



The Body and Relationships – Chapter II

“In the Beginning”

Genesis 2:18 – 25

UNDERSTANDING

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DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Genesis 2:18 – 25

Goal

Our bodies are a theology; they teach us about God. Our male and female bodies show that we are made for spousal communion, an image of the Trinitarian communion. Shame works in the opposite direction, keeping us from meaningful relationships.

Context: The Beginning

Why do you have a body? To answer this question, let's take our direction from Jesus. After they questioned Him about divorce, Jesus told the Pharisees to go back to the beginning, and I think we should do the same. If we want to know why God made humans with bodies, consider the first human: Adam. Adam first appears in Genesis 2, which says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden." At first Adam is alone in the Garden (Gen 2:15 – 17), but God sees this and says, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). God then sets out to make Adam a companion, but He doesn't have much luck. God makes rocks, plants and animals; Adam knows that he is different from all these. He's not a rock, plant, animal or any other created thing. **Adam is a person.** Looking around at creation,

Adam sees that “there was not found a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:20). Adam is alone in the Garden. He is in solitude. John Paul II called this experience “Original Solitude,” and the term doesn’t only refer to Adam. In the beginning of their lives, just like Adam, every man and woman finds themselves in solitude.

Solitude can be a good thing. We learn a lot about ourselves in solitude. Think about your own experiences of solitude. What did you learn in these experiences? Maybe you’ve taken a trip or gone on a retreat, and maybe you’ve learned something about yourself through these experiences. Solitude allows us to ask deep questions — questions like “God, who are you?” and “Who am I?” Especially when someone is young, solitude is a great time to ask these questions. So solitude is good, but it’s also difficult. That’s why God says “It is not good that man should be alone.”

Ultimately, it’s not good for any of us to be alone. While everyone starts in solitude, most of us are not called to remain there. In the end, solitude teaches us two things. First, in solitude we learn that we are not like rocks, trees or animals. We are persons. And second, in solitude we learn that we are not made to stay in solitude: We are made for relationship! Adam did not make sense to himself when he was all by himself. And this is true not only for Adam’s inner life, but also for Adam’s outward existence, his life in the world. He is meant to be a life-giving creation, like every natural creature (yes, the birds and bees) around him. A man’s body makes no sense without a woman’s body, and vice versa.

So why do you have a body? Well, the answer probably has something to do with relationship. Adam’s very body is a kind of bridge that builds a relationship between two worlds. He’s the high point of all creation because he can ponder, wonder and love. And Adam is the being God

made physical, to receive His gift of creation and be able to thank God for it all. Adam's body is the meeting place that connects his senses to the life of the spirit. But he longs for something more than just what his senses stir in him. He thirsts for love, for communion with another person like him with whom he can form a deeper relationship.

Main Point: God's Image and Likeness

God knows that Adam needs a relationship. He puts Adam in a deep sleep and creates Eve from Adam's rib. The symbolism of being created from Adam's rib reveals that Eve is another person just like Adam. Upon waking, Adam says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Adam has finally found someone with whom he can have a relationship!

Now here is the amazing thing about Adam's discovery of Eve. Adam rejoiced in Eve even before he spoke to her. Adam recognized Eve as a person on the basis of her body! And this is an important point in the *Theology of the Body*: **The body reveals the person.** Adam's masculine body reveals his masculine person, and Eve's feminine body reveals her feminine person. Further, our masculine and feminine bodies show that, as persons, we are not meant to be alone. The male body makes no sense without the female body, and vice versa. This is why John Paul says that "It is only through the duality of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' that the 'human' finds full realization" ("Letter to Women" sec. 7).

Together, men and women are meant to form a communion, and this communion is meant to remind us of another communion: the Trinity. Traditionally, the Trinity has been understood as an eternal exchange of love. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit form a communion of loving Persons. This Divine Communion is difficult to describe, but we do know that *relationship lies at the heart of the Trinity*. The Father,

Son and Holy Spirit are in relationship with one another. Now what does this have to do with the body? Well, perhaps you remember the following verse from Genesis:

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; **male and female he created them** (Gn. 1:27).”

What does it mean to image God as male and female? Once again, the answer lies in the *relationship* between men and women. Similar to the Trinity, spouses form a communion of persons. Just like Genesis says, the two become “one flesh.” Then, nine months later, the loving union between the husband and wife is literally born. Father, mother and child form a single family. They form a human communion of persons! So the earthly relationship between husband, wife and child reflects in a certain sense a tiny spark of the eternal, self-giving love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The loving union of a man, woman and child images the loving union of God.

