



2016-2017

Syllabus Handouts

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# What am I doing about the Year of Mercy?

## Summary

Pope Francis proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. He has asked us to reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. What are these works of mercy and how can I be involved in these works today and beyond?

## Objective

Jesus proclaimed mercy to everyone he met and demonstrated that mercy most graciously at the crucifixion. He called on his disciples to be merciful as well. This was so important to Him that he expressed it in the beatitudes, in his illustration of the final judgment, and in several parables. This was not a throwaway concept but a cornerstone for His ministry.

Pope Francis proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy beginning on December 8, 2015, asking us to reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The corporal works of mercy are: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are: counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently, and pray for the living and the dead.

## Bible Readings

1. Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

2. Matthew 26: 37 - 40

Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me'.

3. Matthew 18: 21 - 22

Then Peter approaching asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times."

## Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2447

The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God

2. Paragraph 1473

The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man."

### **Small Group Questions**

1. How would the Church/our world/our families/our souls be different if we prioritized the works of mercy?
2. What is a small work of mercy I can do today to show Christ's mercy?
3. What ministries does our parish have that perform the works of mercy?

### **Recommended Resources**

The book "Beautiful Mercy" is a great guide to understanding and living out the Year of Mercy.

Many saints have talked about mercy. Saints Faustina and Pope John Paul II are infamous for their discussions on mercy, but the Venerable Bede is also a resource that should not be neglected when considering this subject.

### **Accountability**

1. Today, I will do one small work of mercy.
2. This week, I will investigate one ministry that performs works of mercy and pray about how I could be involved.

### **Suggested Song**

Blest Are They (Blue 72, Red 636, Music Issue 635)

### **Author(s)**

John Murphy

# Rediscovering Jesus

## Summary

When is the best time to rediscover Jesus? The answer is, “Now!” Every follower of Jesus should strive to know him better, and seek renewal in their spiritual life.

## Objective

Rate your knowledge of Jesus on a scale from 1 to 10. Do you really know him? Can we ever truly know him enough? In “Rediscover Jesus”, Matthew Kelly describes Jesus as “that amazing friend who will be at your side through it all”. If that is not where you are in your relationship with the Lord of Lords and Savior of the World, then it is definitely time to rediscover Jesus.

One way to utilize Matthew Kelly’s book is as a spiritual exercise during Lent; however, there is no need to wait for the right season to embark upon this effort. Consider presenting one or more chapters from Matthew Kelly’s book to give the group an introduction to this resource.

Explore further ways one can grow in the knowledge of Jesus—the historical Jesus is a place to start, but knowing ABOUT Jesus is not the same as KNOWING Jesus. You can start with the Gospel accounts, or perhaps experience him more deeply through retreats, adoration, and the sacraments. A self-assessment would help each man to reflect on new ways to encounter Jesus.

## Bible Readings

### 1. Matthew Chapter 16:13-16

Now when Jesus came to the district of Caesarea Philippi, he was asking his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, and others Elijah; but still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God”

### 2. Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.

### 3. 2 Cor. Chapter 5:15-17

He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold new things have come.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 448

“Very often in the Gospels, people address Jesus as “Lord”. This title testifies to the respect and trust of those who approach him for help and healing. At the prompting of the Holy Spirit, “Lord” expresses the recognition of the divine mystery of Jesus. In the encounter with the risen Jesus, this title becomes adoration: “My Lord and my God!” It thus takes on a connotation of love and affection that remains proper to the Christian tradition: “It is the Lord!”.

### 2. Paragraphs 528

In all of his life, Jesus presents himself as OUR model. He is “the perfect man” who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayers he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that come our way.

### **Small Group Questions**

1. What aspect of my relationship with Jesus needs the most work?
2. How well could I describe Jesus and his significance to someone who has never heard of him?
3. Am I comfortable talking with Jesus one-on-one, informally?
4. Question 2

### **Recommended Resources**

1. “Rediscover Jesus” by Matthew Kelly
2. “Habits of the Soul”, by Linda Perrone Rooney
3. “Killing Jesus” by O’ Reilly (for a historical perspective)

### **Accountability**

1. What new effort will I make this year to grow closer to Jesus, to rediscover him?
2. How will I ensure that my other responsibilities and activities do not prevent me from reaching this goal?
3. Get a copy of Rediscover Jesus, or find the one that was given as a gift by the parish.
4. Recommit to daily prayer!

### **Suggested Song**

You are Near (Blue 554, Red 590, Music Issue 443)

### **Author(s)**

Jeff Farmer

### **Included Resources**

Youtube link: “Rediscover Jesus by Matthew Kelly” – 3 minute video by Matthew Kelly introducing the book.

Jeff Cavins Bible series on the Book of Matthew is full of fascinating information on the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies by Jesus, the new Adam and the new Moses.

# Barriers to Commitment to Christ

## Summary

"It's Not You, it's me"

This is a quote from Seinfeld where George is talking about how he invented the "It's not you, it's me" approach to breaking up with someone.

Because God wants nothing more than for us to have a relationship with Him, "It's not Him, it's us".

Let's explore the barriers that keep us from having a greater commitment the Christ.

## Objective

### Barrier 1: Commitment

81% say they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today

78% strongly agreed that spirituality is very important to them.

However:

18% claim to be totally committed to investing in their own spiritual development

22% claim to be "completely dependent upon God"

Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Matt. 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

### Barrier 2: Repentance

64% say they have confessed their sins to God and asked for His forgiveness.

12% admitted that recognizing and grasping the significance of their sins had been so personally devastating that it caused them emotional distress.

However:

Only 2% of Catholics go to confession regularly.

Rev. 2:5 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent.

### Barrier 3: Activity

- Christians have confused religious activity with spiritual significance and depth
  - 39% have participated in a combination of three "normal" religious activities in the past week (i.e., attending church services, praying, reading the Bible)

<10% have:

- talked about their faith with a non-Christian

- fasted for religious purposes
- had an extended time of spiritual reflection during the past week

#### **Barrier 4: Spiritual Community**

- Most self-identified Christians note that they feel comfortable and connected within their church.
- Many do not take their faith community seriously as a place to which they should be open and held to biblical principles
- Only 21% believe that spiritual maturity requires a vital connection to a community of faith

Psalm 133:1 - Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!

Proverbs 27:17 - Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

- We cannot be lulled into the stupor of “cultural Christianity”
  - We cannot be satisfied with comfort or nominal growth: perpetual “sameness”
  - The “work of the Church” is the work of each and every one of us
  - We are to equip each member for service and encourage each other to serve the Lord and expand His Kingdom on earth
- We are the Body of Christ!

#### **Bible Readings**

##### 1. Isaiah 56:6-7

"Also the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath And holds fast My covenant; Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."

##### 2. Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

#### **Catechism Readings**

##### 1. Paragraph 2087

Our moral life has its source in faith in God who reveals his love to us. St. Paul speaks of the "obedience of faith"<sup>9</sup> as our first obligation. He shows that "ignorance of God" is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations.<sup>10</sup> Our duty toward God is to believe in him and to bear witness to him.

##### 2. Paragraph 2094

One can sin against God's love in various ways:

- indifference neglects or refuses to reflect on divine charity; it fails to consider its prevenient goodness and denies its power.



- ingratitude fails or refuses to acknowledge divine charity and to return him love for love.
- lukewarmness is hesitation or negligence in responding to divine love; it can imply refusal to give oneself over to the prompting of charity.
- acedia or spiritual sloth goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness.
- hatred of God comes from pride. It is contrary to love of God, whose goodness it denies, and whom it presumes to curse as the one who forbids sins and inflicts punishments.

## **Small Group Questions**

1. Do you go to confession regularly?
2. What sin(s) is creating a barrier to your commitment to Christ?
3. What Blocks us from increasing our trust and faith in Jesus Christ?

## **Recommended Resources**

[http://lighthouse.com/?q=system/files/sermon\\_files/Barriers%20to%20Spiritual%20Growth%20-%202%20Pet%203v17-18.ppt](http://lighthouse.com/?q=system/files/sermon_files/Barriers%20to%20Spiritual%20Growth%20-%202%20Pet%203v17-18.ppt)

<http://www.discipleshiptools.org/apps/articles/?articleid=40612&columnid=4189>

## **Suggested Song**

Send Us Your Spirit (Blue 394, Red 476) The Summons (Music Issue 380)

## **Author(s)**

Tony Heekin

# **Son and father: being an adult son and how that ties into fathering**

## **Summary**

You are the “middle man”. You have an aging father, and you might have an adult son. It is never time to stop being a father to your son, even if he is an adult. However, it might be time to focus attention on your aging father. You might be tempted to be a “father” to him – guide him, take over decisions, even physically take care of him, etc. like you used to when your own son was not capable of doing those things. However, the needs are different and the relationship is different, so this needs to be approached with a different perspective.

## **Objective**

There is plenty of great information about your relationship with your adult son. This topic will focus on your role in caring for an aging father.

After years of literally cleaning up after us, putting up with the turbulent teens, supporting us as we launched our adult lives and countless other things since then, the support and caretaking roles are beginning to be reversed. And it’s now our turn to step up -- and take care of them.

What exactly does it mean to “raise” an aging parent? Just how responsible are we for their financial, mental and physical health, well-being, lifestyle and security? Should we be finding them a place to live, for example, when they can no longer stay in the family home? Moving them in with us? Becoming their caretaker? Taking over their affairs? Supporting them emotionally? Giving them counsel and even “tough love” when they stubbornly resist changes that are difficult but necessary. Hold their hand as they struggle? Or even helping them die?

The answer to all of these questions that’s right for you is somewhere between “not enough” and “too much.”

Sounds a lot like being a “father” doesn’t it?

## **Bible Readings**

Deuteronomy 5:16

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD, your God, has commanded you, that you may have a long life and that you may prosper in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Leviticus 19:32

Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the old, and fear your God. I am the LORD.

## Ephesians 6:1-3

1 Children, obey your parents [in the Lord], for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise, 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth."

## 1 Timothy 5:1

1 Do not rebuke an older man, but appeal to him as a father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with complete purity.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 2215

Respect for parents (filial piety) derives from gratitude toward those who, by the gift of life, their love and their work, have brought their children into the world and enabled them to grow in stature, wisdom, and grace. "With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?"

### 2. Paragraph 2218:

The fourth commandment reminds grown children of their responsibilities toward their parents. As much as they can, they must give them material and moral support in old age and in times of illness, loneliness, or distress. Jesus recalls this duty of gratitude.

For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother.

O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. . . . Whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and whoever angers his mother is cursed by the Lord.

## Small Group Questions

1. Are you in a situation where your parents need your assistance: financially, daily care giving, illness recovery, disability? How do you help them?
2. If your father is alive, how is your relationship with him?
3. If your parents are younger, do you keep a close relationship to them so that later in life that closeness will keep you together?
4. Importantly – what are you and your spouse doing to prepare for your golden years to limit the burden on your children?

## Recommended Resources

1. Raising an aging parent

<http://www.joanlunden.com/category/3-caregiving/item/288-raising-an-aging-parent-deciding-what-s-best-for-you-and-them-by-dr-ken-druck>

2. Perspective from an aging parent  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/03/when-youre-the-aging-parent/472290/>
3. Catholic website with lots of resources on aging parents  
<http://www.youragingparent.com/index.html>

## Accountability

1. If your father is getting to the point that in the next several years he might need extra care, examine the relationship between you and him. What needs improvement?
2. Set up a time with your father to build your relationship.

## Suggested Song

Faith of Our Fathers (Blue 130, Music Issue 450, different words in Red!)

## Author(s)

Steve Frazer

## Included Resources

Excerpts from "Raising an aging parenting"

Here are some other important things to consider when dealing with your aging parent:

1. **For the Best Results, Act from Love Not Guilt or Resentment** - Check your motives, intentions and reason for taking care of your aging parent.
2. **Live and Give Within Your Limits and Have a Life** - Some of us are better prepared and positioned to help an aging parent than others. Our personal wealth, resources, time, health and family situation and ability to set and maintain healthy boundaries are all factors. The key is to live and give within your limits.
3. **Beware of "Never Enough" Scenarios** - Sadly, some of us have gotten caught up in guilt traps and guilt trips. We try to control the other person by inducing guilt in them. This dishonest and destructive habit of selfishly getting an aging parent or adult child to do what you want destroys intimacy and trust.
4. **Make a List of What's Available and What's Not** - By itemizing what you're willing to do, give and be in concrete terms, and listing what's not on the table, you are setting the table for success with your parent.
5. **Empathize and Show Compassion but Set Healthy Boundaries** - Rescuing, saving, enabling behavior shows no regard for the well-being of the giver. Those who learn to give from genuine empathy and compassion, are better able to set reasonable limits and healthy boundaries.
6. **Rest and Replenish: Practice Good Self-Care** - Caretaking someone you love who is struggling with the ills of getting older is a physically, emotionally and spiritually demanding activity. Take appropriate care of yourself so you have the energy (both physical and mental) to do an effective job.
7. **Set a Gentle but Firm Tone for The Transfer of Power** - At some point, you may find yourself gradually or abruptly taking over some responsibilities from them.
8. **Successful Relationships Are a Two-Way Street** - The best insurance for successful relationships at any age of any kind is clear, honest communication, good listening, respect and compassion.

What Your Aging Parent Wants You to Know:

1. **I Still Have a Mind of My Own.** Nobody, young or old, wants to be bossed around and/or dismissed because of their age. Aging parents realize that there are some things they now need our help to figure

out -- but they want us to know how important it is for us to ask (rather than tell) them what to do, think or believe.

**2. Speak to Me With Love and Respect.** Tone is everything. Aging parents realize the sandwich generation is moving at the speed of light to get everything done -- but they want us to speak to (rather than at) them using words and a voice that conveys respect and affection, rather than impatience and frustration.

**3. I Am Still Your Parent.** Even though they are older and may be a step slower, our parents are forever our parents. Treating them like (helpless) children can be insensitive and demeaning.

**4. Sometimes, I Still Want to be In Charge.** Decisions are best made (and implemented) when they are made in concert with your aging parent. Be a patient communicator when it comes to talking through/deliberating about important decisions.

**5. You May be Smarter in Today's World, but I Still Know More About Some Things.** Aging parents want us to tap into the wealth of relevant knowledge they have gained from years of experience. Listen and validate their contributions.

**6. I May Not Always Show it But I Love and Appreciate You.** Some parents, kids, families and cultures are more demonstrative than others when it comes to showing love and affection. Aging parents want us look past their occasional grumpiness and know the depth of their love and gratitude for all the ways we are trying to make their lives better, richer and more comfortable.

# A Life of Prayer

## Summary

How do we develop a life of prayer from defined prayer practices?

What are the different prayer forms that can lead to a life of prayer?

What are some best practices shared by those committed to a life of prayer?

## Objective

“Every one of us needs half an hour of prayer each day, except when we are busy, then we need an hour.” ...St Francis de Sales.

At Mass when the reading of the Gospel begins, we place the sign of the cross on our foreheads, lips, and hearts and pray, “May the Lord be in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.” Lips, minds and hearts—these symbolize 3 kinds of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative. These modes of prayer include formal and informal paths, personal and communal expressions, popular piety, and the liturgical prayer of the Church.

**Vocal prayer**, founded on the union of body and soul in human nature, associates the body with the interior prayer of the heart, following Christ’s example of praying to His Father and teaching the Our Father to His disciples.

In **meditative prayer**, we use our minds to ponder the will of God in His plan for our lives. What does God ask of us---aids for this are in Scripture, the holy Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day, and writings of the Spiritual Fathers and Mothers. Varied methods include Lectio Divina of St Benedict, the radical simplicity of Franciscan spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire.

**Contemplative prayer** involves hearing and obeying God’s Word. It is a time of silent listening and love based on the study of God’s Word. Emptying oneself not for its own sake, but for the sake of being filled with God and entering into a deeper relationship with Him.

There is great power in our Catholic prayers, the prayers of the saints and the prayers Jesus teaches us, but take time to understand these prayers contextually and spiritually so they can be said genuinely, relationally and with purpose.

Reduce barriers to distraction along your prayer routines. Consider the best places and times as well as the resources that may aid you to have sacred time with God.

The posture of your heart and an intentional rhythm in a life of prayer should be considered. The chronology of prayers said in this sacred time can have a deep impact on the impact of the life or prayer. This P.R.A.Y. acronym may help the posture of the sacred prayer life:

**P – Praise:** The posture of praise and gratitude is foundational for sacred prayer life. Jesus teaches this with how he starts the “Our Father”. “Hallowed” is derived from a Greek term that reveals the deepest levels of praise for God as the Holiest of all . Consider praising God for the following:

- Praise Him for His character - loving, graceful, merciful, healing ect...

- Praise Him for giving His one and only son, Jesus , so we could be reconciled with God.
- Praise Him for His creation - as his beauty is all around us and a great reminder of Him.
- Praise Him for His Word – the blueprint to live in relationship with Him for eternity
- Praise Him for His provision and blessings in your life

**R – Repent:** Ask God to search your heart and purify your ways (Psalm 139:23-24 and Psalm 51: 10-11). Search the last few days or week in your mind and allow God to reveal to you areas where you can repent. This repentance will purify your heart to put you in the right frame of mind to have sacred prayer.

**A - Ask:** The bible instructs us that we are to ask God for the desires of our heart. Before asking anything that you desire, seek the Holy Spirit and ask Him to guide your prayers and that amidst your time of asking you will claim only the desires of your heart that will bring honor to God.

**Y- Yield to His will:** Jesus models sacred prayer and yielding to God’s will in the garden of Gethsemane as he prayed before he was to be crucified. In Matthew 26:39 , he states “Not as I will, but as you will”. This overarching theme of a life of prayer is pivotal and reveals the truth that we know God to be omnipotent (all powerful), omniscience (all knowledgeable) and omnipresent (always with us)

### **Moving from a prayer life (with defined practices) to a life of prayer:**

As these and other defined prayer practices develop in maturity and regularity, an ongoing prayerful dialogue between you and God will result. The objective to committing and developing defined prayer routines will result in a life of prayer that is constant prayerful dialogue between you and God. The life of prayer leads the believer to a stronger discernment ability to *God’s will for his life*.

