



Witness to Love

A Couple's Guide to Gearing Up for a Lifelong Journey

Witness to Love



A Couple's Guide to Gearing Up for a Lifelong Journey

Copyright © 2017 by Ryan & Mary-Rose Verret

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in digital format, or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the copyright holder. For permission to quote, copy, or transmit any part of this work, please contact: info@witnessstolove.org.

ISBN 978-0-692-55568-2, V2.0

Published by Witness to Love, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
WitnessToLove.org

Cover Design by Chris Cope, CardinalStudios.org

Please read this prior to beginning your journey.

Dear Engaged or Newly Married Couple,

This is such an exciting and beautiful time in your lives! We are so happy that you are taking the time to prepare for a strong, healthy, and joy-filled marriage. The foundation you lay down together now will bear much fruit for many years to come.

We wish you and your beloved every grace and blessing on this very important journey of love and service to your families, your future families, and the next generation of marriages. Let this experience be one of enrichment, growth in virtue, and a deeper love of God and neighbor.

Please keep in your prayers the Witness to Love community of couples, advisors, contributors, and supporters.

In His Love,

Ryan and Mary-Rose Verret

Ryan and Mary-Rose Verret
Co-Founders & Authors



Table of Contents

	A Letter of Introduction	2
1	The Courage to Love: <i>Gearing Up for a Lifelong Journey</i> a. Virtues: Respect, Courage, & Honor b. Points of Focus: Communication, Commitment, & Clearing Up Conflict	4
2	The School of Love: <i>Where We Both Have Been & Where We Hope to Go Together</i> a. Virtues: Forgiveness, Endurance, & Humility b. Points of Focus: Your Family, My Family, & Our Family	12
3	The Support of Love: <i>What Does Friendship Have to Do with Marriage?</i> a. Virtues: Lovingness, Patience, & Kindness b. Points of Focus: Friendship, Community, & Leisure	22
4	The Gift of Love: <i>Living Your Wedding-Day Promise</i> a. Virtues: Charity, Purity, & Honesty b. Points of Focus: Virtuous Friendship, Marriage, & Living Your Vows	32
5	The Summit of Love: <i>God's Plan for Your Marriage</i> a. Virtues: Sacrifice & Self-Gift b. Point of Focus: The Theology of Marriage	46
6	The Labor of Love: <i>What Are You Working For?</i> a. Virtues: Wisdom, Moderation, & Gratitude b. Points of Focus: Providing for the Needs of Your Family, Home, & Leisure	54

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

—Colossians 3:12-14, ESV



THE COURAGE TO LOVE

Gearing Up for a Lifelong Journey

Navigating Chapter 1:

- Sections 1-3 should be done with your beloved within two days of your meeting.
- Sections 4-5 are done with your mentor couple during the meeting time.
- Section 6 should be done each day after your meeting.



The Gear You Need:

- Key Virtue: Respect
- Supporting Virtue: Courage
- Supporting Virtue: Honor



Mountains to Conquer:

- Communication
- Commitment
- Clearing Up Conflict

Defining the Virtues:



Key Virtue:

- **Respect (or Justice):** To give a person what is owed to him or her.

Supporting Virtues:

- **Courage:** To be prepared for uncertainty; to remain firm in hardship or opposition.
- **Honor:** To choose what is right even when it would be easier to choose something else.

Daily Couple Prayer:



Our Father in Heaven, give me the strength and the grace to love my spouse/future spouse as he/she was created to be loved. I cannot on my own possibly love this precious person as they were created to be loved and as You love them, but I know that You will give me the ability to love them with Your heart when my own heart is weak. Give us courage as a couple to love and respect each other as You do. We ask this in Your name. Amen.

1. Introduction

If you have ever been hiking or mountain climbing, you know how much work goes into preparing for the climb. At the base of the mountain there is a lot of activity. People are preparing their gear, dumping extra weight, exchanging stories, and getting excited or getting nervous. Climbers who have unsuccessfully attempted to reach the summit are returning bruised and discouraged. Those who have reached the peak and rested in triumph are returning renewed and are now prepared to climb yet a higher mountain—a greater challenge.

