

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

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So as promised in the second class, we will begin by taking a look at what the Holy Father refers to as self-giving love. He starts off by saying that what makes married love different from all other forms of love, such as attraction, desire and friendship, is that two people give themselves to each other and not just attracted to each other. They do not simply desire what is good for each other. In betrothed love, married love, each person surrenders himself or herself to the other. That's powerful. Each person surrenders himself or herself entirely to the other.

In the order of love, a person can choose to limit his freedom and unite his will to the other, to the one he loves. In fact, because of his love, a person may actually desire to give up his own free will and bind it to the other person. And so in self-giving love, men and women recognize in a profound way that their life is not their own. They have surrendered their will to their beloved. Their own plans, dreams, preferences are not completely abandoned, but they are now put in a new perspective. They are subordinated to the good of the spouse and the children that may flow from their marriage. And so how they spend time and money, how they order their lives, are no longer a matter of private choice. The marriage, the family become the primary reference points for everything they do. And this is the beauty of self-giving love. It's quite challenging, but it is spectacularly beautiful.

As single people we have great autonomy. We can, in large part, order our lives however we want. But men and women driven by love, freely choose to give up their autonomy, to limit their freedom, by committing themselves to the good of the spouse. In fact, love is so powerful that impels them to want to surrender their will to their beloved in this profound way. Indeed, many marriages today would be much stronger if only we understood and remembered the kind of self-giving love we originally signed up for. When we made our vows, we freely and lovingly chose to surrender our wills to our spouse. And so as John Paul II says, "the fullest, the most uncompromising form of love consists precisely in self-giving, in making one's inalienable and non-transferable 'I,' someone else's property." Now we come to the greatest mystery of self-giving love. At the heart of this gift of self is a fundamental conviction that in surrendering my autonomy to my beloved, I gain so much more in return. By uniting myself to another, my own life is not diminished, but is profoundly enriched. This is what John Paul II calls, the law of ecstasies, or the law of self-giving. The lover goes outside ecstasies, he goes outside of self to find a fuller existence in another. Well, this may be the first time you've ever heard this, which would not be surprising because we live in an age of vigorous individualism. This age leads us, it makes this profound point from St. John Paul II perhaps difficult to understand. The problem is that our modern world emphasizes not self-giving love but self-getting love, which focuses on what I get out of the relationship.

Why should I go outside myself to find happiness? Why would I ever want to give up my autonomy and commit myself to someone else in this radical way? Why would I want to limit my freedom to do whatever I want with my life? Well, these are the questions people ask today. We could say that these are very immature questions, the very image or vision of things, because life, Life with a capital 'L' is not about doing whatever I want. It is about fulfilling my relationships with God and with the people God has placed in my life. We find fulfillment in life by living our relationships well, which means that we must often make sacrifices, surrender only our own will to serve the good of others. We discover a deeper happiness in life when we give ourselves in this way for we are living the way that God made us to live, which is the way that God himself lives—that is in total, self-giving, committed love. And here comes that classic phrase that St. John Paul II loved, “man finds himself only by making himself a sincere gift to others.” You will be fascinated to know that, at this point in *Love and Responsibility*, St. John Paul II offers two observations: one for women, the other for men, that they're different. A woman is capable of truly making a gift of herself, only if she fully believes in the value of her person. And in the value as a, as a person of the man to whom she gives herself. Well, then Edwards Sri asks, How do some women struggle in recognizing that they are intrinsically valuable, that they are a valuable gift? And he says to the women reading this book, “how can you deepen your belief in the value of your own person?” Well, then St. John Paul turns to men. He says, “a man is capable of fully accepting a woman's gift of herself only if he is fully conscious of the magnitude of the gift, which he cannot be, unless he affirms the value of her person. And realization of the value of the gift awakens the need to show gratitude and to reciprocate in ways that would match its value.”

I realize that's a lot to take in. Just, well, anything that St. John, St. John Paul II wrote requires deep thought and reflection. But here, what he's saying is that married men must meditate on the the magnitude of the gift, who is his wife, in order to grow in his appreciation of the value of her person, which will then lead to show gratitude and to reciprocate in ways that would match the value of that gift. To this statement, that we mentioned earlier, ultimately comes from the philosopher Blaise Pascal, who was very key in the Second Vatican Council. That is to say, man is most fully human when he makes it himself a sincere gift. That's taken statement is especially applicable to marriage, where self-giving love between two human persons is seen most profoundly in committing myself to another person and be true love. I certainly limit my freedom to do whatever I want. But at the same time, I opened myself up to an even greater freedom, which is the freedom to love. There's a phrase we need to delve into. And so St. John Paul II explains it. Love consists of a commitment that limits one's freedom, it is the giving of the self. And to give oneself means just that, to limit one's freedom on behalf of another. Limitation of one's freedom might seem to be something negative and unpleasant. But love makes it a positive, joyful, creative thing. In fact, freedom exists for the sake of love. Therefore, while the modern individualist may see self-giving love and marriage as something negative and restrictive, Christians view such limitations as liberating. What I really want to do in life is to love my God, my spouse, my children, my neighbor. For in these relationships, I find my happiness. And if I am to love my spouse, and kids, I must be totally committed to them and free from having my selfish desires dictate my life and rule my household. But if I'm enslaved to always doing whatever I feel like doing, it will not be easy for me to be generous with my spouse, or to be patient with my children, or make sacrifices for my family. It simply will not be easy for me to love them, because I am habitually inclined to put my own preferences and desires above others.

