

# Session 7



**A LOVE THAT LASTS**  
DISCOVERING AUTHENTIC LOVE

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# A LOVE THAT LASTS

## Discovering Authentic Love



### LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

**In his Apostolic Exhortation** *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*, St. Pope John Paul II stated, “God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” (FC 11).

In the world’s view, love is often defined by the Greek word *eros*—the passionate love that seeks pleasure in the company of a beloved. This kind of love focuses on what we can get out of the relationship, particularly a romantic relationship. It’s about good feelings, emotion, and pleasure. It’s primarily about getting, not giving.

The kind of vocational love St. John Paul II talks about is called *agape*—a total, committed, and unconditional love that centers not on what we can get from the other person, but on what we can give.

This kind of love mirrors the love of the Trinity and the love that God has for each one of us. It’s a selfless and self-sacrificing love. But in a divine paradox, the more we practice *agape* love, the more we give of ourselves to another, the more we discover the deep, lasting love our hearts desire. We will only find our fulfillment and happiness when we live total self-giving love in relationship with God and the people in our lives.

Pope Benedict XVI taught that *eros* and *agape* are not intrinsically opposed. If the passionate love of *eros* ascends to the sacrificial love of *agape*, *eros* and *agape* can become united in Jesus Christ, who loves us so much he gave up his life for us. Such a love then becomes “concern and care for the other,” a true self gift (*Deus Caritas Est*, 6, 10). For as the *Catechism* explains, “To love is to will the good of the other” (CCC 1766).

## THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The essential differences between eros and agape**
- **What it means to love according to God's plan**
- **Why the only way we can find the love we desire is by living God's authentic love**
- **The joy and freedom that comes from living agape—the love that lasts**
- **The essential characteristics of this authentic love**

## STEP # 1

### OPENING PRAYER



**SAY:** Welcome to this session of *Symbolon*. This week we are going to look at the Church's teaching on what love truly means. Let us begin with prayer.

*Have participants turn to page 49 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.*



Lord, make me an instrument  
of thy peace;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is error, truth;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master, grant that I may  
not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to  
eternal life.

—Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

### CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

*(Optional)*

**Suggested Scripture readings for a  
Celebration of the Word of God**

*(see Introduction to Symbolon at  
[www.SymbolonCatholic.org](http://www.SymbolonCatholic.org))*

**1 Corinthians 13:4-8**

**1 John 4:18-19**

**Matthew 22:37-39**



## STEP #2 INTRODUCTION



**SAY:** We all want to love and be loved. But sometimes our relationships end up making us feel more lonely and unloved than ever.

**In this Session we are going to look at:**

- **The signs of true, authentic love**
- **The difference a more self-centered love called eros, and God's love, which is described as agape**
- **God's plan for human love**
- **What happens in our relationships when we follow the world's view of love and not God's plan**

**We will start by watching a short video.**

## STEP #3 VIDEO: DISCOVERING AUTHENTIC LOVE



Play DVD Part I, which will play for approximately 18 minutes.

## STEP #4 PROCLAMATION

*After the video has stopped,*



**SAY:** We have just learned some of the truth about the Catholic view on love.

True love is much more than a feeling. It seeks what is best for the other person. As the *Catechism* explains, "To love is to will the good of another." (CCC 1766)

Authentic love is more than eros, that passionate love that suddenly overcomes a person and looks inward and focuses on the good feelings and the pleasure one receives in a romantic relationship.



### DIGGING DEEPER

#### The Need for Love

"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer 'fully reveals man to himself.' If we may use the expression, this is the human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption. In this dimension man finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity."

—St. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*

Love must also be agape, that total, committed, unconditional, and even sacrificial love. This is the love that God has for us, and the kind of love that we are to have for each other, especially in marital love.

Eros and agape are not intrinsically opposed. However, when eros is taken completely separately from agape, it becomes selfish, not focused on the other, and can turn into a using of the other person. (*Deus Caritas Est*, 6)

But when eros and agape are united in Christ and the love of eros ascends to the love of agape, love becomes a true self gift and willing the good for the other. (*Deus Caritas Est*, 10)

If we desire true love and happiness, we must learn how to desire the best for those we love and strive to give rather than receive in our relationships.

## STEP #5 ANNOUNCEMENT



**SAY:** In today's session, we are discussing love and our relationships—topics that are very intimate and personal. Before we go deeper into the Church's teachings on these important topics, we will first take some time after the break to reflect on the true meaning of human love and how it affects our lives. All the necessary material for today's session is covered in just one video. We will now allow time for discussion and reflection on the specific topics discussed so far.

## STEP #6 BREAK



**SAY:** Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in the video segment about true love and how it affects our lives.

