



Who Am I? Discovering My True Identity

Today's middle schoolers face new pressure. Social networking and the whole gamut of virtual reality present new horizons of connectivity, yet often without real engagement, adding to the hard task of early adolescents finding their identity. We need a message of hope that is more powerful than the glitter of society's offerings. This is what Pope St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body provides, for it resonates with the deepest desires of our heart.

As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said, "Of ourselves, we cannot come to terms with ourselves. Our 'I' becomes acceptable only when it has been accepted by another 'I' and is perceived as accepted." What does this mean for you as a parent? Your role is crucial: you are the one who can best help your son or daughter discover his or her incredible dignity, value and identity in Jesus! We pray that these resources will assist you in doing just that. May you be guided by God the Holy Spirit, the giver of life and hope.

Finding Myself Before God

At this crucial time in your child's life, he or she often looks to peers for affirmation, approval, and a sense of identity. In this session, we discuss this tendency and encourage young people to think beyond surface values, such as popularity, looks, sports, etc. Instead, we invite them deeper, to something that reveals their true human identity, which is found in their relationship with God.

God is love and he made us for love. Each person is intimately, uniquely designed by God. We were conceived in love by God and by our parents – our origin. We are made for love and Heaven – our goal. With this starting point and destination, the map of the Theology of the Body guides us, while helping us to see meaning in our choices here and now. Part of a parent's task is to provide their children security to help them grow in *maturity*, on the road to *purity*. Guiding children to embrace their true identity enables them to make proper choices, both short and long term.

The Gift of Freedom: To Love

Whereas middle school students (and popular culture as a whole) often see freedom as getting to do what they want, independent from authority, this program challenges them to see the truth – that freedom's ultimate purpose is to enable us to truly love. This is the essence of being human: loving. We come to discover ourselves, to find ourselves and our identity, when we can make an authentic gift of ourselves to others in love.

Engaging With Your Child

- **Talk with them:** See the Parent's Guide, pages 7-12
- **Pray for them:** "Lord, our child needs our help in becoming his/her true self. Give us the wisdom to know how to direct him/her according to Your divine plan and for his/her good. Amen."

Questions to discuss with your son/daughter

1. If you could choose what you want to be when you grow up – anything at all – what would it be? Why?
2. I remember when I was your age trying to figure out who I was. It was often confusing. What is most confusing for you? What is the hardest thing to deal with?

Adapted from *Theology of the Body for Teens, Discovering God's Plan for Love and Life Middle School Edition: Parent's Guide*, Ascension Press, 2012.