

FULLY ALIVE



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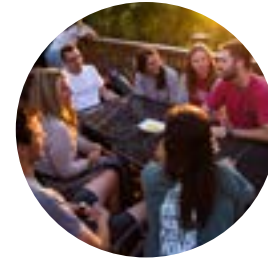
FULLY ALIVE

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Chapter I

Image and Identity

CHAPTER 1

IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to a Deeper Identity

Leader's Guide:

There is no doubt that Greek life contributes to a unique, formative, and often all-encompassing college experience for those who participate in it. We want to contribute to and foster the goodness that can come from a student's participation in Greek life throughout their time in college by integrating it into a relationship with Christ and Christ's vision for our lives.

In this study, you will lead your participants through a discussion of various topics that many students encounter, but are often amplified in Greek life, such as relationships, alcohol, and the desire for success, and how these topics can be seen through the lens of faith. Through these conversations, there is a great opportunity for us as Bible study leaders to provide a space for the Lord to transform the hearts and minds of those involved, to inspire them with the assurance that they are known and loved by Him and made for a relationship with Him. With this, we hope to inspire and equip them with the knowledge and understanding they need to become amazing leaders in their chapters!

Many people view Christians as people who adhere to moral principles and try to be good people. While it's true that Christians are striving to be the best versions of themselves, that striving isn't an end in and of itself, but the result of a life surrendered to Jesus Christ. You, as the Bible study leader, will bring your participants back to the Gospel message as you walk through the various topics that make up this Bible study. This Gospel message is the foundation and the only thing that makes everything else in this study make sense. It is the one message that will eternally make one fully alive.

Note: This first chapter will be the longest in the study, as it lays the foundation of our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God. In the remaining chapters, we will explore how other topics in Greek life relate to this foundational identity. Feel free to take your time with this first chapter!

Please take your time preparing these studies. Discern how much of the content you will want to read to your participants, or summarize in your own words. Be prudent with your group, and feel free to cut back or add as needed!

Introduction: Living Fully Alive

(Please read aloud.)

"The glory of God is man fully alive." – Saint Irenaeus

What does it mean to be fully alive? Is that something you desire?

This Bible study was written specifically for you – students involved in Greek life! College is an awesome time in many people's lives, and

your experiences in Greek life can add to these adventures. However, there are also some unique challenges in Greek life that can pose threats to becoming fully alive in Christ.

Throughout this study, we will explore some of the opportunities and challenges in Greek life and ultimately how we can become fully alive through six different topics that relate to you in Greek life. You will reflect on your own viewpoints and study what God and the Church have to say on these topics. Lastly, you will learn some practical points on how to live an integrated life and embrace being fully alive in the following areas: identity, relationships, sex, alcohol, success and rest.

This Bible study finds its root in the truth of the Gospel: God desires a relationship with each one of us so much that Jesus became man and died on the cross. He did this in order to set right the relationship between God and man so we could have eternal life with him in heaven. This study grows from the root of the Gospel and considers the effects on our lives of a God who so radically loves us.

1. What do you think it means to be “fully alive”? Have you ever experienced a time when you felt “fully alive”?

Response: Let the group discuss.

(Read John 10:10.)

Ultimately, life with Christ is what it means to be free, and Fully Alive!

Fully Alive: Our Identity

Whether or not you remember a time when you’ve felt “fully alive,” the truth is that *we were created to be fully alive*. And yet we also know that it’s easy not to feel this way. There are plenty of things that distract us or keep us from living this way.

In order to more fully understand what it means to be fully alive, we have to know for what we were created. How can we know what we were created for? We can turn to the source. Let’s turn to the very beginning of Scripture to hear what God says about what we were created for.

(Read Genesis 1:23 – 27, 31.)

2. Let’s make sure we’re all on the same page: how does Scripture say that God made human beings?

Response: In God’s image and likeness.

3. What do you think it means to be made in the image and likeness of God? What does this tell you about how God views humanity?

Response: Let the group discuss. Ultimately, this tells us that God views humanity as his own children, as the phrase “image and likeness” is later used to describe Adam and his son Seth — Seth was in Adam’s “image and likeness” (Gen. 5:3). This phrase describes a parent/child relationship. A further implication, then, is that we are created to be in relationship with God and even to become like him.

4. And how does God describe his creation in verse 31?

Response: Very good!

5. Notice that God makes this statement before humanity has done a single thing other than exist — they have not earned any of their goodness; it was purely how they were created. What are the implications of this truth for our lives and how we view ourselves?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: accepting ourselves as we are created, not having to earn our worth or God's love, viewing ourselves as part of the larger family of God, etc.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Take a moment to put your own name in this Scripture passage, and sit with the fact that God made YOU very good.

What else does God say about what we were created for? We've looked at the idea of "image" in the light of Sacred Scripture; now let's dive even deeper by seeing what the Church has to say about our "image."

The Catechism expounds on how awesome it is to be made in God's image, without detracting from the rest of Creation: "The manifold perfections of creatures — their truth, their goodness, their beauty — all reflect the perfection of God" (CCC 41).¹

6. In what ways do you think creation, nature, or the world around us reflect the perfection of God?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: the beauty of nature; the vastness of the world; the incredibly small details of creation that reveal God's handiwork, etc.

7. In what ways do you think men and women even more closely reflect the perfection of God? How have you seen glimpses of God in other people?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: encountering the love of God in family, strangers' acts of kindness, the greatness of God on display through various talents, etc.

8. In what ways does humanity *not* reflect God and his goodness? Why do we often fall short of reflecting who God is, even when we were created in his image and likeness?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: original sin; the gift of our free will, which allows us to choose something other than God; our weaknesses or fears.

Seeking Our Own Image

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

We have looked at how we are created in the image of God and what a profound truth that is. However, any of us can probably recognize the ways that we don't live with confidence in this image and instead are tempted to view ourselves as less than or unworthy to be children of God. In particular, we will look at four areas in which we are tempted to find our image and our worth **apart** from God: approval and appreciation; emotional and physical comfort; security and control; and influence and power.

Each of these four areas has the potential to drive us to find our image and our purpose in things other than God, or to make us forget

our relationship with God completely. Each week, we will connect our topic to these four areas and how they ultimately cause us to live less fully alive and less who we were created to be. This week, we will consider a few ways that we might be tempted to seek our image from the world and not from God:

- When we seek the **approval and appreciation of others**, we can find ourselves doing or saying things to gain attention from the world, rather than knowing that we are always seen and loved by God. *Examples: Getting drunk or providing alcohol to minors at parties so that you are liked, buying expensive and superfluous clothing, working to maintain the status of your chapter amongst IFC and Panhellenic and taking pride in the “tier system.”*
- When we seek **emotional or physical comfort**, we can trade the greatness to which God is calling us for our own lesser or selfish desires out of fear or laziness. *Examples: Missing class because we are exhausted from a terrible night, relying too heavily on a brother or sister for their friendship, sleeping around, one night stands, getting drunk, late night binge eating.*
- **When we seek security and control**, we can try to take our life into our own hands, rather than trusting that God is truly in control and never stops working for our good (Rom. 8:28). *Examples: Not going to bed at a decent hour because we are too worried about the executive duties that we have, staying up late studying to make perfect grades, cheating to maintain your reputation without putting in the real work to learn and do well in classes.*
- When we seek **influence and power**, we can be tempted to believe that our status or our position are what give us worth and the hope for a fruitful or successful future, while both of

these things can only be found in God. *Examples: Hazing new members to gain authority over them, ruining friendships within your chapter because of an excessive drive for an executive position, tearing other chapters down who you consider to be less than yours, unhealthy pride in your status in Greek life as you relate to non-Greek students in class or other groups on campus.*

9. Which of these human desires do you find yourself seeking most often? How might seeking these things from the world make you less fully alive?

Response: Let the group discuss. A potential follow-up question: What are you actually seeking when you are pursuing these things? Help your group realize that all of what they are seeking from the world in these areas is found in God in a more perfect way than could ever be offered by the world.

