



Do I
Attend
the
Wedding?

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1

The Invitation



Someone you love or care about has invited you to their wedding and you know there is something wrong.

Is what they are considering doing really a good thing?

Is there something troubling your spirit?

You're just not sure you should attend and are considering saying NO. Still, you don't know why, exactly, or you don't have the language to explain your thoughts and feelings.

Even more troubling is the fear of offending them, looking self-righteous, not being understood, and even of losing the relationship with them and others as a result.

If you refuse, are you being intolerant, unloving, or unchristian? Some will certainly accuse you of that.

The Church does not explicitly forbid Catholics from attending presumptively invalid marriages. Catholics must use their own prudential judgment in making the decision, keeping in mind the necessity to uphold the universal and natural truth of marriage as upheld by the Catholic Church.

What is the best way to approach this? How do you discern and decide? By first:

- *Elevating your thinking to God's unchanging truths,*
- *Examining timeless principles, and*
- *Embracing proven healthy practices.*

I know you want a quick easy answer but be patient and think this through. Not all situations

are the same; simply blaming the Church for your having to say NO is irresponsible at best and, well let's face it: cowardice at worst. As difficult as it may be, this really is an opportunity for you to develop virtue and cooperate with God in his saving work.

2

Love



Your primary obligation is LOVE

Your primary obligation is to love others as Jesus loves them (see Jn 13:34). Think to the gospel and how Jesus loved others: he showed us that “love” is not just affection and mercy but also calling others out of sin, calling them to detach even from good things to which they are overly concerned or attached, rebuking their hard-heartedness, and even causing a big uproar in the “overturning of tables” (people’s ways and their expectations). At times, the way Jesus loved others also isolated him to where he found himself sorrowful and even weeping—but never confused or regretful.

Each situation you encounter will require the wisdom to find that balance without violating or abandoning truth.

LOVE IS (1) willing the highest best for the other and (2) being willing to say, do, or not do whatever is necessary to facilitate that. (Aquinas)

LOVE may involve friendship and affection, but maybe not. When a child (or anyone) violates our trust, departs from the family's moral code, and can't see that they are hurting themselves in the process, you STILL LOVE them, but you do not have to LIKE OR LOVE what they are doing.

LOVE speaks truth. We have both a right and a responsibility to accept, teach, and defend the TRUTH as we have been given by Jesus through his Church. The person we love who is going the wrong way needs us (whether they want it or not) us to speak TRUTH when and how we can.

LOVE does not whitewash, minimize, or abandon Truth of the sake of keeping others happy. If it does, it is not LOVE.

LOVE is what your loved ones need. Even when they do not want it and instead want your alliance and affection.

LOVE does not fear the other departing. Of course our heart aches when we speak truth and the other rejects it and us. This was Our Lord's life and a lonely sorrow. But he did not water down any of it, or even change "one iota of the law" to keep their affection. He fearlessly gave them room to challenge him, to walk away, and even plot to kill him. He (LOVE) would rather suffer rejection and death than abandon truth.

LOVE is willing to suffer for the truth.

Christ made it clear we are not to make any relationship—with spouses, children, mothers, fathers—one that supersedes the truth (Matt 10:35). This is a hard saying but one that has life in it.

You can love someone in many ways

You can show compassion, understanding, empathy, sympathy, care, support, and love to someone in lots of different ways. They may or may not like those ways.

- You can address the issue as Jesus did with Pilate.
- You can rebuke as Jesus did with those who attacked the truth.
- You can invite as Jesus did with his disciples and others.
- You can join in and celebrate as Jesus did with some.
- You can remain silent as Jesus did with Herod.
- You can disengage or even hurry away as Jesus did with those who would trap him.

These were all LOVING acts . . . and based on the unique situation at hand.

In *your* life, each situation is unique, and each person is unique. The way you express your love should be sensitive to who they are and where they are in their understanding and desire for truth.

- Some are partially open and willing to hear and respect you
- Some are completely shut and have no desire for explanations

It's good practice to find a way to say YES whenever you can without violating your or another's dignity or violating the truth. Sometimes, however, a clear and flat NO is the highest expression of love.

