



FOREVER

A Catholic Devotional for Your Marriage

Jackie Francois Angel and Bobby Angel

FOREVER

A Catholic Devotional
for Your Marriage

By Jackie Francois Angel and Bobby Angel

Foreword by Bill Donaghy



BOOKS & MEDIA
Boston

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Angel, Jackie Francois, author.

Title: Forever : a Catholic devotional for your marriage / by Jackie Francois Angel and Bobby Angel.

Description: Boston : Pauline Books & Media, 2017.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016058215 | ISBN 9780819827432 (pbk.) | ISBN 0819827436 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Married people--Prayers and devotions. | Catholic Church--Prayers and devotions. | John Paul II, Pope, 1920-2005. Theology of the body.

Classification: LCC BX2170.M3 A54 2017 | DDC 242/.644--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016058215>

Many manufacturers and sellers distinguish their products through the use of trademarks. Any trademarked designations that appear in this book are used in good faith but are not authorized by, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition*, copyright © 1989, 1993, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for use in the United States of America, copyright © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. — Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission.

Excerpts from papal and magisterium texts copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

The Four Loves by C. S. Lewis, copyright © C. S. Lewis Ptc. Ltd. 1960. Extract reprinted by permission.

Cover photo by Kristin Rogers

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

“P” and PAULINE are registered trademarks of the Daughters of St. Paul.

Copyright © 2017, Jackie Francois Angel and Bobby Angel

Published by Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Paul's Avenue, Boston, MA 02130-3491

Printed in the U.S.A.

www.pauline.org

Pauline Books & Media is the publishing house of the Daughters of St. Paul, an international congregation of women religious serving the Church with the communications media.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

21 20 19 18 17

Contents

Foreword	ix
Introduction	1
How to Use This Book	5

WEEK ONE

Why Am I Here?

The Meaning of Life	11
Back to the Beginning	14
God Knocks on Our Hearts	16
Waking Up to Love	18
The Human Heart's Deepest Desire	21
In the Image of a Gift	24
The Wedding Feast of Heaven	27

WEEK TWO

What Is Love?

I Love Nachos and I Love You	33
A Love of Choice	36

The True, Good, and Beautiful	39
When <i>Agape</i> Love Blooms	42
Loving Our Spouse “Incarnationally”	45
The Scandal of the Cross	48
Jesus the Bridegroom	51

WEEK THREE

What Is Marriage?

Written in Our Bodies	57
The Marks of Authentic Love	60
Free—Loving Without Reservation	63
Total—Body, Heart, Mind, and Soul	66
Faithful—Until Death Do Us Part	69
Fruitful—“Be Fruitful and Multiply”	73
The Words Made Flesh	76

WEEK FOUR

How Can Our Love Last?

The One Who Satisfies	81
God Cares Who You Marry	85
Love the Person, Not the Idea	88
Chastity and Dirty Windshields	90
You Have Ravished My Heart	93
Masters of Our Own Mystery	97
The Test of Virtuous Love	100

WEEK FIVE

What Endangers Our Love?

The Shadow of Sin	105
The Opposite of Love	108
Guarding the Gift	112
Babies and Bonding	115
Desires of a Twisted <i>Eros</i>	119
The Healing Power of Confession	122
The Cross of Redemption	125

WEEK SIX

What Is God's Plan for Our Family?

Society's Foundational Building Block	131
Communion of Persons	134
Miracles of Creation	137
Trusting God, Even When It Hurts	140
The Family's Mission in the World	143
Family and Forgiveness	146
Reunion with the Trinity	149
Afterword	153
Appendix I: Recommended Reading	157
Appendix II: On Natural Family Planning (NFP)	161

Foreword

You are holding an absolute gem in your hands.

For starters, this book is a crisp, readable, and very thorough walk through the beautiful vision of the theology of the body, Saint John Paul II's epic meditation on what it means to be a human person. You and I were loved, gifted, and called into existence by God to become loving gifts in return.

But this book does so much more than deliver rich dogma—it's a devotional! Each reflection is beautifully crafted for your prayerful meditation, ends with an invitation to live out the teaching it expounded upon, and then closes with a prayer. It's basically one-stop shopping for married couples to know, love, and live out the theology of the body in this age of radical self-centeredness. Through its daily explanations of the theology of the body, it reveals how a couple can discover our amazing human capacity for self-giving love.

