

FULFILLED

THE **PROMISE**
OF
THE **CHRISTIAN LIFE**

STUDY GUIDE

A SERIES BY **CHRISTOPHER WEST**

ABBREVIATIONS

AL	<i>Amoris Latitiae (The Joy of Love)</i> , Pope Francis (Pauline, 2016)
BOL	<i>The Book of My Life</i> , Teresa of Avila (New Seeds Books, 2007)
BST	<i>The Beatitudes: Soundings in Christian Tradition</i> , Simon Tugwell O.P. (Templegate, 1980)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997)
CTH	<i>Crossing the Threshold of Hope</i> , John Paul II (Knopf, 1994)
CWT	<i>The Collected Works of Teresa of Avila, Vol II</i> (ICS Publications, 1980)
DC	<i>Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love)</i> , Pope Benedict XVI, (Pauline, 2006)
DK	<i>Desiring the Kingdom</i> , James K.A. Smith (Baker Academic, 2009)
DV	<i>Dominum et Vivificantem</i> , John Paul II (Pauline, 1986)
EH	<i>Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven</i> , Peter Kreeft (Ignatius Press, 1990)
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio (On the Christian Family in the Modern World)</i> , Pope John Paul II (Pauline, 1981)
FS	<i>Through the Year with Bishop Fulton Sheen</i> , Henry Dieterich (Ignatius Press, 2003)
FTH	<i>Fill These Hearts: God, Sex, and the Universal Longing</i> , Christopher West (Image, 2013)
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican II (Pauline, 1965)
GR	<i>God at the Ritz: Attraction to Infinity</i> , Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete (Crossroads, 2002)
HM	<i>The Heart of Man</i> , Father Gerald Vann, O.P. (Image, 1960).
IC	<i>Introduction to Christianity</i> , Joseph Ratzinger (Ignatius, 1990)
JD	<i>Journey of Desire</i> , John Eldredge (Thomas Nelson, 2000)
LF	<i>Letter to Families</i> , Pope John Paul II (Pauline, 1994)
LJ	<i>Let's Start with Jesus</i> , Dennis Kinlaw (Zondervan, 2005)
LR	<i>Love and Responsibility</i> , Pope John Paul II/Karol Wojtyla (Ignatius Press, 1993)
LW	<i>Light of the World</i> , Pope Benedict XVI (Ignatius Press, 2010)
MC	<i>Mere Christianity</i> , C.S. Lewis (Harper One, 1980)
MCS	<i>Mary: The Church at the Source</i> , Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs Von Balthasar (Ignatius Press, 2005)
MD	<i>Mulieris Dignitatem (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women)</i> , Pope John Paul II (Pauline, 1988)
NMI	<i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i> , John Paul II's Apostolic Letter at the Close of the Great Jubilee (Pauline, 2001)
SL	<i>The Spirit of the Liturgy</i> , Joseph Ratzinger (Ignatius Press, 2000)
SS	<i>Spes Salvi (Saved in Hope)</i> , Pope Benedict XVI (Pauline, 2007)
SOS	<i>Story of a Soul</i> , Saint Therese of Lisieux (ICS Publications, 1976)
TF	"The Two Faces of Love," Father Raniero Cantalamessa, First Lenten Sermon to the Roman Curia, 2011
TOB	<i>Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body</i> , Pope John Paul II (Pauline 2006)
WG	<i>The Weight of Glory</i> , C.S. Lewis (Harper Collins, 2001).

The Cor Project

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SESSION 1

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

IN [THE HEART'S] CREATIVE RESTLESSNESS
BEATS AND PULSATES WHAT IS MOST DEEPLY HUMAN.

SAINT JOHN PAUL II

1. *Awakening Desire*

The first words placed in the mouth of Christ in John's Gospel are not: "Follow all these rules or you're going to hell." Rather, Christ probes our hearts with a question: "What do you want?" (Jn 1:38). Christianity is not "about suffocating the longing that dwells in the heart of man, but about freeing it, so that it can reach its true height" (Pope Benedict XVI, Nov 7, 2012).

- To speak of "desire" is to speak of an expressly felt yearning for something that promises to fill a void; a longing for that which promises satisfaction in its attainment. It comes from the Latin *desiderare*: to long for, wish for, hope for, expect.
- The original sense of desire may mean to "look to the stars" or to "await what the stars may bring" (from the Latin phrase *de sidere*: "from the stars").

