

Grow in Your Marriage with the Virtues

A Short Retreat for Busy People

Duration: 4 hours
 Suggested time:
 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM with on hour lunch break.
 or
 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM followed by Mass.
 If possible, provide childcare.

Suggested Retreat Structure

Activity	Duration
Opening Prayer and Introduction	10 minutes
Session 1	
Video 1: The Virtues – Prudence	10 minutes
Private time for couples	15 minutes
Group discussion	15 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Session 2	
Short introduction of topic	5 minutes
Video 2: The Virtues - Justice	10 minutes
Private time for couples	15 minutes
Group discussion	20 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Session 3	
Short introduction of topic	5 minutes
Video 3: The Virtues - Courage	10 minutes
Private time for couples	15 minutes
Group discussion	20 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Session 4	
Short introduction of topic	5 minutes
Video 4: The Virtues - Temperance	10 minutes
Private time for couples	15 minutes
Group discussion	20 minutes
Closing	10 minutes

Welcome

Say a few words welcoming the participants.

And give any directions for where the restrooms and refreshments will be found.

Then open the meeting with an opening prayer. (See sample below)

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Leader:

The theme for this retreat is our growth in holiness through the practice of the virtues.

It is by growing in holiness that we grow in happiness.

Let us quiet our minds and open our hearts to God.

Let's take a moment to remind ourselves that we are in God's presence.

Pause

+ In the name of the Father . . .

All: We thank you, O God, for all the gifts you have given us.

We thank you especially for our spouse and for the gift that we are to each other.

As we gather today to reflect on our marriage

help us be aware of your presence in our lives,

and help us to listen to your voice.

Reader: A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians (Phil 4:8-9)
(read slowly)

**Finally, brothers,
whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
if there is any excellence and
if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
Keep on doing what you have learned...
Then the God of peace will be with you.**

Pause

Leader:

O God, through your gentle whisper you call us to be Holy as you are Holy.

We pause today to listen to you.

Give us the courage to follow your promptings.

Lord, help us grow in virtue,

so that we can grow in holiness

and become the persons you created us to be. Amen.

+ In the name of the Father . . .

Before delving in the topic of Session 1, review the schedule with the participants so they know what to expect. It is important that during the retreat you follow the schedule closely so that you can end on time.

SESSION 1: Prudence – The habit of making wise decisions

Introductory Message: (5 minutes)

Feel free to adapt this message to your situation.

This retreat is a time you have set aside to reflect on how to grow in your marriage. Today we are here to explore those good habits, the virtues that contribute to our success in life and in marriage. Our bishops wrote: *“As a couple grows in virtue, they grow in holiness.”* (*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, p. 46)

The Catechism teaches us that a virtue is a good habit, a habit that leads us to doing what is good. CCC 1808

Have you ever heard of the term: Cardinal Virtues? If you have, how many are the Cardinal Virtues, and can you name some?

There are four Cardinal Virtues **Prudence, Justice, Courage and Temperance**. They are those fundamental good habits that lead us to success in life, as we read in the book of Wisdom: *“Moderation and prudence, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful than these.”* (*Wisdom 8:5-7*)

We will begin with the virtue of **Prudence**.

St. Augustine writes: “Prudence is the knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid.”

Life is full of decisions, big and small. Each day we make innumerable decisions, many out of habit. We decide what to eat, how we drive, when and how to use the Internet, what to buy, what to watch on TV, etc.

Some of these habits lead us to good decisions; other habits may not serve us well. (Give personal example)

From time to time we need to pause and examine our habits. That is what we are doing today. We want to see if our habits lead us to making prudent decisions, or if there are habits we need to change.

Philosophers are telling us that decisions are made in three steps.

Let’s consider how you made the decision to be here today.

1. **We learn all the facts.** *You learn about today's event. You checked the start and ending time, and checked your calendar.*
2. **You identify the option that is best for us.** *I am certain that you had other things you wanted to do. You considered those and compared them with the benefit of coming here today. You considered the pros and the cons.*
3. **You decided to take action.** *You chose to come here and signed up.*

Making prudent decisions helps us avoid costly mistakes and helps us make choices that benefit our spouse, our family and us.

Show the Video (10 minutes)

We will now view a short video on the virtue of prudence.

Private time for couples (15 minutes)

Give each couple a copy of the handout and allow couples to find a space in the room or the area where husband and wife can speak privately with each other. Indicate that on the backside of the handout they will find a series of questions to guide their conversation. They do not have to answer all of them. They can choose the questions they are most comfortable talking about. Create a relaxed environment by playing soft background music.

Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Bring the couples back together as one group and engage the couples in a group discussion. Perhaps the couples can be seated in a circle or if the group is large they can be split in smaller groups of 4 to 5 couples each.

Questions for the group discussion:

1. What are some of the decisions we make each day out of habits?
2. Which of these decisions have the potential for negative consequences?
3. How do you and your spouse make important decisions?
4. What do you do when you face an important decision and you do not know which way to go? Do you consult with someone?
5. Can you think of decisions you wish you could do over?
Can you share some of these?
6. What about decisions you made and you wish you had listened to some else's advice? Can you share some of these?

7. How do you teach the virtue of prudence to your children?
8. What are some of the decision that your children or grandchildren are facing today? How can you offer the benefit of your experience and wisdom without interfering with their independence?
9. How is your faith guiding you in making prudent decisions?

SESSION 2: Justice – The source of harmony and peace in our homes

Introductory Message: (5 minutes)

(Feel free to adapt this message to your situation. If necessary use some of the materials in the article found on the Justice handout.)

In this second session we reflect on the virtue of Justice. Imagine what your relationship would be like if you constantly acted unfairly toward each other. The relationship would quickly self-destruct. Justice is the source of harmony and peace in our marriage and in our homes. It is the foundation of the trust we need to build a marriage together.

According to the Catechism, justice is “the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.” (CCC1836) The virtue of justice prompts us to respect the rights of others.

In this session we explore justice in the home from three angles:

- what spouses owe each other,
- the obligations of parents toward their children,
- and the responsibilities of adult children toward their elderly parents.

Do you remember what you promised on your wedding day?
(Ask the audience and wait for some responses)

The words of the wedding vows used often in the Catholic Church are: “I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.”

Another aspect of justice in the family involves the our obligations as parents toward our children: providing for them, spending time with them, teaching them through our example, passing on the faith, etc.

Pope Francis reminds us that the family is the place where we are formed as people. The future of the Church and of society depends on us, on how we prepare our children to be tomorrow’s adults.

The third dimension of justice we consider today has to do with our responsibilities toward our parents. We may live far away from our parents, or we may be near them. Do we know what they need? What are our responsibilities toward them?

Show the Video (10 minutes)

We will now view a short video on the virtue of justice.

Private time for couples (15 minutes)

Give each couple a copy of the handout and allow couples to find a space in the room or the area where husband and wife can speak privately with each other. Indicate that on the backside of the handout they will find a series of questions to guide their conversation. They do not have to try to answer all of them. They can choose the questions they are most comfortable talking about. Create a relaxed environment by playing soft background music.

Group Discussion (20 minutes)

Bring the couples back together as one group and engage the couples in a group discussion. Perhaps the couples can be seated in a circle or if the group is large they can be split in smaller groups of 4 to 5 couples each.

Questions for the group discussion:

1. What did you read in the handout or saw in the video that struck you, and why?
2. What do you remember the most about your wedding day? Do you remember how you felt when you said your vows?
3. As a parent what is the strongest obligation you feel or have felt toward your children?
4. What have been your most memorable times as a child?
5. If you are a grandparent, what is your role today in helping your grandchildren grow and mature?
6. What is the most important life lesson you want your children to learn from you?
7. Are your parents still part of your life? What do they need from you and how can you help them?
8. Forgiveness is a means to heal hurts caused by lack of justice. What helps you grow in your ability to forgive?
9. Is your faith helping you remember your promises, obligations and responsibilities?

One subject not touched on in the videos and the handout is that of how families act justly toward neighbors, the community and society. (Social Justice.) You may want to address this topic by adding questions.

SESSION 3: Fortitude – The Strength to Live our Vocation

Introductory Message: (5 minutes)

(Feel free to adapt this message to your situation. If necessary use some of the materials in the article found on the Justice handout.)

The Catechism tells us that fortitude is the virtue that gives us the strength to conquer our fears and to persevere in the pursuit of the good. (CCC1808) We all have fears. We need courage in our daily life to overcome those fears that keep us from doing what is right, all kinds of fears: the fear of standing out, the fear of disappointing someone, the fear of negative consequences, the fear of what people will say or think, the fear of being wrong, etc.

(Give some examples...)

Fortitude is the spiritual strength that helps us make the right choices as spouses, as parents, as sons and daughters; in the work we do, and with the people we serve. Fortitude is the virtue that helps us to challenge each other to become better spouses. Fortitude helps us live our Christian vocation to serve God and one another and in so doing to grow in holiness.

The video we will see invites us to consider how courage helps us grow as spouses and as parents, and reminds us that fortitude comes from God; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Show the Video (10 minutes)

We will now view a short video on the virtue of fortitude.

