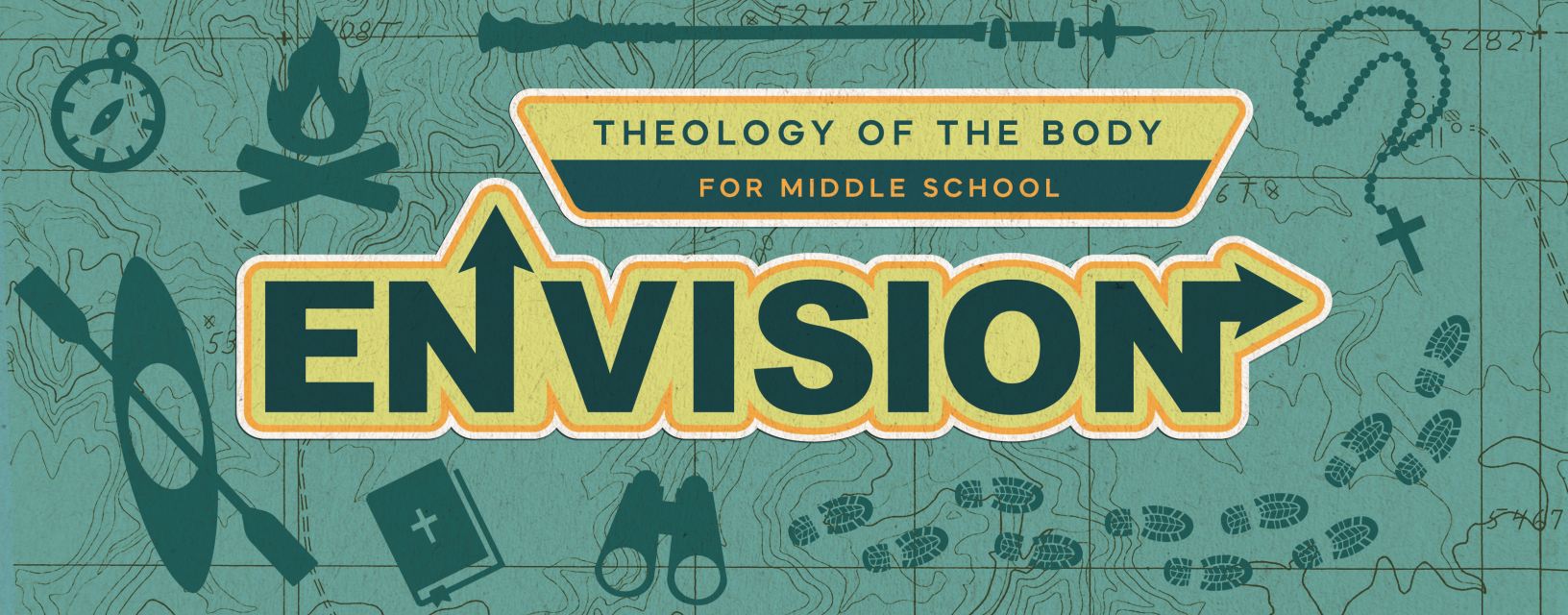




Guide to Sensitive Topics

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Bullet point answers begin with a bold word or phrase to help with memorizing the points to be made. They are not intended to be complete answers; bullet points should not be read to an audience. They are intended as an outline to which you, the leader, must add the proper content.

Answers are adapted from the books *If You Really Loved Me* by Jason Evert and *Good News About Sex & Marriage: Honest Questions and Answers About Catholic Teaching* (Revised Edition) by Christopher West. For further study and reference, citations are offered from both texts. For example, “IfU Q. 46” refers to question 46 in *If You Really Loved Me*, and “GN p. 46” refers to page 46 in *Good News About Sex in Marriage* (page numbers may differ depending on the edition).

General Pointers for Answering Questions

- Let the students know up front that the present format doesn't allow for exhaustive answers to questions, but you are happy to offer some food for thought.
- You might also state up front that you will not have the answer to every question, but you are happy to direct them to resources or organizations that could answer their questions.
- The answers below are to help you as a parent or leader. Always keep in mind the age and maturity of the one asking the question, and be prudent about when and how the discussion should take place. If you are a parent, don't shy away from the questions being asked, but do answer them in a way that matches your child's needs and maturity. If you are a leader, be discerning about these discussions, and always keep parents in the loop. Consider equipping them for these discussions and coaching them; your job is simply about supporting them in their role.
- Do not make up answers. Have the humility to admit when you cannot answer someone's question, and then direct the person to a resource to help him or her find the answer. Perhaps you can offer to study the question more deeply and provide a fuller answer in a week. Teens and preteens especially appreciate such sincerity.
- If the questioner is being aggressive, combative, or immature, use his or her name while addressing the question: "Thanks for that question, Bill. I appreciate where you're coming from, and I can tell how much this topic is affecting you. Allow me to offer you some food for thought." This helps diffuse any sense of being adversarial or inappropriate.
- *Always affirm the person asking the question.* Even if a person is challenging Church teaching, there is usually some point or element of truth that can be affirmed. For example, behind the angst of birth control is the truth that couples often have just reasons to space births. Affirm that, and then demonstrate logically and sensitively the "why" behind the "what" of Church teaching.
- *Discern the root of the question.* Some questions are "root" questions; there is nothing behind them and no deeper issues that need to be addressed. Other questions, though, have deeper or more important issues from which they stem. For example, behind a question concerning Church authority is the question of objective truth. Is there such a thing, and can we know it with certainty? Don't ignore the questions students actually ask; help them get to the real issues. It also may be important to ask for an opportunity to address their deeper questions outside of the formal setting. This will allow for more time to explore these issues with the person asking the question.
- *If someone asks a hostile question, how do I respond?* First, find out whether the student is curious and aggressive about getting his or her question answered or if the student feels threatened, particularly if it is a point of possible embarrassment or anger. Respond with patience and charity, always trying to affirm where the person is coming from. For example, Joe asks, "What do you mean sex outside of marriage isn't loving?" Your response would be, "Joe, thank you for your question. I don't want to imply that people who have sex before marriage don't have genuine feelings for one another. I don't

