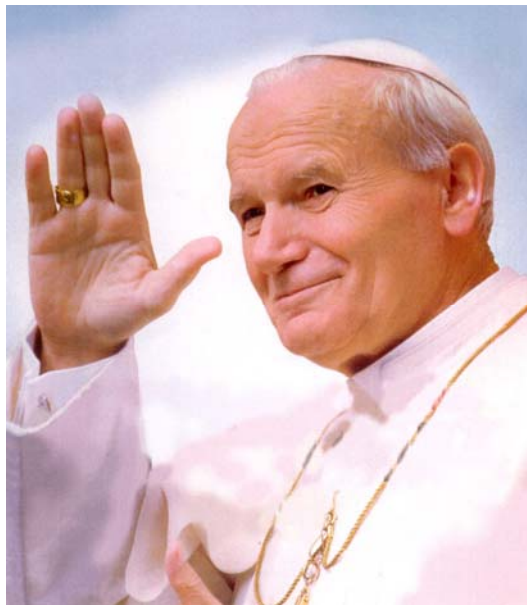


Thriving Ministry to Young Adults and Singles

*Bringing everyone into the
Family Life of the Church*



A model for ministry drawn from the
life and writings of Pope John Paul II

By Dave Sloan

(8 session curriculum begins on page 11)

It is not good for the man to be alone

God created us to live as family, most importantly, as part of his family. God is family, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Church is family. All life comes from family and all life is family life. This is the essential challenge of young adult and singles ministry – to draw *everyone* into the family life of the Church. The evidence is conclusive that life alone, self-reliant and disconnected from family life, is simply not spiritually sustainable, and does not lead to the formation of fruitful marriages and consecrated vocations.

The need is great

There are now over 100 million singles in America, a majority of all households.

Since 1970:

- ◆ The percentage of people living alone increased 2.5 times
 - ◆ The marriage rate declined by 50%
- (US Census Bureau)

Re-creating family life in the Church

Scripture tells us that a man will leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife, and that together they will be fruitful and multiply. In other words, the model here is simply to pass from family to family, from family life to family life. Most of what we see going haywire in the world around us is related to our disconnection from family life and from our Church family. For young adults and singles this is a particularly glaring, often devastating reality.

In building young adult and singles ministries, a primary focus is to draw those who are most disconnected out of the isolation of modern life and into the family life of the Church. We want young adults and singles to fully realize and live the meanings of their lives as Catholics each day, while we help form toward both married and celibate vocations. Vocations come from families.

Therefore, the *context* of our ministries will be every bit as important as the *content*. In other words, in our ministries we must *recreate the experience of family life*. And, at the same time, we want to offer specific, relevant formation to help young adults and singles form families of their own, or join the family life of the Church in celibate vocations.

Because we have such great content to draw from our extraordinary, 2,000 year tradition, we often think that the content is all that matters, and we sometimes ignore context. For this type of ministry, context, i.e. family life in the Church, is absolutely critical. For this reason, we will begin with an intensive look at the nuts and bolts of actually providing this context, then move to some examples of compelling content. Lastly, we will examine a complete, turn-key, eight session curriculum based on the teachings of Pope John Paul II.

Context

We must help every participant, every member of God's family, understand that God has given them many gifts, and help them to contribute those gifts, or the group will not have life in it. Being a part of any family calls not for mere attendance, but for real, active participation. So too, being part of God's family requires us to give and to receive, to bring and to share all of the gifts we have been given. We must invite those who attend to contribute their gifts in meaningful ways, even when that means being open to making important changes in the way we envision things happening. Talented people will only contribute their talents when those talents are welcomed and appreciated. It is not enough to assign small, simple tasks, or even large difficult tasks – it is not enough to assign tasks. We must be prepared to go beyond that and allow people the opportunity to make a real difference, a real creative contribution, if we are to benefit from the very best of they have to bring.

Letting go of our own vision at times so that others can contribute theirs is difficult. It is a form of death. When practiced with the spirit of a servant leader, this is the type of death that can lead the group to all of the joys of resurrection and Easter morning. The bottom line is that creating this family context is going to take a lot of help, and we have to live the kinds of lives and be the kinds of people that inspire others to do the work to make this possible.

One last thing before we dive into some specifics. A little can go a long way to making a place or event feel homey. It doesn't take the fanciest resources in the world to create a sense of home, all it takes is love and care and a bit of work too. Don't get so caught up trying to do everything that you or the ones helping you burn out and disappear, never to return.

Setting

If the setting is in a home, then most of the work is already accomplished. If the setting is a room in a church or other public setting, then the goal is to make the room seem more like a home. It's important, with all of these issues, to try to get the job done as simply as possible. If these logistical issues get too complicated, then the people responsible for them will burn out, and stop participating.

Several simple things will make the setting homey. Start with something alive, some flowers or wildflowers. Flower arrangements are nice, but it can also be very effective simply to pick sprigs from flowering bushes or leafy twigs from trees, and place them in cups around the room and/or on an altar.

It's a very good idea to have something like a simple altar in the room. Any table, or even a boom box covered with a cloth, can do the job. Put an icon or crucifix or holy work of art

on that altar, along with candles (consider scented candles) and some wildflowers. This simple effort makes a world of difference.

At home we have pictures of family members and friends. We can't go wrong with nice, large images of saints, especially the ones God gave us in our time, such as Mother Teresa, Padre Pio, and Pope John Paul II. A large Divine Mercy is great as well. The larger images can be rolled up and easily transported.

If a projector is handy, then a slideshow of favorite photos from our various events, and other favorite inspiring photos, can be kept running as we gather and at various portions of the evening. The same is true of videos. Music videos and other short, compelling videos of interest go a long to creating a sense of setting. These forms of art and media are very important at home, and very important when trying to create a sense of a shared home for those who spend too much time alone.

Music

It's ideal if there are people in the group who will bring guitars or other instruments to play and occasionally lead the group in singing. However, don't call upon people to do more than they are able to do. If someone is effective enough to contribute a little, maybe a song or two, then that's great—just don't wind up having them lead a half a dozen songs. It's fine just to have a CD playing some nice music as people are coming in to begin the session, something instrumental is ideal, or some worship music, but not something too loud or distracting. Then, sing a song at the beginning and a song at the end. Unless you have a very gifted song leader, just keep it very simple. The key thing here, as with decorating the room, is to do something instead of nothing. A little music goes a long way. This is a fine way to get some of the people in the group involved in contributing their talents.

Video

We already discussed having video running in the background at times. But, because TV and videos are so important to our lives in this culture, we should look for some short videos, regardless of whether or not our main curriculum is presented by video, that capture people's attention and inspire them with the promise and possibility of a Christian life well-lived. There are countless examples. There are fine music videos, and fine shorts available at www.catholicscomehome.org and many other sources on the web. Two or three well-placed 1-4 minute videos can make a world of difference in the way people respond to your event. Be creative, and be open to longer videos as well, but don't spend lots of time showing well-intentioned videos on important topics that people *should* be interested in unless they are produced and presented in a very captivating manner.

A last thought on the topic of video. Movie nights, followed by discussion of the Catholic themes in popular movies, can be a great break from or addition to the structure of the more formal curriculum. Movies like "Groundhog Day," "Cinderella Man," "Bella," and many more can stimulate great conversations and fill the need we all have to share these experiences in a family context.

Prayer

For many groups, the best way to handle prayer is to have it be two-tiered. Offer an extensive period of prayer at the beginning, for those who are ready for lots of prayer. This can consist of the rosary or of scripture readings interspersed with intercessory prayer, or of Taize prayer (Google it, it's cool)—there are many possibilities. Schedule things so that everyone knows it okay to drift in afterwards when this pre-prayer is concluded. Then have shorter prayers, which everyone is comfortable with, scattered throughout the course of the evening's events.

This is very effective for several reasons. The people who come early for extended prayer are the people who will just naturally become the leaders of the group. It's important for these people to have a chance to pray together, to pray for one another, and to help each other grow spiritually. This two-tiered approach enables your ministry to bring together those who are ready for lots of prayer, and those who are not yet ready.