1Thes 5:17-18: Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for all is the *will of God for your life* in Christ Jesus.

## **Bible Readings**

### 1. Eph 6:18.

With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones.

### 2. Phil 4:6.

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with Thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

### 3. 1Jn 5:14.

And we have this confidence in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

### 4. Mt 7:7

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish. If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 2707

There are as many and varied methods of meditation as there are spiritual masters. Christians owe it to themselves to develop the desire to meditate regularly, lest they come to resemble the three first kinds of soil in the parable of the sower.<sup>5</sup> But a method is only a guide; the important thing is to advance, with the Holy Spirit, along the one way of prayer: Christ Jesus.

### 2. Paragraph 2724

Contemplative prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery.

### 3. Paragraph 2561

"You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God: "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!"<sup>10</sup> Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God.<sup>11</sup>

## Small Group Questions

1. Do you desire a deeper life of prayer? If so, gain some best practices within your group that works for others.
2. Where and when do you pray? Are there any barriers to sacred prayer time that you could eliminate?
3. Is prayer just about asking God for something?
4. Do we recognize that is God's will be done and not ours?
5. How have you maintained a bond between prayer and an active Christian mission to others?

## Included Resources

"I Shall Keep the Silence of My Heart" Mother Teresa I don't think there is anyone who needs God's help and grace as much as I do. Sometimes I feel so helpless and so weak I think this is why God uses me. Because I cannot depend on my own strength. I rely on Him 24 hours a day. All of us must cling to God through prayer. My secret is simple. I pray. Through prayer I become one in love with Christ. I realize that praying to Him is loving Him we cannot find God in noise or agitation. Nature, trees, flowers and grass grow in silence. The stars, the moon, and the sun move in silence. He speaks to our souls. In silence we are granted the privilege of listening to His voice....Silence of our eyes. Silence of our ears. Silence of our minds.....in the silence of the heart God will speak.

Mother Teresa.....And when times come when we can't pray, it is very simple; if Jesus is in my heart, let Him pray, let me allow Him to pray in me, to talk to His Father in the silence of my heart. Since I cannot speak—He will speak; since I cannot pray—He will pray.

Gandhi.....I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and therefore prayer must be the very core of this life of humanity, for no one can live without religion.

Gandhi.....There is really only one prayer that we may offer, "Thy will be done."

Madeleine Delbrel.....Silence is the place where the Word of God dwells. We, the ordinary people of the streets, do not see solitude as the absence of the world, but as the presence of God.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty.....God has given this day into our hands. This is the day in which we pray, but we pray by action and sweat, just as Christ did. He said He "came not to be served but to serve." (Mt 20:28) He also said "Pray continually (Lk 18:1). Pray while you work and work while you pray.

Howard Thurman.....First, we must learn to be quiet, to settle down in one spot for a spell. Sometime during each day, everything should stop and the art of being still must be practiced.



Cardinal Newman's Prayer to Christ..... Lord Jesus, conceal Thyself not within me thus! Look, thou through my eyes, hear by my ears, speak by my mouth, walk with my feet! Lord may my poor human presence recall, at least distantly, thy divine presence.

Henri Nouwen..... Prayer is entering into communion with the one who molded our being in our mother's womb with love and only love. There in that first love lies our true self, a self not made up of rejections and acceptances of those with whom we live, but solidly rooted in the one who called us into existence. In the house of God we were created. To that house we are called to return. Prayer is the act of returning...the act of prayer is the basis and source of all actions.

## **Accountability**

1. Do some spiritual reading, it can invest your prayers with new meanings.
2. Find that quiet time in your day, anywhere and pray. Find that space in your home, your workplace, in Nature, where you can "be still" and practice.
3. Silence is prayer.
4. Don't expect visions or voices in response to prayer, God works in many ways. The vision could simply be the sunset.
5. DARE to pray
6. Do it every day
7. Ask where you need to be changed
8. Respond to what God is asking you
9. Expect great things

## **Suggested Song**

Amazing Grace (Blue 36, Red 586, Music Issue 424)

## **Author**

John McCarthy / Charles Pfizenmayer

# What Devotion Activities Work for You?

## Summary

Faith and devotion involves both the head and the heart. What devotional activities do you use to get in an adorational “zone” of praise and closeness to Our Lord? Catholic devotional practices allow us to deeply express our love of God. Let’s explore devotional activities.

## Objective

The purpose of popular devotional practices is to attract and direct our souls to God, purifying them from their sins, encouraging them to practice virtue and, stimulating them to advance along the path of sincere piety.

Catholics have always used a variety of devotional practices to bring prayer into everyday life. Examples include Eucharistic Adoration, devotionals, novenas, celebrations in honor of Mary and the saints, the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the veneration of relics, and the use of sacramentals. These devotional practices do not replace the liturgical life of the Church, rather, they extend it into daily life.

In our devotional activity it is vital that we avoid being focused on the “process” of practicing the devotion, rather than the “object” of the devotion, which is intimacy with God and union with Him. We feel like we are holy because we are doing things, but doing things is no substitute for true love of God.

## Bible Readings

### 1. Mark 1: 35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

### 2. Isaiah 38: 3

Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraphs 1674-1676

Besides sacramental liturgy and sacramentals, catechesis must take into account the forms of piety and popular devotions among the faithful. The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals,<sup>180</sup> etc.

These expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church, but do not replace it. They "should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it and lead the people to it, since in fact the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them."<sup>181</sup>

Pastoral discernment is needed to sustain and support popular piety and, if necessary, to purify and correct the religious sense which underlies these devotions so that the faithful may advance in knowledge of the mystery of Christ.<sup>182</sup> Their exercise is subject to the care and judgment of the bishops and to the general norms of the Church "

### 2. Paragraph 971

"All generations will call me blessed": "The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship."<sup>515</sup> The Church rightly honors "the Blessed Virgin with special devotion. From the

most ancient times the Blessed Virgin has been honored with the title of 'Mother of God,' to whose protection the faithful fly in all their dangers and needs. This very special devotion . . . differs essentially from the adoration which is given to the incarnate Word and equally to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and greatly fosters this adoration."516 The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an "epitome of the whole Gospel," express this devotion to the Virgin Mary.

### **Small Group Questions**

1. What devotional activity or practice brings you close to Our Lord? How?
2. Name one new thing you learned about devotions in the large group?
3. Should your small group sign up to cover "just one hour" each week at IHM's Perpetual Adoration chapel?
4. Is there a new devotional practice that you want to investigate?

### **Recommended Resources**

1. Popular Devotions and Practices <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/popular-devotional-practices-basic-questions-and-answers.cfm>
2. Roman Catholic Devotions <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL69SBqtLBOFXGN6z2PTRLamhZJtta1wba>

### **Accountability**

1. Take time to understand Roman Catholic devotions.
2. Incorporate one new devotional activity in your prayer life.
3. Bring up the topic of your devotional practice with your family...and friends.... next week.

### **Suggested Song**

Here I Am, Lord (Blue 180, Red 671, Music Issue 375)

### **Author(s)**

Reid Rooney

### **Included Resources**

Catholic Stand – Catholic Devotions: A Spiritual Vocabulary - <http://www.catholicstand.com/catholic-devotions-spiritual-vocabulary-2/>

Catholic Daily Devotions - <http://www.spiritualcatholic.com/catholic-daily-devotions>

The Magnificat - <http://us.magnificat.net/home/discover>

# How to Read the Bible

## Summary

So if the Bible is the book of the Catholic Church and the Catholic Church was actually the organizer of what went into the Bible in the first place, why do so many Catholics feel ignorant of the scriptures? Learn how to better understand the Bible and to make it a daily part of your faith practice.

## Objective

- Share practical ways that fathers can begin incorporating scripture into their faith practice, including lectio divina
- Help fathers to understand the place of the Bible within the Catholic faith and the unity of the scriptures and how to begin to unravel the complexities of interpreting the Bible.
- Suggest reading plans that fit an individual's particular journey or comfort level.

## Bible Readings

### 1. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

### 2. Psalm 119:12-16

Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes.  
With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth.  
I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches.  
I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways.  
I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 136

God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors; he acts in them and by means of them. He thus gives assurance that their writings teach without error his saving truth.

### 2. Paragraphs 137

Interpretation of the inspired Scripture must be attentive above all to what God wants to reveal through the sacred authors for our salvation. What comes from the Spirit is not fully "understood except by the Spirit's action."

## Small Group Questions

1. What Bible reading practices have worked for you? Not worked?
2. What has kept you from reading the Bible? What have you struggled with?
3. How can scripture enrich your understanding of God's will for you? Humanity?
4. Do you consider the act of reading it to be a prayer?

## Recommended Resources

1. The Real Story: Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible. by Edward Sri and Curtis Martin.
2. Bible Basics for Catholics. by Dr John Bergsma
3. <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies/lesson/lesson-one-how-a-catholic-starts-to-read-the-bible>
4. <http://www.catholicbible101.com/howtoreadthebible.htm>
5. <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Reading-Bible.htm>

## Accountability

1. Find an accountability partner and agree to read the Bible everyday
2. This week in mass pay specific attention to the readings and listen to how the homily ties them together. Read the Mass readings before going to Mass.
3. Intimidated? Pick a book and commit to start.
4. Consider joining one of several small group Bible studies at IHM.

## Suggested Song

## Author(s)

Dave Rahner (updated from Mitch West)

## Included Resources

1. <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies/lesson/lesson-one-how-a-catholic-starts-to-read-the-bible>

### *Going by the Book: How a Catholic Reads the Bible*

#### A. Divine Revelation: How God Speaks to Us

Christianity is a religion of the Word, not of a book! The Word is a Person - Jesus Christ. He is God's "final word" on everything. Through Jesus, God has revealed everything He wanted to reveal to us about who He is and what He intends for our lives. God's revelation of Himself comes to us in three ways:

Scripture (the Bible)

Tradition (especially the liturgy of the Church - the Mass and the sacraments)

The Magisterium (the Church's teachings, such as its dogmas and creeds)

The Holy Spirit is at work through all three channels - He inspires Scripture, animates the Church's living Tradition, and guarantees the teaching of the Church's Magisterium (Catechism, nos. 81-82).

#### B. Reading and Interpreting the Scripture: The Three Rules

Because God's revelation comes to us through these three channels, we must remember three important criteria for reading and interpreting Scripture: \*

##### **The Content & Unity of Scripture:**

Though Scripture is made up of different books, we can't read them as separate books. We have to read each one in light of the rest, keeping in mind that Jesus revealed that there is a unity in God's plan for the world, as that plan is revealed in Scripture.

St. Augustine used to say that: "The New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New." What he meant is that Jesus showed us how the things that God says and does in the Old Testament pointed to what He says and does in the New. In turn, what Jesus says and does in the New Testament sheds light on the promises and events we read about in the Old.

##### **The Church's Living Tradition:**

We must always read Scripture within the context of the Church's Tradition. That means that we should always see how the Church interprets certain Scripture passages, especially in the prayers and readings it uses for the Mass and for special feasts in the Church.

##### **Analogy of Faith:**

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures also safeguards the Church's teaching authority. That means that if we're going to read and interpret Scripture properly - the way God intends it to be read - we have to make sure our interpretations don't contradict the interpretations found in the Church's creeds and other statements of doctrine.

#### C. Scripture is Divine: Inspiration

As you can tell by now, there's no other book like the Bible. The Church teaches that just as Jesus was "true God and true man," the Bible is truly a work of human authors and at the same time is truly the work of God as the divine author.

This is the mystery of the divine "inspiration" of Scripture (see [2 Timothy 3:16](#)). The word "inspired" in the Greek, literally means "God-breathed." And that's a good way to think about the inspiration of Scripture. Just as God fashioned Adam out of the clay of the earth and blew the breath of life into him (see [Genesis 2:7](#)), God breathes His Spirit into the words of the human authors of Scripture and makes them the Living Word of God. The way the Church explains it, it happened like this: The human authors used their literary skills, ideas and other talents in writing the pages of the Bible. But while they were writing, God was acting in them so that what they wrote was exactly what He wanted them to write (see Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, scroll down to nos. 11-12: Catechism, nos. 105-107). The human writers were "true authors" of Scripture, and so was God. Because God is its co-author, and because God cannot err or make mistakes, we say that whatever we read in the Bible is true, free from "error" and has been put there for our salvation. This is called the "inerrancy" of Scripture. This is a very complicated concept that we can't explain fully in this class. But it's important to always read the Bible on its own terms. The Bible doesn't set out to teach modern history, science or geography or biography. So we shouldn't try to compare what it says about the creation of the world, for instance, to what modern science teaches us. That doesn't mean the Bible is ever wrong. The Bible, entire and whole, is true and without error - not only in what it teaches about faith and morals, but also what it says about historical events and personages. It will never lead us astray. But we have to interpret it responsibly - we have to understand that it is giving us history and natural events from a "religious" and divine perspective, and often uses symbolic language.

#### D. Scripture is Human: The Bible as Religious Literature and History

Practically speaking, the "divine-human" authorship of Scripture means we have to read the Bible differently than we approach other books.

When we read the Bible we must remember that it is the Word of God told in human language. It's important that we understand the "human element" of Scripture. As we'll see, this human element can't really be separated from the divine element. But it's important when we read the Bible to remember that it is:

**Literature:** The Bible uses literary forms, devices, structures, figures, etc. We must look for the "literary" clues that convey a meaning. **Ancient:** The Bible is ancient. Its not written like modern literature. It's meaning is wrapped up with the way the ancients looked at the world and recorded history. Although they were interested in recording history, they were not interested in "pure history." History was more than just politic, economics and wars - it had a deeper significance. **Religious:** Today people think of religion in terms of personal piety. Not so for the ancients. The word "religion" comes from the Latin, "religare," - "to bind together." For the ancients everything - culture, history, the economy, diplomacy - was bound together by the religion. The Bible gives us history, but it is religious history. It is history from God's perspective.

#### **2. *Lectio Divina*: One way to read and pray the Bible**

Lectio divina is an ancient tradition of reading and praying through a passage of scripture that is still used by millions of Christians today. The method is fairly simple, can be done in as little as 15 minutes, and can be done by both individuals and groups. Here it is in a nutshell.

Pick a short passage of scripture. The gospel reading for Mass that day might be a good place to start.

Say a quick prayer asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance, as the Holy Spirit is the co-author of all scripture.

Read the passage slowly and carefully.

Be quiet and pray. (that also means listening!)

Repeat steps 2, 3, 4 a total of 3 times; the first time asking God to show you a word or phrase that you should focus on; the second time asking God "what are trying to tell me?"; the third time asking God "how would you like me to change?"

#### **Plans for Choosing Which Biblical Texts to Read**

##### **1) Liturgical/Lectionary Approach:**

- Many people find it good to read the short biblical selections that are used at daily and/or Sunday Mass, as found in the Lectionary for Mass.

- o Readings for daily and Sunday Masses are available on the US Catholic Bishops' website:

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/>

- To help guide you, several Catholic publishers put out monthly and/or seasonal booklets with the liturgical readings, along with commentaries, prayers, and/or study aides:

**Give Us This Day** – excellent new publication, begun Spring 2011, from The Liturgical Press

**Living with Christ** – available in US and Canadian editions, from Novalis Press

**Magnificat Magazine** – available in English, Spanish, and other languages

**The Word Among Us** – daily meditations based on the Mass readings

**Workbook for Lectors...** – available in US and Canadian editions, from LTP

## **2) Canonical Approach:**

- Some people want to read the whole Bible from beginning to end (from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation).

- o Such plans require reading thirty or more minutes each day, or one or more chapters each day, throughout the year.

- This is probably not the best method for beginners, since the Old Testament (OT) is so long and many parts of it are quite difficult;

- o but it could be a good practice for people who are already familiar with much of the Bible, and wish to see how it all fits together.

- Various plans for reading the whole Bible in one or more years are available in print or online:

- o **Daily Scripture and Catechism Devotional** – a downloadable brochure of a **one-year plan** that anyone can begin at any time, with four readings suggested for each day: two selections from the OT, one from the NT, and one from the Catechism of the Catholic Church; by the "[Coming Home Network](#)"

- o **How to Read the Bible Every Day: A Guide for Catholics** – contains 1-year, 2-year, and 3-year plans; by Carmen Rojas (only in print, not online)

- Most other online reading plans and printed "One-Year Bibles" are based on Protestant editions of the Bible, which do not include the Deuterocanonical books considered canonical by Catholics and Orthodox Christians.

## **3) Christo-centric Approach:**

- One could also read one biblical book at a time, but focusing on Jesus and seeing the relation of all the books to Jesus.

- o Begin with one of the Gospels, for the basic story about Jesus (start with Mark, the oldest & shortest Gospel).

- o Then read some NT letters, followed by another Gospel; then the Acts of the Apostles, and more NT letters; then also some OT books, to learn about the history, culture, and theology of the Jewish people.

- You may want to read OT or NT books around the time when they occur in the Lectionary for Mass (see above).

- There are many good published commentaries on each book or section of the Bible, to help guide your study and reflection:

**Ignatius Press Study Bible and Ignatius Press Bible Study Series.**

- o **New Collegeville Bible Commentary** and **Collegeville Bible Commentary** series – by The Liturgical Press.

- o **Little Rock Scripture Study** – by the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, and The Liturgical Press.

o **New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary** – older series, also by The Liturgical Press.

o **Six Weeks with the Bible: Catholic Perspectives** – by Loyola Press.

o **Paulist Bible Study Program** – successor to the “Denver Catholic Biblical School” series; from Paulist Press.

· There are also some good resources available online:

o **St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology** – free online courses and resources for studying the Bible

o **Catholic Scripture Study International** – provides several 30-week in-depth online courses, focusing on one biblical book at a time.

#### **4) Thematic/Theological Approach:**

· Reading portions of the Bible that are related to some theological, ethical, spiritual, liturgical, or other theme.

o For example, reading texts related to Jesus’ resurrection, or to an issue of social justice, or to Mary, etc.

