



New Again: Pursuing A Lasting Love

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PRELUDE

Take a moment to contemplate. What do you remember about the moments before your wedding liturgy? Close your eyes and recall, with all of your senses, the sounds, surroundings, environment, and those by your side as you prepared to meet your spouse at the altar. Most of all, recall the thoughts that might have passed through your mind during those fleeting seconds on the precipice, before the reality of something new happened. The edge of one reality as it transformed into another—one fundamentally, sacramentally changed.

Was *forever* among those thoughts? Excitement? Hope? Those steps you took toward your bride or bridegroom were intentional—a joyful pursuit. On your wedding day, of course you look to the future with joy and anticipation, filled with hope for long and happy years ahead. Like Jesus, the divine Bridegroom, whose pursuit of our hearts is total and relentless, spouses are called to continually seek out one another's hearts in an imitation of His love.

This perpetual pursuit bears the fruits of honesty, understanding, and intimacy in every dimension of your lives. But what a paradox it can feel like: you're certain about choosing your spouse, for life, yet you won't be the same tomorrow or next year or in ten years as you are today. You know sacramental marriage is "all the days of your life", but life changes through different seasons of your vocation and nothing feels absolute.

I truly think this tension, of certitude and uncertainty, permanence and change, forever and today, can become not a source of frustration but of sanctity. These paradoxes illuminate our humanness: we are made for eternity, invited to embrace this earthly life yet to not attach too intractably to the things of this world. We love and revere the Lord, yet struggle to trust and surrender to Him. We set our sights on future aspirations while contending with the present habits that could keep us from getting there.

In answer to this tension, consider what *does* last, and how to chase after it. We are given a great gift in God’s abiding steadiness; unchanging; “so ancient and so new.”¹ This 7-day retreat will invite you to reflect on those matters that remain, always there for you and your spouse throughout the unpredictability of married life.

Days One through Three offer truth, goodness, and beauty—referred to in ancient philosophy as *transcendentals*—as a respite from challenges and a timeless source of renewal. Days Four through Six look closely at the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love; a reminder of God’s own nature that “remain[s]”² always and strengthens your relationship to continue flourishing over your years together. On Day Seven, this retreat concludes with reflections on the nature of pursuit and how you can seek out and delight anew in the infinite facets of your spouse. Each day’s reflection includes questions for deeper discussion and a prayer for your marriage.

Even through the uncertainties and fast-moving changes of your life, draw encouragement from the constants of our faith—knowing the Lord is the steadfast, lasting love behind it all.

DAY ONE: TRUTH

REFLECT

The first three days of this retreat focus on truth, goodness, and beauty. These are “properties of the Divine that are experienced in time and space by the human person.”³ Since we are made in the image of God, we’re wired to seek out the nature of our Creator, who is all truth, all goodness, and all beauty.

We cry out to recognize and know Him through our intellect, our senses, and our hearts. “*God is the source of all truth...* Since God is ‘true,’ the members of His people are called to live in the truth.”⁴

What does living in the truth look like for your marriage? Whether you’ve been wed a short time or many years, reflect today on what you know to be true about your relationship.

¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, (New York: New City Press, 2002), Bk. 10, Ch. 7.

² [1 Corinthians 13](#)

³ Bill Donaghy, *God is Beauty: A Retreat on the Gospel and Art* (Quarryville, PA: Theology of the Body Institute Press, 2021), 121.

⁴ [Catechism of the Catholic Church 2464](#).

Specifically, start with objective facts about your Catholic marriage: you received a sacrament, two made one. You chose and are committed to one another, expressed in the words of your promises and lived out in your daily actions. You believe in the reality of Christ and his Church.

It's relatively easy to recognize these facts, but do you really *feel* an awareness of them, truly accepting and comprehending them? Truth isn't a physical reality, but is of the mind-knowledge that lives in your head. To fully live out the truth, that knowledge has to make its way from the head to the heart. It has to be felt.

While feelings, of course, are fleeting and at times misleading, feelings within a mature love can offer a deeper sensibility of the truth. If your head-knowledge about love and marriage is an outline, heart-knowledge can fill it in with color. Mature love is led by reality, not idealized emotion, and seeks to love for a person's inherent value, not to use another person for convenience or pleasure.⁵ Within this context, "the value of the person must not be merely understood by the cold light of reason but felt."⁶

Because of our totality as human persons—body, soul, mind, will; we cannot entirely separate the feeling part of us from the thinking part. Ask the Lord today to lead and steward your hearts, as spouses, more deeply into the truth of your marriage and what it means. It's natural, and good, to *feel* things about your marriage, whether those things include joy, familiarity, or even frustration. Your feelings indicate what's important to you—things we feel apathetic about tend not to seem important.