Bear in mind that those who don't come early for prayer will nonetheless be aware that the group has prayed, that the room has been prayed in. People appreciate this, even people who don't pray much like to know that others do. It gives them hope, and it gives them a sense of being in a sacred space, a place that is safe. This is especially important when dealing with such sensitive issues as those pertaining to dating and courtship and single life.

Don't neglect to include short prayers throughout the event, especially on all of the transitions from one activity to another. These short prayers, whether they be spontaneous prayers of intercession or praise or three Hail Mary's or an Our Father or a Glory Be, or a short reading from scripture, go a long way to open the group to the grace of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit.

If the event has been successful, then people aren't going to want to leave when it ends. Many people will hang around talking and fellowshiping. This is important, but it doesn't need to go on forever, and sometimes there will be deadlines for when an event has to end. Have a final prayer ready for this time of parting ways. For an evening event, Night Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours is the perfect prayer. This prayer only takes about 8 minutes, and is truly sublime, one of the most beautiful and beloved prayers of the Church. It includes a hymn, and the stanzas can be recited back and forth, ideally alternating between the men and the women.

This powerful prayer can do more to bring about conversion and cohesion in a group than a thousand talks. If the group is healthy and strong, then most of the people, including many people who did not come for pre-prayer, will still be there after the event formally concludes, after twenty or thirty minutes of fellowshiping, when you announce that it's time for Night Prayer. This prayer will not seem like an imposition for the simple reason that people have freely chosen to stay there at the event for such a long time.

When a group gets used to saying this prayer together, and gets good at it, you can absolutely expect to see miracles begin to occur.

An easy to use, one-page version of Night Prayer for each night of the week is available at www.godsfamily.net.

Be on the lookout for the person God sends to coordinate and lead all of your prayer activities.

Hospitality—Greeting and Sharing Meals—Scheduling Events

It's good to have someone(s) in charge of greeting people and paying attention to newcomers. Pay close attention to this as your group begins to grow. Include this in the content presentations as well, that each person is responsible for reaching out to those who are new or who may not fit in very well.

It is important to make every effort to have some sharing of meals together. This can seem logistically daunting, but it doesn't have to be. And it is one of the greatest needs and longings of single people--to share a family meal. One of the best methods is simply to have a potluck, making it known that people are encouraged to bring something, but that they don't have to. Use language like this: "Potluck--Bring a dish, or just bring yourself!"

Be ready to order pizza to supplement the potluck if needed. Take up a collection for the pizza, and let people know if you come up short, and take up another collection. This doesn't have to be difficult, or require lots of time or planning. Get a volunteer to handle it. It's also a good idea to get a volunteer to handle bringing paper and plastic ware and ice.

Do not underestimate the impact this shared meal will have in the lives of young adults and singles, and in the strength and growth of your ministry. It's also a good alternative to go out to a restaurant after the event is over, if there is a suitable place.

Speaking of restaurant availability, this is a good time to mention that the best time to have these kinds of ministries meet is Friday or Saturday evening. Yes, that's right. If you follow this model, this will become the highlight of people's weeks, and they will come on these evenings, evenings which are not usually occupied with other church commitments. Weekday evenings can work, and so can weekend mornings and days, but Friday and Saturday evenings work best. On these evenings, restaurants may be too crowded for your group, and you may have to use, or just prefer to use, the potluck approach. Try it. It works.

Fellowship

When planning fellowship activities, think about all of the elements of family life, and try to include them, at least occasionally. You needn't have any of these elements in every session, but include them whenever fitting. Go for walking rosaries and hikes in local parks. Play football and ultimate Frisbee (rugby is a great form of group bonding as well).

Have parties featuring the talents of people in your group. Encourage people to play music—you probably have a band or two ready to be formed from your group. Have live dance music at your parties or play some CD's that will get folks up and dancing. Go to the theater together, to the symphony, or out to pop concerts. Maybe even put together a staged reading of one of John Paul the Great's plays. Dive into culture together, for this is at the heart of true conversion and evangelization.

Large Group or Small Groups?

Yes. Large group *and* small groups. The debate over which is best is silly. There are very effective ways to incorporate both. If the group gets over about fifteen to twenty, then you'll want to break down into small groups for discussion questions. Form groups of about 5-7 and everyone will be able to participate and contribute. There are many people who have wonderful contributions to make in these small group settings, but who will never speak a single word in a Larger group.

Start out with the whole group together, and bring the whole group back together again after the small group discussions. This creates a powerful dynamic. Think of it as breathing. The group inhales, comes in together, then exhales out into several groups, and inhales and comes together again. It's a beautiful thing. Small group discussions don't have to be facilitated. But, if you have enough talented and committed people on hand, having them facilitate those discussions can be helpful, and can be a good way to get more people involved in leadership.

Periodically, maybe once every one to three months, plan a bigger event with a special guest speaker and better music and food. Throw a full-blown shindig every now and then, every family needs these celebrations, but don't try to do this too often, as you'll lose sight of the real vision of your ministry.

Occasionally Separate Guys and Gals

It's a bad idea to separate the guys and gals all the time, or to never separate them at all. On some topics it will make good sense to have separate discussions for each gender, and maybe even separate presentations for each gender. These gender specific sessions are often extraordinarily powerful.

The best method is to start out together, then separate the genders, and then come back together for the conclusion. In the conclusion there should be a summary of what was shared in each of the groups, and then a special prayer for the men and the women in the group to be given the grace by God to treat each other in ways that are truly holy.

Charity and Chastity

Charity and chastity are two sides of the same coin, two versions of the same virtue. Charity and chastity are all about giving to people, and never using people. For a group to be healthy, as for a family to be healthy, there must be a shared participation in charity. It doesn't matter what form the charity takes, so long as it is shared. When we serve together we learn the truth about each other, and we learn what it means to live and to love as brother and sister.

Chastity is essential to any ministry, and this is no less true of young adult and singles ministry. The leaders of the group must live chaste lives. In some cases conversion will have been rather recent, and the experience of chastity rather limited. That's okay, so long as the commitment to chastity is strong. The core team must come together in prayer and exhort and encourage and support one another in the arena of chastity. Those not living chaste lives are not yet ready for leadership roles, as their lifestyles will undermine the trust necessary for the group to grow and be healthy. If the leaders are not chaste, the group may appear to thrive for awhile, but it will surely die. The fruit of unchastity is death. Be chaste and live. A ministry powered by true purity of heart will bear great fruit.

Sainthood

The purpose of any ministry is for those in it to become Saints, real Saints, great Saints. We should not be afraid of that notion, or think it grandiose. There's nothing grandiose about dying to ourselves and to our own desires, and replacing them with utter reliance upon God and fidelity to his will.

The clearest, simplest way to form a successful ministry is to strive for Sainthood, and to strive together with those who are willing to seek Sainthood along with us. The road to Sainthood is rarely a solitary journey. It is shared, and that is the whole reason for ministry.

In addition to all of the issues we've already discussed, there is one more, which may be the most important of all. It is impossible to lead or meaningfully to serve without a prayer life. At the heart of a healthy prayer life is time spent alone with God. Active prayer of the sort we've described is a very fine thing. It is not enough. All of our activity must be under-girded by times of deep and peaceful quietude shared alone with God.

There is no substitute for the time spent building a relationship with our creator, the one who is the only source for graces in our own lives and in ministries.

The finest book ever written on the topic of ministry to young people is Dom Chautard's Soul of the Apostolate. It offers extensive guidance on the topic of interior prayer for those in active ministry. This book warns against the deadly spiritual dangers of getting so busy doing things for God that we have no time to spend with God. It should be the bedside book of anyone involved in this sort of ministry.

All of our ministry should be a pure and simple overflow of the life we live in Christ.

Challenges Faced and Overcome with Love

There is a lot of confusion in the church today about the whole notion of singles ministry, for the simple reason that the Church has always concentrated on family ministry, and the single life as lived today is such a recent development. So, it's important to take some time to get familiar with the broader themes of singles ministry, and the particular challenges of single life. This guidebook is more of a "how to," than a "what is," or "why is." Much more about what singles ministry is, and why we need it, can be found at www.GodofDesire.com, and www.RealLove.net.

