

Episode: (First Talk) Love and Responsibility: A Podcast Mini-Series

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This is a series of talks, three talks, about marriage. They're based on a wonderful book by St. John Paul II, that he wrote in 1960, when he was all 40 years old, called *Love and Responsibility*. Now that book, as some of you may have discovered, is tough sledding, as the saying goes, very deep, very philosophical. But along in 2015, along came Edward Sri. Sri, who wrote a wonderful book called *Men, Women, and the Mystery of Love*. And this book popularizes, the insights of John Paul II, from his *Love and Responsibility*. So I will be basing these comments on the book by Edward Sri.

The goal of these talks is to how to go about loving in a more reflective way. It is a matter of discovering God's plan for this self, essential element of our vocation, which is to love. St. John Paul II ascribed to the school of philosophy called the personalist school. And right at the beginning of his book, he defines what he calls the personalistic principle, which is the foundational principle for human relationships. And here it is, a person must not be merely the means to an end for another person. We can never treat people as mere instruments for achieving our own purposes. Otherwise, we would risk violating the dignity of the person, as a self-determining being. Anyone who treats a person as the means to an end, does violence to the very essence of the other, to that which constitutes their natural right. Now this can be a real challenge because of utilitarianism. The spirit of utilitarianism pervades our society. The kind of air that we've grown up in dictates that we should always pursue whatever brings us comfort, advantage, benefit, and we should avoid whatever could cause us suffering, disadvantage, and loss. Well, utilitarianism is so much a part of the modern world, that many people today, even good Christians might approach a relationship in terms of how useful the person is, in helping them achieve their goals, or how much fun they have with this person. Well, this outlook is dangerous. Once these utilitarian attitudes are adopted, we begin to reduce the people in our lives to objects to use for our own enjoyment.

This helps explain why many friendships, dating relationships, even marriages today are so fragile and so easily dissolved. If I value a woman only so, insofar as she is advantageous for me to know, or only to the extent that I derive some pleasure from being with her, well, that is not much of a foundation for the relationship. As soon as I cease to experience pleasure or benefit from my time with her, or as soon as I can find more pleasure and benefit with someone else, well, then she no longer is valuable to me. Well, as you can easily see, this view of things is quite far from the personalist principle and even farther from a relationship of committed love. Well, that is very dense. And so I'm going to inject a brief anecdote to let your brain rest a bit. But it has everything to do with what we've just covered.

I was speaking to someone recently, a woman who has a deep interior life, who mentioned that she had recently spoken to a few young women, university age, going to a good Catholic university. And she said that she, well these, these girls she spoke with are generally well formed on marriage, sex, dating and purity. But then she commented that she was taken aback when virtually all of them said that the most important quality that they were seeking in a future husband was someone quote, "who will support me emotionally in whatever I want." Well, that kind of comment should take your breath away because it is pure utilitarianism bordering on narcissism. "Someone who will support me emotionally in whatever I want." What this, this woman who was telling us this, what she went on to comment was, she was dismayed that they were not seeking fidelity, trustworthiness, a man who is committed to his God and family. And so you can see the importance of taking a look, examining very carefully these insights of St. John Paul II in order to establish a firm, firm, rock-solid, foundation for a lasting marriage.

Aristotle spoke of three kinds of friendship. This has a lot to do with our ultimate goal of learning how to love more reflectively. The great philosopher spoke of three kinds of friendship based on three kinds of affection, that unite people. The first place of friendship of utility; that is, the affection that is based on the benefit that the friends derive from the relationship. That friendship means that each person gets something out of the friendship that is to his advantage. Then there is the pleasant friendship; the basis of affection is the pleasure one gets out of the relationship. One comes to see the friend is a cause of some pleasure for himself and so that friendship is primarily about having fun together. Then the one that interests us the most: virtuous friendship is friendship in the fullest sense because the two friends are united, not in self-interest, but in the pursuit of a common goal, the good life, the moral life that is found in virtue. But you can already see why St. John Paul II would, would mention Aristotle, in the context we're considering, because he goes on to say, the problem with useful and pleasant friendships, the first two types, is that the emphasis is on what I get out of the relationship. By contrast, in the virtuous relationship, the virtuous friendship, the two friends are committed to pursuing something outside themselves, something that goes beyond each of their own self interests. It is this higher good that unites them in friendship, striving side by side toward the good life, encouraging one another in the virtues. True friends are primarily concerned not with what they get out of the friendship, but what is best for the friend.