You are getting ready to climb together with your beloved to the summit of Mount Marriage. It is a mountain where almost half of those who attempt to climb it will return to its base bruised, hurt, and discouraged. Is marriage meant to be another of life's "no pain, no gain" experiences? Not necessarily. So we ask: Why do so many not reach the goal and summit of a life-long commitment to their spouse bearing the fruit of life and unity? Perhaps they did not have the right gear or someone to teach them how to climb and to walk with them. Perhaps they just lost sight of their partner and returned without them. Even more frequently, couples forget why they started to climb in the first place. Why does this happen? Often it happens because they had not prepared sufficiently for the journey, and there was no one to turn to when they needed encouragement, direction, mentoring, or a simple lifeline.

Just as important as having a reason to climb to the summit of Mount Marriage, you will also need to know how to climb and begin strengthening those muscles that you will need for the climb. The development of those knowledge "muscles" is called growth in virtue. The word "virtue" comes from the Latin word *virtus*, which means "strength" or "power." Growing in virtue means that you are working to strengthen your willpower to choose what is best and commit to the right decisions or choices even under the most challenging situations.

Throughout this workbook we will be describing virtues as the "gear" that you will need as a couple for your journey up the mountain. The virtues that are needed to begin your climb are respect, courage, and honor. These virtues are key to getting the most out of this process. Without them you cannot even begin the journey, let alone reach the summit of the mountain. We will describe each piece of gear and how to use it so that you can pack for your journey together.



2. A True Story by Mary-Rose

In a few months you will be making a promise to your spouse to love and serve him or her as you would love and serve Christ. You will promise to witness Christ's selfless love to help your spouse grow in their relationship with Jesus. Keeping this promise depends upon the development of respect or justice in your relationship. Justice may not seem like a romantic word, but here is a story that illustrates quite a few virtues—and the key one is justice. As you read, try to note some of the other virtues in the story.

A frail couple in their mid-90s sat at a kitchen table in a well-worn farmhouse. One was blind and the other was hard of hearing. They sat quietly and held hands. Not one word was spoken, yet there was a tangible bond between them. They had been married for eighty years. When I met them, I was engaged to be married, and as a part of my job I was sent by my bishop to give them an award of recognition for being the longest married couple in the state of Louisiana. Eighty years married was impossible to imagine, especially if that meant eighty years of ALWAYS trying to keep those challenging wedding-day promises. Love, honor, and cherish one another all the days of your life until death do you part. How is that humanly possible?

These two people had met as children while walking home from school on the country roads. After he graduated from high school and bought a car, he would pick her up and drive her home from school. They married and had a family. They worked hard on their farm. They had grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She became blind, and he had to care for her. One morning not long ago, he was making her breakfast when his sleeve caught fire from the gas stove. She could not help him because she could not see. He rolled across the kitchen floor to put the fire out. He was severely burned and knew he had to get to the hospital immediately, but he no longer had a driver's license or a car, so he got on his tractor and drove to the hospital where the doctors treated his burns. As the sun was setting, he started to leave the hospital, but they detained him because of the severity of his burns. They told him he had to spend the night in the hospital, but he responded, "I have never spent a night away from my wife in almost eighty years. She is blind. We are always together. I am going home." He got on his tractor and drove home to her before dark.

I came to give them a piece of paper to encourage and congratulate them, but they gave me a far greater gift. They gave me their witness as to what it looks like when you have kept your wedding-day promise for eighty years. The love and faithfulness of God was made visible for all to see. They kept their promise. They made it to the summit. Not long after that day I found out that the husband had passed away. Eighty years of "I do" is a beautiful thing!