know their hearts. But what I want to look at is whether their actions really express love.” Here you are trying to mitigate the feelings of defensiveness that Joe might have. Give him an “out” while also catechizing him about a particular truth. In this hypersensitive age in which we live, the method of delivery is almost as important as the message itself. We are, as St. Paul says, becoming all things to all men for the sake of the Gospel—yet we’re not compromising. We’re simply thinking strategically about how best to approach a given person in a given situation—always desiring to continue to turn charitably toward deeper conversion.

- While the Theology of the Body is not strictly a form of apologetics, some students will approach you with questions not purely out of charity or sheer curiosity but with a posture of doubt or even attacking what the Church teaches. Below is a helpful guide to responding to questions and, hopefully, intelligently answering them. You may win over a student who is searching for the truth.

1. LISTEN CLOSELY AND IDENTIFY CLEARLY THE OBJECTION

What is the objector really saying? Often, the point being argued isn’t the real objection but rather one’s favorite argument. Therefore, it is important to be able to answer the *actual* objection.

2. RESTATE THE OBJECTION

First, this helps you understand the objection at hand. Second, it helps you to be fair. You want his or her objection to be as clear as possible. Third, you do this to build credibility for yourself. Fourth, it gives the other students the opportunity to hear the question again, perhaps with greater clarity. Finally, this helps build rapport with the person. Now the objector knows that you really understand the objector’s position.

3. CLARIFY THE TERMS

Many times, the objector does not have a clear understanding of Catholic doctrine. Before you can explain the importance of the doctrine, you must correct any misconceptions. For example, when dealing with immodesty, you can clarify that the Church does not believe the body should be covered because it is dirty or bad. Rather, the body is veiled to guard the dignity of the person.

4. PRESENT YOUR REPLY

Show the basic evidence from Scripture and Tradition to support the Catholic position. In addition, show how Church teaching has remained unchanged and how it resonates with human experience. You might use the Ascension app to search for passages in Sacred Scripture or relevant paragraphs in the *Catechism* by typing in a keyword.

5. REPLY TO SECONDARY OBJECTIONS

Use the four steps outlined above to answer any further objections the person may have.

1. GENERAL THEOLOGY OF THE BODY QUESTIONS

1. Since we're in middle school, marriage is still many years away. What does the Theology of the Body teach us about our state in life? (See GN p. 170, IfU Q. 16, 33)

- **Affirmation:** Acknowledge that teens do not have to wait until marriage to live out the Theology of the Body.
- **Circumstance vs. choice:** Distinguish being single by circumstance from being single by choice.
- **On hold:** Even if a person is single by circumstance, this doesn't mean his or her life remains "on hold."
- **Spousal gift:** In every way that a single person is a sincere gift to others (workplace, friends, family, community, school, parish, etc.), he or she is living the "spousal meaning of the body." As St. John Paul II said, "Young people ... know that their life has meaning to the extent that it becomes a gift for others."
- **True marriage:** This is what awaits us in heaven, and everyone is invited, regardless of his or her state of life or circumstances here on earth. Therefore, no one should think that his or her life is meaningless without a spouse. Accepting this gift and giving ourselves back to Christ is how we all fulfill our call to spousal love, whether we are married or not.

2. Why haven't I heard of the Theology of the Body before now? (See GN p. 68)

- **Affirmation:** Acknowledge that most people haven't heard this beautiful vision before.
- **Trickle down:** New theological insights tend to "trickle down" slowly in the Church; the Theology of the Body has actually made its impact felt much faster than usual.
- **Crisis:** Part of the reason has to do with a crisis in Catholic education. People have been scared to talk about the "difficult" teachings of the Church.
- **Challenge:** Let's take responsibility for spreading this message ourselves.

3. How did St. John Paul II come up with the Theology of the Body?

- **Background:** Trace Karol Wojtyla's history as a young man, focusing on how he lost his family and was forced to live under Nazism and Communism. The degradation all around him forced him to search for deep answers to life's most difficult questions. He was attracted to questions of the "human person" and came to see man and woman's relationship at the heart of culture.
- **Couples:** As a popular college professor and chaplain, Fr. Wojtyla worked extensively with hundreds of dating, engaged, and married couples. He counseled thousands of people in confession. As a cleric, he also saw the value of socializing with laypeople to understand the challenges and joys of being a person living marriage as a vocation.

- **Love and Responsibility:** This book is a philosophical reflection in which then-Archbishop Karol Wojtyla explores the ideas about human love and sexuality. Published in 1960, it provides a personalistic approach to sexual morality.
- **Whole life:** His entire life was spent pondering the question, “What does it mean to be a human person?”