10. How might God be inviting you to surrender your pursuit of these false sources of image to him? How is God truly the answer to what you are seeking?

Response: Let the group discuss.²

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

God desires us to live fully alive. He created us as the prize of creation, to be his own sons and daughters. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us:

“True happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement – however beneficial it may be – such as science, technology and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God

alone, the source of every good and of all love.” (CCC 1723)

11. Have you encountered true happiness in God throughout your life? If you have, what was that experience like? If you have not, have you desired to know God more deeply?

Response: Let the group discuss.

Made in God’s Image: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time, or, share your own!)

Male Testimony:

Leading up to college, I struggled tremendously with how I thought others viewed me. I wanted to be seen as in control, influential and popular. In high school I chased these images by planting my identity firmly in athletics; but when I graduated, I felt I needed a new platform that would help project these images. I found that platform through fraternity life. This façade I labored to keep up led to abuse of alcohol, unhealthy relationships, vanity issues and ultimately an exhausting and enslaved way of living. It wasn’t until the Lord met me at rock bottom in confession that I began to discover my true identity as his beloved son and the peace and freedom that came from seeking to please him alone.

Female Testimony:

As a new member in my sorority, I quickly found myself placing, and even grasping for, my identity in the people I hung out with and the things we were doing. I knew I was created for more, but

nobody seemed to care. I was losing who I was, and I felt lost. It was only after attending a FOCUS conference and remembering who I was and what I truly wanted that I began to live out of my daughterhood as a daughter of God. At first, I tried to maintain both identities, but that was exhausting. When I finally let go of being “cool” and “accepted” and “fun” and leaned fully into being chosen by God, my life changed forever. Being the “Catholic girl” in my sorority became one of the greatest sources of joy in my life. It allowed me to love women authentically for who they really were, because I knew I was loved for who I was. In letting go of the slavery of “fitting in,” I became free and would continue to invite my friends into this freedom for the rest of my time as a Greek woman in college.

12. What is one thing you want to commit to this week to reorient your understanding of your own identity or to bear more fully the image and likeness of God?

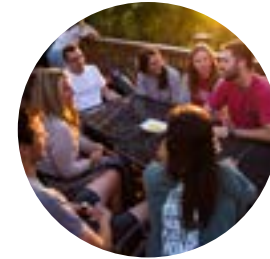
Response: Let the group discuss; be sure your students make a written commitment that you can follow up with next week! Examples include: spending 10-15 minutes of quiet time each day in prayer or reading Scripture; attending a retreat or faith-based event on campus; going to Mass on Sunday or daily; learning more about the saints; spending time daily in creation contemplating God.

¹ Read CCC 2500 to expound on what the transcendentals Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are if your participants want a deeper understanding here.

² Note to leader: If your group desires to go deeper here, desires a more scriptural foundation or is homing in on one certain area from the four above, feel free to share or discuss the following Scripture verses for guidance on surrendering or more rightly viewing the four areas in terms of our faith:

- Approval and Appreciation: 1 Thess. 2:3 – 6
- Emotional and Physical Comfort: John 16:32 – 33
- Security and Control: Matt. 6:25 – 33
- Influence and Power: 1 Pet. 3: 3 – 4)

NOTES



Chapter II

Relationships



CHAPTER 2

RELATIONSHIPS

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to Rightly Ordered Relationships

Leader's Guide:

Last week, we discussed the truth of our identity as sons and daughters of God and how we were created to be fully alive in this image and identity. But we know that we were created not just for relationship with God but also for relationships with others, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. These could be a number of relationships: family, friends, significant others, classmates, coworkers or neighbors. Regardless of the kind of relationship, Scripture tells us, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18).

This chapter will help us navigate the real desires we have for authentic and life-giving relationships and the struggles we face to get there. Our relationships can point us to God and his goodness in so many ways; but when they are out of order with God's designs, they can also be a source of confusion, pain, anger, and temptation to sin. It's our hope that your participants will see that it is ultimately an intimate relationship with the person of Jesus Christ who will fulfill our desire to be known, loved and cared for, and that relationships are a good insofar as they point us and others back to him.

Introduction: Identity and Relationships

(Please read aloud.)

Last week, we discussed the truth of our identity as sons and daughters of God and how we were created to be fully alive in this image and identity. Today we are going to explore the truth that we were created not just for relationship with God but also for relationships with others, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. These could be a number of relationships: family, friends, significant others, classmates, coworkers, or neighbors. Regardless of the kind of relationship, Scripture tells us, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). To kick us off, let's consider the following question:

1. Which relationships in your life are the most significant or impactful? What about them makes them so significant? How have they affected or changed you?

Response: Let the group discuss.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Looking back on last week's discussion and our study of Genesis, we learned we are made in God's image and likeness. Today, we're going to look at another characteristic of God and what that means for how we were created.

(Read 1 John 4:8.)

2. We hear all the time that God loves us; but love isn't just what God does; it's who he is. What does that mean?

Response: Ultimately, love isn't only an action that God does, but it truly is at the heart of who he is. See section below on the Trinity.

When we say that God is love, we know that God has revealed himself as a relationship of persons. God is a Triune God, meaning he is three distinct Persons in one - the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Many of us know this, but the truth of it is profound and worth pondering: God the Father is constantly loving God the Son, and the love between them is so real that it is a third Person, the Holy Spirit. All three are constantly and eternally existing in a relationship of perfect love.

3. Using what you know from the Gospels, how is the Trinity described or explained? How is God revealed as Father? How is Jesus described in relation to the Father? What about the Holy Spirit?

Response: Jesus is revealed as the Son at the Annunciation (Luke 1:35) and throughout the Gospels when he prays to God as Father (Matt. 6:9; John 17:1, 21). At the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples that he will send his Spirit to be with them (John 15: 26). Based on the knowledge of your group, feel free to direct your group to read any of these cited Scripture passages to help their understanding.

4. If, as we learned last week, we were created in the image and likeness of God, and if God himself is a union of three Persons, what does that tell us about what we are made for in terms of relationships?

Response: We are created to be in relationship - with God and with others, as God is within himself. Our very nature is to love and to be loved, to be in relationship. God is love, and we are created to become like him in this.

Relationships and "Original Justice"

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

It's clear that we are made for relationship. However, we are not made for just any relationships, and we are not made for all relationships at the same time or in the same way. There is a divine order to healthy relationships, and we're going to explore that today. Without order in our relationships, we may end up missing the good fruits of them that God intends, and we may even experience negative consequences that keep us from thriving. We can say it this way: insofar as our understanding of relationships is skewed, our ability to be "fully alive" is seriously jeopardized.

Let's go back to Genesis and to the creation story that we talked about last week. In the story of creation, and before sin and distrust entered the world, God created man in a state of harmony in multiple areas: "The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him" (CCC 374).

The Catechism describes this original state -- our state before we sinned against God and where our lives were in perfect harmony -- as "original justice" (CCC 376). The idea of "justice" can, at times, have a negative connotation in our culture today; however, here it is referring to a right order, with everything in its rightful spot in the order. In the Garden, "original justice" looked like this:

- 1) Harmony with God first, as our Creator and Father
- 2) Harmony within oneself, which includes a full understanding and embracing of our identity as sons and daughters of God

- 3) Harmony with others, to live in relationship as we were created in the image and likeness of the Trinity
- 4) Harmony with creation, to cultivate and care for creation as it was entrusted to us by God

Though sin has since entered the picture and ruptured the original harmony and original justice of the Garden in Genesis, we can still see the rightful order in how we were created.

5. Why is it a “just” order for these four harmonies to fall into this order? Why would a different order be less ideal or less in line with God’s purpose in creating humanity?

Response: Let the group discuss. For the second question, draw your group’s attention to the fact that each of the harmonies build upon one another – we cannot have one without the others before it. Union with God ultimately must be first, for everything else flows from it.

6. In our own brokenness, we can be tempted to strive for these harmonies out of order. How are you tempted to order them in your own life? Which do you see as the most important?

Response: Let the group discuss.