That raises the question, how can we prevent our relationships from falling into self-centered utilitarianism? The only way that two persons can avoid using each other is to relate in pursuit of a common good as in the virtuous friendship. If the other person sees what is good for me, and adopts it as a good for himself, well, then a special bond is established between the two of us. It is the bond of a common good and of a common aim. But you will see later on in these classes how this pertains especially in the context of a marriage. Well, then, the Holy Father goes on to talk about the anatomy of an attraction. And you'll see that it is here where he introduces several philosophical terms that will help us throughout the course. The reason men and women are so easily attracted to each other is because of the sexual urge. This is the first term we will come across, the sexual urge, which is the tendency to seek the opposite sex. With a sexual urge, we are particularly oriented toward the physiological and psychological qualities of a person of the opposite sex, their body as their masculinity or femininity. St. John Paul II causes physical and psychological qualities, the sexual values of a person. A person is easily attracted to someone of the opposite sex in two ways, physically and emotionally. First, a man is attracted physically to the body of a woman, and a woman is attracted to the body of a man. The Pope calls this attraction to the body, *sensuality*. Secondly, a man is attracted also emotionally to the femininity of a woman and vice versa. The Holy Father calls this emotional attraction, *sentimentality*. Sensuality is concerned with the sexual value connected to the body of a person of the opposite sex. Such an attraction is not bad in itself because the sexual urge is meant to draw us not simply toward the body, but the body of a person. Hence, an initial sensual reaction is meant to orient us toward personal communion, not just bodily union. You can see how the Holy Father's personalist approach comes in to play here. Let me repeat that sentence, an initial sensual reaction is meant to orient us toward personal communion not just a bodily union.

It can serve as an ingredient of authentic love, if it is integrated with the higher nobler aspects of love, such as goodwill, friendship, virtue or self-giving commitment.

At the same time, sensual attractions on their own can lead to great dangers. Sensuality can easily fall into utilitarianism. When only sensuality is stirred, we experience the body of the other person, as a potential object of enjoyment, we reduce the person to their physical qualities, their good looks, their body, and use the view of the person primarily in terms of the pleasure we can experience from those qualities. Well, that is a tragedy. In so many cases, we end up seeing the person has an object. And this is what the Holy Father goes on to explain sensual desire, which is meant to orient us towards communion with a person of the opposite sex can actually keep us from loving that person. A man for example may sensuously ponder in his mind, or actively seek the body of a woman as a means for sexual gratification. He may do this without any real interest in her as a person. This keeps him from responding to her value as a person. And so the Holy Father concludes, sensuality by itself is blind to the person. Sensuality in itself has a quote, "consumer orientation." It is directed primarily immediately towards a body and it touches the person only indirectly and tends to avoid direct contact. And so sensuality on its own, fails to see the human body as a beautiful masterpiece of God's creation for it reduces the body to being an object to be exploited to satisfy one's own sensuous cravings. Pornography fits into this conversation logically, because pornography does not draw attention to the beauty of the human body. It draws attention to the body as an object to be used for one's own sexual satisfaction. In the end, it is a reduction of the human person to the sexual value of the body. On the contrary, good art depicting the body as beautiful, is not a reduction of the person, but an enlarging of the person, leading us to contemplate the mystery of the human person as a masterpiece in God's creation. Well, the next subheading in Edward Sri's book is called *Enslaved to Sensuality*. So you see here that we're still putting down the foundations, the building blocks, leading to a deeper understanding of marriage. Another reason that John Paul II is concerned about sensuality, if we leave this area of our lives unchecked, we will become enslaved to everything that stimulates our sensual desire. For example, a man given into sensuality, ultimately finds his will so weakened, that he is led around by whatever sexual values appear most immediately to his senses. And that, of course, is a disaster.

We then move on to sentimentality, which is an emotional attraction between the sexes. For example, when boy meets girl, as Edward Sri puts it, in addition to noticing her good looks, he also may find himself powerfully drawn to her femininity, her warm personality, her kindness. Whereas John Paul puts it, her *feminine charm*. Similarly, when girl meets boy, she not only may recognize that he's handsome, but she also may find herself having strong feelings and admiration for his masculinity, his virtue, the way he carries himself, or as the Holy Father calls it, his masculine strength. But St. John Paul is concerned—he's writing this, he's writing this in 1960—he's concerned that people today often think of love only in terms of feelings. Our culture constantly plays with our emotions and prompts us to long for quick, emotionally thrilling relationships, like the ones people seem to find in the movies. But real love, which is what we're looking for, real love requires much effort. It involves sacrifice, responsibility, and a total commitment to the other person. Hollywood-loves is an emotion; it's something that just happens to you. The focus is not on a commitment to another, but on what is happening inside you. The powerful good feelings you experience when you're with this other person. In the next class, we will begin by taking a look at the all-important self-giving love.