ahead. Occasionally, all parties may feel a deep sense of inner peace about the matter that only grows stronger as time goes on. On the other hand, one or more of the parties may find themselves anxious or restless about the matter. It is extremely dangerous to proceed to a marriage if one or more parties do not feel peaceful about it.

ii) ***The Agreement of the Holy Bible***

HG Bishop Moussa wrote, “It is impossible that the divine choice should contradict the commandments of the Bible”. A decision that is taken on the basis of greed, selfishness, materialism, lies or illegal methods cannot be from God!

iii) ***The Course of Circumstances***

If all parties are truly willing to accept the will of God for their lives and doing their best to find it and follow it, then they can be confident that God will so arrange their circumstances to make His will happen. Of course, His will may not be what we expected, but this too is His will. It is not uncommon that a couple surrenders the matter to God, only to find that everything starts to go horribly wrong. With further prayer, consideration and advice, they then discover that for them to get married could have been a major disaster! God has closed the doors in His unfathomable wisdom.

iv) ***The Agreement of All Concerned***

Parents, responsible relatives, old and trusted friends and especially the Confession Fathers may all know the couple very well. It is wise to consider their opinion on the matter carefully, since they may see things the couple cannot see! If all these parties are comfortable about the match and raise no major concerns, one can safely feel that God is opening the doors to go ahead. If, on the other hand, one or more of them raise some major objections, it would be extremely wise not to go ahead until the objection is resolved. If it cannot be resolved, then that too may be the hand of God closing the door.

*“If a couple are genuinely surrendering their decision to God, willing to accept whatever He wills, and they find that all sources are agreeing on that decision over a*

v) ***Special Signs***

In certain rare circumstances, God may give a very clear sign, generally to both the partners as well as to their Confession Fathers.

**Some Notes of Warning:**

- One must be extremely careful about interpreting special signs. Many people are so keen to find a sign that they let their imagination take over, and read far more into simple things than God ever intended! God’s signs are always unmistakable and in agreement with the Bible. It is essential that the person get guidance and direction from their Confession Father before accepting any sign.
- Some people try to perform an altar lot as a way of leaving their decision up to God. Whilst it is true that there are certain kinds of decisions where this is appropriate (e.g. the final choice of the new Pope) there are some very strict limitations on when such a procedure can be successful. It is virtually never appropriate as a method for choosing one’s life partner.

*For more information on these two points, see Appendix 1.*

**Further Reading:**

- “*How Can I Make Decisions?*” HG Bishop Moussa. Undated. Bishopric of Youth.
- “*Youth and Pure Living*” HG Bishop Moussa. Undated. Bishopric of Youth.

## 2. Marriage



And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

*Genesis 2:21-24*

And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.

*Matthew 19:4-6*

Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

*Hebrews 13:4*

Marriage is a sacrament that has attracted controversy since the earliest times. During the time of the Apostles, for example, a group of heretics grew up around one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:5), Nicolas, who taught that marriage was not necessary and that people could have as many 'partners' as they wished. This is the trend we see becoming the normal thing in today's Western society, so it is interesting to note that our Lord Jesus Himself condemned these "Nicolaitans" with incredible vehemence! (See Revelation 2:6,15)

We need to understand the true meaning of marriage as a Holy Sacrament instituted by God in order to have a fulfilling marriage. Christian marriage is one of the best cures for loneliness ever invented. Lived properly, marriage is one of our most powerful tools for knowing God and reaching the Kingdom of Heaven.

## A. Marriage in the Bible:

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### **Exercise:**

Read each of the Bible passages below and summarise its main message

a) Genesis 2:22-24

b) Matt. 19:4-6

c) Hebrews 13:4

d) 1 Timothy 3:12 (**Monogamy**)

e) 1 Corinthians 7:10,11

f) Ephesians 5:22-33

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## B. The Purpose of Marriage

### *i. Unity & Love*

Marriage is one of the ways that human beings learn about the true, divine, unselfish and giving love. It is a kind of laboratory where a person learns the love that will benefit him/her in reaching the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Bible even uses the marriage relationship to represent the relationship between God and man, as for example in the Song of Solomon, the Book of Hosea and in John 3:29; Ephesians 5:25-27 and Revelation 21:2.



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#### **Exercise:**

Use the verses above to compare human marriage to the 'marriage' between our Lord Christ and the Church:

Human Marriage

Christ and the Church

### *ii. Continuity*

Marriage is the manner in which new lives are brought into the world, as God commanded to Adam and Eve, and again to Noah and his family. In this sense, the married couple is sharing with God in an act of creation!

Marriage also provides a secure and permanent environment for children to grow up in. Children need this security in order to develop into successful and emotionally healthy adults. It is now a well-established fact that children of separated or divorced marriages have a significantly higher level of emotional and mental problems than children of stable marriages. This is the result of going against God's original plan for us (like ignoring the manufacturer's instructions!)

