

Bless me Father in this confession...

DOCTRINAL ELEMENT

Morality

TOPIC

Sin and Forgiveness

GOAL

The goal for this session is to give an overview of sinfulness, provide an examination of conscience, and provide the opportunity for the sacrament of Reconciliation. Details on the sacrament of Reconciliation will be handled during the Spring Semester of Year II.

SECONDARY RELIGION GUIDELINES

(II.I.A.3.c) (II.II.C.2)

USCCB FRAMEWORK

(III.B) (VI.B.2.f)

SCRIPTURE

Fall of Man- Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-24

Redemption- Rom 5:12-21

Freedom from Sin- Rom 6

The Flesh- Rom 7:15,17b; Gal 5:19-21

Sinful Habits- Mt 15:10-20

Christ forgives sin- Mk 2:1-12

Our forgiveness of others- Mt 6:14, 15;

Eph 4:32

CATECHISM

Sin- 1849-1850

Original Sin- 397-398, 401

Mortal Sin-1487, 1849, 1854-1861, 1874

Venial Sin- 1431, 1458, 1862

Seven Deadly Sins- 1866

Confession- 1421, 1423-1424, 1442, 1444, 1456, 1461-1467

Forgiveness- 1468-1469, 1708-1709

GOLDEN THREADS

The Trinity: The main teaching of this session is the fact that sin is an offense against God.

The Paschal Mystery: “At the very hour of darkness, the hour of the prince of this world, the sacrifice of Christ secretly becomes the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly” (CCC 1851).

ANNUAL THEME RELEVANCE

Built on Christ. Jesus’ love for us shown through his death and resurrection, celebrated in the Eucharist, is why we have hope in the midst of a world of sin. We must build our life on Christ to find true hope, forgiveness, and healing. Attempting to find healing and hope any place else will never last.

PROCLAMATION

There are two primary categories of sin. There is original sin and personal sin. Original sin is a state or condition of a sin which all generations of people are born into because our first parents (Adam and Eve) abused their freedom and disobeyed God’s command. Since this first sin, Scripture and the Church’s Tradition continually recall the presence and universality of sin in our history.

Bless me Father in this confession...

Secondly, there is personal sin. Personal sins are those sins committed by individuals who act contrary to God's law. They essentially reside in the interior rejection of God's commandment of love. The rejection is often expressed in exterior acts. These personal sins are evaluated by their seriousness. Personal sins are broken down into two categories: mortal sins and venial sins. A mortal sin radically turns us away from God and destroys charity in the heart of a person. A mortal sin:

1. involves grave matter (as defined in CCC 1858)
2. the person knows that the action involves grave matter
3. the person gives complete consent to the sin

A venial sin is committed when a sin of a less serious matter is performed. This happens when we do not observe the divine law, or when we disobey the moral law (in a grave matter) but with ignorance. Venial sins weaken our relationship with God, but they do not break it off completely.

There are seven moral vices that give rise to many other failures to love. These are called the Seven Capital Sins or Seven Deadly Sins which include: pride, greed, envy, anger, gluttony, lust and sloth (CCC 1866).

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

Movies

- Lifehouse's Everything skit – this skit is popular on YouTube and provides a good reflection on how sin can break our relationship with Christ who yearns to be with us.
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyheJ480LYA&feature=related>
- Clip from the movie *Les Misérables*. A great reflection on sin and second chances.
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-KRbQFtQ0w>

Music

- “Forgiven”- Sanctus Real
- “Alive Again”- Matt Maher
- “You Were on the Cross”- Matt Maher
- “Empty and Beautiful”- Matt Maher
- “Start Somewhere”- TobyMac
- “Ocean Floor”- Audio Adrenaline

Websites

- Sin- Catholic encyclopedia overview
 - <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm>
- Sacrament of Reconciliation - Catholic encyclopedia complete
 - <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618c.htm>

Bless me Father in this confession...

