



MODULE TWO

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# Bonding with Our Children

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## Preface

Welcome to Catholic Parents Online, where we share tips and resources on Catholic parenting. This is brought to you by the Theology of the Body parenting team of the Apostolate for Catholic Truth. Presented with the lens of the Theology of the Body, we will see how we can be a sincere gift of ourselves to our kids, in ways that will help them find true happiness and flourish in accordance with God's wonderful plan for each and every one of them.

This project began as a YouTube and podcast channel for Catholic parents, with various modules covering topics such as the foundations of Catholic parenting, bonding with our children, sexuality education, managing social media and so on. In our hope to help parents optimize its contents, we have developed a handbook to accompany each module, such as this one which accompanies the second module which discusses how we can bond better with our children.

This second handbook will cover the various aspects of bonding with our children using the acronym A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I-J mentioned in chapter 7 of the first handbook:

- Affirmation
- Being there for our children
- Communication
- Discipline
- Empathy
- Forgiveness
- God-centredness
- Honesty
- Integrity, and
- Joy

While the contents of each chapter/episode can be accessed through print (handbook), video (YouTube) or audio (Podcast) format, depending on each individual's preference, parents now have the opportunity to run through its contents in greater detail through reflection questions at the end of each chapter. These questions are designed to help us assimilate the materials better, whether as individuals, as couples, or as parent support groups in parishes or Church groups.

We hope and pray you will find these handbooks and YouTube and podcast episodes useful. It is our hope and prayer that through these resources, through God's mercy and grace, we will connect better with our children and lead them to where God wants them to be, glorifying God as human persons fully alive in His image and likeness.

Humbly in His Love and Service,  
The TOB Parenting Team, Apostolate for Catholic Truth

## Glossary of Terms

- AL** **Amoris laetitia** – Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “The Joy of Love”, 19 March 2016.
- CCC** **Catechism Of The Catholic Church** - Latin text copyright (c) Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano 1993.
- EV** **Evangelium vitae** - Pope St John Paul II, Encyclical “The Gospel of Life”, 25 March 1995.
- FC** **Familiaris consortio** - Pope St John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation “On the role of the Christian Family in the Modern World”, 22 November 1981.
- GS** **Gaudium et spes**, “Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World”, 7 December 1965.
- HV** **Humanae vitae**, - Blessed Pope Paul VI, Encyclical “Of Human Life”, 25 July 1968.
- TMHS** **“The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education Within the Family”**, Pontifical Council for the Family, December 8, 1995
- TOB** **Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body**, Michael Waldstein, Pauline Books & Media (2006).

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'PARENTS ALWAYS INFLUENCE THE  
MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR  
CHILDREN. FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE.  
IT FOLLOWS THAT THEY SHOULD TAKE  
UP THIS ESSENTIAL ROLE AND CARRY IT  
OUT CONSCIOUSLY. ENTHUSIASTICALLY.  
REASONABLY AND APPROPRIATELY.'

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- **Pope Francis,**  
*Amoris laetitia, #259*



## BONDING WITH OUR CHILDREN

CATHOLICPARENTS.ONLINE



## Chapter Eight - Affirmation

Just as physical food is essential for our physical growth, affirmation of our children is indispensable for their psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. If our children do not have this most fundamental need fulfilled, they will start looking for it later on in life in other ways, often in all the wrong places, and in all the wrong faces.

This episode seeks to share with parents why right affirmation of our children is so important, and how we can use it in a way that will help us connect better with them.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## What is Affirmation?

The definition of affirmation is “to declare something to be true.” To affirm a child, then, is to bring across to them positive aspects of them that we know to be true. It basically communicates two important messages to them:

1. First, **you are loved**; you are unique; you are irreplaceable. God’s love for you is unconditional. Our love for you is unconditional. We will always love you, no matter what. We love you for who you are. Not for what you can do or achieve. This is to affirm the innate dignity, goodness and preciousness in the eyes of God that every individual has.
2. Secondly, we want to affirm them in the **positive qualities** that they show, for example, patience, generosity, kindness and so on. In other words, we want to affirm their practice of, and growth in, the virtues. As they are affirmed and encouraged to grow in these virtues, they will be able to participate more in God’s life, participate more in His love, and this will certainly help them achieve true happiness, indeed eternal happiness.

## Our Children Must Know They are Loved

Why do we want to do these? Recall a fundamental tenet of the Catechism, and what was shared in the session on the Theology of the Body: that we are made in the image and likeness of God, which means we are made in love, to love, for love.

In other words, our children must know that they are loved. It is a fundamental desire that all of us have – to love and be loved.

Why is this important?

Because if our children do not have this most fundamental need fulfilled, if they do not experience this unconditional love of God through us, they will start looking for it later on in life in other ways, and often in all the wrong places, and in all the wrong faces.

Just as physical food is essential for our physical growth, affirmation of our children is indispensable for their psychological, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Right affirmation will

not only give them a good sense of self-worth, it will also give them the confidence and the resilience to flourish in life, and handle tough challenges that are inevitable in life, including difficult maths problems in national examinations that adults like me can't even solve. They will know that what they have to do is try their level best, and let God take care of the rest.

## Examples of Affirmation

At this juncture, we would like to make a clarification. When we affirm them in the qualities we see in them, we want to affirm qualities that they can control, so to speak, such as patience, kindness, generosity, and not qualities that they can't control, like being "clever".

Some examples include:

- I was very impressed by your patience while waiting for food to be served, even though I know you were hungry; or
- I was so touched by your generosity in sharing your toys with your brother, or sister; or
- Wow! Despite the challenges that you faced, you still showed such fortitude in trying your best to complete your project, as best as you could. Great job!

## In Summary

In summary:

1. Our children need to know that **they are good**. Very good. Because God made them so.
2. Our children need to know that **we love them**. Unconditionally. They need to know that they are loved for who they are, and not for what they can do, or the results that they attain, and certainly not for the honours they can achieve or the career choice that they make.
3. They need to be **affirmed for the** positive qualities that they show, so that they can continue to grow in the virtues, and attain a life of happiness – indeed, eternal happiness.

## Reflection Questions

1. Have I shown my children the unconditional love of our Heavenly Father?
2. What are the challenges I face in trying to affirm my children that I love them unconditionally?
3. This question may be difficult but it will help us identify one of the reasons why we may have difficulty affirming our children of our unconditional love: Did I experience unconditional love from my parents? It might be painful for some of us, but be assured that our Lord continually invites us to bring our joys and hurts to Him in prayer. Our Divine Physician wants nothing more than to heal us and to bring us closer to Himself.
4. Identify at least 3 positive qualities or demonstrable virtues that I see in each of my children. How can I affirm my child of these positive qualities/virtues that I see in him or her?
5. Do I want my children to develop according to my plan for them? Or would I rather help them grow in God's love and flourish according to His perfect and beautiful plan for them?

