



Truth and Freedom

A teen's typical concept of freedom is the absence of constraints – "Let me do what I want, wear what I want, hang out with whomever I choose, come home when I please, and don't ask me any questions."

That kind of litany of teen wishes is painfully familiar to most parents. The part about constraints actually has some truth to it, but only if understood properly. If we are looking at constraints as things that enslave us, then yes, we need to eliminate them to be free. But the worst constraints are the ones that enslave us from within. One example is lust, which is the impulse to use another person for one's own pleasure. A person driven by lust is enslaved by it, lacks the freedom to love. Pope St. John Paul II said that our freedom is best measured by our capacity to love. Everything that impairs our ability to love (selfishness, pride, addiction, etc.) reveals our lack of true freedom.

Love Requires True Freedom

Being free to love is only possible through the grace of God, who gives us pure hearts. Once we choose God and allow Him to transform our desires, then the moral life becomes about love, and is not simply reduced to rules. Then we obey God's commands not because we feel constrained by them, but because we want to. When teenagers reject the calling to purity and truth in order to do whatever they want, they end up empty. Human beings have been created by God to become a gift to others, loving as God loves. If they live for themselves, they miss the point of their very existence and are left unfulfilled.

The title of this program – *YOU* – is meant to draw teens into a true and rich understanding of themselves based on the truth of being created in the image and likeness of God. Beyond the first layer of the program title, their lives – and *our* lives – only make sense when we live them in service to others. True freedom is found in the ability to desire and to choose the good. In fact, Pope John Paul II taught that "freedom exists for the sake of love." Growth in true freedom expands the capacity to love, and growth in love expands freedom. You could call this a "virtuous circle." Read the true story of Crystalina Evert on pages 42-43 of the *Parent's Guide*.

Although some teens may see the Church's laws regarding premarital sex as an unfair constraint, research shows that girls who are sexually active are more than three times as likely to be depressed as girls who are abstinent. Teenage boys are more than twice as likely. These findings show that God's laws are not arbitrary rules created to rob people of freedom. No, they have been given to us to help us lead loving, joy-filled lives. God's laws are like the string for flying a kite. If you cut it, the kite flies wildly and crashes to the ground. If you retain it, the kite soars.

In the words of John Paul II, "Man longs for love more than for freedom – freedom is the means and love is the end." And the evidence of true love is a sense of healthy responsibility toward those we love.

Questions to engage with your son/daughter

1. Why might a person who gets to do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, feel unfulfilled?
2. What can you do to grow in love by cultivating a better use of your freedom?