My sons did not always like my parental discipline, but it was the most loving thing I could do. They did not like me, and I know under their breath they had a few choice names for me. As beautiful and loving as affection is, my primary goal was

not to maintain their affection but to do my job. Affection usually comes and goes and comes again. Truth must stand firm.

You can avoid being soft as a marshmallow or as hard as nails—two confusing and unhealthy extremes—in two ways:

- 1 – Being sure of your rights, responsibilities, and sometimes your authority,
- 2 – Not fearing their arguments, attack, or rejection.
- 3 – Keeping the bad (stupid, naive, selfish, evil) things people may do from the good that they are.

Sometimes the best way of caring for another is not caring so much about their response; authentic love always involves a healthy level of detachment.

3

Marriage



We are all looking for the Ultimate

The desire for marriage is good; God placed it in our hearts to help each soul understand and draw us into the divine, eternal marriage with him. These are our natural God-Given desires:

I want to be loved.

I want to be desired.

I want to belong.

I don't want to be excluded.

I don't want to be alone.

I want to feel good and happy.

I want to feel safe and secure.

I want to have meaning and worth.

I want to experience the best of life!

I want to be one with the ultimate!

We can find some of these in human relationship, but not all, and never perfectly. Only God can feed our hunger for the ultimate love, security, meaning and joy. We have tried to make marriage the place where we get it all.

It can never bear that weight.

Marriage is not for everyone

Marriage is set apart from every other human relationship; it always has been and remains the relationship from which the human family springs. Because it most closely mirrors the life-giving relationship between Christ and his Bride the Church, it must conform to THAT marriage. It requires:

- One man and one women
- Of a certain age, understanding, and ability
- Both of whom are physically and psychologically capable of the marital act
- Both of whom are open to the gift of children through natural means

- Both of whom intend complete fidelity for life
- Neither of whom are acting under fear, force, or an agenda
- Neither of whom have a prior marriage bond

We can be in a loving relationship with someone, but when these essentials are not present, it can never be “marriage.”

Today many demand marriage for everyone

No one wants to be excluded. In Massachusetts, it has now become law that three people can “marry.” What about ten people? Powerful political bodies are pushing for child-adult marriage. People have already attempted to marry their pets. Where does it stop? In our desire to be loving, and failure to properly think it through, we can naively advocate that, yes, *no one should be excluded.*

But injustice, chaos, and even death can and will enter when a civilization opens the doors of *everything to everyone.* Discrimination is not about

the person as much as the higher principles and the protection and preservation of the greater good:

- Universities discriminate against those with insufficient grades,
- The DMV denies licenses to children, some mentally impaired, and the blind,
- Banks deny certain loans to those who cannot pay them back,
- Senior housing developments refuse younger owners,
- Companies refuse to hire those over sixty,
- Mercedes dealers refuse test drivers to most teenagers,
- Stores refuse entry to those without shirts or shoes,
- Theaters refuse entry to those without money,
- ...the list goes on and on and on.

Because of its unique nature, marriage is logically, rationally, and publicly even prohibited for some:

Children

Those with severe mental or emotional illness

Those with severe addictions

Those who are already married or ordained

Those with antecedent and permanent
impotence

Everyone 'qualifies' for love but not everyone qualifies for marriage.

Yes, this is discrimination! But “discrimination” is not a bad word and in many cases is a way we preserve and protect something for everyone’s greater good. Marriage is denied to some not because they are bad or unworthy, but because they do not have the capacity for entering into it and living it out as God intends.

None of these “rejected” people are unloved or considered unworthy or bad; they simply do not qualify. They are considered—sometimes through no fault of their own—incapable in some vital sense. And due to the nature of the incapacity,

some are excluded temporarily, some permanently.

Welcome to the real world!

No one is excluded from authentic love

We are all able to love and be loved and no one is excluded from love.

Love—defined as wanting and acting for the greatest good of another—is available at all times and everywhere, especially when we understand we already have the Greatest Love of All. Of course we can feel isolated, wounded, and lonely—the world is not yet heaven.

Are people for whom marriage is denied free to still love and care for one another? Yes!

