

# A **Mission** to *love*



## Overview

On a Mission to Love  
Sexuality: a Resource  
for Loving

The Power of Affirmation  
Introducing Formation

## Key Concepts

- Marriage is a vocation, a clear and proactive mission to convince the other that they are loved and lovable.
- Affirmation is an empowering and life-giving way to communicate love and acceptance.
- Sexuality is a positive force that draws us to each other and brings out our masculine and feminine virtues.
- Masculinity and femininity are developed in relationship beginning in our family of origin.



# On a mission to love

## Prayer

Father,

We thank you for sending us to each other and for this opportunity to learn how to bring each other your love and joy.

Please bless this time and grant us insight and clarity of vision.

We ask this through Jesus, our Lord,  
Amen.

In choosing to marry in the church, you place yourselves in a special category of couples with high ambitions and ideals for your marriage. You will also enhance your potential to achieve them through the graces of the sacrament.

There is a significant difference between the models of secular marriage and marriage in the church. One of the reasons for the high divorce rate among those married civilly is that all too often the goal is simply to get along and not to fight too much. It's rather like a student who is only aiming to pass, if you miss the mark by even a little, you are already in trouble. You are likely to fail.

The Church has a better idea: make marriage your vocation, your whole life's work. Convince this man that he is loved and lovable; convince this woman that she is loved and lovable. That's the job description. Actually, it is more like a mission, and if you approach it with a pro-active mindset, you can take it on with confidence and enthusiasm. You can dedicate all of your talents and intellect toward achieving your goal.

The church asks you to put your whole self into this vocation, as a total gift of self-donation. Fifty-fifty doesn't really work, because it leads us to hold back and to keep

score. Self-donation implies that we choose it and choose it freely. This is being pro-active. We don't have to wait for the other to lead. We each take responsibility for our mission to love.

Our potential to love our whole life long is all in our will: we choose it, and we are freer than we think to make choices that will be good for us. It is not that difficult or mysterious once we clarify the mission, clear away the obstacles, identify our resources, and make the most of them.

A vocation is a life choice to which God calls us. He is therefore always eager to send the grace to help us get the job done. So, in marriage, we can pray for passion, enthusiasm, or perhaps an affirming spirit, and we are assured of God's help. We cannot miss. He is as anxious to provide what we need as a mother whose teenager asks for the vacuum to clean his room.

It is the Lord's deepest desire that we love one another as he has loved us. The Father sends us to each other to effect His purposes, especially when we draw out each other's goodness and affirm each other's virtue.

It is always difficult to see ourselves objectively or in perspective. In fact, we cannot even see ourselves physically without a mirror. We can only see ourselves clearly through the eyes of those who love us.

For our part, if we keep our eyes focused on the other's masculine or feminine virtue we will not only be drawn to them, but we will feel blessed to be theirs. It will cultivate gratitude and generosity.

The reality is that if you are looking for faults in each other, you will surely find them. Equally so, if you are looking for virtue you will find that too. The more you affirm the good that you see the more that good will be drawn out, and the more you will feel wealthy in love.



# Sexuality

## a resource for loving

One of the fundamental things we bring into marriage is who we are in terms of both the “nature” and “nurture” aspects of being a man or a woman. Physiological maleness or femaleness is universally hardwired into brain structure, organ development, and hormone levels. It is literally stamped on every cell of our bodies; whereas, masculinity and femininity are only developed and revealed in relationships. As relational qualities, they cannot be universally defined.

In general, **Sexuality** is our ability to be attracted out of ourselves into relationship with the opposite sex and our attractiveness to the opposite sex. When we are attracted, we tend to bring out our virtue, that is, what we like best about ourselves. It follows

that each woman’s unique **femininity** will be the sum total of all the virtue drawn out of her in relationship with all of the men and boys in her life. Likewise a man’s **masculinity** can only be defined in terms of what is drawn out of him in relationship to the women and girls in his life. So, our masculinity or femininity is unique to each of us, as unique as our relationships are.