This is a true story about the virtue of respect lived out in a real marriage. This virtue should have just become much more glamorous to you! Respect is a movement towards solidarity. Solidarity is a movement and personal transition from independence to "togetherness." Sharing a roof does not always guarantee that a couple is sharing their life. Remember that God revealed: "It is not good for man to be alone." (See the Book of Genesis.) Therefore, couples are obliged to share their lives in such a way that they reveal their true needs to each other. Growing in respect helps you to provide for the true needs of your beloved in order for them to fulfill their potential as a son or daughter of God.

3. Extremes and Remedies

There are two extreme ways of acting in our lives that work against respect and prevent us from meeting the true needs of our beloved. We either give our beloved more than they are due, and we end up hurting them by indulging them, or we give less than what is due and deny what is best for our beloved to reach his or her full potential. If we act in either extreme, then we do not live out our wedding-day promise to honor our spouse.



Reaching a Balance

Take a look at the habits or traits that fall in extremes, remembering that true virtue is found in the middle where we are balanced in our actions. It is very hard to always aim at the center of a perfect target, but practice does makes perfect. Perhaps at the end of our lives, we will be as perfect as a seasoned marksman at hitting the center of the target. Until then, we simply need to aim towards the center and be aware of the extremes, and our natural tendencies in either direction away from virtue.

Towards which extreme do you tend to lean? Prior to marriage, many couples tend to indulge their future spouse. During the years after the wedding, many couples tend to swing to the other extreme. On this side of heaven none of us are perfect, but we need to try. Jesus says to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect, so we strive for it. We owe this to the person we have promised to love, honor, and cherish for the rest of our lives! Still, in order to hit the mark, we need to be able to know which side of the target we tend to hit.

Evaluating Yourself:

On the following page, for each of the three virtues described, plot where you are on the scale. Please refrain from discussing with your beloved until the meeting day.

***Note:** These scales, which appear in each chapter, simply provide an opportunity for self-assessment, self-awareness, and will help you communicate with your beloved, so that together you can grow in virtue. The word “Extreme” on each scale simply refers to how far away you are from properly living out the virtue described.



Key Virtue: Respect

Selfishness: You have a tendency to be unfair and one-sided, and you keep count of who does or does not do a certain thing.

The Remedy: Begin with understanding the role of being generous, appreciative, and kind.

Respect: You tend to be just, fair-minded, and even-handed, challenging those you love to be the best that they can be. You keep up your end of agreements and encourage others to do the same.

You are growing as a person when: You begin to seriously rejoice in the preferences, ideas, and expectations of your beloved. You feel your willpower increasing to be concerned with others more than yourself.

Indulgence: You tend to be permissive and enabling, making excuses for other's weaknesses, looking the other way, and ignoring issues that need to be addressed.

The Remedy: Develop the ability to recognize the role of truthfulness and sincerity in maintaining dependency and loyalty within a relationship.

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1
(Extreme) (Just Right) (Extreme)

Supporting Virtue: Courage

Indecisiveness: You find yourself fearful, giving up, and unable to make decisions, and you second-guess decisions you have already made.

The Remedy: Understand that trials and difficulties might come but that these are opportunities for growth.

Courage: You are firm and unmoved in difficult times. You don't give up. You know difficulties will come, and you prepare for them.

You are growing as a person when: You feel fear, but still choose to do what is right and good.

Recklessness: You have a tendency to be impulsive or make quick decisions that are not well thought-out.

The Remedy: Begin living with knowledge and intentionality, planning your course of action realistically.

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1
(Extreme) (Just Right) (Extreme)

Supporting Virtue: Honor

Insensitivity: You don't treat others in the way that you would want to be treated.

The Remedy: Take into consideration the other's feelings, and your obligation to be loving and considerate.

Honor: You choose what is right and more realistic, even when it would be fun to do something else.

You are growing as a person when: You experience the peacefulness, happiness, and joy of freely choosing what is good, being truthful, and trusting God with how things will work out.

Dishonesty: You find difficulty in telling the truth, or you avoid telling the truth.