Are they free to share friendship and life together? Yes!

Are they free to express love in many ways? Yes!

Are they free to engage sexually? No.

Sex is a powerful gift that is reserved for marriage

It's not a perfect analogy, but both sex and guns can give us the power over life and death.

- In hunting guns help secure food to feed our loves ones,
- In the preservation of life, they keep us safe from predators and enemies,
- We can find enjoyment and pleasure in their use.

But in the “wrong hands” and without proper maturity, intent, education, and safety restrictions guns can:

- Threaten, intimidate and control
- Wound and hurt
- Kill

Sex is not a plaything. This is another “tough saying” of the Lord and for good reason. Sex is powerful—wherein we enter into the divine—and it’s designed naturally to lead to babies. Babies (all of us!) have the right to the scientifically proven, highest place of flourishing: *their natural mother and father united in marriage*.

Just because some struggle with living up to the ideal, we do not tear the ideal down.

Sex in the hands of immature, naive, selfish, wrongly motivated people always brings heartache and harm.

Any sex outside marriage may seem natural and feel right and good, but it ultimately deprives the person of the highest good for which they were made, violates their body-soul integrity, invites fear insecurity and anxiety, and the list goes on. Just look at the soaring rates of failed

relationships, marriages, and families. When we depart from God's plan to our own, we eventually disintegrate and self-implode.

We are often like children with guns.

We are all made for love and no one can deny our right to love.

But love does not always equal sex or marriage.

4 You



Your attendance at a wedding says something

In his brilliant works, St. John Paul II says that “the body reveals the person.”

No matter your interior thoughts and beliefs, your physical presence at an event speaks a language all its own and is communicating something about you to others. Your attendance says something both privately and publicly.

Since each of us is part of the Body of Christ, everything we do in secret or in public has some effect on the rest of the body—whether or not we see it, believe it, or it shows up right away or not. Think second-hand smoke!

A marrying couple is never separate from the rest of the Church, whether they believe it or not.

Although each of us has a private dimension to our relationship with God and with each other, being part of the Body (family) results in our actions having a public dimension, too.

In 1968 I remember attending an anti-Vietnam protest one sunny Saturday in gorgeous Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. I went because there were cute guys, awesome bands, and free food. I had no idea of what was going on and at that naïve age I didn't care. I was just going along to belong and to have fun. I wanted to fit in. The problem was that my presence there said something. In fact, if the police had disrupted the event, I could have been dragged to jail—despite any verbal protests. My presence was a form of *consent*.

Attending a wedding is a public act of consent to and agreement with what is taking place. Even a casual observer is giving some type of consent to and witness to the event. Remember the old

inquiry from the priest, “If anyone here has any objection to this marriage, let him speak now or forever hold his peace”? That was to clear the way for a unified consent of the whole community to the act about to take place.

Your presence says something, whether you mean it to or not.

5

Catholic Law



Drawing from the words of Christ and the wisdom of the Church for centuries, it is understood that all people have a natural right to enter marriage, *unless there is a serious impediment.*

Additionally, it is required for Catholics to marry in the Catholic manner.

Every marriage is presumed to be valid unless and until proved otherwise (Canon Law 1060).

You don't need to prove that the marrying couple is in a position to enter marriage rightly. You—and the Church—presume they are. Like “innocent before proven guilty,” the couple is given the benefit of any doubt.

Unless there is some obvious problem—such as in an under-age child, a situation of grave fear or force, or a same sex couple. In those cases, you have a moral obligation to think before you decide.

Any baptized Catholic, no matter who they are marrying, is required to marry in the “Catholic manner” (Canon Law 1108). This is:

(a) *in a Catholic Church*. Witnessed by a Catholic priest who has faculties (permission from the Bishop) to perform weddings in that Church/parish. Or, with the Bishop’s permission, in another Church, (say the bride’s father is a protestant minister) still with the Catholic priest involved, administering proper vows and standing as witness.

(b) *Following the prescribed format*, that is, VOWS that appropriately reflect the manner in which Jesus binds himself to us

his Bride. Simply translated? Use the Church vows, not make up your own.

(c) *With two witnesses* over the age of 18 who sign the marriage documents.