1a. The "whole life of the good Christian is a holy longing ... That is our life, to be trained by longing" (Saint Augustine, *Homily on First Letter of John*).

1b. "I will ask you two questions. The first: Do all of you have a desiring heart, a heart that desires? Think and answer in silence and in your heart: Do you have a heart that desires, or do you have a closed heart, a heart that is asleep, a heart that is anesthetized against the things of life? ... And the second question: ...What is the most important, most precious reality for you, the reality that pulls at your heart like a magnet?" (Pope Francis, Aug 11, 2013).

2. *Alive to Beauty*

Think of a time in your life when your heart was *pierced* by something breathtakingly beautiful. What sentiments in your heart did it arouse and awaken?

- Beauty inspires awe in us before the mystery of existence. It also has the power to awaken our deepest *desires*...
- Beauty has both the power to wound us (desire causes us to "*ache*") and the power to fill our hearts with *hope* ... hope of the fulfillment of our deepest desires ... hope that we will somehow participate in Beauty for all eternity...

2a. Authentic beauty “unlocks the yearning of the human heart, the profound desire to know, to love, to ... reach for the Beyond. If we acknowledge that beauty touches us intimately, that it wounds us, that it opens our eyes, then we rediscover the joy of seeing, of being able to grasp the profound meaning of our existence, the Mystery of which we are part” (Benedict XVI, Nov 21, 2009).

2b. “We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it ... At present we ... cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in” (C.S. Lewis, *WG* pp. 42-43).

2c. “The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; ... it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude [supreme bliss and happiness]” (CCC 1818).

2d. “Hope may break through in a song, a sunset, a poem, a movie, an unexpected act of kindness, a good laugh, the birth of a child, the embrace of a loved one. And when these moments come we should drink them in ... and listen. If we listen, we can almost hear a voice whispering to our hearts: ‘It is good to be here. Rest here for a while. Savor it. For this is a taste, a taste of what is to come. Let it lift you up. Let it *fire* you up. Let it give you hope. You’re not crazy. You’re not wrong to believe there’s something more. You will not be unhappy. Have faith. Trust. ... It’s coming. Your desire for *Life* is not in vain” (West, *FTH*, p. 61).

3. The Desire for God

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Saint Augustine). The Greeks called this deep, restless *yearning* we feel “*eros*,” from which we derive the English word “erotic.” If we are to understand *eros* correctly, however, we must never confuse it with another Greek word, *porneia* (from which we get the word “pornography”).

- While *eros* is closely linked with our desire for sexual love and union, that is but a glimmer of a much deeper longing for eternal love and union.
- In its richest sense, *eros* is a reaching and a yearning with every fiber of our being for the fullness of life, of love, of God; it’s a yearning for the *infinite*!
- Saint Francis de Sales observed that *eros* is the desire “that draws love out, that expands [our heart’s] capacity, that passionately rushes toward divinization” (participation in divine life and love).

3a. The “fullness of ‘eros’ ... implies the upward impulse of the human spirit toward what is true, good, and beautiful, so that what is ‘erotic’ also becomes true, good, and beautiful” (John Paul II, *TOB* 48:1).

3b. When eros is rightly directed “it becomes a ‘pure unadulterated affirmation’ revealing the marvels of which the human heart is capable” (Pope Francis, AL 157, 152).