## Resources

1. **Affirmation!** by *Laureen Vierno*
2. **Do you have your children's interest at heart?** by *Jared Ng*

## Notes

## Chapter Nine – Being There for our Children

One of the best ways in which we can be a sincere gift to our children is by making ourselves available to them as best as we can.

Besides creating opportunities to find reachable moments and seize teachable moments, being there for our children affirms them of our love for them and their importance to us.

This episode explores how we may do this in ways that can help us bond more closely with them.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## Being Gift to our Children

In one of the documents of Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, and often affirmed by Pope St John Paul II, we are told that we can find ourselves only through the sincere gift of self.<sup>1</sup> Meaning that we can only find our meaning in life, and fulfil our vocation in life, by loving as God loves, in and through our bodies, by being gift to others, and in our context, especially to our spouse and our children.

One of the ways we can do this, to love them as God loves, is by being there for them, by making time to be with them a priority in our lives.

### Reachable Moments, Teachable Moments

Why is this important?

For one, without an adequate quantity of time spent with our children, there will be fewer opportunities to find reachable moments and seize teachable moments. Reachable moments to bond more closely with them, and teachable moments to form them through the various situations that arise. These opportunities are often unplanned and unexpected, and can arise anytime during the time we spend with them. You would be surprised at how often these opportunities crop up.

Secondly, by being there for them, it transmits a strong message to them that they are important to us, giving them significant affirmation of our love for them.

Consider dedicating exclusive time with each of your children at least once a week – whether it is at their favourite fast-food joint, or ice-cream outlet, or even a walk in the park or at the beach. Just be there for them and let them know they are important and matter to you.

While you are with them, here's a gentle but important reminder: you can and should talk about anything under the sun, except schoolwork, unless they bring up that topic themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> GS, 24

## Body and Spirit

Being there for them does not mean just being physically there with them, but because we are body and spirit, we need to be there also with our mind and heart and soul.

Once, a young father recounted to me how frustrated he felt, even guilty, when while being with his child, he would find himself getting easily irritated by the child. Why? Because during that time with his child, he would receive work messages on his phone which he felt he had to attend to. And at that same time, his child would be clamouring for his attention.

Unsurprisingly he found himself scolding and shouting at his child for disturbing his work during their time together.

After some discussion, he decided he would put away his phone during the time that he spent with his child, thus making a conscious effort to give his full attention to his child. It worked. He was able to spend more and better quality time with his child. They became closer, and the child became much more secure and assured of his love.

In this day and age, the mobile phone can be a big hindrance to parent-child bonding. May we suggest that when we are with our children, when we are having dedicated family time, we put away our phones and just focus on being there for each other?

## A Sharing by our Team Member

On my part, I was guilty too as a young parent. Once, while my kids were still very young. I was approached to be an animator for Masses in the parish. Without consulting my wife (a disastrous course of action as I would learn through our marriage), I responded with a spontaneous yes. I was already an active member of the Catholic Medical Guild at that time. Becoming an animator meant hours were spent away from our young family for practice and training.

I was really passionate about the ministry, and I really wanted people to praise and worship God with all their voice and with all their heart. I remember once, at one of the Masses, I chose



a very lively hymn, and I got the congregation to try and sing as well and as loud and as quickly as they could.

After the Mass, the good parish priest came to me and said: “You know, John, erm... it’s good that you want a fast hymn for the congregation, to sing and praise the Lord with. But you might want to remember that this is a 7am crowd. The parishioners are in their seventies and eighties. Did you notice that half of them could not follow you and the other half were quite breathless trying to catch up with your pace and tempo?”

When I was questioned by my wife as to where my priorities were, I actually responded by telling her it was more important to serve God in church. A totally naïve and ill-informed position. The consequences were clear. My wife felt abandoned with young kids at home when I was away. And our kids pined for their absent father.

It was only later, on the advice and counsel of a much more mature and enlightened couple, that I realised my folly. My priority as a father was my family. While it was good to serve the Church when I could, it should not be at the expense of my family. Otherwise, my children would easily have felt that they had lost their father to the Church. I was that close to making my children resent the Church for depriving them of their father at home. Thank God for sending messengers to shake me out of my ignorance!

Now, we are not suggesting for a moment that we should not respond at all in any way to serve in Church ministry. It is certainly good to serve the Church in whatever way we can. And loving our families and being there for them is our primary God-given responsibility. Our families must not be neglected in any way. Let us always prayerfully discern how it is and where it is that the Lord calls us to serve Him, in our family, the domestic Church, in the Church and in society at large.

As Catholic parents, we must make it a point to be where our children need us most – with them. As priest, prophet and king, we should do no less.

## Reflection Questions

1. Do I prioritise my spouse and children when making decisions involving my work, friends, and pastimes?
2. How can I make sure my primary responsibility to my family is not compromised?
3. How important is dedicating time for my spouse and children to me?
4. How much time do I dedicate to be with my spouse and children each week? Is this adequate and just to them?
5. Do I put away my mobile devices and other sources of distraction when I am with my spouse and children?

## Resources

Online:

1. Pope Francis Encourages Parents to “Waste Time with their Children”
2. Quality Time vs Quantity of Time by Marya Hayes

Book:

*Parenting with Grace: The Catholic Parents' Guide to Raising almost Perfect Kids (2010)*, by Gregory K. Popcak

## Notes

## Chapter Ten - Communication

This episode explores why it is important to provide an atmosphere of love, receptivity, acceptance and availability at home in order to facilitate easier and more open communication with our children, and how we can go about doing this.

Many parents have found it challenging to communicate with our children. Yet we know that communication remains a very integral part of the parent-child connection.

This episode explores why it is important to provide an atmosphere of love, receptivity, acceptance and availability at home in order to facilitate easier and more open communication with our children, and how we can go about doing this.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## Made for Communion

In the Theology of the Body, we learned that we were made for communion.

This is why communication is so important to us. We have an innate desire to know and be known, to love and be loved; to be in communion with others in heart and mind, especially with one who is close to us, such as our spouse, our family members, our good friends.

As we offer the gift of ourselves through this sharing of our thoughts, our feelings, our hopes, and our fears, we want to be listened to, we want to be understood, we want to be accepted. We want to be affirmed for who we are. We want to be loved.

The same goes for our children. They want to be listened to, they want to be loved and accepted for who they are, through what they have shared with us, and sometimes, perhaps even oftentimes, despite what they have shared with us.

Which is why it is so important for us to listen to them not just with our ears, but also with our hearts.