One important challenge to overcome is the confusion over whether single life is "a vocation." Take some time to read the articles on this topic at both websites. Another challenge is the confusion over the relationship between young adult ministry (YAM), and singles ministry. It is essential that neither of these ministries attempt to substitute for the other, but rather that they work together in harmony. Take the time to read about this topic as well on those websites.

Then, be sure to be very sensitive to the many different perspectives people in our church have about young adult and singles ministry. We must take the time to build good rapport, and make it clear that our goal is never to compete, but to help and to serve, and to work in harmony with other ministries.

To love means to give. Give yourself away in love. Resist every temptation to strive for your own way. Remember, it doesn't matter whether you get your way, even if your way is clearly the best way. All that really matters is whether you truly love, in the sense of laying down your life for, the ones who are touched by your ministry. If you are in a role of leadership, then you must lead the way by dying, by giving, by serving.

Do not fear and do not grow discouraged in the face of the difficulties your ministry encounters. These challenges are simply invitations to love, opportunities to love. A most crucial aspect of ministry is to love those who disagree with you. Love those who don't understand you, or don't like what you're doing. Really love them. If you have a rich prayer life, a deep life of contemplation of the Lord's goodness and mercy, you will be able to do this. Love with endless joy, endless sacrifice, and you will be witness to many miracles.

You will see marriages formed from people who were brought together by your ministry. You will see men and women undergo profound conversions as the Spirit of love reaches them through your ministry. You will witness rich and fruitful, beautiful vocations to celibate life come forth from your ministry. You will see all of the bounty of family life, fully lived, in the Father, and the Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Content

The content needs to be consistent, and of high quality, though it can come from many different sources. Some of the content should focus on love and sex, dating and courtship. Another crucial topic, in some ways *the crucial topic* for young adults and singles, is that of freedom, real, authentic freedom, and its role in making it possible for us to choose love.

John Paul II

John Paul II has given us beautifully moving and relevant teachings on these topics in his Love and Responsibility and The Theology of the Body. Outstanding as these books are, their philosophical and theological content will be rather inaccessible to many or most of the people we want to reach. But everyone can benefit terrifically from the highly edited and topically indexed excerpts from these books found at www.GodofDesire.com. These excerpts are compelling, highly readable, and are perhaps the ideal content for young adult and singles ministry.

In the second part of this guide you will find a curriculum for an 8 week session based on these excerpts.

Dating and Courtship

The twelve principles for dating and courtship found at www.GodofDesire.com also make terrific content for these ministries. A group can read and discuss one principle per week, or watch 20-30 minute segments of a three hour video presentation on these topics. All of this material is based on the writings of John Paul II, and presented in ways that are highly relevant to the dating lives of modern Catholics. A curriculum is under development, similar to the one found in this guidebook, which uses the excerpts from Pope John Paul II mentioned above as the core content for an 8 session series on dating and courtship.

Encyclicals

The encyclicals of Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict's new encyclical on love, also make great content for these gatherings. The www.popeoflove.com website offers nicely edited versions of those encyclicals, as well as excerpts to be used as the core of weekly group discussions. It also offers an appropriate sequence for the study of the encyclicals, and lots of ideas as to how to build a ministry around those texts.

TheologyoftheBody.net

There are many fine resources available at www.theologyofthebody.net, including talks by Katrina Zeno just for singles, and many of the most creative speakers on these topics today. The video of Fr. Tom Loya's talk on art and sexuality is very compelling and is a great way to get a group excited about these topics.

Mary Beth Bonacci

Mary Beth Bonacci, at www.reallove.net, offers lots of excellent materials, including articles and videos presented in a very engaging fashion. She is one of the foremost authorities on the Church today on the topic of singles ministry.

Christopher West

Christopher West offers a terrific array of resources on The Theology of the Body, especially his video series, and his book explaining this material for beginners. His material can be found at www.ChristopherWest.com.

Scripture

Another fine source is of course the Bible, especially The Song of Songs, Matthew 19, Ephesians 5, and Revelation 19-22, and the many scripture excerpts found at www.GodofDesire.com.

Presentations

If the content selected is not a video teaching, then it will be necessary to decide how it will be presented. It's okay simply to have a facilitated discussion, with no presenter at all. If talks are to be given, it is important that they be of sufficient quality to keep people interested. There are several ways to accomplish this. One way is to invite guest speakers to the group. Don't be shy about asking the best speakers in your area to come do this. Many of the most gifted, anointed speakers get very excited about these topics, and will come speak to your groups if you give them advance notice, and are flexible about which week you will have them speak. They will be especially excited and inclined to participate when they find out about the context of these talks, which we'll discussing momentarily. Strive to include speakers who can give compelling examples of their own experience of married life or celibate life.

Some Guidelines for Presentations

There will probably be people in your group who have the right gifts for giving group presentations, and these tips will help you bring out the best in your presenters. It's almost always a good idea to keep presentations short. It's often a good idea to split the duties up between two people. Two presentations of about ten minutes in length are about right for most meetings. Many people are unable to contain themselves to time limits, so it may be best to request people to do 5-7 minutes, in order to wind up with something like 10. Some people (many people) will need help stopping on time, so don't be shy about providing that help. Unless we really *know* that this speaker can be compelling for a longer period of time, this is a good guideline to follow.

One way to divvy up the duties between the presenters is by having one person concentrate on *teaching* the content for that session, and the other person do more of a faith *sharing* presentation that ties the material in to personal, real-life experience.

It is important there be some consistency both in the content and the presentations. This doesn't mean being too rigid, but just making sure that, within reason, people know what to expect, and that it will be of a good quality.

By following these guidelines, we will be able to draw out the speaking abilities of those in the group who are called to present, and nurture and encourage those people to grow, without jeopardizing the integrity of the content being presented, or the experience of those attending.

Passion Freedom Fearless Love

**8 session series for young adults and singles
based on the teaching of Pope John Paul II**

This group participation series is based on scripture and excerpts from the writings of Pope John Paul II. The excerpts are carefully edited for ease of understanding and maximum, immediate impact on how we live our daily lives. The series gives an overview of the meaning and purpose of Christian life for young adults and singles, encouraging them to connect to family life in the Church, while preparing them for both marriage and celibate vocations. The session format consists of commentary, then reading the excerpts from Pope John Paul II and scripture, then large and small group discussion. All of this is intended to be presented in the context described in the companion “Young Adult and Singles Ministry Guide”.

Contents

- 1. To Love is to Give**
- 2. Freedom to Love**
- 3. What is Truth?**
- 4. Set Free From the Bonds of Sin**
- 5. It is Not Good to be Alone**
- 6. God's Plan For Romance**
- 7. Serious courtship**
- 8. The Glory of Women and the Role of Real Men**

Note on the commentaries: These commentaries can be read by the group, as well as used as the basis of a talk from your presenter.

Note on the excerpts: Many of these excerpts are edited, sometimes condensed from multiple excerpts. TOB is The Theology of the Body. LAR is Love and Responsibility.

(1) TO LOVE IS TO GIVE

Commentary

Delight in the Lord, and he will grant the desires of your heart—Psalm 37

The problem with the world around us is not that people desire too much, but that they desire too little. We must help them learn to desire more—to desire all of the passion and the power of the love that images the Triune God. The first command in the Bible is to be fruitful. That's Bible code for "have sex." It goes on to add, "and multiply." That's Bible code for "have lots of sex."

Our God is a passionate God. He stretches his arms out and gives us all he has to give. He gives us his body and blood and calls into communion with him and with one another. Attraction, desire, sex, and love, all of these come from God, and are at the very center of his plan for us. The world around us has simply learned to settle for less than God's plan. They've learned to settle for an illusion of love, for sex that takes and uses instead of giving.

Ultimately, the love of God is a *giving* love. We are called to give, as God gives. God, the great lover, the great giver, gives us life itself, then gives to us all of creation. Next, he gives to us his only begotten son, that we may have life everlasting. So, we see that to love truly is to give fully and freely of ourselves. It is appropriate that charity is used as a synonym for love.

What makes us most happy in this world is to know that we are capable of both giving and receiving. The two are interwoven. We can never be happy in situations based upon taking and using rather than upon giving. Our culture has become very utilitarian, meaning that we've become very focused on using people and things in order to satisfy our every whim and desire. When we use people this way, in much the same way we use things, our desires become twisted.