· Various booklets and guides for finding biblical texts related to certain themes are available in print or online.

o **Threshold Bible Study** – thematic studies presented in short workbooks; from Twenty-third Publications.

o **Scripture from Scratch** – four-page flyers published 1993-2005; still available from St. Anthony Messenger Press.

o **Interfaces** – a series of short commentaries on certain biblical characters; from The Liturgical Press.

2. <http://www.catholicbible101.com/howtoreadthebible.htm>

There are 4 basic levels of scripture to understand: The literal sense, the allegorical sense, the moral sense, and the anagogical sense.

· The **literal** sense is what most people stop at when they read the bible. The literal sense when one reads about a temple in the bible is a big building where everyone went to worship. This is what the Pharisee thought that Jesus was talking about in John 2 when Jesus said “Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in 3 days.”

· However, Jesus was talking about the **allegorical** sense (how the text refers to Jesus) and the fact that His Body is the new Temple.

· The **moral** sense of scripture is how the verse applies to us and our personal morality. Since the bible says that our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6, then we should not spend one second desecrating our temple by getting drunk, watching impure movies, having an abortion, cursing, etc.

· The last method, the **anagogical** sense, refers to the heavenly sense. We know that after the second coming there will be a new heavenly temple (Revelation 21), and the old earth and all of its churches and temples will pass away.



# Truth vs. Relativism

## Summary

In his 2005 homily for the mass opening the papal conclave that would elect him pope, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, soon to be Pope Benedict XVI, warned: “We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.” What did he mean, and how does it apply to my everyday life? Come find out how we can recognize relativism and live out the very different vision which the Gospel calls us to.

## Objective

Jesus told Pontius Pilate that the reason for his being born was to bear witness to the truth. Pilate gives a very modern answer: “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38). In the story of Adam and Eve, the serpent takes a two-pronged approach. First, he questions God’s truthfulness. Eve says that God told them that if they ate the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, they would die. The serpent responds: “You will not die” (Genesis 3:4). Second, the serpent says that the reason God told them this was because “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). Some have interpreted this passage to mean that the serpent is telling Adam and Eve that they can decide for themselves what is good and what is evil, rather than God.

When, as Ratzinger put it, one’s “ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires” severed from any objective truth, then two things happen. First, individually, we are not accountable to anyone but ourselves to evaluate the morality of our actions. Second, as a society, where competing individual interests inevitably clash with each other, sheer power will decide whose individual morality will prevail, because there is no objective standard to which to appeal. This power leads to a kind of dictatorship of thought and action. In addition, those who claim that morality is a private preference, rather than an objective reality, are not fully relativists in practice, because they tend to speak very forcefully as though there are objective truths when those truths coincide with their individual perceptions of good and evil. For example, those who believe that sexual morality is up to the individual to decide are often very vocal advocates for “reproductive rights,” which they are clearly claiming to be an objective truth. As Pope St. John Paul II has pointed out, freedom has become more important than truth in much of contemporary culture. The Church understands the irony that this over-emphasis on freedom actually threatens democracy.

## Bible Readings

### 1. John 18:33-38

<sup>33</sup> Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” <sup>35</sup> Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?” <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.” <sup>37</sup> Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” <sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

## 2. Ephesians 4:11-16

<sup>11</sup>And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. <sup>15</sup>Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 2467

Man tends by nature toward the truth. He is obliged to honor and bear witness to it: "It is in accordance with their dignity that all men, because they are persons . . . are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they come to know it and direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth."

### 2. Paragraph 2466

In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest. "Full of grace and truth," he came as the "light of the world," *he is the Truth*. "Whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." The disciple of Jesus continues in his word so as to know "the truth [that] will make you free" and that sanctifies. To follow Jesus is to live in "the Spirit of truth," whom the Father sends in his name and who leads "into all the truth." To his disciples Jesus teaches the unconditional love of truth: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes or No.'"

## Small Group Questions

1. Where do you see relativism at work in society?
2. How does relativism affect your family?
3. How can you speak the truth in love to someone who has a relativistic perspective?

## Recommended Resources

1. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Homily at mass for election of the pope, April 18, 2005: [http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice\\_20050418\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html)
2. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth)*: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html)
3. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)
4. Bishop Robert Barron on Love, Tolerance, and Making Distinctions (video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pO8iYfS6JGY>

## Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to start looking for where in your family or in society you see relativism at work.
2. What will you choose to do to either change your own relativistic thinking or address the relativistic thinking in your family or society?

## Suggested Song

Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory (Blue 308, Red 759, Music Issue 615)

## Author(s)

Pete Caccavari

## Included Resources

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Homily at mass for election of the pope, April 18, 2005:

[http://www.vatican.va/gpll/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice\\_20050418\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/gpll/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html)

Let us dwell on only two points. The first is the journey towards "the maturity of Christ", as the Italian text says, simplifying it slightly. More precisely, in accordance with the Greek text, we should speak of the "measure of the fullness of Christ" that we are called to attain if we are to be true adults in the faith. We must not remain children in faith, in the condition of minors. And what does it mean to be children in faith? St Paul answers: it means being "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4: 14). This description is very timely!

How many winds of doctrine have we known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking. The small boat of the thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves - flung from one extreme to another: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism and so forth. Every day new sects spring up, and what St Paul says about human deception and the trickery that strives to entice people into error (cf. Eph 4: 14) comes true.

Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.

John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth)*: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html)

According to Christian faith and the Church's teaching, "only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good. The good of the person is to be in the Truth and to 'do' the Truth".[136]

A comparison between the Church's teaching and today's social and cultural situation immediately makes clear the urgent need for the Church herself to develop an intense pastoral effort precisely with regard to this fundamental question. "This essential bond between Truth, the Good and Freedom has been largely lost sight of by present-day culture. As a result, helping man to rediscover it represents nowadays one of the specific requirements of the Church's mission, for the salvation of the world. Pilate's question: 'What is truth' reflects the distressing perplexity of a man who often no longer knows who he is, whence he comes and where he is going. Hence we not infrequently witness the fearful plunging of the human person into situations of gradual self-destruction. According to some, it appears that one no longer need acknowledge the enduring absoluteness of any moral value. All around us we encounter contempt for human life after conception and before birth; the ongoing violation of basic rights of the person; the unjust destruction of goods minimally necessary for a human life. Indeed, something more serious has happened: man is no longer convinced that only in the truth can he find salvation. The saving power of the truth is contested, and freedom alone, uprooted from any objectivity, is left to decide by itself what is good and what is evil. This relativism becomes, in the field of theology, a lack of trust in the wisdom of God, who guides man with the moral law. Concrete situations are unfavourably contrasted with the precepts of the moral law, nor is it any longer maintained that, when all is said and done, the law of God is always the one true good of man."[137] (84)

*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church:*

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

*The Church's social doctrine sees ethical relativism, which maintains that there are no objective or universal criteria for establishing the foundations of a correct hierarchy of values, as one of the greatest threats to modern-day democracies. "Nowadays there is a tendency to claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism are the philosophy and the basic attitude which correspond to democratic forms of political life. Those who are convinced that they know the truth and firmly adhere to it are considered*

unreliable from a democratic point of view, since they do not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends. It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political action, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism".[838] Democracy is fundamentally "a 'system' and as such is a means and not an end. Its 'moral' value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behaviour, must be subject: in other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means which it employs".[839] (407)

# True Discipleship

## Summary

What does it mean to you to be a true disciple of Jesus? Jesus knew what he wanted when he chose Peter. He chose an intelligent, capable, proven leader. Over the course of his ministry on earth, Jesus trained Peter to be the shepherd he needed to pastor the Church in its early years. Peter was a brilliant man of deep faith who was open to the grace of the Holy Spirit and learned that the true shepherd is the one who lays down his life for his flock.

## Objective

Peter was going about his business of being a fisherman, until Jesus came along. At that time, he “dropped his nets”, left everything and followed him. After receiving the mandate of Jesus to “Feed my Sheep” and the life-giving Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Peter spent about thirty years on the road proclaiming Jesus. He followed the way Jesus had set him on, even knowing it could not help but bring him suffering and rejection in the world. Ultimately, Peter would glorify God in his death.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus shows the glory of God through his death on the cross in obedience to the Father revealing God’s love for the world. With his unconditional acceptance of Jesus’ mandate to become the shepherd of his people, Peter follows Jesus on his own way of the cross as pastor of Jesus’ flock. Peter ultimately glorifies God through his discipleship in service to others and his death on a cross.

True discipleship is “intentional”. Are you ready to “drop your nets?”

## Bible Readings

### 1. John 12:18-19

Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”

He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.”

### 2. Luke 14:26-27

“If any one comes to me without hating his father\* and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple

### 3. John 15:5-8

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. 8 By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

### 4. 2 Timothy 2:1-3

So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well. 3 Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 2233

Becoming a disciple of Jesus means accepting the invitation to belong to God's family, to live in conformity with His way of life: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother."

2. Paragraph 520

In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model. He is "the perfect man",<sup>191</sup> who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way.

3. Paragraph 546

Jesus' invitation to enter his kingdom comes in the form of parables, a characteristic feature of his teaching.<sup>261</sup> Through his parables he invites people to the feast of the kingdom, but he also asks for a radical choice: to gain the kingdom, one must give everything.<sup>262</sup> Words are not enough, deeds are required.<sup>263</sup> The parables are like mirrors for man: will he be hard soil or good earth for the word?<sup>264</sup> What use has he made of the talents he has received?<sup>265</sup> Jesus and the presence of the kingdom in this world are secretly at the heart of the parables. One must enter the kingdom, that is, become a disciple of Christ, in order to "know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven".<sup>266</sup> For those who stay "outside", everything remains enigmatic.

## Small Group Questions

1. Where are you on your journey to true discipleship?
2. In what areas of your life are you being called to be a true shepherd of Jesus?
3. What must you learn so you may follow Peter to accompany Jesus on the way of the cross?

## Recommended Resources

1. "Every Man's Journey, Becoming the Man God Intended" by James P. Campbell
2. Catholic discipleship and forming intentional disciples  
<http://www.slideshare.net/ColleenReissVermeule/catholic-discipleship-and-forming-intentional-disciples>
3. 5 steps to becoming an intentional disciple  
<https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/ByIssue/Article/TabId/735/ArtMID/13636/ArticleID/15855/5-steps-to-becoming-an-intentional-disciple.aspx>
4. What is Catholic discipleship?  
<http://peopleof.oureverydaylife.com/catholic-discipleship-8732.html>
5. What is discipleship  
<http://www.harvest.org/knowgod/new-believer/foundations-for-living/what-is-discipleship.html>

## Accountability

1. Think about where you are on your journey. What will it take to begin the next step?
2. Drawing on your education, your training, and your experiences, think about one of your talents that can be used to be a true shepherd of Jesus.
3. Do you know who your flock is? Is it your family? The team you lead and manage at work? Some other group?

## Suggested Song

They will know we are Christians (Blue 476, Red 728)

## Author(s)

Steve Frazer (updated from Chris Bergman)

## Included Resources

Excerpt from “Catholic discipleship and forming intentional disciples” (resource #2 above)

Point #1: the origin of intentional discipleship

All we meant... was “intentional” as in Peter and his brother, on the sea of Galilee, they dropped their nets, and they followed him. You don’t do that accidentally, you don’t do it in your sleep, and neither can any of us be disciples in our sleep!

Point #2: characterizing intentional discipleship

Is characterized by:

a “drop the net” decision

primary motivation from within, a “Holy Spirit -given hunger and thirst for righteousness”

worship and love of the Blessed Trinity with one’s whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love of neighbor as one’s self

Some fruits of intentional discipleship – sharing with one’s family, seeking to know and live God’s will, hunger to learn more about their faith, generous giving, love for the Church....

Point #3: intentional discipleship is ecclesial

The personal interior journey of a living relationship with Christ resulting in intentional discipleship.

The ecclesial journey into the Church through the reception of the sacraments of initiation.

The journey of active practice – receiving the sacraments, attending Mass, and participating in the life and mission of the Christian community

Point #4: discipleship matters for everyone

We must be convinced that all the baptized – unless they die early or are incapable of making such a decision – will eventually be called to make a personal choice to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ in the midst of his Church.

Point #5: seek stories, not labels

Not just - “baptized”, “liberal”, “practicing Catholic”, “clergy”, “married in the church”, fallen away Catholic” - but what is each person’s story.

Point #6: offering a framework for the (often overlooked) Spiritual Journey – one example... **(this is explained in more detail in resource #3 above)**

The 5 thresholds of conversion: Trust → Curiosity → Openness → Seeking → Intentional discipleship

Point #7: expect charisms (spiritual gifts) and grace

You and I have no right to judge another’s internal disposition, nor can we see justification happen in an individual’s soul. But this does not mean that no fruits of personal faith are observable from the outside. And it certainly does not mean that a dramatic and widespread absence of these fruits in the community overall cannot be recognized and addressed.

# How to pass on your faith to your children / How to be a disciple-making parent

## Summary

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus charged his apostles to make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:18-20). This includes our families. Our children will live forever, whether in heaven or hell. Studies indicate that most adult children do not actively practice the faith in which they grew up. Sociologists also tell us that the single most important factor in determining whether a child follows the in the footsteps of the family faith is having a strong bond with a father who is fervent in his own faith. So how can we help our children get to heaven?

Today's topic will help us to learn from the experts and one another about how to effectively pass on our faith to our children so they will claim it as their own and spend eternity in heaven.

## Objective

To understand the importance of the family (otherwise known as the domestic church) and especially fathers in helping children to grow up loving and serving Jesus Christ.

- To learn the basic principles needed to help us pass on the faith to our children.
- To share practical suggestions in creating and maintaining a Christ-centered home.
- To learn how to augment our efforts using the resources of our parish, the larger Church, and our communities.
- To learn how to avoid some common pit-falls that can derail our children's faith.
- To encourage our children to pursue lives of Christian service.

## Bible Readings

1. Ephesians 6:4  
Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
2. Proverbs 22:6  
Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

## Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2225  
Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life.
2. Paragraph 2226  
Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.



## Small Group Questions

1. Do we embrace our roles as the primary influence in our children's faith or do we tend to rely on others (the youth group, the Catholic school, our spouses, or our parishes)?
2. Do we model an active faith life to our families, and do our families know that is the most important thing in the world to us (not our jobs, golf game, or social status)?
3. What religious practices at home have helped your family to grow in faith (family rosary, daily prayer as a family, going to confession together, devotion to the Sacred Heart, etc)?
4. How have you and your spouse modeled Christian services to your children, whether at home or in the community?

## Recommended Resources

1. The Disciple-Making Parent by Chap Bettis. Comprehensive guide to raising your children to follow Christ. Much good wisdom backed by scripture, data and the experience of an Evangelical Pastor with 4 adult children. Some elements presented are outside of the Catholic tradition, but still very valuable.
2. Keep Your Kids Catholic: Sharing Your Faith and Making it Stick by Marc Cardonella. Written by a revert back to the Catholic faith who is now the head catechist for the diocese of Kansas City. Just published.
3. "Teaching the Catholic Faith Effectively"  
John A. Hardon, SJ  
<https://www.ewtn.com/library/HOMESCHL/CRUSADE.HTM>
4. "You can keep your kids Catholic, here's how."  
[http://www.fathersforgood.org/ffg/en/month/archive/feb\\_10.html](http://www.fathersforgood.org/ffg/en/month/archive/feb_10.html)

## Accountability

1. Choose one way this week to clearly live out your faith in front of your children and do it. Then do it again. And again and again.
2. Talk it over with your spouse and pick some type of family devotion to do with your children at least weekly. And do it.
3. Talk it over with your wife and children and decide on some form of service in the community that you can regularly do with your family. This week would be a good time to start....

## Suggested Song

Prayer of St Francis (Blue 368, Red 723)

## Author(s)

Dave Rahner

## Included Resources

Here is a summary of some of the key points of the first two resources:

1. Your children's faith needs to be your highest priority as a parent. Are you more concerned about getting your child into the right school or the right career or into heaven?
2. You are the most effective shepherd of your children's faith. Your parish, your Catholic school, your youth minister are important but can never replace you.
3. You do not have to be an expert to teach your children to follow Christ. But you do have to be a genuine witness of the faith. Your example speaks much louder than your words. "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." Pope Paul VI

4. If you want your children to embrace the faith, work on your own relationship with Christ first. As they say on the airlines, "Put on your own oxygen mask first before assisting someone else."
5. Share your faith openly at home as part of everyday life. Your example matters.
6. Invite your children to have faith /trust in God as a part of everyday life.
7. Don't back off when you kids reach the teenage years, even if it seems that they are ignoring you or that they seem to think that you suddenly lost 30 IQ points. They are still keenly watching your example.
8. Surround your children with other good examples of faith. Choose your child's teachers, coaches, and mentors very carefully.
9. Guard your children from media, peers and school cultures that may pull them away from the faith. This does not mean putting them in a bubble, but it does mean you need to be aware of what they are facing and equip them to deal with it.
10. Pray a lot for your children. You can't do this without God's grace. You will make mistakes, everyone does; but be willing to admit it, ask for forgiveness, and try again.
11. Create an atmosphere of service in your family. If you do a service project, don't make it a one-time deal to check off the box, but try to make an ongoing commitment to one project or person.
12. Regular family devotions at home are critical. Within the Catholic faith there are numerous options to consider including the family rosary (even a decade a night), Sacred Heart devotion, talking about the Sunday Mass readings together, or sharing prayer needs together. See resource # 3.

# Why Do You Remain Catholic?

## Summary

For cradle Catholics, their religion can become a “cultural Catholicism” that is based more in habit than intention. There is the danger that custom is the driving force rather than being in a loving relationship with God. It has been said that former Catholics could be considered the second largest religion in the United States. The second point is a direct result of the first point. Come find out how to be a more intentional disciple of Jesus by reflecting on why you remain Catholic.

## Objective

We all know people who are former Catholics. Some of us have left the Church and returned. Some of us were formerly members of other religions or did not even believe in God who became Catholic. We should not take our faith for granted. How can we be more intentional about our faith? Just asking the question, “Why do I remain Catholic?” is a good place to start. As a part of exploring that question, you can ask other questions related to it. Why do I go to mass each week? Who am I worshipping and why, and does how I worship Him matter? What is the Catholic Church and my relationship to it? What does Catholicism do for my life and for the world?