### **iii. Purity**

Physical intimacy is holy and blessed, so long as it is within the marriage relationship. Marriage means giving your whole life to one other person, mind, body and feelings. It involves a great deal of love and trust in one another. It is only in this context that sexual relations can be practiced to their true potential and meaning.

Marriage allows people to express their sexual feelings in a holy and blessed manner, rather than the shallow, selfish and meaningless way that sex outside of marriage represents.

### **iv. Bearing Fruits**

The married couple are responsible for one another's salvation. Each should help and support the other to live a life that will allow them to reach the Kingdom of Heaven.

Within the family unit there is mutual support and encouragement that allows each member to serve God and His children, thus bearing good fruits in the wider community. There have been many blessed couples (e.g. Fr Bishoy Kamel and Tasoni Angele) or even whole families who together have served God in ways they could never achieve alone.

## **C. The Marriage Ceremony**

The traditional marriage rite involved the bride and groom attending Church from Saturday night to pray and fast together with their families and friends in preparation for the wedding and the mass on Sunday morning. On Sunday morning, after the Morning Raising of Incense, the deacons bring them into the church with the appropriate hymns and the marriage ceremony is prayed. They then offer the oblations and commence the liturgy with the bride and groom remaining in their places before the sanctuary door for the whole liturgy. They are then the first among the congregation to have communion at the end of the liturgy.



Antique Coptic wedding carriage, Cairo  
Photo by Patrick Vath



Nowadays, the marriage can be performed any day that is not a fasting day (or the day immediately before a fast begins). The ceremony is usually performed at any time of the day and is not usually linked to a liturgy, although most couples insist on attending a liturgy and having communion on the morning before the wedding. It is also necessary for the couple to have confession sometime soon before the wedding.

It is important to note that since marriage is a holy sacrament, the reception party that follows it must not take away from that holiness. It makes no sense to celebrate the spiritual unification of the couple by the Holy Spirit by drinking alcohol or having very worldly music and dancing which sadden the Holy Spirit! Many couples also like to begin their married life after the wedding with a short period of fasting from sexual intercourse (usually three days) during which they give themselves to prayer together. This practice emphasises the authority of the spirit over the body and builds a strong foundation for a life of true, self-sacrificing love for one another and for God. The practice can be found in the Deuterocanonical Book of Tobit (8:4-6).

Symbol / Rite		Meaning
1	The priest wears either the full liturgy <b>vestments</b> , or at least the 'sadra' (epitrachelion)	This shows the respect due to an important sacrament, and one of the seven sacraments of the Church
2	The bride's <b>father</b> brings the bride to the door of the Church where he surrenders her to the bridegroom. The bridegroom lifts the veil from the bride's face and the priest asks both the bride and the groom to confirm that this is the right person, and that they are marrying of their own free will and choice.	"Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father's house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty" (Psalm 45:10,11)  Marriage must be by the free choice of the bride and groom with no one forcing them into it!
3	The bride always stands, walks or sits at the <b>right hand</b> of the groom.	"At your right hand stands the queen" (Psalm 45:9). Also, Eve was taken from Adam's right rib. In this way, the groom honours his bride.
4	The hymn Πῶπνευμα ἰπαρακλήτων (The Spirit, the Comforter) is prayed	The Holy Spirit will descend upon the couple and unite them spiritually.
5	The church should be <b>silent</b> during the prayers (apart from the responses to be prayed out loud) and the clothing of the bride, bridesmaids and guests should be <b>modest</b>	"Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever" (Psalm 93:5). We should respect the sacrament of marriage as we do other sacraments such as Holy Communion
6	The rings are tied together with a <b>ribbon</b> or ' <b>lafafa</b> ' (red or white linen cloth) and blessed three times in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit	<u>Red</u> : By the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were saved and by His grace, we received the sacrament of marriage in which the Holy Trinity united the two individuals into one. <u>White</u> : indicates the purity and holiness of the sacrament of marriage.

7	The <b>cap</b> es (bornos) are placed on the couple's shoulders	The 'bornos' is a priestly garment. The groom is becoming the 'priest' of the family. He is responsible for their spiritual growth and development. The bride wears a smaller cape signifying her that she must share this responsibility with her husband. (See also Isaiah 61:10)
8	The couple are anointed with <b>oil</b>	This anointment symbolises the work of the Holy Spirit in the couple's lives to sanctify, purify and strengthen them. It is also a symbol of joy (Psalm 45:7)
9	<p>The <b>ring</b>s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Are made of gold which does not rust or become corrupted in any way</li> <li>b. Are round – without beginning and without end</li> <li>c. Have the name of the spouse engraved on them</li> <li>d. Are placed on the left ring finger</li> <li>e. Are placed on the fingers by the priest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The marriage is a sacrament beyond price which is holy and pure</li> <li>b. The sacrament of marriage lasts for the whole lifetime</li> <li>c. A sign that the two are now one and their lives belong to one another and that each is the precious ornament of the other.</li> <li>d. The left side is nearest to the heart</li> <li>e. The priest alone can remove them (Matt 19:6)</li> </ul>
10	<b>Crowns</b> are blessed and then placed on the couple's heads	<p>These represent the authority of the bride and groom over their new household. They symbolise their authority to have self-control and live a pure and holy life (Proverbs 16:32) as well as the heavenly crowns awaiting those who live their lives in purity and holiness (1 Timothy 4:7,8).</p> <p>The bride and groom are also 'crowns' for one another – see Proverbs 12:4 &amp; 1 Corinthians 11:3</p>
11	The couple lean over sideways and bring their heads together till they touch, and are blessed three times in the Name of <b>the Holy Trinity</b> by the priest	<p>Leaning over symbolizes that to be united in love and humility, they have to meet each other halfway.</p> <p>The triple blessing is the moment of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them, uniting them spiritually as a married couple.</p>
12	The couple <b>kneel</b> before the open sanctuary door (before the altar) side by side whilst the priest reads them their commandments (advice on how to have a successful married life).	A sign of the submission of their whole lives to God. Through their submission to God, He also commands them to submit to one another in love and in humility.

