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# LIFE TEEN PARENT LETTER

*Thank you for allowing your teen to join us at Life Teen. Below you'll find some information about this Life Night's topic. Please dialogue with your teen and encourage them to share what they learned.*

## **LIFE NIGHT: WE'RE WAITING FOR YOU!**

### **CONTENT OVERVIEW**

All of us desire happiness and we make decisions every day motivated by the pursuit of happiness. God graces us with the desire to seek happiness because, ultimately, He is the only one who can make our happiness complete. "God has placed happiness in the human heart in order to draw us to the one who alone can fulfill it." (John 15:11, CCC 33, 1718)

Unfortunately, not all of us pursue God and His ways. Since God is love, He does not force us to love Him or to follow His ways. He gives us the responsibility of being "our own counsel" so that we can freely seek Him and gain perfection. (Genesis 3:4-5, CCC 1730)

Choosing to follow God, we arrive at a condition called beatitude, or blessedness and spiritual happiness. The Beatitudes Jesus teaches us to live, found in Matthew 5:1-12, are radically different than the happiness of the world. The world tells us to seek material wealth and power while Jesus tells us to be "poor in spirit."

Sometimes we as parents might encourage our children to seek the happiness of the world. Perhaps we pressure a child to be successful in sports or music and allow them to miss Mass or Life Teen in order to accomplish it? Maybe we schedule them so intensely they have no time to rest and pray. This is especially important on the Sabbath. We must emphasize, through our actions and words that choosing to follow God is the road to true happiness.

There is nothing in this world that can bring us true and unmitigated happiness but God and there is nothing in this world or beyond it that is the height of happiness but God. And because we find happiness in Him, we should pursue the things that bring us closer to Him.

It can be tough to be a disciple of Jesus, especially when so many around us are choosing to either make up their own laws or be completely lawless altogether. Many people look at the Church and say that there are too many rules and regulations, but, as Catholics, we know that there is true happiness in following God.

Over the next four weeks, we are going to delve further into what it means to respond wholeheartedly to God's pursuit of us and our pursuit of God, especially through knowledge of the Ten Commandments, Church authority, and forming our own conscience.

### **CONVERSATION STARTERS**

1. What is your happiest memory? Where were you? What were you doing?
2. When did you choose the world's way over God's way? What did it lead to?
3. As a family, read the Beatitudes and discuss how they call us to live.

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## **LIFE NIGHT: NEW AND IMPROVED!**

### **CONTENT OVERVIEW**

When God delivered His people out of Egypt, He gave them laws to follow called the Ten Commandments. These commandments were built upon natural law, the inherent ability to decipher good and evil. The purpose of these commandments was to help the Israelites, who were new to following the one true God, draw closer to God and His will for their lives.

When Jesus came to earth He gave us a New Law. Jesus did not come to replace the Old Law but to fulfill it. The Two Great Commandments that Jesus gives us are: You shall love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you should love your neighbor as yourself. (CCC 1968, Matthew 5:17, Matthew 22:38-39)

The Ten Commandments were a list of don'ts, whereas the New Commandments focus on the reason behind the list, love. Instead of merely following the rules, the teachings in the Gospel encourage us to live a life of radical love. To love as Christ loves includes not just loving our friends, but also our enemies. We are taught to pray for those that persecute us, comfort those who are in despair, and reach out to the lonely and the friendless. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Not only does God give us commandments, but also grace, won for us by Jesus on the cross, to keep His commandments. Grace is freely given and cannot be earned. There are different forms of grace, each unique to what it accomplishes. Actual grace is the gift that God gives us that enables us to act according to His will in our lives. God gives us this grace throughout our lives according to what we need at the time. Sanctifying grace is the grace given to us for our own sanctification. "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and sanctify it." Grace helps us to achieve God's ultimate desire for our lives, which is our unity with Him in heaven. (CCC 1999)

### **CONVERSATION STARTERS**

1. What is a rule that is unique to your family? How does it benefit your family?
2. How can you love others more radically?
3. How can you better use the gift of grace given to us?