In fact, God has given us richer, truer, deeper desires, and these desires can only be satisfied in mutual giving. One of our great goals is and must be to overcome habits of using, such as the serial monogamy of our culture, which ultimately equates to serial mutual using. Serial monogamy is the school of serial mutual betrayal—it ends up robbing us of the ability to trust enough to make a true of ourselves to another person.

Many Saints, and the Catechism as well, teach of the deep, deep bond between charity and chastity. Why are they so close? Because chastity sets us free from our tendencies to use one another. Chastity gives us the freedom which makes it possible to give, rather than to use. Chastity is not ultimately about saying "no." Chastity is what makes it possible for us to truly, absolutely and irrevocably, give ourselves to another person, or to God in a celibate vocation.

Charity is the virtue closest to chastity. They are both all about giving.

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"Creation signifies giving. It is a fundamental and 'radical' giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothingness" (TOB 59)."

"With regard to man a gift was conferred on him; the visible world was created 'for him'" (TOB 59).

"Understanding the nuptial meaning of the body in its masculinity and femininity reveals the depths of their freedom, which is freedom of giving" (TOB 74).

"That love in which the person becomes a gift fulfills the meaning of his being and existence" (TOB 63).

"(Man) can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself (Gaudium et Spes 24)" (TOB 63).

"Not only the fruits of redemption are a gift, but above all, Christ himself is a gift. He gives himself to the Church as to his spouse" (TOB 325).

"Above all, Christ himself is a gift. He gives himself to the Church as to his spouse" (TOB 325).

"The gift of God in Christ is a total, that is, a radical gift. It is all that God could give of himself to man" (TOB 331).

"The sexual instinct wants above all to make use of another person, whereas love wants to give, to create a good. To desire 'unlimited' good for another person is really to desire God for that person (LAR p. 138)."

"The sexual relationship presents more opportunities than most other activities for treating a person – sometimes without even realizing it – as an object of use" (LAR 30).

"The more successfully the utilitarian attitude (or the urge to use) is camouflaged in the will the more dangerous it is.... 'Sinful love' more often than not is not called 'sinful' but simply 'love', since those who experience it try to convince themselves and others that love is just this and cannot be otherwise" (LAR 170).

"The giving and the accepting of the gift interpenetrate, so that the giving itself becomes accepting, and the acceptance is transformed into giving" (TOB 71).

(Gen 1:27,28,31) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the earth." And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

(Ez 11:19-20) I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

(1 John 4:19) We love, because he first loved us.

(1 Pet 4:8-10) Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another.

(1 John 3:1-2) See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. Beloved, we are God's children now.

(Rev 3:20) Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him.

Group Questions

- 1) Our society has decided that it's okay to use someone as long as that person is willing to be used. What do you think—after all, consenting adults are free to do what they want to, aren't they—is it okay to use someone as long as they seem to be, or come right out and say they are, willing to be used? Why, or why not?
- 2) How do you know if God is calling you to give to someone, or you're really giving just to get something from them?
- 3) What is the difference between mutual giving and mutual using?
- 4) How do we become capable of the kind of love that truly gives?
- 5) We can't give all that we are to everyone at all times. How do we reconcile our call to unconditional love, and unconditional giving, with the necessity of making choices about what is appropriate to give to whom, and when?

(2) FREEDOM TO LOVE Commentary

Pope John Paul II has written that "freedom exists for the sake of love. Freedom is the means and love is the end."

Freedom makes love possible. It makes it possible for us to choose love. But the world has a different idea of freedom. The world thinks that the purpose of freedom is to allow us to do whatever we feel like, without regard for external constraints.

We must untwist this worldly concept of freedom, and replace it with a Godly concept of freedom. The license to do whatever we feel like is not freedom at all. That is called licentiousness, and leads us only into slavery, into bondage to habits of self-destruction. Real freedom is what allows us to choose what we know in our own hearts and consciences to be good and right and true.

Our hearts and consciences, when properly formed, fill us with longing to give ourselves away, to be a real gift to others. This longing reaches its apex in our longing to give ourselves away totally, absolutely and irrevocably, to another person in marriage, or to a celibate vocation. Freedom is what makes this possible. If we are not free, the gift of ourselves can have no value. This is most often what the tribunals determine when annulling marriages—that one or both persons were not free to marry. This is very Largely a consequence of our bondage to habits of sin, to habits of using others.

And so, we see that freedom has a unique role to play for those in the single life, it is actually the very essence and purpose of our single lives.

It is a very different matter for married people. Those in the married life are focused primarily on seeking the graces to keep their vows on a daily basis. Freedom comes from keeping the commitment, but the commitment itself, the keeping of the promise, is and must be the very essence of their lives.

Singles must discern each day how we are called to commit and to make a gift of our freedom that day. Singles should not be languishing in limbo, waiting for some future life with spouse and family. There is great creative power in discerning how we are called to give and live our freedom each day, and we must enter into a dynamic relationship with God and others to make this possible.

At the same time, singles must be focused on our future vocations. We must actively seek the radical freedom that alone can make it possible someday to make a total gift of our lives to God or to a spouse. To live freedom each moment, and to prepare to make a total gift of our freedom in vocation in the future—this is the essence of single life.

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"We mean here freedom especially as mastery of oneself (self-control). It is indispensable that man may be able to 'give himself.' 'They were naked and were not ashamed' can and must be understood as the revelation of freedom. This freedom makes possible the nuptial sense of the body" (TOB 64).

"The man dominated by lust (is under) more or less complete compulsion. This brings with it loss of the freedom of the gift" (TOB 151).

"Man is precisely a person because he is master of himself and has self-control. Indeed, insofar as he is master of himself he can give himself to the other. The liberty of the gift becomes essential and decisive" (TOB 398).

“(The) culture of death betrays a completely individualistic concept of freedom, which ends up by becoming the freedom of 'the strong' against the weak. When freedom is made absolute in an individualistic way, it is emptied of its original content, and its very meaning and dignity are contradicted. Freedom negates and destroys itself leading to the destruction of others, when it no longer recognizes and respects its essential link with truth. When freedom shuts out even the most obvious evidence of an objective and universal truth society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side, but without any mutual bonds" (TOB-GOL 507).

"It is of the greatest importance to re-establish the essential connection between life and freedom. No less critical is the recovery of the necessary link between freedom and truth" (TOB-GOL 568).

"His ability to discover the truth gives man the possibility of self-determination and that is what freedom means" (LAR 115).

Freedom exists for the sake of love. Love commits freedom and imbues it with goodness. Man longs for love more than for freedom—freedom is the means and love the end. (LAR 135-137)

(John 8:32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

(Rom 6:22) You have been set free from sin.

(Rom 8:21) The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

(1 Cor 3:17) Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

(Gal 5:1, 13) For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another.

Group Questions

- 1) Have you ever wished you could make someone love you? Has someone ever tried to make you love them?
- 2) What are some ways that people in the world around us seek to be free, that really only lead to bondage?
- 3) Do you really have to give away some of your freedom in order to be chaste?
- 4) Do you really have to give away some of your freedom in order to commit to loving someone?
- 5) What is the relationship between commitment and freedom?

(3) WHAT IS TRUTH?

Commentary

Jesus told Pilate that he had come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Pilate answered, "what is truth?" It was because Pilate failed to understand this question and its answer that he allowed Jesus to die.

Our world runs away from truth, claiming we cannot really know its ultimate nature, claiming that it changes all the time. The world is afraid that objective truth will take away our freedom. The truth is, however, that when we eradicate truth, we eradicate the possibility of freedom. Freedom is dependent upon the capacity to make a meaningful choice. And we can only do that if our choices are based upon truth. If our choices are based upon fallacies and vagaries, then our choices are robbed of their meaning, and we are not really free. And if we are

not free we cannot love. This is the way in which truth makes love possible, by making freedom possible.

Love is a free decision to give based upon truth. Pope John Paul II teaches that for love to be real, we must know the truth of who we really are, and we must know the truth of who this person is whom we would choose to love. We haven't really chosen to love someone if we haven't had a chance to get to know the truth of this person.