A couple’s sexuality, their attraction and attractiveness to each other, is not just physical.<sup>1</sup> Sexuality draws us out of ourselves in relationship with the other. It is other-centered rather than self-centered, and we are at our best when we allow ourselves to be attracted. What’s more, when the atmosphere between us is conscious of the other as “man” or “woman,” the work of marriage becomes fun. We are naturally more tender, generous, attentive and responsive.

## Stories of the heart

I remember how hurt I was when my husband did not rush to my side the first time I cried in our marriage. I expected him to respond the way that I would, and I interpreted his response as a lack of caring. I did not realize that he felt like a failure when I was upset or angry. In the face of failure, my husband withdraws inside himself or seeks to do something at which he can be successful as an escape. Once I let go of my expectation that he be drawn to me like a woman would tend to do, I did not take offense. I also learned how to counter the feelings of failure in him by reassuring him; so that, he did not feel blamed for my feelings and this made it easier for him listen to me.

### Reflection point

What did you first find attractive about your fiancé(e)?

What was it about him or her that you first fell in love with?

When did you know you wanted to marry him or her?

# Viva la difference

We are created intrinsically male or female which impacts our way of loving and our propensity toward specific virtues in relationship.

**Male physiology is wired for action.** Men sense direction using the hippocampus, spatial relations develop earlier in males, and surges to the limbic system can cause a man to literally spring into action in crisis. Even his retina is thicker with more “m ganglions” that track motion and direction through space. Men are testosterone loaded with a drive to conquer, go forward, provide, and protect. They naturally prefer to process emotions physically rather than verbally, and are gifted with a desire to build, win, and solve problems. Masculine virtue in relationship is often willing to sacrifice for the common good, do the greater physical labor, or take heroic risk. Because men generally see virtue in terms of strength and sin in terms of weakness, strength of character, honesty, competence, integrity, or principled behavior can be ways of loving for a man. He will tend to feel most loved when his strength is needed or appreciated and physical expressions of love are likely to be most natural and powerful for men.

**Female physiology is finely tuned for human interactions.** Her retina has more “p ganglions” to interpret facial expressions, color, and texture. Female hearing is more sensitive in the range of sound where human voices lie. Women are estrogen laden. They are gifted with a natural ability to nurture and are urgently drawn to respond to those in tears, in need, or in pain. Direct pathways from the amygdale to the language centers are formed earlier in girls making it easier for them to express their feelings verbally and to empathize. The female brain is globally organized with more connectors between the frontal lobes; so that, women can be naturally responsive and adjust to change. Feminine virtue tends to be personal and attentive in relationship. Because women see virtue in terms of beauty and sin in terms of ugliness or shame, they will likely express love through beautiful words, thoughtful or compassionate deeds, and by making things beautiful. They will typically feel most loved when they are listened to, understood, and cherished.

### Foot note:

1. “Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in more general ways, the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2332.



# Affirmation

Consistent, sincere affirmation has the capacity to heal the wounds of inadequacy from which so many of us suffer. It communicates acceptability and loveliness. It lifts us up, and helps us feel better about ourselves. However, the power of affirmation is not limited to the recipient only. The person making the affirmation is also transformed. We become more optimistic, and we're more fun to be with. Looking for and affirming the goodness in the other lifts our spirit and cultivates an attitude of gratitude and generosity in us.

Conversely, criticism damages the sense of worthiness in our partner. It works against our mission to love and to communicate our partner's acceptability. When we criticize the other, we also damage our own spirit; instead of focusing on our blessings, we see only his or her inadequacies. Criticism saps the enjoyment out of our life, and is like a poison to a marriage.

We are certainly not saying that we should avoid correcting mistakes or confronting problems, but it is important to do so with an affirming spirit.

**There is a distinct difference between criticism and correction.** Criticism assigns a negative motive or implies an innate inadequacy in the other. It

is aimed at the personhood and is negative. Correction is a simple truthful statement that assumes virtue or goodwill in the other and is aimed only at objective facts.

An example of simple correction would be: "Gosh honey you must have forgotten, we are flying into San Diego not Los Angeles. We better change that car rental reservation". A critical way of saying the same thing would be: "If you were paying attention and taking some responsibility you would have noticed that our tickets say San Diego not Los Angeles. Now we don't have a car! Can't you ever do anything right?" Even words that are intended to be simple correction can come across as criticism if we use a tone of voice that is accusatory, exasperated, or disrespectful. It is all in our attitude.

