

A CATHOLIC GUIDE TO FAMILY HAPPINESS

or
The Secret of
FAMILY
HAPPINESS

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THE FAMILY is the oldest known human institution. But today it is in trouble. The frightening spread in teenage drug abuse and immorality, the modern plague of divorce and family violence, the explosive growth in the number of single-parent families, and other serious problems make some wonder whether family life will survive.

Is it still possible for a family to be a stable, nurturing environment for its members? Yes, if family members know the real secret of family happiness. This secret is not hidden. It has been tried and tested over many, many centuries. What is it? This book, *The Guide to Family Happiness*, gives the answer. It also gives practical examples of how this "secret" can help resolve a number of challenging family situations. Is there anyone today who does not need such information?

CHAPTER ONE

Is There a Secret of Family Happiness?

THE family is the oldest institution on earth, and it plays a vital role in human society. Throughout history, strong families have helped to make strong societies. The family is the best arrangement for bringing up children to be mature adults.

IS THERE A SECRET OF FAMILY HAPPINESS?

Review Question: Why are strong families important in human society?

A happy family is a haven of safety and security. Envision the ideal family for a moment. During their evening meal, caring parents sit with their children and discuss the events of the day. Children chatter excitedly as they tell their father and mother about what happened at school. The relaxing time spent together refreshes everyone for another day in the world outside.

FAMILY HAPPINESS

In a happy family, a child knows that his father and mother will care for him when he gets sick, perhaps taking turns at his bedside through the night.

He knows that he can go to his mother or father with the problems of his young life and get advice and support. Yes, the child feels safe, no matter how trouble-filled the outside world may be.

When children grow up, they usually get married and have a family of their own. "A person realizes how indebted he is to his parents when he has a child of his own," says an Oriental proverb. With a deep sense of gratitude and love, the grown children try to make their own families happy, and they also care for their now aging parents, who delight in the company of the grandchildren.

Perhaps at this point you are thinking: 'Well, I love my family, but it is not like the one just described. My spouse and I work different schedules and hardly see each other. We talk mostly about money problems.' Or do you say, 'My children and grandchildren live in another town, and I never get to see them'? Yes, for reasons often beyond the control of those involved, much family life is less than ideal. Still, some lead happy family lives. How? Is there a secret of family happiness? The answer is yes. But before discussing what it is, we should answer an important question. **WHAT IS A FAMILY?**

But first, some Review Questions:

(a) Describe the security a child feels in a happy family.

(b) What problems are reported in some families?

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

In Western lands, most families consist of a father, a mother, and children. Grandparents may live in their own households as long as they can. While contact is kept up with more distant relatives, duties toward these are limited. Basically, this is the family that we will discuss in this book. However, other families have become increasingly common in recent years - the single-parent family, the step-family, and the family whose parents are not living together for one reason or another.

Review Question: What kind of families will be discussed in this booklet?

Common in some cultures is the extended family. In this arrangement, if possible, grandparents are routinely looked after by their children, and close ties and responsibilities extend to distant relatives. For instance, family members may help to support, raise, and even pay for the education of their nieces, nephews, or more distant relatives. The principles to be discussed in this publication apply also to extended families.

Review Question: What is the extended family?

THE FAMILY UNDER STRESS

IS THERE A SECRET OF FAMILY HAPPINESS?

Today the family is changing - sad to say, not for the better. An example is seen in India, where a wife may live with the family of her husband and work in the home under the direction of her in-laws. Nowadays, though, it is not uncommon for Indian wives to seek employment outside the home. Yet they are apparently still expected to fulfill their traditional roles in the home. The question raised in many lands is: Compared with other members of the family, how much work should a woman with an outside job be expected to do in the home?

In Oriental societies, strong extended family ties are traditional. However, under the influence of Western-style individualism and the stress of economic problems, the traditional extended family is weakening. Many, therefore, view care of aged family members as a burden rather than as a duty or a privilege. Some elderly parents are abused. Indeed, abuse and neglect of the aged are found in many countries today.

Review Question: What problems in some lands show that the family is changing?

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Divorce is becoming increasingly common. In Spain the divorce rate rose to 1 out of 8 marriages by the beginning of the final decade of the 20th century - a big jump from 1 out of 100 just 25 years before. Britain, with reportedly the highest divorce rate in Europe (4 out of 10 marriages are expected to fail), has seen a surge in the number of single-parent families.