13	The priest then prays for the couple the <b>absolution</b> (the same absolution used for confession)	Through the grace of this sacrament, all the sins of their past are absolved and forgiven and they start their life together with completely pure hearts.
14	A number of hymns are prayed in honour of St Mary, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Ⲑⲁⲓⲱⲟⲩⲣⲓ ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲃ</b> (<i>This censor of gold</i>)</li> <li>▪ <b>Ⲙⲉⲣⲉ Ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲛⲟⲩⲣⲟ ⲛⲃⲱ</b> (<i>Hail Mary, the Queen and Bride</i>) as they leave the church</li> </ul>	St Mary is considered our Mother, and the spiritual bride of God (e.g. Song 5:1). She rejoices in the happiness of her children, and she is the perfect model of a pure bride.

Reference: "The Sacraments of the Church vol. 6: Holy Matrimony" by HG Bishop Mettaous. St Mina Monastery Press. 2000

## Exercise

*"21 ...submitting to one another in the fear of God. 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."*  
(Ephesians 5:21-33)

The Bible reading above is read during the marriage ceremony. Using this passage, answer the following questions:

1. Summarise what is expected of the wife.
2. Summarise what is expected of the husband.
3. In verse 21, what is expected of both husband and wife? Give examples of how this could be applied in some common daily situations.
4. "Submission does not mean weakness – in fact it is only the strong who can freely submit out of love and humility." Explain this sentence in your own words.

### Further Reading:

- "The Sacraments of the Church vol. 6: Holy Matrimony" by HG Bishop Mettaous. St Mina Monastery Press. 2000
- "Marriage Ceremony According to the Coptic Orthodox Rite - with explanations" may be downloaded from the Sydney Diocese website, [www.coptic.org.au](http://www.coptic.org.au) and follow the links.

# 3. Living the Dream

"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 is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

*Ephesians 5:31*



Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:  
There is one alone, without companion:  
He has neither son nor brother.  
Yet there is no end to all his labours,  
Nor is his eye satisfied with riches.  
But he never asks,  
"For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?"  
This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.  
Two are better than one,  
Because they have a good reward for their labour.  
For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.  
But woe to him who is alone when he falls,  
For he has no one to help him up.  
Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;  
But how can one be warm alone?  
Though one may be overpowered by another, two  
can withstand him.  
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

*Ecclesiastes 4:7-12*

How fair is your love,  
My sister, my spouse!  
How much better than wine is your love,  
And the scent of your perfumes  
Than all spices!

*Song of Songs 4:10*

Every couple dreams of living a happy and contented life together. They dream of having the kind of relationship in which they will find support, encouragement and acceptance and be able to share their experiences and emotions openly and honestly. This is indeed is God's plan for marriage. But that doesn't mean it's going to happen automatically! Like anything really precious in life, you have to work hard to make it happen, and keep working hard to keep it going. This can involve a lot of sacrifice and patience - "no pain, no gain"! But when you get it right, you realise that it was worth all the effort - and more!

Unfortunately, no one is born knowing how to have a successful, fulfilling marriage, it is something we all have to learn. However, you can get a head start by reading what others have learned over the years...