## Conducive Environment

What is the main principle for communication with our kids, you might ask?

It is simply this: to provide an atmosphere of love, receptivity, acceptance and availability, because this facilitates easier and more open communication with our children; it will make it so much easier for them to connect and bond with us.

How?

1. As we mentioned in the previous episode, we need to **be there for them** in body, in heart and in mind. We need to set aside dedicated time for them every day, as far as possible. Remember to put away the mobile phone during these bonding times. Should they want to talk or ask questions, or just want to talk outside these dedicated times, be available to them. This affirms them of their importance to us. On the other hand, saying: “Don’t bother me now – I’m busy” transmits a message that they are not as important in our eyes.

2. **Be a good and active listener.** I know this sounds so counter-intuitive for parents, isn't it? I have caught myself saying things like "How could you say that?" Or "It's not right for you to feel this way!" Or "You must not do this or that because I say so", without explaining why. Statements like these almost invariably put up a barrier to communication and our kids will naturally close up.

Instead, after the child has spoken, we can show him or her we have listened attentively by repeating in our own words what he or she has said. Or we can ask questions to clarify what was said. Examples include the following: "Why did you feel this way? I see..." or "Oh dear, you must have felt so hurt because the other child said this or did that to you. I feel so much for you! Would you like to tell me more?" All this while, do maintain eye contact to let them know you're completely focused on them.

3. Now if you are really busy and need to attend to something truly important, excuse yourself by all means, but do apologise to them first, then **schedule a time to talk** with them. And stick with it, or you might lose their trust.

4. Once they have experienced our listening ear and feel affirmed of our love for them, they will be much more receptive to whatever we want to share with them. At this point, we want to try to keep our part of the conversation **brief and to the point**, unless our child wants to hear more from us.

Generally speaking, the younger they are, the shorter their attention span.

5. Try to be **approachable and calm** always, so that they can be more confident in asking us questions and confiding in us. I remember once when I was driving my teenage girls back from school, an all-girls school, out of the blue they asked me, "Dad, what do you think of anal sex?" I broke into a cold sweat for a short while, said a little prayer to our Lord to guide me in whatever I was going to say, then as calmly as I could, shared with them my thoughts.

At the end, I told them that if I did not address their question adequately, I would be happy to continue the conversation in the car or later at home. Thank God I didn't get involved in an accident that day.

6. Finally, if we find ourselves rather emotional or upset with our child – which as a parent, I know can happen more frequently than we wish – it would be good to disconnect ourselves from the situation, and give ourselves a day or two, or even more, to think and pray about it, before speaking with them again. Remember, it is important that we are calm in our tone and loving in our demeanour when speaking with our children. Experts estimate that up to 90 percent of communication is non-verbal. It's not easy, that's why we have to pray – all the time!

Ultimately the aim of communication is to offer the sincere gift of ourselves to them, and receive the gift of themselves to us, in love.

## Conclusion

When communicating with our children, we want to provide an atmosphere of love, receptivity, acceptance and availability, because this facilitates easier and more open communication with our children, and it will make it so much easier for them to connect and bond with us.

## Reflection Questions

1. When communicating with my children, how can I be a better listener?
2. Do I make my children feel important by making time to listen to them and scheduling time to have conversations with them?
3. Do I try to create a more conducive environment for communication by being calm and approachable whenever I am with my children?
4. What do I do when I feel upset while talking with my children?

## Resources

1. Family Communication
2. Teaching Kids Critical Thinking and Communication Skills by Marya Hayes
3. Conversation Starters: Promoting Family Communication by Thomas Lickona



## Notes

## Chapter Eleven – Cultivating Discipline

Mention the word “Discipline” and many of us will think of being scolded or punished. Yet is that discipline really is?

In this episode, we discuss what true Christian discipline is, what its objectives are meant to be, and how we can discipline our children in a way that will not only continue to strengthen the parent child bond, but school them in the virtues which are essential for their flourishing.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## Childhood Experience

When I was a kid, I remember I was caned by my mother on three occasions. The first was when I was caught playing in a dirty canal downstairs from the little apartment where we lived. When I heard a familiar voice calling out my name from above – and I knew that voice did not belong to God – I knew I was in trouble.

The second time I was caned was because I refused to take my bath after a sweaty round of playtime.

And the third time I was caned? Up till today, I can't remember what it was for.

Of course it hurt when the cane made contact with my behind, but I must say I remembered those lessons well:

1. Avoid places with rats and cockroaches, which were abundant in the canal;
2. Stay clean, and
3. I can't remember this one... Maybe it was to never disobey the woman in your life.

## Tough Love

Interestingly, I also remember that after each episode, my mother would hug me and calmly say that she did it because she loved me, that she wanted me to avoid trouble and stay on the right path. That did give me some assurance that I was still loved, even though my behind still hurt.

Now I am not for a moment advocating corporal punishment for our kids to keep them in line. In today's world, and with the advancements in child psychology, this would seem quite unnecessary, and in some jurisdictions, the parent might even be charged for child abuse. Rather, I am using this example to lead us into the topic we are discussing today, the "D" in connecting with our children – discipline.

## What is Discipline?

The word “discipline” comes from the Latin word “disciplina”, meaning “instruction and training.” It comes from the word “discere” — which means “to learn.”

To learn what, or to be trained in what, we might ask?

The ultimate goal of discipline is to learn to be like God. As Jesus Himself said, “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

To do that, we and our children must become disciples of the ultimate and perfect Master – Christ Himself.

## Why Virtue?

To discipline is not to impose a set of rules on our children that prevents them from living however they want and being a killjoy in the process. But discipline is really to be instructed, to be led, in the way of Jesus – the Way, the Truth and the Life – so that, liberated by Him from the constraints of our weakened nature, we can live out the image of God in our lives, to love as He loves, and in so doing attain true happiness. Eternal happiness.

How? By becoming formed in the virtues. As St Gregory of Nyssa said, the goal of a virtuous life is to be like God.

## What is a Virtue?

What is a virtue? As the catechism tells us, “A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good.” (CCC, 1803)

What does that mean? Let’s take the piano, for example. I for one cannot create beautiful music with it, because I was not trained to play the piano. Put me at a piano and I will mercilessly torture your ears with the way I bang on the keys.

But put a concert pianist there, and the result will be quite different. She will tease the keys and play such beautiful music that your heart will be lifted to the heavens. Did it come naturally to her? Well, she may have been musically inclined, even gifted. But you can be sure that she must

have spent years and years of practising on the piano to be where she is today, when it appears almost effortless for her.

The same with virtues. We need to learn what they are, then practise and practise and practise again, until doing the good becomes almost effortless, but all the time with God's grace and guidance.