Affirmation is an attitude and a posture of the heart that is focused on the other's virtue and is filled with tender respect and gratitude for their love. As husbands and wives, one of the greatest gifts we can give each other is to communicate God's unconditional love and acceptance by intentionally affirming each other.

## Stories of the heart

If I were to look for my husband's faults I am sure I could find some, but instead, when I keep my focus on his masculine virtue, his honesty and sincerity and the way that he sacrifices for me, I not only melt and act more generously toward him, but I feel so grateful and blessed to have such a wonderful husband. It changes the whole atmosphere between us when we affirm each other as man or woman. It gets me out of myself and more in love with him.

## Deus Caritas Est

"Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united;...Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh...the spirit and body would both lose their dignity...Should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would lose his greatness."

Benedict XVI

## Song of Songs

You have ravished my heart,  
my sister, my bride;  
you have ravished my heart  
with one glance of your eyes,  
with one bead of your necklace.

How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride ...

My lover is radiant and ruddy;  
he stands out among thousands.

His stature is like the trees on Lebanon,  
imposing as the cedars.

His mouth is sweetness itself;  
he is all delight.

Such is my lover, and such my friend,  
O daughters of Jerusalem.

(Songs 4:9-10, 5:10,15-16)

## Skill #1: daily affirmation

Build your relationship on a steady diet of affirmation with this simple daily exercise. At least once a day, tell each other one thing that you appreciate or find endearing or attractive about the other.

What I most appreciate about you today is...



# Introducing formation homework

This exercise is designed to help you see clearly the pictures in your brain, your perceptions or notions of what is normal. These are your unconscious expectations of the dynamic between a husband and a wife.

Even if your parents were extraordinarily happy in their marriage, what worked for them was unique to their relationship. It does not necessarily follow that their behavior patterns will model the best way for you to love your spouse. You will have your own unique relationship with someone who is very special and very different from the person your Mom or Dad married. **The purpose of this exercise is to begin to set you free to love your fiancé(e) and future spouse the way they most need and want to be loved.**

Your **Direct Formation** is the unconscious learned behavior you accepted without question or perhaps adopted without noticing, like an accent or gesture. **Oppositional Formation** happens when you see something that turns you off or offends you and you do the opposite out of a kind of knee-jerk reaction. Neither are freely chosen behaviors. The ideal is to be free to choose to love the way the other wants to be loved.

This is not an objective, or analytical exercise. Just note your immediate reaction to each of the questions. Take your best guess at answering as many of the questions as possible.

If you come from an intact marriage, that is, Mom and Dad stayed together, answer the questions based on your **perceptions** of their relationship. We are not interested in what

may have actually been going on between them; that is their business, but what you **thought** was going on is your business because you carry that into your marriage. The reality is irrelevant, because it is not reality that formed you. It was your **perception** of what was happening that formed your attitudes and expectations.

If your parent's were divorced or if you lost a parent early in life, answer the questions in terms of the general attitudes toward the opposite sex of the parent you lived with and his or her significant relationships with the opposite sex, a father, brother, friend, or boyfriend.

It may be that you are marrying late in life, or that this is a second marriage for one or both of you. In the case of a second marriage, it is important to examine how what you observed in your family of origin affected your behavior in your first marriage. It can be enlightening and liberating to see what was really going on in the first marriage, what your reaction was to that dynamic, and it's subsequent effect on your present relationship. It will be very helpful to work on forgiveness and closure where necessary in order to be free to love whole-heartedly and to fully trust again.

Even if we left home a very long time ago, there is no doubt that we took 'home' with us.



## Stories of the heart

When I heard our six year old son exclaim that "Daddies don't cry" I was taken aback. I do cry, and I have cried in the presence of the children before, but it seems that he had never experienced this part of me. 'Daddies don't cry' wasn't true of me, but it *was* true of his experience of me. I made a mental note to be sure that my son, at some stage, had the opportunity to see some of my weakness and softness as well as my strength and constancy.

