

MARRIAGE MINISTRY TALK

- 730-735 Intro & about us / J: (3M)
 - **INTRO SLIDE** Hi everyone, and welcome! My name is Julie and this is my husband Drew. We are so happy and humbled to be leading the event this evening on Marriage, Scripture, and Prayer Life!
 - We love participating in these date nights and hope to bring an encouraging perspective to you couples who are engaged as well as couples who have more anniversaries than we do birthdays! There is really so much we can all learn from each other. In preparing for this talk I was reflecting on the beauty of this community we have centered around Christ and building up healthy marriages. I hope everyone can approach tonight with open minds and hearts.
 - We are self proclaimed amateurs and realize many of you are probably wondering who on earth allowed us to get up here and talk tonight? We thought the same thing! Having only being married a little over 3 years now, we still have the rest of our lives to learn, but our goal here tonight is to share some of the most meaningful portions of our wedding and marriage to leave every couple - engaged or married - a little inspired.
 - **SLIDE 2:** A little about us: Drew and I met about 8 years ago at the University of Florida (Go gators!) We both were involved in our church and connected at a group dinner one night. Drew purposely took things very slow (to the point that I remember telling my best friend he was just SO nice, but I was pretty sure he had no romantic interest in me.) She rolled her eyes and told me that no guy would take someone he wanted to just be friends with on a picnic. She was right. We got to know each other well as friends first before things became official. Look how cute we were!!
 - **SLIDE 3:** We dated for 2 years in Gainesville, then 2 ½ years long distance prior to us both moving to Orlando. We were engaged in February of 2014, and married in November 2014. And here we are now!

- 735-740 Prayer, Intentionality, Listening for God's Voice / D: (5M)
 - **SLIDE 4:** Why are we here tonight? Tonight we are going to be talking about prayer and scripture in marriage. Why is any of the important? What does that matter? Because it will bring you closer to your spouse? Sure. It will do that. But the reason that any of this important is because of Jesus Christ.
 - **SLIDE 5:** God loves you so incredibly much, that He came down from heaven to earth to show us how to live and to die on a cross, to save us from our sins, and reunite us with His Father. That is the reason that we are here tonight. If it wasn't for that, we could still have marriage but we would be miserable. God gave us the gift of marriage so that we may come to understand His love for us better. It is our role as married couples to help our spouse get to heaven. Prayer is the path that leads us there.

- Okay. Now that we have that out of the way, I'd like to address the elephant in the room. Allow me to say what all of you are probably thinking... she is way out of his league. It's true. I don't know why God decided to bless me so abundantly but hey, I am not complaining.
- My wife is beautiful, smart, funny AND she flosses. And on top of all of that, she is an incredibly successful interior designer. Julie has to travel about once a month for her job and while she is traveling, her days are very busy. It is not uncommon that she might be so busy that we are only able to exchange a text message here or there for a day or two without actually speaking on the phone.
- It can be difficult to spend time apart from the person that you love. I couldn't imagine not talking to her for a whole week. Can you guys relate? Yet, how many of us here have had times when the only time we spent in prayer with God was at church on Sunday?
- In order for me to love my wife to the best of my ability, I need to love God even more. Just like it is important to spend time with your spouse, it is more important to spend time with the Lord. It is through our time with Him that we are given the grace to love our spouse better.
- **SLIDE 6:** Tonight, we are showing you lots of photos from our wedding day. This is essentially our highlight reel. What you aren't seeing are the moments that we've struggled as a couple. You aren't seeing the moments when we were scared or upset and did not know if we would make it as a couple. I mention this because I don't want to give anyone a false impression of our relationship. I do want to be very clear about one thing though: if it wasn't for our complete reliance on our prayer life and God, we would not be here today. More on that later.
- **SLIDE 7:** I think it goes without saying that wedding planning can be a stressful process at times. I mean, I've been saving pinterst ideas for years and have to see them all executed perfectly - gentlemen in the room, I'm sure you understand. I understand how easy to get swept up in the details of the day. We spent hours picking our first dance song and playlist, figuring out our budget, strategizing over seating charts, the whole deal. It's amazing how many details are swept up in one day. What I'm about to share with you, though, are the details that took minimal effort, time, and planning. Yet these details gave us a deep sense of peace and joy on what can be a chaotic day for many.
- Not shown here was one pre-wedding event that Julie and I both loved. We had a large guest list for our wedding (big families .. you know the deal!) and were not able to invite some of our newer church friends from the community at that time. Instead, to celebrate with them we asked if they would join us for Adoration and some celebratory drinks on us afterwards. We openly asked for their prayers for our marriage. Many people think of asking for prayers only when something is "wrong" but that shouldn't be the case. This was one of the most important decisions Julie and I were making, and we felt honored to have the prayers of our friends (many of whom we had only known for a year or less) in the process.