2. CHURCH AUTHORITY

1. How can a celibate priest tell me about sex? (See GN p. 41)

- **Affirmation:** At first, it may seem strange. Married people do have a special knowledge about sexuality. To assume, however, that priests have nothing to offer on the subject would be akin to saying that a doctor cannot treat a particular condition unless he himself has experienced the same illness.
- **Root issue:** Debunk the idea that celibacy is a rejection of sex by using all that is taught in the Theology of the Body. Firmly reiterate that celibacy, properly lived and understood, is living out the deepest truth of sexuality: that we are made to be a gift. The celibate makes himself a gift to Christ and the Church directly, just as spouses are a gift to Christ and the Church through each other.
- **John Paul II** was able to speak so convincingly about sex precisely because he lived the full truth of his own sexuality in “total self-donation” to his bride, the Church. He also had the advantage of understanding the perspectives of the thousands of couples and individuals he counseled over the years. His collective wisdom was drawn from his role as a confessor who, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, heard the myriad problems and issues facing couples.

2. Where does the Church get its authority? (GN p. 31–43, IfU Q. 8, 9)

- **Source of Church authority is Christ:** Christ promised that his Church would teach the truth (see John 16:13). The Bible calls the Church the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The source of the Church’s authority is not the perfection of its members but the promise of Christ (see Matthew 16:15–19). Though members of the Church (including leaders) sin, this does not take away the authority of the Church given to it by Jesus.
- **Logic:** It makes sense that God would establish an authority on earth to make his will known. If we believe that the authors of the books of the Bible did not err when writing them, why would this not continue within the life of the Church? Otherwise, determining matters of eternal significance would amount to a guessing game. The reality that there are thousands of Protestant denominations shows what happens without an infallible authority. In essence, the Church’s teaching authority is like a guardrail on the side of the road, protecting us from error and sin.

- **Deeper question:** Does God have any authority in my life? Have I made myself out to be the final judge of right and wrong? John Paul II summarized this mentality: “If it is convenient and helpful to me, well and good, but if not, I refuse it and leave. ... Christ is found particularly in the field of sexual morality, because it is here that Christ makes demands on men.”

3. Why are there scandals in the Church? (See GN p. 34)

- **Affirmation:** We should all be disturbed by scandal in the Church, but we shouldn’t be surprised; after all, we are all sinners. So we need to have a realistic view of human nature. History has shown that some terrible things have been done in the name of the Church.
- **Wheat and weeds:** Christ chose sinful men as his Apostles, his closest collaborators (he had no other choice!). One would betray him (Judas) and another deny him (Peter). He said the “wheat” and the “weeds” would grow together within the Church until the end of time.
- **Root issue:** Sin in the Church is no excuse for us to turn a deaf ear to the Church’s teachings. This, in fact, is the cause of scandal in the Church. Turning a deaf ear, then, makes us part of the problem rather than a solution to it.
- **Example:** Do you believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John sinned? They also, by the grace of God, communicated the Gospel without error, right?

3. WHAT IS LOVE?

1. What’s wrong with sex before marriage if you really love the person? (See GN p. 66, IfU Q. 47)

- **Affirmation:** While love should, of course, be a component of sex, what exactly is love? Explain that love is willing the good of another, the willingness to sacrifice.
- **Logic:** Make the case that premarital sex is not best for either person involved. Explain the consequences of premarital sex as they relate to family, future, finances, relationships, emotions, spirituality, and so on.
- **Language of the Body:** The body—and therefore sex—is meant to express the language of divine love. That’s the basic Christian proposal. God’s love is free, total, faithful, and fruitful. That’s called the marriage commitment.
- **Ready for marriage:** If this is the kind of love you want to express, you are ready to get married. If not, do not confuse the desire for sharing sexual pleasure with an authentic and full definition of love.

2. How do you know when it’s love? (IfU Q. 14, 15)

- **Affirmation:** Affirm their desire for love and that they desire love because God has created them to deserve love.
- **Review:** Review the above definition of love and expand on it. Explain the role of attractions and emotions and how they are a part of love but not to be confused with love itself.

- **Fruits of love:** Peace, along with union with others who love you (i.e., God, family, real friends).
- **Bible:** Use 1 Corinthians 13 to help students learn the characteristics of a loving relationship.

3. As a middle school student, can you really love another person? (IfU intro)

- **Affirmation:** Our culture has low expectations for youth. But John Paul II has said, “Do not be afraid to be the saints of the New Millennium.”
- **Necessity of love:** Love is not merely a possibility. It is a requirement.
- **Not all love is romantic:** When John Paul II said, “Man cannot live without love,” he did not mean that we could not live without dating.
- **Examples of youthful love:** Maria Goretti, Pier Giorgio Frassati, Thérèse of Lisieux, Bernadette Soubirous, and Dominic Savio (all saints!).

4. HOW FAR IS “TOO FAR”?

1. What is chastity? (IfU Q. 1, 2)

- **Affirmation:** Most people do not know what chastity is. It is often confused with celibacy, abstinence, and prudery. Explain the difference.
- **Define:** Chastity is the virtue of purity, not the absence of sex. This is why married people must be chaste. It is the virtue that orders all our sexual desires toward the truth of love.

