

Session 1

A **Mission** to love



Overview

On a Mission to Love

Sexuality: a Resource for Loving

Cherish and Respect

Love as a Gift of Self

Smart Loving

The Power of Affirmation



On a **Mission** to love

The Church has great ambition for your marriage. In choosing to marry in the Catholic Church, you place yourselves in a category of couples with higher ambitions and ideals for your marriage.

Every couple wants to avoid divorce and get along without too many fights. A successful marriage however, is much more than just this; it is a life-long union in which both spouses flourish as individuals and enjoy a deep and passionate intimacy. Thinking only in terms of 'avoiding divorce' is very limited. It's rather like a student who only aims to pass: if you miss the mark by even a little, you are already in trouble. You are likely to fail.

The Church has a different proposition: make marriage your vocation, your whole life's work. Convince this man that he is loved and appreciated; convince this woman that she is understood and cherished. That's the job description.

Actually, it is more like a mission, and if you approach it with a pro-active mindset, you can take it on with confidence and enthusiasm. You can dedicate all of your talents and intellect to achieving your goal.

The Church asks you to put your whole self into this vocation, as a total gift of self-donation. Fifty-fifty doesn't really work because it leads you to hold back and to keep score. Self-donation implies that you choose it and choose it freely. This is being pro-active. You don't have to wait for the other to lead. You each take responsibility for your mission to love.

Your potential to love your whole life long is all in your will: you choose it, and you are freer than you think to make choices that will be good for you. It is not difficult or mysterious once you clarify the mission, clear out the obstacles, identify your resources and make the most of them.

A Vocation to Love

A vocation is a life choice to which God calls us. He is always eager to send the grace we need to get the job done. So, in marriage, we can pray for passion, enthusiasm, or perhaps an affirming spirit and we are assured of God's help. We cannot miss. He is as anxious to provide what we need as is a mother whose teenager asks for the vacuum to clean his room!

It is the Lord's deepest desire that we love one another as He has loved us. The Father sends us to each other to effect His purposes, especially when we draw out each other's goodness and affirm each other's virtue.

It is always difficult to see ourselves objectively or in perspective. In fact, we cannot even see ourselves physically without a mirror. We can only see ourselves clearly through the eyes of those who love us.

For our part, if we keep our eyes focused on the other's masculine or feminine virtue we will not only be drawn to them, but we will feel blessed to be theirs. It will cultivate gratitude and generosity.

The reality is that if you are looking for faults in each other, you will surely find them. Equally so, if you are looking for virtue you will find that too. The more you affirm the good that you see the more that good will be drawn out, and the more you will feel wealthy in love. §



Video clip

Mission to Love

Sexuality

a resource for loving



One of the fundamental things we bring into marriage is who we are in terms of both our gender and our sexuality. For purposes of clarity, we will define **Gender** as our physiological maleness or femaleness, while our **Sexuality** describes the state of our whole personhood, body and soul, and is expressed as either masculinity or femininity.

Sexuality is developed in relationship. Our masculinity or femininity draws us out of ourselves into relationship and makes us attractive to the other sex. When we are attracted to another, we tend to bring out our good qualities; that is, what we like best about ourselves. Each woman's unique femininity will be the sum total of all the virtue drawn out of her in relationship with all of the men and boys in her life. Likewise, a man's masculinity is defined and developed by what is drawn out of him in relationship to the women and girls in his life. So, our masculinity or femininity is unique to each of us because of our individual experiences.

A couple's sexuality, their attraction and attractiveness to each other, is not just physical. Sexuality draws us out of ourselves in relationship with the other. It is other-centred rather than self-centred, and we are at our best when we allow ourselves to be attracted.

What's more, when the atmosphere between us is 'sexual' the work of marriage becomes fun. We are naturally more tender, generous, attentive and responsive. §

Web link

blog post on TOB

The **Body** reveals **God**



Body & Soul

"The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." Gen 2:7

As human persons, we are both body and soul. We have a physical nature and a spiritual nature. In the creation story from Genesis 2 God formed the man's body from the material of the earth and breathed into his nostrils God's own life. This 'breath of life' is our spiritual nature or soul.

"When the first man exclaims at the sight of the woman, "she is flesh from my flesh and bone from my bones"(Gn 2:23) ... he seems to say, *Look a body that expresses the 'person'!* ... one can also say that this 'body' reveals the living soul." Theology of the Body, n14. pg 183.

