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God's Gift of Self



Images of the Living God

God created humans male and female. He created both equally in his image. In that truth, revealed and made known to us by God, lies the equal dignity of both genders—of all men and women, of all girls and boys. The Church clearly teaches that God has given men and women equal personal dignity.

Our sexuality is a gift given to us by God. Sexuality is our God-given gift of being male or female—of being a woman or girl, or of being a man or boy. Many television sitcoms and practices in society would have us believe that there is a fundamental inequality between boys and girls, men and women. This false opinion is contrary to the teachings of both Sacred Scripture and the Catholic Church.

The four accounts of the Gospel clearly teach that Jesus lived this truth. He treated both men and women with “equal” respect and as having equal dignity. He chose both men and women as his disciples. He honored both men and women for their faith in and love of God.

Soon after the Pentecost event, Saint Paul described the relationship between a husband and wife as a living sign of Christ's relationship with his Church.



*Christ Healing the Mother of Simon Peter
by John Bridges (1818–1854 British)*

Healthy Habits in the Home

Share with one another your memories of the joys and struggles of growing up. Adult family members can share about their adolescent years while younger members can share their current experiences.

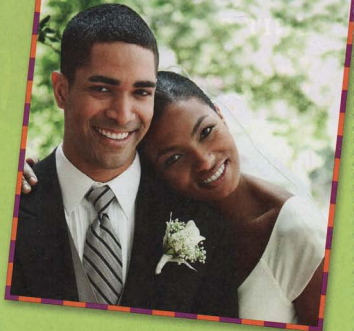
Family Blessings

Thank God the Creator for creating people, male and female, as living signs of his beauty and goodness. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to honor and respect each and every person.

Taking the Lesson Home

Watch and evaluate a popular television show or movie together as a family. Notice how each of the genders is portrayed. Observe how gender influences the attitudes and actions of each character. Then discuss the following questions:

1. How does the show or movie stereotype each gender?
2. How do the male and female characters honor and respect each other?
3. How are men and women portrayed as equal partners?



Making Connections

To help the family grow in their Christian maturity, ask each other the following questions:

- What does it mean to you to be (female/male)?
- How did you learn what it means to be (female/male)?
- How do you see me maturing into Christian adulthood?

Faith on the Fridge

Husband and wife are to love and serve one another out of reverence for Christ.

Based on Ephesians 5:21



Identity

LESSON 3

Heading Toward Maturity

During adolescence, your brain reaches adult size and weight. Your ability to think and to reason increases. You begin to look at things in new ways and make decisions more independently. Your memory skills improve, and you are becoming better able to understand someone else's point of view.

You may also be experiencing your emotions more strongly. Emotions are natural and are caused by changes taking place in your body. Being aware of how you feel and naming your emotions will enable you to better deal with the changes you are experiencing.

During adolescence, your ability to think abstractly will increase. Abstract thinking helps you make connections or understand relationships between ideas. This means that you are maturing in your understanding of things and are moving beyond concrete thinking or beyond your immediate tangible experiences. For example, you are becoming more aware of yourself as independent from others. You are maturing in your understanding of yourself and the world around you.

You are also maturing spiritually. Spiritual maturity is rooted in trust. A spiritually mature person trusts God, in good and difficult times. Spiritual maturity is a journey of faith. Just as your vision of the world changes with age, so does your understanding of God. The Gospel, Church teachings, prayer, sacramental celebrations and faith-filled people help you along your journey toward spiritual maturity.

This lesson will help you to:

- **explore** the different ways you are maturing.
- **understand** the changes during puberty.
- **affirm** that your identity is about your whole person, body and soul.



Who or what in your life helps you to be more mature in how you think, feel and behave?



Catholics Believe

Christian maturity is not limited by the age of our body nor to intellectual ability. Spiritual maturity means becoming more like Jesus in being open to accept and respond to the free and unmerited grace of God (CCC 1308).

Change in Motion

If you look around your classroom, you will notice that there can be a great deal of difference in the level of physical maturity among your classmates. The reason for that is simple. Everyone goes through stages of maturity, including physical maturity, at a different pace.