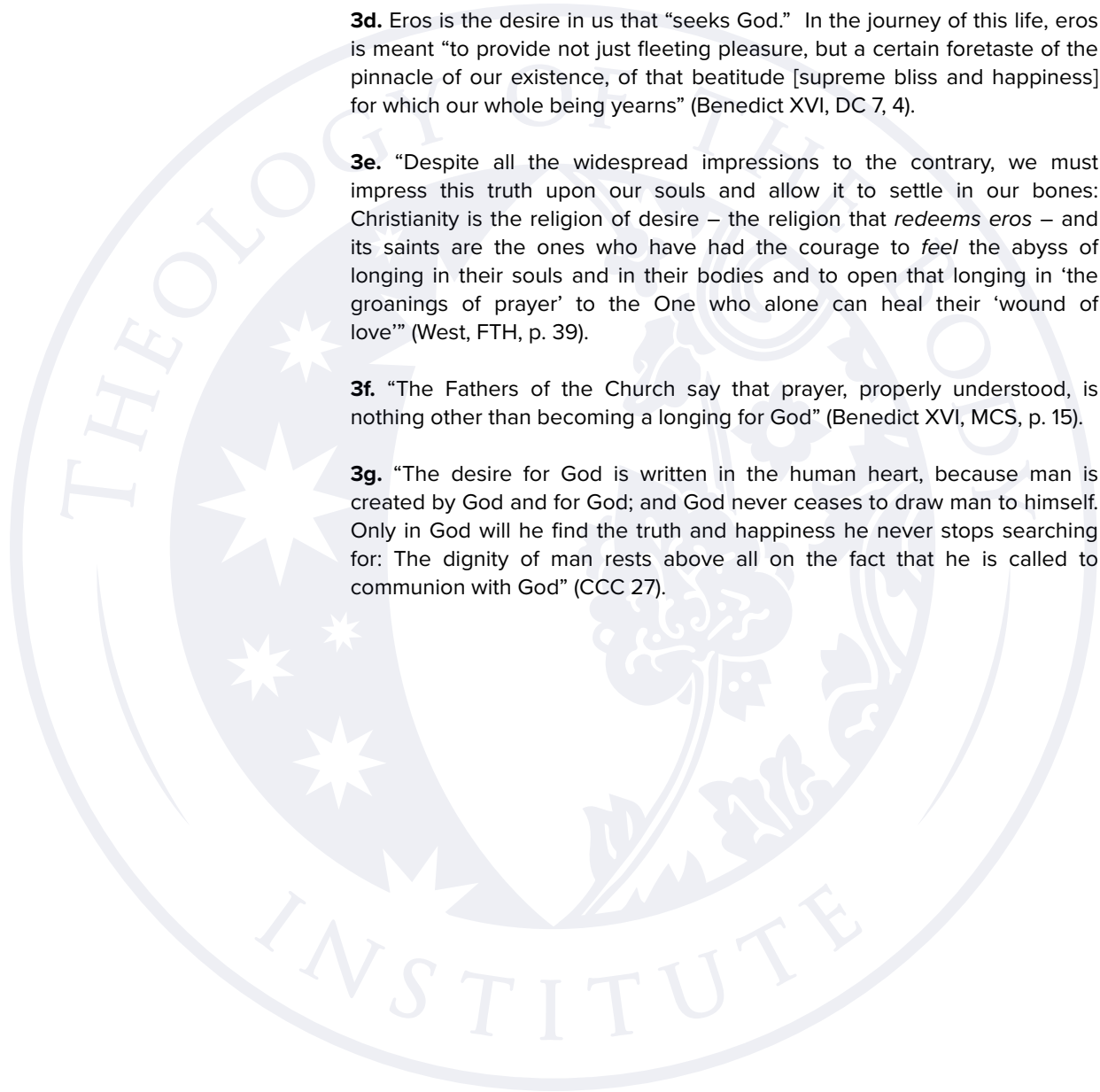
3c. When we follow *eros* from its true depths, it “leads to being drawn out and finding oneself before the mystery that encompasses the whole of existence.” It “becomes a pilgrimage ... towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God” (Benedict XVI, Nov 7, 2012).

3d. Eros is the desire in us that “seeks God.” In the journey of this life, eros is meant “to provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude [supreme bliss and happiness] for which our whole being yearns” (Benedict XVI, DC 7, 4).

3e. “Despite all the widespread impressions to the contrary, we must impress this truth upon our souls and allow it to settle in our bones: Christianity is the religion of desire – the religion that *redeems eros* – and its saints are the ones who have had the courage to *feel* the abyss of longing in their souls and in their bodies and to open that longing in ‘the groanings of prayer’ to the One who alone can heal their ‘wound of love’” (West, FTH, p. 39).

3f. “The Fathers of the Church say that prayer, properly understood, is nothing other than becoming a longing for God” (Benedict XVI, MCS, p. 15).

3g. “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God” (CCC 27).



Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever understood Christianity to be “the religion of desire”? What’s your honest reaction to this idea?
2. Have you ever understood *eros* as the passion in us that rushes toward God? If not, how have you understood *eros*? How might your understanding of *eros* need to be healed and redeemed?
3. Which quote from this session struck your heart the most and why?
4. What are two practical ways I can implement what I’ve learned in this session in my life?

Prayer Exercise

“THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH SAY THAT PRAYER, PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD, IS NOTHING OTHER THAN BECOMING A LONGING FOR GOD.”

— BENEDICT XVI

Prayer, says the *Catechism*, is the cry “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart (see CCC 2559). It is motivated by “the ‘love of beauty’ [that] is caught up in the glory of the living and true God” (CCC 2727).

- As you take this course, pay careful attention to encounters with beauty and how they stir your heart. Consider them “moments of prayer” – opportunities to allow the deeper desires of your heart to be awakened and directed toward God.
- As you take this course, start each day with this prayer: *Lord, help me to get in touch with my deepest longings and to entrust their fulfillment to you.*

Further Reading

See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, numbers 26-28.

See Christopher West, *Fill These Hearts*, chapter 1.

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6. LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

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CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

In order to become fully certified, students must:

- Complete all required courses and pass an exam for each course.*
- Read the entire text of John Paul II's TOB and write a reflection paper for each section of the TOB.
- Complete a self-designated teaching/integration practicum within a year of completing the final course and its exam.

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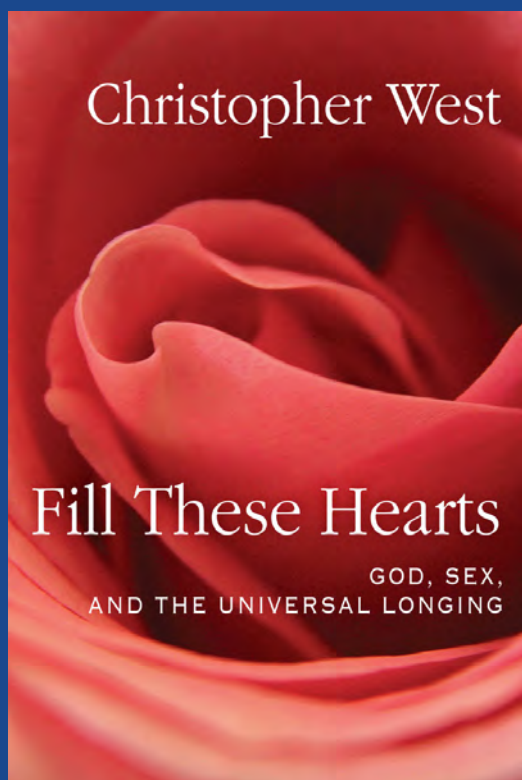
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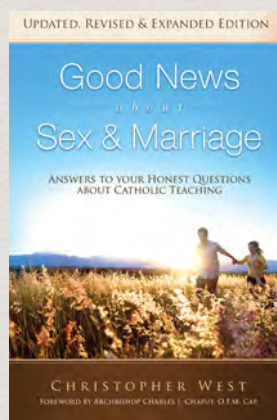
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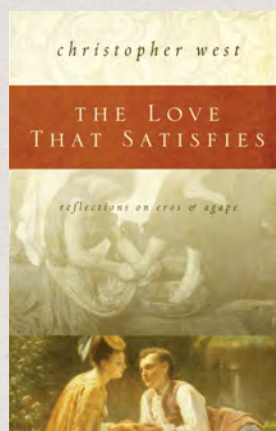
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How We Lost the Meaning of Sex, Gender, Marriage, & Family (and How to Reclaim It)



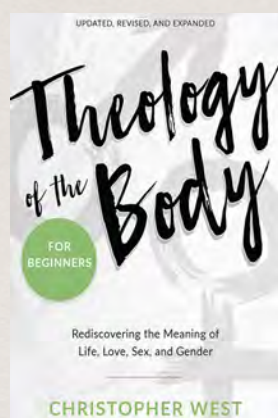
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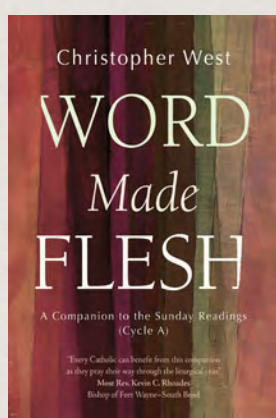
Heaven's Song: *Sexual Love as it Was Meant to Be*