There are so many things one could point to as to why he or she remains Catholic. The sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The Church’s advocacy of social justice. The rich intellectual tradition of Catholicism. The communion of saints. The variety of spiritualities present within a truly universal (catholic) Church. It is also important to take an honest look at some of the reasons why people leave the Church which are within the Church’s control. The priest sex abuse scandal. Lack of clear and deep catechesis. Church members (clergy and lay) who are unwelcoming, self-righteous, unkind, and unforgiving. Cliques. Power and wealth driving parish life in ways contrary to the Gospel. A distortion of doctrine that leaves out mercy and compassion. The Church is holy, as we say every week in the Creed, but the Church’s members are sinners. If we as members of the Body of Christ better reflect Jesus, we will strengthen our own faith and the faith of others so that more Catholics will be intentional about their faith and remain Catholic.

## Bible Readings

### 1. John 6:52-69

<sup>52</sup> The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”<sup>53</sup> So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; <sup>54</sup> he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. <sup>56</sup> He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.” <sup>59</sup> This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. <sup>60</sup> Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” <sup>61</sup> But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? <sup>62</sup> Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?” <sup>63</sup> It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup> But there are some of you that do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that should betray him. <sup>65</sup> And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” <sup>66</sup> After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup> Jesus said to the twelve, “Will you also go away?” <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; <sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” <sup>70</sup>

2. Mark 10:17-22

<sup>17</sup> And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>18</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" <sup>20</sup> And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." <sup>21</sup> And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." <sup>22</sup> At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

3. 1 Peter 3:15-16

<sup>15</sup> Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; <sup>16</sup> and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

## Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 846

How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers?<sup>335</sup> [the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church]. Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.<sup>336</sup>

2. Paragraph 837

"Fully incorporated into the society of the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who - by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion - are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but 'in body' not 'in heart.'"<sup>321</sup>

## Small Group Questions

1. Why do you remain a Catholic? If you are a convert, why did you become a Catholic?
2. What aspects of the Church or its doctrines do you struggle with? What aspects deeply resonate with you?
3. What are some reasons why people you know have left the Church? How can your witness be a positive influence on their perceptions of Catholicism?

## Recommended Resources

1. G.K. Chesterton, "Why I am a Catholic": <http://www.chesterton.org/why-i-am-a-catholic/>
2. Elizabeth Scalia, "On Good Friday, Here's Why I Remain Catholic": <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125493179>

3. Bishop Robert Barron, "Bishop Robert Barron on Why Catholics Leave the Church" (video):  
<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=why%20i%20am%20catholic%20robert%20barron&qsn&form=QBVR&pg=why%20i%20am%20catholic%20robert%20barron&sc=0-21&sp=-1&sk=>
4. Patrick Madrid, "Why Be Catholic?" (video):  
<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=patrick+madrid+reasons+to+be+catholic&&view=detail&mid=1A4550799A5B27DDDFC91A4550799A5B27DDDFC9&FORM=VRDGAR>

## Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to start reflecting on why you are Catholic.
2. If there are certain Church teachings that you struggle with, learn more about what the Church teaches on that topic, starting with the Catechism.
3. Thank the Lord in prayer for your gift of faith, for your relationship with Him, and His Church.

## Suggested Song

How Can I Keep from Singing (Blue 192, vs 1,2,5; Red 598 vs 1, 2, 4; Music Issue 437)

## Author(s)

Pete Caccavari

## Included Resources

G.K. Chesterton, "Why I am a Catholic"

<http://www.chesterton.org/why-i-am-a-catholic/>

The difficulty of explaining "why I am a Catholic" is that there are ten thousand reasons all amounting to one reason: that Catholicism is true. I could fill all my space with separate sentences each beginning with the words, "It is the only thing that..." As, for instance, (1) It is the only thing that really prevents a sin from being a secret. (2) It is the only thing in which the superior cannot be superior; in the sense of supercilious. (3) It is the only thing that frees a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age. (4) It is the only thing that talks as if it were the truth; as if it were a real messenger refusing to tamper with a real message. (5) It is the only type of Christianity that really contains every type of man; even the respectable man. (6) It is the only large attempt to change the world from the inside; working through wills and not laws; and so on.

Elizabeth Scalia, "On Good Friday, Here's Why I Remain Catholic":

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125493179>

The question has come my way several times in the past week: "How do you maintain your faith in light of news stories that bring light to the dark places that exist within your church?" [with regards to the priest sexual abuse scandal].

When have darkness and light been anything but co-existent? How do we recognize either without the other?

I remain within, and love, the Catholic Church because it is a church that has lived and wrestled within the mystery of the shadow lands ever since an innocent man was arrested, sentenced and crucified, while the keeper of "the keys" denied him, and his first priests ran away. Through 2,000 imperfect — sometimes glorious, sometimes heinous — years, the church has contemplated and manifested the truth that dark and light, innocence and guilt, justice and injustice all share a kinship, one that waves back and forth like wind-stirred wheat in a field, churning toward something — as yet — unknowable.

The darkness within my church is real, and it has too often gone unaddressed. The light within my church is also real, and has too often gone unappreciated. A small minority has sinned, gravely, against too many. Another minority has assisted or saved the lives of millions.

But then, my country is the most generous and compassionate nation on Earth; it is also the only country that has ever deployed nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

My government is founded upon a singular appreciation of personal liberty; some of those founders owned slaves.

My family was known for its neighborliness and its work ethic; its patriarch was a serial child molester.

I want my church to shine. But I understand that everything, from our institutions to our innermost beings, are seen through a glass, darkly. Arms outstretched, listening for the Word, and its echoing liturgy, I make my way forward, in bright hope.

# Goals: Are You and Your Spouse on the Same Page?

## Summary

Relationships are dynamic and are ever changing. Is your relationship with your wife growing closer or further apart? One way for the relationship to improve is to have common shared goals or dreams. Goals take many forms, you may call them “dreams, expectations, desire, ideals, vision, values”. Shared goals don’t happen by accident, they take work and communication. Here are some proven methods to set goals and execute the plan.

## Objective

A relationship without goals or a common vision is subject entirely to external influences, regardless of whether they are desirable or not. Setting goals as a couple ensures that you always have something common to work towards. This common goal and vision may be the glue that binds you together in times of hardship.

## Bible Readings

### 1. Ephesians 5:25-31

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing[b] her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh

### 2. Philippians 3:12-16

12 It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ [Jesus]. 13 Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us, then, who are “perfectly mature” adopt this attitude. And if you have a different attitude, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only, with regard to what we have attained, continue on the same course.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 1605:

Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: "It is not good that the man should be alone." The woman, "flesh of his flesh," his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a "helpmate"; she thus represents God from whom comes our help. "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." The Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what the plan of the Creator had been "in the beginning": "So they are no longer two, but one flesh."

### 2. Paragraph 373

In God's plan man and woman have the vocation of "subduing" the earth as stewards of God. This sovereignty is not to be an arbitrary and destructive domination. God calls man and woman, made in the image of the Creator "who loves everything that exists", to share in his providence toward other creatures; hence their responsibility for the world God has entrusted to them.

## Small Group Questions

1. How have you used written goals to improve your life?
2. How do you get to shared goals from personal wants?
3. Do you have goals? Does your wife? Shared goals?

## Recommended Resources

1. Goal Setting Strategies – Goal for Marriages  
[http://www.goalsettingstrategies.com/goals\\_for\\_marriages.html](http://www.goalsettingstrategies.com/goals_for_marriages.html)
2. Goals In Marriage – Why Bother  
<https://marriageisacommithment.wordpress.com/2013/02/09/goals-in-marriage-why-bother/>
3. Creating Dreams and Goals: Creating an Emotional Connection  
<https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/cfs/cfs-747-w.pdf>

## Accountability

1. Set aside some time this week to discuss goal setting with your wife.
2. Make a list of 3 goals to improve your marriage.

## Suggested Song

We Are Many Parts (Blue 510, Red 727, Music Issue 610)

## Author(s)

Steve Frazer (updated from material by Sean Mullarkey)

## Included Resources

Relationship goals--Where to begin:

First, pick an area of your relationship that you'd like to work on. Here are some examples:

1. Communication goals: How can you become a better communicator? This might involve asking your partner more questions about his/her job, not interrupting your partner while s/he is speaking, or stating your needs more directly.
2. Compassion/support goals: This might involve asking your partner what s/he needs, driving him/her to a doctor's appointment, or setting aside a certain amount of time each day to check in with each other.
3. Affection/love goals: How often and how clearly do you express your emotions? Being affectionate can take on many different forms: directly with loving statements; through touch, such as hand-holding or a shoulder rub; or by establishing special gestures that only the two of you share. Establish goals to be more demonstrative means finding creative ways to express loving feelings on a regular basis.
4. Physical intimacy goals: Take steps to become a more attuned, responsive sexual partner. For instance, take the time to discover all the ways in which your partner would like to be sexually satisfied or come to an agreement with your partner regarding how often you'd both like to make love.
5. Shared interests/activities goals: The most successful married couples cite friendship as a key ingredient of their long-term success. Work toward developing activities that you both enjoy and that you both enjoy sharing with one another. You might try a new activity together each month, such as taking tennis lessons or learning to speak a new language.
6. Household responsibility goals: How involved are you with completing household chores? Does it feel like the work is equally or fairly divided? The mundane details of daily life (things like cooking, shopping, cleaning) should be negotiated, not just assumed by default. Find out if your partner is happy with the current arrangement by asking if there is more that you can do.



This list is by no means exhaustive. Reflect on the areas of your relationship that you'd like to improve. Do some introspecting on your own and also think back to feedback you may have already received from your partner. For instance, if your partner has questioned your commitment by noting, "You never call when you say you're going to," you can develop a goal to show your commitment by becoming more reliable in following through on your promises.

# Exodus 90 program – 90 days to break bad habits and form habits of virtue

## Summary

It's a popular and well intended virtue to give up a vice or bad habit or to add something positive to your life during the Lenten Season. We all have something or things we battle in our daily lives that get in the way of growing and deepening our connection to Jesus. Exodus 90 is a program introduced to me by my friend that lives in Seattle. He has done this program and has encouraged me to try it as well. He is much stronger than I with self discipline but it has got me interested enough to research the Exodus 90 program and introduce it to our group. Whatever your course of action for Lent, the program will offer great ideas for what you can do and how you can grow your faith and love of our Lord Jesus. Whether you do a part or pursue the program in its entirety, it will be time well spent to help us grow in our faith.

*"Freedom is possible; Exodus provides clarity of the mind, heart, and soul; Exodus gives a foundation for a pure life; you see the world with new eyes!"*

Recent Exodus Participant

## Objective

The goal of Exodus is to achieve the freedom necessary to fully engage the love of God and the love of neighbor. Exodus is based on a challenging 90-day period of purification, a dying to self, which is supported by a fraternity of like-minded men for greater interior freedom and, eventually, a more purified and selfless love.

The experience is designed for all men, but is particularly effective for:

- Men discerning a vocation
- Men preparing for marriage
- Men struggling with an addiction of any kind

Most importantly Exodus is for men who have difficulty finding God and desire to radically unite himself to his Heavenly Father. Exodus is not a program of penance and self-abasement. It is a program for men who seek, together, to strive for more-perfect FREEDOM. This is the cornerstone of the exercise and much will be lost if that is forgotten.

## What Can I Expect to Give Up During Exodus?

Three pillars: prayer, asceticism, and fraternity which combined, lead to freedom. Nothing profound here but the attempt to present the Catholic tradition to men who are often unaware of the rich heritage they have received.

1) Fraternity: The Exodus fraternity consists of 3-5 men and a spiritual director. These fraternities are flesh-and-blood fraternities; not online. You make your team from men you know and that are near to you. Ask a priest or other wiser man to guide your fraternity. These fraternities are to meet 3 times/week for no more than 30 minutes. Minimum: 1 meeting/week. These are an opportunity for

the men to give a self-report for accountability, to receive encouragement from the brothers, and wisdom from the mentor.

II) Prayer: Each man is to commit to a holy hour each day. Minimum: 20 minutes. Where possible this is to take place with the other brothers of the Exodus fraternity.

III) Asceticism: cold-lukewarm/short showers; no alcohol; no desserts & sweets; no eating between meals; no soda or sweetened drinks; no television or movies (without permission of group); only music that lifts the soul to God; no televised sports (without permission of group); computer for school/work ONLY; regular and intense exercise; group holy hour & meetings; no major material purchases (beyond toiletries, etc., without permission of group); and seven hours of sleep each night is essential.

All of the above is to be adapted to each man's particular circumstances. Some things may not be possible. That stated: this is supposed to be demanding. But to be free in a world that enslaves us takes both grace and hard work. Exodus 90 provides that opportunity for the men who choose to undertake it. We acknowledge that it's not for everyone.

5 Steps to Accomplishing Exodus:

1. Create a band of brothers to join you on your journey
2. Plan and prioritize weekly meetings. In person preferred, but digital meetings work as well.
3. Find an accountability partner within your Exodus fraternity
4. If possible, pursue communicating with a priest or other mentor to act as an occasional spiritual director for your Exodus fraternity
5. Adapt your daily schedule to the Exodus regimen, read and reflect on the daily emails received through the purchase of the Exodus program.

## Bible Readings

1. Joel 2:12-2:13

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster."

2. 1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

3. 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

## Catechism Readings

1. [1987](#)

The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" and through Baptism:<sup>34</sup> But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. [2013](#)

"All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity."<sup>65</sup> All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>66</sup> In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that . . . doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.<sup>67</sup>

### **Small Group Questions**

1. How do you think you could benefit from doing all or part of the plan?
2. Who could be your accountability partners?
3. What is your goal for Lent? For growing your Catholic faith?

### **Recommended Resources**

<https://exodus90.com/about/>

Bible and Friends

### **Accountability**

1. This week would be a good time to start speaking with your children about social media
2. Become more familiar with the social media your child uses

### **Suggested Song**

Christ Be Our Light (Blue91, Red 512)

### **Author**

Dave Karsten

My friend Paul Eckert in Seattle

# Reinventing Date Night

## Summary

God designed marriage to be a lifelong covenant. Over the courses of their lives together, husbands and wives go through a variety of stages which have their blessings and their challenges. Grace is what gives couples the strength through those challenges, and it creates the conditions for the blessings of the joyous times. Come find out how reinventing date night for you and your wife can become a grace-filled process.

## Objective

Why is dating your wife important? Because no one wants to be taken for granted. Because relationships need to be nourished. Just as we go to God in prayer and at mass, so too we need to go to our wives to show them we care about them and enjoy their company. Date night becomes a very tangible and very pronounced way of telling our wives that they are important enough to set other matters aside to focus on just them. Dr. Gary Chapman talks about “the five love languages” and how each of us has one that speaks most particularly to us. While only one of those is “quality time,” the others (words of affirmation, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch) can also be incorporated into a date night.

While it is good to have a regular date night, that is not always possible. But have a set amount of time that you won't let go by without a date night. And of course, your dates don't have to be at night. Especially if you have younger kids, having dates for a couple of hours during the day can often be easier to arrange than at night (and less expensive). One of the obstacles to going on dates is just coming up with ideas. There are plenty of places to find ideas. Below is a link to 101 date ideas. Also below is a link to a site specifically for things to do on a date in Cincinnati. Here are a couple of local ideas: go to the Starlite Drive-In for an old-fashioned date (<http://www.starlitedriveinohio.com/>), or go star gazing through the Cincinnati Observatory at Stone Lick State Park (<http://www.cincinnatiobservatory.org/>).

## Bible Readings

1. Genesis 2:24

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

2. Ephesians 5:25-30

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body.

## Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 1609

After the fall, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving.

2. Paragraph 1611

Seeing God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People's conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage. The books of *Ruth* and *Tobit* bear moving witness to an elevated sense of marriage and to the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. Tradition has always seen in the *Song of Solomon* a unique expression of human love, insofar as it is a reflection of God's love - a love "strong as death" that "many waters cannot quench."

## Small Group Questions

1. What was the last date you and your wife went on? How did it go?
2. What prevents you from having regular dates? What can you do to overcome those obstacles?
3. What kinds of things make your wife really happy? How can you incorporate one of those things into a date?

## Recommended Resources

1. Dr. Gary Chapman's Five Love Languages:  
<http://marriage.about.com/cs/communicationkeys/a/lovelanguage.htm>
2. *Friday We're in Love: 101 Date Ideas*: <http://www.fridaywereinlove.com/p/101-date-ideas.html>
3. Date Night Cincinnati: <http://datenightcincinnati.com/>

## Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to plan your next date with your wife.
2. Ask your wife what she would like to do for that date.

## Suggested Song

Prayer of St Francis (Blue 368, Red 721, Music Issue 508)

## Author(s)

Pete Caccavari

## Included Resources

Dr. Gary Chapman's Five Love Languages:

<http://marriage.about.com/cs/communicationkeys/a/lovelanguage.htm>

Words of Affirmation - This is when you say how nice your spouse looks, or how great the dinner tasted. This involves showing love through the use of verbally affirming statements toward your partner. These words will also build your mate's self image and confidence.

Quality Time - Some spouses believe that being together, doing things together and focusing in on one another is the best way to show love. This includes emotional engagement in each other during whatever activity you may be doing together, even if it is just "hanging out." If this is your partner's love language, turn off the TV, ignore your cell phone and give one another some undivided attention.

Receiving Gifts - It is universal in human cultures to give gifts. They don't have to be expensive to send a powerful message of love. Spouses who forget a birthday or anniversary or who never give gifts to someone who truly enjoys gift giving will find themselves with a spouse who feels neglected and unloved. This is not about materialism, it is about knowing that you are on someone's mind even when you are not together. Here is where the thought definitely counts!

Acts of Service - This is about how you can best do something for your spouse will require time and creativity. These acts of service like vacuuming, shoveling the snow, hanging a bird feeder, planting a

garden, etc., need to be done with joy in order to be perceived as a gift of love. For people who value acts of service, "actions speak louder than words" is their mantra.

