

How the Weaker Sex (Men) Can Keep Romance in Their Marriage

By Stephen Gabriel

Any young man contemplating marriage today must wonder if it's reasonable to expect to marry the girl of his dreams and remain happily married for the rest of his life. Based on divorce statistics, a young couple has about a 50-50 chance of staying married for a lifetime. Even Our Lord's disciples found it difficult to accept His teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, saying, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry" (Mt 19:10). Jesus went on to say, "Whoever can accept this ought to accept it" (Mt 19:12) – that is, if we discern that we have a vocation to marriage, we accept Christ's teaching that marriage is for life.

I've not seen any statistics on which gender is the worst offender in divorce cases. However, we can be sure that men are responsible for a fair share of the blame. Fortunately, there are a number of common-sense steps that men can take to increase the likelihood of a successful marriage.

Let's start by recognizing a couple of facts about men, women and relationships. First, men are driven (at least initially) by pleasure, while women want romance. Second, out of the millions of possible mates available at the time we chose our wives, there were probably many others whom we would have found attractive and who would have made good choices as well. And we can still be attracted to other women.

(This, of course, was not true in my case. My wife is the only woman in the world to whom I could be happily married. But, for most men, I believe this is a reasonable assumption. I suggest, however, that you not share this fact with your wife unless you like sleeping on the couch.)

These are two very important facts that men need to recognize up front so they can exercise prudence in their relationships and behavior. They should be regarded as vulnerabilities in our defenses that must be guarded vigilantly.

So, how do we defend ourselves? We must be prudent in what we look at and in our relationships with members of the opposite sex. Remember, we are married. We want to stay married. But we are weak due to the effects of Original Sin.

Guarding the Eyes is the First Step to Guarding the Heart

We are bombarded with sex in our society today. It is presented to us very attractively on television, at the movies, in magazines and on the Internet. And furthermore, we are told that much of this is "adult" fare. And we are, of course, adults. The key for us is to guard our eyes. Don't look. Change the channel. Put down the magazine. Don't watch that questionable movie. We have to struggle not to add fuel to the fire of our imagination,

which is difficult enough to control under the best of circumstances. Let's not make it hard on ourselves.

Prudence is the Watchword for Married Men Outside the Home

Prudent behavior with women in the workplace and in social situations is important when we are happily married and everything is going fine. It is *crucial* if we are experiencing difficulties in our marriage. It is just too easy to become involved with a woman to whom we are naturally attracted. Of course, there is nothing wrong with being attracted to someone. This is normal. It is wrong, however, to become inappropriately involved with a woman. As married men, our prudent behavior will keep us from going down a path we may later regret for the rest of our lives.

Prudent behavior includes avoiding getting too chummy with female co-workers. For example, it would not be smart to go to lunch alone with a female colleague on a regular basis, even if your intentions are strictly platonic. We not only run the risk of the relationship taking a direction we don't initially intend; we also risk causing scandal to those who see us together so often. This doesn't mean that we can't be friends with members of the opposite sex. It simply means that we have to be careful how the friendship develops. And quite frankly, we are probably much better off trying to foster friendships with other men.

In other business and social settings, we should always remind ourselves that we are married men and consider how the current situation might look to someone else. We need to take preemptive steps to avoid an inappropriate relationship as well as causing scandal.

Courting Our Wives Will Help Fan the Flames of Romance

Enough of things *not* to do. How about things husbands can do to keep the flames of our romance burning? The romance of marriage is unlike that of courtship when a couple's overtures to each other are seemingly effortless. Marriage suffers from the effects of familiarity and all the distractions that life puts in our way. Consequently, building a good and happy marriage takes effort – not a burdensome kind of effort, but effort all the same.

For starters, we should recognize that supernatural dimension of marriage. A marriage is in many ways a partnership with God to nurture and support our wife and children. We should pray every day for our wives and the success of our marriage.

The success of any relationship is largely dependent on little things. It's not the big house or fancy vacations that will keep the coals of your romance glowing. Rather, it's the phone call during the day to say "I love you"; or the walk around the neighborhood that you initiate to ensure some one-on-one time with the mother of your children; or it's the date you arrange to see a movie or go to the coffee shop. Husbands need to say "I love you" with actions like helping around the house or graciously "giving in" on matters of personal preference.

It's important that we make an effort to stay reasonably fit and attractive to our wives. In a real sense, we should continue to court our wives long after the honeymoon is over. Our interest in courting our wives is expressed in the attention we give them, the effort we

make to please them and the way we dress to be attractive to them. Americans tend to be horrendous weekend dressers. They can be truly grubby. We ought to think about trying to be more attractive to our wives. Some may argue that this is not important. Their love runs much deeper than the pair of sweat pants and old T-shirt they find so comfortable to wear. Of course, I would hope this is true. But we are made of flesh and blood, and our wives will appreciate the efforts we make to be physically attractive to them. And who knows? They may even reciprocate.

It is worthwhile for husbands to remember that they are called to love their wives with the same love that Christ loves His Church. (see Eph 5:25-26) It is a sacrificial love. We are called to be servants of the family, not its lord and master. Struggling to grow into this role throughout our marriage as we prudently defend ourselves against the weaknesses of the flesh and take positive steps to fan the flames of our romance will enable us to beat the odds and stay in love for a lifetime.

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Stephen Gabriel has been married for 35 years. He and his wife Peggy have eight grown children and fourteen (at this writing) grandchildren. He is the author of *Speaking to the Heart: A Father's Guide to Growth in Virtue* (Our Sunday Visitor, 1999) and *To Be a Father: 200 Promises That Will Transform You, Your Marriage, and Your Family* (Spence, 2006). His forthcoming book *Catholic Controversies: Understanding Church Teachings and Events in History* will be published by Moorings Press in the fall of 2010.