



Free, Total, Faithful, Fruitful

In the first half of this program, we discussed how your teenager should understand his or her identity as a person made to give and receive love in the image and likeness of God. The focus now will be to delve into specifics about how to give true and authentic love.

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, there is one analogy God uses more than any other to express His love for us: the love between a husband and wife. The story of God's love in the Bible begins in Genesis with the marriage of Adam and Eve and concludes with the book of Revelation in which we read about the Marriage Supper of the Lamb – the union of Christ and the Church in Heaven. God's love for us is free, total, faithful and fruitful (life-giving), and the couple's love for each other should be all these things as well. In fact, these four aspects of love – free, total, faithful, and fruitful – are mirrored in the vows & promises that a husband and wife exchange during their wedding.

If you remove any one of these four essential elements of married love from the gift of the sexual embrace, it will no longer be a true gift. As a result, those who have sexual encounters outside of marriage eventually find themselves unfulfilled. No amount of pleasure alone can satisfy a person, because we have been created to give ourselves totally, and receive the other totally. Nothing less will satisfy.

Consider what happens when you reverse these four key elements:

- Instead of sex being **free**, it is pressured at the end of a date, forced in sexual abuse, paid for in prostitution, and not freely given by the person dominated by lust.
- Instead of a **total** gift of self, there is sexual intimacy with no permanent commitment to the other person (often trivialized in slang as “friends with benefits”) and so-called “safe” sex, where the persons are more concerned with protecting themselves than giving of themselves.
- Instead of fostering **faithfulness**, Hollywood promotes and celebrates casual sex.
- Instead of being **fruitful**, the sexual act is sterilized with contraception and is not open to the possibility of new life.

The Church and Sexuality

This vision of human sexuality is not a list of rules the Church forces us to follow, nor is the Church opposed to sex. The demands of love have already been written on our hearts and stamped into our bodies. And if we live out this call to love through a sincere gift of self, we become a visible image of Christ's love for the Church. (See page 54 for a description of how this applies to all vocations.)

Young people need to seek God's will for their lives. Whether their vocation is to marriage, or the priesthood or consecrated life, they should know that they will not be able to love others unless they learn to receive God's love. Then they will be prepared to love freely, totally, faithfully and fruitfully.

Questions to engage with your son/daughter

1. If so many teens want true love, why do you think so many settle for unloving relationships?
2. How can learning to grow in “free, total, faithful, and fruitful” love prepare you for your future?

Adapted from *YOU. Life, Love and the Theology of the Body. Parent's Guide*, Ascension Press, 2016.