### Homework preparation

What was the situation in your family of origin: Do you come from an intact marriage, single parent, widowed, divorced or re-married?

What was the most significant marital relationship during your growing up?

.....  
 .....

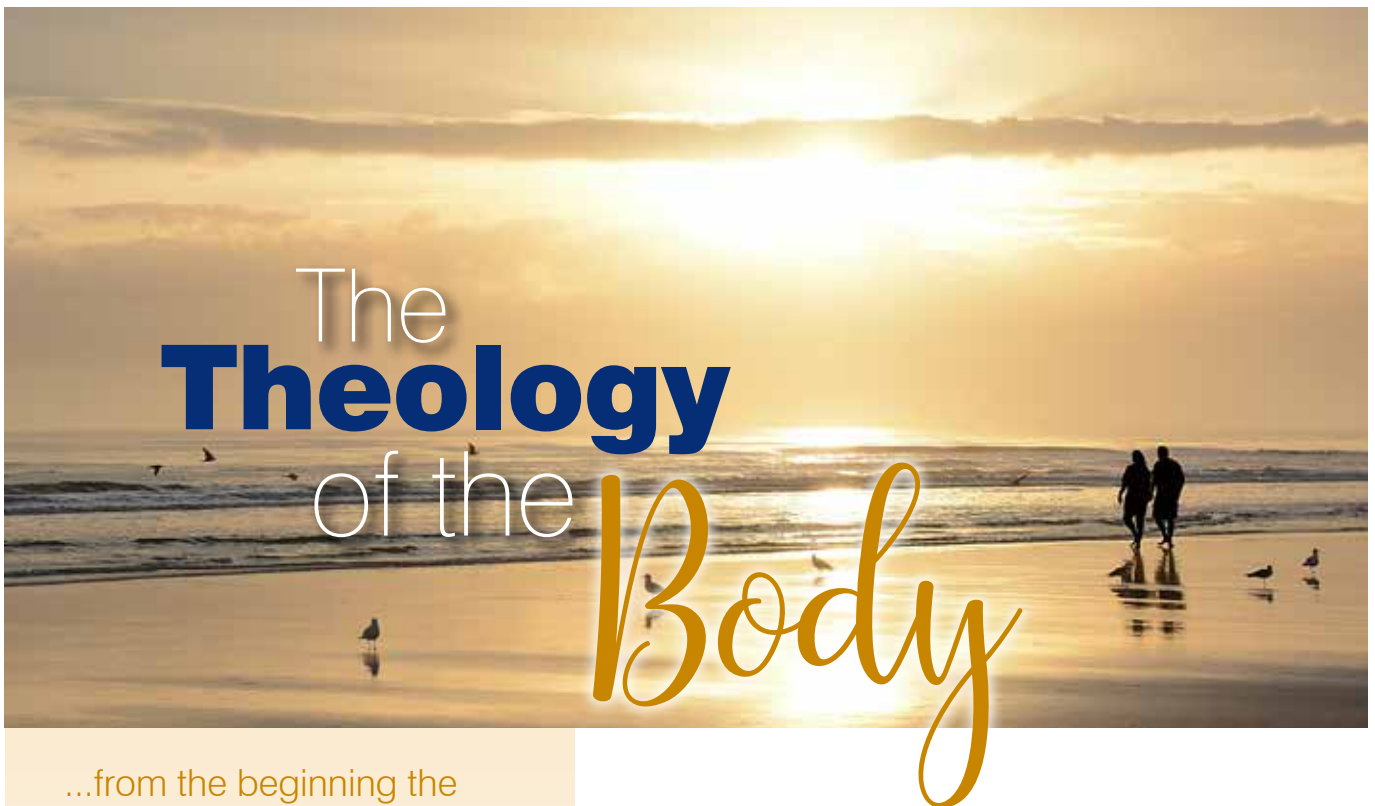
Who was the most significant father figure?

.....  
 .....

Who was the most significant mother figure?

.....  
 .....

Keep these relationships in mind as you examine your formation for marriage in your homework.