7. Now, think back to last week and the four areas where we could seek our image from things other than God: **approval and appreciation, emotional and physical comfort, security and control, and influence and power.** How could these temptations cause relationships with others to become out of order in our own lives?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: *We can be tempted to place relationships with others over our relationship with God and the worth of our lives that he gives. We can then seek to gain their approval over right relationship with God.*

Emotional and Physical Comfort: *When we seek our own emotional or physical comfort above God, we can reject his call for our lives; when we seek comfort from others, we are bound to be disappointed and unfulfilled.*

Security and Control: *Chasing security and control can lead us to putting created goods (money, possessions) or temporal situations (career, friendships) ahead of God in our lives. We can be tempted to put our trust in things that fade away, rather than in God’s eternal providence.*

Influence and Power: *Seeking influence and power over others is another way we can put our relationships with others over our relationship with God: we can get our sense of identity and worth from the titles we have or the success we experience and not from God our Father.*

God’s Vision for Relationships

Though we were created in a state of original justice, we know that sin has led us out of the Garden of Eden and into generations of a broken world. We are constantly being tempted to put relationships before God, to let ourselves live disintegrated lives and to seek ways to be filled that only leave us empty.

However, we can turn to Scripture and see the ways that Jesus helps people re-order their priorities and offers them the fulfillment they are seeking.

(Note to leader: Women, read the Woman at the Well below. Men, skip ahead to the Prodigal Son.)

Women: John 4, the Woman at the Well

We are going to look at the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John, chapter 4.

(Read John 4:4 – 14.)

7. The woman in the passage thinks Jesus is talking about actual water from the well, but Jesus seems to be talking about a different kind of water. What do you think Jesus is actually referring to when he talks about “living water”?

Response: Possible answers include: companionship, fulfillment, happiness, the love of God, eternal life, etc.

(Read John 4:15 – 19.)

8. Jesus reveals to the woman that he knows about the struggles of her life. How does it seem that the woman has sought to find happiness and fulfillment? Has she found what she is looking for?

Response: Through her marriages and relationships with men. No, the fact that she has been married so many times seems to indicate that she has not found what she is looking for. Also, the fact that she is at the well by herself at the hottest part of the day reveals that she is very isolated and alone and wanted to avoid the other women of the village, who likely would have drawn water in the morning.

(Read John 4: 25 – 30).

9. We see Jesus reveal his true identity to the woman and the effects it has on her: she came to the well alone at noon, steering clear of everyone else drawing water before the heat of the day, but leaves after encountering Jesus ready to enter the town and tell everyone about him. What do you think changed her?

Response: Let the group discuss. Help your group see that searching for fulfillment in others had led the woman to shame and isolation, but finding fulfillment in Jesus led her to joy and conversion.

10. What do think God is trying to tell us with this encounter? How does that apply to your life?

Response: Let the group discuss.

Men: The Prodigal Son

We can turn to Scripture and see one way that a good father helps a man re-order his priorities and offer him the fulfillment he is seeking. We are going to look at the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke, chapter 15.

(Read Luke 15:11-32)

8. The son takes his “inheritance” and goes and squanders it. When he has nothing left, what does he realize? How does he think his father will respond?

Response: He realizes he needs to return to his Father – not as a son, but as a slave instead. He thinks he isn't worthy to be a son anymore, so he plans to be treated like a hired worker.

9. Why do you think that the son thought he wasn't worthy to be a son to his father anymore? How do you think he feels about wasting away all that his Father had given him?

Response: The son thinks he has ruined his relationship with his father, that he has become unworthy of his love and care. He thinks he has to work to earn his love. He was given "all" that his Father had for him and now that is gone. He believes he must earn any attention or material goods that he received from his Father moving forward.

10. We see that the Father runs to the son, embraces him and kisses him. This comes as a shock to the son and he doesn't know why his Father would treat him this way after all that he has done wrong. The Father disregards his son's statement and reassures him of his love through his decision to slaughter the fattened calf and throw him a welcome home party. What is the Father telling his son through his actions?

Response: let the group discuss. He is telling his son that he loves him unconditionally and that he forgives him and is not holding his sin against him, and that the son needs to do nothing to earn the father's love. He is expressing mercy and love to his son when he needs it most.

11. What do think God is trying to tell us with this encounter? How does that apply to your life?

Response: Let the group discuss.

Finding Order in Relationships: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

My junior year of college I experienced what true friendship was. I'd been living the "college life" for two years and had everything the world told me would make me happy - a bunch of friends (thank you Greek life), multiple parties to go to every weekend, decent grades, and a beautiful girlfriend. I was so confused because despite all of this I felt totally empty. So I walked into the Newman Center one day and accidentally met John. John invited me into his life, and he challenged me to become the best-version-of-myself. In doing so, He taught me how to pray, showed me that following Jesus is worth the pain of rooting out the sin in my life, and helped me take steps to prepare to be a great husband and father one day.

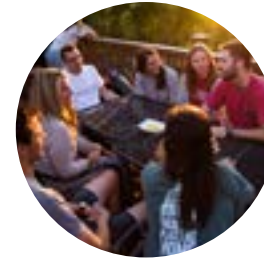
Female Testimony:

In high school, I was very picky about keeping my friend groups from different organizations separate. These friendships from dance team and other extra-curricular activities ended up being friendships of utility and pleasure, and most of them didn't last once I went to college. In college, I treated Greek life in a very similar way. I wanted my sorority sisters to be my friends in Greek life, but I was nervous to combine worlds and introduce any of them to my Catholic friends. One day, I put my concerns aside and decided to start a Catholic Bible study in my sorority house. Little did I know that so many of my sorority sisters were

Catholic and were hungry to know the Lord. The women from that Bible study are some of my closest friends to this day, and that may have never happened if I didn't introduce my faith into those friendships.

12. What does putting God first in your life look like? How could you do this this week?

Response: Let the group discuss.



Chapter III

Sex

CHAPTER 3

SEX

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to God's Plan for Sex

Leader's Guide:

The past two weeks, we've looked closely at our human nature and the Christian nature of relationships. With these valuable foundations, the next few weeks we're going to apply some of these principles and the Gospel message to a few specific areas that are common in Greek life: sex, alcohol, success, and time.

Last week, we talked specifically about ordered relationships, and how God is our ultimate source of fulfillment. We are made for relationship, and especially for a relationship with God, who is love. Often, we feel this truth about our nature most when it comes to the desire for romantic relationships – we desire to be known in deep ways, and we look to fulfill this desire through romantic relationships. However, we also know how quickly these relationships can become sources of pain, confusion and hurt.

Our desire for love and for meaningful relationships gets even more complicated when sex enters the picture. Though our culture loves to sell us the narrative of casual sex, that sex with “no strings attached” is

healthy and even a rite of passage, many young people have first-hand experience that this narrative does not lead to being more fully alive but often leaves us even more broken.

In this chapter, we're going to look at God's vision for sex established in Genesis and how that vision becomes twisted through sexual sin. We'll also look at some Scripture passages that reveal God's true vision for marriage as something we can strive for as we live out our Christian faith and identity. Though these visions may be difficult to reconcile with the brokenness around us in our culture today, we know that we can rely on God's grace and the sacraments to guide us to living out romantic relationships with freedom and virtue.

For you as the leader, it is good to be aware that this might be the first conversation that your participants have had on sex and how it is designed to be used. This can be an extremely sensitive topic, and we encourage you to approach this study with patience and prudence as participants begin to unpack their experience and their potentially distorted views of the sexual embrace. Invite your participants to share about their experience without encouraging over-sharing or directly calling out your participants. We also encourage you to initiate follow-up conversations with the individuals in your group after the study as you support them in the healing process and invite them to greater freedom.

Remember: This chapter will only scratch the surface of God's vision for sex and meaningful relationships. Consider checking out the “Cultural Apologetics” series or the “Theology of the Body” Bible study on FOCUS Equip to dive more deeply into this topic.

Introduction: Identity and Sex

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Last week, we talked specifically about ordered relationships and how God is our ultimate source of fulfillment. We are made for relationship, and especially for a relationship with God, who is love. Often, we feel this truth about our nature most when it comes to the desire for romantic relationships – we desire to be known in deep ways, and we look to fulfill this desire through romantic relationships. However, we also know how quickly these relationships can become sources of pain, confusion and hurt.