God created us in such a way that our physical growth is determined by the endocrine system. This system is made up of glands that work together to keep a body healthy. Heredity and diet influence the working of our endocrine system.

The endocrine glands secrete chemicals called hormones into the bloodstream. The word *hormone* comes from a Greek word that means “to set in motion.” God has set in motion within your body a means of growing that is essentially the same for everyone, but at a pace unique to each individual.

Hormones act as messengers throughout your body. Your body produces about thirty different hormones. One of the most active ones in your life right now is nicknamed the growth hormone. The growth hormone, or *somatotropin*, sets body growth in motion. During adolescence, this hormone is released at an increased rate and thus growth spurts result.



Think about the different kinds of growth and maturity that you have recently experienced.

It is not only your body but also your whole self that is undergoing amazing growth at this stage of your life. The amazing growth occurring in you and your friends is happening physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Through puberty, you might recognize how God has created you to be resilient. This means that as you mature, you grow in your ability to handle more challenges. While hormones help your body be resilient, your mind and will can help the rest of you think and choose to be strong. Just as your body needs exercise to maintain healthy growth so does your mind and “spirit.” You need to practice the virtue



of fortitude through resilience, to stay healthy mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

God created you as a whole person, body and soul. Your soul is the spiritual part of you that never dies. And he desires for you to know more fully who you are. With God's grace, you can and will grow in maturity.

What is even more incredible about all this growth is that through all of this change, God has given you the ability to come to know yourself better. For example, intellectually as you study the physical sciences and all the body systems that God designed, you will be able to apply that knowledge to understanding more about how you can stay healthy and safe. Spiritually, as you mature in faith, you will be able to reflect and discern more about your relationship with God.

"Looking in the Mirror"

Find some quiet time to look at yourself in a mirror. Write down who you see yourself to be at that moment. Describe all aspects of your personhood.



Growing in Virtue

God has created you **resilient** in all ways: physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Practicing the virtue of fortitude, or courage, exercises both your mind and will to know and choose to do what is right in seeking true happiness.



Physically I am

Mentally I am

Emotionally I am

Spiritually I am

Catholic Family Album

Saint Gertrude the Great (1256–1302) used her mental, emotional and spiritual gifts to come to a deeper understanding of herself, others and God. Gertrude, who was exceptionally smart, spent much of her time studying literature and philosophy as well as copying manuscripts by hand. At the age of twenty-six she received a mystical vision from Christ. After this experience, Gertrude spent the rest of her life pursuing a deeper understanding of God and guided others on their spiritual journey through her advice and writings.



What I will do!

To work toward achieving this goal, I will

Identify Yourself

Throughout your life, you will hear one question perhaps more than almost any other, “Who are you?” Most often you will identify yourself by telling your name.

The ability to discover, appreciate and value yourself as God created you is called self-acceptance. In the years ahead, you will grow in your understanding of yourself, both your strengths and weaknesses. Learn to be realistic about your weaknesses and to build on your strengths.

Spend a few moments answering the following questions, and come to know yourself better.

1. Three words that best describe me are

2. My proudest achievement is

3. What I most like about myself is

4. The thing that gives me the most confidence is

5. If I could change one thing about myself, I would

6. My favorite way to pray is

7. My biggest fear about the future is

8. My favorite saint is

9. The thing that makes me most sad is

10. A goal I have for my future is

Gender

LESSON 4

Male and Female He Created Them

The Book of Genesis has a very simple verse that tells of the crowning wonder of God's love. "God created man in his image; / in the divine image he created him; / male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

God created human beings with the gift of human sexuality, or gender. Sexuality is the gift of being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. The word *gender* refers to a person's sexual identity as male or female. There are three aspects of a person's gender: physical, psychological and spiritual.