We must also know the truth of human love—we must know that we are made to love, to give and never to use. We must know that the gift of ourselves and our sexuality is a free, total, absolute and irrevocable—that it is a one-flesh union which images the Triune God in its life-giving, creative power. These are truths we must know if we would find our vocations, if we would truly love.

Sometimes we are fooled into thinking that such considerations have no place in love—that love must be based upon emotion alone. Emotion is important; it is certainly essential to love. But it is not enough, because emotions change, and their changes cannot be predicted. For love to thrive and grow, it must do so throughout all of the range of emotions we experience. We must continue to love even when angry or sad or disappointed or depressed. This can only happen if love is based upon truths which do not change. Only in this context of love that can be truly trusted will we be free to discover the full richness and scope of the emotions of which the human heart is capable.

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"(Man) is called in that truth which has been his heritage from the beginning, the heritage of his heart, which is deeper than the sinfulness inherited, deeper than lust" (TOB 167).

"Feelings naturally are not concerned with the truth. Truth is a function (of) reason" (LAR 77).

"Love demands freedom—the commitment of freedom, is, in a sense, its psychological essence. A really free commitment of the will is possible only on the basis of truth. The experience of freedom goes hand in hand with the experience of truth. Love also insists upon objective truth. Only on this basis can the integration of love take place" (LAR 117).

"Love is a virtue an authentic commitment of the free will of one person resulting from the truth about another person" (LAR 123).

"Only true knowledge of a person makes it possible to commit one's freedom to him or her. Love consists of a commitment which limits one's freedom—it is a giving of the self. Man longs for love more than for freedom. He longs however for true love, for only if it is based on truth is a genuine commitment of freedom possible" (LAR 135-137).

"A purely emotional love often becomes an equally emotional hatred for the same person. (In emotional attractions) the subject does not enquire whether the other person really possesses the values (perceived), but mainly whether the newborn feeling for that person is a true emotion. People generally believe that love can be reduced largely to a question of the genuineness of feelings. We must (insist) that the truth about the person who is (love's object is) at least as important as the truth about the sentiments. These two truths, properly integrated, (result in a) genuinely good and genuinely 'cultivated' love" (LAR 78).

"It is a man's duty to choose the true good. It is, indeed, duty that most fully displays the freedom of the human will. The will 'ought to' follow the true good, but this 'ought to' implies that it 'may' equally well not do so" (LAR 119).

(Jer 31) I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts

(Ps 15) Who shall dwell on thy holy hill? He who speaks truth from his heart;
(Pro 2: 10) Wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.
(Jn 18:37) For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.
(2 Cor 4) He has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.
(Eph 1) Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, you may know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe,
(John 8:32) You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

Group Questions

- 1) What is truth?
- 2) Why does scripture so often state that truth is revealed in the heart? What is the difference between and this and the idea that everyone for themselves what their own truth is?
- 3) Does it make sense to say that there are absolutely no absolute truths?
- 4) What is the relationship between truth and freedom? Give an example.
- 5) What is the relationship between truth and love. Give an example.

(4) SET FREE FROM THE BONDS OF SIN

(With separate discussion sessions for women and men)

Commentary

The truth alone is not enough to set us free. It is entirely possible for us to know the truth and not to act in accord with it. As Saint Paul says in Romans 7, he wills to do the good, but he cannot. The vast majority of the havoc in our lives is wreaked by habitual sins. We become prisoners to behaviors that separate us from God, and, in a vicious cycle, because sin breeds the proclivity to sin, separate us from the grace needed in order to resist sin. While we have a lot in common, men and women also have important differences in our experiences of sin and grace.

Men are under particular assault from all types of images, from beer commercials and billboards to internet spam and porn sites. These temptations are extremely difficult to resist, particularly in that they are often confronted alone. There are many techniques and resources to cope with this great evil—many of those are found at www.GodofDesire.com. The best resource is the support and encouragement and prayers of other men who face these struggles with faith and courage.

While men struggle more with simpler sins of lust and sensuality, women struggle with more complex sins of sentimentality, that is with longing for all of the qualities, including the psychological and emotional qualities, of masculinity to fill a void in their lives. Women not only have more complex bodies, but more complex minds and spirits as well. And so women's experiences of sin and grace are often more complex.

A woman may be tempted to seek to get attention from guys in ways that are emotionally selfish, taking advantage of her God-given charms in careless or manipulative ways, maybe even trying to keep herself from realizing what she is doing. These temptations are often much more subtle than the cruder temptations normally faced by men. And yet they are just as dangerous—

just ask any women who has ever wound up in an intimate relationship and then been disappointed by the impurity with which she was treated.

Being set free from sin means above all else to develop a healthy prayer life—learning to pray when we’re busily involved in daily life, and spending quiet time alone with God. We must be willing to give God the first slice of our day, the prime piece right off the top, even if we only manage to muster a few minutes at first. And we must learn to pray during the various activities of our day as well. We can’t wait ‘till later to pray. The time to pray is always “now.”

Any task which is regularly repeated in the course of our work, school, exercise, or other duties or activities, can have a short prayer associated with it. Regular repetition is CRITICAL in reprogramming our minds and hearts, so that we are not so vulnerable to temptation when it strikes.

Christianity is not a solitary religion. If we fight the battle alone, Satan will defeat us. If we come together with other Christians in *truth* to fight the battle, we cannot be defeated. To confess means more than to tell our sins. It means to share our struggles, our temptations, and our *triumphs*. Every Christian should have something like an accountability partner. We must have someone we can talk to about the small things *before* they become big things, before they even become sins. And we must have Christians, as many as possible, with whom we share the *celebration* of the gifts we are being given every day by our Lord.

(After this commentary, men and women should be separated for the discussion sessions. These sessions could be opened with a short testimony for each group on the topic of deliverance and conversion.)

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"It is pretty generally recognized that woman is 'by nature' more sentimental, and man more sensual. The male psyche is more readily 'compelled' to objectivize the (sexual component) of love for a person of the opposite sex. In the woman sensuality is covert, and concealed by sentimentality. For this reason she is 'by nature' more inclined to go on seeing as a manifestation of affection what a man already clearly realizes to be the effect of sensuality. There exists, then, a certain psychological divergence between man and woman. (The woman's) role and her responsibility will be different from the role and responsibility of the male" (LAR 111).

"From the beginning' the woman is entrusted to his eyes, to his consciousness, to his sensitivity, to his heart" (TOB 71).

"The fundamental fact of human existence at every stage of its history is that God 'created them male and female'" (TOB 74).

“(Christ) assigned as a duty to every man the dignity of every woman. Simultaneously he assigned to every woman the dignity of every man” (TOB 346).

"Each man must look within himself, to see whether she who was entrusted to him as a sister in humanity, as a spouse, has not become in his heart an object of adultery or exploitation" (TOB-DVW 464).

"One also has a responsibility for one's own love: is it mature and complete enough to justify the enormous trust of another person? The greater the feeling of responsibility for the person, the more true love there is (LAR 130f.).

“(Women) are less aware of sensuality and of its natural orientation in men. The evolution of modesty in woman requires some initial insight into the male psychology. (A man) is very

keenly aware of his own sensuality. For him, sexual values are more closely bound up with the 'body and sex as potential objects of enjoyment'" (LAR 177).

"The fact that they were not ashamed means that the woman was not an 'object' for the man nor he for her. Purity of heart made it impossible somehow for one to be reduced by the other to the level of a mere object. They were mutually conscious of the nuptial meaning of their bodies, in which the freedom of the gift is expressed and all the interior riches of the person are manifested. This mutual interpenetration of the 'self' of the man and of the woman seems to exclude reduction to an object" (TOB 75).

"According to Genesis 4:1, the man 'knows' the woman in the act of conjugal union" (TOB 80).

"Joy may be bestowed either by the great variety of pleasures connected with the differences of sex, or by the sexual enjoyment which conjugal relations can bring. The creator designed this joy, and linked it with love between man and woman" (LAR 61).

(Psalm 51: 2, 7-10, 17) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

(Ezek 36:24-29) I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.

(Joel 2:25) I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten.

(Luke 19:10) For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

(1 Cor 6:18-20) Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body.... Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God. You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

(James 5:16) Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Activity: Mutual Encouragement.