The Body Reveals God

We cannot see the soul or spirit of another person, we can only see their body. In this sense, the soul is hidden; it is the invisible mystery of God, the spiritual and the divine enfleshed in the human body. Yet we know when a person's soul is present, by the presence of their body. You know that your fiancé's soul is present, because you can see, feel, experience him/her through your senses - through your own body. We can say that our bodies are 'sacraments' because they are a visible sign of the invisible reality of our spiritual nature.

All of creation is sacramental in that it reveals something of the mystery of the Creator. This is why we are able to feel close to God and are aware of His presence when we are conscious of nature. As human persons, we are the crowning glory of God's creation! If all of creation reveals something of the mystery of God, we as human persons made in the image and likeness of God, are the fulfilment of the 'sacrament of creation'. We image God in and through our very bodies created as male and female.

"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Gen 1:27

"The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it." Theology of the Body, n19. pg 203. **\$**

Created Male & Female

We are sexual by God's design!

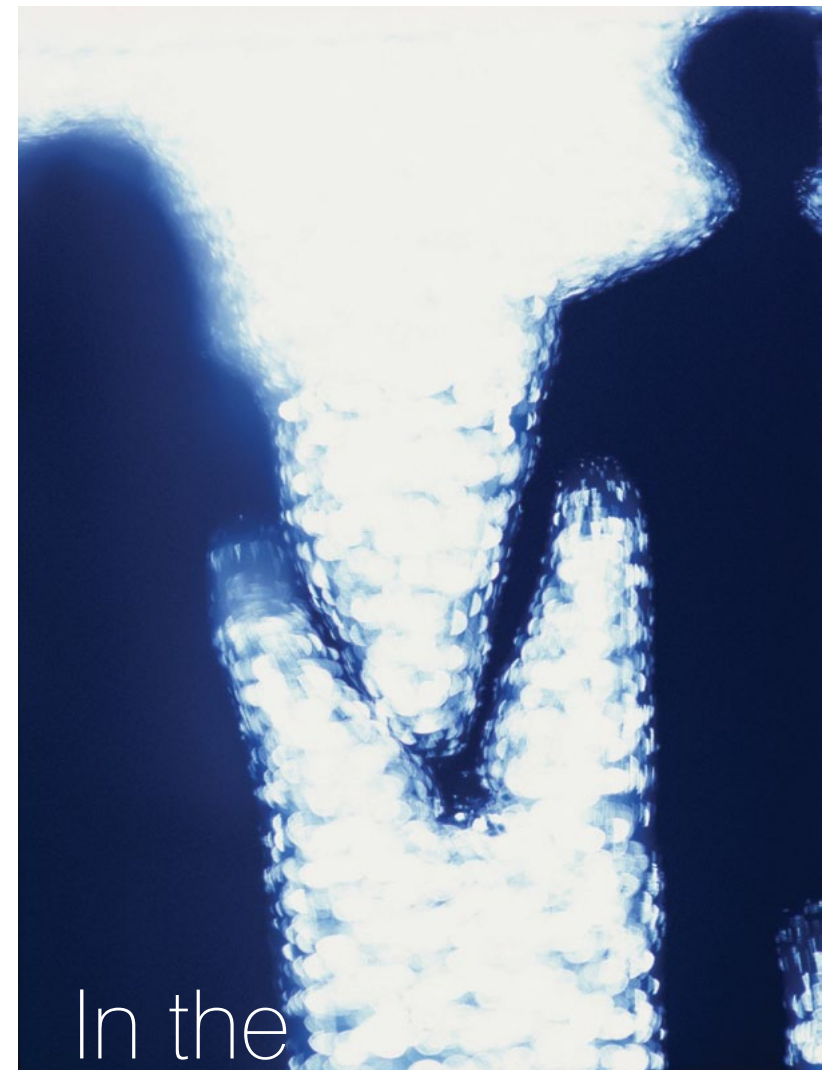
Our masculinity and femininity are completely integrated with our personhood. They are stamped into our spirituality, hard-wired into our brains, completely ingrained in our personality and manifested in and through every part of our bodies. To be human, is to be sexual.

“As Genesis 2:23 already shows, femininity in some way finds itself before masculinity, while masculinity confirms itself through femininity. Precisely the function of sex, [that is, being male or female], which is in some way, ‘constitutive for the person’ (not only ‘an attribute of the person’), shows how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the uniqueness and unrepeatability proper to the person, is constituted by the body as ‘he’ or ‘she’.”

Theology of the Body, n10. pg 166.

