



LIVE YOUR VALUES

Values differ from ideals. An ideal is merely wishful thinking, a behavioral change we would like to make but just never get around to, a change that never becomes reality. Broken New Year's resolutions are examples of ideals. A value, in contrast, is an action chosen and lived. What we value is how we spend our time. Values are the myriad choices, big and small, made every day. They are shaped by many influences: parents, family, friends, the media and peers. Husband and wife come to marriage with values that vary in intensity. The more a couple shares the same values, rooted in love and care, the more successful their marriage will be. Couples entering into marriage need particularly to discuss their values concerning:

- Spiritual beliefs and faith traditions
- The need for possessions (materialism)
- Money issues such as spending versus saving; who should pay the bills; how to make major spending decisions
- Children
- Professional careers and ensuing career decisions
- The need for personal, private space and autonomy
- How much time to spend on what types of leisure activities

Of course, one's values often change over time. The spice of a good marriage is growing together in shared values.

Converting Ideals to Values

Sometimes we confuse values with ideals, deluding ourselves that an ideal is a value. God calls us to put our faith and our marriage at the center of our life. For example, the Catholic Church believes that couples, married in the Church, are Sacraments, living signs of God's love for each human being. Accordingly, we should value our marriage above all else. But do we? Sometimes, often unwittingly, couples immerse themselves in myriad activities (e.g., work, the TV, the computer, volunteer activities, parenting, etc.) that prevent them from spending quality time on their marriage. Nothing is wrong with separate activities. Indeed, many, like parenting and volunteering, are extremely valuable and important. The problem comes when these activities crowd out the time spent with our spouse. Couples who spend little quality time with each other live as *married singles*. Their marriage is merely an ideal, not a value.

Some ideals are difficult to convert to values. For example, the diet industry reaps billions of dollars annually on weight-loss programs. Though losing weight initially, most people eventually gain it back. To change an addiction like smoking or eating usually requires a significant personal commitment. So does escaping from a married-singles lifestyle. Let us share with you our values journey.

Our Values Journey

A married-singles couple first needs the grace to realize that they do not value their marriage highly enough. Next they need the courage and grace to make the changes that will make their marriage their highest priority. We would like to share how we realized that we were enmeshed in a married-singles lifestyle and the changes we made to make our marriage our highest priority. Fortunately, we were, and are, not alone in our values journey. We had the loving support of family and friends, our faith, and the models of other loving couples to guide and help us.

Charlie: When we first got married, Marty and I shared a strongly held value of wanting to help others. Inspired by the examples of Christian role models, Marty went into teaching in order to shape the values of high school students. Though not believing in God, I felt a great sense of gratitude for my excellent education and all the opportunities given me. I judged that mere chance had given me such opportunities, and I wanted to give something back. After we were married, we joined Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) to help the less fortunate. After our service in VISTA, Marty resumed her career as a teacher and I began a career in city management.

Marty: Besides wanting to contribute to society, Charlie and I valued spending time with our families and friends. For our vacations we visited our families and good friends. We usually spent at least one night every weekend with friends. Last but not least, we valued having children and caring for them. We decided after our daughter was born that I would stay home, even though it meant a sharp drop in income.

Charlie: After about 10 years of marriage, I was given the gift of faith in God. It was truly a gift because I still have no clear idea how I got faith. Wanting to pay God back, I volunteered for many church activities like singing in the choir and working in the St. Vincent DePaul Society. I also spent an excessive amount of time on my job, exercising and just hanging out with the guys (bowling, golf, watching sports, etc.).

Marty: I carried out most of the parenting responsibilities, balanced the checkbook, and immersed myself in volunteer activities, including serving on the Parish Council, relocating Vietnamese refugees, restoring the church nursery, and counseling friends on the telephone. Our daughter, Heidi, who has cerebral palsy, required considerable time driving her to various therapies. When we socialized, I invariably went off with the girls and Charlie with the guys.

Charlie: We were doing worthwhile activities, Marty immersed in being a good mother, both of us volunteering for the church, but we did virtually nothing as a couple.

We became more and more distant, more like business partners than spouses. I kept a mental ledger. "If Marty did this, I would do that." My allegedly good-natured kidding of Marty turned into hurtful digs.

Marty: Our loneliness and hurt further distanced us from each other. As I became more cut off from Charlie, I threw myself more into parenting and volunteer activities. Charlie accordingly worked longer hours, spent more time with friends at work and ran longer distances. We were unable to heal and forgive each other for the hurts that built up.

Charlie: We had been married 13 years, when we went on our Marriage Encounter Weekend. God gave us the grace to rediscover on that Saturday night that we still loved each other, to see how we had hurt each other and to start the healing process.

Marty: That weekend we learned that Charlie and I are a Sacrament, a visible sign of God's love for the world. We began to understand our responsibility to God to be a loving couple. We realized that to be the Sacrament God wanted us to be we had to reorder our priorities. I realized that I had to spend less time on volunteer activities and more on us as a couple and that I had to stop making our children my number one focus. I remember hearing the words: "The best thing you can do for your children is to love their father."

