



QUALITIES OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

By Susan Vogt
©1990, rev. 2007

A couple does not *have* to get married in a Church or with any specific religious beliefs to be moral people and have a lasting marriage. There are many good, decent, human beings who come to marriage out of a generous love for their spouse but do not ascribe to a particular religious denomination.

In the sacrament of marriage in the Catholic Church, however, couples celebrate both their individual faith in God and their choice together to continue seeking God especially through the intimacy of their marriage relationship. A couple who chooses this enters into a call that does not always make sense in purely human terms but promises a depth of meaning to their lives together.

Marriage can be good on strictly human terms because it is founded on love. (1 Jn. 4:16) When a couple enters into a Catholic marriage, however, they choose to add a dimension of purpose beyond the couple themselves. The church blesses this union and calls it a sacrament because it is a sign of God's love made real in this world through the couple's generous love and sacrificing for each other and for the world.

Some qualities that characterize a Christian Marriage are:

Covenant: A Covenant relationship differs from a contractual one.

<u>Covenant</u>	<u>Contract</u>
promise	conditional
bond	legal agreement
unlimited	specific limits
unbreakable	can be broken
total	50/50
New Testament (2 great commandments)	Old Testament (10 commandments)
the spirit	the law

Reflection: Reflect on when your relationship has not always been fair or 50/50. When has one of you been called to give more than your fair share?

Unconditional

This quality is related to Covenant and further amplifies one aspect of it. It has to do with the "for better or for worse" of the marriage vow. I promise to love you even when: you change, I come to see your faults, you become sick, annoying, grow in an unexpected direction, life becomes boring, you do stupid, hurtful, or destructive things, you become old, ugly, fat or senile, etc. Think about it. That's a lot to say a blind "yes" to.

Reflection: Is there any way that one or both of you have changed since your wedding day that has called you to accept this new person and love despite the change? The negation of this is the statement: I will love you as long as you are...(smart, pretty, healthy, sexually attractive, faithful, emotionally stable, etc.)

Permanence

Traditionally "Permanence" has meant "till death do us part," the intention not to divorce. In an every-day sense, however, permanence can also mean a daily attentiveness to the relationship, to build it actively and not give up when stresses or difficulties arise. It's preventive maintenance.

Reflection: What are those daily or frequent habits we have developed to pay attention to our relationship before it gets to a point of crisis? (for example, taking a nightly walk and talk). Has there ever been a crisis in your relationship where you have been tempted to give up on it? What helped you get through it?

Fidelity

This quality is really an extension of Permanence in that the core of it has to do with keeping the relationship alive and growing. Active Fidelity goes far beyond not committing adultery and encompasses all those indirect and preventive actions you cultivate to keep the romance and interest alive in your relationship. Not taking each other for granted, sharing your growing selves with each other, dates, etc. can all be manifestations of this.

Reflection: Have you ever experienced boredom or ruts in your marriage? What do you do to keep your relationship alive and growing?

Fruitfulness

This includes, of course, an openness to having children BUT goes much further than that to also extend our love beyond yourselves - to others, both close to home and throughout the broader community. Hospitality, generosity, community service, care for the world are all aspects of it.

Reflection: How have children stretched your generosity? How have you cared for, or reached out to, others outside your family? (Hospitality, volunteer work, involvement in causes, etc.) This is not charity, but only your duty because you have been shown love.

Risk

Although as Christian, we want to be responsible about our lives, there may be times when you feel God is calling you to stretch yourselves and not to take the entirely safe course, in order to grow and lead others to God.

Reflection: Consider possibilities like changing to a job that might be more conducive to a healthy marriage, even though it might reduce your income or being open to having a child when your lives may not be completely secure and stable but your love calls you to it. Can you think of any time you risked or were faced with a problem that seemed too much for you and yet you felt the strength of God's presence?

Prayer

Again, most people's experience of prayer is limited to Sunday worship, grace before meals and perhaps a bedtime prayer with the kids. Good as these may be, consider prayer in a broader, deeper way. How do you bring each day to the Lord and keep in touch with those ultimate questions of life and values that you live by?

Reflection: Have you tried to pray together? What obstacles have you faced? What works for you? Have crises or big decisions ever prompted you to prayer?

Forgiveness

Any two people who share a life together will inevitably hurt each other. Often it's not intentional, but sometimes it may be. The virtue to be developed is not so much to avoid all hurts (that's inhuman and impossible), but rather to swallow one's pride and develop the ability to ask and give forgiveness. Gentleness and graciousness are called for, not stubbornness and power plays.

Reflection: When have you forgiven your spouse? Are there any circumstances in which you find it hard to forgive? How does forgiveness affect your relationship?