2. How far is too far? (See GN pp. 74-78, IfU Q. 44-52)

- **Wrong question:** This is a legalistic and minimalist approach to morality. People who truly love each other are not looking to “get away” with as much as possible before they “break the rules.” They are looking to love one another as sincerely as possible.
- **Real questions:** These should be “What does it mean to love?” and “What more can I do? What more can I sacrifice to love this person sincerely?”
- **Drawing a line** merely at behaviors doesn’t do justice to the human heart. It’s even possible to hold hands with the wrong motive or intention if you are using physical affection as a way to manipulate.
- **A personalistic norm** is the true line. It states that you must never treat a person as a means to an end. The opposite of love is not hatred but using someone as an object for your selfish pleasure.
- **Homework of the soul:** You have to be honest with yourself and your own motives. No one can do that “homework of the soul” for you by simply giving you a list of dos and don’ts.

3. But how do we know where to draw the line? (IfU Q. 44-52)

- **Reminder:** Purity is not about following a list of rules but having a change of heart. As we grow in purity, we stop looking for a line that marks where not to cross and start considering the best way to love a person now with his or her future in mind.
- **Practical tips to awaken consciences:** How far is “too far” for your future spouse? Future daughter? The expression on her dad’s face if he were to walk in? Would you do it with Jesus in the room?
- **Challenge:** Live with integrity. Do not live one way and expect your future spouse to live another. Become the type of person whom you would want to date your future child.

4. Doing things the moral way cramps spontaneity. (See GN p. 98, IfU Q. 3)

- **Define terms:** “Spontaneity” in this sense usually refers to abandoning oneself to the passion of the moment. If that “passion” is lust, then yes, the Church’s teaching will “cramp your style.” Virtue calls us to a much richer and more beautiful kind of spontaneity.
- **Spontaneity of love is the fruit of virtue.** When, through ongoing conversion from lust to love, authentic love wells up as a passion of the heart, spouses can and should “abandon themselves” to it.
- **Purpose of purity:** Only with purity can one tell the difference between selfish seduction and romantic love. True romance is impossible without a pure heart.
- **Piano analogy:** Anyone can walk up to a piano and “spontaneously” bang on the keys and make meaningless noise. A concert pianist can also “spontaneously” touch the keys and make music that raises our hearts to the heavens. But we know behind the beauty of the spontaneous music is a lifetime of effort, discipline, and sacrifice.

5. What’s wrong with pornography? Nobody’s getting hurt. (See GN pp. 83-85, IfU Q. 53-55)

- **Affirmation:** The body is beautifully made. As John Paul II has said, though, the problem with pornography is not that it shows too much but too little. It reduces a person to their body parts.
- **Pornography *does* hurt people:** Some people hurt by pornography include models in pictures and the participants in videos; the spouses of those who are addicted to it; the children abused by people who act out as a result of their pornography addiction; and, of course, those who view it themselves. The viewers of pornography are hurt because their ability to love is crippled. They sin against their own bodies by training themselves in boredom. The images take moments to see and years to forget.

- **Frog in boiling water:** This popular analogy can be used to show how the effects of pornography are often unnoticed until the damage is caused. (The analogy is that a frog, because it is cold-blooded, will not respond to water heating up slowly and can end up boiling along with the water. When we are in bad situations, we tend to slowly adjust as things get worse—and if we aren’t careful, we end up like the frog.)
- **Appeal to the heart:** Would you want your future spouse looking at online pornographic images right now? Would you want your future son or daughter involved in the pornography industry? If not, why? (Have your students consider their reactions to these questions. Ask them, “If there really is nothing wrong with pornography, why do you have any negative reaction to it?”)
- **Dignity:** Even if a person is willing to be viewed in pornography, this does not make it moral, no more so than a woman who willingly sells her body for sex (i.e., in prostitution) makes it moral. She is using and being used. The viewer is also using and being used. No one is satisfied or loved.
- **Encourage:** The habit of viewing pornography can be difficult to break, but with the proper professional counseling, support, and frequent recourse to the sacraments (especially Reconciliation), it is possible to overcome such an addiction. With God’s grace, all things are possible.

6. What’s wrong with masturbation? (See GN pp. 78-82, IfU Q. 56-58)

- **Affirmation:** Our culture is largely silent and/or confused about the meaning of sex, so it can be hard for those of us immersed in this culture to step back and take a deeper look.
- **Review the meaning and purpose of sex:** Marriage makes two into one flesh. The love of God is expressed in the body, procreation, and union. Explain how masturbation communicates none of these profound truths.
- **Training in selfishness:** Masturbation trains you to take and to expect instant gratification. It easily becomes a habit, a vice, that is difficult to break and could lead to deeper addictions.
- **Habit can be broken:** Offer encouragement that this vice can be overcome with prayer, perseverance, frequent recourse to the sacraments (especially Reconciliation), and spiritual direction.

5. CONTRACEPTION

Note: It is critical that you spend some quality time fine-tuning your responses to this issue. Though many do not realize it, contraception is the very foundation of all Catholic teachings on sexual morality. If you can successfully explain the Church's teaching on contraception, you can successfully explain everything the Church teaches regarding sex.