Fortunately for us, God has revealed to us his vision for sex and relationships that will lead us to greater unity with him, ourselves, and others. God is not anti-sex; rather, he views it as so sacred and important to who we are as human beings that we must be careful to treat it with the reverence it deserves. Sex, as God has designed it, can reveal to us incredible truths about the infinite and eternal love we all desire and are created for.

1. What do you know about what the Catholic Church teaches about sex? What do you think God thinks about sex and relationships?

*Response: Let the group discuss. Some follow-up questions include:
How have you been taught the Catholic Church's teaching on sex?
Are there any questions you have or teachings you don't understand?
Where else do you look for the truth about sex?*

Let's once again return to Genesis, to the story of Adam and Eve, to see what our creation can tell us about God's design for sex.

(Read Gen. 1:26 – 28, 2:24.)

2. What do these passages tell us about God's view of sex? What is its purpose?

Response: Sex is rightly designed by God as an act within marriage between a man and a woman for the purposes of unity of the couple and for procreation. It is meant to be a participation in union with God and one another and participation with God in creation by populating the earth. Sex is an invitation into the love and the creative power of God!

(Read CCC 1604-1605.)

3. How does sex fit into the order of the four harmonies that we talked about last week? What might be the result if it is not ordered rightly?

Response: Sex falls into the category of right relationship with others. Let the group discuss the consequences of sex that is not ordered rightly.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

We talked about the four harmonies last week and the order of healthy relationships; similarly, romantic relationships have their own healthy inherent order. A healthy progression in a relationship begins with getting to know another person – their interests, their personality and their values and beliefs. This occurs through friendship and through dating. As the relationship progresses, it grows, with a deeper and deeper understanding of the other's longings and desires. At the altar during the sacrament of marriage, the couple commits

themselves to one another “until death do us part,” and they enter into a sacred covenant that cannot be broken. And finally, their love is consummated in the sexual embrace, making physical the spiritual reality of the covenant, that is, a total gift of self from one to the other.

Simply put, the stages of relational development move from sharing the mind, to the heart, to the soul in the sacrament of marriage, and finally to the body, in the sexual embrace. Too often, though, this order is completely reversed; and two people find themselves giving their bodies to one another a few months (or even moments) after meeting, saying with their bodies that they desire to make a total gift of self to one another, but coming nowhere close to saying that with their hearts, minds or souls. It is only within marriage, where the words and the actions of a “total gift of self” match one another, that sex is truly allowed to be what it was created to be.

4. What do you think of this natural progression of a relationship? How does this truly allow a romantic relationship and, eventually, a marriage, to be a “total gift of self”?

Response: Let the group discuss.

5. Why are we tempted to rush or distort the natural progression of a relationship? What are we most likely seeking?

Response: Let the group discuss. Prompt your group to think of the four motivations mentioned in the previous two chapters. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: “Having sex makes me feel wanted, loved, approved, and affirmed.”

Intimacy and Physical Comfort: “Sex makes me feel closer to him/

her” or “Looking at porn makes me feel less lonely” or “Having sex or looking at porn relieves my stress.”

Security and Control: “I think that having sex will make him/her stay with me.”

Influence and Power: “I feel powerful when I am able to sleep with multiple guys/girls” or “I like to give or withhold sex to get what I want.”

6. We discussed in Chapter 1 that we are created in God’s image and likeness, and we discussed in Chapter 2 that God as Trinity reveals to us that we are made to give and receive love. If the meaning of sex is a total gift of self to another person, what does that tell us about the nature of God?

Response: God is constantly giving us a total gift of himself at every moment, through grace. He also gives us a total gift of himself in the Eucharist, where he gave himself up completely and died on the cross so that we would be reconciled to God the Father. Sex is an earthly image of the divine nature of God’s complete and total love for us, holding nothing back.

(Read John 19:30)

“Consummatum est” is Latin for “it is consummated” or “it is finished.”

7. What do you think about that? How does Christ “consummating” himself to the cross influence your understanding of sex, and Christ and His Church?

Response: Let the group discuss.

Distortions of This Vision: Sexual Sin

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

As we've seen, God has a very intentional design for sex that is meant to teach us about the eternal love we are truly created for. However, we don't have to look very far around us to see that sex is constantly used and abused for our own selfish purposes, and that our culture even seeks to deny the very nature of sex as God designed it at every turn.

We see the abuses against this design everywhere: the pornography industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry; movies and TV shows promote the lie that promiscuity and casual sex are a normal part of life and are without consequences; divorce rates are over 50%, and committed lifelong marriages are seen as archaic or limiting to freedom. This culture affects us personally: encouraging us to turn to pornography and masturbation as solutions for our everyday ills, to treat sex as a way to embrace freedom or heal loneliness and to use other people on dating apps, through messaging, and even in person for our own selfish desires.

8. Why do you think hook-up culture, pornography and sexual sin are so popular and accepted in our world today, especially in Greek life on the college campus?

Response: Let the group discuss.

9. How has the hook-up culture, pornography, or the culture's attitudes about sex and relationships affected your own life or your relationships, or even your chapter?

Response: Let the group discuss. You may want to remind your group that they should share prudently but are free to open up about their own experience. Feel free to model appropriate sharing with a story of encountering this culture in your own life and how Jesus has invited you to greater freedom in chastity. Take note if abuse or assault gets brought up. Be sure to follow up with that student prudently and privately.

10. How might the world be different if society bought into God's vision for sex and relationships? What do you think would have to change in our culture for that to become a reality?

Response: Let the group discuss. Think about the common things that are justified in our culture: sex before marriage (even with someone you've been dating a long time), co-habitation (even if you're not having sex), or "just staying the night."

Encountering Hope in God's Vision for Sex

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Though all of us likely endured effects of this broken vision of sex and relationships, we do not need to give up hope!

In Scripture, we can see how God beautifully lays out his plan for spousal, married love, and how it is meant to image his relationship with his Church (as read in John 19:30!). This is a lofty vision, and one that requires much grace to live out, but God reveals it to us as the way to true and lasting happiness and fulfillment.

(Read Eph. 5:21 – 33.)

11. What is striking to you about God's call to marriage, and modern culture's gender roles?

Response: Let the group discuss. Forward your participants to Chapter 1 of the "Theology of the Body" bible study for deeper insight here.

12. How do these verses rightly illustrate marriage and sex as a total gift of self?

Response: Let the group discuss. In particular, verse 25 describes Christ giving himself up for the Church, and verse 28 describes loving the other as you love yourself.

13. What does it mean to say the relationship between a man and a woman images Christ and his Church?

Response: By suffering and dying, Christ gave himself up completely for who he loved, which is the Church. Spouses are meant to die to themselves as he did out of love.

14. How can we live out this renewed vision for relationships *before* we are married? How could you begin preparing to live this way in your life today?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: practicing giving of self and dying to self in small ways, particularly in friendships and dating relationships; loving our current families in a self-sacrificial way and choosing their good, etc.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Christ is inviting us to live more fully alive right now, whatever our personal situations may be. He does not wait for us to "be better" or to reach a certain level of holiness on our own to offer us grace and welcome us home; he offers it now and at every moment.

A Renewed Understanding of Sex: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

Coming from all-boys high school, I showed up on campus and was absolutely floored by the insane amount of gorgeous women everywhere. It was like being a young kid in an arcade: endless possibilities for pleasure. Shortly after showing up on campus, I began engaging in a non-committal sexual relationship. At first, I thought it was the dream – pleasure without responsibility. A month or two went by, and the pleasure had lost its luster; and I remember walking back from her dorm one night feeling so unbelievably empty. It was this feeling of emptiness that ended up bringing me to the place where I wanted to give God's plan for sexuality a try. The more I fell in love with God's view of sexuality, the less empty I felt. It was truly unbelievable.