Emergency requirements vary a bit, but they are so few and far between, that we'll leave that for another discussion.

Mandating a certain way to do things is not about control, but safety. God knows we needed his Church as an anchor so that we don't drift off course in our own puffed-up opinions, ignorant views, and self-centered plans. He does not want us drowning in error, sin, and misery. Like family curfews, when God's children are mature and wise, the law does not bother them when they have no desire to violate it.

Any baptized Catholic who does not believe or practice—or even who thinks he/she has

formally defected—is still bound by these requirements whether they agree or not.

Christian baptism leaves what we learned as kids, that “indelible mark on the soul” (CCC 1272). Even non-belief—or an attempt to formally and publicly leave the Church—does not terminate their eternal membership of the Body of Christ and of being a Catholic (*moto proprio Omnium in Mentem* – Pope Benedict XVI).

For a baptized Catholic to attempt marriage outside of and apart from the Church requirements automatically renders the wedding only an attempt at marriage and invalid.

The civil marriage may be valid, and the Church acknowledges that civil obligations may be imposed on the parties, but there is no valid marriage bond in the eyes of the Church.

So why do Catholics marry outside the Church?

Those baptized Catholics who marry outside the Church tend to do so for two general reasons:

1 – They do not fully understand what they are doing, what they are rejecting, and why it is vital. No one has explained it in a satisfactory way. There is a serious ignorance in these cases that hopefully can be corrected before the wedding. But maybe not.

2 – They do understand, in a general sense, but have decided it is too laborious, intrusive, unnecessary, and even ridiculous. They believe they know better and have the right to make these decisions apart from the Church. Usually this is because they see the Church as an outdated institution, not the living, breathing “Bride of Christ” and the precise place where Jesus operates most fully in drawing them to himself in truth and the Sacraments.

Understanding their ignorance fear, and pride does not make it any easier when the person(s) is someone you love and who has invited you to their attempt at marriage.

6

Choices



To go or not to go? Prudent choices involve you understanding the truth, using your best judgement, having an open but brave heart, a solid commitment to your faith over the affection of others, and sometimes just using common sense. Oh yes, and a kind manner.

When you should not witness a wedding

These situations are a serious impediment to marriage as the Church understands and upholds, and should not be witnessed:

When a baptized Catholic is marrying outside of the required Catholic manner

At the beach, in a court room, in a hotel. Even in another Church but not with a

Catholic priest as witness or permission by the Catholic bishop.

When one has a prior marriage not yet declared null by a competent tribunal

If they are “waiting” for an annulment, they can wait to marry when it arrives. To do otherwise violates marriage itself, the dignity and integrity of the human person(s), is a serious rejection of God’s loving wisdom and authority, makes a mockery of their faith, puts them in a state of serious sin (adultery) whether they believe it or not, blocks them from God’s graces, jeopardizes their souls, gives scandal to others, and can be an excuse for others to fall into sin. Sadly, most don’t realize or believe this.

When you *know* there is abuse, grave fear or force

If you know for sure that someone is entering an abusive situation, you not

only have the responsibility to not attend but to alert appropriate authorities or other persons of responsibility or influence. You are not responsible for their situation or for saving them, but you must not remain silent, or you will be complicit.

When one is underage, abducted, a blood relative, or there is fraud

This is rare but can happen. If you know with certainty of anything that violates marriage, don't witness (be party to) it. There are several other such situations (you can't kill a person's spouse to marry them) but those, too are rare and for another time. Seek wise counsel if you have doubts.

Same sex couples

Despite their mutual goodness, affection, tenderness and deep desires, no same sex couples can ever marry. Pray for

them to find appropriate and holy ways to love one another.

Most of the time you may not know

If the couple has been living together, or she is pregnant, it's likely you have no idea of the full extent of their situation, nor are you responsible for knowing. Without condemning, and in the absence of knowledge any of the preceding impediments, you are usually free to witness the wedding or not.

No one requires that you must attend a wedding

It's customary to attend weddings when invited, especially for close family, but there may be many reasons you do not attend. You have the right and, as we are addressing, maybe the responsibility not to attend. I don't attend many of the weddings to which I am invited simply because they are far away, and I can't afford the costs.