OTHER RESOURCES

- *The Theology and Practice of the Sacrament of Confession with Teens* by Fr. J.D. Jaffe, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 9, pg. 15-16
 - *How to Go to Confession Guide*, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 9, pg. 17
 - *Examination of Conscience for a Good Confession*, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 9, pg. 18
 - *Group Examination of Conscience*, CDA Youth Ministry Resource Manual, Chapter 9, pg. 19-21
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Session Idea # 1 - Reconciliation service

A quick teaching on sin, followed by an opportunity for all of the teens to go to the sacrament of Reconciliation. This would be highly recommended if you have not had a retreat recently or have not yet established a culture of regular participation in the sacrament among the teens. This would require several priests in order to make this work well.

Session Idea # 2 – A talk on sin and forgiveness with several videos and activities to cover the topics. If you have recently had an opportunity for all of your teens to go to confession, or you cannot find enough priests to offer confessions, then you should go with this outline.

GATHER

Environment

Depending upon which direction you choose, the environment would be different:

Session Idea # 1 - The nave of the Church would be a good place to have this evening complete with the opening talk and Eucharistic Adoration while teens are participating in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Have the room as dark as possible, with as many burning candles around the altar that is safely possible. The monstrance is in place on the altar but without Jesus present. Chant or reflective music is softly playing. The only light in the room should be shining onto the crucifix.

Session Idea # 2 - The environment is set to be penitential and reflective. It should be more of a serious and quiet night, in order to stress the grave importance of the sacrament of Reconciliation and the seriousness and reality of the existence of sin and evil in the world. Candles, less lighting and quiet music will help set the atmosphere.

Icebreaker: To help maintain the seriousness of the session, there is not necessarily a need for an icebreaker.

Opening Prayer:

(Have copies of this prayer for each teen to read once out loud as a group, and then silently on their own for a few minutes.)

Bless me Father in this confession...

Take me from the Dark:

Lord, with your bright and open heart, forgive me for showing darkness to the light.

Putting my back to what is right was wrong, and I have sinned against you.

Forgive me O Merciful One because I have realized my wrong and I am sorry for what I have done. Lord I am ready to continue following in your footsteps.

Take me from the dark.

Hear me now O Lord.

Amen.

EXPLANATION

Obviously tonight is different from other nights because we are meeting here in the Church. I wanted to create an environment that would help you to be more reflective upon your personal relationship with Christ. Tonight is not about your relationship with the other students in the room, it is about your relationship with your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

(Insert opening prayer here)

Look at Jesus on the cross. The God of the Universe allowed this to happen to his son. Think about that. The God that created everything that is, that gave us life, that created the very wood that you are sitting upon allowed his son to be tortured and nailed to a cross. God allowed this to happen in order to redeem us. The sin of Adam and Eve, the 'sin of the world' referred to by St. John the Baptist, needed to have a fit punishment. This (*point to the cross*) was that fit punishment. Only a **perfect** human could die in our place.

My mind finds this very difficult to accept. I ask the question, "Well if God can do anything, then why did this have to happen?" Couldn't he just forget the whole thing? After all, he's God and he can rewrite the rules of what is fair and not fair in the universe. Can't he?

Well this very question is wrong because it is assuming that I know more than God and that I have a "better" way to fix things. Remember that it says in Isaiah 55:8 - "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," says the Lord. Perhaps the God of the Universe knows better than I do. **Perhaps.** (*said with much sarcasm...*)

However, as Pope John Paul II explained in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (pg 62-63):

"God . . . is Love (and) desires to justify Himself to mankind. He is not the Absolute that remains outside of the world, indifferent to human suffering. He is Emmanuel, God-with-us, a God who shares man's lot and participates in his destiny. God is not someone who remains only outside of the world, content to be in Himself all-knowing and omnipotent. . . . The crucified Christ is *proof of God's solidarity with man in his suffering*. God places Himself on the side of man. He does so in a radical way: *"He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming*

Bless me Father in this confession...

in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8)."