Female Testimony:

I came into college with a wounded foundation. My experience with men and sexual sin had reached rock-bottom in high school, and I was really hoping to have a fresh start. Unfortunately, I wasn't strong enough to resist the party scene. Starting on bid day of my freshman year, I was back to my old habits. I lived

a life of toxic promiscuity, spending many nights partying and many mornings with an empty heart. Though I felt horrible, I persisted in my sin. From my perspective, I was good at being “bad.” My judgement was so clouded by sin that I couldn’t see a reason to change. As the years continued, I knew I wanted an out, but I was scared to seek it myself. A pledge sister of mine had the courage to ask me hard questions and offer accompaniment to see me through the change I deeply desired and needed. I was scared to fail in striving for chastity, but she believed in me. That made all the difference. I met Jesus, and his love was worth the sacrifice involved to make the change. I finally understood that I was made for more. I met love itself and couldn’t be the same. I was able to receive the abundant mercy of God and be restored in my innocence. I am forever grateful.

15. What is a next step you could take this week to live more fully alive in the area of relationships and sexual freedom? Who in your life could support you in taking that step?

Response: Let the group discuss. Consider following up with members of your group individually throughout the next week if they desire support and encouragement to grow in chastity. Check out the “Path to Freedom” (Men) and “Uncompromising Purity” (Women) resources on FOCUS Equip for help in accompanying someone in the journey to freedom.

(Note to leader: As a follow-up to the previous question, feel free to print this page as a resource to give your participants or to go over it as a group at the end of study).

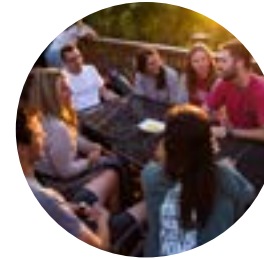
Next Steps:

If you desire to live more fully alive in your relationships, there are a few steps you can begin to take as you begin this journey:

- **Go to confession.** God gave us the gift of the sacrament of confession to make peace with him, each other and ourselves. The sacrament reconciles us from the mortal sins that separate us from God and the Church and gives us grace to overcome future moments of temptation. If it’s been a while since you’ve gone to confession, find out when it’s available and try to go this week. If you’re not Catholic and/or would like a better understanding of what confession is, your study leader can get together with you and help you answer any questions you may have.
- **Set boundaries.** Jesus says in Scripture that if something causes you to sin sexually, root it out of your life (Matthew 5:27-30). This could mean getting rid of or setting limits on a book, your computer, the TV shows you watch, or even on the physical parts of your dating relationship, insofar as they are “near occasions of sin.” Setting these limits won’t cure you of temptation, but they will help keep you from feeding sinful desires and will make room for Jesus to fill you even more with his grace.
- **Find accountability.** Accountability is especially helpful with sexual sins, as what remains hidden will continue to have power over us, but what is brought to the light and surrendered to the Lord can be transformed. A priest or a trusted, virtuous friend who is living chastity well can be a tremendous aid. Consider finding someone you can check in with regularly as you pursue healing and growth in this area

who can help encourage you and celebrate your victories with you.

- **Pray.** St. Alphonsus Ligouri says, "Chastity is a virtue... Whoever prays for it will certainly attain it." If you don't pray regularly, begin to do so. Even ten minutes a day will allow the grace of Jesus to enter your life in new ways. When you pray, pray for the gift and the virtue of chastity, and listen to how Jesus might be guiding you to take steps to grow in exercising the virtue in your own life.



Chapter IV

Alcohol

CHAPTER 4

ALCOHOL

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to Temperance

Leader's Guide:

The temptation to abuse alcohol is a common one on the college campus. For many young people, their college experience is, in some ways, defined by alcohol: the parties they attended, the social circles they associated with and the "freedom" they experienced. However, similar to the last chapter's discussion on sex, the freedom and excitement that the culture often promises through the use of alcohol is often not an experience that leads us to living fully alive. Instead, the abuse of alcohol often leads to emptiness and hopelessness.

In response to the various dangers of alcohol, some groups use scare tactics about the dangers of binge drinking and alcoholism to encourage moderation through fear. Others take a sort of Puritan approach, which views consuming any alcohol as sinful or hedonistic.

However, the Catholic understanding of alcohol strives for a healthy middle ground between these two views. On the one hand, we strive for the virtue of temperance, which helps us moderate our desires in a healthy way; on the other hand, we view alcohol as a gift from God that can foster joy and cultivate relationships, when used correctly.

When it comes to alcohol, motivations matter. As we have discussed frequently throughout this study, our human motivations can cause us to seek happiness and worth in people or in things that can never fulfill us; this is often the case with those who use alcohol in an unhealthy way. But the Lord doesn't want us to live as slaves to a created substance; he wants us to be fully alive and to experience the joy that created things have to offer, but always in a way that reflects and points back to him.

For more on this topic and some of the other themes in this study, reference the "Christlike Leadership for Men" or "Christlike Leadership for Women" Bible studies on FOCUS Equip. In addition, you can reference the "Cultural Apologetics" series on FOCUS Equip for a discussion of Catholicism and alcohol.

Introduction: Identity and Alcohol

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

In the last few chapters of our study, we've been learning that man is made in God's image and likeness, and that through that image, we are made for relationship. We've also discussed the beauty of the natural order of creation and how that can help us orient our lives to living fully alive.

In our chapter on relationships and original justice, we discussed the importance of an ordered relationship with *creation* or *nature*. This includes the natural world around us, as well as the created things of this world. In this chapter, we are going to discuss how we can approach a rightly-ordered view of alcohol, which is a created substance. If you've never heard it before, the Church has a moderate approach to this topic that you might find refreshing! Let's dive in!

1. How does the culture tell us that alcohol will lead us to being fully alive?

Response: The lie being told to us by the culture is that fun or freedom can't be accomplished without alcohol, or even excessive alcohol use, and by drinking, you can have a better time with friends (or strangers).

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

There is plenty of information in the media and the culture that shapes our understanding of alcohol. There is the mainstream cultural view that we just discussed; in response to the various dangers of alcohol, some groups take an opposite approach and use scare tactics about the dangers of binge drinking and alcoholism to encourage moderation through fear. Others take a sort of Puritan approach, which views consuming any alcohol as sinful or hedonistic. But what is an ordered, Christian outlook on the topic of alcohol?

The Catholic understanding of alcohol strives for a healthy middle ground between these two extremes. The Church calls us to the virtue of temperance, which helps us moderate our desires in a healthy way; Scripture also points out how we can view alcohol as a gift from God that can foster joy and cultivate relationships!

2. What has been your personal experience with alcohol? What have been some of the effects of alcohol on your life, your time or your relationships, family, and friends? Take a moment to reflect on this before answering.

Response: Let the group discuss. Be intentional in creating space for participants to share a variety of experiences if they desire, whether it be no involvement with alcohol or over-consumption of it. Be watchful

for the sensitivities that may be present for certain members of your group, and feel free to model appropriate or prudent sharing.

3. Let's again consider the same four motivations from the previous three chapters: approval, comfort, control and power. How might these motivations affect how we or those around us use or abuse alcohol? Consider, what is *your* motivation? Take a few moments to reflect on this.

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: *"If I drink with this certain group, I can finally get their acceptance," or "I'm willing to break the law to get this group's approval."*

Emotional and Physical Comfort: *"Getting drunk helps me to numb the pain, get rid of stress or escape the problems in my life."*

Security and Control: *"Drinking with this crowd ensures that I won't spend my Friday night alone," or "Getting in with this crowd will give me a group of friends I can relate to."*

Influence and Power: *"Drinking with this crowd will make me more popular," or "I need to drink with this crowd for them to respect me."*

God's Vision for Alcohol

Let's look first at how Scripture and the Church can help us understand temperance.

(Read Sirach 31:25-31.)

The CCC defines temperance as "the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created

goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable" (CCC 1805). Further, CCC 2290 says, "The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess."

4. How might this definition of temperance and what we read in Sirach apply to use of alcohol? What do you think the "honorable limits" of using alcohol might be?