This is the path we want to lead our children on. How?

Not by using harsh and demeaning methods, but by building on the loving bond we have with them, lead them to build conscience and self-control, and ultimately leading them to have a good and deep relationship with Christ our Lord and Saviour, without Whom we are nothing, and can do nothing.

## The 5Cs

All the time, discipline must be premised on the following principles, some of which we have covered in prior sessions. These are what I would like to call the 5 Cs:

1. Be **calm** in our disposition;

2. Be **clear** in what we say;

3. Be **concise** in how we communicate our points;

4. Be **charitable**. By this I mean being filled with love for them. Not love as a sentimental fuzzy feeling, but love being defined as the commitment to will the good of the other. Yes, they must be affirmed of our love no matter what they do. We may point out a behaviour that needs to be corrected, but they always must be affirmed of our unconditional love for them;

5. Be **consistent**. Our disciplinary measures must be consistent, and not vary according to the feelings we have at any point in time;

## Turn to Christ

Finally, turn to Christ as our model to strive after, and the source of our strength. Think about it. An absolutely imperfect individual and father like me trying to form my children to lead virtuous lives and be perfect like God? There is no way can I do it on my own power. I'm a sinner, and a big one at that, and I need Christ, our Lord and Saviour, to lead me in my vocation. I believe it is the same with all of us.

## Summary

The goal of discipline is to live a virtuous life, to learn to be like God. We discipline, or instruct our children, by communicating with them in a calm, clear, and consistent manner, all the time turning to Christ, our source and our goal.

## Reflection Questions

1. How did my parents discipline me when I was young? Did I like it or did I not? Do I think I will use the same methods with my children?
2. Do I believe in corporal punishment e.g caning? If so, what are the situations when I will use it? If not, why not? Do I think corporal punishment is acceptable in today's context?
3. What are alternatives to corporal punishment that I can use?
4. What are the virtues I am strong in?
5. What are the virtues I need to improve on?
6. How can I be a role model for my children in the practice of the virtues?
7. Do I discipline out of love for my children or out of anger?
8. Am I calm when disciplining my children? Or do I react emotionally and angrily when I discipline them?
9. How can I help my children to be like Christ?

## Resources

1. Discipline and Punishment are not the same by Deborah Jones
2. Four Tips for Effective Discipline by Dr. Gregory Popcak

## Notes



## Chapter Twelve – Empathy

To empathise with our children is to emotionally understand what they are feeling, to see things from their point of view, and imagine myself in their place. Essentially, it is putting myself in children’s position and feeling what they must be feeling.

Empathy is important because once our children can perceive that we have taken the effort to listen to them, to understand how they feel, and feel what they feel, they will feel more connected with us, they will be more willing to share their lives with us, and they will be more willing to listen to what we have to share with them.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## What is Empathy?

In an earlier episode on communication, we shared that our children do not only want to be listened to – they also want to be loved and accepted, through what they have shared with us, and sometimes despite what they have shared with us.

This is why it is imperative for us to listen to them not just with our ears, but also with our minds and our hearts. In other words, we need empathy when connecting with our children.

Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people are feeling, see things from their point of view, and imagine myself in their place. Essentially, it is putting myself in someone else's position and feeling what they must be feeling.

## Why is empathy important?

Once our children can perceive that we have taken the effort to listen to them, to understand how they feel, and feel what they feel, they will feel more connected with us, they will be more willing to share their lives with us, and they will be more willing to listen to what we have to share with them.

When that happens, our bonding with them will improve by leaps and bounds. They will no longer see us as 'public enemy number 1' whom they have to shun in order to avoid any scolding or punishment, but someone whom they can trust, and even someone they can turn to during the most difficult parts of their lives. This is why empathy is such an important aspect of the communion of persons that we are called to, in this special way as parents and children.

## How do we show empathy?

As we said earlier, by listening to them not just with our minds, but especially so with our hearts.

For younger kids in pre-school, we could say things like: “Oh... are you feeling upset? Are you crying because you could not get what you wanted? I know... I know... But if you were to have too much ice cream today, you might get a tummy ache. You know I love you so much, I do not want that to happen to you. Tell you what. Maybe we can have some ice cream another day? How about some fruits instead for now?”

This allows our younger children to feel understood, even though they may not always get what they want.

For older children, say teens for example, we could say something like: “Am I right to say that this is what you are feeling?” Continue with “I know how you feel. When I was your age, I felt the same way too.” Then carry on the conversation from there.

One good topic to share is that of teenage crushes or infatuation. We can share with our kids about our own teenage crushes. My wife and I used to share about our teenage crushes with our kids when they were teens – how we tried to take the same bus or be in the same place where a particular girl or boy was whom we had a crush on.

We told them, “Crushes are normal.. they are feelings that will come and go... just don’t let these affect your development in the other important areas of your life, such as your family, your friendships, your studies, and other activities like sports and so on.”

Not only will our kids feel that they are not that abnormal, they will also appreciate how we understand what they’re feeling, knowing we too have gone through these similar experiences before.

## Getting Under Their Skin

In the book *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the protagonist Atticus Finch, in trying to explain what empathy was to his son, said: “*You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.*”

Let us ponder on whether we can try to get under our children’s skin, not to irritate them, but to “walk around in it”, and feel what they feel.

### Reflection Questions

1. When I was young, did I feel understood by my parents? How did I feel?
2. Do I make the effort to listen to my child “with my heart”?
3. Is there anything that prevents me from trying to put myself in my child’s shoes, “climbing into his/her skin and walking around in it”? If so, what is this/are these?
4. Do I feel what my child feels when he or she is upset?
5. What can I do to try to empathise more with my child?

## Resources

[How to Raise Kids Who Care](#)

[Fostering Empathy in Children is Crucial](#)

## Notes

## Chapter Thirteen – The Importance of Forgiveness

Many of us have suffered from, and possibly even contributed to, the wounds that have hurt ourselves and our children. Often we have found much difficulty in finding reconciliation, healing and peace within ourselves and our families.

Yet we know for a fact that forgiveness is absolutely necessary if these wounds are to be healed, and for us to reconnect again with our spouse and children. But is this really possible? How can we go about doing this? Or should we just let time heal all wounds?

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## The Unhealed Wound

There is an old adage that says, “Time heals all wounds.”

Is this true? For many of us, I’m sure reality and experience tell us otherwise. For if it were true, then the whole world should be a very peaceful place indeed. Which unfortunately, as we know, it is not.

The fact is when hurts are unresolved, they tend to accumulate and put ever more strain on a relationship as time goes on. Every time we feel hurt by someone, old wounds reappear and grow even deeper, if forgiveness is not sought or given.