Charlie: I realized that our marriage, not my job, had to be my number one priority. I had to spend less time at work, and less time mentally preoccupied with work when home. I also had to spend less time hanging out with the guys and running marathons. I could still run, but not as many miles. We both realized that to be a visible sign of God's love, we had to do something as a couple. We decided to teach religious education to third graders together.

Marty: We also decided to provide transportation to church to a disabled parishioner, who became like a family member. We became involved in Marriage Encounter and formed a support group with other couples with whom we met monthly to share our lives. We shared our ups and downs and formed lasting friendships.

Charlie: Today I still struggle with following my call to make our marriage my highest priority. As I age, I have a strong urge to see more of the world's wonders and can obsess about travel. Another obstacle is our daughter Heidi, who lives with us and suffers from multiple disabilities. Instead of loving her for her joyful presence, I sometimes resent that having to take care of her limits what Marty and I can do. My resentment causes ill will among Heidi, Marty and me. Finally, my old siren, work, still calls me. Realizing that my workdays are finite, I can get too immersed in work projects.

Marty: As Charlie said, we struggle to make our values more important in our lives. For example, I need to temper my personal need for peace and quiet and join with Charlie doing fun things like socializing. Another way I can live out our value of being a Sacramental couple is to invite others to visit our home. To do this, I need to squash my ideal of having a perfect-looking home and a dynamite dinner menu.

EXERCISE 1: Live Your Values

Visualize the end of your life. Write your own eulogy—what would you like your spouse, family and friends to say about your life?

My eulogy: _____

Our Responses

Charlie: As I view my life, I have made regrettable mistakes; but I hope my family and friends forgive those errors and bad decisions. I hope they say that I tried hard to be a loving husband, a supportive father and a good friend. I hope they will remember my curiosity and sense of humor and celebrate my life at a fun-filled party.

Marty: At my funeral I hope my family and friends might say that she loved her family and friends and cared for them with food, cards, gifts and her specialty: “clipping important newspaper articles just for them.” I hope they say that I tried to use my education in social studies to help others understand world events and different cultures. I hope I will be remembered for putting love of my family and the world into action through volunteer service to Marriage Enrichment, church activities and community activities. Finally, I hope someone will say: “She prayed a lot.”

EXERCISE 2: Distinguish Your Ideals and Values

Rank the following values based on their importance to you, and then based on how important you think they are to your spouse.

Use the following scale:

- 4 Very high value
- 3 High value
- 2 Some value
- 1 Little or no value

Value	Importance to You (1-4)	Importance to Your Spouse (1-4)
Marriage		
Work, job		
Children		
Religion		
Money/possessions		
Financial security		
Nice house		
Exciting sex life		
Personal fitness		
Volunteer activities		
Alcohol, drugs or cigarettes		
Friends		
Extended family		
Education		
Nice car		
Clothes		
Vacations		
Watching TV		
Being on the computer		
Reading		
Other: _____		

Compare your answers with your spouse. How closely do your highly held values match each other's? Compare your eulogy from EXERCISE 1 to what you value highest. To what extent do these values reflect what you wrote in your eulogy? If you find a mismatch, select those ideals you would like to convert to values. What changes will you have to make in your priorities? Discuss these changes with your spouse.

Our Responses

Value	Marty's Rankings		Charlie's Rankings	
	Importance to Marty	Importance to Charlie	Importance to Charlie	Importance to Marty
Marriage	4	4	4	4
Work, job	4	4	4	4
Children	4	4	4	4
Religion	4	4	4	4

Value	Marty's Rankings		Charlie's Rankings	
	Importance to Marty	Importance to Charlie	Importance to Charlie	Importance to Marty
Money/possessions	3	2	3	3
Financial security	4	3	3	4
Nice house	4	3	3	3
Exciting sex life	2	4	4	2
Personal fitness	3	4	4	2
Volunteer activities	3	4	4	4
Alcohol, drugs or cigarettes	1	2	2	1
Friends	3	4	4	4
Extended family	4	3	4	4
Education	3	4	4	4
Nice car	2	1	1	1
Clothes	2	1	1	2
Vacations	2	4	4	2
Watching TV	2	4	4	1
Being on the computer	1	3	3	2
Reading	3	4	4	4

Charlie: *For the most part we share the same values. We both highly value our marriage, our work, our children and family, financial security, our house, education and reading. We do, though, differ on some items. I value more highly than Marty does having an exciting sex life, going on vacations and watching TV. With regard to our sex life and vacations, I would like both to be more frequent, so we have to negotiate compromises. Regarding TV I wish I were not addicted to the "boob tube." I would like to make more productive use of my time. But so far this is merely an ideal, not a value. Nevertheless, I think that my eulogy matches up fairly well with what I claim to value highly.*

Marty: *When I compare my eulogy to my rankings in this exercise, I judge that I am pretty consistent. Out of the seven topics that I ranked 4, five appeared in my eulogy, including family, friends, education, volunteer activities and religion. The two categories not in my eulogy that I ranked high (4) are work and having a nice house. On second thought, I would be very pleased if people said I was a hard worker.*