## A. The Relationship between Husband and Wife

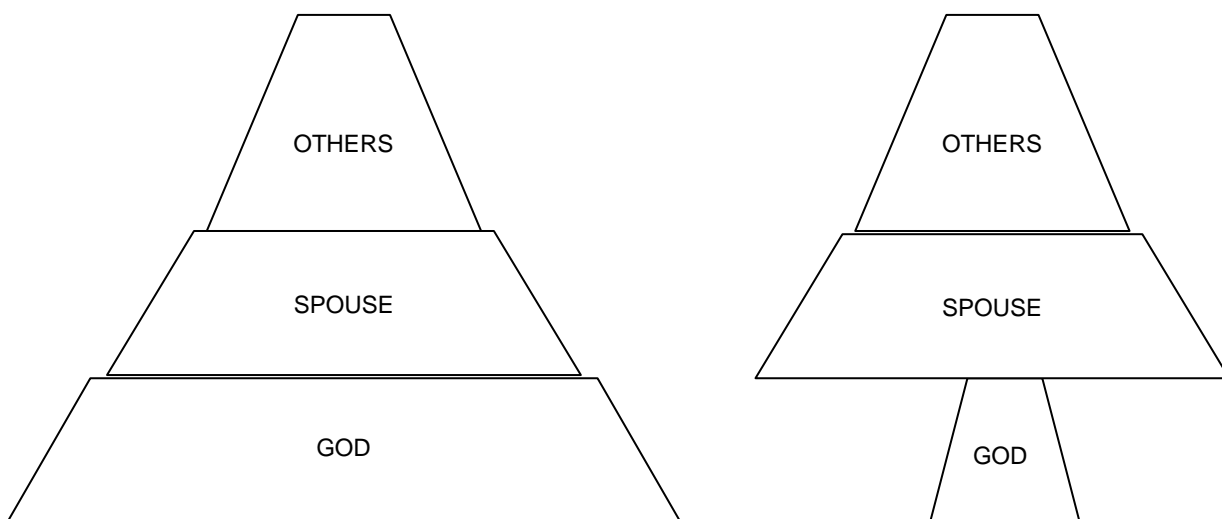
In the last section, we looked at the Biblical and spiritual meaning of marriage. Now we will see how this understanding of marriage applies to its daily practice.

We live in a society today where newly married couples actually have more chance of ending up divorced than they do of remaining married all their lives. The statistics in the Coptic community are far better, but there is still a worrying trend. Break-ups often involve innocent children who suffer greatly through the anguish of the process of divorce. Clearly, something is going terribly, terribly wrong. Even if the parents do not actually break up, the emotional effects on children of living in a stressful environment at home can be devastating.

The saddest thing about all this is that it doesn't have to be like that. As we saw earlier, God created marriage as a beautiful bond of love and mutual support. But every successful marriage needs preparation and hard work – it won't just happen by itself. Whilst this is a very big subject, we will look at just a few of the factors that can make for a successful marriage:

### i. Spiritual Life

- **Your personal relationship with God is the foundation on which you build your relationship with your spouse. It needs to be cared for first and above all else, for everything else in your life depends on this.**
- Shared prayers and Bible readings are extremely important in bringing and keeping a couple together around Christ as the centre. You can really get to understand a person better when you share spiritual experiences with them. Also, so many problems really can be solved through prayer.
- Having Communion together is a sign of unity and peace between a husband and wife. If there are issues, they have to make peace before having Communion, so this can be a great way to encourage reconciliation when things are not going well.



If a person's relationship with God is strong, it can easily support other important relationships, including that of a spouse (left pyramid). When the relationship with God weakens, other relationships may become unstable too (right pyramid).

### ***Practical Points:***

- Do not neglect your personal private ‘quiet time’ with God. Do this in addition to your spiritual time spent with your spouse.
- Make it a rule to pray together every night. It is very hard to stay angry with someone if you have to stand next to them and pray with them!
- Read a chapter from the Bible together every night and take the time to discuss it together.
- The pressures of modern life often lead to people neglecting either their personal spiritual life or their shared spiritual life. Don’t let this happen! It is a matter of priorities – make your time with God the first priority. A little bit of organisation can go an awfully long way.
- Be regular in your Confession and Communion and encourage your spouse to do likewise.

## ii. Communication

- Communication is a two way street. People are often very good at talking but not nearly so good at listening; yet listening is far more important. Through listening, we learn to understand how the other person is thinking and feeling. We can then respond in a way that is appropriate and more likely to be successful.
- If we don’t listen well, then misunderstandings happen, and small problems can very quickly develop into major disasters.
- We must be very careful about the way we speak to each other: *“For He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”* 1 Peter 3:9-11. Although you may be saying the right thing, the way that you say it can cause problems in itself.
- If anger enters a discussion, it is very unlikely that the will of God will be the result, *“for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God”* James 1:20. Going against the will of God is a sure road to disaster.

### ***Practical Points:***

- Make a conscious effort to stop talking and listen, trying to actually understand what the other person is saying, whether you agree with it or not.
- Don’t jump to conclusions about what you think they mean – try to know what they really do mean.
- If you are unsure, repeat what you think they said, and ask them if you got it right.
- Try very hard not to let anger enter into a discussion. If necessary, take a break from discussing and come back to it later, or put off the discussion for another time when both parties will be calmer.



*“For the wrath of man does not work for the righteousness of God” – James 1:20*

## iii. Responsibility

- We know from the Bible that each person will be judged according to his or her own deeds. It will not be possible to say to God, “I only did this because .....” – it didn’t work for Adam, and it won’t work for us! In the closeness of marriage, it becomes even more important for each person to accept responsibility for his or her own mistakes.

