



The Crosiers

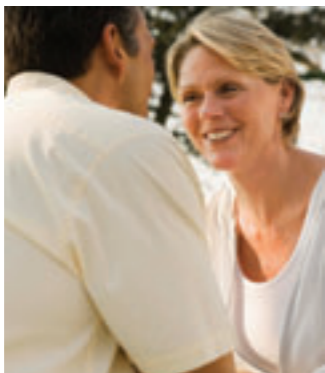
3 Avoidance of Temptation

We all struggle with the effects of original sin. This means we may feel drawn to what is bad for us. Unfaithfulness often occurs when we start to believe that a key emotional need — for example, emotional intimacy or sex — will be met by someone other than our spouse, and the opportunity presents itself. Don't go out to a bar alone with an attractive or sympathetic coworker. Avoid pornographic websites and be cautious about online chatting and messaging. Don't shower all your attention on your children (ignoring your spouse), and don't give in to curiosity about a "better" (sexier, more attractive, or more understanding) partner. Share your feelings with your spouse, spend quality time together, and pray.

4 Healthy Communication in Word and Action

Pope Benedict XVI writes in *Caritas in Veritate*, "Truth is . . . communication and communion." We need daily, loving communication to develop intimacy — with God, our spouse, our kids, and our friends.

Communication not only encourages intimacy; it also protects our relationships. It gives us the means to address problems rather than avoid them. Avoidance or despairing of solving our problems leads to unfaithfulness, but communication gives us hope and the means to solve the problems that inevitably occur in any relationship.



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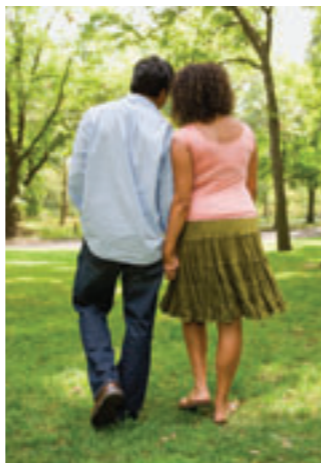
5 Gratitude and Forgiveness

Sometimes we think that we would be happy if only. If only we had a bigger house, more money, a different spouse. On the contrary, research shows that faith, friends, and family are what make us truly happy.

But we're not perfect, and faithfulness does not depend on perfection. We shouldn't expect our spouse to understand us completely and fulfill our every need. Only Christ can do that.

An attitude of forgiveness recognizes that we are all in need of God's mercy. God will forgive us to the degree that we forgive those who trespass against us. Forgiveness means being truly sorry and making amends with empathy toward the person we have betrayed. Showing empathy and compassion toward the wounded partner is one of the biggest factors in healing our relationships.

We can actually increase our happiness by being thankful, performing acts of kindness, and expressing gratitude. As St. Paul points out, there is a connection between thankfulness and joy (see Phil 4:4 and 1 Thess 5:17).



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Revealing the "Great Mystery" of Love

Love, by its very nature, reaches out to another: the love of Christ for his Church is that of a bridegroom for his bride!

St. Paul tells us that this is a "great mystery." Christ died for the Church; he died for each one of us. That is the true love that St. Paul says husbands and wives must show to each other. In fact, our entire Christian life bears the mark of this spousal love (CCC 1617). We are called to imitate Christ — in his patience, kindness, forgiveness, faithfulness, and self-giving.

With the help of God's grace and a firm commitment to grow in virtue, we will be able to withstand the pressures and temptations of the world. The road to true happiness is the narrow way, but its rewards are eternal. "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). God wants for us what is best for us; he has called us from all eternity to life, love, and true happiness.

For Further Reading

The Temperament God Gave You (2005) and *The Temperament God Gave Your Spouse* (2008), by Art and Laraine Bennett. Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press.

For Better . . . Forever! A Catholic Guide to Lifelong Marriage, by Gregory K. Popcak, Ph.D. Our Sunday Visitor (2008).

His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage, by Willard Harley. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co. (2001).

Stress-Proof Your Marriage, A 30-Minute Read, by Cory and Heidi Busse. Our Sunday Visitor (2010).

Ten Lessons to Transform Your Marriage, by John Gottman and Julie Schwartz Gottman. New York: Crown Publishers (2006).

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By Art and Laraine Bennett

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Fidelity

Remaining Faithful in Today's World

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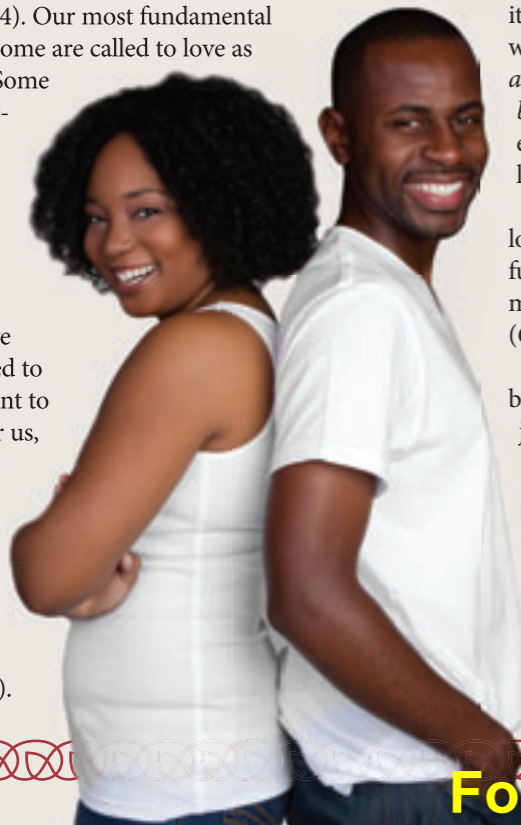
It's a familiar scenario: a middle-aged man feels he has plateaued in life, and his wife soon discovers he's having an affair with a coworker. "I don't know what to do," he confesses, in distress, to his psychologist. "I love my wife and my family, but (the coworker) is so different . . . she really understands and respects me!"