Response: Alcohol is a created good and can be dangerous to ourselves and to others when consumed in excess. Alcohol itself is morally neutral, neither a good nor an evil. What matters is how we use it. Honorable limits your group might discuss could include: not drinking underage, limiting oneself to one or two drinks over the course of an evening/event, never driving while intoxicated, etc.

5. This definition describes that overdoing it on created goods can impair "the will's mastery over instincts." What might be some consequences of this? Look back at Sirach to help.

Response: Possible answers include: an impaired understanding of right and wrong, opening the door to sin; impaired decision-making, especially of the effects of our actions on others; falling prone to choosing what we personally want or need, regardless of whether or not it is good for us, etc.

6. As St. Ambrose puts it, "For the things we avoid when sober, we unknowingly commit through drunkenness." St. Thomas Aquinas adds that drunkenness is sinful because "man willingly and knowingly deprives himself of the use of reason, whereby he performs virtuous deeds and avoids sin." When man loses his will and his reason, he actually loses his ability to recognize and choose the good, which are part of what it means to be

made in God's image and likeness. Throwing away our reason, even for a night, rejects this identity and separates us from God. How does this change or add to your understanding of the sin of drunkenness?

Response: Let the group discuss.

7. On the other end of the spectrum, Scripture describes alcohol as a gift from God to his people. As the Psalms tell us, God makes "wine to gladden their hearts" (Psalm 104:15)! Alcohol is often present at celebrations and social gatherings and can foster joy and friendship. How can we utilize alcohol for these purposes for which God meant it, while ensuring that we are not falling into a near occasion of sin for ourselves or for those around us?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: moderately consuming alcohol at celebrations, on feast days, etc.; learning about different types of alcohol and how to enjoy them appropriately, such as wine tasting; learning to pair alcohol with a meal and discussing how they complement one another, etc. Thomas Aquinas famously stated: "Drink to the point of hilarity!", and 20th century writer Hilaire Belloc famously once said: "[w]herever the Catholic sun doth shine, / There's always laughter and good red wine."

The Church's Invitation

Our relationship with alcohol can be guided by the Church's wisdom and by our own personal experience, but those are not the only guiding factors. We must also take into account the national and local laws on this topic. Scripture can help us understand how to approach our country's laws regarding alcohol.

(Read Romans 13:1 – 2.)

8. *What does this passage reveal to us about government authority?*

Response: Paul is calling every Christian to follow the law of the land (so long as the law is just). While many students can understand the reasons not to get drunk, it is harder to understand why someone cannot drink under the age of 21, especially if they know how to handle alcohol. The invitation to follow the law of the land and avoid underage drinking can be seen by college students as a radical call, but it is one that provides an incredible witness of the Christian life on campus.

9. *How does this apply to our drinking age in our nation?*

Response: Let the group discuss. For more information, consider reading CCC2242 or the “Christlike Leadership” chapter on Sobriety. The National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984 made it illegal for those under 21 to purchase or publicly possess alcohol. Every state has its own specific laws on the consumption of alcohol by minors. For example, some states do not allow it in any circumstance; others allow it in private at the home of a parent/guardian with their consent. For state-by-state laws, feel free to check out: <https://alcoholpolicy.niaaa.nih.gov/underage-drinking/state-profiles>.

10. *What kind of witness might it be to others on your campus or in your house to live out Romans 13 or of the Church’s vision for the temperate use of alcohol? What effects might that witness have on those around you?*

Response: Let the group discuss.

Alcohol and Temperance: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

Greek life gave me the instant community I desired when I first got to college. I didn’t care if throwing wild parties, chasing women or doing drugs wasn’t moral or virtuous. All I cared about was having fun and having a group of friends to share the memories with. Several years of blacking out, waking up next to strangers, and feeling depressed left me devoid of life and a ghost of the man I had always hoped to be. I slowly started creeping into the back of the chapel during Mass – arriving five minutes late to avoid being seen. One day, I encountered a priest who radiated Christ’s love and joy for life itself. This priest chased me down after Mass and brought me to a FOCUS Missionary who changed my life. Through my friendship with this missionary, I learned that drinking alcohol didn’t have to end with regretting decisions from the previous night, but that I could have great conversations and make the real connections that I longed for. God longs for us to live life abundantly and to throw off the chains of slavery. Let God into your life and begin growing in virtue. You will not be disappointed!

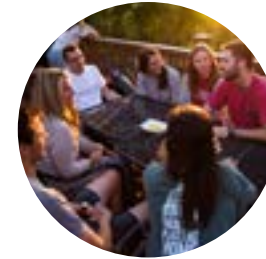
Female Testimony:

When I started my freshman year of college, I knew I wanted to join a sorority. I wanted to “fit in,” and I was willing to do just about anything to make sure I did. I quickly realized fitting in meant going out and drinking with my sisters basically every

weekend. I came to realize after a semester living that life, the “fitting in” I was seeking never left me fully satisfied. I found myself constantly searching for more, thinking that alcohol and partying was the answer; but it was never enough. That same year, God so lovingly put someone in my life who gave me the option to choose something more. The women in my sorority who were running after Jesus and a life of virtue were so patient with me as I dug my way out of the party scene, and they helped lead me into the arms of the One whom I had been seeking. He was waiting to fill me with his merciful and endless love that drinking and partying could never offer.

11. What is one action you can commit to this week to grow in temperance or moderation towards alcohol?

Response: Let the group discuss. Invite your students to make a written commitment that you can follow up with next week!



Chapter V

Success

CHAPTER 5

SUCCESS

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to Christian Excellence

Leader's Guide:

This week, we are discussing the topic of success and the Church's understanding of Christian excellence. As we begin, here are a few statistics that illustrate the Greek system's impact on our nation (feel free to share these with your participants!):

- *Over 85% of the students in campus leadership on 730 campuses are members of Greek-letter organizations.*
- *As alumni, Greeks give approximately 75% of all money donated to universities, which is four times more than non-Greek alumni.*
- *Forty-three of the 100 members of the U.S. Senate are members of a fraternity or sorority. Thirty-six percent of the House of Representatives are members of a sorority or fraternity.*
- *Of North America's 50 largest corporations, 43 are headed by Greek men and women.*
- *Since the founding of Greek-letter organizations in 1825, all but three U.S. Presidents were Greek. 40 of 47 U.S. Supreme Court Justices are Greek.*

- *63% of all U.S. Cabinet members since 1900 have been and are Greek. All of the Apollo 11 astronauts were Greek.*

Success is not a foreign concept to Greek life. Seeing the above statistics, it's easy to see that Greeks are successful not only on the college campus but in the world post-graduation. In Greek houses, members are encouraged to strive to be successful, as many of their founders had been. However, a disordered emphasis on success can lead to anxious perfectionism, fear of failure, or rebellion and rejection of responsibility. How can we view and pursue success rightly and with virtue? How can we strive for excellence in a wider culture that often encourages the opposite?

Some of your participants may be struggling under the pressure to succeed in worldly ways; others may struggle to be motivated to excellence and to give their best every day. Perhaps there may have been a draw to Greek life to be a part of something that can give access to greater friendships, academic successes and extracurriculars to add to a résumé. The goal of this chapter is to help your participants identify and break free from the strain to be perfect and successful in their endeavors and to embrace a true Christian understanding of excellence.

Intro: Identity and Success

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

In this chapter, we will continue to make sense of the harmony God desires for us from the beginning of creation. We've talked about some common struggles within Greek life – the temptation to put our identity in who the world says we are and the temptations to misuse sex and alcohol. Today, we will continue our conversation by talking

about success – what the world says about success and what the Church says about it. To kick us off, let's discuss:

1. How would you describe the difference between success and excellence?

Response: Let the group discuss. Potential answers include: success has more to do with an end result, whereas excellence has more to do with the process; success is more defined outwardly, by the world or by those around you, whereas excellence is more internal and doing the best that you personally can do, etc.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

According to Merriam-Webster, success is defined as a “favorable or desired outcome” or “the attainment of wealth, favor or eminence.” This seems to be along the lines of how people today view success -- in a recent Poll published in USA today, 81% of Generation Y surveyed said that their most important goal in life was wealth, and 54% said being famous.