...from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'

Mt19:3

### Viva la difference

The good news is that we are sexual by God's design. Our masculinity and femininity are completely integrated with our personhood. They are stamped into our spirituality, hardwired into our brains, completely ingrained in our personality and manifested in and through every part of our bodies. The even better news is that as sexual beings we are designed for intimate love relationships that are the image of God.

Saint Pope John Paul II writes:

"The fundamental fact of human existence at every stage of its history is that God 'created them male and female'. He always creates them in this way and they are always such." pg 74

"The constitution of the women is different as compared to the man. We know today that it is different in the deepest bio-physiological determinants. It is manifested externally only to a certain extent, in the construction and form of her body." pg 81

"As Genesis 2:23 already shows, femininity finds itself, in a sense, in the presence of masculinity, while masculinity is confirmed through femininity. Precisely the function of sex, which is in a sense, 'a constituent part of the person' (not just 'an attribute of the person'), proves how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the never to be repeated uniqueness of his person, is constituted by the body as 'he' or 'she'." pg 49

Quotations are from Saint Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body taken from *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, Daughters of St Paul.

## Sexuality, a resource for loving

To the extent that we accept our own maleness and femaleness and develop our masculinity or femininity in authentic relationships, we become more aware of ourselves as whole persons and can give ourselves to the other as gift. When we see the other as a whole sexual person mind, body, and soul, we see the depth of who they are as a man or woman and we are attracted in love to that femininity or masculinity. What the Holy Father calls the “perennial attraction” of the male and female draws out our generosity and virtue or tenderness and our ability to love unselfishly. Our sexuality is revealed and developed in relationship. Sexuality is a resource because we are designed to live in love. God designed us to experience the joy of intimacy and the thrill of self donation not just when we are making love (certainly then) but also in our every interaction. Our love is inherently sexual because we are.

Saint Pope John Paul II writes:

“... Gn 2:23 ... seems to say that here is a body that expresses the person ... it can also be said that this ‘body’ reveals the living soul.”  
pg 61

“The human body, oriented interiorly by the sincere gift of the person, reveals not only its masculinity or femininity on the physical plane, but reveals also such a value and such a beauty as to go beyond the purely physical dimension of sexuality.” pg 65

“... the perennial mutual attraction on man’s part to femininity and on woman’s part to masculinity is an indirect invitation of the body. But it is not lust in the sense of the word of Matthew 5:27-28” pg 148

“On the one hand, the eternal attraction of man toward femininity (cf. Gn 2:23) frees in him - or perhaps it should free - a gamut of spiritual-corporal desires of an especially personal and ‘sharing’ nature ... On the other hand, lust limits this gamut, obscuring the pyramid of values that marks the perennial attraction of male and female.” pg 149

“... the body is the expression of the spirit and is called, in the mystery of creation, to exist in the communion of persons in the image of God.” pg 125

“The body, which through its own masculinity and femininity right from the beginning helps both to find themselves in communion of persons, becomes in a particular way, the constituent element of their union, when they become husband and wife.” pg 50

“There is a deep connection between the mystery of creation, as a gift springing from love, and that beatifying ‘beginning’ of the existence of man as male and female, in the whole truth of their body and their sex, which is pure and simple truth of communion between persons.” pg 61

## Sexual affirmation

The Holy Father’s reflections on the Song of Songs teaches us to focus on what is most wonderful about our beloved, to keep our attention on what attracts us into love. Sexual affirmation draws us to each other in love. Our mission to love, to bring the other the “good news of salvation” that they are loved and lovable, is fundamentally a mission of sexual affirmation.