God did **this** (*point to the cross*) because he loves us. But more importantly, God did this because he loves **you**. God would have done all of this just for **you!** (*point to just one single individual*)

Do parents with one child love that one child more than parents with 5 children are able to love each of their kids? **Of course not!** Love is not given to each human as a finite amount that must be divided among everybody that they know. The human heart has the ability to love each person as much as the next; regardless of how many people we show love towards.

If a human can love this way, then think about how much God can love! "God **IS** love" (1 Jn 4:8...emphasis is mine). As a wise person once said, "God only knows how to count to one." (*Call Him Father, Edward Maristany, pg. 16*)

God loves you unconditionally. He loves you regardless of what you do. There is nothing you could do to make him love you more, and nothing you could do to make him love you less. If you become a monk and spend the rest of your life in prayer, he will love you just the same as if you live a life of crime and spend the rest of your life in prison. God loves you unconditionally.

God desires a relationship with you and is calling you to love him in return. The reason we are gathered here tonight is because we do not always love God the way that we should. As broken humans, we sin.

So what is 'sin'? (*Ask for a definition from some of the students.*) The definition is quite simple, "Sin is a rejection of God and his will for us."

As little children we all learned the story of creation in scriptures. We are taught that Adam and Eve ate an apple from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Did they really eat a fruit in a garden? Was it an apple? We don't know. The story of creation in Genesis 3 uses figurative language. Don't get caught up in the relatively 'juvenile' nature of the story while ignoring the deeper importance of the event.

Adam and Eve were created good, but were tempted by the Devil to lose trust in God and to disobey him. Adam and Eve chose themselves over God. Because of this, their human nature was changed, and all of their descendents would be born in this fallen state of "original sin." This original sin can only be erased through the sacrament of Baptism which returns us into the graces of Christ.

Despite baptism, we will always have our inclination towards sinfulness; this is called "concupiscence" and is what allows Satan to continue to tempt us towards sin. To give an example, I will use the situation of a person that is addicted to alcohol. After years of struggling, this person may go through a process of healing and eventually be successful

Bless me Father in this confession...

in no longer drinking alcohol. However, the temptation to drink will always be there. The same is true for us. Despite baptism and despite regular confession, our concupiscence remains and every day we perform “personal sins” by disobeying God and not trusting in his goodness.

As you know, these personal sins can fall into one of two categories...venial sin and mortal sin. Can somebody explain the difference between the two? (*Ask for volunteers...many teens can already articulate the difference*)

Correct...a mortal sin involves:

1. grave matter (breaks one of the ten commandments)
2. you know it is grave matter
3. you do it anyway

A mortal sin turns you away from God and can only be forgiven through the sacrament of Reconciliation. If you were to die in the state of mortal sin, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven and will be doomed to eternal suffering in hell. Yes, we do believe in hell and that is why tonight is very important.

A venial sin is a sin of less serious matter than a grave sin. It can also be a sin of grave matter in which you did not fully consent to the sin or did not know that your actions were sinful. Venial sins do not remove you from God’s graces, but weaken your will to avoid evil and thus may lead you towards mortal sin. Venial sins are forgiven each time that you go to Mass and receive Holy Communion, but should also be discussed in the confessional.

To explain the difference, I use the example of a pipe between yourself and God. Imagine if there were a pipe between God and yourself through which all graces and communication flowed. A venial sin is similar to dirt that may build up within the pipe and make communication between God and yourself difficult. However, a mortal sin breaks the pipe and removes all transmission of graces and communication between God and yourself. To repair the pipe, you must go to the sacrament of Reconciliation.

We will learn more later about the sacrament of Reconciliation, but for now it is important that you understand that Jesus Christ, gave the power to forgive sins in his name to the Church. He told his apostles, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:22–23). This means that the apostles and their successors, the priests and bishops of the Catholic Church, can forgive sins in Jesus’ name.

For some of you, it won’t take much convincing that you are a sinner, your sins are right there in front of you. They are huge boulders in your path to God. You recognize your sins and the problems that come with those sins are obvious in your life.