What do your feelings toward your spouse look like today? Challenge yourselves to seek areas of your marriage where you can let yourselves be surprised. Let yourselves be known.

Easy, right?

In all things, seeking a greater fullness of one another illuminates a greater truth. Seeking out new or undiscovered aspects of your spouse calls you to vulnerability, but it's worth it to fully engage with the truth of your beloved as a person. To move from the awe-inspiring objective truths about your marriage to the subjective, personal nature of what it means for you as a couple is to move from head knowledge to heart knowledge. This knowledge bears the fruit of rediscovery and renewed appreciation for each other. "[W]e sometimes learn that too much curiosity, like too much vulnerability, can lead to hurt. As a result, we turn to self-protection-

⁵ C.f. Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993).

⁶ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 199.

choosing certainty over curiosity, armor over vulnerability, knowing over learning. But shutting down comes with a price...[curiosity] reminds us we're alive."⁷

Staying curious as you seek to encounter both familiar and new qualities in your spouse lets you remember, or even rediscover, the good in him or her. Tomorrow you'll reflect more on goodness: we are drawn to it, and in marriage are invited to see the goodness of God in the person of your spouse.

DISCUSS

Opening the truth of yourself to your spouse, especially if there are areas of your relationship that have gone unprobed for a while, is uncomfortable at best and even painful at the worst. Of course, if there are serious issues of dysfunction, trauma, or abuse, it's essential to seek out psychological and pastoral counseling. As for the slighter, everyday matters that can keep you and your spouse less fully known to one another, what areas of your life is the Lord calling you to share with one another more fully? Maybe it's your work lives, friendships, dreams, or individual hobbies. Maybe it's spending habits, distractions, preoccupations, or near occasions of sin. All of these are rich sources of discussion, and bear the fruit of deeper unity.

Is what you believed to be true about your spouse during dating and engagement still true? Do you have any preconceptions or lingering ideas about past versions of your spouse that are different now? It's valuable to consider any assumptions or worn-out narratives you might have about your spouse and your relationship, and whether they're worth re-evaluating.

PRAY

Lord, we kneel before you in thanksgiving for our marriage and for the love you have called us to. Turn our gaze to you, who are all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. Break our hearts open, restore our hope, and draw us more fully into your abundant love.

Grant us the joy of discovery as we pursue one another in spirit, mind, and body, seeking ever-new understanding. May our love reflect your own: freely poured out even unto death, and renewed to new life each day.

⁷ Brene Brown, *Atlas of the Heart* (New York: Random House, 2021) 66.

DAY TWO: GOODNESS

REFLECT

Yesterday's reflection regarded the nature of truth, as a reality both *about* your Catholic marriage and *within* the specific nature of your relationship and the person your spouse is. Remembering all your marriage is—specifically, an unbreakable bond infused by grace, with a mission to imitate and witness to the love of God before the world—allows you to reflect on and rediscover the good in your spouse. Today we'll dive deeper into goodness.

We as humans are drawn to goodness. You saw it in your spouse, and it's fulfilled in marriage: "...male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them: Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it...God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good."⁸ Your marriage is an invitation to see the goodness of the Lord, who invites you in marriage to receive one another as a complete and total gift.

Considering basic, fundamental truths about the sacrament of marriage might seem overly simple, like a return to high school Religion class. Yet the seeming basicness of these teachings hides their real and profound depth. It's important, and renewing, to be reminded now and then of what a big deal your marriage and your bond as spouses really are. If you haven't contemplated this big-dealness in a while, it's distinctively motivating. No matter where you are in your relationship, it can return you to the awe-inspiring gravity of what you and your spouse have promised one another.

On your wedding day you were asked, "Have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?" and answered, "I have."⁹ Freedom is a gift, granted by God so each of us can choose what is good, "indeed for the greatest 'good'—in other words, for God. The more we do what is good, the freer we become."¹⁰

Reflect on ways you encounter the good in your spouse. When you admire or appreciate your beloved, do you verbally express it? When you're communicating a critique or need, is it spoken in charity or harshness? Today, commit to recognizing the good in your spouse, so that you might freely offer them a gesture of your love and grow in thanks for who your spouse is.