Many in Germany seem to be abandoning the traditional family altogether. The 1990's saw 35 per-cent of all

German households made up of a single person and 31 percent made up of just two individuals. The French too are marrying less often, and those who do marry divorce more often and earlier than used to be the case. Growing numbers prefer to live together without the responsibilities of marriage. Comparable trends are seen worldwide.

Review Question: What facts show that the family is changing in European lands?

What of children? In the United States and many other lands, more and more are born out of wedlock, some to young teenagers. Many teenage girls have a number of children from different fathers. Reports from around the world tell of millions of homeless children roaming the streets; many are escaping from abusive homes or are cast out by families that can no longer support them.

Review Question: How do children suffer because of changes in the modern family?

Yes, the family is in crisis. In addition to what has already been mentioned, teenage rebellion, child abuse, spousal violence, alcoholism, and other devastating problems rob many families of happiness. For a great number of children and adults, the family is far from being a haven.

Review Question: What widespread problems rob families of happiness?

Why the family crisis? Some blame the present-day family crisis on the entry of women into the workplace. Others point to today's moral breakdown. And additional causes are cited. Almost two thousand years ago, a well-known former tent-maker, whom many regarded as a lawyer, foretold that many pressures would afflict the family, when he wrote: "Know also this, that, in the last days, shall come dangerous times. Men shall be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, haughty, proud and self-assuming, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful and unthankful, wicked and disloyal, without affection, without peace and not open to any agreement, slanderers, incontinent and without self-control, unmerciful and fierce, without kindness and the love of goodness, traitors, stubborn and head-strong, puffed up (with pride), and lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." (2 Timothy 3:1-4) Who would doubt that these words are being fulfilled today? In a world with conditions such as these, is it any wonder that many families are in crisis?

Review Questions:

(a) According to some, what are the causes of the family crisis?

(b) How did a first-century lawyer describe today's world, and what influence has the fulfillment of his words had on family life?

THE SECRET OF FAMILY HAPPINESS

IS THERE A SECRET OF FAMILY HAPPINESS?

Counsel on how to achieve happiness in the family is offered from all sides. In the West, a never-ending stream of self-help books and magazines offer advice. The problem is that human counselors contradict one another, and what is fashionable counsel today maybe viewed as unworkable tomorrow.

Where, then, can we look for reliable family guidance? Well, would you look to a book completed some 1,900 years ago? Or would you feel that a book like this must be hopelessly out-of-date? The truth is, the real secret of family happiness is found in just such a source, properly understood and explained by its custodians and authorized interpreters.

That source is the Bible. According to all the evidence, it was inspired by God himself. In the Bible we find the following statement: "All scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct or set things straight, and to instruct in justice." (2 Timothy 3:16) Every part of divine scripture is certainly profitable for all these ends. But, if we would have the whole rule of Christian faith and practice, we must not be content with those Scriptures, which Timothy knew from his infancy, that is, with the Old Testament alone: nor yet with the New Testament, without taking along with it the traditions of the apostles, and the interpretation of the Church (the Catholic Church), to which the apostles delivered both the book, and the true meaning of it. In this publication we will encourage you to consider how the Bible can help you to 'set things straight' when handling the stresses and problems facing families today.

Review Question: In this book, what authority will be pointed to as holding the secret of family happiness?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

If you are inclined to dismiss the possibility that the Bible can help to make families happy, consider this. The One who inspired the Bible is the Originator of the marriage arrangement. (Genesis 2:18-25)

The Bible says "And let them know that the Lord (The One Who Is) is Your name: You alone are the most High over all the earth." (Psalm 83: 18 [82:19 in the Vulgate]) He is the Creator and 'the Father, of whom every family in heaven and earth owes its name.' (Ephesians 3:14-15). God, our Father, has observed family life since mankind's beginning. He knows the problems that can arise and has given counsel for solving them. Throughout history, those who sincerely applied Bible principles in their family life found greater happiness.

Review Question: Why is it reasonable to accept the Bible as an authority in marriage counseling?

IS THERE A SECRET OF FAMILY HAPPINESS?