Physical Touch - These people place a lot of importance on physical affection and touch. Not necessarily sex per se, but hugs, hand holding, an impromptu massage and so on. This physical contact is very reassuring and meaningful to someone with this love language.

*Friday We're in Love: 101 Date Ideas:* <http://www.fridaywereinlove.com/p/101-date-ideas.html>

Read The 5 Love Languages and discuss what you can do better to help your spouse feel loved

Go stargazing

Watch the sunset

Watch the sunrise

Pack a picnic basket and go to unique location

Make a nice dinner together

Look on Yelp, find a high rated restaurant and recommended meal for a type of food you've never tried before, share dishes for a new culinary experience

Enroll in a cooking class for 2

Have your own cooking class at home with YouTube or Food Network video demonstrations

Rooftop picnic at home or a building you have access to

Give each other massages at home

Find a hill or mountain in your area and go to the top at night to look at the city lights. Enjoy a "dessert picnic" while you look at the lights.

Date Night Cincinnati: <http://datenightcincinnati.com/>

## Date Night Cincinnati

Bringing you the best restaurants, experiences, events, reviews and date ideas in Cincinnati!



**DATE IDEAS**



**THINGS TO DO**



**REVIEWS**



**THIS WEEK**

**KEEP YOUR DATING ROUTINE FUN & EXCITING!**

# Managing Money With Your Spouse

## Summary

Money issues can drive a wedge between husband and wife and can be a source of conflict among siblings, and between parents and children. How we deal with money often sets the stage for relationships and how we live our lives.

## Objective

Each man should leave the meeting with a better appreciation of the role of money in his life, how it can be better managed with his spouse with proper communication and prioritization, and how broader family relationships can be affected by money issues.

## Bible Readings

1. 1 Timothy 6:7-10

For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it. If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.

2. Matthew 6:24

No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

3. Matthew 12:25

Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and no town or house divided against itself will stand.

## Catechism Readings

1. Paragraphs 2536

"The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods:

When the Law says, "You shall not covet," these words mean that we should banish our desires for whatever does not belong to us. Our thirst for another's goods is immense, infinite, never quenched. Thus it is written: "He who loves money never has money enough."

## Small Group Questions

1. Have you openly discussed and agreed with your spouse about the management of money?
2. Have you agreed to a proper balance of spending, saving, giving, indebtedness, investment risk-taking and other factors?
3. How much is "keeping up with the Jones" operative in your family?
4. How do your siblings or grown children handle their money? Do differences here contribute to tension within your families?



## Recommended Resources

1. Ten ways to improve your financial intimacy in marriage  
[www.getrichslowly.org/blog/2008/01/23/how-to-stop-fighting-with-your-spouse-about-money/](http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/2008/01/23/how-to-stop-fighting-with-your-spouse-about-money/)
2. Money and Marriage -- Persuading Your Spouse to Save  
<http://www.passionsaving.com/money-and-marriage.html>

## Accountability

1. With your wife, set up a review of your finances or a meeting with your financial planner.
2. Ask yourself and your wife if there are non-necessities that you could cut out of your life in order to give more to the church.

## Suggested Song

Gather Us In (Blue 150, Red 743)

## Author(s)

Tim McElroy (adapted from previous version)

## Included Resources

<http://www.biblemoney matters.com/ten-ways-to-improve-financial-intimacy-in-marriage/>

Ten ways to improve your financial intimacy in marriage

1. Pray for guidance and wisdom:

Few couples invite God into their financial lives. I think God has some amazing things he can do with our finances if we allow him to enter into the process. Marriage is always a joint relationship between husband, wife, and God.

In your prayers focus on the following:

Pray that God would allow you to put the marriage above any individual concerns. Ask God to guide you in how he wants the funds earned, used, and distributed. Request a double portion of humility so you can be prepared to accept God's guidance. Plead with God to give you the necessary strength to release control of your money and give God control.

2. Be partners

Marriage is an amalgamation of all the pieces of life. The husband and the wife lose their individual identity and become one. "I" is dropped from the vocabulary and replaced with "We." The married couple no longer uses "my", but "our". This includes finances. Every dollar brought into the home is a dollar that belongs to the home. Every dollar that goes out the door is a dollar that the household spent. Erase all notions of individual finances. Forget about who bought what. It doesn't matter who first signed for the loan. From now on we are in this financial situation together. We have an equal responsibility and an equal opportunity.

3. Define Goals

Goal setting is a form of practical dreaming – and who doesn't like to dream about what the future could be? This goal setting is not just about finances, but it is about all things in life. Where do you want to be? What do you want to be doing? What do you want people to say about your life accomplishments? Goal setting is where a husband and wife look at each other and say, "Where do we want to be in 5 years? In 10 years? In 15 years?" Husband and wife then look at the financial implications of those goals they have jointly set. If a husband and a wife have separate goals it will be nearly impossible to have financial intimacy in marriage.

4. Combine it

Since there is a union between husband and wife it is essential that couples combine bank accounts and all other financial items. It is difficult, but possible, to function financially with separate bank accounts. However, what do you seek for in your marriage? To 'function' or to thrive? I do not believe a marriage can thrive until there is intimacy on all levels. This involves combining all financial resources.

It doesn't matter who earns it. Some couples think that the one who earns the money spends the money or dictates how it ought to be spent. Instead, you should respect your unique contributions to the home. Our family has made the decision that my wife will stay home and raise our children. She is well educated and easily marketable in the professional world, but we made a choice, and we each make a contribution to the decisions we made.

#### 5. Distribute Responsibilities:

Money management takes time, energy, knowledge, and wisdom. One of the common complaints about the modern family is the burden of so many responsibilities and commitments. This makes its way into the home as couples are forced to decide who will take care of the different tasks related to personal finances.

#### 6. Budget Jointly and Meet Regularly:

When you have defined your goals you now have a broad or general direction that you would like to follow in your lives. In addition, you have figured out the financial implications of those goals. Now your job is to apply those long term goals to the short term – this month's budget. If you have first agreed on your long term goals your dollars should more easily fall into a natural pattern for short term usage. The budget represents the small goals you meet along the way to achieving your ultimate goals.

Once the budget is set it is important that you track your progress. The best way is to meet together regularly. Imagine if Junior got sick and I bought a bunch of medication. My spouse needs to know that happened because we may need to adjust another budget item to make the budget work.

Here is what my wife and I do. Every Monday night is budget night. After the kids go to bed we sit down at the dining room table together. We take all the receipts we collected from the previous week. She reads them and I type them into our budget program. One of us could do the job, but as she reads and I type, we are both aware of all the week's expenditures. We then take a quick look over the budget to be sure the dollars we allocated to each category still seems sufficient. If we have overspent on a category we take the money from somewhere else in the budget. The meeting shouldn't take any more than 15 – 20 min per week.

#### 7. Work at Removing Financial pressure:

Too many money discussions in marriage happen in high-stress situations. Chuck Bentley at Crown Financial Ministries frequently talks about creating financial margin. Where there is margin, stress is removed from the situation. Imagine this scenario: you are on your way to work on a day that every second counts because you didn't leave a spare moment anywhere on your agenda. Then you end up getting stuck in traffic. Every moment is torturous because you have no margin, no space to delay. I guarantee that if you made that same drive on a Saturday morning visit to see friends you would not be nearly as stressed. You need to take away the pressure that every financial decision could break you. This must be done by paying off debt and saving for emergencies. Once you have taken care of those financial pressures you will find that all your financial discussions are suddenly so much easier because there is now space to breathe and even room for error.

#### 8. Agree on Some Guiding Principles:

You should only need to make some decisions in your marriage once. Unfortunately, many couples have not put those boundaries in place so when it comes to making financial decisions they are forced to keep re-addressing the same issues.

Here are some examples of guidelines you might have: We will give a least 10% of our income to our local church or other charities. We will save 15% of every paycheck towards retirement. We will buy things with cash and will not borrow. We will always make a car payment to ourselves. We always put down at least 25% when buying a home. The list could continue. The point is when you set your goals some decisions only need to be made once and then you budget according to these guidelines.

#### 9. Seek outside help:

Sometimes a third party can be an invaluable resource. Couples who find themselves at an impasse often just need someone to help them hear what the other spouse is saying. When communication in marriage has failed, find a church counselor or minister who can guide you back on track. This does not

need to be a costly endeavor as many churches have resources available to offer you assistance free of charge.

Perhaps you need a different type of outside help. Ask a friend or parent to watch the kids for an evening or day so you and your spouse can discuss these issues without the children distracting you.

10. Put the needs of your spouse above your own.

Often our financial discussions are a sign of our immaturity and our carnal self. We hunger and lust for things. We desire those things even above the welfare of our marriage. Give up the insignificant things of life so that you can gain the greater reward of a unified marriage.

# What does God teach us about money – Should we give it all away?

## Summary

From the very beginning, man and woman had one master - God. But for thousands of years, we've had two. It's a battle between God and money. What we want, versus what God wants. What if I want both? What if I need both? Do I have to give up money?

## Objective

Do you notice how the moment we say the word "money", our thoughts go immediately inward? To our version of living the "American Dream"? Our focus leaves the wider world and narrows to the wallet in our pocket. As we begin talking about money our inner eye leaves the plight of the poor or suffering and lingers on our businesses, bank accounts, homes, and possessions. We have thoughts of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, pleasure or bitterness, but our thoughts immediately go to ourselves.

There is a quote that goes – "Money is the root of all evil." However, that doesn't get it quite right. The real quote is from Paul in First Timothy and it reads "The LOVE of money is the root of all evils ". It is this obsessive, romantic attachment to wealth that has the potential to demote worldly things into mere commodities that can be bought and sold for our personal pleasure, regardless of the costs. The love of money is evil because it translates into love of self, and selfishness.

We have to realize that money is just one of the many blessings from God. When we embrace the fact that our wealth is God's wealth, we realize it's not about the American Dream; it's about God's Dream.

Serving God, not money will allow us to live richer lives. It means releasing our fist clenched around our cash so that we have the ability to extending a hand to someone in need. In our choice for God we become new people. We are free from the narrow conception of what defines "me" and my life defined by what I own and what I can buy.

Which master are YOU serving, God or Money?

## Bible Readings

Matthew 6:19-21

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.

Matthew 6:24

24 "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Mark 10:23-27

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to pass through [the] eye of [a] needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26 They were exceedingly

astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God."

#### 1 Timothy 6:6-10

6 Indeed, religion with contentment is a great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it. 8 If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. 9 Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.

#### 1 Timothy 6:17-19

17 Tell the rich in the present age not to be proud and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth but rather on God, who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. 18 Tell them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, ready to share, 19 thus accumulating as treasure a good foundation for the future, so as to win the life that is true life.

### Catechism Readings

#### 1. Paragraph 2536:

The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods: When the Law says, "You shall not covet," these words mean that we should banish our desires for whatever does not belong to us. Our thirst for another's goods is immense, infinite, never quenched. Thus it is written: "He who loves money never has money enough."

#### 2. Paragraph 2113

Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and mammon."<sup>44</sup> Many martyrs died for not adoring "the Beast"<sup>45</sup> refusing even to simulate such worship. Idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God; it is therefore incompatible with communion with God.

### Small Group Questions

1. In what ways do you sense a tension between your commitment to God and your love for money and its benefits?
2. How have you resolved this tension?

### Recommended Resources

1. The Sin of Greed  
<http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/the-sin-of-greed>
2. You cannot serve both God and money  
<https://leewoof.org/2012/11/24/you-cannot-serve-both-god-and-money/>
3. God vs. the American Dream  
<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/career-money/features/21260-god-vs-the-american-dream>
4. God vs. Money: No one can serve 2 masters  
<http://www.grizzlygrowler.org/god-vs-money-no-one-can-serve-two-masters/>

5. A sermon on Wealth vs. God

[http://web.princeton.edu/sites/chapel/Sermon%20Files/2004\\_sermons/091804.htm](http://web.princeton.edu/sites/chapel/Sermon%20Files/2004_sermons/091804.htm)

## **Accountability**

1. Take a look at how much of your “treasure” you devote to God. Any adjustments necessary?
2. Identify potential new ways to serve God with your money.

## **Suggested Song**

Whatsoever You Do (Blue 535, Red 656, Music Issue 585)

## **Author(s)**

Steve Frazer

## **Included Resources**

The Christian life requires us to make choices about how to live our lives. Jesus tells us that we cannot serve both God and money. All of us should choose to serve God. Does that mean we can't have any money, of course not. Money is not evil, it is love of money that is evil. And choosing God over money means that we are free from the dominion of money over our lives and the choices we make. It means that today we expose as a lie the idea the money will buy us happiness and bring us fulfillment – it won't. Only loving God and experiencing God's love in return will bring us lasting happiness. Only coming out of our self-inflicted isolation and joining with the rest of the world will bring us lasting fulfillment. We should remember that we are pilgrims on a journey and are only passing through this world, on our way to our eternal home. Money can't take us where we ultimately want to go in life, and it can't erase our deepest desires.

Let's not lose focus of this, and get distracted by the desire for money, possessions or other temporal things of this world. There is a greater treasure to be found in our eternal home in heaven.

PRAYER: Gracious Lord, you know how I struggle with serving you and money at the same time. It isn't just that I want more money. My service to money often comes in the form of my personal priorities or in how much I can worry about money. I claim to trust you with all of my life. Yet I find myself fretting about money, as if this were something that evaded your lordship.

Help me, dear Lord, to serve you fully and freely. Let nothing else take first place in my devotion. Let no other master direct my life. May you be honored and glorified in every aspect of my life. *Amen*.

# Disciplining Teenagers

## Summary

As Christian parents we are expected to "train a child in the way that he/she should go." Teens, however, aren't children even though they may act like it at times. In the culture of Jesus' day, young people were considered adults when they turned 13. Today, we don't generally raise teens to deal with adult responsibilities. Teens are in a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood. We are responsible for them and they need our guidance. That guidance is even more crucial in today's world with massive media, advertising, and technology constantly bombarding our teens. The best kids step out of line and need to be lovingly disciplined once in a while. We need to keep in mind when disciplining your teen that you are dealing with someone who will soon be an adult. The goal of discipline is to develop self-discipline and inner strength. Keeping our discipline related, reasonable, loving, and respectful should be the goal for the best outcome.

## Objective

The Apostle Paul taught parents that we should be careful not to exasperate or embitter our children while we are disciplining them. Unreasonably harsh or unrelated discipline can cause more problems than it solves. When discipline is overly harsh, it will often cause teens to come to the conclusion that they simply can't please their parents. When they come to that conclusion, they usually stop trying. When discipline is reasonable, teens are more likely to learn something from it.

Tips recommended could be:

1. Guide your discipline techniques to fit well with the temperament.
2. Communicate your discipline plan
3. Be respectful
4. Be consistent
5. When it's done it's done
6. Understand what is appropriate
7. Look for the why behind behaviors. This doesn't excuse behavior, but it can help prevent reoccurrence
8. Admit your mistakes
9. Realize some days will be challenges. If the situation becomes dangerous or intolerable, seek professional help.

No discussion would be complete without considering the concept of positive discipline. This approach does not use any form of punishment. It is about loving guidance as opposed to threats and punishment.

## Bible Readings

1. [Proverbs 12:1](#)

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.

2. [Hebrews 12:11](#)

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

3. [Ephesians 6:1-4](#)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

## Catechism Readings

1. Section [2207](#)

The family is the *original cell of social life*. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

2. Section [2222](#)

Parents must regard their children as *children of God* and respect them as *human persons*. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God's law.

## Small Group Questions

1. Discuss some of your most challenging issues regarding your teen?
2. How have you handled it? What were the results? What worked and didn't work?
3. Are you and your wife on the same page and consistent with how you will handle discipline for your teens?

## Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.crosswalk.com/family/parenting/discipline-and-your-teen-1311061.html>
2. <http://www.angelfire.com/hi3/catholichomeschool/parent.html>
3. <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=136>
4. <http://drjamesdobson.org/Solid-Answers/Answers?a=dfb42dda-edf0-4db8-956a-b10737af7f59>

## Accountability

1. Develop a plan of handling discipline with your spouse if you don't have one already.
2. Be consistent.
3. Let the punishment fit the crime.
4. Be loving and forgiving and realize the discipline will help shape them for the future. We were all there at one time.

## Suggested Song

They'll Know We are Christians (Blue 476, Red 728)



**Author**

Dave Karsten

With help from Kevin McDonough / Reid Rooney

# Drugs and Depression in Today's Youth

## Summary

To understand the signs and effects of drugs and depression in today's youth, and to know how to respond

## Objective

Parents often assume that teens try alcohol and other drugs to rebel or to "fit in" with their peer group. However, teens with undiagnosed emotional or behavioral problems often use drugs and alcohol as a way to relieve their frustrations. A depressed teen may self-medicate with alcohol to escape the terrible sense of hopelessness. Unfortunately, alcohol only exacerbates the problem. Drugs like ecstasy and other clubdrug uppers may even make them feel "normal" when for weeks they have felt miserable. The impact of such drugs on serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins, chemicals in the brain that regulate mood, can be devastating for children and adolescents. The damage they do to receptors in the brain can make the road back from depression even harder. While some teens self-medicate to treat depression, other teens end up with a serious mental disorder due to abuse of drugs or alcohol. Some drugs, such as methamphetamines, can seriously affect the neurotransmitters, which are known as the "messengers of the brain." Recent studies suggest this damage can be long lasting and even permanent. Many teens have the mistaken notion that club drugs are benign. In fact, while they might feel "good" while taking them, they can make it difficult for the child to feel good naturally for a long time to come. The longer children use these drugs, the more difficult treatment and the higher rate of relapse due to their inability to "feel good" or even "normal" because of the damage to their neurotransmitters. Recent studies have shown a link between frequent cannabis use and later depression in teenagers.