For others, it might take some work to see the ugliness of your sin because the problems they create are hidden. You may have already taken care of those large boulders in your

Bless me Father in this confession...

path to God, and now you need to start looking at just finding the best route between you and God. St. Ignatius of Loyola challenges you to pay special attention to the ‘inordinate attachments’ in your life; the seemingly good things that are actually pulling your attention away from the Lord and allow Satan to creep into your life. This could be your attachment to a friend who does not support your faith life, or your love of reading which actually takes you away from a good prayer life.

Tonight I want to reflect upon the seven ‘deadly’ sins to help to guide you in an examination of your conscience. These are considered ‘deadly’ because we are focusing on ourselves and not on God. Look at each of these and then how they hide themselves in less obvious behaviors. You have a sheet of paper and pen in the event that you want to take some notes as I discuss each of these.

1. Pride- the root of the first sin and the root of all sin

- the first sin in this world was the sin of the angels. God gave them the choice right at the beginning of their creation. Satan and his followers chose out of pride to go against Christ.
- the sin of Adam and Eve was also a sin of pride...pride blinded their hearts and their eyes as they listened to Satan and desired the knowledge of God.
- C.S. Lewis on pride: “There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves.” (Mere Christianity, Chapter 8)
- Proverbs 16:5, “Every proud man is an abomination to the LORD; I assure you that he will not go unpunished.”

Ways that pride may happen in your life:

- wanting things “your way” all of the time
- “I am a good student, who are you to tell me how to do this?”
- How thankful are you for your successes and your gifts, the good things that God does through you?
- being on a ‘power trip’
- gossip is a form of pride

2. Envy- sadness at the sight of another’s goods.

- a step beyond jealousy – you don’t just desire something that somebody else has, you don’t want them to have it either!
- Peter Kreeft says that envy is the only deadly sin that gives the person no pleasure.
 - It always leaves you high and dry.
 - You get zero satisfaction from envy.
 - At least the other sins give you a momentary high or thrill.
- Do you compare yourself to others?
- Are you envious of other students? Athletes? Speakers? Artists? Writers?
- Are you envious of the “stuff” that others have? Phones, cars, clothes, etc...

Bless me Father in this confession...

3. Anger- “a desire for revenge”

- not the emotion, you are not responsible for that feeling. However, if in your will, you allow the emotion to continue when it should not, you sin.
 - Some anger is just, you should be angry that 40,000,000 babies have been aborted since 1973.
 - God was angry throughout the Old Testament
 - Psalm 4:4 “Be angry, and sin not.”
- Anger becomes a sin when you get angry at the wrong things or when it is too much.
- When anger with a person becomes hatred, it is sinful. Who do you hate?
- Do you think that you are always right and dismiss others, rather than listen to them? This may be one way that we mask our anger with them.
- Venting – do you know who to talk to that will help ‘fan the flames’ of your anger? This is sinful.

4. Sloth – to refuse the joy that comes from God

- Sloth is a sin of omission, not a sin of commission.
- A joylessness when faced with God’s amazing blessings
- Do you fail to recognize the blessings in yourself and in others?
 - when you don’t think that change will happen
 - when you think that people in your life will always be holier than you
 - when you are comfortable with your solutions to your sin
 - when you are content with the minimal effort you are giving

Last three are not the most dangerous, but the most popular in our society today...

5. Lust- a disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure

- Remember, God made sex. Sex is good, but only when it is open to the creation of life and love within a marriage
 - Lust is insatiable, it always wants more
 - Leads to self-centeredness
- Do you have control of your eyes?
 - Just to walk by the magazine rack today requires a grace to avert the eyes.
- Pornography of all types is sinful whether it is in the form of pictures, books, images, or even songs that depict nudity or sex.
- Any contact between yourself and another person’s genitals is sex; many assume that they can do anything they want with their bodies as long as they do not have sexual intercourse...wrong!
- Any physical touch, communication, or discussion that is meant to get another person sexually stimulated (outside of marriage) is sinful. Massages, petting, “dirty dancing”, sexting, “spooning”, phone-sex, etc...
- Lust can also be a domination of others, games we play in our relationships, flirting.