1. What's wrong with contraception? (See GN p. 109, IfU Q. 63)

- **Affirmation:** Heap lots of affirmation on those who have questions about this. “Yes, Molly, I can totally relate. It does seem odd at first, doesn't it? I mean, it seems like the Church is just denying people a modern convenience. What's the big deal? Let's take a deeper look ...”
- **Define terms** (see GN pp. 114–115): Birth control, artificial birth control, contraception, artificial contraception. The Church is not opposed to “controlling births.” Nor is it opposed to all things “artificial” (that would make wearing polyester immoral). The Church is opposed to those methods of controlling births that are “contraceptive”—that impede the procreative potential of a given act of intercourse.
- **Why?** Rendering the sexual act sterile radically changes the meaning and significance of the act, the spouses' relationship to one another, and the spouses' relationship to God. It does “violence” to God's creation and the physical and spiritual integrity of spouses. If spouses choose to engage in sexual intercourse, they must do so with respect for God's design for the act.
- **Wedding vows:** The body has a language that is meant to express wedding vows, and one of the promises you make at the altar is to “receive children lovingly from God.” Rendering the act sterile turns the “I do” of wedding vows into an “I do not.”
- **False sign:** Contracepted intercourse is not an act of love that images the divine. It makes of the spouses a countersign of God's life-giving love and a kind of “anti-sacrament” of Christ's love for the Church.

2. What is the difference between contraception and Natural Family Planning (NFP)?

- **One says “no” and the other says “yes”:** Contraception says no to the free, total, faithful, and fruitful meaning of sex. It says no to the reality of a woman's fertility and seeks to control and rewrite the meaning of the sexual act. When using NFP, a couple says yes to each other—even when they abstain from sex to delay pregnancy—by understanding and acting according to one another's fertility.
- **In short:** One controls and manipulates God's design and tries to rewrite its meaning, whereas the other honors God's design and acts accordingly.
- **Different means to same end:** One requires temperance, while the other side-steps virtue. Both achieve the same end but with very different means.

3. What constitutes just reasons for using NFP to avoid children? (See GN p. 118)

- **Avoid extremes:** Some wrongly think that only the gravest reasons, such as a deadly disease or extreme poverty, would justify avoiding a child. Others think that just about any reason whatsoever justifies avoiding children.
- **Avoid selfishness:** The Church teaches that it is the parents' duty to "make certain that their desire [to space births] is not motivated by selfishness" (CCC 2368). That is it in a nutshell.
- **Some reasons:** Just reasons could include financial (e.g., hard time feeding and clothing the kids you already have, just lost a job), physical (e.g., legitimate health concerns), emotional or psychological (e.g., already have a number of children under the age of four).

4. Is it morally acceptable to use contraceptives (e.g., "the pill") for medical reasons? (See GN p. 128, IfU Q. 70)

- **Principle:** Medical procedures that cause sterility are not in themselves immoral (e.g., hysterectomy, removal of cancerous testicles) as long as the sterility they cause is not directly willed (this is the moral principle of *double effect*). Likewise, "the pill" (birth control) is often prescribed to treat medical problems in young girls (e.g., irregular cycles, painful cramps, ovarian cysts).
- **Alternatives to the pill:** The good news is there are medical alternatives to the pill (recommend contacting the Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction, visiting wellcatholic.com, or using the NFP directory at OMSoul.com to recommend a local doctor).

6. HOMOSEXUALITY (SAME-SEX ATTRACTION)

1. Does the Church expect those with same-sex attraction not to love and just live in the closet? (See GN pp. 145-157, IfU Q. 59)

- **Affirmation:** All people, including those who experience same-sex attraction, are called to love and receive love.
- **Redefine love:** Our secular culture often equates sex with love. Many believe that a lack of sex means a lack of love. Most messages in popular media and music do not reflect an understanding of how abstinence can express love. Everyone, though, is called to love according to his or her specific state in life. Regardless of a person's sexual attractions, all are called to live lives of chastity—a profound expression of love. All, no matter what their sexual desires, are called to live in purity of heart, mind, and body.
- **Two options?** People who experience same-sex attraction may believe they have only two options: live "in the closet" in fear or come out, embrace an actively homosexual lifestyle, and decide on their own what is right and wrong regarding sexual behavior.
- **Hard road:** A person who experiences same-sex attraction may approach it this way: "I feel like I'm caught in a no-win situation. If I obey my sexual impulses, it will require me to deny the

Christian faith. But if I deny my impulses to obey God, I feel like I'm walking away from love and denying my identity!" Few people can imagine the difficulties that people with same-sex attraction experience every day. The Church wants to love and support them by aiding them in a life of ever-increasing prayer, sacraments, and virtue; assisting them along the road of self-mastery; helping them foster genuine friendships; and providing resources to help them navigate the many difficulties associated with this particular cross.