An invitation from someone you care about deserves a response

The invitation is an opportunity. Your response should be:

- Well thought out,
- Honest,
- Tailored to the person(s) and circumstance
- Never in an email, and for special cases, maybe in person

7

Explanations



If you've carefully decided not to attend, then you'll also want to carefully construct your response. Especially when the invitation comes from a close family or friend. As tempting as it may be to avoid unpleasant tasks and potential conflict, don't ignore it, procrastinate, or make up a phony excuse.

What to remember about explanations

First, assess the relationship. If there's likely to be some type of rupture to the relationship, it may be prudent to withhold your entire train of thinking. A short and direct response can still be adequate and loving,

Second, it may be tempting to use other reasons to say NO (I can't afford it; I will be out of town), but you may be avoiding an opportunity for being

brave, virtuous, for inviting them deeper into truth, or witnessing an heroic stand for your faith principles. God may be hoping to use you to teach their hearts.

Third, if you suspect or even know they are completely closed to any possibility of hearing and receiving the truth of your “No,” then Our Lord allows you not to throw those pearls “before swine.”

That may sound harsh, and people are certainly not pigs, but when we close our minds, hearts, and spirits off to truth, we debase ourselves. We’ve all done it. Don’t let pride or a false need for being righteous get in the way of humility. Our Lord was strong, bold, brave, and clear, but he also did not chase after others if they were closed. You don’t need to chase them down, either.

Fourth, trust God as the primary worker of truth in their life and let go of that responsibility.

Your written letter may be a gift

When I was in college my father wrote me a letter. I had failed to attend my classes and had wasted my very expensive tuition in a year of parties. The letter admonished me and, yes, I felt ashamed, but it was written with such crystal clarity, truth and tenderness (calling me to grow up and assuring me of his love), that it is one of my most cherished possessions. Yes, your letter may go in the trash—or worse—but that is beyond your control.

Follow these tips for writing your response. You can either deliver it or even read it in a face to face meeting and then hand it to them afterward.

For everyone

Mail or hand-deliver it. Don't email.

This is sensitive matter; treat the person and your response with care and dignity.

Consider the level of explanation that is necessary or prudent,

People need and want far less explanations than we suspect. Sometimes our fear of rejection or conflict makes us explain ad nauseum.

Assure your love and support in general for *both* parties.

You don't have to like or love someone to desire their true happiness.

Avoid any inflammatory or accusatory words

Keep your response about YOU. Criticizing(even indirectly) someone rarely works to change their heart and usually does the opposite.

~~We just can't abide by what YOU are doing.~~

~~We are sorry YOU can't live by the morals we gave you.~~

~~We hope and pray for your eternal souls.~~

~~It causes us great grief that YOU have chosen this path.~~

~~We are praying for your repentance and for God to change your hearts.~~

Statements like this may be true but they are not necessary or appropriate in this letter.

If you decline the wedding, decline the reception.

This “separation of Church and state”, as it were, is an understandable attempt at softening the blow or being able to be supportive in some way. However, there’s no way around it: *attendance at either event conveys support for the wedding.* And, sending a present *also supports the wedding.*

Never forget:

You already *do* love them and care for them.

You *do* support them in finding true happiness and holiness.

You *can* express your love at other times and in other ways.

Meet with them before the event if you can

With some relationships it would be appropriate

and even the best way of communicating to the couple to meet with them for dinner. Your treat.

Meeting in a public place helps to prevent eruption of emotions and allows an out for anyone who is having difficulty. Don't be discouraged if this happens. If you say something you regret later, apologize and seek forgiveness when appropriate.

Don't force it.

You can express yourself, your beliefs and your love for them and offer explanations at this time.

Ask for their input and listen with love.

You don't have to change, fix, help, or save anyone at that dinner. Let the Lord lead.

If a safe and honest conversation can occur, go for it. If not, ask the Lord for another opportunity later or the wisdom and courage to let it go.

Some people will bring the letter and read it aloud. That can be a good way to say all you want without losing your train of thought.

Pray before you go and pray in thanksgiving afterward, no matter what happens.