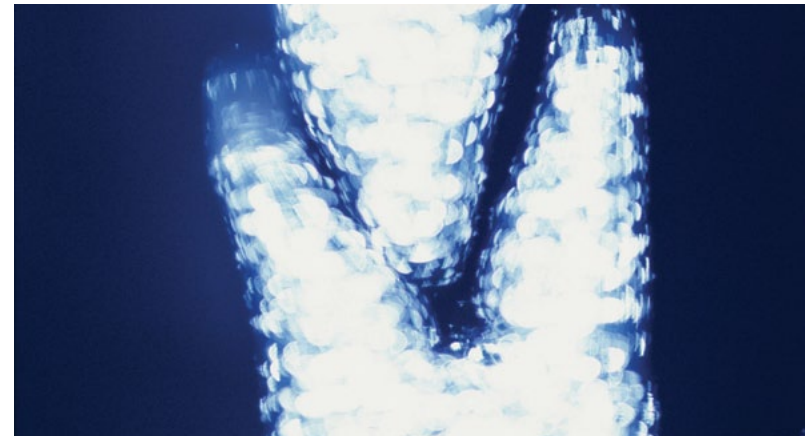
Video clip

Gender Complementarity



In the
Image
of *God*

viva la difference



“Woman’s constitution differs from that of man; in fact we know today that it is different in the deepest bio-physiological determinants. [And] the difference is shown only in a limited measure on the outside, in the build and form of her body.”

Theology of the Body, n 21. pg 211.

Our physiological sex influences our behaviour in relationship. Differences in our brain structure and development as well as hormone levels make certain ways of loving or being loved come more naturally for each of us while others require effort.

Men are testosterone-loaded, lateral-brained and often left-brain dominant. They are gifted with a desire to build, to spring into action, to provide, to protect, to conquer tasks, to win, solve problems, or plan for the future. They are very often the anchor in a relationship regardless of their personality. They may be constant in service or able to provide security. Masculine virtue is often willing to sacrifice for the greater good, offer the greater physical labour, or take the heroic risk. Because a man generally sees virtue in terms of strength and sin in terms of weakness, strength of character, honesty, competence, integrity or principled

behaviour can be ways of loving for a man. He will also tend to feel most love when he is respected and his strength is needed or appreciated. Physical expressions of love, sexual communication, touch, and spending time together are likely to be most natural and powerful for men.

Women are oestrogen-laden, have more connectors in the brain, and are often right-brain dominant. They are gifted with a natural ability to nurture, are often warm and personal. They tend to build relationships by expressing feelings, sentiments, and affection, and by communicating verbally. Feminine virtue will be urgently drawn to respond to those in tears, in need or in pain and will endure long suffering for those they love. They are very often able to be flexible and creative, adjust to change and allow themselves to be vulnerable in a relationship. Because women see virtue in terms of beauty and sin in terms of ugliness or shame, they will naturally express love through beautiful words, thoughtful gestures, compassionate deeds, and by making things beautiful, decorating everything with great care. They want to be known on a personal level and are willing to trust others and share their interior selves. They will typically feel most loved when they are listened to, understood, and cherished. §



Cherish & Respect

Respect: esteem; a feeling or attitude of admiration and deference toward somebody or something.

The Latin roots of the word 'respect' are 're' meaning to 'do something again', and 'spect' meaning 'to see'. In the context of this passage, respect means to look upon your future husband through God's eyes, as a man with dignity, honour and value. When you respect someone, you value their opinion and are open to being influenced by them. Respect will not let a wife criticise or belittle her husband, but rather, will call her to encourage and affirm him. Respect will also give a husband the freedom to love and cherish his wife with all his masculine goodness and value.

In fact, many men will report that they can't differentiate between being loved and being respected – to them, the two are the same experience. In a survey of 800 men*, when asked "if you had to choose between the following two negative experiences: to be either 'alone and unloved' or to be 'inadequate and disrespected'", three quarters said it was worse to be 'inadequate or disrespected'. This is a powerful insight into the importance of respect to a man.

Practical expressions of respect may include seeking his opinion when making decisions, avoiding negative judgements about his motives when something goes wrong, trusting his judgement, and refraining from criticism or put-downs. It is through a wife's respect for her husband; her admiration and appreciation of him and the sacrifices he makes, that he most often experiences her love. To say to a man 'I love you but I don't respect you' does not compute... for most men they are one in the same.

"Each of you, however, should love [agapé] his wife as himself, and let every wife respect her husband."