This is our first window into a *sacramental* understanding of the body. A sacrament is a visible, physical sign of an invisible, spiritual reality. Acting like bridges, the sacraments take divine, heavenly realities and transport them to our earthly experience. This is what bodies are meant to do. Our bodies are physical signs of God, which make Him present. This happens most especially in the sacrament of marriage when the two become “one flesh.” But even outside the sacrament of marriage, we should learn to see bodies — all bodies — as physical signs of God’s love.

So why do you have a body? You have a body to reveal the image and likeness of God! This is why we say that the body is a theology. Theology is the study of the God. Theologians, for example, study Scripture, because Scripture reveals God. But Scripture is not the only

source of knowledge about God; we have other sources, and the body is one of them. For this reason, there is in fact a theology of the body.

For those striving to follow God’s plan, this can be an important realization. Because sexuality is often misused, it can be tempting to perceive all sexual activity in a negative light — but this is not the Catholic view. According to the Catholic Church, sex is a beautiful thing. In many ways, our sexuality is the most beautiful thing. Why? Because sex and marriage teach us about God. So the Catholic Church does not have a negative view of sex. In fact, the Catholic Church has a higher view of sex than anyone else in the world.

Application: Shame and Self-Gift

When Adam awakens and sees Eve, he exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” It’s interesting to note that Adam recognizes Eve as a feminine person just by seeing her body. He sees Eve’s body and immediately knows that this body is not the body of an animal, but the body of a person. In this moment, Adam knows he is no longer alone in the world, and he forms a communion, or “co-union,” with Eve. This original union was a union of persons, not just of bodies. Adam (a masculine person) found himself enriched by Eve, and Eve (a feminine person) found herself enriched by Adam. John Paul II calls the relationship between Adam and Eve “Original Unity.”

Adam and Eve’s perfect unity is possible because of what John Paul II calls “Original Nakedness.” When Adam first sees Eve, he leaps for joy. But it is not the mere physical dimension of Eve’s nakedness that causes him to leap for joy. Rather, Eve’s exterior nakedness shows forth her interior soul. When Adam sees Eve’s body, he does not just see a body; he sees a body that revealed a soul. That is, Eve’s feminine body revealed her equally feminine interiority. And neither Adam nor

Eve felt a need to cover themselves. As Scripture says, “They were naked and felt no shame.”

After sin, Adam and Eve did feel the need to cover their nakedness. Here you might ask a question: If bodies are so good, why did Adam and Eve cover themselves? The answer is shame. Depending on how you use the word, shame can be either a good or a bad thing.

On the positive side, shame acts as a protection against being used. Like we said before, the body expresses the person, and people don’t like it when their bodies are viewed separately from their personhood. After falling away from the Garden, Adam and Eve no longer “see” like they used to see. Instead of seeing the body as a window into the heart and as a sacrament of God’s love, Adam and Eve are prone to forget the person and just focus on the body. This is bad, and we feel ashamed both when we do it to other people and when other people do it to us. This is illustrated in ordinary experience. Imagine, for example, that you accidentally enter a room where someone else is changing. This person will likely respond by quickly covering themselves. Instinctively, they know that people have a tendency to see one another incorrectly, and shame protects people from this incorrect way of seeing. Shame also keeps us from viewing other people inappropriately. Imagine a young boy caught spying on a woman’s locker room.; when caught, he turns red and feels ashamed. Instinctively, he knows he has done something wrong. In this way, shame is a good instinct. The good kind of shame encourages us to experience our bodies correctly, both in the way we see others and in the way we allow ourselves to be seen.

Unfortunately, there is also a bad kind of shame. Sometimes we’re so afraid of being hurt, the defense mechanism of shame spirals out of control. Bad shame applies more to our hearts than our bodies.

Understanding / "In the Beginning"

Bad shame prevents us from revealing ourselves because of fear of judgment or inadequacy. We're afraid of what others might think, so we don't allow ourselves to be vulnerable. This can happen when we try to make ourselves appear better than we are or when we don't reveal our faults and weaknesses. In short, shame sometimes gets out of control, and this is a bad thing.

Now in the beginning, Adam and Eve were not ashamed. Neither Adam nor Eve struggled with shame. Why? Adam and Eve did not use each other for themselves; instead, they gave of themselves to each other. John Paul II often said that "Man finds himself in a sincere gift of self" (GS 24:3). Before the fall, Adam and Eve experienced their bodies perfectly. They had no fear of being seen incorrectly, so they experienced their sexuality authentically, without shame.