Sample Letters



Some wedding invitations come from people you may not even know. In that case, they probably just want to hear back from you YES or NO so that they know how many will be seated at the church or the reception. Send back your RSVP card; no other response is necessary.

For those you know where a little more communication is necessary, these sample letters may help. Add your own personal touch.

Sample Letter 1

No close relationship/ no explanation:

Thank you for including me in your wedding guest list. I/we am thankful to be your friend and want the best for you both. I wish I (we) could witness your wedding, but we are unable to attend. With regrets but continued friendship.

Sample Letter 2

Close relationship/ no detailed explanation:

Thank you for including me/us in your wedding guest list. I/we certainly do love you and want only the best for you both and always will. I/we wish I (we) could witness your wedding, but for reasons I/we are sure you are aware, my (our) conscience(s) will not allow it.

The older I/we get, and the more I/we see the importance of people living faithfully by their principles, the more I/we must do so in my/our own life. I believe you might feel the same and so I/we trust you understand how important that is to me/us.

With that “no”, here is my/our always “yes”: nothing will ever make me/us stop loving you and wishing and praying for your happiness and holiness. God bless you both. Much love, _____.

Close relationship/ some explanation:

Thank you for including me/us in your wedding guest list. I/we certainly do love and care for you both and want only the best for you and always will. I wish I (we) could witness your wedding, but for reasons I/we are sure you may be aware, my (our) conscience(s) will not allow it.

First, forgive me/us if I/we have said or done, or failed to say or do, anything to mislead you in any way. The older I/we get, and the more I/we see the importance of people faithfully and consistently living by their principles, the more I/we must do so in my/our own life. You have a right to know at least a little of why we must decline.

(Optional: Insert some additional explanation or thoughts here, appropriate to their situation and your relationship. For some who may be open, you can even borrow from this document.)

Marriage is a unique relationship that requires specific conditions to be valid and the Church helps

us to choose these things wisely. Not everyone who truly loves another person is called to attempt marriage with that person. This is a complex reality, and a sensitive one, because we are complex and sensitive beings. I wish I could share more here but would only do so if I knew you would be open. If you are curious and want to talk, let me/us know.

Second, I/we trust you understand how important this is to me/us.

With that “no”, here is my/our always “yes”: nothing will ever make me/us stop loving you and wishing and praying for your happiness and holiness. You have blessed me/us beyond measure, and I /we are proud to be your parents/friend/other.

(Optional: If you ever want to talk more about this or would like some guidance in the future, you know the door is always open.)

God bless you both. Much love, _____.

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Afterthoughts



Declining a wedding invitation—or simply saying “No” to someone we love—can be an easy decision for some, but a painful decision for others. Remember:

- Love can be expressed in ways other than accepting an invitation.
- Grief in making your decision can be expected.
- People are free to accept you or reject you.
- You cannot control their response.
- You must be ready for possible rejection.
- Time and open doors have a way of bringing some level of reconciliation later.
- Don't fear the fallout; grieve and offer it up.
- Ruptures can be healed with time, patience, and our cooperation with God's grace.

What will happen if I say yes to this invitation?

You will likely keep the peace, preserve the relationship “as is”, help the couple feel happy. But you may interiorly be repressing deep concerns and sorrow and suffering because of it.

You will also be publicly denying the fullness of truth of our faith, your own interior beliefs, and causing others to think you are perfectly fine with what is going on. You are likely to be giving a witness of weak faith to your other children or family and friends.

You will be giving an implied message to all who observe your presence, whether they realize it or not, that the relationship and the couple’s “happiness” trumps their holiness. You may be the one who the Holy Spirit was hoping to work through to bring his truth to the couple and you opted for comfort. Our Dear Lord understands our fear and reluctance, but he died on the cross to give us the courage, grace, and power to take

the high path. We need to take it even when it hurts.

What will happen if I say no?

You may be criticized, shamed, ostracized, humiliated, and rejected by the couple and others. You may permanently lose relationship(s). In today's "cancel culture," you may even lose your job, your income, your freedom and more. No one wants this but, when the issue is serious, this is the price we must be willing to pay if we are to surrender fully to the Lord and live our faith both privately and publicly.

