



Many brides-to-be (and grooms-to-be) find themselves suddenly surrounded by unsolicited advice, welcome or unwelcome. I've been engaged for nine months (three to go), and now am pretty sure I know a thing or two about this whole 'betrothed' thing. So, to add to the chorus, here are seven completely unsolicited tips for couples staring down the altar:

1. It's OK if you freak out a little after the proposal – and not in a good way

A lot of women spend a lot of time imagining how their engagement will happen, what they'll be wearing, how the scene will be set, how their beloved will ask them and a myriad of other details. All of this is touching and can make for beautiful memories, but can also distract from the real question that is being asked: will you stay with me forever no matter what? It's a huge ask.

This is Anthony, now. Guys, asking a woman to marry you is a huge commitment, and I had no idea how big it was when I asked Sara. God doesn't give us the grace we need for the future. He gives us what we need right now. It's impossible to understand what life-long fidelity will mean for us in ten years, but if we trust in God and live our love one day, one week at a time, He will give us the grace we need to be faithful and loving right now.

Sara again: After the initial butterflies dissipate, it's OK if you find yourself freaking out a little bit, and this goes for the guys, too. For a solid week after Anthony and I got engaged, I woke up in a cold sweat every night wondering what in the world I had gotten myself into. Life is not a romantic comedy; it's OK to freak out in a completely unromantic way.

2. It's a Sacrament

After the nervousness subsides (and it will) comes the planning: and oh, what an adventure planning a wedding is! A solid third of the internet is made up of wedding websites, so I'll spare the repetition and simply say: remember that you're preparing for a Sacrament, and you should approach it the way you would approach any other Sacrament, with prayer and reverence.

3. You're still getting to know each other

Some of the most honest conversations Anthony and I have had came (and continue to come) after we became engaged. This is normal, of course, especially as you're going through pre-Cana classes; they're designed to spur conversations. Through our classes and meetings with the priest who will marry us, we've had to have many conversations about everything from the mundane to the heartbreaking and after each one I walk away knowing more about Anthony. Don't be afraid of the conversations, especially if they show you a side of your beloved you have yet to see.

4. Forgive and be forgiven

Wedding planning and Sacrament preparation is stressful: no way around that. At some point you will hurt each other and be hurt by those around you. Be quick to forgive and ask forgiveness in return – especially through the Sacrament of confession.

5. Get away

Go on dates together. Go out with your friends apart. Get a lot of sleep.

6. Allow yourself to be delighted

As overwhelming as the engagement period can be, it is also a time of unbelievable joy. This is especially true as you learn more and more about the soul you get to spend the rest of your life loving. Joy also hides within the totally mundane moments. God will surprise you and delight you in a million different little (and big) ways along this journey, if you let Him.

7. Pray

Pray with each other, pray for each other, pray in the car, pray before planning meetings, pray before bed, pray when you wake up, pray when you don't feel like it, pray when you do feel like it. It doesn't have to be elaborate or long; Anthony and I are way into the "Lazy Catholic Three-Pack" (Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be). No matter what you do, give every single moment of this time to God. It is God who sent you on this journey together and God who will sustain you through it. Always check in; He likes hearing from you.