1. **Physical:** The most obvious aspect of gender is related to our body. This is determined at the moment of conception when chromosomes from parents are joined. If a Y chromosome from the father joins an X from the mother, the result would be XY, and the gender of the baby is male. Otherwise X chromosomes from both parents would join and the baby is female.
2. **Psychological:** The way you view yourself as male or female is called your psychological gender. Parents and others help to affirm the gender of boys and girls.
3. **Spiritual:** Our capacity to love and be in relationships with God and others is affected by our gender. As an image of the power and tenderness of God, he created both men and women with differences that balance and complete one another.

Men and women need to accept their sexual identity. Through our sexuality we express and share our life and love most intimately with and for others. The only proper place for intimate sexual activity is within a lifelong marriage between a man and a woman.

As you develop, your gender is expressed in a series of changes. If these changes embarrass or worry you, be patient with yourself. Share your feelings with your parents, another trusted adult, or even an older sibling who has been through the same things already.

This lesson will help you to:

- **explore** the meaning of gender.
- **understand** that males and females complement each other.
- **affirm** your gender.

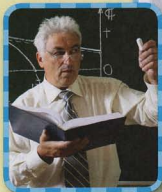


In what ways have you learned to appreciate and value your own gender?



Catholics Believe

Harmony of married life and in society depends in part on the way in which the complementary needs and mutual support between the genders are lived out (CCC 2333).



Different and Equal

Maybe your mom is an "I-can-fix-anything" kind of woman, comfortable with a power drill in her hand. Perhaps your dad is the best cook you know. Is that surprising to you? Some people would view these images as surprising, even "odd." Why might that be? It is because they have a false understanding of gender and gender differences. They believe that there is a fundamental inequality between boys and girls, men and woman.

God created humans male and female, he created both equally in his image. The Gospel clearly teaches that Jesus lived this truth. He treated both men and women with "equal" respect and as having equal dignity. The Church also clearly teaches that God has given men and women equal personal dignity.

Women and men possess differences that balance and complete, or complement, each other. When they honor one another, respect one another's gifts and work together as suitable partners, they are images of the beauty and goodness of God. When women and men use these differences as a source of power to dominate one another, God and his plan of creation is dishonored and not shown respect.



Think about the different kinds of growth and maturity that you have recently experienced.

Sexual Identity

Some people have created stereotypes of what it means to be a "man" or a "woman." A stereotype is a generalization about some group in society. It confuses individual observations with a whole group. It is easy to see how false stereotypes can result in people not respecting one another.

As individuals, each person has God-given gifts. Through personal persistent attention and appreciation of your gender, you can be proud of who God created you to be. This requires diligence about your sexual identity. This kind of diligence can be a healthy way of understanding why God

created you male or female. God created humans with two kinds of bodies, two complementary genders, two different kinds of persons.

Complementarity is the Creator's gift to humanity. Men and women are created to live with and for each other as equals. Women and men are to help each other complete God's plan on earth. This is how men and women are unique and in need of each other to live and to love, especially in marriage.

This is part of God's plan. We exist and continue to exist based on the complementary relationship of men and women. Life and love are instrumental to our existence. When men and women share their unique gifts for the good of the family and the world, they are images, living signs, of the mystery of God's love at work in their lives and in the world.

"Viewing the Genders"

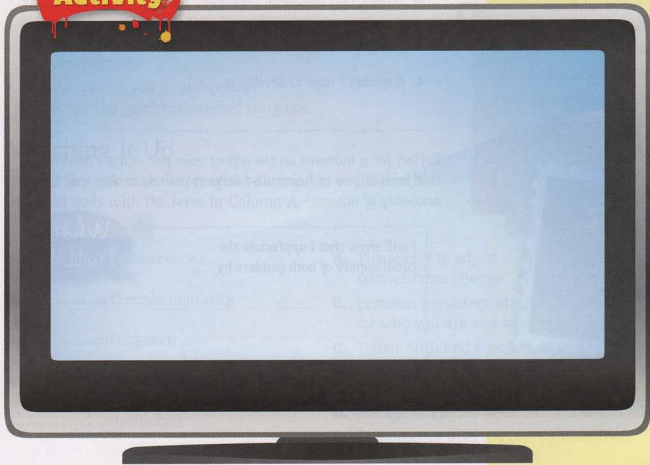
In the space below, outline a review of your favorite movie or show. Describe how the gender differences are treated. Equal? Complementary? Negative stereotype?

