

Covenant love is centered on Christ, not self

When my wife Colleen and I were married we made a permanent decision to love — to give ourselves to each other freely and completely. On our wedding day, through the gift of grace, we entered into a profoundly intimate and life-giving relationship in communion with the Lord. On that day, with the help of Christ, we established a strong foundation upon which to build our married life.

The Scriptures say, "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labor." When building a home, you simply don't purchase a piece of land and begin construction! You have to build a foundation — you have to dig deep into the ground and build a strong support structure upon which that house will stand firm. The married life is no different. We must build the foundation of our married



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life on the covenant love of Jesus Christ.

In 1 John 4, we see this love in action. In verse 16, John tells us, "Let us love one another, for God is love, and he who lives in love, lives in God. And God lives in him." God is inviting husbands and wives to participate in a life of mutual self-gift built on the foundation of love, service and sacrifice. A contract is an exchange of goods that says, "This is yours and this is mine." A covenant is an exchange of persons that says, "I am yours and you are mine." A covenant is making a com-

plete and total gift of yourself to your spouse and they, in turn, make a complete and total gift of themselves back to you in love that is free, faithful, total and fruitful. It is a love that holds nothing back because Jesus held nothing back of his love for us on the cross when he broke himself open and poured himself out in love for us. This is the nature of the marriage relationship to which we are called and gifted.

Covenant love and intimacy is not self-centered but Christ-centered. Marriage is not simply about husbands and wives as a couple—it's taking that love that you have together and being a gift to the rest of the world. Through the cross God establishes a covenant with us in which he gives himself to us freely and completely, and when we open our hearts to his love and to his mercy—

when we make ourselves vulnerable before the giver of all gifts — then husbands and wives are giving themselves to Him in return.

In covenant relationship, each spouse helps the other to become more of the person who Christ created them to be. You don't lose yourself in this exchange of love and life — you find yourself. The strength of covenant intimacy sustains and nurtures married couples throughout their life together. Husbands and wives learn to see each other through God's eyes. Let us never forget that even in difficult moments that our Lord is the firm and strong foundation upon which our married life is built.

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