- **Third option:** Chastity is rarely proposed as a viable option—the only one that brings freedom. In this option, you acknowledge your attractions, recognize your true identity as a child of God, and have the courage to follow God's designs for sexuality. Chastity, and in this case abstinence, is certainly a long and hard road, but not an impossible one, for Christ gives us the strength to "do all things in him" (Philippians 4:13).
- **Reaffirm:** God loves every person, no matter what their situations or weaknesses may be. No one, no matter their struggles or sins, is outside the reach of God's deep mercy, powerful love, or plan of hope for each person. God desires happiness for all people. However, sex does not equal happiness. Therefore, the Church teaches us that chastity in one's state of life is possible, has the capacity to generate authentic love and brings great joy. While the challenge of living a chaste lifestyle should not be underestimated, one should not underestimate the graces that God gives to those who trust in him.
- **Referral:** CourageRC.net and Narth.com

2. What light does the Theology of the Body shed on homosexuality? (See GN p. 151ff)

- **The body reveals God and the person:** God's love is made visible through people, specifically through their bodies, no matter what their sexual attractions may be. The body is clearly oriented toward the opposite sex; so too is the person at his or her deepest level oriented toward "the other." The body, both male and female, reveals God's plan for men and women to become cocreators with God—through a marriage of love and life—procreating through the sexual embrace. Sexual activity between same-sex partners precludes this central aspect of God's plan for human sexuality.
- **Disconnected:** Some people, through no fault of their own, are unaware of or disconnected from this deepest part of themselves, but orientation toward the "other" is still at the deepest level of the person.
- **Sexual "reorientation":** The redemption of sexuality is offered to one and all as a living possibility. Some people with same-sex attraction have experienced healing and true "re-orientation" toward the opposite sex through therapy, counseling, prayer, and growth in a community of authentic friendship. Others, even with similar experiences and desires, continue to experience same-sex attraction their entire lives. With Christ's help, all of us can be redeemed and gradually come to a renewed understanding and experience of God's plan for our lives.

3. What's wrong with two people of the same sex loving each other? (See GN p. 152, IfU Q. 59)

- **Nothing:** But what does it mean for two men or two women to love each other? The Church reminds us that “chastity blossoms in *friendship*” and friendship “is a good for all” (CCC 2347). Christian friendship is a call to love through which persons can grow alongside one another as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- **Root question:** What does it mean to love someone sexually? The basic proposal of the Theology of the Body is that the “language of sexual love” is stamped in our bodies as male and female, and this is meant to express the free, total, faithful, and fruitful love of God. This type of love is reserved for the commitment it reflects inside the bond of Christian marriage. Therefore, human love is authentic only to the degree that it reflects the love of God.

4. Why would God make people this way and tell them they can't live this way? (See GN p. 154, IfU Q. 60)

- **Root problem:** Remind students that we live in a fallen world. No one can fully explain why some people experience same-sex attraction, but it is important to note there is a difference between experiencing certain desires and acting on those desires. Just because a person experiences sexual attraction—either to the same or opposite sex—toward another person does not mean it is in the person's best interest to act on those desires.
- **Biological?** The Church reminds us that the psychological beginning of same-sex attraction “remains largely unexplained” (CCC 2357). This means we must be very sensitive and careful with the way we treat this issue and all those who experience it. What is clear is that everything in human life, including biology and psychology, is impacted by human imperfection. But this is not the end of the story. The good news is that everything in human life is also impacted by the redemptive nature of Jesus' death on the Cross. Whatever became disintegrated in humanity through sin can begin to move—even if very slowly—toward wholeness and integration, by the grace of God.
- **Process of redemption:** St. Paul reminds us that “for freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). The more we choose what is good and the more we receive the grace of Christ in our lives, the more we gain the freedom God desires for us (see CCC 1733). While redemption is not complete until we are in heaven, it begins now. “The redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came ‘to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mt 20:28), that is, he ‘loved [his own] to the end’ (Jn 13:1), so that they might be ‘ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers’ (1 Pet 1:18)” (CCC 622).

5. I know a gay couple who love each other very much. They had a civil marriage ceremony last year to deepen their commitment. I see how they care for each other and their children. I refuse to believe they're living in sin. (See GN p. 157, IfU Q. 59)

- **Affirmation:** The love they have for each other and their children may be sincere and genuine in many ways. But this doesn't mean that everything they do in their relationship is loving and good. It also doesn't mean that their relationship is the same thing as a marriage. Many people may have certain virtues while still needing to grow in other ones.
- **Recognizing goodness** in some areas of a relationship does not mean the entire relationship is necessarily good. If there is homosexual activity in their relationship, you should pray for them to be able to see that. Whatever their struggles may be, this is not good for them or for the family. Therefore, it is right to hope that they will come to a renewed understanding of God's plan for life and love.
- **Marriage** is a particular relationship between a man and a woman. This has been defined since the dawn of human civilization. While the civil laws regarding this may have changed, this is still the case. The Gospel's call to a compassionate response rooted and convicted in the truth will cause us to walk a tight balance, even a painful balance, especially in our current cultural situation. It is more than a platitude to say that living and loving in these situations takes lots of prayer.
- **Having compassion:** You also should love this couple with the love of Christ and be sure to avoid any prejudice in your interaction with them. Pray for your own heart to be pure as you learn to love others whose struggles are different from your own. As one woman who had lived an actively lesbian lifestyle said, "[We] carry a cross that you do not know. Please understand that the anger and bitterness that comes from the other side is rooted in suffering. How can suffering be so closely tied to love? Ask Jesus; he suffered because of love." To give up sexual relationships for godly friendships and an intimate relationship with God is not an easy decision. Those who struggle with the choice deserve our support, compassion, and unconditional love. But part of this authentic love means guarding against a false form of compassion that seeks to condone any behavior out of fear of offending others. Love and truth cannot be separated.

7. GENDER IDENTITY

1. Isn't there a distinction between sex and gender? I've heard that you are born a certain sex, but your gender is a different thing.