## We Need God’s Grace

This is why St Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, exhorts us to “forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins”. Because it is only when we forgive as God forgives, when we love as God loves, when the peace of Christ reigns in our hearts and our families, that we can become a communion of persons, in the image and likeness of God.

*“Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. You have been forgiven; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together, and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body.” (Colossians 3: 13-15)*

How easy is it to forgive? It is not difficult. It is impossible! Especially when the hurts are deep and allowed to fester. This is why we need to pray, asking for God’s grace and mercy to flow through us to each other, in order that we can forgive. We cannot do it on our own human steam. No way!



## Healing & Restoration

When we do allow God's grace to help us forgive, we will find it very healing for ourselves and for our families.

As St John Paul II said:

*"Forgiveness is the essential condition for making the journey towards authentic and lasting peace."<sup>2</sup>*

Pope Francis chipped in with some practical advice too. He said:

*"There is a simple secret to healing wounds... It is this: do not let the day end without apologising, without making peace between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters... If we learn to apologise promptly and to give each other mutual forgiveness, the wounds heal, the marriage grows stronger, and the family becomes an increasingly stronger home."<sup>3</sup>*

## Extending Grace

Very often, when there has been a misunderstanding or hurt inflicted, we tend to expect the other party to ask for forgiveness first. Sometimes we even seem to enjoy making them sweat for it.

As Catholic parents, perhaps we should be the ones to initiate the process of forgiveness. Make a simple statement like, "I am sorry for having hurt you by doing this or saying that. Will you please forgive me?"

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<sup>2</sup> *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the XXX World Day Of Peace, 1 January 1997*

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 4 November 2015

Yes, our children might have said or done something first that hurt us. But if we examine ourselves deeper, quite often, our reaction might have been equally, if not more hurtful, to them too.

## Role Model

When we make the first move in reconciliation out of love and humility, it provides a massive example for them to emulate. It not only demonstrates to our children the importance of reconciliation in our family relationships, but also shows them how important they are to us, that it is more important to reconcile than to be right all the time; and, to some extent, shows them what the forgiving love of God the Father is like.

## Summary

1. Forgiveness is essential for family life
2. We need to pray and ask for God's grace and mercy to forgive
3. As parents, we want to be an example of reconciliation for our children by initiating the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Let us reflect on St Paul's advice to us in his letter to the Ephesians:

*“Even if you are angry, you must not sin:  
never let the sun set on your anger,  
or else you will give the devil a foothold”  
(Ephesians 4:26- 27)*

## Reflection Questions

1. Do I believe that time will heal all wounds, and therefore refrain from seeking forgiveness when hurts are inflicted in the family, whether by myself or others?
2. Are there hurts from my past that I find difficulty in forgiving?
3. “To err is human. To forgive is divine.” Do I turn to God and ask Him for the grace to forgive?
4. Am I the one to initiate forgiveness in the family, or do I tend to wait for the other person to apologise first?
5. Are there are areas in which I have hurt my spouse or children and have not sought forgiveness yet? If so, am I humble enough to admit it and seek their forgiveness?
6. When I feel hurt by my spouse or children, do I express my feelings of hurt to them? Or do I keep my feelings to myself, presuming that they should know what they have done?
7. From what we learned in the chapter on communication, how can I express my feelings when I am hurt?

## Resources

1. *The Power of Forgiveness: How Lives Are Changed and Transformed*, National Catholic Register, 23 October 2020.
2. *Forgive us our debts*, Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday, 4 November 2015.
3. *Forgiveness*, Father Mike Schmitz, 8 July 2015.

## Notes

## Chapter Fourteen – God in our Family

Experience and evidence tell us that our deepest yearning for happiness cannot be easily satisfied in any way. Not by honour, nor wealth, nor power, nor pleasure. Only God can fill that void in our hearts that He made. Which is why St Augustine famously said once that “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

This also explains why it is so important for God to be at the centre of our family life, and the centre of our children’s lives.

Yet many of us may have difficulty believing in a loving God who wants only the best for us, and therefore have difficulty entrusting ourselves and our families to Him.

This chapter discusses why this may be so, and how we can overcome this.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## Poor in Spirit

When my mother was alive, whenever some problem or crisis arose in the family – which was not infrequent – she would exclaim: “God, please help us! Mother Mary, please pray for us!”

And when something good happened in the family, she would exclaim: “Thank God and thank Mother Mary!”

So I grew up with this deeply impressed on me: Let God be at the centre of our family life. Turn to Him always, in good times and in bad. He will guide us through. All we have to do is just try our human best in a given situation, and let God do the rest.

## Building Resilience

This attitude of trusting that God would take care of us certainly helped in building our resilience and confidence, because no matter what happened, we knew God was the one in charge and that He was in control and would guide us through – so long as we did our part in trying our best.

Let’s face it. As parents, and now as grandparents, we know there are so many situations that are outside our control, and if we have an attitude that we need to be in control of all situations and all outcomes at all times, instead of trusting in a loving God Who is the one ultimately in charge, it would be very easy indeed to become depressed.

## Faith and Mental Health

This is backed up by data. In an op-ed for *The Straits Times* in February 2021, a senior consultant psychiatrist, Professor Chong Siow Ann, noted that “there is a strong inverse correlation between religious commitment and depression – or more simply put, religious people seemed less likely to get depression.”

Of course, there are many factors that can be involved in the development of depression, including endogenous, environmental and medical ones, but we cannot deny the data that shows clearly the inverse correlation between religious faith and depression.

## Our Fulfillment

As we discussed in an earlier episode on the Theology of the Body, it is only in our union with God that the spousal meaning of our bodies will be definitively fulfilled, and it is then that our infinite thirst for love, for fulfilment, and happiness, true happiness, be quenched by the One Who is absolute goodness, beauty and truth – God Himself. Without God, we will not find any meaning in life. Not for ourselves. Not for our children.

Which is why St Augustine famously said: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

## Why Do We Not Trust God?

Yet we know for a fact that many of us have difficulty trusting in God and letting Him be in control. Why? It has been suggested that it is because many of us have difficulty trusting in a loving Father Who truly wills our good and wants only the best for us.

Certainly it could have been a possible result of the problems we may have had with our own fathers.

Yet, in a sense, this is also a consequence of original sin, isn't it? Pope St John Paul II once said that original sin was above all an attempt to abolish fatherhood, placing in doubt the truth about God Who is love.

When Adam and Eve decided to take things into their own hands and grasped at the forbidden fruit, at what they felt was good for themselves, they did it because they were deceived into thinking that God was withholding something good from them. They did not believe nor trust that God was their loving Father who just wanted their good and their true flourishing.