Research consistently supports a connection between gratitude and emotional and social well-being. Individuals who describe themselves as the happiest include those who regularly

⁸ [Genesis 1:27, 28, 31](#)

⁹ English translation of The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation, 2016.

¹⁰ Youcat Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church, Question 286. Cf. [Catechism of the Catholic Church 1730](#).

engage in some sort of gratitude practice, even for small things.¹¹ Conduct some unofficial research yourselves and you'll find it's hard not to will the good of your spouse when all the reasons you're thankful for him or her are at the forefront of your thoughts. The more you devote your attention to what you're grateful for in your marriage and in each other, the more things you'll *notice* to be grateful for.

Like any new practice you might take up, gratitude is a matter of mindset, creating a habit of closer attention and remembering no detail is too small for the Lord. Just as He created the vast grandeur of earth, sky, and sea, He spared no less intention and love in creating every aspect of your spouse—a person, loved and willed into existence to be exactly the person *you* love, today and for all time.

DISCUSS

List the qualities, attributes, and gestures you're grateful for in your spouse; write them down and share them with each other. Did anything on each other's lists surprise you?

Something is good when it fulfills its intended purpose. When that thing fulfills its purpose, Church fathers and ancient philosophers deem the good as having been brought to perfection. The intended purpose of marriage, then, is the good of the couple and any children they have, and it's perfected as "[marriage] sanctifies them on the way to eternal life."¹² With eternity in mind, talk about if and how you show one another a sanctifying, life-laid-down love. What specific gestures mean the most to your spouse in this area: Acts of service? Intercessory prayer? Words of encouragement? Commit to making at least one of these gestures, out of goodwill for your spouse, by the end of this week.

PRAY

Lord, we kneel before you in thanksgiving for our marriage and for the love you have called us to. Turn our gaze to you, who are all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. Break our hearts open, restore our hope, and draw us more fully into your abundant love.

Grant us the joy of discovery as we pursue one another in spirit, mind, and body, seeking ever-new understanding. May our love reflect your own: freely poured out even unto death, and renewed to new life each day.

¹¹ Portocarrero, Gonzalez, and Ekema-Agbaw, "A Meta-Analytic Review of the Relationship Between Dispositional Gratitude and Well-Being," 1 May 2020.

¹² [Catechism of the Catholic Church 1660-1661](#)

DAY THREE: BEAUTY

REFLECT

As you've reflected on truth and goodness over the past several days, beauty—a third transcendental—has also been here all along, because these properties that reveal God's nature are so closely connected. If something (like your marriage) or someone (like your spouse) draws you into *one* of these attributes, it draws you into *all* of them. "[B]y truth we are put in touch with reality which we find is good for us and beautiful to behold. In our knowing, loving and delighting the gift of reality appears to us as something infinitely and in-exhaustively valuable and fascinating."¹³

Beautiful to behold. Beauty is profound, sacramental even, because it enables us to experience a seemingly intangible thing—that is, the nature of God—through our senses. You truly can behold Him, and all He has created, in the beauty of nature, in a stirring work of art (including books, movies, and music), in the Mass, and in the particular qualities you find most endearing in your loved ones. "Everything found in the concept of beauty is found in God. And created things...possess only a sort of glimmer, a reflection, one might say a certain fragment, of beauty."¹⁴

Held in a rightly ordered perspective, we're reminded that all physically beautiful things of this world echo the beauty of eternity, in a manner we can sense and observe right here in our earthly lives. And of course, in this tension of the tangible and intangible we're brought to contemplate the Incarnation: Jesus, the Word made flesh.

If all beauty in this life is made to draw our attention to the next, consider that any beautiful things in your life can take on a holy meaning. We, as humans, find ourselves innately drawn to beauty because we, as humans, are innately drawn to God, created in love by Him and for Him.

In this light, any desire we feel to share in beautiful things—whether in the liturgy, our homes, our creative pursuits, or in our admiration for the physical beauty of our spouse—is not frivolous or unimportant. In fact, it's an invitation to share in the nature of the one who is all beauty. I call this an "appeal to the heart." "Beauty stirs something within us; an ache for meaning and for the infinite. We are made for eternal life, and so these longings draw us into our identity and purpose."¹⁵

¹³ Fr. Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty: Science and Theology Meet* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 24.