For example, a housewife in the Philippines was a compulsive gambler. For years she neglected her three children and regularly quarreled with her husband. Then she started to study the Bible. Gradually the woman came to believe what the Bible said. When she applied its counsel, she became a better wife. Her efforts, based on Bible principles, brought happiness to her entire family.

A housewife in Portugal says: "We had been married only a year when we began to have serious problems." She and her husband did not have much in common, and they spoke little except when they were arguing. Despite having a young daughter, they decided to get a legal civil separation. Before that happened, though, they were encouraged to look into the Bible. They studied its counsel for married men and women and began to apply it. Before long, they could communicate peacefully, and their small family was happily united.

The Bible helps older people too. For instance, consider the experience of a certain Korean couple. The husband was short-tempered and sometimes violent. First, the couple's daughters began to study the Bible, despite their parents' opposition. Then, the husband joined his daughters, but the wife continued to object. Over the years, however, she noticed the good effect of Bible principles on her family. Her daughters took good care of her, and her husband became much milder. Such changes moved the woman to look into the Bible for herself, and it had the same good effect on her. This elderly lady repeatedly said: "We became a real married couple."

Review Question: What modern experiences show the power of the Bible to solve marriage problems?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

These individuals are among the great many who have learned the secret of family happiness. They have accepted the Bible's counsel and have applied it. True, they live in the same violent, immoral, economically stressed world as everyone else. Moreover, they are imperfect, but they find happiness in trying to do the will of the Originator of the family arrangement. As the Bible says, God our Father is "your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, your God that teaches you profitable things, that govern you in the way that you should walk." - Isaiah 48:17.

Although the Bible was completed almost two thousand years ago, its counsel is truly up-to-date. Further, it was written for *all* people. The Bible is not an American or an English or an Australian or a Western book. God our Father "made out of one man of one, all mankind, to dwell upon the whole face of the earth, determining appointed times, and the limits of their habitation," and He knows the makeup of humans everywhere. (Acts 17:26) Bible principles work for everyone. If you apply them, you too will come to know the secret of family happiness.

Review Question: How does the Bible help people of all national backgrounds to find happiness in their family life?

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

What is happening to the family today?

-2 Timothy 3:1-4.

Know also this, that, in the last days, shall come dangerous times. Men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasures more than of God:

Who originated the family arrangement?

- Ephesians 3:14-15.

For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all fatherhood and every family in

heaven and earth is named.

What is the secret of family happiness?

- Isaiah 48:17.

Thus says the Lord your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the Lord your God that teaches you profitable things, that govern you in the way that you (should) walk.'

CHAPTER TWO

Preparing for a Successful Marriage

CONSTRUCTING a building requires careful preparation. Before the foundation is laid, land must be acquired and plans drawn up. However, something else is vital. Jesus said: "For which of you having a mind to build a tower, does not first sit down, and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he has wherewithal to finish it?" - Luke 14:28.

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

What is true of constructing a building also applies to constructing a successful marriage. Many say: "I want to get married." But how many stop to consider the cost? While the Bible speaks favorably of marriage, it also draws attention to the challenges that marriage presents. (Proverbs 18:22; 1 Corinthians 7:28) Therefore, those contemplating marriage need to have a realistic view of both the blessings and the costs of being married.

Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments instituted by Christ Himself.

Review Questions:

- (a) How did Jesus stress the importance of planning?
- (b) In what field particularly is planning vital?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

The Bible can help. Its counsel is inspired by the Originator of marriage, God our Father. (Ephesians 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 3:16) Using the principles found in this ancient yet very up-to-date guidebook, let us determine

- (1) How can a person tell whether he or she is ready for marriage?
- (2) What should be looked for in a mate? And
- (3) How can courtship be kept honorable?

Review Question: Why is the Bible a valuable aid to those planning for marriage, and what three questions will it help us to answer?

ARE YOU READY FOR MARRIAGE?

Constructing a building may be expensive, but caring for its long-term maintenance is costly as well. It is similar with marriage. Getting married seems challenging enough; however, maintaining a marital relationship year after year must also be considered. What does maintaining such a relationship entail? A vital factor is a wholehearted commitment. Here is how the Bible describes the marriage relationship: "A man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to [stick to] his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) Jesus Christ forbade divorce and the Church has followed in his footsteps, though at times permitting separation without the possibility of remarriage while the partners are alive. (See 1 Corinthians 7:11)

This is such an important element of marriage that it is worth quoting our Lord's teaching in its full context from Matthew chapter 19 verses 3 to 9.

