

## YOU.

When using Google Maps, the first piece of information required is your starting point. Without this information, it would be impossible for the website to create directions to your destination. In the same way, in order for your teenagers to understand themselves, they must understand God's original plan in creating them.

In Session Two of the YOU program, we unpack the following topics:

- God created man and woman in his image and likeness.
- God is love, and his call for us to love is stamped into our bodies.
- In the beginning, the innocence of Adam and Eve allowed them to be "naked without shame."
- With the Fall, lust and shame entered our story.
- Original sin still affects our daily lives, but there is hope.

When teenagers think about the story of Adam and Eve, they often remember only three things: a talking snake, an apple, and a naked couple wearing plants. As a result, our teens often give the biblical accounts of Creation about as much credibility as Alice in Wonderland or the Easter Bunny. However, this week will reveal to them the richness and wisdom of what God intended to reveal through our bodies.

### The Power of a Pure Heart

A deeper look at authentic purity shows that Christ came to redeem mankind from the Fall:

In the early Christian Church, several bishops were gathered outside a cathedral in Antioch, when a beautiful prostitute passed by on the street. Upon noticing her, the crowd of bishops looked away to avoid being seduced. Bishop Nonnus, however, stared intently at her and then said to his fellow bishops, "Did not the wonderful beauty of that woman delight you?" The bishops remained silent. Nonnus insisted, "Indeed it delighted me." But he wept for her. When the prostitute saw how the bishop looked at her, she was caught off guard. No man had ever looked at her with such purity. He was not lusting after her, but rather saw something in her that she did not even see in herself. The simple purity of that one bishop's glance marked the beginning of her conversion to Christ. She soon returned to seek his spiritual guidance, and began to follow Christ, later becoming a saint in the Catholic Church, St. Pelagia.

Bishop Nonnus was not afraid that the sight of her body would force him to lust. Rather, her body revealed his call to love her properly. He did not see a prostitute walking toward him—he saw a woman, made in the image and likeness of God. Though he lived many centuries ago he truly lived out the call of the Theology of the Body (TOB) that gives every person the task to assign dignity to every other person.

While we need to practice "custody of the eyes" and avoid occasions of sin, God ultimately wants to transform our hearts so that we are not afraid we will lust every time we see an attractive person. This is the freedom exhibited by Bishop Nonnus and offered to all of us. Similarly, God offered St. Pelagia freedom and gave her the grace to stop allowing herself to be used. No matter how old we are, where we have been, or what we have done, purity is possible.

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## The Spousal Meaning of the Body

While the story of Bishop Nonnus and St. Pelagia should inspire us toward the goal of Christian purity, it also reveals something of our origin. In the beginning, God created man and woman in his image and likeness. Adam and Eve were naked, and yet they experienced no shame. How was it that Adam could look upon the body of Eve and not lust?

At the time of Creation, everything was pure, including the heart of man. For example, Adam experienced sexual desire in a totally pure way. When Adam first saw Eve, he saw her as God intended her to be seen. There was no lust. When he saw her body, he did not want to use her. He saw and experienced his call to love her. This may be hard to imagine because many teenagers (and adults) have been led to believe that sexual union is bad or "dirty." But when God originally designed us, sexual desire was the desire to love in the image of God. In other words, sexual desire was a pure desire to give to the other. Sexual desire was an expression of the person who desired to make a gift of self (a self-donation) to another person. Their innocence allowed Adam and Eve to be naked without shame.

But Adam and Eve's innocence was not based on naïveté. Rather, it was an ability to see rightly. Because of the purity of their hearts, Adam and Eve's naked bodies revealed their call to make a gift of themselves to each other. This is what the TOB called the "spousal meaning of the body." In the physical design of their bodies, Adam and Eve saw that their bodies literally fit together; they knew they were made for a communion that is sacred. This union was not merely a physical one, but was a fully personal one. This is what is meant by the "spousal meaning of the body."