- Photographed here are my groomsmen and I praying a rosary before the wedding. Again, I stress to you, don't be afraid to ask your friends to pray with you during this time. Married couples - we encourage you to not be afraid to ask friends for prayers for any struggles or exciting new big steps (like starting a family) you may be encountering. We have a few married couples we are really close with, and we ask them for prayers all the time. We ask for prayer in the big things, but also in everyday events (like settling our nerves for giving this talk.) You'll be amazed at how this nurtures your marriage and deepens your friendships.
- The last thing that I did before walking out to marry my wife was go to confession. I wanted to be in a state of grace when I made the sacrament. I wanted to be completely free of mind and spirit to make the commitment from the purest place possible. Julie and I then prayed together before the ceremony - hence the cute yellow blindfold I'm wearing in that photo.
- **SLIDE 8** It is important to know what you're saying before you commit. We memorized our vows and encourage engaged couples to do the same. On stressful days or sometimes on really good days, we'll say vows to each other before going to bed. We have been to weddings before with personalized vows (which are beautiful!) but at the heart of it, the church's vows encompass what it is you're signing up for. Better, worse, richer, poorer. Forever.
- **SLIDE 9:** Our verses were also really important to us and we wanted to share what they meant to us and why we chose them. Particularly, our first reading and the gospel. Here are portions from each.

this is why a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body
genesis 2:24

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate."
matthew 19:3-6

To us, these verses illustrated God's plan from the origin of humanity (the first reading) and how Jesus came to fulfill the truth in God's plan in the Gospel. We wanted to show the truth of this amazing plan in our wedding day with many of our friends and family who don't have a relationship with God yet. Our wedding was an opportunity to spread the gospel.

- **Liturgy of the word (740-745) / J: (5M)**
- **SLIDE 10** This brings us to our next topic: the art of listening. Now that we've focused on the importance of intentional scripture and prayer in a wedding ceremony you're hopefully feeling at least a little excited if you're engaged, and maybe reflective or sentimental if you've been married a while. We love talking about Catholic weddings

(and it's especially fun once you're married, and not in the thick of the planning, budgeting and praying that no one causes a scene or catches on fire with your sparkler exit.) A Catholic wedding is something beautiful, to be celebrated, but it's really just the beginning.

