

# Talking Points on Theology of the Body with Teens

by Elizabeth Sieb

Many people have heard the phrase “Theology of the Body” or “TOB,” for short, and have a basic conceptual knowledge of what it is about. However, if you are like the average TOB follower, you think it is GREAT but you may still struggle to know *how* to begin sharing this good news with teens. The following points are the backbone to the late Holy Father Pope St. John Paul II’s teaching on Theology of the Body which came from 129 homilies that he delivered between September 1979 and November 1984.

Theology of the Body is easily broken down into **two** basic questions, or parts.

1. Part I: *What does it mean to be human? (Versus being an animal, a robot, etc.)*
2. Part II: *What is true happiness and how can I find it?*

Use these very questions as discussion starters for you and your teens. These are universal questions and it is in the teenage years that we begin to ask these questions. Starting a conversation is the easy part, now you need to be ready for what will follow. Memorizing the following points and then remembering common responses that you get from teens will help you to better answer and discuss with them the beautiful message of Theology of the Body.

Each of these two questions can be further divided into **three sections** or additional questions.

Part I: <i>What does it mean to be human?</i>	Part II: <i>What is true happiness and how can I find it?</i>
Section I: Our Origin <i>What was man’s experience with the body before sin entered the world?</i>	Section I: Celibacy for the Kingdom <i>What is celibacy and why do people choose it?</i>
Section II: Our History <i>What was man’s experience with the body after sin entered the world and after Jesus redeemed it?</i>	Section II: Christian Marriage <i>What is a true Christian marriage? What is this analogy about God marrying the Church?</i>
Section II: Our Destiny <i>What will man’s experience of the body be like in heaven in a glorified state?</i>	Section II: Sexual Morality and Procreation <i>How far can I go before I am being immoral? How does the truth of sexuality set me free for true love?</i>

Below are the very basic beginnings of questions and suggestions on how you can get teens talking about these themes within the context of Theology of the Body.

Part I: **Introduction:** *What does it mean to be human?*

- Ask teens the following questions.  
*Who am I? What is my purpose in life? Why did God make me male or female? Why is there evil in the world and how do I overcome it? How can I find a love that really satisfies me?*
- Have teens create a collage, a poster, a playlist of music, or a short video using popular culture to get them to try to explain their answers to these questions. From these creations you can begin to draw out the ultimate truths that believe as Catholics such as belief in God, belief in suffering, belief in need of redemption, belief in an afterlife, and the belief of free will.
- Pope St. John Paul II said, “The body, in fact, and it alone, is capable of making visible the invisible: the spiritual and divine.” Open this point up by asking a teen to “Show me your soul.” No one can really show their soul so this gets teens to see that our bodies and souls

are intrinsically connected. Ask teens to create a list of things that are invisible. Then ask them to explain *how* we experience these things. (hint: by the 5 senses of our bodies)

- Use Play-Doh or sculpting clay and ask teens to sculpt God and their relationship with him. Focus on how they represent God and how they represent themselves. There are no wrong answers.

Section I: **Our Origin:** *What was man's experience of the body before sin entered the world?*

- Introduce the idea of God having an original plan for us. Spend time getting teens to imagine what The Garden of Eden was like. Remind them of God's perfection. Remind them that there was no sin. Play a game or create a list of what the world would have been like if sin had not entered the world.
- Read and study Chapter 2 of Genesis. What did man and woman experience? What does it mean to be "naked without shame?"

Section II: **Our History:** *What was man's experience with the body after sin entered the world and after Jesus redeemed it?*

- The Effects of Sin: This is a great time for personal, quiet reflection for your teens on the hurts and pains they have had in life. Then reflect on God mercy and forgiveness.
- The Redemption of Sexuality: Offer a healing night with adoration and adult volunteers to meet one-on-one with teens to listen. Offer confession.
- Look at the difference between Love and Lust. Have teens make a list of what they think love is and what they think lust is.
- Have teens take popular movies and rewrite them so that they are "redeemed" in the Christian sense by promoting chastity, purity, and dignity in the new version.

Section III: **Our Destiny:** *What will man's experience of the body be like in heaven in a glorified state?*

Part II: **Introduction:** *What is true happiness and how can I find it?*

- Does God want me to be happy? Many teens do not believe or are unsure if God loves them or wants them to be happy. True happiness is knowing and believing that we are loved by God beyond our imagination.
- Celibacy points to heaven where we will all "marry" God.

Section I: **Christian Celibacy:** *What is celibacy and why do people choose it?*

- Celibacy and the Religious Life: When sexuality is reduced to sex, than celibacy is in opposition of sex and is completely misunderstood. (See "freedom" below.)

Section II: **Christian Marriage:** *What is a true Christian marriage? What is this analogy about God marrying the Church?*

- God's Mystery and the Spousal Analogy
- Read Ephesians 5:22-23
- Read the book of Tobit and about the wedding of Tobias and Sarah.

Section III: **Sexual Morality and Procreation:** *How far can I go before I am being immoral? How does the truth of sexuality set me free for true love?*

- Freedom. Sexuality is "who we are" as either male or female. Sex is an "act we do" that fulfills the purposes God intends it to do. By teaching teens to see the difference they can recognize the freedom to choose what is good; to choose against a single act and still embrace their sexuality as male or female.
- Chastity.
- Counterfeits. All you have to do is look to the present culture and media to see the lies it tries to get us to believe. Make it a point to use songs and slogans, magazines, and videos to uncover the counterfeits, the lies, that our society is faced with and contrast them to the beauty of the Truth.

## **Basic Points of TOB**

- Christianity does not reject the body; it in fact, respects and honors it.
- Human nature is both physical and spiritual. We are not spirits trapped in our bodies.
- Our bodies help reveal to us our human nature and our God-given purpose - that we are made for love and communion.
- Love is FREE, TOTAL, FAITHFUL, and FRUITFUL.
- Love equals communion. Love is complete self-gift to others.

## **Five Practical Tips when Talking to Teens about Theology of the Body**

1. Tell them the good news.
  - 93% of teens are unimpressed and unaffected by statistics.
  - Share the Church's teaching as a "source of joy."
2. Speak their language.
  - Use digital media as a visual resource to reach the teens.
  - Challenge them to look critically at magazines, movies, and internet to see what is influencing them and the moral decisions they make.
3. Use a multidimensional approach.
  - Take into account their life situations and cultural backgrounds.
  - Teach not only to teens but to their parents and the church community.
4. Teach TOB as Vocation
  - TOB is much more than just a "sex talk."
  - Teach with a holistic approach and confront the questions "Where am I going?" and "What is God calling me to?"
5. Recognize TOB as a conversation and not just "The Talk."
  - TOB cannot be taught just once and then forgotten about. It must be an ongoing teaching and way of life that both you and the teens embrace.
  - Incorporate the teachings on chastity, purity, modesty, and TOB in all activities that you have.

## **Resources:**

<http://thetheologyofthebody.com/information/teens.html>

*Theology of the Body for Teens* by Jason and Crystalina Evert and Brian Butler printed by Ascension Press (This really is the BEST out there. Highly recommended and very, very practical and easy to use.)

*Theology of the Body for Beginners: A Basic Introduction to Pope John Paul II's Sexual Revolution, Revised Edition* by Christopher West printed by Ascension Press

*Called to Love* by Carl Anderson and Fr. Jose Granados printed by Image/Random House

*God's Plan for You: Life, Love, Marriage and Sex (The Theology of the Body for Young People)* by David Hajduk printed by Pauline Books and Media