



## THE PRODIGAL YOU LOVE

### Inviting Loved Ones Back to the Church

By Theresa Aletheia Noble, FSP

Foreword by Father Dave Dwyer, CSP

### Supplement for Book Clubs and Parish Groups

These questions are a supplement to the book *The Prodigal You Love: Inviting Loved Ones Back to the Church* by Sister Theresa Aletheia Noble, who shares her own personal experience as a “prodigal daughter,” showing how we can journey with our loved ones, witnessing to the never-failing love of God, always ready to welcome us home. \$12.95 ISBN #0-8198-6004-2. For more details, go to [pauline.org/prodigal](http://pauline.org/prodigal).

### Chapter One: A Story of Hope

Sister Theresa Aletheia, FSP, has an unusual story of return to the Church, but we all have unique and beautiful salvation stories. God works in each of our lives and brings us closer to him through both big and small events. It is important to recall how God has worked in our lives so we can recognize the ways that he works in the lives of our loved ones.

1. Take a moment to share with the group an important moment in your journey with God. How has this impacted your life?
2. After considering the many ways that God has worked in our own lives, discuss how God is working in the lives of your loved ones.



3. Consider how differently God communicates with each person. Share with the group a unique way that God communicates with you, then everyone may discuss what this means for interactions with loved ones.

## Chapter Two: The Foundation of Humility

A foundational virtue, humility helps us to grow in faith and to see ourselves and others truthfully and compassionately. Without humility, interactions with our loved ones will most likely not bear fruit. But with humility we open a door for God's grace to enter, and God will bring about the fruit.

1. Has humility played a part in your journey of faith? Discuss with the group.
2. There are many suggestions for how to grow in humility in this chapter, were any of them particularly helpful? Do you have any other ideas?
3. Share an inspiring example in your own life or in the Gospel when someone acted with humility.

## Chapter Three: Listening to the Holy Spirit

To evangelize effectively, we need help. The Holy Spirit is the evangelizer *par excellence*. He can inspire us to say the right words and do the right things because he knows the hearts of our loved ones even better than we do.

1. Share an example from your life when you have felt that you listened to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
2. What are some guidelines that the author gives readers to begin to identify and follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in our lives?
3. Why do you think it is important to act in union with the Holy Spirit when we interact with loved ones?

## Chapter Four: Finding the Balance: Love and Truth

In order to love others we must love them in truth. If we accept everything they do and say and never mention when they are doing things to endanger their relationship with God, this is not love. On the other hand, if we berate a loved one and hit him or her over the head with our judgments every time we see that person, this also is not love. It is difficult, but effective evangelization demands that we offer the truth at the time and in the way that love requires.

1. Are you more a "love" person or a "truth" person—do you struggle more to accept others or to be honest and straightforward? What are the pros and cons of both approaches?
2. Why is it so important to establish trust first before challenging a loved one's actions? Have you had any experiences with this, good or bad, that you can share with the group?



3. How is the interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well an icon of truth and love? Can you think of any other examples in Scripture, books, or movies that exemplify this ideal way of communicating with others?

### **Chapter Five: Responding to Illusory Ideas**

Many ideas floating around in our modern society are not healthy for the soul. It helps to identify those ideas that may negatively affect our loved ones in order to better help them overcome obstacles to faith.

1. What are some of the negative ideas that have influenced your own life?
2. What are some ideas that have affected your loved ones and been harmful to their faith? How do you see them playing out in their lives?
3. What are some ways that you can address and respond to the false ideas that impact your life and the lives of your loved ones?

### **Chapter Six: Accepting Doubt and Embracing Doubters**

Everyone doubts. The difference between a person of faith and person without faith is not that one doubts and the other does not. Rather, the difference is what a person chooses to do with their doubt. Modeling a healthy relationship with our own doubts and seeing the positive potential in doubt could be the best way to help our doubting loved ones.

1. Why is it important to acknowledge the doubts we have in our own faith lives before confronting and responding to our loved ones' doubts?
2. What does it mean to "hold our doubts lightly"? Do you think you manage to do this in your own life?
3. Did this chapter help you to reevaluate how you interact with doubting loved ones? If so, please share with the group.

### **Chapter Seven: Why Our Faith Matters**

God's plan of salvation plays out in the drama of the sacramental life of the Church. Our loved ones need the Catholic Church and they need her sacraments just as much as they need God. Why? Because Christ is present in the Church and in her sacraments and he draws us to himself through the beauty of this plan of salvation.