I know it is not easy. Many of us have been hurt by authority figures in one way or another, at one time or another, and therefore have difficulty, have lots of difficulty, trusting in a God who is love, in a God who came not to be served but to serve.

## The Boy in the Quake

Here is a story which Jason Evert related when he gave a talk in Singapore in 2017.

One day, a father brought his child to school. As the boy left the car, the father said he would be coming back for him. This was in Armenia in 1988. Later that morning, an earthquake struck and the school building collapsed with all the students and teachers inside.

The boy's father rushed to the school and started removing the bricks and debris with his bare hands. Minutes turned into hours, and hours turned into a day. Then the next day. And the next. His hands hurt, his skin was broken, and he was bleeding from the wounds. But he did not stop.

He just kept digging away, removing brick after brick, boulder after boulder, furniture after furniture. He only had his son in mind. Finally, he removed a piece of rubble and there below it was his son. His son just smiled back at him and said, "Papa!" Then his son turned to the other students around him and said to them, "I told you my papa would come. He told me so."

This is the image we hope we can have of our God, Who will stop at nothing, absolutely nothing, in offering His Life and Love to us.

## Our Image of God

As we end this chapter, let us reflect: what is our image of God? Do we buy into the lie that He is like a harsh policeman up there, just waiting to catch us out and punish us when we sin?

Or do we see Him as a God Who is madly in love with us and our children, and wants only our flourishing and good, even if it means bleeding, suffering and dying for us? Can we let this God be in charge? Can we let Him be at the centre of our family life?

## Reflection Questions

1. What is the mental image I have of God?
2. Have I been badly hurt by my own earthly father before? If so, can I bring this pain to our Lord and let Him heal me and give me the grace to forgive?
3. Do I believe that God truly wants my good and my flourishing, and is in charge even when things are not going well from my human point of view?
4. Can I let God be in charge of my life and my family? Do I want to? If not, what is my image of God that is preventing me from doing so?
5. Read Luke 15: 11 – 32. In this story of the Prodigal Son, what is Jesus telling us about our Heavenly Father's love for each and every one of us?
6. Let us bring this to prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts and mental image of God.

## Resources

1. **Christ at the Heart of the Family: Chapter Three of Amoris Laetitia** by Julian Paparella
2. **The Bridegroom is with You (Letter to Families, Pope St John Paul II, 1994)**

#18. Dear brothers and sisters, spouses and parents, this is how the *Bridegroom is with you*. You know that he is the Good Shepherd. You know who he is, and you know his voice. You know where he is leading you, and how he strives to give you pastures where you can find life and find it in abundance. You know how he withstands the marauding wolves, and is ever ready to rescue his sheep: every husband and wife, every son and daughter, every member of your families. You know that he, as the Good Shepherd, is prepared to lay down his own life for his flock (cf. *Jn 10:11*). He leads you by paths which are not the steep and treacherous paths of many of today's ideologies, and he repeats to today's world the fullness of truth, even as he did in his conversation with the Pharisees or when he announced it to the Apostles, who then proclaimed it to all the ends of the earth and to all the people of their day, to Jews and Greeks alike. The disciples were fully conscious that Christ had made all things new. They knew that man had been made a "new creation": no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, but "one" in Christ (cf. *Gal 3:28*) and endowed with the dignity of an adopted child of God. On the day of Pentecost man received the Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. This was the beginning of the new People of God, the Church, the foreshadowing of new heavens and a new earth (cf. *Rev 21:1*).

The Apostles, overcoming their initial fears even about marriage and the family, grew in courage. They came to understand that marriage and family are a true vocation which comes from God himself and is an apostolate: the apostolate of the laity. Families are meant to contribute to the transformation of the earth and the renewal of the world, of creation and of all humanity.

Dear families, you too should be fearless, ever ready to give witness to the hope that is in you (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*), since the Good Shepherd has put that hope in your hearts through the Gospel. You should be ready to follow Christ towards the pastures of life, which he himself has prepared through the Paschal Mystery of his Death and Resurrection.

*Do not be afraid* of the risks! God's strength is always far more powerful than your difficulties! Immeasurably greater than the evil at work in the world is the power of the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, which the Fathers of the Church rightly called a "second Baptism". Much more influential than the corruption present in the world is the divine power of the *Sacrament of Confirmation*, which brings Baptism to its maturity. And incomparably greater than all is the power of the Eucharist.

The *Eucharist* is truly a wondrous sacrament. In it Christ has given us himself as food and drink, as a source of saving power. He has left himself to us that we might have life and have it in abundance (cf. *Jn 10:10*): the life which is in him and which he has shared with us by the gift of the Spirit in rising from the dead on the third day. The life that comes from Christ is a life for us. *It is for you, dear husbands and wives, parents and families!* Did Jesus not institute the Eucharist in a family-like setting during the Last Supper? When you meet for meals and are together in harmony, *Christ is close to you*. And he is Emmanuel, God with us, in an even greater way whenever you approach the table of the Eucharist. It can happen, as it did at Emmaus, that he is recognized only in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. *Lk 24:35*). It may well be that he is knocking at the door for a long time, waiting for it to be opened so that he can enter and eat with us (cf. *Rev 3:20*). The Last Supper and the words he spoke there contain all the power and wisdom of the sacrifice of the Cross. No other power and wisdom exist by which we can be saved and through which we can help to save others. There is no other power and no other wisdom by which you, parents, can educate both your children and yourselves. The *educational power of the Eucharist* has been proved down the generations and centuries.

Everywhere the Good Shepherd is with us. Even as he was at Cana in Galilee, *the Bridegroom in the midst of the bride and groom* as they entrusted themselves to each other for their whole life, so the Good Shepherd is also with us today as the reason for our hope, the source of strength for our hearts, the wellspring of ever new enthusiasm and the sign of the triumph of the "civilization of love". Jesus, the Good Shepherd, continues to say to us: *Do not be afraid. I am with you*. "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt 28:20*). What is the source of this strength? What is the reason for our certainty that you are with us, even though they put you to death, O Son of God, and you died like any other human being? What is the reason for this certainty? The Evangelist says: "He loved them to the end" (*Jn 13:1*). Thus do you love us, you who are the First and the Last, the Living One; you who died and are alive for evermore (cf. *Rev 1:17-18*).

## Notes

## Chapter Fifteen – Honesty

Often times, as parents, we might be tempted to tell some “white” lie, either to avoid admitting to a mistake we have made, or to induce a desired behavioural change in our children.

Yet the lack of honesty can significantly compromise our relationship with them and become an impediment to their development and character formation.

How can we avoid this pitfall? How can we cultivate this virtue in our families?

In this chapter, we share about the importance of honesty in connecting with our children and for their future flourishing.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## Honesty is an Imperative

One of the most important ingredients for any human relationship is honesty.