Eph 5:33

When St Paul wrote these words 2000 years ago he was keenly aware of the differences between the sexes and so he deliberately gave husbands and wives different instructions on how to live a successful marriage.



Experiencing my wife's respect for me as a person and as her lover is a powerful experience of being loved for me. Respect doesn't mean she has to agree with me (far from it!), but rather, she doesn't assume the worst of my intention, especially when things go wrong between us. While not a perfect husband, I do try my best to love and care for her. While I don't always get it right, nothing quite hurts so much as her assumption that I didn't care or was thoughtless. On the other hand, an expression of respect, such as assuming I meant well, even if it was the wrong action, is really affirming.

Video clip

Testimonial

Cherish: to feel or show great care for somebody; to value highly; to retain a memory of.

The original text of St Paul's letter uses the word 'agapé' for love. In Ancient Greek (in which St Paul wrote), there were at least three different words used to describe different types of love. In English, we have only the one word: 'love' and it has many meanings.

'Agapé' described the kind of love that was completely other-centred and in service to the other. In the context of marriage, the English word 'cherish' sums it up well. It is the kind of love that led Jesus to tenderly wash his disciples' feet at the Last Supper, to teach to the point of exhaustion, to feed and nourish his followers, to ultimately give his life on the cross in love. In fact, earlier in the passage (Eph 5:25-30), these very actions were referred to by St Paul as examples of how a man is to love his wife. Like Christ, husbands are to take the leadership in being of service in the marriage, just as Christ leads the Church in self-sacrificing love. It's a big mission – to 'agapé' [i.e. cherish and care for] your future wife in the same way that Christ loves and cherishes his people!

Most women experience love most powerfully in the form of being cherished. When you cherish someone you value them greatly, they are precious to you, so you care for them tenderly, and you think about them often. Practical expressions of cherishment include: providing for a wife materially, caring for her physically, protecting her from harm, doing things to help her and making gestures to show that her husband has been thinking about her. A husband can communicate how much he cherishes his wife by affirming her beauty, listening to her and letting her get close to him emotionally.

Like many of your sexual differences, these traits are not exclusive. Women like to be respected and men also like to be cherished. The differences occur in the **relative importance** of these two modes of expressing love. Just as you have two hands, but only one hand, (either your right or your left) is the preferred or dominant one; likewise with your experience of love. Most men predominantly experience love in the context of respect and secondarily in the context of being cherished. For most women the reverse is true: she experiences love more powerfully in the form of cherishment, rather than respect.

* Shaunti Feldhahn, "For Women Only". §



Love as Gift

In our culture, 'love' is generally seen to be a 'feeling'. We fall into love and we fall out of it. Love is something that just happens **to** us; we can't help falling in and out of love.

In fact, 'love' is a choice. True love is a conscious, deliberate choice to make a gift of our selves to another. For Pope John Paul II, love is all about gift. To love someone is to make a gift of yourself to another. Reflecting on the Trinity, we see the inner dynamic of love as a mutual gift of self: the Father makes a gift of himself to the Son, the Son makes a gift of himself to the Father, and the Holy Spirit springs forth from their mutual self-gift.

Being created in the image of God means that we too are called to become gift. A gift just as God is gift within the inner life of the Trinity and within the heavenly and created world.

"To say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is created to exist 'for' others, to become a gift."

On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, No. 7

This idea of 'love as gift' is expressed in several different phrases used frequently by the Pope: self-donation, a sincere gift of self, self-gift, or simply 'gift', where 'Gift' refers to the divine and 'gift' to the human. All these terms refer to the same idea: to love is to make a gift of oneself to another.

We can't make a gift of ourselves in isolation; we need someone to be gift **for**. This is why Adam needed Eve. He needed someone to make a gift of himself to, and to make a gift of self to him. It is only in relationship that we can discover our capacity for making a sincere gift of self to God and others.

"Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for himself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self."

Gaudium et Spes, No. 24

A Gift made through the Body

This gift of self is made through the body. We are embodied souls, so our gift of self will be expressed and lived out through bodily acts. This may take the form of a generous act of service, the patient listening to another, or even the total gift of self enacted in sexual intercourse.

A mutual gift of self

This gift of self may be unilateral or mutual. A parent-child relationship is most often a unilateral, or one sided, gift of self. It is a benevolent love, in which the parent has no expectation of having his or her personal needs met. In a mutual gift of self, the love is reciprocated. This is the ideal of the husband and wife relationship, where both make a sincere gift of self to each other. Pope John Paul II called this mutual exchange a 'communion of persons'. This is one reason why marriage is a sacrament but parenthood is not; in parenthood, the relationship is most often unilateral, whereas marriage, as a mutual exchange, more accurately images the Trinity.

