

TIPS FOR STARTING A STUDY GROUP

1. Always start with prayer; it is your foundation and your protection. Pray about who to study with and for God to draw whom He wills to the group, pray about which book/talk/video to study, and pray as you open and close each study time. Put on the armor of prayer and stay close to Jesus in the Eucharist.

2. Plant seeds by passing around web links, CDs, books, podcasts, etc. about the Theology of the Body. It always starts with one-on-one conversations and it's not about big numbers. God will faithfully turn the mustard seeds into the largest of plants; be not afraid.

3. While forming the group, leaders should clearly communicate with participants the format and goals of the study group. To what degree is it academic? To what degree will there be personal sharing? A good study should have elements of both: application to real life situations is necessary to integrate the head with the heart. This should not morph into a *support group* unless a qualified person is present & it has been clear from the start that this is the purpose of the group.

4. Leaders should facilitate and gently prompt the group to stay on track with the content at hand (are stories illustrating the point or just leading from one to another?); **participants** should be encouraged to self-monitor. Watch so that input is not dominated by just a few people.

5. When tangents occur, gently re-center on the points you are studying (i.e. concepts John Paul II presents in his writings). It is easy to eclipse the study with excessive examples of how the world views these topics, how people we know do not live the Catholic faith, or how we personally feel. Though it is good to discuss applications of the subject matter and dig into hard questions that members are grappling with, balance is important (recourse to point #1).

Suggestions for a lay person study of *LOVE & RESPONSIBILITY* (Translation by Grzegorz Ignatik) or *MAN & WOMAN HE CREATED THEM: A THEOLOGY OF THE BODY*

(Translation by Michael Waldstein)

Groups or individuals may benefit from first utilizing a multi-part set of Theology of the Body talks or videos to create context. Some study groups have gone through a series together before starting the text. Other groups simply watch a series together or read books *about* the Theology of the Body without ever reading St. John Paul II's text. These choices hinge upon what the participants would like to get out of their study and the academic desires/comfort level of the group.

When the texts are undertaken, leaders should be aware of and look up unfamiliar theological or philosophical vocabulary in advance. It can be helpful (though not necessary) for participants to read the assignment prior to each meeting at their own pace to pinpoint questions. During the study time, the text can then be read out loud, pausing briefly after paragraphs for vocabulary to be defined or clarifications to be discussed. This process has shown itself to be successful and efficient as it keeps questions in context and helps solidify understanding of the dense text.

A helpful gauge: 2-3 audiences or 7-10 pages per 2-hour meeting time works well.

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