This is especially true between husband and wife; between parent and child.

### Why Honesty

There are many reasons why we as parents should model and teach honesty to our children, and we will list just a few of these here.

- 1. We want our children to grow up to be trustworthy people.** Without this virtue of honesty, their future will be in serious jeopardy, whether as students, colleagues, employers, spouses, or parents. Our children must learn that once trust is broken, it is often very difficult to earn it back. Not impossible, but definitely difficult.
- 2. The communion of persons, the mutual self-gift of one to another, can only be meaningful and fruitful if there is absolute honesty between them.** In our case, the parent-child relationship must be built on a firm foundation of trust. Without honesty, there will be no trust. Without trust, the relationship cannot grow, and we will have lots of difficulty passing on values and inculcating the virtues that we know are for their own good.
- 3. When we are honest with our children, and earn their trust in so doing, they are more likely to turn to us with questions about life, love and God** as they grow older, rather than just turn to their friends or the internet for their answers.

### Instilling this Virtue

How can we cultivate this virtue of honesty at home? The answers might seem obvious, but we will be surprised at how often we overlook these.

- 1. Be a role model in honesty, just as with all the virtues.** Be truthful in whatever we say to our children, to each other as spouses, and to others. It will be easier for them to learn honesty, indeed any virtue at all, when we model it for them. Is this necessary? Yes. Is it easy? Not at all. That's why we need God's grace and help – always!

2. **If our children ask us a question that we do not have the answer to, just tell them that we do not know**, and better still, try to search up the answer and let them know once we have found it.

3. **Apologise** as soon as we realise we have said something wrong, even if it is due to an honest mistake or unawareness of the truth earlier. This shows our kids how much the truth matters to us.

4. **Affirm honesty** in our children whenever we can. For example, when a child owns up to a mistake or misdeed, we should thank him for his honesty and affirm his courage in speaking the truth. It also helps if they know that, by being honest, the disciplinary measures meted out would be a lot less severe than if they had not told the truth. Of course, we still need to process their misdeed with them, but at least they know that honesty is still the best policy, and much appreciated and treasured in the family.

5. Now, while we want to be honest, **it is imperative that we should not be brutally so**. For example, even if we have an issue with our daughter's dressing, it would be totally imprudent to tick her off in front of her friends. Instead, we wait for a separate time when we can be alone with her, so we can share our thoughts on why we felt her dressing was not appropriate, out of earshot of others. We will be covering more about topics like this in a later miniseries on chastity and sexuality education. While we want to love our children truthfully, it is equally important to tell them the truth lovingly.

How can we do this? Once again, let us turn to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He will show us the way to speak the truth in a life-giving manner.

## Summary

1. Honesty is important for the parent-child relationship
2. We need to teach, model and affirm honesty, and
3. It is Jesus whom we must turn to help us in this role as parents, always.



## Reflection Questions

1. Have I always been truthful to my spouse and children?
2. Do I sometimes tell “white lies” to my children to get a certain desired result? What will they think of us if they find out the truth later.
3. Am I a good role model to my children when it comes to honesty?
4. Have I been too brutally honest sometimes when trying to communicate certain “hard truths”, especially to my spouse and children?
5. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Do we turn to Him when we face challenges in trying to communicate certain “hard truths” to my children?

## Resources

1. The Saintly Approach to Honesty by Fr. Joseph M. Esper
2. Is It Ever OK to Lie? By Fr Hugh Barbour

## Notes

## Chapter Sixteen - Integrity

As parents, we know how sharp our children are in detecting whether we are walking the talk at home. That is why integrity is so important if we are to earn their trust and respect, and through this, bond with them ever more deeply.

Not only is integrity necessary for our connection with our children, it is also indispensable for our children's future and flourishing.

This chapter discusses how integrity can help in these aspects, and how we can we role model and cultivate this virtue in our children.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## What is integrity?

Integrity comes from the Latin word “*integer*”, meaning whole or complete. In the context of this chapter, it refers to the wholeness and soundness of character, when our behaviour is consistent with what we believe in; when what we believe in is grounded on right principles, principles that are in accord with the virtues. When we have this integrity of character, we will do what we should do, even when no one is looking at us.

## Why is integrity important?

Integrity is important on two counts: for our children and for ourselves.

1. For our children, it builds their character, confidence, resilience, and self-esteem, and help them make the right decisions in life, decisions which will most certainly help in their flourishing as persons made in the image and likeness of God.
2. As for ourselves, having integrity will go a long way in earning their trust and respect, and this will help us greatly in our efforts to transmit the right values to them.

## How do we teach integrity?

1. As mentioned before many times, we role-model it, and lead by example.
2. Be clear and specific with our reasoning. For example, we could say something like “The elderly lady standing there in the train might lose her balance and fall. Let’s give her our seat so she can be safe, okay?”
3. Seize teachable moments and opportunities to bring up examples of good conduct. For example, we can bring up good examples from the newspapers or social media feeds, or we can intentionally choose good books which are age-appropriate and which help teach them virtues such as generosity and sensitivity, and so on.

4. Affirm positive behaviours in our children, and process with them when they make mistakes. But remember – do it gently while being firm at the same time.

## When we make mistakes

Let us be honest. We mess up sometimes, don't we? Myself included.

Please don't engage in self-condemnation when this happens. Let's take parenting as a journey: a journey of ups and downs. We are not perfect. While this is true, we must remember that we are called to continue to strive to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect, as Jesus tells us. But only with His grace, without which we can do nothing.

When we do make mistakes, it is important that we should acknowledge them, and ask for forgiveness, from God and from our family, when that happens. When our kids see that, they will appreciate our honesty, and be motivated to do the same when they make mistakes themselves. After all, honesty is a very important aspect of integrity too.

## Personal Experience

Allow me to share something that happened in my family.

We were preparing for the first day of school in January this year. It was exciting as three of our grandchildren were going to school, two of them for the first time.

As part of the safety measures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, parents accompanying their kids to school had to take an Antigen Rapid Test on that same morning, take a photograph of it and show it to the staff before they were allowed to go in.

Someone jokingly said they could just do the test the day before and take a picture of that one to show. To which our daughter said, "No. We will do it as requested, on that same morning, even if we're in a rush. It's a matter of integrity."

Thank God she said that, because the children were all around the dining table, listening to every word we were saying. They may not have understood everything, but I am sure they would be taking in all these over time.

## Summary

1. Integrity is important for connecting with our children, and for their flourishing.
2. To nurture integrity in our children, we need to talk the right walk, and walk the right talk. Always relying on God's grace, wisdom, and direction to do so.