The nature of the gift

But what does this gift of self look like? Again, if we refer to the Trinity, we see that the nature of the mutual self-gift between the Father and the Son has several important characteristics: it is freely given; it is total and complete, holding nothing back; it is faithful; and it is fruitful, springing forth in the Holy Spirit. This gift of self is also evident in the passion of Jesus on the cross; His gift of self was made freely, totally, faithfully, and bursts forth in spiritual fruitfulness (i.e. our salvation).

Likewise, the gift of self made in marital union, in order to be truly sacramental and prophetic, needs to also be freely given, total, faithful (exclusive) and fruitful. §

Web link

blog post on TOB



“... man, willed in this way by the Creator from the ‘beginning,’ can only find himself through a disinterested gift of self ... precisely this gift allows both the man and the woman *to find each other reciprocally*, inasmuch as the Creator willed each of them *‘for his own sake’* (see Gaudium et Spes, 24:3).”

Theology of the Body, TOB 15. pg 187.

In the early years of our marriage, when I felt ‘out of love’ with my husband, I used to become critical of him, and would try to nag him into giving me the attention I wanted. I blamed him for the loss of my ‘in love’ feelings. When I realised that love wasn’t about a feeling, but about being a gift, it changed the way I behaved. I stopped demanding that he help me feel loving feelings, and instead, focused on loving him. I tried to put aside my feelings of irritability and hurt that made me want to punish him, and concentrated on how I could help him feel more loved. I found, that by focusing on him, I also ended up feeling a lot better myself because our relationship was better.

Video clip

testimonial

Purity of Heart

“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God”. Mt 5:8

To be pure of heart means to be able to love another without self-interest; to set aside our own self-centred desires in order to love as a pure and unselfish gift of self. This purity of heart we see in people like Mother Teresa of Calcutta who loved the people of the street purely for themselves. She had no desire to use them or manipulate them for her own benefit. Jesus tells us that when our hearts are pure and we are able to love unselfishly, we will see God; we will see Him in the body of the one we love. How true this was of Mother Teresa who saw every suffering person she met as Jesus present with her.

For couples, being pure of heart by loving our spouse or fiancé as an unselfish and generous gift of self, we are able to see and experience God present in him or her. Rather than seeing only the limited human view of the external, bodily dimension, we see our loved one as God does, with mercy and delight. When we see with the eyes of God, we are able to see both the body **and** the soul. We see our loved one in all her beauty and tenderness, in all his strength and majesty. §

“Purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God. Even now, it enables us to see *according to* God, to accept others as “neighbours”; it lets us perceive the human body – ours and our neighbours – as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty.”
Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2519.



Smart Loving

Video clip

SmartLoving

Loving the way my fiancé likes to be loved.

Every person experiences love in a unique way. Some gestures of love will more powerfully communicate love to you than others. For example, some people feel close and connected when they can physically touch the other person. Others demonstrate love through words of affirmation or affection, acts of service or thoughtfulness, or by spending time in intimate conversation. Still others feel deeply loved and connected through eye contact or other body language.

Both you and your fiancé will instinctively give love in the way that you most like to receive it. However, it is unlikely that you will both experience love in exactly the same way. In order to be effective in your efforts to love, you will need to learn how your fiancé wants and needs to be loved; to love by intention rather than by instinct.

When you understand what is important to your fiancé, then you can choose to give love to your fiancé in exactly the way he or she best experiences it.

This is Smart Loving: giving of yourself to your fiancé in the way they most like and need to be loved.

Smart Loving is genuine loving because it's other-centred and focused on loving them on their terms rather than your own. It is also smart, because it's effective. It helps you to target your efforts to love towards what will truly communicate love. §

Stories of the Heart

For many years I used to get annoyed when my husband left dirty clothes on the floor in our bedroom - I judged him to be selfish and ungrateful for the work I did in the home. As I learned to love him more and myself less, I came to see him differently. Now when I wake later and I find his dirty clothes strewn on the floor, I see evidence not of a selfish man, but of a generous one. I see a man who rises early to quietly leave a sleeping household so that he can meet the demands of the job. His clothes do not represent his indifference, but rather are evidence of his self-sacrifice to provide for our comfort. And instead of feeling resentment towards him, I experience compassion and respect. I think that I am learning to 'see God' in him, to see him as God sees him, not just the external appearances that used to send me crazy, but the incredible, internal qualities of his personhood.