(This activity is conducted while the group is separated by sex.) Everybody pair up with someone else. Now each of you tell the other some habit that you would like to change in your life, something you would like to do better—it doesn't have to be some heavy, major sin. It could be some small habit that you'd like to break, or some small habit that you'd like to start. Then, each of you tell the other something positive that the Lord has helped you do to change your life.

Group Questions

- 1) What is an example of something you've been able to learn or understand about yourself, and been able to change for the better, just because you talked about it and/or prayed about it with someone else?
- 2) What are some examples of quick responses we can make to temptation?
- 3) What are some examples of more strategic plans we can implement to transform potential using into true giving?
- 4) What are some examples of ways we can make a prayer a very regular, very frequent habit in the midst of our daily lives?

(Bring the men and women back together at the conclusion for a short discussion of the most interesting results of the separate discussions.)

(5) IT IS NOT GOOD TO BE ALONE

Commentary

Singles have bought into the modern ethos of rugged individualism and self-sufficiency. This is one tough way to live. Life alone tends to revolve around our own desires, whims, thoughts, and problems.

This life of isolation we've been living hasn't been working. Since 1970 our marriage rate has dropped by half, that's right, by half, and our divorce rate has doubled. The core of the problem here is isolation from family life. We aren't made to live the lives of isolation and insularity we are living today. We're made live to in families. It is in family life that we learn to give, and live lifestyles of giving. Modern, isolated, self-centered lifestyles produce men and women who aren't capable of the total self-giving which defines marriage.

The single greatest need of single people is to be drawn into the family life of the Church. Healthy marriages are formed from people who are living healthy family lives, not from isolated people who are looking for someone to match the profile of characteristics they seek. We can't go shopping for spouses like we go shopping for features on computers and TV's and cars and houses. We become spouses by living family life. Since healthy families are so rare in our culture, and since most singles have long since left their families behind, we'll have to form family life in the Church. A man prepares to be a husband by first living as son, brother and spiritual father. A woman prepares to be a wife by first living as daughter, sister, and spiritual mother.

We, as singles, must form the sort of communities that make true giving and sharing the very essence of our lives. We must come together to pray, worship, attend Mass, eat, dance, study, play, create art, and, ultimately, to live. We're talking roommates here, not one-bedroom condos. We're talking selfless living on behalf of our brothers and sisters.

All of us should look around us in our churches, ministries, and communities, for ways we can live out these values. The single most effective tool is simply to look around the room in our ministry group, and pick someone (of the same sex) who doesn't seem to be particularly popular or well-appreciated, and make an effort to befriend that person.

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"The 'definitive' creation of man consists in the creation of the unity of two beings" (TOB 45).

"Man was God's image through the original communion of persons, constituted by the man and the woman together" (TOB 114).

"Alone, man does not completely realize (his) essence. He realizes it only by existing 'with someone'—and even more deeply and completely—by existing 'for someone'" (TOB 60)."

"(Man) can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself (Gaudium et Spes 24)" (TOB 63).

"The meaning of man's original unity, though masculinity and femininity, is expressed as an overcoming of the frontier of solitude" (TOB 45).

"Solitude is the first discovery of the characteristic transcendence peculiar to the person" (TOB 46).

"Sex expresses an ever new surpassing of the limit of man's solitude" (TOB 49f.).

"Man's capacity for love depends on his willingness consciously to seek a good together with others, and to subordinate himself to that good for the sake of others, or to others for the sake of that good" (LAR 29).

"The value of the person is for all humanity the most precious of goods – more immediate and greater than any economic good" (LAR 65).

(Gen 2:18, 24-25) It is not good that the man should be alone." I will make him a helper fit for him...." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

(Rom 8) When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

(Rom 12) We although many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.

(Eph 2) You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

(Eph 4) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave.

Activity

One of the most powerful ways to overcome isolation is through service to others. Look at the charity activities in your Parish or in your community, or come up with one of your own for the group to participate in together. This activity should bring you into close interaction with each other, and, ideally, bring you into close interaction with your community as well. Be bold, and try something really tough and tender, like going to visit a nursing home together.

Group Questions

- 1) In what ways is solitude good? Include the example of Adam's solitude before the creation of Eve, as well as examples from our own lives.
- 2) In what ways is solitude bad? Include both examples from above.

- 3) Justice Blackmun, in *Roe Vs. Wade*, wrote that our primary value in making life and death decisions today is privacy. In the past, we made important decisions on the basis of the concept of common good. Compare and contrast the implications for society, and for our personal lives, when we make critical decisions on the basis of privacy, or on the basis of common good.
- 4) Give some examples of ways we can come together to overcome solitude and live a life more like family life.
- 5) How would it affect our lives if we truly thought of each other, and treated each other, as brothers and sisters rather than as just friends.

(6) GOD'S PLAN FOR ROMANCE

COMMENTARY

(Based on principles 1-6 at www.GodofDesire.com.)

The purpose of all of our relationships is to glorify god, and to bring us closer to him.

God has made us to be powerfully drawn to one another. As Pope John Paul II writes, attraction and desire are of the essence of love (Love and Responsibility 80). These experiences should be a cause for joy, and for drawing us closer to God. When we get interested in someone, we shouldn't have to start wondering whose life is going to get wrecked.

Many Christians simply reject the very notion of dating, preferring instead the courtship model. They won't get involved in any relationship at all, unless they are sure they want to seriously pursue marriage with the person in question.

The problem with this model is that it often leads to too much intensity, too much emotional intimacy, too quickly. The fledgling relationship is overwhelmed with the passion of newfound romance, combined with the enormity of discerning impending marriage. Physical abstinence is usually not enough to save such a relationship from the great weight of its excessive emotional burdens. We must have the opportunity to get to know the truth of the person before we can make meaningful commitments to them, such as exclusive dating, or discerning marriage.

All romantic relationships should begin as brother-sister relationships. Our relationships will be deeper, richer and more rewarding if we see other and treat each other from the beginning as children of God, rather than as "just friends." This brother-sister perspective also should help us be more open to getting to know each other, open to exploring the attractions and desires God gives us.

All of us should learn to tell each other the truth about our intentions. An enormous cause of the pain and difficulty in relationships is that we just don't tell each other the truth. Be not afraid. Tell the truth. You can do it. It will yield a marvelous freedom.

Men, if you want to date a woman, tell her that. Tell her you're attracted to her and like her and admire her and would like to take her on a date. But don't be too intense about it. Find the balance between going slowly while you get to know each other, and letting her know that you are dating her because you see the possibility of serious courtship and marriage growing between the two of you. This is a hard balance to strike, but you can do it.

Women, you must tell men the truth when they court you. You can't pretend for any reason at all. No matter how hard it is, you have to be straightforward. As scripture says, you

must "let your yes be yes, and your no be no". And if you are confused about his intentions with you, then come right out and ask him. You have a right to know.

One great way to get things on the table, without you having to give awkward speeches, is for both of you to take the dating license test at www.GodofDesire.com. This multiple choice, 24 question test is very funny, and very serious too. If you pass it, you can print your own dating license right from the website. This test is a great way for both of you to start conversations and open up dialogue on your thoughts about relationships. It's a great way for both of you to find out where you really stand with each other.

No more unlicensed dating!

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"The sexual urge is a natural drive born in all human beings along which their whole existence develops and perfects itself. The sexual urge is a property of the whole of human existence and not just of one of its spheres or functions. (It) permeates the whole existence of man" (LAR 46f.).

"Any immediate contact between a woman and a man is always the occasion of a sensory experience for both of them. (The) ease with which emotions arise in contacts between persons of (opposite) sexes is bound up with the sexual urge as a natural property and energy of human existence" (LAR 104).

"By its nature, human life, its dignity and balance, depend, at every moment of history on who she will be for him, and he for her" (TOB 159).

"Awareness of the meaning of the body, in particular of its nuptial meaning, is the fundamental element of human existence in the world" (TOB 66).

"Attraction is of the essence of love and in some sense is indeed love, although love is not merely attraction. Attraction is not just one of the elements of love, but is one of the essential aspects of love as a whole" (LAR 76f.).