BOOKS BY CHRISTOPHER WEST:

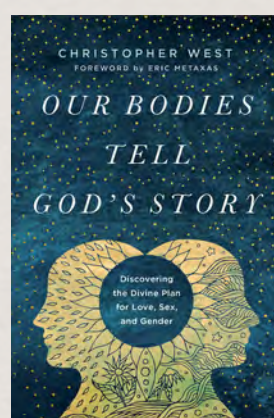
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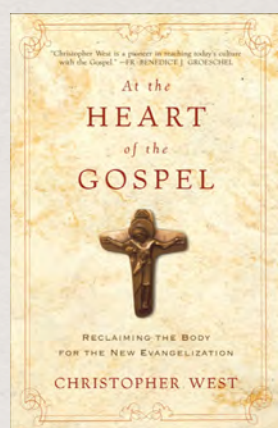
Word Made Flesh:
A Companion to the Sunday Readings (Cycles A, B, C)



Our Bodies Tell God's Story:
Discovering the Divine Plan for Love, Sex, and Gender — This book makes Theology of the Body accessible to a Protestant audience.



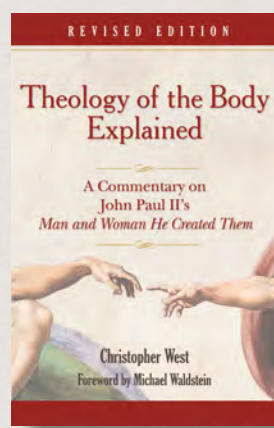
Love Is Patient, but I'm Not:
Confessions of a Recovering Perfectionist



At the Heart of the Gospel:
Reclaiming the Body for the New Evangelization



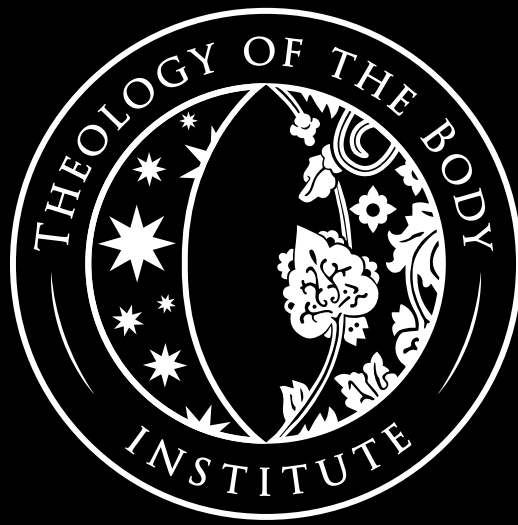
Pope Francis to Go:
Bite-Sized Morsels from The Joy of the Gospel



Theology of the Body Explained:
A Commentary on John Paul II's Man and Woman He Created Them



Man and Woman He Created Them:
A Theology of the Body by Pope John Paul II (Foreword by Christopher West)



The first words placed in the mouth of Christ in John's Gospel are not: "Follow all these rules or you're going to hell." Rather, Christ probes our hearts with a question: "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38).

Christianity is not primarily a religion of law, as it is so frequently considered. It is first and foremost a religion of longing. The purpose of God's law is to point our longing toward real satisfaction and away from the counterfeits. The "whole life of the good Christian is a holy longing," wrote Saint Augustine. "That is our life, to be trained by longing."

In this life-changing series, Christopher West takes you on an eye-opening tour of the first pillar of the Catechism of the Catholic Church – beginning with the "ache" of human longing and ending with a vision of the Creed like you've never heard – and in the process demonstrates beyond any shadow of a doubt that Christianity is not the backward list of prohibitions it is so often assumed to be. Rather it's the religion of desire that holds out to us the hope of infinite bliss and fulfillment.





+†+

Christopher West serves as President and Senior Lecturer for the Theology of the Body Institute near Philadelphia, PA. His global lecturing, best-selling books, and multiple audio and video programs, and popular podcast have made him one of the world's most recognized teachers in the Catholic Church today.

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