Private time for couples (15 minutes)

Give each couple a copy of the handout and allow couples to find a space in the room or the area where husband and wife can speak privately with each other. Indicate that on the backside of the handout they will find a series of questions to guide their conversation. They do not have to try to answer all of them. They can choose the questions they are most comfortable talking about. Create a relaxed environment by playing soft background music.

Group Discussion (20 minutes)

Bring the couples back together as one group and engage the couples in a group discussion. Perhaps the couples can be seated in a circle or if the group is large they can be split in smaller groups of 4 to 5 couples each.

Questions for the group discussion:

1. What did you read in the handout or saw in the video that struck you, and why?
2. What are the moments in which you have been most afraid during your life? What helped you find the courage?
3. Pope Francis told engaged couples: You are the courageous one what are choosing to marriage? Does it take courage to get married and to stay married?
4. Do you remember a time when you witnessed one of your parents or both show courage?
5. Jesus said to his disciples "Do not be afraid." What are the fears that you have to conquer day in and day out in your home, neighborhood, at work, etc?
6. Are there times when you are afraid for your children or grandchildren? What do you do?
7. What prayer or scripture passage helps you find the courage you need?
8. Can you think of a person in your life who has demonstrated courage and who inspires you?
9. Is there a thought or an insight that came up in this discussion, which you think it is important, and you want to remember?

SESSION 4: Temperance – The Virtue of Self-control and Moderation

Introductory Message: (5 minutes)

(Feel free to adapt this message to your situation. If necessary use some of the materials in the article found on the Justice handout.)

Temperance is not a word we hear often these days. To some it may seem an antiquated word. Other words, which relate to the virtue of temperance, are: self-discipline, self-control, and moderation.

When we speak about temperance what are we talking about? We are talking about the habit that controls our desires, because even though desires are good they need to be guided. In our everyday life it is easy to develop habits that are created by self-indulgence and which hurt us and hurt our relationships.

(Give examples, such as too many sweets, not enough exercise, etc.)

The Catechism tells us that we, either govern our passions and find peace, or we let ourselves be dominated by them and become unhappy. (CCC2339)

Instead of dwelling on the way we can fail in practicing this virtue, the program invites us to consider how we can grow as persons by developing habits that channel our desires for the good, such as chastity, modesty, self-control and moderation in all that we do. The video touches on two problems that are sources of pain in today's families: alcoholism and pornography.

Show the Video (10 minutes)

We will now view a short video on the virtue of temperance.

Private time for couples (15 minutes)

Give each couple a copy of the handout and allow couples to find a space in the room or the area where husband and wife can speak privately with each other. Indicate that on the backside of the handout they will find a series of questions to guide their conversation. They do not have to try to answer all of them. They can choose the questions they are most comfortable talking about. Create a relaxed environment by playing soft background music.

Group Discussion (20 minutes)

Bring the couples back together as one group and engage the couples in a group discussion. Perhaps the couples can be seated in a circle or if the group is large they can be split in smaller groups of 4 to 5 couples each.

Questions for the group discussion:

1. What did you read in the handout or saw in the video that struck you, and why?
2. What does moderation mean to you?
3. Is anyone willing to share in which areas of your life you feel strongest when it comes to self-control?
 - a. Eating and drinking
 - b. Social Media/use of digital devices/Internet
 - c. Watching TV
 - d. Following sports
 - e. Hours spent on work (workaholic)
 - f. Time spent with friends and hobbies.
 - g. Any other not listed.
4. Who is a good example to you of moderation and self-control? What can you learn from this person?
5. How do we teach modesty to our children or grandchildren?
6. How do we teach our children or grandchildren about the virtue of chastity? Where do we start? Does anyone have any suggestions?
7. Are you aware of how your children or grandchildren can be exposed to pornography? What can you do to protect them?
8. Many psychologists are recognizing that pornography damages the brain and affects negatively marriages and couples' sexual health. Why do you think this is so?
9. How is your faith giving you the courage to control your desires and resist temptations, or develop positive habits?

Closing

Spend a few moments recapping some of the key points presented in the videos and discussed by the participants. Stress the importance of these virtues to the health of the relationship between husband and wife and with God. The mastery of the Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance is the prerequisite for success in life and in marriage. Virtue is the source of our happiness and leads us to holiness, as the United States Catholic Bishops remind us: "As a couple grows in virtue, they grow in holiness." (Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan, p. 46)

Close with a prayer. We recommend the prayer to the Holy Family found at the end of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation: The Joy of Love.

Prayer to the Holy Family
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
Graciously hear our prayer.
Amen.