The Remedy: Become aware that true friendship can never be developed or maintained when it is based upon lies and deception. Choose the honorable option of being honest and truthful.

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1
(Extreme) (Just Right) (Extreme)

4. Meeting With Your Mentor Couple

Witness Couple Video:

In this first video, the witness couple will share with you the beautiful story of their relationship, some of the difficulties they faced along the way, and keys they have discovered to a happy and strong marriage.

Let's Talk About It:

1. Which aspects of respect below are most obvious in the opening story and video? Give examples to explain your choices.

- Likeability
- Courtesy
- Generosity
- Gratitude
- Kindness
- Loyalty
- Justice
- Prayerfulness
- Sincerity
- Truthfulness
- Dependability

2. How does this impact your understanding of marriage and your wedding vows?

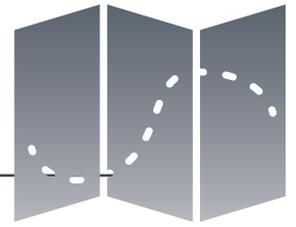
3. Now go back and read through the above list of the aspects or fruits of respect and number them in order of their importance to you in your relationship. When you are finished, compare your lists.

4. Which area(s) came first in importance for each of you?

5. Share with your beloved the reasons why the area you chose is most important to you in your relationship.



5. An Action Plan for Strengthening Your Relationship



Assessing Where you Are

Look at each of the scales in Section 3 for Respect, Honor, and Courage. Let's explore ways that you can honor your relationship with your beloved by developing and strengthening the virtue of Respect and its supporting virtues of Honor and Courage.

- Did you land toward the extreme in all situations? _____
- Which remedies for each of the virtues should you incorporate to move towards the center? (The remedies are listed below each of the extremes on page 8.)

Respect: _____

Honor: _____

Courage: _____

Mapping Out the Path to Growth in Respect

- Discuss which are the areas in which you need help from your beloved to fully embrace and grow in Respect. Which chosen area of growth will you spend the next month working on?

- How can your beloved hold you accountable? How can you hold your beloved accountable?
- How will you measure your progress?

Studies show that it is best to identify one area to work on rather than trying to work on more than one at once. Over a three- to four-week period you should notice some positive growth. The key to growth is accountability. You and your beloved will help each other to grow in the virtue of Respect by holding each other accountable.

Finally, write the date, time, and location of your next meeting here:



Takeaway:

Keep your “couple conscience” honest. Always keep in mind that every time a conflict or disagreement arises each of you should ask yourself: “Why am I fighting? Am I trying to protect myself? Am I working to protect my spouse and the unity of our relationship (marital bond)?” Which one are you fighting for? If being right is more important than your marriage, then your marriage will suffer. Respect does not mean an eye for an eye. It means giving your spouse the honor he or she is due as a child of God and keeping your wedding-day promise.

6. Follow-Up

Review these items daily with your beloved:

- Each day begin your follow up by praying the couple prayer found on page 5.
- Spend at least five minutes discussing how you did that day in your chosen area of growth.
- Talk about how you plan to work on that area the next day. Take the next five minutes to focus on your beloved’s chosen area of growth.
- Wrap it all up by encouraging each other and asking God for the grace to grow into the person who can love the way you were created to love.

Planning Ahead

1. Two weeks before your next meeting with your mentors, check in with them and have a similar conversation with them over the phone (or in person).
2. Remember your chosen area of growth. Plot on the number line below where you consider yourself to be now.



3. What was your greatest moment of growth?
4. Sections 1-4 of Chapter 2 should be done with your beloved within two days of your next meeting.

In Chapter 2 we will work on a different virtue that you will need for a long and happy marriage. Don’t stop working the new muscles you just acquired because you will continue to need them for your journey. Each virtue builds on the previous, providing foundation for the next. We are working to get your core strengthened first.

Remember that growing in virtue is similar to a physical workout. The more you work a particular muscle, the stronger it becomes, and the more you can do!