"There came to him the Pharisees tempting him, and saying: 'Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?' [that is 'for any pretext whatever?'] Answering, Jesus said to them: 'Have you all not read, that He who made man from the beginning, 'made them male and female?' And that He said: "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh."

"Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

They say to him: 'Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce, and to put away? Jesus said to them: 'Because Moses by reason of the hardness of your heart permitted you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery: and he that shall marry her that is put away, commits adultery.' (Matthew 19: 3 -9.)

The exception that Jesus mentions points to a type of 'uncleanness', which invalidates the original marriage contract and is the basis for the Church's investigation of some marriages to see whether they should be annulled. Annulment is not divorce.

If you are contemplating marriage, bear these Scriptural standards in mind. If you are not ready for this solemn commitment, then you are not ready for marriage. – See Deuteronomy 23:21(verse 22 in some versions); 'When you have made a vow to the Lord your God [including the marriage vow], you shall not delay to pay it: because the Lord your God will require it. And if you delay, it shall be imputed to you for a sin.'

See also Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5.

Review Question: What is a vital factor in maintaining a successful marriage, and why?

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

The idea of a solemn commitment frightens many. "Knowing that the two of us were stuck together for life made me feel pushed into a corner, closed in, totally confined," confessed one young man. But if you really love the person you intend to marry, commitment will not seem like a burden. Instead, it will be viewed as a source of security. The sense of commitment implied in marriage will make a couple want to stay together through good times and bad and to be supportive of each other come what may. The Christian apostle Paul wrote that true love "bears all things" and "endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7) "The commitment of marriage makes me feel more secure," says one woman. "I love the comfort of having admitted to ourselves and the world that we intend to stick together." – Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

Review Question: Although the solemn commitment of marriage frightens some, why should it rather be highly valued by those intending to marry?

Living up to such a commitment requires maturity. Thus, many read Paul's counsels about young Christian virgins as advise that they do better not to marry until they are past the bloom of youth; the period when sexual feelings run strong and can distort one's judgment (1 Corinthians 7:36) In fact Paul regarded virginity given to the Lord as a great blessing. Read all of chapter 7 of this letter with a good Catholic commentary to see the depth of Paul's insight. Let's think some more about maturity. Young people change rapidly as they grow up. Many who marry when very young find that after just a few years their needs and desires, as well as those of their mate, have changed. Statistics sadly reveal that teenagers who marry are much more likely to be unhappy and seek divorce than those who wait a little longer. So do not rush into marriage. Some years spent living as a young, single adult can give you precious experience that will make you more mature and better qualified to be a suitable mate. Waiting to get married can also help you to understand yourself better-a necessity if you are to develop a successful relationship in your marriage.

Review Question: Why is it best not to rush into marriage at a young age?

KNOW YOURSELF FIRST

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Do you find it easy to list the qualities you want in a mate? Most do. However, what about your own qualities? What traits do you have that will help you contribute to a successful marriage? What type of husband or wife will you be? For example, do you freely admit your mistakes and accept advice, or are you always defensive when corrected? Are you generally cheerful and optimistic, or do you tend to be gloomy, frequently complaining? (Proverbs 8:33 says 'Hear instruction and be wise, and refuse it not.' Proverbs 15:15 says: 'All the days of the sorrowing are wretched, but the cheerful and joyous heart has a continual feast.') Remember, marriage will not change your personality. If you are proud, oversensitive, or overly pessimistic when single, you will be the same when married. Since it is difficult to see ourselves the way others see us, why not ask a parent or a trusted friend for frank comments and suggestions? If you learn of changes that could be made, work on these before taking steps to marry.

Review Question: Why should those planning to get married examine themselves first?

PEPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

The Bible encourages us to let God's Holy Spirit work in us, producing qualities such as "love (or charity), joy,

peace, long-suffering (or patience), kindness, goodness, trustfulness, faith, mildness, self-control, modesty, and chastity.” (Galatians 5:22, 23) It also tells us to “be renewed in the spirit of [our] mind,” and to put on the new man [the new self], who according to God’s will is created in justice and holiness of truth.” (Ephesians 4:23, 24) Applying this counsel while you are still single will be like depositing money in the bank—something that will prove very valuable in the future, when you do marry.