- **Affirmation:** Gender stereotyping is not a myth. As predicted in Genesis 3:16, there has been a long-standing historical imbalance between the sexes. This is a stark manifestation of sin in the world. Today, we still see this reality in the objectification of women, in the workplace, and, sadly, in dark realities like human trafficking. There are also certain overinflated gender stereotypes that cause confusion—for example, the idea that to be “manly” means one must like sports or that pink is a girl’s color. The very ideas conjured up by the words “macho” and “girly” project caricatures that are far from the experience of many men and women when it comes to their own sexual identity.
- **Challenge:** While there are many cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity that are arbitrary—which can and should develop and shift over time—manhood and womanhood themselves are not arbitrary. The body reveals a person, and the person is created as male or female. This reality is central to the whole question of human identity. We are not souls trapped in bodies, but body-souls who will forever be male or female. Consider Mary, who was assumed body and soul into heaven. She is forever the complete manifestation of womanhood. Her sex was not a provisional reality on earth but is an eternal reality.
- **Background:** Very recently, the term “gender” was co-opted and distinguished from the term “sex.” “Gender theory” recognizes the cultural stereotypes mentioned above and goes so far as to split body and soul. (For more on this, check out the excerpt from Jason Evert’s book *Male, Female, Other?* found in the Leader’s Resources on the Thinkific course.) In this way of thinking, sex is biological and mechanical, but gender is something more personal and tied to how one identifies. Gender theory denies that we are body-soul creatures at all. Such thinking is actually quite similar to the earliest heresies that the Church came into contact with and has marked similarities to trends of thought throughout history. Like all heresies, it identifies one reality, overinflates it, and ends up denying another entirely. Gender theory identifies major problems in our cultural conceptions and stereotypes when it comes to manhood and womanhood, but it ultimately ends up denying that we are truly created male and female.
- **The bottom line:** The body reveals the person, and one’s sex is integral to personhood. When a woman feels like a man or vice versa, there may be several things going on. It may seem like a dismissal to ask, “How does a woman who feels like a man know how it feels to be a man?” But perhaps that is a good question. A woman may feel the way she imagines a man feels—but not being a man, how does she know? Her feeling that her femininity is wounded or distant is very personal and important. She is certainly in need of help, healing, and compassion. There is no debate there. But is it really a help and a mercy to allow a man or a woman to alter their bodies to project a different sex?

2. I know a man who says he is “transitioning to a woman.” How should I respond?

- **Affirmation:** Regardless of the confusion or struggles that others face, the mandate of the Gospel is simple and clear: love your neighbor. That genuine love for neighbor isn’t the same thing as tacit approval of every feeling, opinion, or action of your neighbor, but it is a genuine kindness, concern, and outreach. Recent events in our culture imply that we must buy into a particular agenda to be compassionate and enlightened. Scripture can show us “a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).
- **Close to home:** When the person in question is a family member or close friend, this position can be a practical challenge, but relying on the help of grace, we can certainly find ways to love as Christ loves. Knowing that the person in question has a genuine interior confusion and having compassion for their struggle is important. That compassion can point toward hope and healing for the person without indulging and affirming the confusion.
- **Love alone is credible:** Each person has a unique and unrepeatable experience of being a human person, and the complex experiences one may have regarding sexual integrity cannot be dismissed. Undoubtedly, the experience of one who identifies as transgender is more than a matter of fitting the mold of cultural gender stereotypes. There may be deep-seated wounds that have dramatically affected his or her experience as a person, and there is no doubt that help is needed. Our current cultural climate, in which it is seen as heroic to alter one’s body, has perhaps made real help much more difficult. So, how do we respond? Our certain compass is Jesus himself. In the Gospel, we never hear of Jesus’ encounter with gender confusion, but we can see from his entire ministry the pattern of compassion and mercy rooted in truth. This can be, simply put, messy, and it requires that we sit at the feet of the Master daily to learn from the one who is meek and humble of heart.

8. STARTING OVER AND STAYING PURE

1. Can God forgive you if you have already been sexually active? (See IfU Q. 79)

- **Affirmation:** God's mercy is equal to his love: it is infinite. He loves you infinitely and is always ready to forgive you if you turn back to him. He wants you in a loving relationship with him; that is why he created you!
- **Biblical examples:** Parable of the Prodigal Son, the woman caught in adultery, Peter's denials.
- **Historical and scriptural examples:** St. Augustine (premarital sex), David (murder and adultery), St. Margaret of Cortona (cohabitation), and St. Pelagia (prostitution).
- **Confession:** Encourage the student to experience God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

2. How do I forgive myself? (See IfU Q. 87)

- **Affirmation:** All people have things in their past that they wish they could erase.
- **Future:** Living purely heals the past. By making smart decisions about future relationships, you will impress yourself that you have learned from the past instead of repeating it.
- **Forgiveness is not a feeling:** Regret may linger for some time. Forgiveness is a decision to let go. Do not beat yourself up. As St. Francis de Sales said, "Have patience with the whole world, but first of all with yourself."
- **Confession:** It is easier to forgive yourself when you know that God has forgiven you.