*Break should be about 10 minutes.*

# STEP #7

## DISCUSSION

*Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.*



**SAY:** Welcome back to our session on a love that lasts. Let's talk a bit about what we learned in the video segment.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

**What are some of the characteristics of agape love? Why does agape love fulfill us in ways that eros alone cannot?**

#### LEADER'S TIPS:

- **Agape love focuses not on what we can get out of a relationship, but on wanting the best and highest good for the other person.**
- **It looks toward giving, rather than getting.**
- **It mirrors God's love in the Trinity and God's love for us.**
- **Because it is an essential part of God's plan for all humanity, it fulfills our needs both to love and be loved in a way that nothing else can.**

### DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

**Is it easy or hard to love in the selfless, committed way the presenters talked about? Explain.**

#### LEADER'S TIPS:

- **It's both easy and hard. It's hard because the world is constantly telling us that self-centered love is the way to live, and when we live that way, the world validates our choices.**
- **It is also hard because when we live God's way, we must put aside our own desires and seek first the good of the other, and that requires discipline.**
- **It's easy because in the end we receive what we have been searching for all along—true, lasting love.**
- **It is also easy because it frees us from guilt, pain, sin, and sorrow and allows us to live in God's own grace and freedom.**



## DIGGING DEEPER

### Three Words for Love

“That love between man and woman which is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings, was called *eros* by the ancient Greeks. Let us note straight away that the Greek Old Testament uses the word *eros* only twice, while the New Testament does not use it at all: of the three Greek words for love, *eros*, *philia* (the love of friendship) and *agape*, New Testament writers prefer the last, which occurs rather infrequently in Greek usage. As for the term *philia*, the love of friendship, it is used with added depth of meaning in Saint John’s Gospel in order to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples.” –Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 3.



## STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL) SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

*At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segment. Here are some key points you may want to cover.*

- We considered two dimensions of love—eros and agape. *Eros* is the Greek word that describes that passionate love that suddenly overcomes you. It looks inward and focuses on the good feelings and the pleasure one receives in a romantic relationship. It is often seen as “worldly love” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 3).
- The Bible uses the Greek word *agape* to describe total, committed, unconditional, and even sacrificial love. This is the love that God has for us, and the kind of love that we are to have for each other, especially in marital love (*Deus Caritas Est*, 7-9).
- Eros and agape are not intrinsically opposed. However, when eros is taken completely separately from agape, it becomes selfish, not focused on the other, and can turn into a using of the other person (*Deus Caritas Est*, 5).
- The Christian view of love is when eros and agape are united in Christ, and the love of eros ascends to the love of agape and love becomes a true self gift, and willing the good for the other (*Deus Caritas Est*, 6, 10).
- “By contrast with an indeterminate ‘searching’ love, this word [agape] expresses the experience of love which experiences a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 6).
- Vatican II teaches that man, who is created in the image and likeness of God, is called to imitate the self-giving love of the Trinity: “This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24).
- God gave man and woman the vocation of love and thus the ability to love as he loves us (CCC 2331).
- Marriage and sexual love are ordered to this complete self-giving of husband and wife—“Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement ‘until further notice.’ The ‘intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them” (CCC 1646).

## STEP #9

### CALL TO CONVERSION



**SAY:** Spend a few moments reflecting on some of the things we learned today about lasting love. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. In the video, the presenter encourages us to prayerfully consider how the world's view of love has changed how we look at relationships. In what ways have you been influenced by the world's view of love? How might this have affected your previous (or current) relationships?
2. Think about what a love built on wanting the very best for another person would look like. Take some time now and reflect on how this way of loving would change your relationships with:
  - a. Your spouse (if you have one)
  - b. Your boyfriend/girlfriend (if you have one)
  - c. Your children (if you have them)
  - d. Your friends
  - e. Your co-workers
  - f. Your relatives
3. Reflect on the following quote from Pope Francis about agape love.

*“Agape, the love of each one of us for the other, from the closest to the furthest, is in fact the only way that Jesus has given us to find the way of salvation and of the Beatitudes.”*

Why do you think Pope Francis says that agape is the “only way” to find the way of salvation? How can you live this out in your own life?



## STEP # 10

### CLOSING PRAYER



**SAY:** I hope you take time this week to reflect on the Church's teaching on lasting love. Your Guides will give you prompts if you need some guidance.

Let's close our time together today with this short prayer.

God, my Father,  
may I love you in all things and above all things.  
May I reach the joy which you have prepared  
for me in heaven.  
Nothing is good that is against your will,  
and all that is good comes from your hand.  
Place in my heart a desire to please you  
and fill my mind with thoughts of your love,  
so that I may grow in your wisdom and enjoy your peace.

—<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=798>



#### FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading, see the following *Catechism* passages:

**God is Love: CCC 2331**

**Love as Vocation: CCC 2392**

**Chastity: CCC 2377**

#### Other Resources:

*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*

by USCCB United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

*Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est* by Pope Benedict XVI

*Men, Women, and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights from John Paul II's Love and Responsibility* by Edward Sri