As a personal friend of Bobby and Jackie, it has been a huge grace to see their hearts grow in friendship and mutual love and now step into the dance that is marriage and family, the earthly sign of the Great Dance to which every human heart is invited.

How refreshing to hear their stories and to see how they have learned and continue to learn the steps in this dance as they prepare for their ultimate entrance into the heart of the Bridegroom himself. In this age of varied interpretations of marriage, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity, this little work brings a clarity that is sorely needed. The sign of our masculinity and femininity is indeed of divine design. So take up this gem of a book, fellow married lovers! Treasure it and let its wisdom and light be a source of God's grace for you, your marriage, and, through that holy love, a light for the world to see.

BILL DONAGHY

Introduction

Every person on this earth is united in more ways than one: we all breathe air, we all need water, we all love nachos (most of us), and we all have an insatiable need to love and be loved. Without love, human existence quickly loses its color, its vitality, and its meaning. Because love is so key to our happiness, we often find unhealthy ways to satisfy our ache for love, and sometimes we try to repress or deny its existence altogether. But our longing for love always returns. You could say that it's built into our very creation as man and woman.

It was a celibate pope, of all people, who helped us to understand the mysterious dynamic of love: Saint John Paul II.

John Paul II is like a spiritual grandfather to the both of us. We spent the first two decades of our lives under his pontificate. And what a pope to grow up with! His joy and charisma were infectious, and we watched with excitement as he travel the globe.

Even as he aged and grew ill, John Paul II still carried a charismatic light of holiness that sparked hope in others. We both cried when he passed away on April 2, 2005. We felt we had lost someone we knew personally, someone we loved and who also

loved us. We were also grateful that he was free of his trials and sufferings and that he would finally be completely united with God, his heart's lover.

Along with God's providential guiding hand, we credit the teachings of John Paul II (and possibly his direct intercession) for bringing us together as a couple. We were on different vocational journeys when we met at a retreat dedicated to comprehending and living out this pope's great body of work known today as *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (henceforth *TOB*). From this seemingly random encounter, a friendship and eventually a romantic relationship blossomed. Now married, we are amazed at how God used one saint above all others to form us intellectually and spiritually and to lead us to a deeper love of God, the Author of all life, who is Love itself.

Through John Paul II's great work we received a new "lens" through which to see the world. We began to understand how God revealed his divine plan of love in our bodies, in our creation as male and female. We began to understand that what we do to our bodies we do to our souls. This carries weight especially for those of us called to the great vocation of marriage.

In generations to come, as the Church looks back, it will likely see John Paul II as a brave shepherd whose teachings gave clarity to so many lost in the cultural wasteland of the sexual revolution. We have seen the power of this great teaching in our lives and how it has changed others, which is why we're so eager to pass it on.

John Paul II's great vision of the human person is not secret Gnostic information or anything truly *new* to Christianity. Understanding what it means to be incarnate—to be bodily—is at

the heart of Christianity, but we have all been influenced by a modernist perspective that sees the human body as something only outside of our *real* selves, a mere tool to be enhanced, reshaped, or even discarded. We've lost the right way to truly see our bodies.

John Paul II had his finger on the pulse of modern culture and saw where it was headed, so he packaged an ancient vision of the integrated human person in a way that would make sense to our modern ears. We are more than random biological cells and neurons chaotically firing together, he declared. Our bodies are worth *infinitely more* than a hook-up or a one-night-stand. Our bodies, so often misunderstood, actually contain a grand theology (a study of God)! The *invisible* mystery of God is physically manifest in the *visible* sign of the human body.

But how can we adequately learn this amazingly rich teaching and apply it to our lives? First, we must be *open* to receiving this great truth. Like Christ himself, John Paul II never *imposes* the truth—he only *proposes*. For those of us who have grown up Catholic or within a Christian tradition, we particularly need to hear the story of God's love for us with new ears and to have an open attitude willing both to wrestle with God intellectually and to allow him to gently transform our hearts. If we have come out of poor marriages or relationships that have wounded us deeply, we need to open our hearts up to God's great love story all the more. Only he can heal the ache of our hearts.