Saint Pope John Paul II writes:

“Love obliges the bridegroom-husband to be so solicitous for the welfare of the bride-wife. It commits him to desire her beauty and at the same time to appreciate this beauty and to care for it. Here it is a case of visible beauty, of physical beauty. The bridegroom examines his bride with attention as though in a creative, loving anxiety to find everything that is good and beautiful in her and which he desires for her”. pg 319

“On seeing the woman created by God, man’s first words express wonder and admiration, even more, the sense of fascination (cf. Gn 2:23). A similar fascination - which is wonder and admiration - runs in fuller form through the verses of the Song of Songs ... Even a summary analysis of the text of the Song of Songs allows the language of the body to be heard expressing itself in that mutual fascination. The point of departure as well as the point of arrival for this fascination - mutual wonder and admiration - are in fact the bride’s femininity and the groom’s masculinity, in the direct experience of their visibility. The words of love uttered by both of them are therefore concentrated on the body, not only because it in itself constitutes the source of the mutual fascination, but it also, and above all, because on the body there lingers directly and immediately that attraction toward the other person, toward the other “I” - female or male - which in the interior impulse of the heart generates love. In addition, love unleashes a special experience of the beautiful which focuses on what is visible, but at the same time involves the entire person.” pg 369

In the  
**Image**  
of *God*



## Homework Session 1

1. For each item on the inventory, make a Note of how you **perceived** your parent related to their spouse.
2. Reflect on the impact this formation has had on you and the way you behave with your fiancé(e).
3. If this is your second marriage, please note what effect your formation had on your behavior in your first marriage and what you took away from that experience before reflecting on it's impact in your present relationship.

### Section 1 : Areas of Responsibility

### Notes

A. Who was the central figure or the more dominant presence in your family of origin? Mom or Dad?

- Did you respond favorably to that atmosphere? If not, how did it affect you?

It is of little concern whether the actual behavior is judged to be good or bad. The intent is to free you from it's influence. For example, if you perceived Mom as overly submissive to Dad or dominated by him, you may put undo emphasis on getting your opinion respected. Conversely, if as a boy, Mom seemed to control your Father, you may guard your independence fiercely and have trouble being open to the influence of the women in your life.

B. Please indicate who took the lead or made most of the decisions in the following areas of responsibility by marking 'M' for Mom, 'D' for 'Dad' or 'B' for 'Both'.

In the case of a single parent, simply note which areas he or she handled personally versus those delegated to others or to hired help.

- ..... Hospitality
- ..... Money / Finances
- ..... Gift giving
- ..... Leisure time activities
- ..... Vacation planning
- ..... Career choices
- ..... Car maintenance
- ..... Home décor
- ..... Meal planning / Cooking
- ..... Cleaning / Laundry
- ..... Yard work / Gardening
- ..... Healthcare / Sicknes
- ..... Grocery shopping
- ..... Fashion / Clothes

- Did the way responsibilities were handled seem normal and acceptable to you or did you dislike it?
- In what way do you find yourself taking a lead or wanting to make decisions in the areas that your parent of the same gender did?
- In which areas do you tend to be uninvolved? Has that caused distance between you or caused you to take the other for granted?
- Are there any areas in which you tend to act in the opposite way to the behavior of your parent of the same gender?
- Do you expect your fiancée to take responsibility in the areas that your parent of the opposite gender did? Or did not?
- Which areas would be most important to you to share responsibility with your future spouse?
- Are you prepared to share responsibility with your spouse even in areas where your parent of the same sex was uninvolved?



A. What was Mom's attitude toward Dad (or men in general if she was a single mom)? *Check off any that applied to any degree or in any way.*

- Was he the boss?
- Did she fear him or keep secrets from him?
- Was he the big kid who broke her rules?
- Was he charming but irrelevant?
- Did she look to him to provide for her or protect her?
- Was he her knight in shining armor, her rescuer?
- Did she think that she knew best?
- Did she 'mother' him?
- Did she criticize or put him down?
- Could he do no wrong? Nothing right?
- Was he her 'best friend'?
- Was he her 'one true love'?
- Other?

B. What was Dad's attitude toward Mom (or women in general if he was single?) *Check off any that applied to any degree or in any way*

- Was she the boss, 'Mother Superior'?
- The 'warden' who kept him from having fun?
- Was he afraid to get her angry?
- Was she mysterious, impossible to understand?
- Was he always trying to please her?
- Was she a helpless maiden to be protected?
- Was she the 'little woman', innocent in the ways of the world?
- Was she an 'angel', saintly and faultless?
- Was she just like 'one of the guys'?
- Did he worship the ground she walked on?
- Did he patronize or 'Father' her?
- Was he disrespectful, rude or violent?
- Did he see her as a trusted friend?
- Did he look to her to take care of him, like a mother?
- Did he think of her as his 'lover', sexy, and exciting?
- Other?