Consistent, sincere affirmation has the capacity to heal the wounds of inadequacy from which so many of us suffer. It communicates acceptability and loveliness. It lifts us up, and helps us feel better about ourselves. However, the power of affirmation is not limited to the recipient only. The person making the affirmation is also transformed. We become more optimistic, and we're more fun to be with. Looking for and affirming the goodness in another lifts our spirit and cultivates an attitude of gratitude and generosity in us.

Conversely, criticism damages the sense of worthiness in our partner. It works against our mission to love and to communicate our partner's acceptability. When we criticise another,

we also damage our own spirit; instead of focusing on our blessings, we see only the inadequacies of others. Criticism saps the enjoyment out of our life, and is like a poison to a marriage.

We are certainly not saying that we should avoid correcting mistakes or confronting problems, but it is important to do so with an affirming spirit.

There is a distinct difference between criticism and correction.

Criticism assigns a negative motive or implies an innate inadequacy in the other. It is aimed at the personhood and is negative. Correction is a simple truthful statement that assumes virtue or goodwill in the other and is aimed only at objective facts.

An example of simple correction would be: "Gosh honey you must have forgotten, we are flying into San Diego not Los Angeles. We better change that car rental reservation". A critical way of saying the same

thing would be: "If you were paying attention and taking some responsibility you would have noticed that our tickets say San Diego not Los Angeles. Now we don't have a car! Can't you ever do anything right?" Even words that are intended to be simple correction can come across as criticism if we use a tone of voice that is accusatory, exasperated, or disrespectful. It is all in our attitude.

Affirmation is an attitude and a posture of the heart that is focused on the other's virtue and is filled with tender respect and gratitude for their love. As husbands and wives, one of the greatest gifts we can give each other is to communicate God's unconditional love and acceptance by intentionally affirming each other. §

"... the perennial reciprocal attraction of the man to femininity and of the woman to masculinity, is an invitation mediated by the body."

Theology of the Body, n40. pg 287.

Affirmation

Mutual Wonder

Our sexuality is revealed and developed in relationship. The more we accept and develop our masculinity or femininity in authentic relationships, the more we become aware of ourselves as whole persons. The deeper this awareness, the more capable we become of giving ourselves to the other as gift.

When we see the other as a whole sexual person, body and soul, we see the depth of who they are as a man or woman and we are attracted in love to that femininity or masculinity.

Pope John Paul II calls this the “perennial attraction” of the male and female. It draws out our generosity and inspires us to love unselfishly. §



Audio clip

Gender Complementarity

Tool: Daily Appreciation

Build your relationship on a steady diet of affirmation with this simple daily exercise. At least once a day, tell each other one thing that you appreciate or find endearing or attractive about the other.

What I appreciated about you today is...
followed by how that quality has impacted you.

“On seeing the woman created by God, man’s first words express wonder and admiration, or even better, the sense of fascination (cf. Gn 2:23). *And a similar fascination - which is wonder and admiration* - runs in fuller form through the verses of the Song of Songs ... The point of departure as well as the point of arrival for this fascination - reciprocal wonder and admiration – are in fact the bride’s femininity and the bridegroom’s masculinity in the direct experience of their visibility. The words of love spoken by both of them are therefore concentrated on the ‘body’, ... because the *attraction toward the other person* ... lingers directly and immediately on it. ... In addition, *love unleashes a special experience of the beautiful*, which focuses on what is visible, although at the same time it involves the entire person.” Theology of the Body, n108. pg 552-554.

Key Concepts

- Smart Loving is loving your fiancé in the way that they most like and need to be loved.
- Men and women relate differently, and understanding these differences will help you to love smarter.
- Affirmation is a powerful way of strengthening your bond as a couple and helping you to love smarter.
- Approach your marriage as a mission to convince your fiancé that they are loved and lovable.

to love

Song of Songs

“You have ravished my heart,
my sister, my bride;
you have ravished my heart
with one glance of your eyes,
with one bead of your necklace.
How beautiful is your love.
My sister, my bride ...

My lover is radiant and ruddy;
He stands out among thousands.
His stature is like the trees of Lebanon,
imposing as the cedars.
His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is all delight.
Such is my lover, and such my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.”

Songs 4:9-10, 5:10,15-16

music mp3

The Bride