¹⁴ *God is Beauty: a Retreat on the Gospel and Art* (Quarryville, PA: Theology of the Body Institute Press, 2021), 124.

¹⁵ Stephanie Calis, *Invited: The Ultimate Catholic Wedding Planner* (Boston, Pauline, 2021).

Do you seek to notice and cultivate beauty in your marriage? Maybe it's through hospitality, the look and feel of your home, creating art or music, the elegant precision of the scientific and mathematical worlds, or the wildness of nature. Whatever your particular interests, individually and as a couple, consider those matters, too, that are universally beautiful to a Catholic Christian: the sheer magnitude and goodness of a God who moved heaven and earth to grant us eternal life. The art, architecture, and detail found in an awe-inspiring church. The sacraments. A model of love for us, in marriage and in every vocation, to love totally and unreservedly.

Beauty unites, because witnessing it alongside another person is powerful, drawing you outside of yourselves. It's communal. Today, choose one thing—a Scripture verse, piece of music or literature, image, or place—that evokes the beauty of God. Share and experience it with your spouse.

DISCUSS

Don't just read about the exercise above instructing you to share one thing with your spouse that you find beautiful. Experience it together—read from Scripture, literature, or poetry. Listen to a song. Show each other a work of art. Walk or drive to a place that pierces your heart. The payoff of this shared encounter will be profound; guaranteed. You might be left speechless, or you might be overflowing with words—either reaction is normal and good!

You've now spent three days reflecting on three transcendentals: truth, goodness, and beauty. Each offers you a way to encounter God and to see Him at work in your marriage. Many people find themselves drawn to one transcendental in particular as a way to observe and know the Lord; is this true for you and your spouse? Which of these three stirs your heart the most?

PRAY

Lord, we kneel before you in thanksgiving for our marriage and for the love you have called us to. Turn our gaze to you, who are all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. Break our hearts open, restore our hope, and draw us more fully into your abundant love.

Grant us the joy of discovery as we pursue one another in spirit, mind, and body, seeking ever-new understanding. May our love reflect your own: freely poured out even unto death, and renewed to new life each day.

DAY FOUR: FAITH

REFLECT

The first three days of this retreat focused on the transcendentals: truth, goodness, and beauty. Today, the daily reflections shift to another trio: faith, hope, and love, the three theological virtues with “God for their origin, their motive, and their object—God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for His own sake.”¹⁶ Together, the transcendentals and the theological virtues offer an unailing foundation for your marriage, for they are of the Lord and He is unailing.

It sounds so simple to state that faith is belief in the one we’ll never fully know, face-to-face, on this side of eternity. We know it, believe it, and feel it, but the practical daily realities of noticing (or failing to notice) the Lord’s presence can be so much harder to navigate. Even when we know He’s at work, it’s easy to not notice. Today, consider how you might dispose your hearts more fully to the Lord’s goodness, so you’re well attuned to His hand in your marriage.

Raise your hand if you find yourself distracted in your everyday life. Phones? Packed schedules? The desire to just zone out? Of course, the desire to rest is important and even holy, echoing the culmination of the creation account.¹⁷ It’s so easy, though, to “rest” in ways that leave us still unfulfilled. Even morally neutral or harmless distractions, in the form of things like online articles and information, can create in each of you a more singular interior world that isn’t shared with your spouse, and can therefore feel isolating and incommunicable.

I’d argue, in fact (and speaking as a fellow guilty party), that seeking continuous distraction is a form of a hardened heart that can blind and deafen us to the Lord’s presence and His work in our lives. And when we sense Him less acutely, it’s harder to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit or to trust in His faithfulness. It even becomes harder to maintain a habit of asking the Lord for what we hope and long for. Saint Teresa of Avila reportedly said, “You pay God a compliment by asking great things of Him.” Those great things, those big asks, feel natural when we sustain a relationship with the Lord; they feel less attainable when we’re at a distance from Him, which creates an obstacle to deeper faith.

Since this week is all about pursuing love and seeking renewal in your marriage, pray today for an increase in faith that comes specifically from a renewed heart: “Lord, shatter our hearts. Break through the hardness, that we might know and rely on you more fully.”