Worldly motivation for success tends to be oriented toward recognition, wealth, and fame. However, seeking these things, thinking they will lead us to happiness and fulfillment, tends to leave us disappointed.

2. Have you felt the influence of the world's view of success in your own life? What were the results of chasing that standard of success?

Response: Let the group discuss.

3. How might the four human motivations we've been talking about (approval, comfort, security and power) drive us to seek the world's view of success?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: *“If I get this award, then everyone will see what a success I am” or “If people see how successful of an athlete I am, people will start to talk about me and desire to know me.”*

Emotional and Physical Comfort: *“When I get good grades, a promotion at work, or recognized for something I did, I will have proof that I am not a failure.”*

Security and Control: *“My reputation as a successful person will help me get what I want in the future” or “If I'm successful in the classroom and get the job I want, then I can make a lot of money and secure the lifestyle I want.”*

Influence and Power: *“I love the respect I get when I'm leading other people” or “I don't matter unless I'm in a position of leadership.”*

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

We can find how the Church would define excellence in the following verse.

(Read Colossians 3:23-24.)

Excellence is the ability or the habit of giving the best of ourselves in our daily commitments and responsibilities – regardless if the task is monumental or small, or if it is seen by many or only a few.

4. Do you think you value the Lord's inheritance more than the world's? If not, why?

Response: Let the group discuss.

5. Who are examples for you of people who live out the Church's vision for excellence well? What is it about the way that they live that inspires you?

Response: Let the group discuss.

6. Based on the definitions for success and Christian excellence, in what ways are these two concepts similar? In what ways are they different?

Response: Similarities include striving for greatness, a strong work ethic, can be oriented toward making a difference in the world, etc. Excellence is different from success because it focuses more on the intentions and efforts behind our actions, not just the results or outward appearances. We can pursue a task or a role with excellence and still not be seen as successful or rewarded as such; we can also pursue and achieve success in a task or position but not have done it excellently, with our best effort, integrity and charity.

God's Vision for Success

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

St. Paul is an incredible example of the Church's vision of true excellence. One of the most successful evangelists in the history of the Church, St. Paul did not define himself by his successes but by the salvation of Christ.

(Read 1 Cor. 2:1 – 5.)

7. How can we reconcile St. Paul's humility in these verses with the Church's vision for excellence?

Response: Paul's humility is a testament to his greatness! He gives his best despite his weaknesses. He knows that all he has done is because of Jesus. This causes him to strive after all that God is asking of him but also helps him accept failures and embrace his own weaknesses with trust.

8. Why do you think God would desire to use our weakness to demonstrate his power? How can we strive for excellence while still embracing our weakness in the name of Christ?

Response: Our weaknesses allow his power to be on full display – when it is obvious that we couldn't do something in our own strength, his providence is revealed. He doesn't expect perfection from us, but obedience and trust. We can continually improve our weaknesses and surrender them to Jesus, asking him to transform them. We can receive our successes with humility and our failures with trust and hope, giving all glory to God.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Though St. Paul's humility is admirable, we aren't called to simply hide away and seek no greatness at all. Rather, we are to do all for the glory of God; our living fully alive and the use of our gifts and talents actually gives God glory and is a testament to the power of the Holy Spirit!

Saint Thomas Aquinas describes the call to greatness through the word *magnanimity*:

“Magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God”...Indeed, the magnanimous person continuously strives to perfect the virtues in all areas of his life. He is not content with simply being good. He reaches out toward excellence. For example, magnanimity may impel a good man to go beyond his daily obligations and make more sacrifices in his daily life for the sake of others. He may be driven to defer to others’ preferences, to endure criticism with patience, or to avoid defending his opinion in non-essential matters. These are small ways of living “greatness of soul.” ... As Aquinas explains, “if his soul is endowed with great virtue, magnanimity makes him tend to *perfect* works of virtue.”¹

9. Like St. Paul, how has God provided opportunities for you to use your God-given talents and work ethic for his greater glory? How have you been a witness of true excellence for others?

Response: Let the group discuss.

10. In what ways do you struggle to live up to the excellence to which you are called? Why do you think the temptation to mediocrity is present in the human heart? Where do you see mediocrity in your own life?

Response: Let the group discuss. For the second question, possible answers include: human sinfulness; fear or anxiety; laziness or desire for comfort; comparison to the efforts of others, etc.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Whatever projects, assignments, goals, plans, hopes, dreams, or opportunities that come our way, we can practice filtering them through the lens of bringing glory to God. In time, we will begin to be able to discern if we are chasing our own glory or God’s in our desire for success. Also, when we are truly doing it for the Lord, we will work harder and better than if we are simply working for ourselves. When an opportunity comes your way, consider: am I chasing worldly success or true Christian excellence? Examine your motivations, seek ways to glorify God and give your best in what you choose!

Success and Excellence: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

In today’s social media age, displaying a put-together and successful image of yourself is one of the biggest temptations for college students, and this was a trap I definitely fell into. Having to constantly keep up with other men on my campus and in my fraternity by maintaining the right image, social life, grades, involvement and approval from women brought much fear, anxiety and stress – although I didn’t really recognize the root of it at the time. Over the course of college, as I continued to be invited into a life of prayer, the Lord revealed these burdens to me and the reality that I was placing them on myself. There was no space for Him to tell me who I am and to receive my identity as a beloved son until I let go of the perfect image of myself that I tried to construct. It was scary at first but ultimately it was a leap I had to take in order to really allow the Father into my heart.

Female Testimony:

For as long as I can remember, I have associated my worth with my achievements and accomplishments. In college, that was no different. I graduated early with two majors and served in leadership positions for every organization I was in, including the executive board of my sorority. On paper, I was incredibly successful; but I personally felt unfulfilled and empty. Upon graduation, my biggest regret was not giving more time to my faith and friendships. I started praying daily and attending daily Mass, and it was unbelievable how much my time was multiplied and how joyful I felt. After graduation, I learned that success wasn't about accolades, but rather, it was about living a well-balanced life with Jesus Christ at the very center. I don't regret a single minute that I gave to the Lord, and I wish I had learned that earlier on.

11. What is one thing you want to commit to this week to reorient your understanding of success?

Response: Let the group discuss. Feel free to have your group write down a commitment or choose one you can do together. Consider closing this study by praying the Litany of Humility as a group.

(Note to leader: If time remains, consider walking your group through the [Litany of Humility](#) or praying it together. You could invite your group to pray it throughout the week as their action step.)

¹ Edward Sri, "Called to Greatness: The Virtue of Magnanimity." *Lay Witness* (November/December 2009), <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/philosophy/called-to-greatness-the-virtue-of-magnanimity.html>



Chapter VI

Rest

CHAPTER 6

REST

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to Holy Rest

Leader's Guide:

You have reached the final chapter of this study! We began our study at the moment of creation with Adam and Eve, and we are going to end our study circling back to creation and what that has to teach us about rest. You have been leading your participants through conversations on many relevant and potentially challenging topics, and we hope this chapter will draw your conversations to a close in a hopeful and encouraging way.

Last week, we discussed the ideas of success and excellence and how they particularly affect Greek students. Indeed, time is one of the most precious resources that any of us get, this side of heaven. Time is a gift that God has given us to spend in ways that fulfill us and bring him glory.

As chapter members, Greeks are constantly bombarded with a full calendar and schedule of events – chapter meetings, social functions, study hall hours and more. And, while Greeks are invited to excellence in these areas, it can be tempting for the activities on our plate to overwhelm our identity and to crowd out any time we may have left for what is most important: our time with the Lord.

During this study, you as the leader will have the opportunity help your group reflect on what is revealed through the six days of work and the seventh day of rest during the creation story. The structure of this narrative teaches us an important truth: we are invited into labor by God, but we are ultimately created for rest and worship. We are created for the sabbath.

Please note: FOCUS Greek is preparing to write part two of “Fully Alive”! The next edition of this study will dive into topics that are more suited for participants who are deeper in their journey of faith. These topics will build upon the foundation laid in this study.