- Each partner should also feel responsible for the well-being and happiness of their spouse. Our actions have the greatest effects on those who are closest to us!
- These responsibilities are actually given to the couple by God, through the Church. Towards the end of the marriage ceremony, the ‘Commandments’ to the couple are read out. These are certainly to be taken seriously!

**Practical Points:**

- Always take personal responsibility for your own actions.
- Always try to change yourself; never try to change your partner. S/He is the only one who can do that!
- Remind yourself often of the responsibilities you accepted in getting married.
- Change your way of thinking from looking out for your own welfare to looking out for the welfare of both you and your spouse.

**Further Study:**  
 Read the ‘Commandments to the Bride and Groom’ (Appendix II) and underline the important responsibilities for each.

#### iv. Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is an essential part of being a Christian: *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* Matthew 6:14,15. This applies even more so in such a close relationship as that between a husband and wife.
- We all sin. We all make mistakes. It is far better to have an atmosphere of forgiveness in a relationship than an atmosphere of constantly holding grudges – one day you yourself will need to be forgiven!

**Practical Points:**

- Decide never to hold a grudge.
- Do not bring up past problems and mistakes. As the Lord Jesus says in the famous poster: “when I forgive, I forget”. Even if you can’t really forget, at least stop yourself from bringing old problems up again and again.
- Some couples insist on doing a metania to each other every night and saying, ‘If I have hurt you in any way today, please forgive me’. They do this whether there are problems or not.

#### v. Kindness and Courtesy

- We are often far more polite and considerate to those who are outside our house than to our family members who are in it! If you think about it, you will see that there is really no good reason for this to be so. If anything, we should treat our family members better, since they do so much for us and take such care of us.
- Kindness is a commandment of God: *“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us”* Ephesians 4:32-5:2.
- God condemned those who did not take proper care of the members of their household: we are responsible for one another before God.



A little kindness can make a BIG difference!

### **Practical Points:**

- Look for opportunities to do nice things for those of your household, without being asked!
- Make a point of observing those small niceties, such as saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. This gives the message that you care for and respect the person you say them to.
- Think of the needs of your spouse before you think of meeting your own needs. If **both** partners do this, life would be Paradise on earth!
- If an argument begins to become unpleasant, stop for a while and have a cooling off period – don’t keep going until someone says something they will later regret.
- Make a rock-solid rule that physical violence is absolutely unacceptable and stick to it.

## vi. Honesty and Trust

- Honesty is an essential characteristic of the Christian person: “*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight*”. Proverbs 12:22.
- The marriage relationship depends on trust. The two have become one and must be able to trust one another as they trust themselves.
- Remember the “Humpty Dumpty Rule”: Trust is like an eggshell – once broken, it is very hard to put it together again.
- Being honest results in a much more peaceful life! Lying leads to anxiety, stress and worrying that you may be found out. This stress can have a terrible effect on a relationship. Say instead, as the righteous Job did: “*My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live*”. Job 27:6.
- Hiding your feelings can allow them to build up into very unhealthy gripes or feelings of being hurt. It is better to be honest and open. Then the couple can work together to fix the problem.

### **Practical Points:**

- Be open with your spouse in general. Take the time to share your life with them. Tell them important things before they hear them from someone else.
- Do not take ‘shortcuts’ that may make life easier in the short term, but lead to a loss of trust in the long term.
- Cling tightly to being truthful and honest with your spouse. What you gain will be far more than what you lose.
- Be honest about your emotions, but in a calm and loving way.
- Beware of revealing the private matters of your relationship to others outside. This can be extremely embarrassing for your partner and damaging to your relationship!

## vii. Unity

- A married couple must try to be united in thoughts, actions and even feelings, for, “*They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*” Matthew 19:4. Whilst this is not possible to achieve every second of your life, we must at least try to make it so as much as possible.
- This requires a great deal of giving and taking. Both partners need to be willing to give in to the other for the sake of unity.
- True unity can only be based on true, divine love: “*Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another*” 1 Peter 3:8.



True unity comes only through  
Christ-like love.



- One of the greatest threats to unity is the intrusion of others, such as relatives or close friends. A couple needs to be committed to one another above all others, (except God of course!)

**Practical Points:**

- Make an effort to DO things together – even simple things like going for walks or regularly having dinner together.
- Discuss things together and try to understand one another. Be willing to give up your own cherished ideas.
- Whenever you disagree about something, remind yourself that you are still on the same team. Never allow yourselves to feel you are opponents - working against each other. You are team mates, striving together for the same goals.
- Never let anyone else drive a wedge between you – not even close relatives such as parents in law or siblings.
- Never embarrass your spouse by seriously disagreeing with them in front of others.

### viii. Wisdom

- We must strive to learn wisdom all our lives, for wisdom makes life run far more smoothly. Wisdom is a gift from God: *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy”*. James 3:17
- Experience will teach a person wisdom, but this takes time. In the meantime, make use of the wisdom of others who have already been through what you have been through. Apart from human resources (people you can turn to) there are many books and other resources on the subject of marriage that can teach us important lessons in life.