***“Whoever can be trusted with small things can also be trusted with big things. Whoever is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in big things too.”*** ~ Luke 16:10

## Reflection Questions

1. Which areas of my life need healing from our Lord, so that I can live a life of integrity, and teach my children to do the same?
2. What are the challenges I face when trying to walk the talk?

## Resources

1. Holiness and Personal Integrity by Thomas Berg, LC
2. Integrity by [Joseph LaCombe](#)



## Notes



## Chapter Seventeen – Bonding With Joy

Pope Francis once said that as evangelisers, we should “not look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!”

As the primary evangelisers of our children, do we make the home a place of joy and peace? Or do we subconsciously give in to the stresses that inevitably come our way and contribute to the home being a place of tension and disharmony?

What is joy in the first place? Is it merely a positive feeling that we experience when “good” things happen, and which dissipate as quickly as it comes? Or is it something more permanent?

This chapter discusses what true joy really is, and how we can live it in our family, in a way that will not only enable us to bond with our children more closely, but also help them flourish and find happiness.

[Watch the YouTube video here](#)



## A Common Home Scenario

Let us imagine this scene.

Your family is preparing for Mass on Sunday morning. It is a peaceful morning. You're becoming a little anxious because the time is getting rather tight. Then one of the younger kids starts acting up.

You get so frustrated that you lose it and start scolding him (or her): "Will you just stop it? We've got to go to church now! Stop it right now or I am going to give it to you when we come home from church!"

I suspect this is not an uncommon scenario in our families, mine included.

## Chief Evangelisers

Now let's ask ourselves this question. How inclined will our children be to bonding with us when we as parents lose our temper, or get impatient with them, or get easily upset with them at home? How attractive will our faith be to our children if we behave in this way when trying to engage them in practising it, such as gathering them for prayer or Mass?

I would think the answer would be "not at all". Yet, as evangelisers of our children, we must, as Pope Francis once said, "not look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!" Our children, indeed all of us, are drawn to goodness, beauty and truth. And joy! Which is why we are drawn to people, events and things which exhibit these qualities, or help us experience these in one way or another.

## Made for God, Made for Joy

Why? Because, as we have mentioned before in our segment on the **Theology of the Body**, we are made in the image and likeness of God, Who IS truth, goodness and beauty. Not only are we made by Him; we are also made *for* Him.

Once we have found Him, we will find joy - joy in its purest essence, a joy that no one and no circumstance, no matter how adverse, can take away from us, as Jesus Himself tells us: “Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (cf. John 16:22)

## More Than a Feeling

Let’s delve a little bit more into what joy truly is. Is it a kind of good feeling that we have when something good happens to us, like striking the lottery or when our children do well in their examinations, or when we are having a fun time at some party? Well, such an emotional state is highly dependent on external factors that make us feel “good”. But joy, true joy, goes a lot deeper than that.

“This joy,” as Pope Francis said, is “not just positive emotions or feeling cheerful.” (Homily, 16 April 2020)

Instead, “The Gospel’s joy [is] the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of that hope that Jesus is waiting for us, the joy that – even with the crosses and sufferings we bear in this life – is expressed in another way, which is peace in the certainty that Jesus accompanies us, is with us.” (Homily, 23 May 2016)

## Joy Amidst Suffering?

Put in another way: it is ok to feel sad when something painful happens in the family. It is ok to grieve when a loved one passes on. These are normal human reactions and emotions. We cannot and must not deny them. Yet despite these pains, our faith in the infinite love of God, according to Pope St John Paul II, “transforms our lives and fills us with joy.”

When we experience this joy, it will show, it will be infectious, and it will be attractive to our children. When that happens, our children will be drawn to us even more, and through us, to Jesus, the source of that joy.

Finally, how can we continue to grow this joy in us? Pope St John Paul II tells us emphatically that true joy “grows through unselfish love.” In other words, joy grows through loving as Jesus loves. Is this easy? Not at all. We need God’s grace, because as St John Paul reminds us, this joy “demands unselfishness; it demands a readiness to say with Mary: ‘Be it done unto me according to Thy word’”. (Angelus, Adelaide, Australia, Sunday, 30 November 1986)

### Summary

1. God is the source of our joy.
2. Our faith in His infinite love fills us with joy and transforms our lives.
3. Our joy grows through self-sacrificial love: for our spouse, our children, and others.
4. This joy that we have and show will draw our children closer to us, and through us, to God. Therefore:
5. Go and have fun with them! Enjoy good times with them, doing things together that they would enjoy. Cultivate a healthy sense of humour too. And share it with your kids. God is not a God of boredom, but a God of joy!

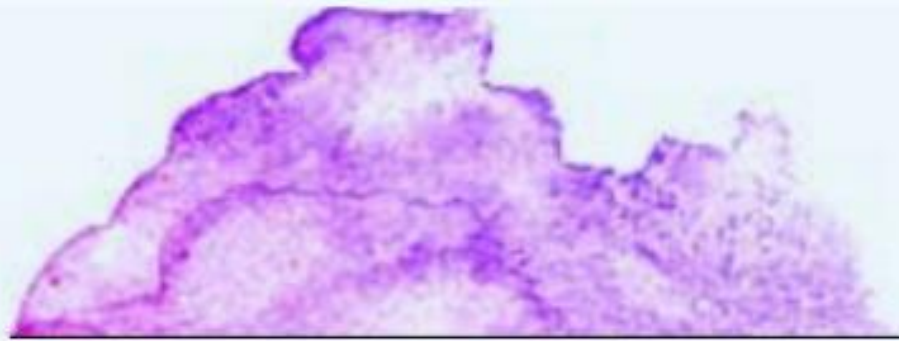
## Reflection Questions

1. Does my faith in God give me hope and joy?
2. How can I experience joy amid suffering which we seem to face so often?
3. Why did Pope St John Paul II say that true joy “grows through unselfish love”?
4. How can I be more joyful in my disposition, in a way that can draw my children closer to me, and to God?

## Resources

1. Angelus, Pope St John Paul II, Adelaide, Australia, Sunday, 30 November 1986.
2. Joy is more than emotion, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, Pope Francis says, Catholic News Agency, 16 April 2020.
3. “The Gospel of Joy” – Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis.

## Notes



'ONLY IF WE DEVOTE TIME TO  
OUR CHILDREN. SPEAKING  
OF IMPORTANT THINGS WITH  
SIMPLICITY AND CONCERN. AND  
FINDING HEALTHY WAYS FOR THEM  
TO SPEND THEIR TIME. WILL WE  
BE ABLE TO SHIELD THEM FROM  
HARM. VIGILANCE IS ALWAYS  
NECESSARY AND NEGLECT IS  
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**Pope Francis**  
Amoris Laetitia, #260