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Marriage and family enrichment

Reflection paper #1: Sacred marriage

1. In Christian spirituality, sincerity is not enough.

I have been a Christian since the age of 17, and all I've known over the past nine years has been "I have to be a good Christian" and "I need to be an honest and sincere being." The roller coaster of my spiritual faith was embedded in my "spirituality" and to be just and be right. However, reading sacred marriage, I loved the reminder that my spiritual life has an important component, which is always relational with God himself. When I remember God's presence as always constant and always with me, I can begin to practice the discipline of turning to him when I feel weak and alone. I am now starting to feel familiar with God's presence to be all around me; I can identify God dwelling in my marriage. I see my marriage as something so beautiful that God created, and when I am in prayer with my husband, we can begin to be a testimony to how God is loving and all present. What I learned from this point of spirituality being more than just sincerity is also what God mirrors in my marriage, that communication is a discipline of love. When my husband and I reach out to one another out of love in the same way God reaches out to us, and as we learn to embrace the intimacy of God's loving word, we become attuned to our spouse and Christ in the process.

2. A spiritual marriage will remain between two individuals pursuing a shared vision outside of themselves.

As "I" became "we" in my recent marriage, I began to have a hard time with not just uniting my personal life with my husband, moving in things that were mine, or seeing my money as not just mine but also confronting that we are now in a spiritual journey together. I had a vision for

myself to be a Marriage and family therapist. My husband felt discouraged because he did not feel like God had a plan for him yet, but we desired to build God's mission together; however, it was meant to look in the moment. So, professionally I feel like this point of having a mission with different gifts stuck out to me because of where I find myself today; I am in school as a full-time student, almost finishing up my degree to be an MFT. My husband is my cheerleader right now and is waiting on the sidelines for me to finish because we know God has bigger plans for him after I finish school. The duties of my marriage call us to do rather uncomfortable things for the sake of God's vision and not our own, but my husband and I remember that God is building a church, and each member is crucial.

3. Marriage teaches us how to love.

I love my husband with all my might, and although it has only been a year of being married to him, I know that I wouldn't be able to love him for as long if I did not allow my cup to be filled with God's love. It was long believed in the secular marriage that we could "fall deeply in love" and people could get hurt, but the problem is not loving someone "too much"; it is loving God "too little." Jesus calls us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves; this would mean to love even people that treat me wrong and people I may dislike. But Christian love is displayed throughout my marriage, that when my husband isn't being his cheerful self or becomes a little messy, I may too have grace for him as God has grace for me and everyone.

4. Marriage exposes our sins.

When I was single, I could be in sin, physically alone in my thoughts, and yes, God would see everything. Through my marriage, I have learned that marriage highlights the areas of myself I don't like, which is very sinful. I know this point of sin being exposed in my relationship as a chance to mature personally because I fall short, and it's the biggest blessing when someone can

help guide me to the right path. In my spiritual maturity process, I desire to be more like Jesus and embrace the reality of my flaws when my partner point them out or when I do the same to my partner.

5. The first purpose of marriage is to please God.

When preparing for my wedding, I could see the many frustrating, fantastic, fun experiences of planning for a wedding. I also learned there is little preparation in being with an individual for the rest of our life to prepare for marriage. Ideally, in my mind, I thought that in getting married, I was to build God's kingdom and procreate. I also thought of loving my husband and him loving me and being happy, and while my points were reasonable, the most crucial part was to please God. Through Christian premarital counseling, my husband and I were challenged to live selflessly, ask each other what makes God happy, and remember this daily.

6. Appreciating the struggle in your marriage.

Jesus has long told his people in the bible that when you enter the Christian life, you will struggle and take up your cross daily to follow him. My husband and I graciously barely fight, but when we fight, we've learned something great at the end of an argument or disagreement. I know we run to God when the following discomfoting feelings appear, whether a situation in my life or my husband's words were deeply penetrated to hurt. I am still learning to suffer sweetly and appreciate all the work God is doing in me and my marriage, so it does feel good to understand that suffering conforms me to the image of Christ.

7. Sex can certainly season our lives but also reminds us that sex will never fully nourish our souls.

It is hard to move past all the hurt, shame, and evilness in connection to sex. However, I have learned through reading sacred marriage that I see sex in a biblical view that would allow me to

see physical intimacy as a spiritually meaningful vision of faith. I see sex as something beautiful God created; therefore, making a safe space within my marriage to have sex becomes important. I also have to remove my presumed assumptions about sex in the past, filled with guilt and shame, to see sex with gratitude now and also reflect on our expectations of sex. I don't want to reduce sex as something just pleasurable but also a way where God allows me to connect with my husband so deeply. In the same way, I don't want to view sex as better than what God can give me because nothing compares to being with Christ.