6. Gluttony- eating or drinking inordinately, seeking pleasure in worldly things

Bless me Father in this confession...

- You may be quick to dismiss that eating can be sinful. However, Peter Kreeft points out that cook books outsell spiritual books and bibles by 10 to 1. In other words, does eating and the pursuit of only the best meals preoccupy our thoughts and attention far more than spiritual food?
- Drinking alcohol when you are under 21 is sinful because we are supposed to follow the laws of our state. Once 21, drinking with the purpose of getting drunk is sinful.
- What are your ‘addictions’? What could you go without every day? Your cell phone? Your computer? Your video games?
- desiring things of the world, seeking physical pleasure over spiritual pleasure
- Gluttony can also be wastefulness of our resources, not being good stewards of our planet. A 30 minute shower can be sinful.

7. Greed- an inordinate love of money or possessions

- Do you find security in your “stuff”?
- Do you worry about your image, your status?
- Are you making future plans based strictly on your future salary? If God is calling you to be a teacher, are you ignoring that call to make more money as a lawyer?
- Are you tithing to the Church?
- Are you willing to be poor?

APPLICATION

Session Idea # 1- Reconciliation service

Begin by giving a talk on God’s love and our failure to love him. An example talk is provided above. Modify the talk to your group and things that you know they are struggling with.

Then finish the talk with:

Tonight you will have the opportunity to receive healing through the sacrament of Reconciliation. We have several priests that have come tonight to hear your confession. You will have the opportunity to go to confession face to face with the priest or behind their back. You do not need to worry about remembering how to go to confession or any of the required prayers. I will provide you with a guide on how to go to confession and each of these priests are happy to help you through the process.

Remember that these priests hear thousands of confessions every year and will not judge you for your sins. They simply want to help you to make a good confession before the Lord. Even if you are not aware of any mortal sins, you are still encouraged to go to confession tonight. Regular confession brings you graces to avoid sin, and helps you to feel sorrow for even the venial sins in your life.

I will now distribute an examination of conscience to each of you as well as the guide to making a good confession (see “Other Resources” section). Please spend time in front of

Bless me Father in this confession...

the Blessed Sacrament and ask the Lord for the guidance to make a good and heart-felt confession.

(It is helpful to have reflective music playing while confessions take place...you may also consider saying a rosary together as a group while you are waiting for the confessions to take place. Once everybody has had the opportunity to go to confession, you will want to give a short reminder of the mercy and forgiveness of God.)

You have been forgiven! In the words of St. Isidore of Seville, “Confession heals, confession justifies, confession grants pardon of sin. All hope consists in confession. In confession there is a chance for mercy. Believe it firmly. Do not doubt, do not hesitate, never despair of the mercy of God. Hope and have confidence in confession.”

What should our response be to this forgiveness? Gratitude. Thanksgiving. A desire to love God and love others. Spend a few minutes here saying thank you to the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

As we go forth from this night we should remember that we are not perfect; everyone makes mistakes. However it is through our sinfulness that we need a redeemer. Christ is our light and with Him we have hope and faith. When we frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation we grow in holiness and more graces are poured down upon us, making us stronger and stronger. The process of sin, examination, repentance, and forgiveness is a prime example of the unconditional love that God shares for each one of us. We must always strive to show that same patience and generosity with others that God has shown to us.

(End the night with Benediction and send them home with a prayer card with a daily examination of conscience and a Confession schedule for your parish and surrounding parishes.)

Session Idea # 2- A talk on sin with several videos and activities to cover the topic.

The evening could begin with Lifehouse’s ‘Everything’ skit listed in the media suggestions of this document. This could be a good lead-in to your talk on God’s love and our failure to love him. An example talk is provided above. Modify the talk to your group and things that you know they are struggling with. You will want to insert any of the following three activity options at appropriate points in the evening. You may also consider showing the *Les Miserables* clip listed in the media suggestions of this document as a lead-in to your discussion about forgiveness.