¹⁶ [Catechism of the Catholic Church 1840](#)

¹⁷ Genesis 2:2

A faithful, tender heart has less matter surrounding it, and from that tenderness flows more ease in prayer, greater faith, and deeper trust. Picture a hard, rocky shell giving way to the living heart of flesh within.¹⁸ A heart that's encased is more distant, more closed off from your spouse's heart, and from the Lord. Habits that unite, rather than divide and distract, break apart that shell and foster a reawakening to His goodness. Choose tonight, or an evening this weekend, to keep your devices away for a designated time and plan a date night. It takes effort to un-distract yourselves, even temporarily. Shattering through hardness of heart doesn't happen all at once. But a commitment to seeking the Lord, again and again, bears fruit in your sense of faith and belief. There is joy and renewed possibility in returning yourselves to Him.

DISCUSS

Today's reflection cites distraction (digital, logistic, and otherwise) as a primary source of hardened hearts. While this is the case for many couples, are there any additional challenges, specific to your relationship, that contribute to hardness of heart? Talk about these challenges and identify at least one way to re-devote yourselves to uncovering a heart of flesh: begin or add something new to a shared prayer routine; go to the sacrament of Reconciliation; make any needed apologies to one another and ask and grant forgiveness.

Think back to Saint Teresa's words: "You pay God a compliment by asking great things of Him." Does this feel easy for you to believe? More difficult? Pray today for increased trust in the Lord's greatness and His mercies. Take a real step forward in trust by listing what "great things" you feel called to ask of Him, in your marriage, family, and life together.

PRAY

Lord, we kneel before you in thanksgiving for our marriage and for the love you have called us to. Turn our gaze to you, who are all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. Break our hearts open, restore our hope, and draw us more fully into your abundant love.

Grant us the joy of discovery as we pursue one another in spirit, mind, and body, seeking ever-new understanding. May our love reflect your own: freely poured out even unto death, and renewed to new life each day.

¹⁸ [Ezekiel 36:26](#)

DAY FIVE: HOPE

You've spent the past four days contemplating and discussing enduring, inspiring elements of the spiritual life that can re-focus your attention on the good of your marriage, your spouse, and God's unfailing love. Simply recognizing a desire to re-focus yourselves on these matters is the start of great growth—may it continue throughout the rest of this week, and beyond.

Before taking a closer look at today's virtue, pause. At this point in the week, what are you feeling toward your marriage? Joy? Resolve? Gratitude?

...Frustration?

The positive emotions you might feel can exist at the same time as frustration or disappointment. Really! The transcendentals and the theological virtues are ideals of our Christian faith, gifts and guiding principles. Reflecting on them can feel exhilarating; a reminder of all your marriage can be, calling you to a higher standard of possibility and commitment in your marriage. But what about when those standards feel, well, too high?

It's normal to feel regret, disillusionment, or disappointment over the hopes and expectations you had on your wedding day, and whether they measure up to your current experience. These states of mind, after all, are often rooted in a mismatch between expectations and reality. If you're feeling like the current state of your marriage doesn't match the goals and expectations you have, you're not alone, for it's only by grace we're able to get there. Don't lose hope for your relationship, for hope reminds you of your call as both Christians and as spouses: "Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit."¹⁹

In other words, you and your spouse don't have to—and were never meant to—go it alone in marriage. Your union is founded on the unbreakable bond and flood of grace that took root on your wedding day. Even amid the all-too-human tendencies toward apathy, sin, or taking one another for granted, take time today to refocus your attention on the ultimate goal of your marriage: bringing one another to the heavenly wedding banquet.

Sacred artist Kate Capato powerfully depicts the restoration that's possible for spousal love, and the battle that's already been won. Her painting [*Misericordiae Invitatio*](#)—"Invitation to Mercy" shows the barren landscape of Eden. Naked, ashamed, and visually divided by the tree that brought about their fall, Adam and Eve stand far apart, each one's body turned away from the body of their spouse. On the tree trunk the serpent snarls. The sense of despair is palpable.