If you express your general love and support of them as persons in other ways (see later) you may help to alleviate some of that. You will also be sending a loud and clear public message of authentic love. You will be witnessing to the truth and that you believe in the highest and best expression of allegiance to Our Lord. You will be setting an example for others to follow in the future.

You will be giving the message to everyone that marriage is not subject to the whims of man, it is no light matter, and that truth means something. That it is important enough to you that you are, like the martyrs, willing to suffer and even “die” to uphold a greater good.

God may use this witness to stir something in the hearts of those who see and understand what you are doing—including your immediate family. You may feel alone, but you will be cooperating with God in the powerful work of salvation of souls.

Is this kind of LOVE rigid and harsh?

Saying no may seem so to those who still have an immature faith and view of the world. It certainly seems “harsh” in a culture that promotes happiness over holiness, feelings over truth. It *is* the difficult and even heartbreaking path, but our very salvation may depend on it.

Should you risk alienating them?

Yes, if what they are about to do will bring great harm to them and others. Imagine someone you love is about to drink poison. Would you scream quickly, "STOP!" or stay silent to keep them from getting startled, upset, or offended by you?

It may not seem like the same thing, but it is!

Can't we leave it all up to God?

Yes and no. God has given us various levels of responsibility to be in charge over each other. He instructs, guides, heals, loves, and saves his people *through us*, inviting us into his work. As Mary said to us all, "Do what he tells you."

Why are our children leaving the Church?

Because they have seen us not living our faith to the fullest—privately and publicly—and standing firm when it becomes difficult. If we don't think it's worth it, why should they? We still have an obligation and an opportunity to witness to them, even when it hurts, trusting the Lord to continue the work in their hearts.

Does time heal all wounds?

Time alone does not heal all wounds. God heals all wounds, with our cooperation, and over time. That is our hope.

How do I deal with the pain?

Saying no to anyone we love, and having them pull away, is painful. Pain is what we feel when we experience loss of something good. Too often, the pulling away also includes attack in the form of criticism, shaming, and name-calling:

What's wrong with you?

You're so rigid!

Your religion has twisted your heart!

You have no right to judge!

Get with the times; you're so old fashioned.

When the pain seems unbearable, you can find consolation in remembering what you KNOW and not just how you FEEL:

You FEEL:

You maybe you *have* been too rigid.

Things might never be the same.
You might lose the relationship.
They might even hate you.
Others you care about might think and say the same.
You are the only one left standing for truth.

But You KNOW:

Their criticism is a form of control, meant to shame you into compliance.
They are hurting, too, and both of you are grieving.
Your emotions *will* take a hit, but your faith need not be shaken.
Your grief (shock, denial, anger, sorrow, and acceptance) will take some time.
Your child is wired to always be drawn to your love.
God has not given up on them.
God is asking you to give him room to work in their hearts.
God is asking YOU for your trust and patience.

You can unite your pain with his and it can be powerfully redemptive.

Have hope! Nothing stays the same forever.

* * *

About Rose Sweet



You've seen her on EWTN and heard her on Catholic radio. Rose is a Catholic author, speaker, life and relationship coach, and a pioneer in separation, divorce, and remarriage ministry.

Why can't someone in love have sex outside marriage?

*Why can't anyone marry if they love each other?
What's the big deal anyway?*

A woman who had herself suffered from a sinful past, Rose was searching for these and other answers.

*Why can't we find happiness on our own?
How can God make such rigid demands of us?
Isn't God all loving?*

When these earnest questions arose in her own heart, Rose made a deep dive into the truth as upheld by the Catholic Church.

Exploring the words of Christ through the powerful lens of St. John Paul II's "Love and Responsibility," and "Theology of the Body," Rose found the reasons and the language to reply.

And everything changed.

For over thirty years Rose has drawn from Scripture, TOB, and the mystical writings of Saints such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross to share the beauty of God's plan for man and woman. She offers neither permissive passes nor pious platitudes, but the Catholic Answers to the deepest aches of the human heart.

Contact rose for coaching: rose@rosesweet.com