God made them as a gift for each other. By giving themselves to one another, Adam and Eve were able to mirror the very life of God. The Trinity is a communion of persons, a family of love.

Unfortunately, with the Fall of Adam and Eve, this original innocence was lost. They realized that they were naked, and shame entered the picture. Although some people would like to think that original sin is simply a quaint religious idea, its effects are hard to dispute.

John Paul II noted that before sin entered the picture, Eve enjoyed "all the peace of the interior gaze." By this, he meant that she did not feel threatened by the possibility of being used. Rather, she knew in her heart that she was being looked upon as respected and beloved. However, after the Fall, humans began to experience a restless vulnerability in their relationships. Something was lost.

## The Effects of Shame

Adam and Eve did not trust God's plan for them, and this same attitude of prideful distrust is alive and well today. We will (you can as well!) ask your teenagers to consider for themselves:

- How often do we doubt the goodness of God and feel the need to break away from him in order to satisfy our desires?

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- How often do we want to decide for ourselves what is right instead of trusting God and following his ways?
- How often do we grasp at what feels like love, only to discover that it was a counterfeit? We are left with regrets, and we may even come to doubt that love is possible.

Because of original sin, mankind forgets the goodness of the body. Sadly, many people today even harbor a sense of hatred for their own bodies. Eating disorders, cutting, and drug use are often symptoms of self-loathing. Because we are bombarded by a culture that expects every man to have six-pack abs and every woman to wear a size zero, most of our teens (and us adults) feel inadequate.

While some people are ashamed of their bodies, others deal with shame by becoming shameless. In other words, they learn to feel no remorse for their desire to use another person or to be used themselves. They make no effort to overcome this selfish urge with selfless love. This usually happens because they have numbed their consciences or been violated by others and think there is nothing valuable about themselves to protect.

### The Hope of Redemption

However, original sin has not annihilated our ability to love. TOB shows us that only true love is capable of absorbing shame. This means that shame is “swallowed up by love, dissolved in it, so that the man and woman are no longer ashamed” of sharing themselves and their sexuality with each other. When a husband and wife understand each other’s value as persons, they are safe. There should be no shame, because they are making a total gift of themselves in life-giving love. After all, what could be shameful about loving as God loves?

Because of the redemption that is offered to us in Christ, our hearts can be renewed. Because Christ’s death on the Cross won for us the grace not only to be saved, but also to transform our fallen inclinations. Giving us the ability to grasp, in a small way, a bit of that original nakedness without shame. We can experience the authentic, safe, self-donating love we all seek.

### Questions for Your Teen

1. How can the way a person dresses affect the way others view him or her?
2. Why do you think fashions have become more immodest over time?
3. If men and women desire love, why do you think so many dress, dance, and act in a way that seems to distract others from their real value?
4. Do you think that guys and girls see the value in the opposite sex?
5. What do you think it means to “trust God”?
6. Do you trust God?

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## Family Application

1. When God created man and woman, he said that they were "very good." Many students today are starved for affirmation, and they can make poor relationship decisions when flattered by a member of the opposite sex. To help your children (and spouse) know their value, try praising them at least twice for every time you offer advice or criticism.
2. Many modern fashions are shameless. In order to encourage dignity, do not be afraid to talk to your students about what they wear. Use it as an opportunity to explain how immodest attire distracts others from seeing their real value and their real dignity.
3. Many people feel unable to compete with the starving models depicted in the media. And even more people expect others to live up to those standards. In order to create an environment free of such unrealistic expectations, affirm their dignity and worth based not on cultural perceptions, but on their Imago Dei. This may mean saying no to certain images, movies, or other media that causes unrealistic expectations to be the norm. Although your student might claim their "first amendment rights" or protest against such an "exercise of unconstitutional censorship," stand firm in your resolve to maintain a home with healthy bodily expectations. It may also be helpful to use this time as a teaching moment by giving your student an explanation on how you deem things as dignifying or not. This sends a message that you are not being unreasonable or random in your choices, but that our call as Christians is to work towards dignifying and loving all others and ourselves.