Activity



Growing in Virtue

To accept and appreciate the gender God created you to be is a **diligent** way of understanding your sexual identity. Be proud of who you are with unique gifts, persevering as a young man or young woman according to God's plan.



Catholic Family Album

Paul of Tarsus, Apostle to the Gentiles, encountered the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. This experience resulted in him becoming a disciple of Christ who zealously proclaimed Jesus Christ to Gentiles and, through his writings, reminded the early Church of the teachings of Christ. Many of Paul's letters are found in the New Testament and are part of the Canon of Scripture. In the Letter to the Ephesians, which is attributed to Paul, Paul described the relationship of Christ to his Church like the relationship of a husband and wife. Each must love the other with mutual respect.



Part of God's Plan

Both genders, which complement each other, are very much equal parts of God's plan for the human race. At your age, you may concentrate a bit more on the differences. But you also need to learn what human beings share in common. Neither gender is better than the other. God wants everyone to appreciate their own gender and to respect the gender of others.

Explore some of your own attitudes about what it means to be male or female. Complete the sentences that follow.

1. *My favorite toy when I was very young was*

2. *A quality I most admire in someone of the other gender is*

3. *What I most like about myself is*

4. *A quality I hope to develop is*

Reflect for a moment on the gift of your sexuality. Then make this faith choice to honor and respect your sexuality and the sexuality of others:

I will show that I appreciate the equal dignity of both genders by

What
I will do!

REVIEWING UNIT 2

Name

Summary

Remember what you have learned in each of the lessons in God's Gift of Self.

LESSON 3: Identity

- During adolescence you are maturing physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.
- Spiritual maturity is a lifelong growth process that focuses on living as Christ did.
- God created you—all of you. Much searching for self-identity occurs during adolescence.

LESSON 4: Gender

- God created the human race with two genders. Gender is a person's sexual identity as a male or female.
- The differences between men and women are not signs of their inequality. The way these differences work together is called complementarity.
- God desires for you to accept and appreciate the gender he created you to be.

Matching It Up

On each line, write the letter of the description in Column B that best goes with the term in Column A.

A

- 1.....Adolescence
- 2.....Complementarity
- 3.....Diligence
- 4.....Maturity
- 5.....Resilience

B

- A. The ability to adjust to change or capacity to recover from change
- B. Personal persistent attention and appreciation for who you are and what you do
- C. To live with and for each other as equal in dignity and unique in gender to complete God's plan
- D. A stage of life between childhood and adulthood
- E. The process whereby one realizes their full potential

Thinking It Through

1. How have you grown spiritually in the last year?

2. How do students in your school show respect toward people of the other gender?

3. Identify one masculine and one feminine image that would help you personalize your relationship with God?

REVIEWING UNIT 2

Name.....

Recalling Key Concepts

Circle the T if the statement is true. Circle the F if the statement is false.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Normally the ability to think abstractly will decrease during adolescence. | T | F |
| 2. God created human beings different in gender and therefore unequal in dignity. | T | F |
| 3. Growing in Christian maturity is a lifelong process. | T | F |
| 4. Males and females are different in opposite ways. | T | F |
| 5. A person's physical growth is determined by the reproductive system. | T | F |

Fill in the missing words in these sentences.

- refers to a person's sexual identity as male or female.
- By following and the way he lived, you can be a positive role model for others.
- are chemicals that act as messengers throughout the body setting things in motion for the body to grow and mature.
- When you others, you erroneously generalize and expect all people in a certain role to act or be the same.
- The three aspects of a person's gender include: physical, and spiritual.

Working Together

In a group, look through fashion advertisements. Each person in the group should pick one image and evaluate it on how it respects and honors the person and his or her gender. Discuss how these images influence you in helping or hindering your ability to accept and appreciate the gender God created you to be.