C. Your Relationship:

Which of these attitudes has had an effect on your attitude toward your fiancé(e) or your expectations of him or her? In what way?



D. How did Mom express her love for Dad? *If she was a single mom, how did she show her love for the men in her life, her dad, brothers, sons? Check off any that applied to any degree or in any way.*

- Did she try to spare him the hassles of family life?
- Did she take care of the home, bills, or yard for him?
- Did she offer words of encouragement or praise?
- Did she dress to please him?
- Did she cook his favorite foods?
- Did she offer touch, hugs, back rubs?
- Did she flirt with him, smile or kiss him affectionately?
- Was she compassionate and nurturing toward him?
- Other?

E. How did Dad show his love for Mom? *If he was a single dad, how did he demonstrate his love for the women in his life: his mom, sisters, daughters? Check off any that applied to any degree or in any way.*

- Did he take the hit for the hardest or most unpleasant physical work?
- Did he like to provide financially?
- Did he like to give gifts, surprises, or great vacations?
- Did he like to solve mom's problems?
- Did he encourage her in her own interests?
- Did he tease, or joke with her?
- Did he flatter or affirm her?
- Was he a good listener?
- Did he protect her from harm?
- Other?

F. Your Relationship:

- In what ways do you express love for your fiancée?
- Are your expressions of love similar or in opposition to how your parent of the same gender showed their love?
- Do you expect your fiancée to demonstrate their love in the same way as your parent of the opposite gender did?

G. Who was more focused on the marriage?

- Mom or Dad? Or was it equal?
- How much time and attention did they spend on their intimacy as opposed to their career, parenting, sports or other activities?

H. Your Relationship:

Have you noticed a similar pattern in your present relationship with your fiancé(e)? Or are you determined to do things differently?





- A. What was Dad's attitude toward conflict? Did he withdraw or confront? How?
- B. What was Mom's pattern in conflict? Did she withdraw or confront? How?
- C. Do you withdraw or confront in a similar or opposite fashion to your parent of the same gender?
- D. Who initiated opportunities or conversations designed for Mom and Dad to grow closer in their relationship?
- E. Who initiates those kinds of conversations or opportunities in your present relationship with your fiancé(e)?
- F. Were either or both of your parents afraid to rock the boat? If both were, you may have never witnessed any hurt or disagreement between your parents. What effect do you think that has had on the way you behave in relationship?
- G. If only one was afraid to risk the other's disapproval or anger, you may have seen one parent as too weak or the other as overbearing. What effect did that have on you?
- H. If your parents argued or hurt each other's feelings, did they also model how to reconcile?
- I. How did they handle disagreements?
- Were there cold wars or silent treatments?
  - Did they argue loudly?
  - Did they argue often?
  - Who do you think said "I am sorry" first, most often? Mom or Dad?
  - Did they stew over things, or make up quickly?
  - Were they affectionate when they made up?
  - Did either of them cry when they fought?
  - Did they leave hurts unresolved or have touchy subjects?
  - Did they use writing or prayer to come together on issues?
  - Did they rely on compromise or give in and keep score?
- J. Based on your own present behavior, do you think that you accepted or rejected what was modeled for you?



## A. Who initiated romance?

- Did Dad pursue Mom?
- Did Mom reach out to Dad with touch or other expressions of affection?
- Who planned for dates, sent flowers or gifts, or set a special atmosphere to create romance?
- Did one always seem to be trying to please the other?
- If you had to guess, would you say that Mom ever initiated lovemaking?
- Do you think that dad would have to ask Mom to make love or was she a constant “yes” to him?

## B. In your relationship, do you expect to pursue your fiancé(e) or to be pursued?

## C. In what ways were physical, outward demonstrations of affection present in your parent’s relationship? Hugs? Kisses? Hand-holding? Sitting together? Touching?

- Did Mom melt if Dad touched her? Or did she stiffen?
- Was Dad comfortable being hugged? Or was he distant and aloof?