For example, if you are a woman, learn to pay more attention to "the secret person of the heart" than you do to your physical appearance. “A woman’s adorning - let it not be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel: - but the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit, which is rich in the sight of God.” (1 Peter 3:3, 4) Modesty and soundness of mind will help you to have wisdom, a true "crown of beauty," “the noble crown” (Proverbs 4:9; 31:10 & 30, First Timothy 2:9, & 10) If you are a man, learn to treat women in a kind and respectful way as you would your mother or sisters. (1 Timothy 5:1, 2) While learning to make decisions and shoulder responsibility, learn also to be modest and humble. A domineering attitude will lead to trouble in a marriage. - Proverbs 29:23; Micah 6:8: Ephesians 5:28, 29.

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Although remodeling our lives in conformity with these guidelines from God in these areas is not easy, it is something all Christians should work on. Moreover it will help you to be a better marriage partner.

Review Question: What counsel does the Bible give that will help an individual to prepare for marriage?

A NOTE ON CUSTOMS AND THE BIBLE

Bride Price and Dowry: In some lands the groom’s family is expected to give money to the bride’s family (bride-price). In others, the bride’s family gives money to the groom’s (dowry). There may be nothing wrong with these customs as long as they are legal. (Romans 13:1 says ‘Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God’.) However, in either case, the receiving family should avoid greedily demanding more money or goods than is reasonable. (Proverbs 20:21 says: ‘The inheritance gotten hastily in the beginning, in the end shall be without a blessing’. First Corinthians 6:10 says: ‘Neither the effeminate, nor the sodomites with mankind, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortionists, shall possess the kingdom of God.) Further, the paying of bride-price should never be construed to imply that a wife is simply purchased property; nor should a husband feel that his only responsibility toward his wife and his in-laws is a financial one.

Polygamy: Some cultures allow a man to take more than one wife. In such an atmosphere, the man may become an overlord rather than a husband and father. Furthermore, polygamous marriage often fosters competition among wives. For Christians, the Bible allows only singleness or monogamy. - 1 Corinthians 7:2-4 says. ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But for fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render the debt to his wife, and the wife also in like manner to the husband. The wife has not power of her own body, but the husband. And in like manner the husband also has not power of his own body, but the wife.’ "Have his own wife" (in verse 2). . . That is, keep to his wife, which he has. Paul’s meaning is not to exhort the unmarried to marry: on the contrary, he would have them rather continue as they are. (Verses 7 and 8.) But he speaks here to them that are already married; who must not depart from one another, but live together as they ought to do in the marriage state.

Trial Marriage: Many couples claim that living together before marriage will help them test out their compatibility. Yet, trial marriage does not test one of the most crucial elements of marriage commitment. No arrangement other than marriage offers the same degree of protection and security to all parties including any children that may result from the union. In the eyes of God our Father, living together consensually without the benefit of marriage is fornication. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says; ‘Fly fornication. Every sin that a man does, is without the body; but he that commits fornication, sins against his own body.’ Hebrews 13:4 says ‘Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.’”

A HANDY HINT

While still single, develop qualities, habits, and abilities that will serve you well in marriage.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MATE

Is it customary where you live for a person to choose his or her own marriage mate? In some places this is not the case. But, if it is so, how should you proceed if you find someone of the opposite sex attractive? First, ask yourself, 'Is marriage really my intention?' It is cruel to play with another person's emotions by raising false expectations. (Proverbs 13:12) Then, ask yourself, 'Am I in a position to get married?' If the answer to both questions is positive, the steps you take next will vary depending on local custom. In some lands, after observing for a while, you might approach the person and express a desire to get better acquainted. If the response is negative, do not persist to the point of being objectionable. Remember, the other person also has a right to make a decision in the matter. If, however, the response is positive, you may arrange to spend time together in wholesome activities. This will give you an opportunity to see whether marriage to this person would be wise. (Note: This would apply in lands where dating is considered appropriate for Christians. (There are some cultures where 'dating' is NOT a socially acceptable custom.)

What should you look for at this stage?

To answer that question, imagine two musical instruments, perhaps a piano and a guitar. If they are correctly tuned, either one can produce beautiful solo music. Yet, what happens if these instruments are played together? Now they must be in tune with each other. It is similar with you and a prospective mate. Each of you may have worked hard to "tune" your personality traits as individuals. But the question now is: Are you in tune with each other? In other words, are you compatible?