Intro: Rest and Identity

(Please read aloud.)

We've reached the final chapter of our study! We've talked about a number of ways that our worldview has been shaped by the tides of the world, and hopefully we've been practicing new habits to reorient our understanding and root our identities more deeply in the Lord. Let's start off by reflecting back on our study so far.

1. What has been a top takeaway or “aha” moment for you so far in this study? How has what you put your identity in shifted or changed?

Response: Let the group discuss.

In this chapter, we're going to dive even deeper in orienting our lives toward the Lord. Last week we talked about success and excellence – topics that no chapter member is a stranger to. Greeks are constantly

bombarded with a full calendar and schedule of events – chapter meetings, social functions, study hall hours and more. And while Greeks are invited to excellence in these areas, it can be tempting for the activities on our plate to overwhelm our identity and to crowd out any time we may have left for what is most important: our time with the Lord.

We are going to look at what God has to say about time, and more specifically, how we are invited to use our time as he has designed, specifically in the areas of rest and worship. We started our study in Genesis, in the Garden of Eden, and we're going to return there for our final chapter.

In Genesis 1, the writer outlines the first six days of creation. Many of you may be familiar with the story. God creates the day and night, earth and sea, land and sky. Then he creates the sun and the moon, the living creatures that populate the earth, and finally, human beings. Let's turn to Genesis 2 to see the importance of the seventh day, the final day of creation.

(Read Genesis 2: 1 – 3.)

2. On the seventh day, God rested. Why do you think God rested on this day? Did he need it, or did he choose it? Why do you think so?

Response: Let the group discuss. For the second question, God did not need to rest – he is all-powerful. However, he rested as a model and as a promise for us: he first made the sabbath a sign of the covenant with his people (CCC 2170) and a model for us to “be refreshed” from “the servitude of work and the worship of money” (CCC 2172).

3. If we are made in God's image and likeness, as we talked about way back in chapter one, what does the fact that God rested say about us?

Response: God desires us to rest as he did – he knew that we would need a day of rest to free ourselves from the bondage of the world to remember our purpose in life, which is to know, love and serve God.

God's Vision for Rest and Worship

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Just as God's rest on the seventh day in the creation narrative signals the importance of a day of rest and worship of God, this importance was elevated by Jesus' death and resurrection. Sunday is not only a fulfillment of the Jewish sabbath but also a celebration of the Resurrection and the salvation won for us by Christ! It is so important that we find it in the Third Commandment given to Moses in the Old Testament.

(Read Exodus 20: 8 – 11.)

4. Why do you think God went so far as to make observing the sabbath day a commandment (along with commandments like “You shall not steal” and “You shall not kill”)?

Response: Remaining in right relationship with God is just as important, and even more important, than remaining in right relationship with others. For him, nothing could be more important than our covenantal, abiding relationship with him. But he knew our hearts and that we would be tempted to make other things more

important. It is from our relationship with him that we will have the grace to live out the other commandments in our lives.

5. Though we can be tempted to think of commandments as strict rules that confine our freedom, how is this commandment an example of the ways that God's commandments for us are for our good and reveal his love for us?

Response: God does not desire us to be slaves to the world or to our own selfish desires. This commandment ensures that we will have time set aside to enter into our true purpose and to remain in communion with him, which is our only true path to happiness. Sabbath worship is required by God not because he's a vain dictator that needs our worship to feel good about himself; rather, he desires us to worship him and keep his day holy because it's for our good, not his.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

A central way we enter into the sabbath as God designed it, and thereby live in accord with this commandment, in our lives today is through worship, particularly through the celebration of the Eucharist at Mass:

"The celebration of Sunday... render[s] to God an outward, visible, public and regular worship 'as a sign of his universal beneficence to all.' ... The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life." (CCC 2176-77)

"The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason...on Sundays and other

holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass." (CCC 2181, 2180)

6. Why is an "outward, visible, public and regular" act of worship on Sunday an important part of keeping holy the sabbath? Why are rest and personal worship not enough to fully embrace God's command to keep the sabbath?

Response: The very reason for the sabbath is worship – God gave us a day of rest so that our work would not get in the way of us coming together to worship God in the ways he asked us to! Without attending Mass, the sabbath would be just an opportunity for us to pursue rest selfishly. Ordering this day around worshipping God ensures that the day is oriented toward him first.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

As we discussed in Chapter 1 on image, if we forget to rest and keep holy the Sabbath, we eventually forget who God is; and if we forget who God is, we eventually forget who WE are. We allow our identities to become shaped by our activities, our work, our successes, our failures and our achievements, instead of letting them be shaped by God. What's in our schedule reveals to us what's most important to us; and if time with God isn't present, it reveals what's really in our hearts.

7. Are there any ways that you currently enter into the sabbath intentionally with rest and worship? If so, why did you choose those things? If not, why not?

Response: Let the group discuss. Examples include: cooking with roommates, hiking / walking around town, leisurely shopping for fun items, playing sports with friends or strangers.

8. What prevents you from living the sabbath in accord with the vision in this chapter? How might the motivations we've been discussing (approval, comfort, control and power) influence how you live the sabbath? Which motivation do you wrestle with the most?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: "I can't say no to anyone who asks me to do something because I don't want to let them down" or "I need to keep checking Facebook to see how many likes or comments I got."

Emotional and Physical Comfort: "I don't want to go to Mass on Sunday because it's my only day to sleep in" or "I prefer to worship my own way, so I don't go to a Sunday service or Mass."

Security and Control: "I can't stop working on Sunday, or I might fall behind and lose opportunities to get ahead" or "If I have time on Sunday, I'll make time for rest or worship; but if I'm too busy, then those things are more important."

Influence and Power: "I have to fill my schedule in order to get more knowledge, money, friends or prestige on campus" or "I don't want to have to tell my friends, coworkers or classmates that I can't meet on Sunday because I don't want to look weak."

9. What are some ways you could more intentionally live out God's vision for the sabbath on a weekly basis?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include: making Sunday Mass a priority every single week; finishing all homework prior to Sunday; making extra time for prayer on Sundays; avoiding unnecessary work or tasks on Sundays; if required to work on Sundays, setting aside other time throughout the week for intentional rest and relationship with God, etc.

Rest and Relationship with God: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

My fraternity always expected the best of me and my brothers, usually pushing us to be as involved as possible, not only within our own organization but also in all the high-profile organizations on campus. While I was also expected to excel at all of my schoolwork, we were expected to excel in all the leadership positions across campus; and it was something that consumed me for the majority of my time in college. When a missionary helped me finally to realize that prayer and my relationship with God had to be the priority, it took a lot of stretching to let go of some of the things that I had done for so long. But when I finally did, I found that I had a greater zeal and energy to go above and beyond in the things that I actually was deeply invested in, all as a result of the grace that God gave me through prayer.

Female Testimony:

When I joined my sorority my freshman year, I was immediately bombarded with many responsibilities and commitments in addition to my normal schoolwork. These commitments, both freshman year and throughout the rest of college, easily consumed many of my sisters' lives. When I decided I wanted to prioritize daily prayer, Mass, Bible study, and faith-based friendships, I had to actively and intentionally choose to honor these priorities. I wanted to keep eternal life and holiness as my ultimate goal and purpose in life, and thus I strove to live each day in accordance with that. Time is the most precious gift God gives us and must be used wisely and for his glory.

Ironically, the more time I gave God and effort to live missionary discipleship, the more he multiplied the rest of my time to succeed in school, enjoy sorority life and fulfill my campus leadership roles.

10. What is one thing you want to commit to this week? What are some challenges you might face to live out that commitment?

Response: Let the group discuss.

11. To wrap up our study, reflect back once again on all we've discussed. In what ways have the topics of this study helped you become more fully alive?

Response: Let the group discuss.

NOTES

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FOCUS Equip

'FOCUS Equip' is based on Ephesians 4:12 "for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ."

These materials seek to equip you for lifelong Catholic mission.

We would love to hear your feedback at: focusequip@focus.org

FULLY ALIVE