You don't have to be an Einstein to live your married life wisely!



**Practical Points:**

- Do not be quick to judge or jump to conclusions: *“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”* (James 1:19)
- Do not make decisions quickly or by yourself. Consult your spouse and discuss the decision first.
- Avoid doing things that you know are likely to annoy your spouse, even if you feel there is nothing wrong with them.
- Seek guidance when necessary, whether from your Confession Father, or a trusted relative or servant. However, always be careful that you do not break the trust of confidentiality that is between you and your spouse.

### ix. Patience

- It is a general principle in life that time can change many things. The problem that seems so big and impossible to solve today will probably be fixed up by tomorrow (or next week!). This principle is even more important within the environment of marriage.

- Our Lord Jesus taught us the ‘Golden Rule’, often quoted as: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Today, it may be you who must be patient with your partner. Tomorrow, the roles may be reversed!
- Patience becomes especially important when your partner is going through a major difficulty. Serious illness, unemployment, bereavement and mid-life crisis are all examples of times where the other partner needs to be patient. In these situations, such patience is a truly beautiful image of divine, unselfish love. How inspiring to meet a husband who has given up his work to care for his wife, ailing with cancer!
- Let your patience be based on love – this is the only basis that can allow patience to keep going and going, for love “*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.*” (1 Corinthians 13:7,8)

**Practical Points:**

- Make a conscious decision from the beginning of the marriage to be patient with your partner.
- Renew this decision every day of your married life.
- Be patient in big things as well as in little things.
- Memorise some nice verses or passages that can help you to be patient. Read or recite them when you really need a bit of extra help!
- Remind yourself constantly how patient God is with us, the sinners, who constantly hurt and disappoint Him.

**Verses For Patience:**

- II Peter 1:5-7
- John 16:33
- Matthew 11:28-29
- John 13:35
- Ephesians 4:32
- Philippians 4:5
- I Corinthians 15:58
- II Corinthians 4:17
- Matthew 5:11
- Galatians 6:2,9

## x. Commitment and Hard Work

- Once an engaged couple has married, they have actually made a rock solid commitment to stay together for the rest of their lives, as they say in Western weddings, “for better or for worse”.
- We cannot stress often enough that good marriages don’t just happen by themselves. They require an awful lot of effort, sacrifice and perseverance. It is important that the two partners are fully aware of this before they commit to the marriage relationship.
- Fr. Joseph Purpura of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in North America wrote: *“When I was a parish priest, I was often asked, during the course of pre-marital counselling, what it would take to have a long and successful marriage. I would often send these couples to spend some time with some of the elderly couples of the parish who had been married for fifty or more years. I would then ask upon their return, ‘what did they say?’ I always heard a similar answer: “they said they worked at making their marriage work”, “they only thought of making it work, no matter how bad it got”, “it was not always this good, there were rough times and we had to really work at it”. (“The Angel’s Voice” Newsletter, vol.2. Issue 3.)*



The wedding band or ring is a perfect circle, symbolising that marriage is for life.

**Practical Points:**

- Remind yourself constantly of your commitment to your spouse. Remind him/her regularly that you do love them and have happily and willingly given them your life.
- Put time and energy into reviewing your relationship regularly and into doing what needs to be done to keep it healthy and strong.

- Be willing to sacrifice other things in your life that are not as important as your marriage (i.e. most things).

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**Exercise:**

Use the notes above to answer the following questions:

1. Which of the ten points above do you feel is the most important? Why?
  2. In your own words, what does unity between a husband and wife actually mean?
  3. What do you feel are the greatest dangers to a marriage? List five dangers in order starting with the most dangerous.
  4. Quote one Bible verse about anger.
  5. A newly married friend comes and complains to you that they are having a lot of trouble getting along with their spouse. There is a lot of anger and miscommunication, and they are beginning to doubt if their spouse really loves them. List five pieces of important advice you could give them.
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## B. Understanding One Another

We need to be taught how to understand one another.

You may think the above statement is ridiculous: *"I don't need anyone to teach me how to understand MY fiancé/e!"* But the truth is that human beings are very complicated creatures, and that most people do often find themselves feeling quite bewildered by their partner's behaviour or reactions. Without understanding, this bewilderment can easily turn into resentment, anger or disappointment.

The first step towards understanding is to realise that you are different:

- One of you is male, the other female.
- You grew up in different houses, with different rules and expectations.
- You have different personalities and different needs.

Differences can and should be a positive thing in a relationship. Differences lend variety to life and open up whole new worlds to you as you experience life through the eyes of your partner. So learn to enjoy and value your differences and use them positively. But in order to do this, you must understand where your partner is coming from. Let's look at some of the more important differences:

### i. Men and women seem to come from Different Planets.

This startling conclusion comes from the book, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" by John Gray. What led him to this belief is that men and women have such different temperaments - they react to life in very different ways. If men expect women to react like men do, and vice versa, then the relationship will simply be a disaster! Here are some of the points he makes:

- When they're upset, men go to their caves (be alone).  
When women are upset, they want to talk (share).
- A man feels he is worthwhile if he can achieve results.  
A woman feels she is worthwhile if she is happy with her feelings and has quality relationships.
- When a woman gives advice to a man without him asking for it or tries to help him, she has no idea how critical and unloving she may sound to him.  
Many times a woman just wants to share her feelings about her day, and her husband, thinking he is helping, interrupts her by offering her a steady flow of solutions.