Review Question: How may two people find out whether or not they are compatible?

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It is important that both of you have common beliefs and principles. The apostle Paul wrote: "Bear not the yoke with unbelievers. For what participation has justice with injustice? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). In 1 Corinthians 7:39 he wrote: "A woman is bound by the law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband die, she is at liberty: let her marry to whom she will; only in the Lord." Marriage to someone who does not share your faith in God makes it more likely that there will be severe disharmony. On the other hand, a mutual devotion to God our Father, through Jesus Christ Our Lord in the One, Holy and Catholic Church which He founded, is the strongest basis for unity. God our Father wants you to be happy and to enjoy the closest possible bond with the person you marry. He wants you to be bound to Him and to each other by a threefold bond of love, husband, wife and our Redeemer.

– See Ecclesiastes 4:12 and Bishop Sheen's *"Three to Get Married"*.

Review Question: Why is it very unwise to court someone who does not share your faith?

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

While worshipping God together is the most important aspect of unity, more is involved. To be attuned to each other, you and your prospective mate should have similar goals. What are your goals? For example, how do you both feel about having children? Children, after all, are the second of the purposes that God gave us marriage. What things have the first place in your life? (Remember that Jesus said in Matthew 6:33: 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.')

NOTE: Even within the Catholic Church, the true Christian congregation, there may be some, indeed sadly there are so many, who live on the fringes, as it were, instead of being wholehearted servants of God. They may be influenced by the attitudes and conduct of the world. – Remember Jesus had said 'I have manifested Your name, Father, to those whom You have given me out of the world. Yours they were, and to me You gave them; and they have kept Your word ... They are not of the world, as I also am not of the world. (John 17:6 and 16); Bear in mind what James wrote in his letter, sobering words which call us to prayer and repentance: 'Adulterers, know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

In a truly successful marriage, the couple are good friends and enjoy each other's company. (See Proverbs 17:17) For this, they need to have interests in common. It is difficult to sustain a close friendship - much less a marriage - when this is not the case. Still, if your prospective partner enjoys a particular activity, such as hiking, and you do not, does that mean that the two of you should not get married? Not necessarily. Perhaps you share other, more important interests. Moreover, you might give happiness to your prospective partner by sharing in wholesome activities because the other person enjoys them. – "remember the word of the Lord Jesus, how he said: 'It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive'." Acts 20:35.

Indeed, to a large degree, compatibility is determined by how adaptable both of you are rather than by how identical you are. Instead of asking, "Do we agree on everything?" some better questions might be: "What happens when we disagree? Can we discuss matters calmly, according each other respect and dignity? Or do discussions often deteriorate into heated arguments?" ("Let no evil speech proceed from your mouth; but only that which is good, to the edification of faith, that it may administer grace to the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God: whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and anger, and indignation, and clamour, and blasphemy, be put away from you, along with all malice. Ephesians 4:29-31) If you want to get married, be wary of anyone who is proud and opinionated, never willing to compromise, or who constantly demands and schemes to have his or her own way.

Review Question: Is having the same faith the only aspect of unity in a marriage? Explain.

FIND OUT BEFOREHAND

In the Church, the Christian congregation, St Paul says that those who are entrusted with responsibility are to be "first tested and proved as to fitness." (1 Timothy 3:10) You too can employ this principle. For example, a woman might ask, "What kind of reputation does this man have? Who are his friends? Does he display self-control? How does he treat elderly persons? What kind of family does he come from? How does he interact with them? What is his attitude toward money? Does he abuse alcoholic beverages? Is he temperamental, even violent? What church and parish responsibilities does he have, and how does he handle them? Could I deeply respect him?"

FAMILY HAPPINESS

– How does he compare to ideals shown in these Bible standards?

‘Rise up before grey hairs and the hoary head, and honour the person of the aged man: and fear the Lord your God for I am the Lord’. - Leviticus 19:32;

‘Have you seen a man swift in his work? He shall stand before kings, and shall not have to serve before those that are obscure.’ - Proverbs 22:29.