So many couples we encounter ask us, "*Where* was this teaching twenty years ago!" or they say sadly, "We never heard any of this." To those couples we say, "It's *never* too late. Give thanks that you're finally *hearing* it!" God meets us in our brokenness and leads us out toward wholeness. So many wounded people

starve for love in the world, our workplaces, our homes; we need to receive this good news and to be missionaries of love to the world.

To those couples who learn this teaching at the beginning of their dating relationships: brothers and sisters, we have the profound *responsibility* to be witnesses of this life-giving and joyful love for a world *starving* for authentic love. We've grown up in a culture of promiscuity that degrades the human body. We need to reclaim the conversation and witness to the joy and radiance that a devoted marriage can offer to the world.

For married couples, we hope this book will help you pray with your spouse, as well as grow in your understanding of this profound vision from John Paul II. We also hope that you will find joy in the vocation of marriage and discover how we can make the love of God physically present in the world through the simple act of loving our spouse and our children. We need holy husbands and holy wives, holy fathers and holy mothers. Because marriage is an emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual union, this path begins by praying together and uniting yourselves spiritually with one another.

We were blessed to begin our marriage with this formational teaching, and we pray the insights of this great saint will bless you as they have blessed us. We are humbled to be messengers of this teaching and to be missionaries in the service of Jesus Christ and his Church. We have all been made for a love that lasts *forever* and there's no better time to begin this journey than today.

Saint John Paul II, pray for us!

How to Use This Book

The primary purpose of this book is to lead couples into prayer and meditation on the glory of God's love and his call to love freely, totally, faithfully, and fruitfully.

We also hope to give you an overview of Saint John Paul II's teaching on the theology of the body and lead you through the major themes in this beautiful body of work. If you are already familiar with the theology of the body, we hope this book will bring you some new insights and ways to live it out as a couple.

We read several books as an engaged couple that helped us to grow together intellectually and spiritually, including Fulton Sheen's *Three to Get Married*, Saint John Paul II's document "On the Christian Family in the Modern World" (*Familiaris Consortio*), and other great books on the theology of the body. This is why we believe in the power of doing spiritual reading together as a couple.

The challenges in this book focus on married couples, but it will be helpful for couples who are dating and engaged as well. At whatever stage you may be in your relationship, we hope this devotional will help you grow in your relationship. Feel free to

read the chapters together as a couple or on your own. But be sure to *talk* about it afterward if you are able. Communicate with one another about what moved or challenged you—it will be time well spent.

It is possible to read this book straight through, but we hope you will take the time to meditate and reflect on the daily topic and allow for a six-week devotion (trust us, there's plenty to chew on; it will take a lifetime to unpack some of these themes!). Reading a book, especially a good book, is never a race.

We hope you take the time to read this book *prayerfully*. Before you read, ask God to reveal what he wants you to learn. Daily prompts and challenges will help you along the journey. Don't be afraid to sit with whatever is stirred up by the readings. None of us have lived chastity perfectly, and the theology of the body can bring to the surface past memories, failures, and deep wounds. But the message of Christ is always a message of hope and redemption. No one is ever "too far gone" to return to the welcoming arms of God the Father. To repeat the constant refrain of our favorite saint: "Be not afraid!"

You may want to pick a favorite feast day or a Marian feast to start or end your devotional reading. The intercession of our Holy Mother and the saints can only unite couples more in Christ.

We hope this book helps you to grow as a couple. John Paul II and his teachings changed our lives. His writings have been studied and disseminated by scholars, speakers, writers, and many talented individuals; we are humbled to also share this great teaching with others.

Have fun, and remember to laugh with your spouse. If nothing else, this book will make a worthy coaster for your coffee.

Praised be Jesus Christ!



WEEK ONE

Why Am I Here?



DAY ONE

The Meaning of Life

Why am I here?

What's the meaning of my life?

Do I have a purpose?

These questions have provoked and plagued humanity since the time of the ancient philosophers. Today, the multiplication of self-help books and therapist offices suggest that we are not any closer to knowing the purpose of our existence.