Abusive drinking or drug use can seriously undermine your child's physical, emotional, and psychological health. Often parents approach the issue of drug and alcohol use as simply a discipline issue for a child who is "bad." However, your child may be sick. They may be unable to express to you exactly how they feel. Therefore, contacting a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist who specializes in the treatment of adolescents, is your first step in nailing down the source of the problem. If your child is self-medicating to treat depression, anxiety, or other emotional or behavioral disorders, simply applying more discipline and creating more rules will not impact the underlying problem that led to substance abuse in the first place. Avoiding the discussion of anxiety and depression can perpetuate both the depression and the abuse. Understanding the underlying problems and learning healthy coping mechanisms can assist families in healing and in changing behaviors.

## Bible Readings

### 1. Galatians 5:16-26

16 I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. 18 But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, 21 occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things

will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ (Jesus) have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. 26 Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another.

## 2. Romans 12:21

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we are being slain all the day we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things,\* nor future things, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth,\* nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 2288

Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good.

*Concern for the health* of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living-conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance.

### 2. Paragraph 2290

The virtue of temperance disposes us to *avoid every kind of excess*: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. Those incur grave guilt who, by drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others' safety on the road, at sea, or in the air.

### 3. Paragraph 2291

The *use of drugs* inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense. Clandestine production of and trafficking in drugs are scandalous practices. They constitute direct co-operation in evil, since they encourage people to practices gravely contrary to the moral law.

## Small Group Questions

1. What will you do with this information?
2. How can you promote healthy alternatives to drug use for dealing with depression or anxiety?

## Recommended Resources

1. <http://family.go.com/parenting/pkg-tween/article-778715-warning-signs-your-teen-is-using-drugs/>
2. <http://www.about-teen-depression.com/drugs-alcohol.html>
3. [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression\\_teen.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_teen.htm)

## Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to start talking with my kids about drugs and depression

2. Keep communication open with your kids by showing that you are interested in their lives and the lives of their friends. Ask your child if he/she would like to pray for a friend together.

## **Suggested Song**

Lord of All Hopefulness (Blue 273, Red 560, Music Issue 394)

## **Author(s)**

Jon Stahlberger (updated by John Murphy)

## **Included Resources**

1. <http://family.go.com/parenting/pkg-tween/article-778715-warning-signs-your-teen-is-using-drugst/>
2. [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression\\_teen.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_teen.htm)

### **Is Your Teen Drug Dependent?**

Consider these warning signs:

Stressors as noted above.

Change in peer group.

Decrease in school performance.

Staying out late at night.

Breaking house rules.

Secretive behavior.

Fatigue, lethargy and apathy (lack of motivation).

May admit to some drug use, but rationalizes and "enjoys" it.

Adamantly denies drug use in a manner disproportionate to the question.

Normal healthy teens may show a few of these signs anyway, but a drug-dependent youth will show several signs. If you suspect your teen may be drug dependent, you should take action including:

Talk to your teen about your concerns (if non-responsive, you talk; they listen).

Although controversial, consider searching their room for drugs and drug paraphernalia (destroy if found).

Set curfews, limits on behavior and reasonable expectations for appropriate performance.

Look to engage your teen in activities that are fun and incompatible with drug use.

Consider attending counseling with your teen.

Consult your physician.

If your teen is drug dependent, by definition, they are out of control. It will be necessary for you to take control in the short term at least to help them overcome their dependency. Never fall into the trap of denying their problem, because it is too difficult for you to admit! A drug-dependent teen can use clean and sober parents for support and direction.

Signs and symptoms of depression in teens

Sadness or hopelessness  
Irritability, anger, or hostility  
Tearfulness or frequent crying  
Withdrawal from friends and family  
Loss of interest in activities  
Changes in eating and sleeping habits

Restlessness and agitation  
Feelings of worthlessness and guilt  
Lack of enthusiasm and motivation  
Fatigue or lack of energy  
Difficulty concentrating  
Thoughts of death or suicide

If you're unsure if an adolescent in your life is depressed or just "being a teenager," consider how long the symptoms have been present, how severe they are, and how different the teen is acting from his or her usual self. While some "growing pains" are to be expected as teenagers grapple with the challenges of growing up, dramatic, long-lasting changes in personality, mood, or behavior are red flags of a deeper problem.

#### Effects of teen depression

The negative effects of teenage depression go far beyond a melancholy mood. Many rebellious and unhealthy behaviors or attitudes in teenagers are actually indications of depression. The following are some the ways in which teens "act out" or "act in" in an attempt to cope with their emotional pain:

#### Problems at school.

Depression can cause low energy and concentration difficulties. At school, this may lead to poor attendance, a drop in grades, or frustration with schoolwork in a formerly good student.

#### Running away.

Many depressed teens run away from home or talk about running away. Such attempts are usually a cry for help.

#### Drug and alcohol abuse.

Teens may use alcohol or drugs in an attempt to "self-medicate" their depression. Unfortunately, substance abuse only makes things worse.

#### Low self-esteem.

Depression can trigger and intensify feelings of ugliness, shame, failure, and unworthiness.

#### Internet addiction.

Teens may go online to escape their problems, but excessive computer use only increases their isolation, making them more depressed.

#### Reckless behavior.

Depressed teens may engage in dangerous or high-risk behaviors, such as reckless driving, out-of-control drinking, and unsafe sex.

#### Violence.

Some depressed teens—usually boys who are the victims of bullying—become violent. As in the case of the Columbine and Newtown school massacres, self-hatred and a wish to die can erupt into violence and homicidal rage.

# Letting Our Children Fail

## Summary

No one wants to let their child fail. It can be one of the hardest and rewarding things we do for our children. When do we let them fail? How do we be there for them without being there for them too much?

## Objective

Have you ever looked at some of the things that are going on in your kids' lives and wondered why they are doing something or the other? You may wonder why they just won't listen to you and gain knowledge from your experience. Have you thought that maybe God is allowing these situations in our children's lives in order for them to become what He desires for all of us? If we constantly bail our children out when they get in trouble from their own device or if we constantly monitor and control situations and their environment to keep them safe, they will never gain at! of the above. So when we as parents always say that it seems our kids must learn the hard way, remember that this is not only true but it is by design.

Perhaps we should teach them godly ways and allow them the freedoms appropriate to age to make their own decisions but don't interfere with the natural consequences if they are hard on them. Create a godly home and expose them to a godly lifestyle but don't manipulate in order to control certain outcomes. Even though our kids' tribulations may often be of their own doing, God can still use these times to foster dependence on Him and a desire to live a godly life if we stay out of the way.

When we rescue them we really do them a disservice because we not only cheat them out of a spiritual growth experience but also a regular life experience. So the next time your son or daughter is bent on finding something out on their own, let them. Don't hold back or stand in the way of any natural consequences that come from it. God has a purpose for disobedience; let Him pursue it.

## Bible Readings

1. Romans 11:30-32

30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

2. Proverbs - Chapter 22:6

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

3. Ephesians 2:12-13

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

## Catechism Readings

1. Paragraph 2206

The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all

from the members' respect for one another. The family is a *privileged community* called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing."

2. Paragraph 2207

The family is the *original cell of social life*. it is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

### Small Group Questions

1. Think of a time when you let your child fail. Discuss the outcome with the team.
2. Think of a time when you wished you let your child fail but you didn't. Discuss the outcome with the team.
3. Was there a time in your own life when your parents let you fully realize the consequences of a decision you made? What were the benefits or outcomes of this?
4. Is there a middle ground between preventing our kids' failure and just watching it happen?

### Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.integratedcatholiclife.org/2012/09/andy-hain-letting-our-kids-struggle-and-fail/>
2. <http://www.cultofpedagogy.com/gift-of-failure/>

### Accountability

1. Is there an opportunity to let your child fail in the near future? Think about what they would learn from this lesson.
2. Talk with each of your children this week about taking responsibility for their own decisions.

### Suggested Song

Be Not Afraid (Blue book p. 54, Red book #596)

### Author(s)

Vince Phelan

# Living Relationship with Jesus

## Summary

Every relationship involves some type of risk. Do we have a living relationship with Jesus or are we simply trying to be a good person, or just practice religion?

## Objective

Many non-Catholic Christians commonly speak of "knowing" Jesus and of having a "personal relationship" with him. "Do you know Jesus?" is just another way of asking "Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?" Such an inquiry can lead to the Catholic being accused of relying on a "religion" rather than a "relationship" for salvation. Religion is thought to be bad, a relationship good. Do these Christians know something Catholics don't?

At the start of the *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes: "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not for him or her."

Christianity is a religion whose adherents are expected to live moral lives that include works. And Scripture reveals the very same thing about truly knowing, or being in relationship with, God. Thus, to know God truly is to be a religious Christian: Religion and relationship are not separate entities.

Therefore, making religion and relationship both priorities is important. We must live our lives the way Jesus taught – love God (relationship), and love others (understand and practice our religion).

How are you doing with these 2 things?

## Bible Readings

### 1. Isaiah Chapter 43 11-13

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine.

When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned; the flames shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior.

### 2. John 14:20-23

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." Judas, not the Iscariot, said to him, "Master, [then] what happened that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.

### 3. 1 Cor 1:9

God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 787

From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings. Jesus spoke of a still more intimate communion between him and those who would follow him: "Abide in me, and I in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches." And he



proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

## 2. Paragraph 521

Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. "By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man." We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model: We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus' life and his mysteries and often to beg him to perfect and realize them in us and in his whole Church. . . For it is the plan of the Son of God to make us and the whole Church partake in his mysteries and to extend them to and continue them in us and in his whole Church. This is his plan for fulfilling his mysteries in us.

## Small Group Questions

1. What habits do you have in your daily life or at certain times of the year that put you in a position to have a living relationship with God?
2. Aside from births, deaths, and sacraments, when do you feel closest to God? How does this affect your family?

## Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/do-you-know-jesus>
2. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/standingonmyhead/a-personal-relationship-with-jesus>
3. <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/why.pope.francis.is.calling.catholics.to.have.a.personal.encounter.with.jesus/49378.htm>
4. <http://www.catholicbasictraining.com/apologetics/coursetexts/2k.htm>
5. <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/dan-burke/can-a-catholic-have-a-personal-relationship-with-jesus>

## Accountability

1. Find a quiet time for prayer and spend that time getting to know Jesus a bit more
2. Possibly try saying the rosary or visiting the adoration chapel. Do something for another person without being asked.

## Suggested Song

Glory and praise to our God (Blue 160, Red 537)

## Author(s)

Steve Frazer

## Included Resources

Excerpt from <http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/do-you-know-jesus>

Christians are often surprised to learn that the word "relationship" does not appear anywhere in Scripture at all. Nowhere in the Bible do we find the apostles or others asking the question, "Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?" Even so, Scripture does speak of knowing God and of not knowing him. In this passage, we discover what it means to be in relationship with God.

Paul tells the Christians in Galatia:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? (Gal. 4:8-9)

This knowing God and being known by God which Paul writes about implies relationship.

Excerpt from <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/standingonmyhead/a-personal-relationship-with-jesus>

Finally, the best way to think about this is marriage. It's great to fall in love. It's wonderful to have those feelings and emotions of passion and affection. All of that leads to a wedding. But a marriage is the daily grind—the hard work of love. Marriage is "for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health until death do us part".

Same with the "personal relationship with Jesus" and it's no mistake therefore that Jesus calls the church his "bride" and that he is the "bridegroom" and there is so much nuptial imagery in the Bible. This is what our relationship with Christ is like. We're married to him, and marriage is full of hard work and sacrifice, but it is also full of love, and life and ultimate glory.

# Why Should I Avoid Vices and Instead Seek Virtues?

## Summary

Virtue or Vice: Which one brings lasting happiness and fulfillment?

## Objective

This topic is intended to encourage members to think deeply about their choices. Fathers' Team members all agree that we want to follow the path of virtue rather than vice, but in moments of weakness, or when we doubt our faith, do we always know that the path of virtue is better than the path of vice?

## Bible Readings

### 1. Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

### 2. Romans 8:5-7

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.

### 3. Galatians 6:9

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

## Catechism Readings

### MAN'S FREEDOM

1730 God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions. "God willed that man should be 'left in the hand of his own counsel,' so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him."<sup>26</sup>

Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts.<sup>27</sup>

### FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

1731 Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. By free will one shapes one's own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude.

1732 As long as freedom has not bound itself definitively to its ultimate good which is God, there is the possibility of choosing between good and evil, and thus of growing in perfection or of failing and sinning. This freedom characterizes properly human acts. It is the basis of praise or blame, merit or reproach.

1733 The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to "the slavery of sin."<sup>28</sup>

1734 Freedom makes man responsible for his acts to the extent that they are voluntary. Progress in virtue, knowledge of the good, and asceticism enhance the mastery of the will over its acts.

1735 Imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors.

1736 Every act directly willed is imputable to its author:

Thus the Lord asked Eve after the sin in the garden: "What is this that you have done?"<sup>29</sup> He asked Cain the same question.<sup>30</sup> The prophet Nathan questioned David in the same way after he committed adultery with the wife of Uriah and had him murdered.<sup>31</sup>

## ON VIRTUE

1833 Virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good.

1834 The human virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They can be grouped around the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

1835 Prudence disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it.

1836 Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.

1837 Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

1838 Temperance moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods.

1839 The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them.

## Questions for Discussion in Large and Small Groups:

1. What does it mean to have free will?
2. Is it always better to choose good over not good?
3. What's the difference between an innocent indulgence and a vice?
4. If a vice feels good, can it really be all that bad?
5. Is there more happiness in following the sometimes difficult path of virtue or in following the easier path of vice?
6. How does God want me to enjoy myself?
7. Many influences in our culture promote vice, and laugh at virtue, What are some of these influences in my life? What about in my children's' lives?
8. If I'm not choosing the virtuous path, how does that affect my attitude toward my wife's and children's' choices?
9. Do I see my choices reflected back to me in the behavior and attitudes of my wife and children?

## Accountability

1. This week, think about how you interact with family members. When you practice virtue, how does that affect your family members? How about when you don't practice virtue?
2. Take some time to think about how you spend your spare time. When do you feel most happy and fulfilled?
3. When you make a choice between the paths of virtue or vice, how do you feel at the end of the day?

## Suggested Song

City of God (Green book p. 100, Red book #663)

## Author

Vince Phelan

## Included Resources:

[www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/virtue](http://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/virtue)

According to its etymology the word virtue (Latin *virtus*) signifies manliness or courage. ("The term virtue is from the word that signifies man; a man's chief quality is fortitude"; Cicero, "Tuscul.", I, xi, 18). Taken in its widest sense virtue means the excellence or perfection of a thing, just as vice, its contrary, denotes a defect or absence of perfection due to a thing. In its strictest meaning, however, as used by moral philosophers and theologians, it signifies a habit super-added to a faculty of the soul, disposing it to elicit with readiness acts conformable to our rational nature. "Virtue", says Augustine, "is a good habit consonant with our nature." From Saint Thomas's entire Question on the essence of virtue may be gathered his brief but complete definition of virtue: "*habitus operativus bonus*", an operative habit essentially good, as distinguished from vice, an operative habit essentially evil. Now a habit is a quality in itself difficult of change, disposing well or ill the subject in which it resides. (See *Habit*.) Virtue then has this in common with vice, that it disposes a potency to a certain determined activity; but it differs specifically from it in that it disposes it to good acts, i.e. acts in consonance with right reason. Thus, temperance inclines the sensuous appetite to acts of moderation conformably to right reason just as intemperance impels the same appetite to acts of excess contrary to the dictates of our rational nature.

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy.

"It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed"

# Get Out of Your Comfort Zone!

## Summary

We will discuss ways to see change and growth as necessary in our spiritual lives, and in our roles as husbands, fathers, and workers.

## Objective

We will discuss ways to see change and growth as necessary in our spiritual lives, and in our roles as husbands, fathers, and workers. Humans are habit forming creatures; we seek routine in order to feel less anxious. While habits and consistent behaviors can be reassuring, if you sense that you're too comfortable in each area of your life, or if you sense a decrease in mental clarity, physical strength, emotions, and most important your relationship with God, it may be time to consider trying new things and increase your activity, learn new things, meet more people, read more books.

The discussion should serve as a starting point for members to enrich their lives by stretching themselves beyond the "same old - same old"

## Bible Readings

### 1. Matthew 14 :22-33

Then Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people away. After sending the people away, he went up a hill by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone; and by this time the boat was far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves, because the wind was blowing against it. Between three and six o'clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and screamed with fear. Jesus spoke to them at once. "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!" Then Peter spoke up. "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you." "Come!" answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. "Save me, Lord!" he cried. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?" They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. Then the disciples in the boat worshiped Jesus. "Truly you are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

### 2. James 1:22

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

### 3. 2Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

### 4. Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

### 5. Jeremiah 29:11-14

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

## Catechism Reading

### 1. Paragraph 700

The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God; it is fulfilled in his vocation to divine beatitude. It is essential to a human being freely to direct himself to this fulfillment. By his deliberate actions, the human person does, or does not, conform to the good promised by God and attested by moral conscience. Human beings make their own contribution to their interior growth; they make their whole sentient and spiritual lives into means of this growth. With the help of grace they grow in virtue and avoid sin.

## Small Group Questions

1. In what areas of your life have you become too comfortable?
2. What are some obstacles that keep you from stepping out of your comfort zone?
3. In which areas of your life have you recently stepped out of your comfort zone?
4. Do you really think you are too old or too young to learn something new?

## Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-comfort-zone.html>
2. <https://haroldherring.com/blogs/harolds-blogs/richthoughts/325-7-things-you-must-do-to-leave-your-comfort-zone>
3. <http://www.sermonnotebook.org/old-testament/1%25Chronicles-4-91-10.html>

## Accountability

1. This week, I will identify areas of my life (personal relationships, spiritual life, work life) where I've become too comfortable.
2. This week, I'll do one task that I've been putting off because I'm not confident in my ability.
3. This week, I'll spend a few more minutes each day with the Lord.

## Suggested Song

God Has Chosen Me (Green book p. 166, Red book #669)

## Author

Vince Phelan

## Included Resources

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/10-ways-step-out-your-comfort-zone-and-enjoy-taking-risks.html>

### 10 Steps to Getting out of your comfort zone

#### 1. Become aware of what's outside of your comfort zone

In other words: What are the things that you believe are worth doing but are afraid of doing yourself because of the potential for disappointment or failure? Draw a circle and write those things down outside the circle. This process will not only allow you to clearly identify your discomforts, but your comforts. Write identified comforts inside the circle.