It's time for another quick anecdote that illustrates this. I'll never forget reading in an alumni magazine of a young couple standing in the middle of their condo living room, looking very be proper, very prosperous, both had important jobs. The interviewer then turns to the woman and says, “What about children?” And the wife, the woman says, “Oh, that that could never be. I can't imagine making a lunch and engagement and then having to break it because one of my children would become ill.” So, in essence, she prefers a bologna sandwich over having children, which is pretty sad. So what we're saying here, what the Holy Father's saying is that the key to personal communion in married life is mutual self-giving love, and the accompanying sense of responsibility for each other as a gift. Indeed, this theme of responsibility is so important that he put it in the title of his book, calling it not simply love but love and responsibility. Since my beloved completely entrusts her life to me in this

unique way, I must in turn have a profound sense of responsibility for her, for her well-being, her happiness, her emotional security, for holiness. As the Holy Father explains, “there exists in love a particular responsibility, the responsibility for a person who was drawn into the closest possible partnership in the life and activity of another and becomes in a sense, the property of whoever benefits from this gift of self.” Well here, St. John Paul II offers a standard for love that is countercultural. He writes, “The greater the feeling of responsibility for the person, the more true love there is.” Notice that he did not say that the more powerful the emotions, more powerful the love. Because authentic love is not so self-centered and inward looking, rather true love looks outward in awe at my beloved who has entrusted herself to me. To love has a deep sense of responsibility for her good, especially in light of the fact that she has committed herself to me in this way.

At this point we turn, guided by Edward Sri, to consider the key to intimacy in marriage. He takes us back to Adam and Eve. Adam accepted his wife as a tremendous gift that he would treasure and care for. He had a profound sense of responsibility for her. He always sought what was best for her, not just his own interests. He never did anything that would hurt her. It's as if Adam carefully held her heart, the palm of his hands, sensing the full weight of the gift, entrusted to his care. Put yourself in his shoes, imagine how she must have felt being totally accepted in this way. Indeed, having a husband joyfully receive her as a gift and love her for her own sake was a great gift to her. For now, her longing for personal communion could be fulfilled. Adams total acceptance of Eve provides her with the security she needs to feel safe enough to entrust her heart, indeed her whole life fully to him, without any fear whatsoever of being let down. In other words, his committed love and acceptance of her fosters in her the trust that makes emotional intimacy possible. Well, this is the key to personal communion and marriage. Since Eve had complete trust in Adam's love for her, she never felt afraid of being used by him, being misunderstood by him, or being hurt by him. Therefore, in this context of committed love and responsibility, she felt free to give herself fully to her husband, emotionally, spiritually, physically holding nothing back.

So clearly this is the kind of dynamic we want for our marriage, one of total trust that makes personal intimacy possible. But my beloved will grow to trust me and thus unveil her heart to me only to the extent that she senses that I am committed to her, that I totally accept her and that I feel great responsibility for what is best for her. But this is obviously not an easy thing to do, to achieve. Unlike Adam and Eve in the garden, we are fallen, we are selfish. We often do things to hurt one another, which can break down trust and thus hinder intimacy. For example, when a man is more preoccupied by what he needs to do at work, than he is about caring for his wife's needs, he sends a message to her that she is not a priority, that everything else is more important. Well, this, of course, does not help build trust and only makes her feel more distant from her husband. Similarly, a wife who constantly nags her husband, who criticizes him for his weaknesses, for not getting things done around the house, for not having a better job that may make him feel disrespected or unappreciated. That kind of complaining will likely only drive him further away from her emotionally. What about when we experience firsthand our beloved's weaknesses and feel hurt by something he or she has done? When we're hurt, we're tempted to get frustrated with our beloved saying to ourselves, “Why does he always do this? He's never going to change.” We could become defensive, “it's not my fault. Why doesn't she understand?” We might put up walls, “I'm not going to tell him what I'm really feeling anymore. He doesn't care anyway.” We might even begin to withdraw our love, “If I had married someone else, I know I would not be treated this way.” We should love the person complete with all his or her virtues and faults—now, up to a point, independently of those virtues and in spite of those faults. With this, we finish this class. We'll pick up right there in the next class.