So how do we get back to an authentic experience of spousal love? Paradoxically, the answer has something to do with solitude. The best relationships are those in which both individuals are confident in their own identity. Like we said at the beginning of this study, Adam and Eve realized their own identity in the experience of solitude. Solitude can be a powerful tool for us as well! You see, the more confidence we have in our own identity as men and women, the better we will be able to give ourselves to one another. Though we will never do it perfectly, it is important to realize our own identity before giving that identity to someone else.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 2:18 – 25

BEFORE WE BEGIN...

Leader Note: Before beginning, it is important to iterate to the participants that this study will not talk about anything controversial just yet. The intention is not to avoid controversy but rather to understand the Church in greater depth. Paradoxically, the best way to understand the issues of the Catholic Church and sexuality is to set those issues aside and shift focus to the foundations. Thus, this study is not going to start with controversial things like homosexuality, contraception, divorce, transgender, etc. We will return to those things later. For now, at least at the beginning, this study will begin where the Church herself begins: that is, with a sense of wonder at the beauty of the body and sexuality. You have a lot to cover in this chapter, so make sure to keep things moving!

Context

1. Solitude and Relationship

Leader Note: This question about solitude is vitally important. The question has two goals: one, to show students that they need to be solid in their own identity before identifying with another person in a relationship; and two, to show that solitude enables us to know ourselves better so that we can one day give of ourselves.

A. Read: Genesis 2:18 – 20.

B. State: Adam is alone in the Garden. John Paul II calls this experience “Original Solitude.” In solitude Adam learned about his own identity.

C. Ask: How do you know that Adam is learning about his own identity?

Answer: Because “he did not find a helper fit for him”; he sees that he is different from the rest of creation.

D. Ask: What did Adam learn in the Garden?

Response: He knows that he is not a thing (not a rock, plant or animal). Thus, inanimate objects cannot be his companion because they are not equal to him. Adam is a person: Unlike the animals, he is capable of self-knowledge, self-possession and self-gift. Only another person, equal to Adam in dignity, can be his true companion.

E. What does Adam's experience teach us?

Response: Allow group to apply these concepts to their own lives.

F. Ask: Have you ever had an experience where, in solitude (and maybe silence), you came to a deeper understanding of who you are, i.e. your identity?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. You're looking for students to talk about experiences when they learned about their own identity by being alone. You may wish to provide a story yourself. Time alone with God, especially as a young person, can be a powerful time to understand our identity in Christ and our identity as men and women.

G. Ask: God says that "It is not good that man should be alone." Why?

Response: A man's body shows that he is incomplete in himself. He is made for relationship! In original solitude, Adam experiences two things. The first we have already said: Adam (human), insofar as he is different from the rest of creation, is alone in the Garden. But here we will focus on another dimension of solitude. Adam (male), insofar as he is made for a woman, is alone without Eve. Adam's body shows that he is made for Eve. In a certain sense, he is incomplete without her. Our bodies show us that we are made for relationship and self-gift. But, you might wonder, why are we made for relationship...?

Main Thing

1. The Body and the Trinity

Leader Note: This is meant to be a wow! God is Trinity, and the Trinity is an eternal relationship of love between three Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is a connection between the loving relationship of a married couple and the Trinity.

A. Read Genesis 1:27.

B. State: Notice what this verse says, “So God created man in his own image...**male and female he created them.**” This means that we do not only image God as individuals. We also image God when we come together as men and women. But what does this mean?

C. Ask: I think we can answer this question with another question. Does a man’s body make sense by itself?

Response: No.

D. Ask: Does a woman’s body make sense by itself?

Response: No.

E. Ask: Does a man’s body and a woman’s body make sense in relation to each other?

Response: Yes.

F. What can we learn from this about God?

Response: Just as a man's body and a woman's body make sense in relationship with each other, so it is best to understand God, the Trinity, as three Persons in relationship with each other. Husbands and wives form a communion of persons, and this human communion images the Persons in the Trinity. Father, mother and child form a single family. So the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is reflected, in a certain sense, in the relationship between husband, wife and child.

Leader Note: Our culture doesn't think that bodies mean anything. It wants to tell us that what you do with your body doesn't matter because bodies themselves don't matter. This is false. The body reveals the person, and our bodies testify that we are made for communion, a communion which images God's Trinitarian love!

A. State: Genesis 1:27 shows us that we reflect the image of God
IN OUR BODIES! God is a relationship of love. And our bodies,
as male and female, are made for relationship as well!