That's the common catch with infidelity — no matter what your walk of life, or vocational calling. At first, the "forbidden fruit" is exciting and enticing, enough to cause our everyday responsibilities — commitments to those we love — to suspend themselves in midair. But after the romance fades, all the same problems occur with the new partner or temporary distraction, and reality confronts us once again.

The old country ballad "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places" sums up our dilemma. The world tempts us with images of sex and endless romance, but this will not ultimately bring us true happiness. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world" (1 Jn 2:16).

Our faith, as a much more reliable source than any fleeting whim or social trend, says that each one of us is created in the image and likeness of God, who is love. We are created by love, and for love (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1604). Our most fundamental vocation is to love. Some are called to love as priests or religious. Some are called to the married state. Some are called to love as single persons. But we are all called to love God and our neighbor.

No matter how we are individually called to love, our love is meant to reflect God's love for us, which is faithful and enduring: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends" (1 Cor 13:7-8).



Love and Eternity

As soon as we finish that last bite of chocolate decadence or open the last present on Christmas, we begin to feel an emptiness — the emptiness that no earthly good thing can ever fill, because nothing on earth is lasting. We long for eternity, because our souls are eternal.

Longing for Eternity

We are seagulls smelling the salt air of our home even here far inland.

— Peter Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven*



And when we love, we want it to last forever. That is why we vow "till death us do part" or "all the days of my life." We wouldn't want it any other way.

Who would declare at their wedding, *I will love you as long as I feel like it or as long as I haven't found anyone better than you?* We don't do so, because part of the essence of love is fidelity: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it" (Song 8:7).

Underlying the psychological fact that human beings long for true and lasting love is the fact that love is faithful, because God is faithful. He has made a covenant with man, embodied in Christ's love for his bride, the Church (CCC 1647).

But will we be happy loving like this? Isn't this sort of boring — this virtuous, long-suffering endurance? Are we just gritting our teeth and sadly enduring our spouse (or our vocation)? On the contrary — recent psychological research shows that faithfulness actually makes us happier.

Harvard psychologist Dan Gilbert, author of *Stumbling on Happiness*, conducted an experiment in which research subjects chose between two things they liked equally well. One group was forced to stick with their choice (make an irrevocable decision), while the



other group was allowed the option to change their minds at a later date. The result? The subjects who were forced to stay with their original choice (i.e., remain "faithful" to it) were happier than those who had the freedom to change!

How Can We Be Faithful?

Jesus told us, "In the world you have tribulation" (Jn 16:33). This means we will face temptations and other afflictions. The *Catechism* tells us that our marital union is always threatened by sin — we may experience jealousy, infidelity, conflict, and even separation. The culture bombards us with images of false love, pornography, and sexualized media. Marriages struggle through economic difficulties, sickness, and spiritual trials.

How, then, is it even possible to remain faithful? "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26). Five keys will help us remain faithful in love and our vocation: closeness to Christ; self-knowledge; avoidance of temptations; healthy communication in both words and actions; and cultivating an attitude of gratitude and forgiveness.



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Conditioning for Lifelong Fulfillment

1 Closeness to Christ

Without him, we cannot even survive, much less bear fruit. We are then like the branch that is cut off from the vine, withers, and dies (see Jn 15:1-17). But if we remain close to Christ, we will bear *lasting* fruit. This is true no matter what our vocation or state in life — whether married, single, priest, or religious.

How do we stay close to Christ? Prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, and reflecting on Scripture. Prayer, the life of the soul, connects us to God. "We live as we pray," the *Catechism* tells us. So, if we do not pray at all, we will not truly live.

All the sacraments give us the grace we need to live happy, holy lives. The Eucharist is the heart of our Christian life; it unites us to Christ himself and to the entire Body of Christ, strengthens our charity, and even *protects us from future mortal sins!* Jesus told us, "He who eats this bread will live for ever" (Jn 6:58).

Remember that God never allows us to be tempted beyond our strength. He gives us the means we need to remain faithful to our vocation. But if we fall, we can always turn to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There is no sin that is beyond God's infinite mercy. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20).

2 Self-knowledge

A key to remaining happy and faithful to our vocation is honest self-assessment. We should be aware of both our natural and supernatural strengths and weaknesses, so that we are not caught off guard by a temptation that might otherwise have been avoided. Do I tend to be a people pleaser or am I a control freak? Am I prideful, vain? Do I tend to sensuality? Do I struggle to maintain proper boundaries? Extramarital affairs (and other sins against chastity) often occur when we ignore our deepest emotional needs; knowing our temperaments and personality, virtues and faults, and deepest emotional needs will help us avoid being blindsided by temptation.



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