‘Her husband is honourable in the gates, when he sits among the chief men of the land.’ - Proverbs 31:23;

‘Be you all therefore followers of God, as His most dear children; Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has delivered himself for us, as an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness. But as for fornication, and all impurity, or covetousness, let it not so much as be named among you, as it is fitting for the saints: There must be no obscenity, or foolish or salacious talking nor rude joking, which is to no purpose; but rather let there be the giving of thanks. For know you this and understand it, that no fornicator, or impure person, or covetous person (which is a serving of idols and false gods), has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. . . . Nevertheless let every one of you in particular love his wife as himself: and let the wife respect her husband.’ - Ephesians 5:1-5, 33;

‘But if any man does not care for his own relations, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.’ - 1 Timothy 5:8:

‘For the love and desire of money is the root of all evils; which some, in coveting, have wandered from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.’

- 1 Timothy 6:10;

As for the young men, in like manner, exhort them that they be sober. In all things show yourself as an example of good works, in doctrine, in integrity, and in earnestness.

- Titus 2:6, 7.

A man might ask, "Does this woman display love and respect for God? Is she capable of caring for a home? What will her family expect of us? Is she wise, industrious, thrifty? What does she talk about? Is she genuinely concerned about the welfare of others, or is she self-centered, a busy-body? Is she trustworthy? Is she willing to submit to true Christian headship, or is she stubborn, perhaps even rebellious?"

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

– How does she compare to ideals shown in these Bible standards?

Have a read of the beautiful Old Testament poem dedicated to the ‘Perfect Wife’, ‘The Woman Who Is Wise’ - Proverbs 31:10-31;

Jesus said: ‘A good person, out of the good treasure of their hearts, brings forth that which is good: and an evil person, out of the evil treasures, brings forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks’. Luke 6:45;

‘Be subject one to another, in the fear of Christ. Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord: Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. He is the saviour of His body. Therefore the church is subject to Christ.’

Ephesians 5: 21-23; "Subject" is a translation of the Greek word for "give way to"

[Some foolish women] are withal being idle, and they learn to go about from house to house: and are not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.' - 1 Timothy 5:13;
'But let none of you [as true followers of Christ] suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a criminal or a gossiper, or a coveter of other men's things.' - 1 Peter 4:15.

Review Question: What might a man or a woman look for when considering a prospective marriage mate?

Do not forget that you are dealing with an imperfect descendant of Adam, not some idealized hero or heroine out of a romance novel. Everyone has shortcomings, and some of these will have to be overlooked - both yours and those of your prospective partner. ('For all have sinned, and do need the glory of God.' Romans 3:23; 'For in many things we all offend. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man. He is able also with a bridle to lead about the whole body.' James 3:2) Further, a perceived weakness can present an opportunity to grow. For example, suppose during your courtship you have an argument. Consider: Even people who love and respect each other disagree at times. (Compare Genesis 30:2 about Jacob and Rachel; or Acts 15:39 about St Paul with St Barnabas and St Mark.) Could it be that both of you simply need to 'restrain your spirit' a little more and learn how to settle matters more peacefully? (Proverbs 25:28 says 'As a city that lies open and is not compassed with walls, so is a man that cannot refrain his own spirit in speaking.') Does your prospective mate show a desire to improve? Do you? Could you learn to be less sensitive, less touchy?

(Ecclesiastes 7:9 says: 'Better is the end of a speech than the beginning. Better is the patient man than the presumptuous.') Learning to resolve problems can establish a pattern of honest communication that is essential if the two of you do get married.

- Colossians 3: 13 says 'Bear with one another, and forgive one another, if any have a complaint against another: even as the Lord has forgiven you, so do you also.

Review Question: If minor weaknesses are perceived during courtship, what should be borne in mind?

What, though, if you notice things that trouble you deeply? Such doubts should be considered carefully. However romantic you may feel or however anxious you may be to get married, do not close your eyes to serious faults. (Proverbs 22:3; Ecclesiastes 2:14) If you have a relationship with someone about whom you have serious reservations, it is wise to discontinue the relationship and to refrain from making a lasting commitment to that person.

Review Question: What would be a wise course of action if serious problems surface during courtship?