Can you see how misunderstanding these differences could lead to conflict? On the other hand, can you see how understanding the differences could lead to a much better relationship?

Below are a few more quotes from this book. Discuss them with your fiancé/e to find out how much they apply to your specific circumstances.

A woman under stress is not immediately concerned with finding solutions to her problems but rather seeks relief by expressing herself and being understood.

A woman should not be judged for needing reassurance, just as a man should not be judged for needing to withdraw.

When negative feelings are suppressed, positive feelings are suppressed as well, and love dies.

A man wants to make solutions when he feels that he is being approached as the solution to the problem rather than as the problem itself

Men are motivated and empowered when they feel *needed*  
Women are motivated and empowered when they feel *cherished*

## ii. Different People experience Love in Different Ways.

This is the basic idea of the book, "The Five Love Languages". In this book the author describes five main ways of expressing your love for someone. The thing is, if you use the wrong language, the other person may not get it!

Take the example of a husband who is moved by love to do something really special for his wife. He goes to a florist on his way home from work and spends a long time choosing just the right bunch of flowers and writing an eloquent card to attach to them. Beaming, he comes home and surprises his wife with this gift into which he has put so much of himself.

Imagine his surprise when he finds his wife doesn't care about the flowers. She tosses them aside and starts quizzing him on why he's so late in getting home! If he'd received such a lovely bouquet of flowers and sincere card, he would have felt absolutely fabulous. But she's been worried

sick about him and her beautiful dinner has grown cold. What's worse, she's had a terrible day and has been waiting and waiting for him to get home so she could tell him about it and have a good cry on his shoulder. But the longer she had to wait, the more disappointed she got and the angrier she became with her husband.

Does this couple love one another? How is it then that they are now having a major argument? The problem is that they have misread each other, and used the wrong "love language".

- Can you work out which of the love languages is the most important for each of these two people?
- How could they have gone about their day in such a way as to effectively express their love for one another?
- What do you think would have been the result if they had done this?

## The Five Love Languages

1. Physical Touch
2. Words of Affirmation
3. Quality Time
4. Gifts

Let's apply this to your own relationship:

- Which of the love languages do you think your fiancé/e appreciates the most?
- Did you guess correctly, or did s/he actually think another love language was more important?
- If there was a difference, why was this so?
- How important are the other four love languages?
- Do you have any difficulty in expressing yourself in the main love language of your fiancé/e?
- What could you do practically to overcome this difficulty?

If you have this section useful to your relationship, the books below are strongly recommended. Get a copy and read it together with your fiancé/e. Discuss the issues the books raise. The better you understand one another, the happier your relationship will be.

*But remember, none of this will work without the basic Christian foundations of love, faith and hope. If Christ is not the centre of your life and your relationships, you will not be able to do it alone...*

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### Further Reading:

- "The Mystery of Marriage" by Mike Mason. Multnomah, Portland Oregon. 1985
- "The Five Love Languages" by Gary Chapman. Northfield Publishing, Chicago.
- "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" by John Gray. Lement / Harper Collins Publishers, London. 2003
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## HOW CAN I MAKE OUT GOD'S WILL?

*By HG Bishop Moussa, Bishop for Youth*

*From "How Can I Make Decisions?" pp. 23-25, Bishopric of Youth Affairs.*

Now we have realized that:

1. **We are weak human beings**, have limited knowledge of the present and know nothing about what is kept in store.
2. **Our will should conform to God's will**, the loving, almighty and beneficent God, with full confidence in His compassion and wisdom.
3. **We have to protect ourselves with prayer**, surrendering to God all along the way whenever we discuss any matter, to be sure that God will intervene in an appropriate way and at the right time.
4. **All one's powers must be orchestrated under God's Holy Spirit** so that conscience, mind, soul, body and community would each play its proper part to the appropriate degree.
5. **Ask God constantly, consult your spiritual father**, discuss the matter with him in a calm, objective dialogue, without any stubbornness but with a feeling of weakness, deficiency and need for constructive counsel.

After all, how can we make out what God's will is? Are there specific signs to ensure that what is decided is God's will?

### Signs

Some people may imagine that the Lord must give us miraculous or specific signs to reveal His will to us, such as a dream, a significant event, or specific words from a specific person etc. But this way is not sound in many respects because:

1. **God gave us His Holy Spirit to guide us** in the right way. So, it is not right to deal with God through superstition, fables, visions, dreams and appraisals, for He is present among us. He works within us, and is able to guide us.
2. **It is easy for Satan to interfere** in such matters, knowing how keen we are to get signs. He can give us such signs to lure us into an ambush.
3. **Possibilities of psychological self-deceit exist**. No doubt, dreams reflect one's concerns and lusts. If a man or a woman is hankering after something, even passive things, this may conquer his or her dreams. The result is disorder, even deviation.