3. How do you avoid making the same mistakes in the future? (See IfU Q. 86, 90-96)

- **Affirmation:** Praise students' desire to be pure and their insight into the necessity of planning ahead.
- **Sports/theater analogy:** How would an actor or athlete perform without practice and rehearsal? When the time came to say one's line or perform the play, the actors would be caught off guard. If a football player did not study the playbook before the game, he would be unprepared for the game and probably botch the play. Therefore, to be pure, one must plan ahead.
- **Strategies for purity:** Avoid bad relationships before they begin, break off unhealthy relationships, surround yourself with good friends, get involved in youth groups, go on group dates, do not be alone with a date when parents aren't home, and pray.
- **Acknowledge:** All these things are more easily said than done. But you have confidence in your students.

9. CELIBACY

1. If the Church is so gung ho on marriage, why does it promote celibacy? (See GN p. 164)

- **Affirmation:** Celibacy does sound strange at first. But a deeper look reveals that the Church's understanding of celibacy vows flows directly from its understanding of marriage.
- **Foreshadowing:** The purpose of marriage is to provide an earthly foreshadowing of the "marriage of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7), the eternal union between Christ and the Church that awaits us in heaven.
- **No marriage in heaven:** When Jesus affirms this, he is pointing to the fact that marriage on earth will be fulfilled in the marriage of heaven.
- **For the kingdom:** In Matthew 19, Christ calls some to "skip" the Sacrament of Marriage to devote themselves entirely to the marriage that alone can satisfy: the marriage of Christ and the Church. It is celibacy not for celibacy's sake, but *for the kingdom*.
- **It is not a rejection of sex** but a living out of the ultimate purpose and meaning of our creation as male and female and our call to union—to point us to Christ's union with the Church.

2. Does the Church still teach that celibacy is a higher calling than marriage? (See GN p. 165)

- **Affirmation:** There has been a lot of misunderstanding on this point. St. Paul teaches that he who marries does well, but he who refrains does better (see 1 Corinthians 7:38). But he does not mean that marriage is a second-class vocation. Nor is it only for those who "can't handle" celibacy. The Theology of the Body firmly rejects any interpretation of these words that would belittle or devalue marriage.
- **Value of marriage:** The value of marriage determines the value of celibacy. The value of a sacrifice is determined by the value of that which a person sacrifices (no merit if a non-smoker gives up smoking for Lent). If marriage were "bad," every Christian would be called to renounce it.
- **Objective/Subjective distinction:** What's better, heaven or earth? Celibacy is "better" by virtue of its object; it is a choice for the heavenly marriage. Subjectively speaking, the better vocation for you is the one to which you are called by God.

3. Why aren't Catholic priests allowed to be married? (See GN p. 166, IfU Q. 100)

- **Some are:** We often forget in the West that Eastern Rite Catholic churches permit married men to be ordained as priests. Mandatory celibacy is a discipline of the Latin (or Roman) Rite of the Church, which has decided to choose its priests from among those men who have embraced a life of celibacy for the kingdom.
- **Important symbolism:** While it is not essential that a priest be celibate, a celibate priest has an important symbolic value in imaging Christ, who himself was celibate. Christ was not married because he came to “give up his body” for all humanity—for his Bride, the Church.
- **Free choice:** The vocation of celibacy, like the vocation of marriage, must always flow from a free choice. The Church forces no one to be celibate. As a discipline, the Roman Church chooses her priests from among those men who have freely chosen celibacy as their life's vocation.

4. Why can't women be priests? (See GN p. 168)

- **Affirmation:** We must work to overcome any exaggerations of the differences between the sexes that have been used to favor men and oppress women. Yet there are true gender differences that matter. Men and women are not simply interchangeable.
- **Where difference matters:** What is one thing a woman can do that a man cannot? Be pregnant and give birth. What is one thing a man can do that a woman cannot? Father a child. This is where sexual difference really matters.
- **Not a career choice:** Women are right to insist that they can be doctors, lawyers, politicians, astronauts—jobs that were traditionally held only by men. But the priesthood should not be seen as a career choice. It is spiritual fatherhood, and to be capable of being a father in the spirit, you must be capable of being a father in the flesh.
- **Eucharistic union of Bridegroom and Bride:** The Eucharist is the consummation of a mystical marriage. The one-flesh union “is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5:32). The difference between the sexes matters precisely here.
- **Priest acts as bridegroom:** A priest gives up his body for his bride, the Church. When he celebrates the Eucharist, a priest is acting *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ—the Bridegroom offering himself to his Bride, the Church. Having women in this role would change the relationship altogether. It would no longer be bridegroom to bride, but bride to bride. Just as in the case of two women, there is no possibility of a true communion, and there is no possibility of new life.

5. How do you know your vocation? (See IfU Q. 97-99)

- **Affirmation:** Most teenagers do not spend much time thinking about this question, so it is a sign of maturity, courage, and generosity to open your heart to God's will for your future.
- **Practical ideas:** Daily prayer, discernment retreats, talking with those who have different vocations and spending time with them, consideration of your personal talents and desires, and so on.
- **Be careful:** Some people mistakenly assume that they do not have a vocation to religious life simply because they desire children or a spouse. In a profound way, the religious life fulfills both yearnings.
- **God's will:** God will not call you to a vocation that will not fulfill you. No matter what vocation you are called to, sacrifice and joy will be mingled daily. It is a sign of maturity, courage, and generosity to open your heart to God's will for your future.

More questions? Please contact us—we'd love to hear from you!

support@ascensionpress.com

1-800-376-0520