KEEP YOUR COURTSHIP HONORABLE

How can you keep your courtship honorable?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

First, make sure that your moral conduct is above reproach. Where you live, is holding hands, kissing, or embracing considered appropriate behavior for unmarried couples? Even if such expressions of affection are not frowned upon, wisdom would seem to indicate that they should be allowed only when the relationship has reached a point where marriage is definitely planned. Be careful that displays of affection do not escalate into unclean (that is impure) conduct or even fornication.

(See Ephesians 4:18, 19: '[Pagans] have their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts. They despair, and have given themselves up to lasciviousness, unto the working of all uncleanness and indecency, and unto covetousness.'

You can compare Song of Solomon 1:2; 2:6; 8:5, 9, & 10 where at one level we see the poetry of love between the Bride and Bridegroom, between 'my love' and 'my beloved'. [Find a good Catholic commentary on this fascinating book to discover all the allegorical meanings contained in this inspired book including the mutual love of Christ and His Church, or to the union of the individual soul with God, or the relationship of God and Israel in addition to its more obvious literal meaning.])

Because the heart is treacherous, both of you would be wise to avoid being isolated in a house, an apartment, a parked automobile, or anywhere else that would give opportunity for wrong conduct. (See Jeremiah 17:9) Keeping your courtship morally clean gives clear evidence that you have self-control and that you put unselfish concern for the other person's welfare ahead of your own desires. Most important, a clean courtship will please God our Father, who commands his servants to abstain from uncleanness and fornication.

- Galatians 5:19-21 says: 'Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, jealousies, wraths, quarrels, dissensions, sects, envies, murders,

drunkenness, orgies, and such like. Of these things I foretell you now, as I have foretold to you before, that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God.

Review Question: How can a courting couple keep their moral conduct above reproach?

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Second, an honorable courtship also includes honest communication. As your courtship progresses toward marriage, certain matters will need to be discussed openly. Where will you live? Will both of you work secularly? Do you want to have children? (Remember that the purpose of marriage is ordered to the procreation of children. Many couples will find themselves unable to conceive, but an openness to the possibility is an essential element to an authentic marriage.) Also, it is only fair to reveal things, perhaps in one's past, that could affect the marriage. These may include major debts or obligations or health matters, such as any serious disease or condition you may have (including a known diagnosis of infertility). Since many persons who are infected with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) show no immediate symptoms, it would not be wrong for an individual or for caring parents to request an AIDS blood test of one who has in the past engaged in sexual promiscuity or was an intravenous drug user or, indeed, if the family background indicates there might be some genetic risk of AIDS for instance from the mother's breast milk or at the time of the birth. If the test proves positive, the infected person should not pressure the intended mate to continue the relationship if that one now wishes to terminate it. Really, anyone who has engaged in a high risk life style would do well to submit voluntarily to an AIDS blood test before beginning a courtship. Remember that God loves every repentant sinner and that many infected with AIDS have still found their God-given partner for married life. Do not neglect, no matter what your situation, to pray to God to send you're the partner He has chosen for you if your vocation is to the married life.

Review Question: What honest communication may be needed in order to keep courtship honorable?

LOOKING BEYOND THE WEDDING

During the final months before the marriage, both of you will likely be very busy with arranging for the wedding. You can alleviate much of the tension by being moderate. An elaborate wedding may please relatives and the community, but it may leave newlyweds and their families physically exhausted and financially drained. Some adherence to local customs is reasonable, but slavish and perhaps competitive conformity can overshadow the meaning of the occasion and may rob you of the joy that you should have. While the feelings of others must be considered, the groom is primarily responsible for deciding what will go on at the wedding feast. – See John 2:9 for an example.

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Remember that your wedding lasts just one day, but your marriage lasts a lifetime. Avoid concentrating too much on the act of *getting* married. Instead, look to God our Father for guidance, and plan ahead for a life of *being* married. Then you will have prepared well for a successful marriage.

Review Questions:

- (a) How could balance be lost when preparing for a wedding?
- (b) What balanced view should be maintained when considering the wedding and the marriage?

HOW CAN THESE BIBLE PRINCIPLES HELP. . .

A PERSON TO PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE?

A husband and wife
must be committed to each other.
-Genesis 2:24.

The inner person (the 'heart') (the 'spirit' or 'soul') is more important
than external appearance.
-1 Peter 3:3, & 4.

"Bear not the yoke with unbelievers."
-2 Corinthians 6:14.

Morally unclean people are alienated from God.
- Ephesians 4:18-19.