"Like attraction, desire is of the essence of love. This results from the fact that a human person is a limited being, not self-sufficient, and therefore needs other beings. Realization of the limitation and insufficiency of the human being is the starting point for an understanding of man's relation to God" (LAR 80).

"A human being is either man or woman. Sex is also a limitation, an imbalance. A man therefore needs a woman to complete his own being, and woman needs man in the same way. This need makes itself felt through the sexual urge. The love of one person for another grows up on the basis of that urge. This is 'love as desire.' There is however, a profound difference between love as desire and desire itself, especially sensual desire. Love-as-desire is not felt as mere desire. Love is apprehended as a longing for the person. Desire goes together with this longing, but is overshadowed by it. The (person) in love is conscious of its presence, but working to perfect this love, will see to it that desire does not dominate, does not overwhelm all else that love comprises. If desire is predominant it can deform love between man and woman and rob them both of it" (LAR 81f.).

(1 Thess 4:3-5,7-8) Each one of you (should) know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God.... For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness.

(1 Cor 7:4) The wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.

(1 John 4:7,12,16, 18) Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us.
(Rev 2:23) I am he who searches mind and heart.

GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you like best about dating?
- 2) What do you like least about dating?
- 3) How can you tell whether someone you are dating, or want to date, can really be trusted?
- 4) What are some signs the relationship should get more serious?
- 5) What are some signs you should run screaming into the night?
- 6) We see in these readings that attraction and desire are natural and good, and that lust is a deception. Let's talk now about how to tell the difference between the two. How do we know when we've gone over the line from attraction and desire into lust?

(7) SERIOUS COURTSHIP

(Based on principles 7-12 at www.GodofDesire.com)

Commentary

The technical term for what goes on in this stage of courtship is “falling in love”. Because God is love, falling in love is really falling into God. Which is why it’s such a big deal, one of the biggest deals that any of us will every experience in our lives. This is a time filled with great joy, and it can be a time of great anxiety as well, because now is the time when we discern whether we’re really called to marry one another.

It is essential during this stage of courtship to learn everything we need to know before we promise to get married. Too many engaged couples today treat the period of marriage preparation as a time for finding out things which should have been uncovered before committing to marry one another. The pressure and intensity of wedding planning are burdens a relationship should not try to carry before its time. Nor should a pledge to marry be made before enough is known for the pledge to be true. This is not to say that no one should ever break off an engagement. But an engagement should not have to be broken off as a consequence of appropriate information not having been gathered beforehand.

Some people go looking for long checklists they can use to determine whether a certain guy or gal is the right one. The problem is that the factors that must be discerned are a thousand times, and a thousand times a thousand times, more complex than any checklist could ever be. The answers we need can only be found in our hearts, because that is where God reveals them.

What we will need to know is simply whether we’re being drawn to this person in mind and body and spirit, and, at the same time, whether the relationship is drawing us closer to God. It’s possible for us to trick ourselves as to whether we are in fact growing closer to God, but there is a good way to find out the truth.

A healthy relationship, one that comes from God, will not only bring us joy, but it will draw us closer to our Church and to our fellow Christians. A relationship that comes from God will be clearly good for the ones we love, for our families and friends and those with whom we

minister. A relationship that draws us away from our Church community, and away from God, is one which should be allowed to die, for it is a deadly relationship.

Everything we're talking about here is in the heart. And that is why this whole process of discernment can only be accomplished by those with pure hearts. If our hearts are riddled with impurity, they will not be able to reveal to us what God wants us to know and to do.

The battle for purity is fought in our minds and in our prayers, but it is also fought, perhaps primarily fought, in our most intimate embraces with the one we love the most. Here is where we must fight, and we must win, the battle for a love that truly gives, and never uses. Only in winning this battle for purity will we be able to read the language of the heart, the language with which God writes the answers we're looking for about love and courtship and marriage.

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"Christ (demands) from man that in relations with persons of the (opposite) sex he should have full and deep consciousness of his own interior acts. He should be aware of the internal impulses of his heart. He should be the true master of his own deep impulses" (TOB 172).

"Man must learn what the meaning of the body is. He must learn this above all in the interior reactions of his own heart. This is a 'science' (in which) man learns to distinguish between what composes the multiform riches of masculinity and femininity in their perennial call and creative attraction, and what bears only the sign of lust. These variants and nuances of the internal movements of the heart can, within a certain limit, be confused with one another. However, man has been called by Christ to discern and judge the various movements of his heart. This task can be carried out and is worthy of man" (TOB 172).

"Purity is the glory of the human body before God. It is God's glory in the human body" (TOB 209).

"Purity of heart means freedom from every kind of sin or guilt, not just from sins that concern the lust of the flesh" (TOB 212).

"Christ's words (in the Sermon on the Mount) are realistic. They indicate the way to a purity of heart which is possible and accessible, even in the state of hereditary sinfulness" (TOB 213).

"Man feels himself, in his body as male and female, the subject of holiness. That holiness pertains to the 'sacrament of creation.' Marriage is the central point of the 'sacrament of creation.' It is the primordial sacrament" (TOB 335).

"Marriage (constitutes) the basic main structure of (salvation) and the sacramental order. In a certain sense all the sacraments find their prototype in marriage (TOB 339)."

"(Chastity) is above all the 'yes' of which certain 'no's' are the consequence. The essence of chastity consists in quickness to affirm the value of the person in every situation, and in raising to the personal level all reactions to (sensuality). This is above all positive and creative requiring a special, interior spiritual effort. Only the chaste man and the chaste woman are capable of true love" (LAR 171).

"(You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride (Sg 4:9)) As though he and his woman were descended from the same family circle; as though from infancy they were united by memories of a common home. Through the name 'sister' the groom's words tend to reproduce the history of the femininity of the person loved. They embrace her entire soul and body. Hence that peace arises which the bride speaks of. This is the peace of the body. This is above all the peace of the

encounter as the image of God. 'So am I in your eyes, like one who has found peace' (Sg 8:10)" (TOB 371).

"The love that unites them is at one time of a spiritual and a sensual nature. This brings them joy and calm, and seems to lead them to a continual search for integral beauty, for purity that is free from all stain, for perfection that contains the synthesis of human beauty of soul and body. The fullness of their belonging (to one another) goes to the furthest limits of the language of the body in order to exceed them" (TOB 373f.).

"(Chastity) has a dual content 'thou shalt love,' and 'thou shalt not use" (LAR 171).

(Sir 23:4-6) Purity is the condition for finding wisdom and following it" (TOB 209).

(Sg 2:16) My beloved is mine and I am his.

(Sg 4:9) You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes.

(Sg 8:10) I was in his eyes as one who brings peace.

(Sg 3:5) I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up nor awaken love before its time.

(Eph 5:24f, 31f) As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church;

Activity: Perceptions of Intimacy Shared

Give everyone a handout with the following items listed. Ask everyone first to read the entire list, and then to write a number from 1-5 next to each item, to indicate how much intimacy they perceive to be shared in each activity. 1 represents the lowest intimacy, and 5 represents the highest intimacy.

- 1) Looking at each other's high school annuals and photo albums.
- 2) Having dinner with each other's parents (assuming no lengthy travel is required.)
- 3) Staying together after a church event until everyone else is gone.
- 4) Talking about the names you'd like to give your children.
- 5) Walking her to her car.
- 6) Making and giving a compilation CD of songs you think he/she would like.
- 7) Meeting at Starbucks for coffee.
- 8) Holding hands.
- 9) Lunch with him paying.
- 10) Talking about the most difficult, challenging experiences of your past.
- 11) Renting a tandem bicycle for a ride through the park.
- 12) Dinner at a nice restaurant, with him paying.
- 13) Back rub.
- 14) Her wearing something extra nice and him telling her how extra nice she looks.
- 15) Talking about where you'd like to go on your honeymoon.

After everyone has finished writing their answers, read each item aloud, one at a time, and have everyone hold up one to five fingers corresponding to the score they gave that activity. Say something like "ready, go," to get everyone's fingers up all at the same time. The

chances are that you'll all be amazed at how widely the answers vary. Call on people who have widely disparate answers, and get them to give the reasons for the answers they gave. This should be a lot of fun.