¹⁹ [Catechism of the Catholic Church 1817](#)

Yet atop the tree, hope is found. Mary, surrounded by blazing branches fully in bloom, cradles her womb where Christ dwells. A new Eve and a new Adam, openly embodying the Lord's promises of mercy and renewal. Instead of mistrusting Him, she receives Him. A new tree—the Cross—that doesn't beget death but resurrected life. A closer look back at the ground of the garden reveals new growth in the grass and a single flower: hope, never too far beyond the reach of the Lord's mercy and restoration.²⁰

Trusting the Lord, Our Lady said yes to His invitation to bear His Son. In obedience to the will of the Father, Christ accepted suffering and death in order to accomplish His plan of salvation for humanity. Mary and Jesus embody the promise of the Father's love (literally, for their role in salvation history is realized through their bodies). Because of her yes, and His embrace of the Father's will, it doesn't matter that we fall short in our humanness and sin; the hope of our own resurrection has already been fulfilled.

If you're experiencing a sense of motivation to overcome disillusionment and habits that chip away at your marriage, ready to embrace the greatness you were created for, look to Mary and Jesus. In their example there is reunion, repair, and restoration. There is hope.

DISCUSS

Visio divina, "divine seeing," is the practice of praying with an image. With your spouse, place yourselves in the presence of the Holy Spirit and find Kate Capato's sacred work online *Misericordiae Invitatio*, described in today's reflection. Take a few silent moments to gaze upon it. Where is your eye drawn to in the painting? What details or big-picture images catch your attention? Note what stands out to you visually, and whether any words or phrases arise in your heart. Share your reflections with your spouse.

Are there areas of your marriage where you've given yourselves over to despair or hopelessness? Name them, and identify ways you can begin to heal them, in spiritual and practical actions.

PRAY

Lord, we kneel before you in thanksgiving for our marriage and for the love you have called us to. Turn our gaze to you, who are all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. Break our hearts open, restore our hope, and draw us more fully into your abundant love.

²⁰ C.f. Kate Capato, "Invitation to Mercy," <https://visualgrace.org/originals-available#/>

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DAY SIX: LOVE

REFLECT

The past two days of this retreat have explored different angles of the virtues of faith and hope. Alongside them resides love; famously, “[they] remain, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”²¹ Before the Lord at the heavenly banquet, we’ll have no more need for faith and hope, for they are fulfilled in His presence, yet love will endure. Today’s reflection proposes restlessness as an aspect of love that lasts and keeps surprising us.

Whether you’ve been married several months or several decades, it’s probably no secret to you that even if your wedding felt like a fairy tale (and hopefully it did!), it’s not happily ever after. I don’t mean that in the sense you and your spouse won’t experience many joyful years ahead, but in the sense that “ever after” seems to imply a lack of change: That’s it, the final state of things. Everything’s fine; good even, and will stay that way, unchanging. And yet, was a permanent, unchanging state ever the goal?

A relationship that stays status quo might be comfortable and peaceful enough. But love calls us *not* to stay the same, or be satisfied with good *enough*, for ever after. We’re called to go ever deeper, as spouses *and* as sons and daughters of God.

One of the final, and most indelible, scenes, in C.S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* finds some of its heroes surveying the vista before them, following a devastating battle that destroyed the kingdom of Narnia as they had known it. As they gaze ahead of them, they see a landscape that feels brand new, yet somehow familiar. There are mountains, hills, and waterfalls; each time they ascend one, they feel the anticipation of exploring the next. Their comrades in battle repeatedly invite them “further up and further in,” beckoning them to revel in this surpassing beauty more and more.²² “Only when they reached the very top did they slow up; that was because they found themselves facing great golden gates. And for a moment none of them was bold enough to try if the gates would open... ‘Dare we? Is it right? Can it be meant for us?’

²¹ [1 Corinthians 13](#)

²² C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins 2010 ed.).

But while they were standing thus a great horn...blew from somewhere inside that walled garden and the gates swung open."²³

This scene paints a vivid picture of eternity: a place that echoes the one we know here on earth, yet more vivid and more beautiful, to the point that even the greatest earthly joys feel only like a shadow. There is a garden, a restored version of our first home. It's a scene of such beauty, maybe bringing a lump to your throat, that reveals something telling about both divine and earthly love: it's restless, and that's good.

Deep, vulnerable, intimate love can only grow in the presence of restlessness; a desire for discovery. This leads to new joys, continually revealed. Like the Narnians, you and your spouse could choose (whether consciously or not) to remain at a particular apex without going beyond it—a feeling that your marriage is happy “enough;” that you help one another “enough;” know each other “enough.” But when there's no going beyond, that apex actually becomes a plateau.