## D. What was your reaction to the amount and the manner in which your parent’s showed affection?

## E. How emotionally open was your Father?

- Did he talk about his own feelings, hopes, dreams, disappointments?
- Did he allow you to get to know him?

## F. Have you followed similar patterns or reacted to them?



A. How did Mom and Dad make decisions?

- Did they have separate roles or separate areas of decision making?
- Were decisions made quickly or did they labor over them?
- Did they do extensive research and analysis?
- Did they decide based on who felt more strongly on an issue?
- What role did feelings play?
- What role did logic play?

B. How do the two of you make decisions in your present relationship?

C. In general, how did Mom influence Dad?

- Did she charm him?
- Was she emotional?
- Did she use persuasive speech?
- Did she use anger?

D. How did Dad influence Mom?

- Did he use superior logic?
- Did he lecture her?
- Did he use humor or cajole?
- Did he get angry?

E. Have you repeated any of these patterns or reacted to them?





## Section 6: Relationship with our parent of the other sex

We practiced being in relationship with the other sex largely through the relationship we had with our father (if a woman) or mother (if a man). This relationship was an important training ground for marriage, and the patterns of relating that we learned there tend to be repeated in our marriages and set our expectations for our spouse.

1. For each item on the inventory, make a note of how you **experienced** your parent (or significant parent figure) of the other sex.
2. Reflect on the impact this formation has had on you and the way you behave with your fiancé(e) or what you expect of him or her even if they are nothing like your parent.

### Notes

#### A. How did you regard your parent of the opposite sex?

- For men: Was she the boss, the nag, sweet and innocent, naive, a saint, a martyr, in need of protection, a helpless maiden?
- For women: Was he the boss, the protector, gutless, withdrawn, a martyr, marginal or insignificant in family life, the big kid, the rescuer, the provider, the rock, the hero?
- Are you marrying someone much like or the opposite of your parent?

#### B. How did you influence him or her? How open were you to his or her influence?

- How did you behave to get his or her attention?
- What did you do to try to please him or her?
- What did you do when you wanted to get your way?
- Do you behave in a similar way with your fiancé(e)? Is that how he or she most wants to be loved?

#### C. How openly affectionate were you with him or her?

- What expressions of affection were normal for you?
- Did he or she say, "I love you?"
- How much time did you spend together?
- Did you confide in him or her?
- Do you expect that same level of affection from your fiancé(e)?

#### D. Your Relationship:

- Have you been disappointed when your fiancé(e) does not behave the way your father or mother would?

Having a wonderful childhood or a particularly special relationship with your parent of the opposite sex can have the unintended consequence of setting unrealistic or unfair expectations for your future spouse.

Conversely, hurts from childhood can limit our ability to trust. It may be that a parent's lack of affection or presence has caused a sense of neediness in you that can be demanding of your future spouse.

It is important to forgive Mom or Dad for not being perfect, for not being the parent you wanted them to be. Ask your Mentor to help you with this in Session 6 when you discuss forgiving outside injuries.



## Share:

1. Affirm your fiancé(e): What do I find most attractive or virtuous about you today?
2. How is my pattern of handling conflict similar to or the opposite of my parent of the same sex? Is that the best pattern for us?
3. How is my preference for the level of physical affection between us similar to or a reaction to what was modeled in my family?
4. How are the patterns of control or uninvolved in my parent's marriage similar to patterns in our relationship?
5. What patterns of behavior in my parent's marriage do I most dislike? Which do I most want to emulate?

# Family



## Stories of the heart

### Husband:

I married someone very different from my Mom. My wife is spontaneous and social. She smiles disarmingly and hugs everyone. She is outgoing, confident, and decisive; whereas, my Mom was more reserved, quiet, and nurturing in a steady and reliable way. While my wife is exciting and I appreciate her dynamic personality, I can sometimes feel inadequate when she takes charge in a way my mother would never have done.

### Wife:

I married someone just like my Dad, fun loving and cheerful, affirming, and playful, but also very committed to his career which keeps him long hours at the office. We can have a great time when we're together, but just like my Mom, I find myself running the house, making most of the family decisions, and expecting my husband to be uninvolved at home.