1. Are you aware of the importance of the sacraments in your own spiritual life? How do you communicate this to others?
2. Have you had an experience of the sacraments that drew you closer to God? If so, please share with the group.



3. After reading this chapter, how do you feel it would be appropriate to share the importance of the Church with loved ones who have left? Can you give examples?

## Chapter Eight: Respecting Free Will

God has given all human beings free will. However, in order to attain freedom we are called to unite our will to the Father in trust as Jesus did. True freedom can only be found in exercising our free will in union with God's will. Respect for this dynamic in our loved ones' lives is vitally important.

1. How is manipulation an imposition on another's freedom? How is non-engagement an imposition on another's freedom? How can you relate to your loved ones in a way that avoids both of these pitfalls?
2. Do you consider evangelization to be one of your primary tasks as a Catholic? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. Why is staying in relationship with loved ones so key when it comes to respecting their freedom? Do you have a difficult time maintaining a good relationship with loved ones whose choices concern you?

## Chapter Nine: Prayer Is Key

It sounds obvious but prayer is the most important thing we can do for our loved ones. We may know this intellectually, but actually doing it is another issue. When we pray, God gratefully accepts our prayers, injecting them with more power than we could ever imagine. Our prayers translate into an abundance of grace for our loved ones and the entire world.

1. Do you pray for your loved ones? What are the methods of prayer that you find to be most efficacious and helpful?
2. Are you confident that your prayers make a difference? If so, please share an example or story. If not, what keeps you from believing in the power of prayer?
3. Do you feel alone when you pray? Have you ever experienced feeling united to the universal Church and the saints in heaven when you pray? Share examples and ideas you have for uniting in prayer for loved ones with the saints and other members of the Church.

## Chapter Ten: The Power of Suffering

Suffering has been transformed by the death of Jesus on the cross. The Christian approach to suffering is not the same as the rest of the world. God himself suffered for our sins. From the greatest tragedy, God brought the greatest beauty, our salvation. It is important to stay close to the mystery of suffering in our relationship with loved ones.



1. What are the lessons that Jesus teaches in Scripture about suffering? How does this help you think differently about suffering?
2. After reading this chapter, how do you feel called to approach the suffering in your life or in the lives of loved ones?
3. Give an example in your own life or in the life of a loved one where something positive came out of a circumstance of suffering. Why is this important to keep in mind when considering loved ones who have left the Church?

### **Chapter Eleven: Be Saints, It Is All That Matters**

The most important thing we can do in life, in absolutely any situation, is to become holy. By becoming holy, we can help fallen-away loved ones more than in any other way. When we are holy, Christ lives in us and we are able to clearly communicate Christ to our loved ones.

1. Why is holiness the most important goal in life? How is this related to our loved ones who have left the Church?
2. Can you name a holy person in your own life who helped you to remain a Catholic or to return to the Church? How would you describe that person's impact on my faith?
3. Do you want to be a saint? What are some concrete changes that you can make in my life in order to make this goal a priority?

### **Chapter Twelve: Becoming a Person of Hope**

Sometimes the life circumstances of our loved ones make the practice of the virtue of hope difficult, if not seemingly impossible. But when we cultivate a deep trust in God, we can see deeper than external circumstances and find hope. Our hope is not rooted in our loved ones. Our hope is rooted in God, the source of our hope, who can bring light to any situation, even if we cannot see it now.

1. Is there someone who inspires you to have hope for your loved ones who have left the Church?
2. What are some ways that you feel called to try to grow in the virtue of hope?
3. Mary is a woman of hope; how does her example inspire you? How can you entrust yourself to her when you feel hopeless?

### **Concluding Questions**

1. We are called to gaze upon our loved ones with the eyes of Jesus. How can this become a reality in your life? What are your greatest obstacles to holiness? What is God calling you to now in your spiritual life?



2. How has reading *The Prodigal You Love* helped you in your approach to loved ones who have left the Church? What are some concrete changes that you plan to make in the way you invite loved ones back to the Church?
3. How can you seek out support in your efforts to invite loved ones back to the Church? What are some ways that you can call upon the help of God, the saints, and fellow Church members in this important work of evangelization?

As you wrap up your book club or parish group study of *The Prodigal You Love*, please know that each one of you are in the prayers of the Daughters of St. Paul. We pray that your interactions with your fallen-away loved ones are fruitful and grace-filled. May many of your loved ones return to the Church as a result of the work of God's grace in their lives and in your life.

May God be with you.