But maybe we've *already* been given the answer. Maybe we just need to rediscover it or see it with new eyes.

Our answers to life's important questions largely direct our energies and choices. For many centuries, it was commonly understood that there was a divine design behind all of creation—whether it was attributed to the Greek gods; the Egyptian deities; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; or Jesus Christ himself. Centuries before our current millennium, advances in science and modern philosophies led many to ditch the idea of an all-loving God designing the universe (or at the

very least demote him to the position of an aloof “clockmaker” content to wind up creation and never interfere with it again).

When we believe that we are simply the result of random biological processes and chance, our lives lack meaning. This can be crushing. These ideas have left a great void in the human heart. We’re facing a societal spiritual crisis. Violence, promiscuity, and suicide rates have all been increasing steadily. People have access to a global network of communication, information, and opportunities, but they are more depressed and bored than ever before.

You may have felt the weight of this “crisis of existence.” You may wonder what this life is all about. You may question where this ache for meaning comes from and how it can possibly be answered.

Thankfully, we have not been left alone. We’ve been given a saint to guide us. Saint John Paul II formed himself so closely to the heart of Christ that he could sense the wayward signs of the times. So he devoted his energies to leading the stray sheep back to the heart of the Father who has willed us into existence and had us in mind before the dawn of creation itself.

The secret to our existence is closer than we realize. To find the secret of life we don’t need another self-help book or to see a guru atop a Himalayan mountain.

The answer to this ache is written right into our bodies.

Daily Challenge

Think about your life up to this point and consider everything (good and bad) that has brought you to where you are now. Can you feel

a sense of direction or see a purpose in the events in your life and why they have happened as they have? Discuss this with your spouse.

Prayer

Lord, help us to find in you the meaning of our existence and the answer to the ache of our heart for purpose. Thank you for bringing us to where we are today, and be with us in the days ahead. Protect and guide our vocation so we can truly love one another. Amen.



DAY TWO

Back to the Beginning

If you've ever picked up a book and flipped open to a random page and started reading, it can be pretty confusing. Names, places, and plot developments mean little to nothing because you have no context for the greater story taking place.

With any great story, you must start at the beginning. Saint John Paul II embarks on his teaching with the prompt Jesus himself gave to the Pharisees who challenged him on marriage. He called them to look back to the beginning:

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? (Mt 19:8)

The “beginning” refers to Genesis, the scriptural account of our earthly creation, where we see that God created the world *out of love*, since God himself *is love* (see 1 Jn 4:8). God's love is creative and overflowing. In this story of creation, we encounter God who is Love, and by nature love diffuses itself; it flows out like water from a fountain.

Thus, *all* creation is for the glory of God and reveals his Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. The stars, fish of the sea, creeping things, and wild animals are all God's handiwork; all of them are called “good.” But, as everything in the order of creation gets more beautiful and more complex, God saved the best for last:

us. He created us male and female and doesn't call us just "good," but "very good," since we alone are created in his image and likeness—the image and likeness of *love*. In this profound truth we find our purpose—to *love and to be loved*.

Saint Teresa of Kolkata often emphasized that we are not just numbers in the world but that we all have been created to love and to be loved by God in return.

The book of Genesis is a profound narrative detailing the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. The first book of the Scriptures lays the foundation for the story of the human person who is created out of God's generosity and is destined to share in that blessed union of love.

Is this not the desire of every human heart?

Daily Challenge

What are some ways your spouse shows you love? How do you show yours in return? Read the first chapter of Genesis slowly and take the time to absorb its poetic language and imagery. Discuss it with your spouse. What new insights come to mind?

Prayer

God, open our eyes to see the way we are loved each day by you and by others. Allow our love to always reach outward and not to remain within ourselves. Amen.



DAY THREE

God Knocks on Our Hearts

Our purpose is to love and to be loved, which is why the human heart fears few things as much as loneliness. Knowing this, we can understand why the ache of Adam was so deep. In the second account of the creation story in Genesis 2, Adam cannot find a suitable partner among the other animals. He quickly realizes that none of the animals can be his partner. He cannot cuddle with the porcupine, and the giraffe proves an ill-suited dance partner. Profoundly alone, Adam longs for life-giving love.