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## **LIFE NIGHT: EAT YOUR VEGETABLES!**

### **CONTENT OVERVIEW**

The world is constantly changing. We have new technologies, scientific advancements, and forms of communication. The Church adapts to the changing times. The teachings of Jesus never change, but as new situations and questions arise, the Church applies these teachings to modern situations.

Jesus sent the Spirit of Truth to the apostles after His Ascension. He wanted to make sure that His teachings would not be lost so that all people could attain salvation, even after He had left this world. (John 16:13, Acts 2)

Adaptations of Church teaching were first visible at the Council of Jerusalem in the first century. This council dealt with the question of Gentile converts and their adherence to the Mosaic Law. The earliest Christians looked to the apostles to settle this matter because they knew the apostles, the first bishops and pope, spoke with the authority of Jesus Himself, thanks to the grace of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 15:1-5)

The grace of the Holy Spirit has been handed down from the first bishops and pope until today by the laying on of hands and apostolic succession. The unbroken line of succession from the apostles to today's bishops and pope allows our bishops and pope to speak with the authority of Jesus, just as the apostles did. This charism applies to the Church's teaching on matters of faith and morals. (CCC 888-889, John 14:6)

We are called to give the obedience of faith to Jesus and, therefore, to His Church. The obedience of faith is the obedience by which we submit our intellect and our will to the teachings of God and His Church. Jesus Himself modeled this obedience in the Garden of Gethsemane when He submitted His human will to the divine will. (CCC 143, Romans 1:5, Luke 22:42)

We submit our intellect to Jesus and His Church when we choose to follow a teaching on morals that we don't fully understand or when we make the choice to believe a teaching on faith that we are unable to comprehend.

We are not asked to blindly obey. For every Truth proclaimed by the Church, and every moral precept, there is a reason, an explanation, and a purpose. We need to keep asking questions, keep pursuing the truth, and keep praying for the grace of the Holy Spirit to find them.

### **CONVERSATION STARTERS**

1. Has there been a time that accepting a precept or teaching of the Church has been particularly difficult?
2. What family rules or changes in family rules have been the most difficult to accept?
3. Why do you think we struggle with obedience?
4. As a family, pray for the leaders of our Church to always seek the Holy Spirit's guidance.

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## **LIFE NIGHT: THE DRIVE OF YOUR LIFE!**

### **CONTENT OVERVIEW**

When you were a kid did you ever start an adventure by using a compass to get your direction? Today, we have replaced compasses with GPS systems and Google Maps, but the idea is the same. These tools help us get where we want to go.

God knew that we would face difficult decisions that would make us feel lost on our journey toward Him. So, He gave us a spiritual compass called our conscience.

Our conscience is the inner voice that reminds us of God's law. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that, when God gave us the New Covenant, He would "place his law within us and write it on our hearts." (Jeremiah 31:33, CCC 1777)

Our understanding of God's law is not perfect and we were not born with a perfect conscience. Sometimes certain topics, problems, or decisions can point us in the wrong direction away from God. So, we need to train our conscience to choose the good. (CCC 1783)

Sometime choosing the good can be difficult because we are ignorant of what is right and what is wrong. Invincible ignorance is when knowing the difference between right and wrong is, possibly, asking for too much. For example, when a teacher tells students to prepare for a test by reading pages twelve through twenty-three and then tests on information found on page fifty-two. (CCC 1793)

Vincible ignorance is when we can and should overcome our lack of knowledge. God expects us to work at forming our conscience, and so there will be times when saying, "I didn't know it was wrong" just doesn't cut it. For example, when a teacher clearly communicates what information will be covered, tests on it, and the students still claims, "but I didn't know." (CCC 1791)

Our job is to form our conscience well through prayer, reading the Bible and the Catechism, and through seeking wisdom and guidance from trusted mentors. As parents, we have a responsibility to our children to help them form their conscience. If we are not diligent in this responsibility, they will make their decisions based on secular culture that permeates their daily lives.

### **CONVERSATION STARTERS**

1. Parents - When and how have you helped your children form a Godly conscience instead of a worldly view? How do you keep abreast on contemporary issues and the Church's teaching on them?
2. Teens - Why is "I don't know" sometimes a valid or invalid excuse?
3. What can we do to continue to form our conscience?
4. As a family, pray for the courage to follow your conscience.