

Stay Mr. & Mrs. After You're Mom & Dad



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Introduction

*Certainly [children] are a gift from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb, a reward.*

PSALM 127:3

Dear Parents-to-Be,

We are so very excited for you as you embark on this journey into parenthood, your life's true vocation. As the psalmist tells us, you are preparing to receive a gift from the Lord. God has selected you to raise and nurture one of his beloved children, and you will be forever changed by this calling. You will experience overwhelming joy upon seeing that beautiful face for the first time, tenth time, thousandth time. Your heart will swell with love and warmth when those little arms squeeze your neck tight. Your eyes may fill with tears and your heart may ache when you realize just how quickly that baby is growing and changing before your eyes. In short, you will love as you have never loved.

In all corners of the world, parents-to-be are preparing for this exciting chapter of life. In our corner, that usually involves baby registries, showers, nursery decorating, childbirth classes, and endless shopping

trips. The nursery will be just the right color, the décor perfectly darling, and books and experts on childbirth and childcare consulted. With all of this preparation, baby's needs will undoubtedly be met. But what about your needs? What about your spouse's needs?

Research has long indicated that as much as we love, adore, and enjoy our children, the responsibilities and stress of child rearing can take their toll on a marriage. In fact, a graph of marital satisfaction over the course of a lifetime creates a U-shaped curve, with the dip occurring during the years of child rearing. With the majority of couples, conflict tends to increase, while positive interactions and affection decrease after baby. This is not welcome news to parents-to-be, but it is vital to realize the importance of focusing on marital issues while bringing up baby. Our marriage is precious and fundamental to us, to our children, and indeed to our world.

In the eyes of the Church, the importance of marriage and family cannot be overstated. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the family “should be called a *domestic church*. It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church.... The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and Son in the Holy Spirit” (CCC 2204–2205). When speaking to the clergy and the faithful on the role of the Christian family in the modern world (*Familiaris Consortio*), Pope

John Paul II explained that parental love is to be for children a visible sign of God's love.

Given this awesome task of building the domestic church and actually becoming the sign of God's love for our children, we need to focus on maintaining a happy marriage as the foundation of a peaceful, Christ-centered home. Couples who make a point to nurture their marital relationship are providing for their children a model of what love and marriage should look like. These children enjoy a great feeling of peace, security, and stability as they grow, knowing that mom and dad love them and each other. In an uncertain and chaotic world, they can view their families as a haven, a refuge, truly "the visible sign of the very love of God."

We hope this workbook will prove helpful as you begin to build your domestic church. May God bless you and your family always.

With God's Peace,
David and Christine Gibson

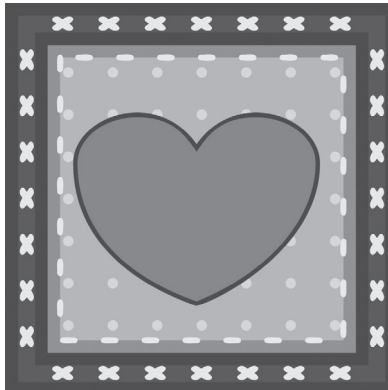


1. Prayer

*Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.*

*Then, the peace of God that surpasses
all understanding will guard your hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7



This is a most exciting time in your marriage as you stand united, ready to cross the threshold from couplehood to family. It is a miraculous and momentous transition, and amid all of the excitement and preparation, we need to pause and reflect on what it means to become a family, and then to contemplate the role of prayer during this very special period of preparation.

The *Catechism* states, “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*. It is a community of faith, hope, and charity”(CCC 2204).

As you embark on this adventure, this ministry, and this mission of building a domestic church, let’s reflect on the role prayer must play in your preparation. Holy Scripture makes it clear that when Jesus faced important milestones in his ministry, he devoted himself to prayer to the Father:

- The night before he chose his Twelve Apostles, “he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God”(Luke 6:12).
- At the time of the transfiguration, the Lord “took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying, his face changed in appearance”(Luke 9:28–29).

- On the eve of his passion and death, “Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray’” (Matthew 26:36).

If Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, needed time and space to pray as he built the Church, how much more do we need to devote ourselves to prayer to our God as we build our domestic church?

If you are seeking some guidance in prayer, a popular structure that may be helpful is called the ACTS prayer. ACTS is an acronym for Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, and Supplication, four types of prayer that can lead us to a well-rounded prayer life. Let’s examine each of these types of prayers.

Adoration: In adoration, we focus on our love for God. Jesus told us that we are to love God with all our heart, being, mind, and strength (Luke 10:27), and adoration helps us focus on doing just that. Additionally in adoration, we pause to acknowledge whom we are praying to: the Creator of the universe, who despite his glory and awesome power, invites us to call him Father and has numbered all the hairs on our head (Luke 12:7). Contemplating this may give us the proper attitude in prayer.

“Shout joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; serve the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful song. Know that the LORD is God, he made us, we belong to him, we are his people, the flock he shepherds” (Psalm 100:1–3).

Contrition/Confession: If we love someone, we seek that person's forgiveness when we offend him or her. In contrition, we ask God's forgiveness for our sins. We should reflect for a short while and try to be specific in contrition. This will help us to be more loving and obedient children tomorrow. From Scripture we may pray the simple prayer of the tax collector, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Jesus praised this prayer, saying that all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted. If you and your spouse are praying together, this is the perfect time to ask each other's forgiveness as well.

Thanksgiving: We have found that being parents has given us a new perspective on our relationship with our heavenly Father. The boundless love we have for our children gives us just a glimpse of the magnitude of God's love for us, his children. And when the objects of our love pause in their play to say, "Thank you, mom! Thank you, dad!" it does our hearts good, just as God must be pleased when we give thanks for our many blessings. The Blessed Mother prayed, "The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Luke 1:49). We also have much to be grateful for as we grow into a family.

Supplication: This prayer may be the most natural to us as we stand on the verge of parenthood, because in supplication, we ask for God's help. Oftentimes we may

view this prayer as somehow less than the others, but it really isn't. It shows our reliance, our dependence, and our faith in our God. Even in the Our Father, we ask for daily sustenance: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Scripture is full of the faithful's calling on God's assistance, and a simple, heartfelt prayer of supplication comes from King David: "Graciously rescue me, God! Come quickly to help me, LORD!" (Psalm 70:2).

Questions for him

If you were to pray only a prayer of supplication today, for what would you ask God for special help? What specifically about your wife are you thankful for?

Share with your wife a prayer of thanksgiving for her.

Questions for her

One of the most famous lines in Scripture spoken by the Blessed Mother is, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). How might Mary's words inspire you in your prayer life? How might this attitude of faith empower you in your role of mother? What specifically about your husband are you thankful for?

Share with your husband a prayer of thanksgiving for him.

Questions for both

If you don't yet pray together, what are your thoughts on starting this practice? If you do, share your feelings about this practice with your spouse. Would you like to use the ACTS format together? Why or why not?

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, we love you as our creator and the author of all life. Please forgive us for every offense against you and against each other. We are endlessly grateful that we have been called to become mother and father to one of your precious children. Please guide us in wisdom as we prepare to build our domestic church, and keep our hearts full of wonder at your creation and the gift of life. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.