Activity Option # 1: Video and Confession

Play the following video: (<http://www.godtube.com/featured/video/tenth-avenue-north-video-journal-1-healing-begins>)

This is a video of the lead singer from Tenth Avenue North (a Christian band). It explains the ideas many teens have about sinning. Without knowing it, this Protestant-based

Bless me Father in this confession...

teaching makes a very good argument for the Catholic teaching on the sacrament of Reconciliation. It stresses the importance of going to confession.

Review with the teens the elements of the sacrament of Reconciliation:

1. Examine your conscience.
2. Be sincerely sorry for your sins.
3. Confess your sins to a priest.
4. Resolve to amend your life.
5. After your confession, do the penance the priest assigns.

Encourage the teens to get to Confession soon. Send them home with an examination of conscience, a description of how to make a good confession, and a Confession schedule for your parish and surrounding parishes.

Activity Option # 2: Forgiveness Video and Small Group Reflection

Proverbs 17:9 tells us that a real friend will forgive. God has also made forgiving others a requirement for receiving his forgiveness.

"If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."
(Matthew 6:14, 15)

"Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ." (Ephesians 4:32)

We will now spend some time talking about forgiveness. There is an old saying, "To err is human, to forgive, divine." What does this mean? (*Help the teens to come to the conclusion that it is only through the grace of God that we are able to forgive others. This is a grace that we must pray for in our lives.*)

Begin by playing this video for the teens.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iv50xrsFNdU>
This video depicts a son forgiving his father for the death of his mother. The video ends with a quote from Mary Karen Read...one of the victims of the Virginia Tech shooting. The quote was found in her journal from the day before the shooting. It reads, "when deep injury is done to us, we never recover until we forgive...forgiveness does not change the past. But it does enlarge the future."

After playing the video, break the teens into groups of two to four people. Ask each person to share a time that they forgave somebody for something that was done to them.

Once each person has had the opportunity to speak, ask them to now share a time that they were forgiven by somebody for something that they had done to hurt another.

Now have each person write down a situation in which they are seeking the Lord's grace of forgiveness. Ask them to place this piece of paper someplace that they will remember to pray for this situation each day.

Bless me Father in this confession...

Activity Option # 3: New Testament Role Play

The New Testament is filled with Jesus' healings/miracles and redemptive stories. Examples of these stories are Mt 9:2, Jn 8:3-11, Jn 8:7, Jn 8:11. The Gospel of Luke is filled with sin and forgiveness stories such as, The Penitent Woman (Lk 7:36-50), Lost Sheep, Lost Coin (Luke 15:1-10), The "Good" Thief (Lk 23:39-43), Seven Times (Lk 17:3-4), Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32).

Depending on the size of the group, split the teens into smaller groups of at least four people. Have one person from the group pick a piece of paper from a hat or other object. In the hat will be stories of sin and forgiveness from the New Testament. Each group will be given enough time to prepare a skit based on the story they received and act it out for the rest of the groups to try and guess what it is.

The group should then read the story as a reminder of the passage.

SEND

Summary: What does this have to do with Jesus?

Jesus was crucified for our sins, the sins of the world. Without Jesus taking the fall for mankind we would not have had the chance to be redeemed and filled with grace. Jesus rose from the dead giving the world light of salvation, hope and forgiveness.

Closing Prayer:

Father, I look at Peter and see myself. How I have failed you! How I have disappointed you! How I have grieved you -- not just once but again and again. Thank you for the costly cross. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for your love for me and for the whole world. Thank you for Jesus. In his holy and precious name, I pray. Amen.

OR

Saint Michael, the Archangel

Saint Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do you, thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God cast into hell Satan and all evil spirits who wander about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Biography

Kevin Bohli is the Director of the Office of Youth Ministry for the Catholic Diocese of Arlington. He has held this position since 2001 and has been in active youth ministry since 1995. He is a full member of the Youth Apostles Institute (www.YouthApostles.org) and a founding member of the Fellowship for the New Evangelization (www.F4NE.org). He loves camping and all sports that involve getting outdoors with his wife and kids and as far away from civilization as possible.