## 2. Become clear about what you are aiming to overcome

Take the list of discomforts and go deeper. Remember, the primary emotion you are trying to overcome is fear. How does this fear apply uniquely to each situation? Be very specific. Are you afraid of walking up to people and introducing yourself in social situations? Why? Is it because you are insecure about the sound of your voice? Are you insecure about your looks? Or, are you afraid of being ignored?

## 3. Get comfortable with discomfort

One way to get outside of your comfort zone is to literally expand it. Make it a goal to avoid running away from discomfort. Let's stay with the theme of meeting people in social settings. If you start feeling a little panicked when talking to someone you've just met, try to stay with it a little longer than you normally would before retreating to comfort. If you stay long enough and practice often enough, it will start to become less uncomfortable.

## 4. See failure as a teacher

Many of us are so afraid of failure, that we would rather do nothing than take a shot at our dreams. Begin to treat failure as a teacher. What did you learn from the experience? How can you take that lesson to your next adventure to increase your chance of success?

## 5. Take baby steps

Don't try to jump outside your comfort zone, you will likely become overwhelmed and jump right back in. Take small steps toward the fear you are trying to overcome. If you want to do public speaking, start by taking every opportunity to speak to small groups of people. You can even practice with family and friends.

## 6. Hang out with risk takers

There is no substitute for this step. If you want to become better at something, you must start hanging out with the people who are doing what you want to do and start emulating them. Almost inevitably, their influence will start have an effect on your behavior.

## 7. Be honest with yourself when you are trying to make excuses

Don't say "Oh, I just don't have the time for this right now." Instead, be honest and say "I am afraid to do this." Don't make excuses, just be honest. You will be in a better place to confront what is truly bothering you and increase your chance of moving forward.

## 8. Identify how stepping out will benefit you

What will the ability to engage in public speaking do for your personal and professional growth? Keep these potential benefits in mind as motivations to push through fear.

## 9. Don't take yourself too seriously

Learn to laugh at yourself when you make mistakes. Risk taking will inevitably involve failure and setbacks that will sometimes make you look foolish to others. Be happy to roll with the punches when others poke fun.

## 10. Focus on the fun

Enjoy the process of stepping outside your safe boundaries. Enjoy the fun of discovering things about yourself that you may not have been aware of previously.



# Forgiveness

## Summary

The Gospels are very clear about our need to receive mercy from God and to show mercy to others. The action of doing so is forgiveness. Forgiveness is not something that comes easily to us. Our limited sense of justice or our desire for vengeance often blocks our ability to seek forgiveness or to forgive ourselves and others. In this year of Mercy this is a great topic to better understand the character of God as the foundation of mercy and the call on our lives to forgive. Doing so will glorify Him and show those around you what a true relationship with Jesus looks like. Come find out how forgiveness helps in bringing about the Kingdom of God.

## Objective

There are 4 areas relative to forgiveness that are worth exploring:

1. Seeking Forgiveness for our sins: To give mercy, we must be aware of our own need to receive mercy. We must be actively repenting to God for our wrongs. Repentance in prayer and sacrament are integral to have a deep relationship with the Lord. King David is a great example to study to understand the vulnerable nature of realizing ones sin through prayer and seeking repentance (Psalm 139: 23-24 and Psalm 51: 10-11)  
Pope Pius XII said in 1946: "The sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin." In 1 John 1:8-9 we read: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So we must clearly see that we are sinners in need of forgiveness before we consider how to forgive others. Jesus teaches us this truth through Matthew 7:3: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"
2. Forgiving God: While this is one of the least thought of levels of forgiveness it could be one of the most important for many of us and most of all for our non-believer friends. If something has gone wrong in one's life that person may blame God for the hardship. This may be subtle, but the feeling that God has done something horrific in one's life can be a major barrier for knowing His true character and seeking a relationship with him. Being aware of the brokenness of this world and the big picture of God walking us through sanctification to see Him through eternity is a perspective to realize that God is not the cause of one's hardships. Being aware, compassionate and biblically equipped to walk those in our lives who may need to forgive God (or see a true perspective of Him) is very important to minister to others.
3. Forgiving Oneself: Jesus lived a life of showing others grace constantly. If we are to model our lives after Him, we should seek to give others grace and forgiveness, but also to give ourselves grace and forgiveness. We have all sinned. Some of us have made terrible mistakes in our lives and hurt others badly. God commands we cast our burdens on Him and this includes our baggage due to the sins we have committed in our lives. God wants to make you whole in order to be the vehicle of His peace and justice in the world. If we truly understand God, His character of grace and forgiveness should surpass our brokenness because of our past mistakes.

4. Forgiving others: One of the most powerful ways to be Christ like is to forgive those that have wronged you. Think about the level of sin that Jesus forgives. Even as he is dying on the cross, He is asking God to forgive those that have killed Him. His model of forgiveness is an essential element to our relationship with Jesus. Jesus offers up great parables about forgiveness (Prodigal Son , Unforgiving Servant) to teach us about the many elements of forgiveness.

Forgiving others has a good effect on ourselves. When we foster grudge in our hearts our ways will not be pure. Forgiving those that have wronged you is freeing and will better align you with a life full of Christ. Remember that holding a grudge rarely hurts the person that we hold the grudge against, but always hurts ourselves.

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover the prisoner was *you*” (anonymous).

Forgiving others has a good effect on the Body of Christ / His church: Pope Francis, who has referred to the Church as “a field hospital after battle” (“A Big Heart Open to God”), has been emphasizing that the Church is a place for healing: “The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium/The Joy of the Gospel*). We see this emphasized in Jesus telling Peter the story in Luke 7:36-50

## Bible Readings

### 1. Matthew 6:9-13

Pray then like this:  
Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we also have forgiven our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.

### 2. Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should

pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

### 3. Luke 7:36-50

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

### 4. Luke 15:11-32

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 1443

During his public life Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.

### 2. Paragraph 1449

The formula of absolution used in the Latin Church....God, the Father of mercies, through the death and the resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

### 3. Paragraph 2843

Thus the Lord's words on forgiveness, the love that loves to the end, become a living reality. The parable of the merciless servant, which crowns the Lord's teaching on ecclesial communion, ends with these words: "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." It is there, in fact, "in the depths of the heart," that everything is bound and loosed. It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession.

## Small Group Questions

1. When have you received mercy?
2. Have there been people in your life who have wronged you and were (are) difficult to forgive?
3. Is confession a regular part of your life? Why or why not?
4. Are there others in your life who may need to forgive God for something that has happened to them? If so, can you be intentional to intercede for them and pray that their hearts can better understand God's character?

## Recommended Resources

1. Forgive (Fr. Larry Richards-video):  
<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=fr%ee%80%81+larry+%ee%80%80richards+on+confession&qpvf=fr.+larry+richard+on+confession&FORM=VQFRML#view=detail&mid=E77C36B14A623666C743E77C36B14A623666C743>
2. A Story of Love (Fr. Larry Richards-video):  
<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=larry+richards+story+of+love&qsn&form=QBVLPG&pq=larry+richards+story+of+love&sc=0-24&sp=-1&sk=#view=detail&mid=107B52C528836B0F6A68107B52C528836B0F6A68>
3. Confession (Fr. Larry Richards-video):  
<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=larry+richards+confession&qsas&sk=&FORM=QBVLPG&pq=larry%20richards%20conf&sc=4-19&sp=1&qsas&sk=#view=detail&mid=9BF4FE61EEE9B660804B9BF4FE61EEE9B660804B>
4. Divine Mercy Chaplet: <http://www.ewtn.com/Devotionals/mercy/dmmap.htm>

## Accountability

1. This week would be a good time to start praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet.
2. If you have not been to confession for a while, go.
3. Ask Jesus to help you forgive someone who has wronged you.

## Suggested Song

Let There Be Peace On Earth (Blue 260, Red 723, Music Issue 510)

## Author(s)

Pete Caccavari / John McCarthy

## Included Resources

John Paull II, *Dives in Misericordia/Rich in Mercy*

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30111980\\_dives-in-misericordia.html#%24G](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html#%24G)

The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy-the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer-and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser. Of great significance in this area is constant meditation on the Word of God, and above all conscious and mature participation in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. The Eucharist brings us ever nearer to that love which is more powerful than death: "For as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup," we proclaim not only the death of the Redeemer but also His resurrection, "until he comes" in glory.

St. Faustina Kowalska, *Diary*

Let the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right before others to trust in the abyss of My mercy. My daughter, write about My mercy towards tormented souls. Souls that make an appeal to My mercy delight Me. To such souls I grant even more graces than they ask. I cannot punish even the greatest sinner if he makes an appeal to My compassion, but on the contrary, I justify him in My unfathomable and inscrutable mercy. Write: before I come as a just judge, I first open wide the door of My mercy. He who refuses to pass through the door of My mercy must pass through the door of My justice... (1146)

# Love Languages

## Summary

Do you ever feel like you are showing love to your wife or children, but they do not feel the love? We love our wife and kids, but how do we ensure they feel the love we have for them?

1 John 3:18 states that we are not to love in word or in talk, but in deed and in truth. Understanding how your wife and kids feel loved is a practical and actionable way to make sure you are putting your love for them in action the way they best need to be loved. Your wife and children have an emotional love tank and the more you can fill their tank the more they will feel loved. It is essential to know how to fill their tank and not assume that the way you like to feel loved is going to be best for them.

## Objective

Each one of us has predominant love languages that fill up our love tank. We all need all the 5 love languages expressed, but one or two dominant love languages expressed will better fill our love tank and make us feel loved.

Most people have a primary and secondary love language. Knowing yours, your wife's and your children's can help create a more loving family and help you sanctify each member for the coming of our Lord (1 Th 5:23-23).

Rarely do a husband and wife have the same love language. Without digging into understanding our wife and children's dominant love language/s we will assume their love tanks will be filled most by the way we like to be loved. This assumption is poor and may not lead to the expression of love that you desire in your families.

When your children know they are loved they are much more easy to disciple and discipline. Knowing how to fill your child's emotional love tank will help them know they are loved and will maximize the chance they reach their full potential.

The unconditional love that the Lord has for each of us is something to be mimicked in our most important relationships here on earth! We must show our children unconditional love to help them feel secure and have a strong self esteem. This does not mean we like all of their behavior or accept it without discipline but it does mean we show love all the time even when their behavior is poor.

Being a Godly husband and a great father requires a great deal of service in love. When we seek to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45) and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us (Ephesians 5:2) we will be in a posture of true, unconditional love. Being aware of love languages is a great tool in the tool belt of loving our wives and children.

There are 5 love languages as explained in Dr Gary Chapman's book The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts and the 5 Love Languages of Children.

1. *Words of Affirmation* – These are words that build others. They are powerful motivators that are encouraging and kind in nature.
  - a. Considerations for your wife:
    - i. Be observant to her and mention what you see that is good.

- ii. Stay away from generic comments (“You look nice” or “ I like your shirt”).
    - iii. Personalize your words (“I really like that color on you”, “You always point out intriguing things that I would not thought about”).
    - iv. Make sure your comments are genuine and you are not making them to get something.
  - b. Considerations for your children
    - i. Discern the difference between affectionate language about your child which is unconditional and praise which is noticing and recognizing what they have done well. The two are very different:
      - 1. Praise is good but if overused and not genuine it can be destructive. Praise reinforces worth in the action so should be given but only when appropriate. In many instances encouragement is more appropriate then praise.
      - 2. Affectionate language is never inappropriate. If your child’s dominant love language need is words of praise this language will be very important.
    - ii. The volume, tone and focus of the affectionate language is very important to send the right message.
    - iii. The words "I love you" should never be stated in a conditional statement. Say it often without a reason tied to it.
2. *Gifts* – These can be of any size and do not need to be at a cost, but the most important element of the gift is the thought behind it.
- a. Considerations for your wife:
    - i. Look for markers to do something special for her – make a big deal out of holidays, hallmarks and anniversaries.
    - ii. Give gifts randomly as well with no reason at all.
    - iii. Listen and pay attention to things she says she wants. This will ensure the gifts you get her are exciting to her not just you.
  - b. Considerations for your children
    - i. Gifts should not be given with condition. When that is the case those are rewards and send a wrong message about gifts.
    - ii. Gifts must be given alongside the other love language to convey love specifically.
    - iii. Gift giving must portray love. If gift giving is not communicating love and is becoming a substitute for true love that gift can send the wrong message.
      - i. Children whose primary love language is gift receiving will make a big deal about the process of receiving the gift, the gift itself and will show it off to others. They do this because they equate it with the true love of their parents.
3. *Acts of Service* – This is intentional desire to give our energy for the benefit of another. The posture of putting your family members before yourself is a great model.
- a. To be in service to your family you must be in good physical and mental health. Do not underestimate this importance. Seek to be healthy in order to better serve others.
  - b. Considerations for your wife:

- i. Find out which acts of service she appreciates you doing by staying in tune with feedback and/or felt needs that are expressed.
    - ii. Encouraging her that you would love to carry any of her load when you notice she is overwhelmed.
      - 1. Better yet, just do it, but be aware that she would prefer to do certain things as opposed to you doing it.
    - iii. Call in help when needed and surprise her by getting things done that are on the to do list by the experts.
  - c. Considerations for your children
    - i. Acts of service for your children does not mean doing what they want, rather it is doing what is best for them. This is an important distinction because by just doing what they want you can create a very self-centered child.
    - ii. Be aware of child development. Do acts of service that your children are not equipped to do. Walk with them in service when they are developing independence on certain tasks and then let them accomplish the right tasks for their development on their own. Doing so , requires patience and a service mindset. Simply serving them with all tasks without thought of where they need to grow is not best for them.
    - iii. The acts of service towards a child can be very small and mundane, but the repetitiveness of this service is psychological impactful for your child being felt loved.
    - iv. Look for opportunity to do acts of service for those in need together. This will set your child up with the belief in serving the underserved as Jesus teaches.
- 4. Quality Time – Undivided attention that the recipient defines as “quality”
  - a. Considerations for your wife:
    - i. Focus on simply being together and about quality conversation not related to tasks , yet higher level connection.
    - ii. Find activities that you both enjoy doing and set them up. If a babysitter is needed, make the arrangements.
    - iii. Find activities that create fun for both of you.
  - b. Considerations for your children:
    - i. All children require undivided attention with their parents. If this is the child's primary love language and they do not get it they may seek attention through negative behavior that will get the parents attention.
    - ii. Quality time with a child needs to be:
      - 1. One on one - if you have multiple children schedule one on one time with each.
      - 2. Full of good eye contact - to show true attention.
      - 3. Sharing of thoughts and feelings - being vulnerable and honest is a great model for your child.
      - 4. Quality conversation- go deeper on the surface things that your child speaks of.
    - iii. If quality time is not happening spontaneously it needs to be scheduled.



- iv. For scheduled quality time you need to meet your child where s/he is and what s/he likes to do.
5. Physical Touch – These are all kinds of touch that shows affection
- a. Considerations For your Wife:
    - i. These touches can be subtle – hand on shoulder, waiving fingers through hair ect...
    - ii. Find out what touches she loves and do it regularly.
    - iii. Do not just do this because you want sex.
  - b. Considerations For your Kids:
    - i. Boys need just as much physical touch as girls, although it may be in different forms. Physical touch is very important for a boy's emotional security.
    - ii. Girls require physical touch at all ages as well for emotional security. A father's physical touch is extremely important when a girl is 11 ish. This is a time when girls are usually very awkward around boys and need her dad to reaffirm her worth as a female. She needs to feel good about herself and her changing body so this time frame is crucial for physical touch of dads with daughters. Healthy physical touch from parents increase the propensity towards a healthy sexual identity of a child, especially a girl.
    - iii. In teenage years: Boys need physical touch, but in more private as opposed to public because they will be seeking independence. Girls need hugs and kisses from their dads in these years or it is likely they will seek that physical affection from another boy.
6. How Do I learn which preferred love language my wife and children have?
- a. Be attentive, understand the differences and listen for needs expressing the different types of love.
  - b. Try each one and watch the reactions to the love being expressed. The stronger the reaction, the more likely that may be a strong love language desired.
  - c. Take the assessment with your wife: <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/couples/>
  - d. [You can also take the profile for your children: http://www.5lovelanguages.com/](http://www.5lovelanguages.com/)

## Bible Readings

### 1. Ephesians 5: 25 – 28

<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup>that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup>so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup>In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

### 2. 1 John 3:18

<sup>18</sup>Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

### 3. James 1:22

<sup>22</sup>But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

### 4. Mark 10: 13-16

<sup>13</sup>And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>15</sup>Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." <sup>16</sup>And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 1615

Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy - heavier than the Law of Moses. <sup>108</sup> By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. <sup>109</sup> This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life.

### 2. Paragraph 1803

A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.

### 3. Paragraph 2223

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.

## Small Group Questions

1. How can understanding your wife and children's love language bring them closer to God?
2. Have you assumed you know your wife's love language?
3. Have there been times you were showing her love , but she did not feel loved?
4. How can being in tune with your wife's love language and her/yours change you marriage?
5. What do you need to do to better understand your wife and children's love languages?

## Recommended Resources

1. The 5 Love Languages: The Secret of Love that Lasts  
By Gary Chapman
2. The Five Love Languages of Children  
By Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell
3. Love Language Profile Test for couples: <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/couples/>
4. Love Language Profile Test for your Child

## Suggested Song

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (Blue 288, Red 613, Music Issue 468)

## Author(s)

John McCarthy

# Managing the Impact of Social Media on Our Children

## Summary

Like it or not 95% of teenagers are online and over 90 % are Social Media. It has become the new way to communicate with friends, catch up on celebrity gossip and gather information about society as a whole. Studies show it can also lead to internet addiction, Facebook Depression, cyber bullying, etc. How do we as fathers help our children manage this effectively?