- **SLIDE 11** How does life get even sweeter than this amazing day with all of your family, friends, a pretty dress, cake, and dancing? Often society wants us to see this as the pinnacle. We stress so much about creating a Pinterest perfect wedding, and lose sight of the "After" which is the true gift. On the contrary it seems fairly common for people to comment with their unsolicited, so called wisdom on married life becoming monotonous and how "tied down" you'll feel after being married a few years. Consider yourself warned, I will get a little sassy with Debbie Downers like that because I wholeheartedly disagree..
- We have good news. We think otherwise. We think authentically lived Catholic marriages can provide a depth to make our ordinary lives something amazing.
- This doesn't just happen on it's own or automatically once you're married. Or because you've hit some great milestone like being married 25 years now. Extraordinary marriages don't just happen because you've been married many years. It take effort, communication, and planning on the part of both spouses - much like anything else you care about making great. It's like signing up for a gym membership and thinking you'll automatically get really fit because now you have a little tag on your keychain.. We all know unfortunately that's not the case. It takes signing up for the membership, but then planning when you'll go to the gym, actually going, and then working while you're there. It's not a one time workout that will make you fit .. it's the continuous, intentional workouts. It's making priority with your routine. Just because we have these rings, doesn't mean a healthy and happy marriage happens on its own.
- We're going to zoom in on one part of our routine as individuals and as a couple and how it shapes us. A staple of our routine is Sunday mass as I'm sure is for many here. We're going to dive into a vital part of mass - Liturgy of the Word.
- **SLIDE 12** "As we celebrate Liturgy of the Word we don't leave our lives and our moment in history behind as we listen to these stories from the past; we actually take them up anew in the light of the word we have heard.
The story of our lives is seen to be part of a larger story
The story the Bible tells"
- I thought this quote was pretty spot on in it's description. The Liturgy of the Word is the beginning portion of Mass where we are called to actively listen and reflect on scripture. These words aren't meant to just be a history lesson, they are meant to connect to the deepest parts of our hearts. I'm always amazed by how similar core human struggles have remained since the time scripture was written. Of course, the culture and context differ greatly from us today, but the concepts like "fear of the unknown" broke the ancient Israelites hearts and our hearts today, just the same.
- **SLIDE 13** The Liturgy of the Word is a time to listen. It's a time to quiet our minds and open our hearts to what God is trying to teach us. Active listening will change your

relationship with God. Think deeper than the surface level of the reading - What is God actually trying to say to my heart with this?

- Active listening is a skill to be developed and I can confidently say I struggle with it on a regular basis. But if you're eager to understand and to listen, the spirit will guide you and help you.
- **SLIDE 14** Similarly, we believe intentional listening is also one of the best skills you can develop as a spouse. How many times does your partner tell you something that has a much deeper meaning than what is at the surface level? In the same way listening is a vital part of the Mass, it's also extremely important for us to have that type of eagerness in listening to our spouses. If we don't listen, how can we understand their heart? If you ask meaningful questions, and listen to your spouse's response, your relationship will change. If you zone out or get distracted while your spouse is trying to tell you something (Drew can attest I do this on a regular basis..) ask them to repeat what they told you. Be humble, admit you're sorry you weren't fully present. When you really care about what your spouse tells you, and care about being a good listener, an authentic level of trust and honesty can develop. This active listening applies to the bad days (we all have them) when your spouse is sharing about their hurt. This active listening also applies to the good days and learning more about what brings your partner joy (Drew told me once about how much he loved Fudruckers as a kid, and was majorly pumped when months later I suggested we go there for his birthday.) In a world of distractions, it's easier than ever not to listen well. Listening well is a skill and a choice that can become one of the healthiest habits in your relationship with your spouse, and your spiritual life with God. Only you can decide to make it a priority.
- We're now going to have a quick table discussion on marriage scripture. Printouts are on your table and we'll reconvene in about 10 minutes'
- 745-755 - Table Discussion - Scripture / Verses (10M)
- 755-8 / D: Importance of Individual Prayer Life with Scripture (5M)
 - **SLIDE 15:** I am going to talk to you about the importance of praying every day but let me start off by saying that I stink at it. Don't get me wrong, I talk to God throughout the day and Julie and I pray together every night but I would like to spend at least 10-15 minutes in quiet prayer every day. I stink at that. There was a time in dental school when a really good friend of mine was trying to get me to pray every day. He would literally meet me at my apartment in the morning and walk with me to the chapel before class and sit and pray silently next to me. It was his commitment that finally got me to pray consistently. He then taught me how to pray with scripture. Imaginative prayer.
 - We are going to watch a video in a few moments. I picked it out because I felt like the priest in this video was speaking directly to me. I hope that it speaks to you as well. Before we watch it, I would like to share with you one example of how prayer has made a huge difference in my life.