We can probably relate to Adam's loneliness. Whether loneliness strikes in marriage or a new community, work environment or even in a crowded room, this aloneness seems part of the human condition. While we may be tempted to just cry and belt out a rendition of "All by Myself" or "Somebody to Love," these times of loneliness can be opportunities to draw closer to God. By our solitude, we are "set into a *unique, exclusive, and unrepeatable relationship with God himself*" (TOB 6:2).

A priest-friend once told us that, "Loneliness is simply God knocking on your heart, asking you to spend time with him." We often think of loneliness as the enemy, as a terrible threat to our peace and happiness. Instead loneliness is perhaps a plea from God to remember him and to turn to him first before we try to fill up our lives with any other person or thing.

Solitude is not the same thing as loneliness. Times of solitude are set aside purposefully for reading, prayer, or simply to be alone. Today, because we are glued to our cell phones and caught up in the endless distractions they provide, we are often never truly silent. And thus we risk not hearing the still, small voice of God. It is not good for us to be alone, but once we realize that in him “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), we are never truly alone.

All of us, without exception, have the “ache of Adam,” this fundamental ache within our being for wholeness—a cry for *communion*.

God wants to satisfy that longing.

Daily Challenge

Find time to be alone. Turn off your phone or leave it far away from you. Sit outside if you can. Listen to your breathing and observe God's creation. Ask for peace in this moment.

Prayer

God, help us to seek solitude so that we may see and hear you. Help us to reclaim an appreciation for silence and your presence all around us. In you we live, move, and have our being (see Acts 17:28). Amen.



DAY FOUR

Waking Up to Love

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”
(Gen 2:18)

Middle school dances are wonderfully awkward. At the height of puberty, when girls tower over boys who barely reach their shoulders, warring parties are subjected to the bizarre cultural ritual of *dance*.

Some of us remember these dances like they were yesterday. A brave male and female eventually emerge from their respective corners of the room and begin the uncoordinated sway that leads others to the dance floor. Maybe you were the self-conscious wreck who detested having to deal with the other sex, or maybe you were the life of the party. Or maybe you were the kid who had a mega-crush on a certain someone since kindergarten (whose name you can *still* remember) and you got googly eyes whenever you saw them.

If you’ve ever experienced that feeling (whether as an adolescent or as an adult) when you see a beautiful person across the room who takes your breath away, you have a tiny glimpse of what Adam saw in Eve.

“At last!” he cries out. “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). With wonder and fascination, Adam exclaims, “*Look, a body that expresses the ‘person’!*” (*TOB*

14:4). The body of Eve, a woman, awakens Adam's understanding that he has an "other," another being just like him. Being of Adam's rib—his very bones—signified the whole person in the Jewish understanding.

This unity transforms the solitude we *all* experience into a purposeful communion with another person. We're meant for union, and our bodies express this fact. Male and female bodies only make sense in light of one another. We are made for each other. And this communion with an earthly person ultimately points us to communion with God.

Sometimes spouses refer to one another as "my other half," or to lovers as "two pieces of a whole." There's some truth to these expressions for they echo the reality that we come from a common place. The unity of man and woman is "based on masculinity and femininity, which are, as it were, two different 'incarnations' . . . [of] the same human being, created 'in the image of God'" (*TOB* 8:1).

While Genesis uses figurative language, it points us to the deeper truth of our creation—we are made in the image of God who is love and a communion of distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. "Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion" (*TOB* 9:3).

Adam does not truly become himself until he sees himself in relation to Eve. Think of a middle-school boy totally self-absorbed until he is awakened by the beauty of a female classmate. His whole world changes!

The waking up we all experience through the eyes of love can be a profound event. Whether during middle school, college, or

well into adulthood, being love-struck calls us out of ourselves and into relationship with another, which is exactly what we were created for.

Daily Challenge

Recall the first time you saw your spouse. What went through your mind? What feelings emerged in your heart? How would you describe the first sensation of feeling “in love”?

Prayer

O God, help us to constantly ignite a holy fascination and wonder for one another. Thank you, Lord, for bringing us together in this union so that we might not be alone, but may journey together to our ultimate destination: your love in heaven. Amen.