B. Ask: What does it mean to say that there is a "theology of the
body"?

Response: The theology of the body is the great mystery of how the invisible (God) becomes visible through the physical (us!). John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* presents a vision of human life that sees male and female bodies as more than mere hunks of matter, but as signs which point to divine realities. Just like a *sacrament* (a visible sign communicating an invisible reality), human sexual love reveals the mystery of God! We image God's relational, life-giving love through our complementary love for one another!

Application

Leader Note: In this section, you want to do three things. First, you want to help your students realize the devastating effects of the Fall. Before sin, Adam and Eve had a perfect experience of sexuality, but the Fall brought brokenness and shame. We're fallen, and the Fall has had disastrous effects on our sexuality. Second, your goal is to give your students hope and help them begin to heal from the devastating effects of shame. Sometimes the best way to heal from shame is by beginning to share the causes of shame. Be prudent with this conversation, but know this can be an excellent opportunity to teach students to share their crosses. Encourage your students to invite Jesus into their brokenness. If you feel comfortable, perhaps you might share some of the brokenness and healing you have experienced in your own life.

1. *Original Unity and Nakedness*
 - A. State: Adam is made for relationship, so God did not leave him alone in the Garden. Let's read about the creation of Eve.
 - B. Read: Genesis: 2:21 – 25.
 - C. Ask: In verse 23, we see Adam recognize Eve as his companion: "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" But Eve had not yet said anything. How did Adam know that she was another person?

Response: Adam saw Eve's **body** and immediately knew she was a person, a companion, a "helper fit for him." For Adam, Eve's body revealed her person!

Discussion / "In the Beginning"

Leader Note: For those familiar with Theology of the Body, I encourage you to briefly explain Original Nakedness and Original Unity. Key points include the following: Adam and Eve experienced a relationship that was free from lust; their bodily nakedness was a means for expressing their person. When Adam saw Eve's body, he rejoiced because he had finally found a person who could serve as his equal and companion, a "helper fit for him." Adam knew that Eve was a person based on seeing her body! Adam and Eve saw each other with purity; they saw the person revealed in the body. They "read" the "language" of the body as God had written it. In the beginning, man was pure and knew himself to be a person who was meant to give himself as a gift back to God and to another. When Adam saw Eve, he knew he had found the other person he could give himself to. He had no desire to use her for his own selfish desires. He wanted to give himself to her and to lovingly receive her. This sort of love images the love of the Trinity!

2. Shame

A. Ask: Genesis 2:25 says that Adam and Eve did not experience shame. Why not?

Response: Before sin, Adam and Eve experienced their bodies correctly. They knew their own dignity. Note that this is different than either prostitution or pornography. Prostitutes are shameless; that is, they don't have shame when they should have it. A prostitute has not cultivated an appreciation for the beauty of their body. In fact, exactly the opposite is the case: Prostitutes allow others to use their bodies as separate from their persons.

B. Ask: We all know that Adam and Eve did not remain perfect in the Garden. What happened to change their experience of the body?

C. Read Genesis 3:1 – 7.

D. Ask: John Paul II says that **shame** lies at the heart of our broken relationships. Why do you think Adam and Eve felt ashamed!?

Response: Adam and Eve lost the purity of their gaze! Whereas before Adam and Eve saw each other as persons, they have now learned to see each other as objects. That said, both Adam and Eve know that deep down they should not view each other as objects. When they do so, or when they experience the other doing so, they often blush! They feel ashamed!

E. Ask: Have you ever experienced this sort of shame? Do you currently struggle with shame?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. Depending on the group, this might be a good time to discuss the shame that is usually brought about by sexual sin.

F. Ask: Do you think that shame is keeping you from authentic relationship?

Response: Yes! When we are ashamed we hide from others, but our bodies show us that we're made for relationship! We are made to see and be seen in purity!

G. Ask: Is there a way out of shame?

Response: Only Jesus can restore our sight and give us the power to love as He loves, the way we did "in the beginning." We must let Jesus into our lives to transform us if we want to live without shame and learn to love. This is necessary to experience deep relationships of any kind: familial, platonic and romantic. We must invite Jesus into our brokenness!

H. Ask: Practically, is there a way out of shame?

Response: How can we learn to experience sexuality without shame? Paradoxically, the answer has something to do with solitude. The best relationships are those in which both individuals are confident in their own identity. Like we said at the beginning of this study, Adam and Eve realized their identity in the experience of solitude. Solitude can be a powerful tool for us as well! You see, the more confidence we have in our own identity as men and women, the better we will be able to give ourselves to one another. John Paul II says that "man finds himself in a sincere gift of self." Though we will never do it perfectly, it is important to realize our own identity before giving that identity to someone else.