- Prayed for my wife even before I met her. So just us standing before you this evening is evidence that prayer works.
 - There was a time when I was in dental school that was particularly difficult on us as a couple. I was nearing the end of dental school and I was feeling a strong call in my heart to become a missionary with this group called focus. If I became a missionary, I would need to go where ever they sent me for at least two years and put my future career as a dentist on hold. Oh and they also asked all missionaries to go on a dating fast for at least the first year. So that means that Julie and I would have to break up or get engaged. And like I said, I was in dental school, which means I had no money for a wedding ring.
 - After several late night telephone talks, what Julie and I decided to do was to place it in God's hands. We completely surrendered our will to His. We asked Him to lead us and let us know if our future together was in His will. We decided to pray and fast for 30 days straight. We also decided to not discuss what was God was saying to either of us until the end of the 30 days. I tend to be pretty stubborn so my prayer was just that God would make it abundantly clear to me. I needed a sign. It didn't have to be a miracle, but God knows our hearts. He created them. So I knew that if He wanted to, He could find some way to make it clear to be without the need to a miracle.
 - On our last day of praying and fasting, I was walking back from class. I had been praying and waiting for a sign for 30 straight days. I was now going back to talk to Julie about my "conclusion" but I was no closer to an answer than when we had started. I got back, and I was going to check the mail before going upstairs to call her. I opened the mailbox and what do I see? A giant magazine addressed to me titled, "Preparing for a Catholic Wedding."
 - I began to tear up and then tremble a little bit. Then I grabbed the mail and ran upstairs to call my future wife :)
- 8-807
 - **SLIDE 16:** Video Clip: Importance of Prayer Life
 - 810-820 / J: Importance of Prayer Life as a Couple (10M)
 - **SLIDE 17:** The last part of our talk shares about our prayer life as a couple. When Drew and I were engaged, we met with the priest marrying us and he explained the importance of consistent prayer with each other. Up until that point I hadn't really considered it. I had my prayer life, Drew had his. I thought we were all set. When life got really stressful we might pray together asking for God's help, or when life was really exciting we might pray together thanking God. He handed us a printout of the Ignatian Spiritual Examen, and encouraged us to use this as a jumping off point. Then his "homework" for us, was to pray together every night prior to our wedding, and to continue praying every night after we were married. This sounded like a pretty big homework assignment .. but here we are almost four years later talking about it - so clearly it made a difference for us.
 - He told us even though we knew each other really well, and loved each other it was normal for prayer as a couple to feel awkward at first. You're becoming vulnerable with your spouse in a new way. This prayer for a few minutes every night is a conversation with you, your spouse, and God. That's a pretty different concept to get used to.

- That same night Drew and I prayed together, starting our nightly routine for the first time. It wasn't as awkward as I thought it would be, but it was definitely a different form of prayer than I was used to. Again this circles back to the power of consistency and commitment. Spoiler alert - this prayer structure is nothing earth shattering. It's really simple. The growth developed from it is merely the result of a daily practice and God's grace. We've continued this pretty much every night and even when we are traveling apart from each other we will try to do this on the phone.
- To be honest, there have been a lot of days, when this prayer doesn't share anything new with me and feels very much just like a routine. But that's part of the beauty in commitment. These nights when I don't think or realize any spiritual growth is happening, God is still with us. In the commitment and the routine he is guiding and changing us even we don't realize it. In contrast to the days that might feel routine, I've also experienced prayer with Drew that filled me with gratitude bursting at the seams. There have also been times when I'm going non stop all day at work and don't realize what burdens I need to place before God until I am praying them outloud with Drew .. and I completely break down. There's been laughter in our prayer, and there has also been some ugly crying on my part. When that happens I can't help but think, how else would this have come to the surface?
- Like I said, our priest gave us the examen as a jumping off point, so to clarify the structure we're about to share with you is not quite as sophisticated as the examen. It's kind of the examen's cute little brother. It is what works for us. No matter what point in your faith journey, we ask for your trust and your time in going through this prayer with us tonight.
- If you love it, that's awesome and we hope that you keep praying with it. If you want to make your own with different reflective questions,, we get it, and that equally great. The main takeaway from this is just encouraging all couples (engaged or married 35 years) to pray together every day. How exactly you do this is up to you.
- **SLIDE 18:** On the screen and on your tables is the simplified outline. I'll go through it with you first, and then we'll give each couple time to go off and pray this together.
- We begin by acknowledging God's presence, and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide our words and our hearts. You can simply say the words we've written at the top of our sheet "Holy spirit guide our words and our hearts. We pray for your presence in these moments" or you can freestyle if you'd rather. This opening transitions us from our everyday conversation into prayer mode.
- **SLIDE 19:** We alternate each night who starts it off. Remember this as a conversation between you and God, and your spouse and God.
- **GRATITUDE:** So in starting with Gratitude, my prayer might sound something like - Thank you God for today. Thank you for our health, our home, and our jobs. Thank you for Drew and how hard he is working to provide for us. Thank you for his heart and the way he didn't leave home this morning without giving me a kiss first. Thank you for our friends especially for the call I had with Dana today when I was stuck in traffic. Thank you for our family and for all the people you placed in our path today.