That's why a believer should never rely on the paranormal. How many times have dreams and visions entrapped saints, who had no humility or the ability to discern between spirits? They were taken in by Satan's suggestions. In the Paradise of the Fathers, there is a special section on handling this danger. St. Anthony the Great considers distinguishing good from evil as the most important virtue, without which all other virtues turn into vices. For instance, a person may pray without any self-knowledge of his motives, and, as a consequence, may prolong the prayer in order to obtain the praise of others. The prayer then counts against the person instead of building up his life. Moreover, it entraps the one who prays in self-conceit.

It is not right that we should wait for strange signs to reveal God's will in a particular matter. We have God's Holy Spirit, our human intellect and a spiritual father. We have family, friends and acquaintances to consult.

## The Altar Lot

Some people may resort to this way of finding out God's will, but this way is often irrelevant. The only case where it is suitable is when it carries with it conditions which are difficult to meet:

1. A person should be **completely sincere** in seeking God's will, leaving the result finally and strictly to God.
2. The choice should be between **two equally viable alternatives**, it would be difficult to choose this and give up that.
3. Man should **not hesitate after knowing the result** but he should consider it final. Generally, all these conditions are difficult to fulfill in our daily lives, so man should prefer one thing to the other by the guidance of God's Spirit, by thinking and by consultation. What we generally notice is that man, after finding out the result realizes that:
  - a. He was craving for one thing, but his craving was based on wrong grounds.
  - b. He was expecting refusal for instance, but the result was approval (or vice versa) so he asks for the repetition of the lot.
  - c. He gets convinced, later, by a choice which was not chosen from the lot. Then, he becomes suspicious, and he disobeys the altar.

*That's why it would be better if we don't resort to the altar lot unless the above-mentioned terms are met. If a person becomes more confused, he has to resort to more prayers, thinking and consultation. God will settle the matter, whether one way or the other, by thousands of possible methods.*

The Apostles never resorted to the Altar Lot except:

- i. Before they were filled with the Holy Spirit.
- ii. When all the terms were exactly equal. For instance, all the conditions were equal between Joseph and Matthias (Acts 1:21-26).

Let's pray from the depths of our hearts asking for God's intervention, guidance and settlement of all matters. He will certainly intervene and make everything clear.



## Appendix II. Commandments to the Bride and Groom

*From the Coptic Orthodox Marriage Ceremony*

PRIEST        Now since you have been present at this blessed time before the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts and His Holy Altar and in the midst of this congregation, you have been joined together and united in the blessedness of matrimony. We remind both of you that our forefather who were believers in Christ and were married, were joined in blessed matrimony following the rule of monogamy. They sought to marry for procreation and to fulfill the divine command. So you too, follow in the steps of our forefathers and submit yourselves to one another in love and purity.

DEACON        *Take unto you, O bridegroom, Your bride,  
Jesus Christ Has given her to you,  
And at the hand of the priest he has given her to you,  
And blessed you both with His Holy Name.  
Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison*

PRIEST        My blessed son, may the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen you to take unto yourself your wife, in purity of heart and in sincerity. Do all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and always hasten to do that which will gladden her heart. Take care of her as her parents did in love and in humility remembering that you have been crowned with heavenly crowns and confirmed by the grace of God. Remember that if you fulfill the divine commandments which urge you to look after your wife, the Lord will bless you in all you do, because His blessing is enjoyed by those who live in harmony: He will grant you blessed children and a long peaceful life; He will bless You in this life and the hereafter.

DEACON        *Listen O bride and lend your ear,  
forsake your people and your father's home,  
for your chastity has appealed in the bridegroom,  
and he is your husband and to him you will submit.  
Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison*

PRIEST        And you, blessed daughter, and happy bride, you have heard what was commanded of your husband. So you must honour and respect him, do not disagree with him but increase your obedience to him over what was commanded many times. For you are now alone with him and he is responsible for you instead of your parents. So you must receive him with joy and cheer, do not frown in his face, observe all your obligations to him, and fear God in all you do. Because God the most high instructed you to submit to him and commanded you to obey him as you obey your parents. So obey him as our mother Sarah was obedient to our father Abraham, and used to address him "my lord." Thus God looked upon her obedience to him, blessed her, gave her Isaac in her old age, and made her offspring as the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore. So if you observed what we instructed you to do, and followed all commandments, the Lord will support you and provide for your livelihood, the blessings will descend upon your house, and He will grant you blessed children who will fill your heart with joy.

DEACON        *A pure marriage and a revered crown,  
Bless it, Our God Emmanuel,  
As You blessed the wedding of Cana of Galilee,  
For [Groom] the bridegroom and [Bride] the bride.  
Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison.*