Other reflections this week have noted the potential pain of growth that honesty and vulnerability ask of us. Total, faithful love invites you to self-sacrifice and good will that prioritizes your spouse over yourself. To achieve that, you have to *know* your spouse (and let them know you!), and that takes courage. Check in with each other today: in this particular season you're in, what words and actions make you feel most loved? What acts, gestures, and practical support do you need from your spouse right now? Are there parts of yourself—interests, goals, character—you feel called to bring to the forefront, for better or worse?

To be clear, restlessness doesn't mean dissatisfaction with your spouse, nor does it mean impersonal facts about your beloved to uncover without purpose. Instead, a restless love feels a joyful spirit of discovery, marveling over the gift of who your spouse is and over all there is to continue learning about her over a lifetime.

In the absence of curiosity and restlessness, love plateaus. But in their presence it thrives, only becoming more real, drawing you closer to one another and to the Lord, its source. Restlessness sustains and deepens your love, emotionally and spiritually. It is holy.

DISCUSS

When you think of diving deeper in knowledge of your spouse, what do you feel? Excitement? Trepidation? Talk together about the specific ways you each feel heard, seen, and affirmed when discussing your interior lives, so that you might best receive what your spouse shares with you.

²³ Ibid, 208.

Identify 2-3 ways you can create an atmosphere of holy restlessness in your marriage. These might include weekly or monthly dates set aside for deeper conversation, starting a shared journal (with or without prompts), or going through a question deck together. It might feel formal scheduling time for something as seemingly normal as talking to your spouse, but it's surprising how much your conversations deepen when they're oriented toward greater knowledge and discovery. Pick a day next week, after this retreat concludes, to try an occasion like this for the first time.

PRAY

Lord, we kneel before you in thanksgiving for our marriage and for the love you have called us to. Turn our gaze to you, who are all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. Break our hearts open, restore our hope, and draw us more fully into your abundant love.

Grant us the joy of discovery as we pursue one another in spirit, mind, and body, seeking ever-new understanding. May our love reflect your own: freely poured out even unto death, and renewed to new life each day.

DAY SEVEN: UNENDING LOVE

REFLECT

This week, you've spent time considering what it means to pursue a lasting love. Even as uncertainty, doubt, and suffering can arise in your spiritual lives and your marriage, the Church offers gifts and virtues that endure through all of it. Today's conclusion offers you an opportunity to consider the past, present, and future of your married life.

Specifically, consider whether certain topics this week illuminated habits that have affected past situations, and even caused your spouse pain. Have you, here in the present, experienced a renewed motivation to change whatever habits might be blinding you to the Lord's glory? Habits that might be hardening your hearts, making you lose sight of your redemption, or allowing your love to coast along a plateau?

It's forever timely—and never too late—to pursue your spouse's heart again and again. Whatever truths, feelings, and memories have arisen this week, resolve to dwell in the good and make efforts at repair. When you truly believe, head and heart, that the Lord is unfailingly steadfast

and all loving, you're free: you have the confidence of knowing He is present through every season of your married life and will never change. A constant and a firm foundation.

Together you are "[exiles] and sojourners," but only for now. May your marriage be filled with truth, goodness, and beauty; with faith, hope, and love, and may your sojourn bring you both, rejoicing, to the heavenly wedding feast.

DISCUSS

Recap this past week in conversation. Did any particular days or reflections inspire you to pursue one another, or a particular transcendental or virtue, in a new way? How will these pursuits influence your relationship going forward?

What areas for growth do you see in your marriage? Consider the spiritual, physical, emotional, and financial dimensions of your relationship. Make a list of several resolutions you can take on, individually and as a couple, to make productive changes in these areas.

Dream together! Write down at least one goal for your marriage: in one month, six months, one year, five years, and ten years. Consider how you hope to feel at each of these landmarks, how you hope your relationship will be compared to now, and what life might look like.

Take a picture together today and store it in a new album on your phone. Set reminders to take another one month, six months, and one year from now. What will you hope to see in these future images of yourselves? What feelings will you see in your eyes? Talk about your hopes for your marriage, and reiterate the steps you'll take to fulfill them.

PRAY

Lord, we kneel before you in thanksgiving for our marriage and for the love you have called us to. Turn our gaze to you, who are all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. Break our hearts open, restore our hope, and draw us more fully into your abundant love.

Grant us the joy of discovery as we pursue one another in spirit, mind, and body, seeking ever-new understanding. May our love reflect your own: freely poured out even unto death, and renewed to new life each day.