- Then Drew will say his prayers of gratitude. Every day we express gratitude for each other, and for me it's so comforting to hear Drew speak those words in prayer to God.
- FOR OTHERS - Next, who needs our prayers? My prayer might sound something like - God, I pray for healing for my mom and healing for our friend Stan. Please heal our sister Katie, and give Drew's parents strength in this difficult time of caring for her. God we ask for you to protect all of our friends who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant.
- Then Drew will say his prayers for others. Incorporating this into our prayer helps us stay mindful of our community on a daily basis.
- GOD'S PRESENCE - This portion is essentially reflecting back on our day and thinking about the moments we felt God's presence. It could sound something like - God, I felt your presence in the cool air on my morning run and in being held by my husband after a stressful day. God I felt your mercy when I listened to my coworker who was going through a tough time today.
- Then it's Drew's turn. Hearing each other express where and how we see God gives some of the clearest insight into our spouses heart and how they see the world.
- SHORTCOMINGS - This portion is a newer addition to our prayer, and I've really liked it.. I have a tendency to obsess over shortcomings and incorporating my failures in prayer by plainly stating them and asking for God's help surprisingly decreases my dwelling. I find when I don't acknowledge a wrongdoing out loud, it grows and grows in my mind and my heart as a distraction - escalating sometimes to an unrealistic level. In contrast, acknowledging these mistakes (however big or small) to God and in front of Drew on a daily basis keeps my dwelling at bay, and forces me to acknowledge truths I otherwise may not have wanted to face plainly. This part of the prayer could sound something like - "God, I felt far from you today when I criticized my coworker harshly. I pray for the grace to communicate more fairly and patiently."
- Then Drew will have his turn. This portion of our prayer is when we're at our most vulnerable - admitting we are wrong and asking for help. This part of our prayer has been especially powerful if had a day where I've said or done something that hurt Drew. Even if I have asked him for forgiveness already, and he's forgiven me, I'll still bring it to prayer.
- THE BIG PICTURE - Last but not least. This is usually just one or two sentences of what is on our heart for a big picture goal which has us feeling excited, nervous, or a combination of the two. Right now, our big picture prayer usually includes something along the lines of "God we trust that you will provide us with a family someday, and pray for our hearts to grow in ways that will make our marriage stronger and make us good parents in the future." In the past we've prayed for our wedding day, we've prayed when there were enormous decisions on the line for Drew's business.
- Then Drew will have his turn. This last part keeps us focused on what longings, fears, and excitement is deepest in our hearts for our future together.

- Now that you all have a good idea of how we pray as a couple - we've set aside time for each couple to go off for a period and pray. This might be a little awkward for some of you, but we hope that you're able to approach it with an open mind, and that you can hear God's voice and grow closer to each other as a result. We encourage you to set your phone alarm for 10 minutes to complete this prayer, and come back to your table once you're done or the alarm goes off - whichever happens first.

- 820-830 - Couples: Allow time for private prayer together (10M)

- 830-840 - Open for questions/comments from audience. What's your takeaway? (10M)

- 840-845 - Closing
- J: We'd like to thank everyone here tonight for keeping an open mind and spirit, and for your attention. We know your time is extremely valuable and are honored for the time you spent with us. We started this marriage devotional together that has been really great and we wanted to share with you. We've have a bunch of copies to hand out up here, so please come up and take one afterwards if you'd like. I'll hand it off to Drew to close us in prayer.
- D: Closing Prayer