The point here is not to get right answers for these items. The point, rather, is for people to realize that they can't assume they know what these various activities mean to someone else. Therefore, it is important for us all to be attentive to the intimacy we share with one another, even in ways we might have thought insignificant. We have to find the courage to be really open and honest about what our attentions are with each other, and we have to be very careful with each other's hearts. We must learn to really pay attention to how we treat each other even in the ways that may seem small, so that we'll have a good habit of true caring in place when the relationship advances to the things are more significant.

As John Paul II put it: "These variants and nuances of the internal movements of the heart can, within a certain limit, be confused with one another. However, man has been called by Christ to discern and judge the various movements of his heart. This task can be carried out and is worthy of man" (TOB 172).

Group Questions

- 1) What are some specific examples of things we can say to clarify where our relationship stands, rather than solely relying on interpreting each other's "signals?"
- 2) When is it time for a relationship to go from casually dating and getting to know each other, and into serious courtship and discerning marriage?
- 3) Is it better to for a courting couple to spend a lot of time around their Church friends, or to be more private to avoid the gossip that happens in Church groups?
- 4) Is it really realistic in this day and age to expect people to be chaste when they are in love and they are planning to get married?
- 5) What is the ultimate goal and purpose of courtship?

(8) THE GLORY OF WOMEN AND THE ROLE OF REAL MEN

Commentary

Femininity has been under a terrific assault from our culture. It is up to us to rescue it, to recover and to restore the truth of the glory and dignity and splendor of woman. We need to redeem the truth of feminine beauty in all of its manifestations.

God made women beautiful and he did it on purpose. Women need to recognize the whole truth of feminine beauty, and celebrate that, instead of allowing themselves to be reduced to pieces and parts like meat on display at a butcher shop.

It's important for us also to address the confusion of those who would go to the other extreme, allowing excessive prudery to deny and reject the true gifts of feminine beauty.

Many times the motive is a good one, simply to be moral and modest. But modesty must be raised to the level of real integration with all of the gifts of femininity.

God has given every woman the gift of feminine beauty, and he's done so for very good reasons. Woman is the highest paradigm of beauty in the created world. God made women beautiful on purpose. It is only fitting the tabernacle of life should be resplendent, bedecked in beauty surpassing that of the grandest sunset.

The principle challenge in this arena, and the principle reason we don't understand feminine beauty in this culture, is because we have so little appreciation for motherhood. Every woman is a mother at some level, because womanhood itself is life-giving and life-nurturing. Every woman shares in a unique way in the gift of life brought forth into the world with the gift of every child.

Every woman is a participant at some level in the single greatest act ever performed by any purely human person. One young woman said yes to God, and brought forth into the world the giver of all life. God chose to come into the world through a woman. He chose to have a mother. And his mother chose to give him life.

Women are real partners with God not only in bringing forth life, but in making that life human, in imparting to children the love which is the fabric of our humanity. The glory of women does not stop with birthing and loving children. Women have an enormous capacity to care for and about others.

Women have hearts that are as miraculous as are their bodies. Women have the strength and the courage to love when men do not. John Paul II has written that, "in the Biblical account, the words of the first man at the sight of the first woman are words of admiration and enchantment, words which fill the whole history of man on earth."

It is also written in the Epistle to the Ephesians that men are to be leaders of women, that wives are to submit to husbands. How are men to understand that call to leadership given all that we've been discussing?

We don't have to look far beyond that call to submission for wives in order to find our answer. Paul tells the Ephesians that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself up for her.

Men, we mustn't wait until marriage to apply this standard of leading by laying down our lives. We must apply it throughout the dating and courtship process. We recognize that we must take the lead and try to earn the love of the woman we are courting because so much greater a sacrifice is to be asked of her. We're asking a woman to consider laying down her life in a profound way, giving her body and her blood and then giving up her sleep and her freedom in order to bear and nourish and nurture our children. We're asking her to pour forth endlessly from the wellspring of feminine love in her heart the tenderness required to forge the great treasures of home and family.

No matter how much we may give, we'll not be able to match her in what she will be called upon to give and sacrifice.

And so, men, we court. We accept the role of leader, and we try to show that we recognize the value of a woman, and we try to win from her the gift of the priceless treasures of her mind, her body, and her spirit.

The leadership demanded of us is heroic, noble, and sacrificial in the extreme. It far exceeds our power as men. And so we must climb the hill to the only place where the power we seek may be found.

We climb the hill to Golgotha and "BEHOLD THE MAN!"

There upon the cross is the example of leadership we require. But it is not enough for us to watch him there. We must join him there. We must share with him in his death if we wish to rise with him in the resurrection which will make it possible for us to truly love. As we share in his death we have the opportunity to learn the greatest lessons there are about the nature of what it is to be a man, and what it is to be a woman.

We must prefer to be crucified rather than to use or abuse or look upon any woman as an object, as a thing. We must look out from the cross as we hang there with Jesus and see what he saw as he died.

Here on the cross we learn the truth of women's heroic love. All the men save one have run away. Jesus as he dies is surrounded by the undying love of faithful women. Look out from his eyes and see them there. Mary Magdalene is there. Mary the wife of Cleopas is there. All of the holy women who followed him from Galilee ministering to him are there. His mother is there. The promise made to her by Simeon so many years before is drawing near; the sword is soon to pierce her heart even as it pierces her son.

Men, BEHOLD THE WOMEN! They are the glory of God, the women who participated with Christ in the act of our salvation—the women whose love would not die.

And listen, men, listen to the words of our savior, as he speaks to us "Behold your Mother."

Women, learn what it means to be a woman from the one who gave him life and remained faithful to him until the time had come to hold his lifeless body in her arms.

Men, let us learn what it means to be men as we lay down our lives in love and follow the model of the one man who was faithful to Jesus until the end.

"From that day he took her into his home."

John, the beloved disciple became a protector and defender of Mary, the mother who gave Life Himself to us all. Let us join him in being protectors and defenders of life, of womanhood and femininity in all the ways that they bear the fruit of life-giving love in the world.

Excerpts: John Paul II and Scripture

"(The) essential richness (of women) is indeed an enormous richness. In the biblical description, the words of the first man at the sight of the woman are words of admiration and enchantment, words which fill the whole history of man on earth" (TOB-DVW 457).

"Christ speaks to women about the things of God, and they understand them" (TOB-DVW 465).

"Women were in the forefront at the foot of the cross. John was the only apostle who remained faithful, but there were many faithful women. Not only the Mother of Christ and 'his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene' were present, but 'there were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him.' As we see, in this most arduous test of faith and fidelity the women proved stronger than the apostles" (TOB-DVW 466).

"The woman's motherhood constitutes a special 'part' in this shared parenthood, and the most demanding part. Parenthood is realized much more fully in the woman. No program of 'equal rights' between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account. Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life. The mother's contribution is decisive in laying the foundation for a new human personality" (TOB-DVW 470).

"(It is the woman) upon whom the very humanity of the new human being mainly depends" (TOB-DVW 470).

"The 'woman' as mother and first teacher of the human being has a specific precedence over the man. (It is the woman) upon whom the very humanity of the new human being mainly depends" (TOB 470).

"The words of the first man at the sight of the first woman are words of admiration and enchantment, words which fill the whole history of man on earth" (TOB 457).

"Tenderness is the ability to feel with and for the whole person, to feel even the most deeply hidden spiritual tremors, and always to have in mind the true good of the person. This is the sort of tenderness which a woman expects from a man. (A woman's) emotional life is generally richer than a man's, and so her need for tenderness is greater. There can be no genuine tenderness without a perfected habit of continence {or chastity}" (LAR 207).

(1 John 2:14) I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

(Pro 31) A good wife is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her. Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her.

(1 Cor 7:4) The wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.

(Rev 19: 7-9) Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" --for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Spirit and the Bride say "come. Let him who thirsts come. Let him who desires drink of the water of life without price."

Group Questions

- 1) Is it okay for a woman to take the lead in a relationship, especially considering that some men "just don't get it."
- 2) What can women do, and men do, to help men become better leaders.
- 3) What can women do, and men do, to help women fully and properly appreciate their own beauty, femininity, and dignity as women?
- 4) Give examples of ways we can effectively share these ideas with acquaintances, friends, and family.

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