## Objective

"Parenting, as is often said, involves giving kids wings to fly and roots on which to stand. Parenting in the digital age can only be more so. The only path ahead involves conscientious and conscious participation, rather than outright techno phobia or philia, to provide an inclusive life where the parents join children and schools in balanced technological engagement that does not compromise on the ability of society in general, to stop and smell the roses."

—Suren Ramasubbu, about parenting in the digital age, in the Huffington Post

## The Stats

- 73% of teens have a smartphone
- 95% of all teens ages 12-17 are now online (September 2012 survey).
- Over 90% are on social media
- 70% of teens hide their online behavior
- 77% of parents say they are not very or not at all worried about their teens cheating online and 74% trust their teens to not access age-inappropriate content online. The stats say otherwise.

## What can we do as fathers to counteract the impact of Social Media on our children?

### First let's look at the impact:

#### 1. Social Media is Addictive

Studies show that 63% of Americans log on to Facebook daily, and 40% log on multiple times each day. People use the site for myriad reasons; however, it usually serves, on some level, the same basic purposes: distraction and boredom relief. "Likes" and comments are positive reinforcement for posting information, making it difficult for a person to stop. Researchers have found this so common that they created a scale to measure this addiction: The Berge Facebook Addiction Scale.

#### 2. Self-Esteem

When the person who logs on to Facebook experiences a self-esteem boost by using their profile to affect how others see them online. However, another study suggests that Facebook leads users to feel

dejected and worthless, because they constantly compare themselves to their online friends and to others, including high-profile personalities.

### **The need to be liked**

Millennials have grown up getting trophies just for showing up. This correlates to the need to be “liked” online. More and more young people seek validation through being “liked” on social media. If they don’t get enough ‘likes’ for their selfie as expected, they decide to post another, but still do not receive a good response. This could affect their thoughts. They can lose self-confidence and have a negative attitude toward themselves, such as feeling dissatisfied with themselves or their body.

### **3. Effect on Brain – Daydreaming**

Studies on the human brain show that the part of the brain used when daydreaming is not accessed while using a device (like a smartphone). These areas of the brain used while daydreaming also help develop empathy. This leads to cyberbullying.

### **4. Depression**

According to recent studies, depression among college students has risen, with a correlation to excessive Internet usage. There was a 56% percent rise in depression among college students within the last six years.

Students with depression use excessive amounts of Internet, more than an average student without depression. This resonates personally in terms of using social media as an outlet to cope with depression. One student said, “My Internet usage is actually pretty ridiculous. I know when I’m feeling extra down, I’d rather sit around and check Facebook over and over again, knowing that there’s nothing exciting going to happen.”

A study from the University of Michigan collected data about Facebook users and how it correlated with their moods. Simply put, they found that the more avid users were overall more unhappy than those who used the site less. Over more time, avid users also reported lower satisfaction in their lives overall.

## **10 Things we can do as Fathers:**

1. Be a good role model. If you and your child are connected on social media, they can see your posts too. Respect boundaries. Don’t post anything that’s inappropriate. Be positive and make sure that your activities are safe.
2. Look over the privacy and usage policies to find a website you feel comfortable allowing your child or teen to use. Take a look at the terms about privacy settings and determine if you want your child to have a certain privacy setting on his or her profile.

3. Consider the pros and cons of monitoring software such as Net Nanny or Mobicip. If you have thoughts about setting up software to monitor or censor your child's online activity, factor in your child's age and your trust level with him or her as you weigh your options.
4. Talk to your child about the implications a social media post could have on his or her adult life. Make it clear that although many social networking sites allow users to choose privacy settings, there are ways for people to access users' accounts despite these settings.
5. Set rules for online behavior, including what social networks your child may use and when. You can also set posting guidelines, such as what pictures are appropriate to post and what personal information can be shared.
6. Know the warning signs of cyberbullying and how to handle an online bullying situation if one arises. Check your child's know-how to stand up for a cyberbullied victim and properly report any bullying activities he or she witnesses online.
7. Discuss the permanency of the Internet. Even things that are deleted online can be found through the Wayback Machine or in personal caches. Posts on social media can last longer than a memory, so let your child know that what he or she posts may be seen forever.
8. Talk to your child about "checking in." Some social media sites allow users to check into locations, which allows other users to see where your child is or has been. Let your child know what the dangers behind making this information public are.
9. Be cautious of "catfish." These fabricated online identities are created to deceive others online, generally to trick others into romantic relationships. Your child should be cautious when talking to others via social profiles and know how to spot a fake profile.
10. Keep The Computer Centralized – Regardless of your child's age, it's always a good idea to keep the computer in a location that is central to the home. This makes it easier to keep an eye on the websites they're visiting and to monitor their time spent on social sites.

## **Bible Readings**

1. Proverbs 22:6  
Train a boy in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not swerve from it
2. Romans 12:2  
Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect

## **Catechism Readings**

1. Paragraph 2224  
The home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities. Parents should teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences which threaten human societies.
2. Paragraphs 2496  
"The means of social communication (especially the mass media) can give rise to a certain passivity among users, making them less than vigilant consumers of what is said or shown. Users should practice moderation and discipline

in their approach to social media. They will want to form enlightened and correct consciences the more easily to resist unwholesome influences."

### **Small Group Questions**

1. Do you permit your child to participate in social media? Why or why not?
2. How should we talk to our children about the responsibility of participating in social media?
3. Do you monitor your child's activities on social media? Why or why not?

### **Recommended Resources**

1. The Impact of Social Media... <http://m.pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/127/4/800.full>
2. The Bad, the Ugly and the Good of Children's use of Social Media:  
<http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/3346768>

### **Accountability**

1. This week would be a good time to start speaking with your children about social media
2. Become more familiar with the social media your child uses

### **Suggested Song**

Christ, Be Our Light (Blue 91, Red 512, Music Issue 542)

### **Author**

Dan Driggers/Update by Tony Heekin July 2016

# Friendships as Men

## Summary

Friendships can have a major impact on your health and well-being, but it's not always easy to build or maintain friendships. Understand the importance of friendships in your life and what you can do to develop and nurture friendships.

## Objective

We all have friends, some of us have many people we refer to as friends, some have only a few select friends. The objective is to take a serious look at our existing friendships and not just take them for granted. Another thought to consider, do we have all the friends we need? Also, what makes a Christian friendship strong?

## Bible Readings

1. Proverbs 18:24

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

2. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

## Catechism Readings

1. 1939

The principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of “friendship” or “social charity,” is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood

2. 1829

The *fruits* of charity are joy, peace, and mercy; charity demands beneficence and fraternal correction; it is benevolence; it fosters reciprocity and remains disinterested and generous; it is friendship and communion:

## Small Group Questions

1. What makes a Christian friendship?
2. Do I need to work at deepening my current friendships?
3. How do I build friendships that illustrate "Christian brotherhood"?  
Do I need to keep myself open to new friendships and why?

## Recommended Resources

1. <http://catholiclane.com/people-who-need-people-a-view-on-friendship/>
2. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860>

## **Accountability**

1. Make a list of traits that exemplify Christian friendships and reflect on specific friendships those illustrate.
2. Think of a way to deepen one of your existing friendships and do it.
3. Get to know someone better this week, make an acquaintance a friend.

Friendships as Men

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## **Included Resources**

What are the benefits of friendships?

Good friends are good for your health. Friends can help you celebrate good times and provide support during bad times. Friends prevent loneliness and give you a chance to offer needed companionship, too. Friends can also:

Increase your sense of belonging and purpose

Boost your happiness and reduce your stress

Improve your self-confidence and self-worth

Help you cope with traumas, such as divorce, serious illness, job loss or the death of a loved one Encourage you to change or avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as excessive drinking or lack of exercise Why is it sometimes hard to make friends or maintain friendships?

Many adults find it hard to develop new friendships or keep up existing friendships. Friendships may take a back seat to other priorities, such as work or caring for children or aging parents. You and your friends may have grown apart due to changes in your lives or interests. Or maybe you've moved to a new community and haven't yet found a way to meet people.

Developing and maintaining good friendships takes effort. The enjoyment and comfort friendship can provide, however, makes the investment worthwhile.

What's a healthy number of friends?

## **Suggested Song**

Gather Us In (Blue 150, Red 743, Music Issue 302)

## **Author(s)**

Jack Voet (updated by John Murphy)



# Empty Nesting – how do you deal with the children moving on?

## Summary

Have your children all gone off to college or moved away for a new career? Perhaps you're a stay at home parent and you're sending your last one off to school. Changes to the household can be a big change for a parent. You may be spending more time with just the two of you, or have a lot of time alone. How do you prepare yourself for these life changes?

## Objective

A lot of the older fathers on the team have experienced or will soon experience an empty house from children going off to college or moving away for work. This can present some wonderful opportunities for you and your wife to get closer. It can also present an awkward silence in the house, bored spouse, and conflict. How do you prepare yourself for a different life-style when you're so used to being a parent and all that it entails when children are around?

Fathers team has a lot of younger fathers as well, who can experience the same issues when all of the children are finally off to school and a stay at home parent is alone for much of the day. Sometimes that's a blessing! Sometimes that can present a change for one of the parents that we have to deal with.

Use this session to discuss both "empty nesting" and major changes at home related to these life changes.

## Bible Readings

### 1. Matthew 19:13-15

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." After he placed his hands on them, he went away.

### 2. Mathew 19:23-30

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." Then Peter said to him in reply, "We have given up everything and followed you. What will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

### 3. Mark 10: 6-9

But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 2223

"Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material

and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.”<sup>31</sup> Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them: He who loves his son will not spare the rod. He who disciplines his son will profit by him.<sup>32</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. Paragraph 2230

When they become adults, children have the right and duty to choose their profession and state of life. They should assume their new responsibilities within a trusting relationship with their parents, willingly asking and receiving their advice and counsel. Parents should be careful not to exert pressure on their children either in the choice of a profession or in that of a spouse. This necessary restraint does not prevent them – quite the contrary from giving their children judicious advice, particularly when they are planning to start a family.

## Small Group Questions

1. Have you experienced an empty nest from children going off to college or moving away? How did you deal with it? Was it a positive or negative experience?
2. Are you in touch with your wife enough to deal with significant family changes?
3. Have you experienced the last child off to all day school and the changes that brings?
4. Are there other major changes in your family life that have led to you and your wife needing to adapt and grow?

## Recommended Resources

1. US Catholic: Faith in Real Life Article  
<http://www.uscatholic.org/life/2012/06/25-year-itch-empty-nesters-and-second-half-marriage>

## Accountability

1. If you have older children, start thinking about how you and your wife will deal with the changes.
2. If you are stay at home parents, how can you prepare for the last child off to all day school?

## Suggested Song

Be Not Afraid (Blue 54, Red 596, Music Issue 426)

## Author(s)

Dan Lape / Reid Rooney

## Included Resources

Empty nest syndrome: Tips for coping <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/empty-nest-syndrome/art-20047165>

Fighting for Your Empty Nest Marriage <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/wiley031/00009169.pdf>

Empty Nest Syndrome Interview [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eBY3u5\\_oCk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eBY3u5_oCk)

# What do you do when your adult children reject your values?

## Summary

How can it be that after you and your spouse worked so hard to bring your child up in the catholic faith that they now reject or ignore the values that you worked over time to instill in them? It is a depressing feeling that reaches deep. They may openly challenge the beliefs that you hold dear, and even worse, be non-caring about the vital spiritual component of their lives. They are adults now and you have done your best, hopefully, to bring them to make God-centered choices for themselves and their families. What options do you have?

## Objective

Whether your children are young single adults or married and now raising families, you probably feel that your primary duty as a parent was to instill in them spiritual awareness and ideally, active participation in their Catholic faith. In many cases we find that our adult off-spring, exposed to unending glamorization of worldly gratification and desire for goods, reject our focus on the Catholic faith and spiritual growth.

They list boring “old fashioned” church rituals, out of touch services, priest scandals, and other circumstances as reasons for them not to be practicing Catholics and believers anymore. Worse yet, they may not even care.

If you find yourself concerned about the spiritual health of your adult children...join the crowd! You are not alone. Each of us as individuals have travelled a journey of faith and in many cases it has been less (sometimes much less) than a straight and flat path. We can each tell of times when we felt much the same way as our children, put-off with the teachings of the church and perhaps were even at a point of defiance.

But something in our lives changed that point of view and changed our lives. God found a way to come into our lives. Maybe it was a tragic experience, a loving relationship, the birth of a child, or someone that just “paid it forward” for us. In fact, we can likely look back and see that had we not gone through that period of denial, rejection, or defiance, we would not be as strong a Catholic today.

So the question is, what are you doing to bring about the spiritual awakening in the adult child that has rejected, or at least is not recognizing, the gift of Catholic faith? You can only do your part, just do it! Do what you can by living your faith each day. Be confident that they will see the strength you receive from your faith and that God will find a way into their lives. It may not be a “St. Paul moment,” but be assured that God does put a fire in each of our hearts that ultimately draws us to Him.

## Bible Readings

### 1. Isaiah Chapter 55 6 - 9

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he is near.

Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the LORD for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.

For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior.

### 2. Acts 22 12 - 16

A certain Ananias, a devout observer of the law, and highly spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me and stood there and said, ‘Saul, my brother, regain your sight.’

And at that very moment I regained my sight and saw him.

Then he said, ‘The God of our ancestors designated you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the sound of his voice;

for you will be his witness before all to what you have seen and heard.

Now, why delay?

Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling upon his name.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 154

When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood", but from "my Father who is in heaven".<sup>24</sup> Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. "Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.

### 2. Paragraphs 1147

God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read the traces of its Creator.<sup>16</sup> Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolize both his greatness and his nearness.

## Small Group Questions

1. How did you view the Catholic faith as a young adult? Young parent?
2. Do you have a "conversion story?"
3. Where are your children on their faith journey? Are you part of it?
4. Share the reasons your adult child may be rejecting the Catholic way of life. How does this affect your family?

## Recommended Resources

1. When Your Adult Child Chooses a Different Path - <http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Aug2002/Feature3>.
2. Children fallen away from the Church | Catholic Psychology [http://www.chastitysf.com/q\\_children.htm](http://www.chastitysf.com/q_children.htm)
3. Parenting Your Adult Child: Keeping the Faith (and Your Sanity) Book by Susan Vogt

## Accountability

1. Contact your children this week and find a way to weave an example of your spiritual life into the exchange.....without preaching to them.
2. Do you have a "conversion story?" Have you shared it with your children?

## Suggested Song

We Walk By Faith (Blue 517, Red 583, Music Issue 448)

## Author(s)

Reid Rooney

# Supporting Aging Parents

## Summary

As our parents reach old age, they depend on us to give guidance, support, and understanding. This session seeks to explore issues that our parents may be experiencing, how we are engaged and affected, and share ideas and experiences of how to help our parents deal with the physical, emotional, financial challenges, and to enjoy their old age as best they can.

## Objective

How will you team with family and friends to support your parent's needs when they can't handle everything they used to? Discuss ways to preserve your parent's dignity while helping them through their aging and "Golden Years".

### **Patience, Patience, Patience**

Transitioning into new phases of life can be hard. Please be patient with your aging parents. Remember they were patient with you when you were learning to walk, talk, eat with your mouth closed, and so much more.

### **Be on the same page**

Just like parents need to have a united front when disciplining children, family members need to be united when making decisions for their parents (to the extent possible☺).

### **Treat your parents with dignity**

As our parents continue to grow older and personal cleanliness becomes a problem, it was they who walked us through potty training and who bathed the mud from our childhood antics, then re-cleaned the tub for the umpteenth time. It was our parents who cheered us through the rough times as a child and who allowed us to lean against them as adults.

Growing old can be a challenge. Losing your independence as well as physical and mental faculties can be humiliating. Remember to "honor your father and your mother".

### **Getting old is financially scary**

No matter how much money one may have, thinking about covering the expenses associated with aging or dealing with the unknown can be extremely scary. What if your elderly parent doesn't have enough insurance or savings to pay for long term care or a terminal illness such as cancer? Talking to a qualified professional to make sure any possible expenses are covered can be vital. If you need help finding retirement or eldercare services, the National Care Planning Council provides a free referral service of various senior services in your area.

### **Plan for the worst, hope for the best**

When planning with an aging parent, gracefully plan for worst case scenarios, such as needing an estate plan, power of attorney, or financing for long term care from a facility or a family member. Planning early can help relieve possible stresses which may happen. Approach the subject with a light touch. An experienced Elder Law Attorney, Medicaid Planner, or an individual accredited by the VA to help senior veterans can be very useful in these scenarios.

As much of the family should be involved in planning for cases where a family member will be a caregiver. Consider which responsibilities can be shared in cases of multiple siblings and strive to avoid overwhelming the main caregiver with too many tasks.

## Bible Readings

### 1. 1 Timothy 5:8

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever

### 2. Leviticus 19:32

Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the old, and fear your God. I am the LORD.

### 3. Proverbs 10:1

A wise son gives his father joy, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.

## Catechism Readings

### 1. Paragraph 2251

Children owe their parents respect, gratitude, just obedience, and assistance. Filial respect fosters harmony in all of family life.

## Small Group Questions

1. Are you in a situation where your parents need your assistance: financially, daily care giving, illness recovery, disability? How do you help them?
2. If your parents are younger, do you keep a close relationship to them so that later in life that closeness will keep you together?
3. Importantly – what are you and your spouse doing to prepare for your golden years to limit the burden on your children?

## Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.agingcare.com/>
2. <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/the-best-life/2011/07/18/10-tips-for-caring-for-aging-parents>  
financial resources focused
3. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2005-07-13-alzheimers-caregivers\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2005-07-13-alzheimers-caregivers_x.htm)
4. Caring for elderly parents catches many unprepared. -  
<http://www.usatoday.com/money/perfi/basics/story/2012-03-25/caring-for-an-elderly-parent-financially/53775004/1>
5. Technology that can Help the Elderly  
<http://elderhelpers.org/blog/>

## Accountability

1. Carve out time every week to see your parents. Take them Communion if they can't make it to church.
2. Work with other family members to make sure your parents are taken care of and have interaction with family.

## Suggested Song

Faith of Our Fathers (Blue 130, Music Issue 450, different words in Red!)

## Author(s)

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