

## Chapter 1

# Building on the Rock

Every week, people get married in the United States. Each couple hopes to find joy, happiness, and love in their marriage. They stand with sincerity before their family and friends. Many of the marriages even take place in churches, so the bride and groom are also standing before God to profess their love. So why do so many marriages struggle or fail? These aren't bad people. What's wrong with these marriages? Where do we turn to find the support and assistance we need to make our marriages work? Is there something missing in marriage today? Is there any hope?

### Just a Thought

Imagine a man and a woman who love each other very much. One day they decide to build their dream home. Each of them is very eager to begin this project. They look forward to sharing their lives together in their new home. They go down to their local home improvement store and buy all sorts of building materials and tools. Then they go to their perfectly selected spot and, side by side, begin hammering boards together in an attempt to build this dream home. But something is missing.

No amount of love, sincerity, enthusiasm, or dedication can ever make this house a reality without a blueprint or detailed plan. Similarly, no amount of love, sincerity, enthusiasm, or devotion can make your marriage a lasting success without a blueprint. Jesus Christ has given a blueprint for marital happiness to the Catholic Church. In this study, we want to explore the teachings of Jesus Christ and discover the keys for building a marriage and family on a foundation of solid rock (cf. Mt. 7:24-25).

## Where to Start

Imagine a fleet of ships on a journey to a distant destination. C. S. Lewis asserted that three things are necessary for the fleet to succeed. First, each ship must be seaworthy and functioning properly. Second, the ships must avoid crashing into one another. Finally, the captains must know where the entire fleet is going. If any of these components is missing, no amount of hard work or good intentions will save the fleet from disaster.<sup>1</sup>

Marriage is like this fleet of ships. If we want to succeed, we must first have our own life in working order. Then we must take care to avoid crashing into one another through selfishness or a lack of thoughtfulness. Finally, we must know where our marriage and family should be headed, so that if we fall off course, we can make the necessary changes to come back on course.

The very best place to start is at the beginning. We need to ask ourselves, “What does God want from us?” More than anything, He wants us to know, love, and serve Him in this life and then be with Him in heaven for all of eternity. The best way to get to know God is to spend time with Him in prayer, receive His life-changing power through the sacraments, and read His words to us in Sacred Scripture. After we begin to get to know God, we will find ourselves falling more and more in love with Him. The amazing thing about love is that it moves us to do things for the loved one. The same is true with God. When we really love Him, we are drawn to seek and to serve Him in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Why is this important? It’s important because all people, whether we are single or married, are looking for love. We are looking to other people to give us good feelings of self-worth and affirmation. As much as we may want to find that perfect someone to fulfill all of our hopes and dreams, the fact is that we are all broken and fail to meet each other’s expectations. The only

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 69 ff.

person who will be able to satisfy us completely is Jesus Christ. That's why it is important to be in right relationship with God and to learn what He wants for each of us. Then and only then will we discover His overwhelming peace and joy in our lives. If we have this priority in place, then we will be equipped and prepared for the relationship that God has designed for each of us.

Once we seek and accept God's mercy and forgiveness, we are able to get our spiritual life right with God. Then we will be ready to work on making a marriage all that God wants it and has designed it to be.

Throughout this Bible study, we will develop these concepts and examine the three necessary elements of a successful, loving marriage:

1. Faithfulness, the total gift of self by one spouse to the other;  
in other words, no adultery
2. Indissolubility, the lifelong nature of marriage; in other words,  
no divorce
3. Fruitfulness, the openness to children; in other words, no contraception

These three elements encompass God's goals for each of us in marriage. He wants us to be faithful to our spouse for our entire life and be open to His blessings in children. We will discuss the biblical basis of these elements as well as the timeless teachings of the holy Catholic Church.

### **In the Beginning**

The place to start is with you and your relationship with Jesus Christ. It may seem odd that a Bible study on marital relationships begins by focusing on an entirely different relationship, but as C. S. Lewis said, each ship needs to be watertight and seaworthy in

## Family Matters

order to survive the journey. What type of marriage will we have if one or both spouses are not living according to God's blueprint for their lives? What kind of marriage might we have if we can't avoid crashing into one another and hurting one another's feelings? How can we live in harmony and seek fulfillment with our spouse if we don't have a personal sense of what we want out of life? What is our final destination?

The answers to these questions lie in God's plan for each individual. He created each one of us and has blessed us with guidelines for avoiding disaster and reaching our God-made goals. Are we willing to trust Him to form us for the sake of our marriage? We may be surprised to find out that we will be greatly blessed, and so will our marriage!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh (cf. Jn. 1:1,14). Jesus is the Word, and He became flesh in order to save us and offer us eternal life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is only fitting, then, that we begin our study with the Word, Christ Himself. How can we have Jesus Christ at the center of our personal lives and at the heart of our marriage? Where can we turn for answers? Where and when do we get started on this adventure? Let's go straight to God's love letters to us—the Gospels, and the rest of Sacred Scripture.

### Personal Application

1. God's plan leads us to happiness. Read the following verses and fill in what God is promising each of us.

a. Jeremiah 29:11

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b. John 10:10

2. What keeps us from experiencing the happiness of God's plan for us? What answers are found in the following passages?

a. Isaiah 53:6

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b. Romans 7:15-25

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*Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.*  
—Catechism, no. 397

3. Jesus provides us with truth and grace—His very life and power—to overcome sin and be reunited with God and His loving plan. What are we told in the following verses? What is the role of Jesus in bringing us back to God?

a. John 14:6

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b. John 3:16

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## Family Matters

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4. We must accept Jesus as the Lord of our lives.

a. Read Matthew 7:24-27. What is the only difference between the two men?

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b. Read Luke 6:46-49. What does Jesus expect from us?

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c. Read Acts 2:38. What does Saint Peter tell us to do?

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To repent means to change our life, our actions, and our thoughts. According to the Catechism (no. 397), sin is caused by disobedience and a lack of trust; therefore, repentance entails placing our trust in God and obeying. Baptism is the introduction into the sacramental life of the Church. Through each of the sacraments, Christ gives us His life and power to imitate Him. Without Jesus and the sacraments, our good intentions and repentance would not be enough. Saint Peter teaches us in Acts 2 that we need both the desire to change (repentance) and the power to change (which comes from Jesus through the sacraments).

5. Reunited to God, we are brought back into God's family, the Catholic Church. With the teachings of the Church and the sacraments, our individual and family lives can reflect the love of Christ.

a. Read Ezekiel 36:25-28. What does the prophet say will happen when we are sprinkled with the waters of Baptism in the New

Covenant?

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b. Read Acts 2:42. To which four things do the disciples of Jesus devote themselves?

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- (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- (4) \_\_\_\_\_

In this study, we will explore the teachings of the apostles, but there is more that you must be prepared to do. Seeking out committed Catholic friends (fellowship), leading a sacramental life with the Eucharist and Confession (the breaking of the bread), and praying are the essential actions that the wise man must do in order to succeed in life and in marriage.

### **Talk Tips**

This section of the Bible study is designed to aid couples in communicating their thoughts and ideas to one another after completing the study questions.

- Is Jesus the center of your life? If not, are you willing to make Him number one?
- What resolutions or steps are you going to take in order to get to know Christ better?
- On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your marriage?
- How can you build on the rock of Christ in your marriage?

## **Action Points**

- Decide how you can specifically make Christ the Lord of your life. Have you made a good Confession recently?
- How can you show your spouse that you are willing to make Christ the center of your relationship?
- Make a monthly date to work through this study.