

IN GOD'S IMAGE SERIES

LEADER'S GUIDE

**A Journey Towards Wholeness in Sexuality,
Identity and Relationships**

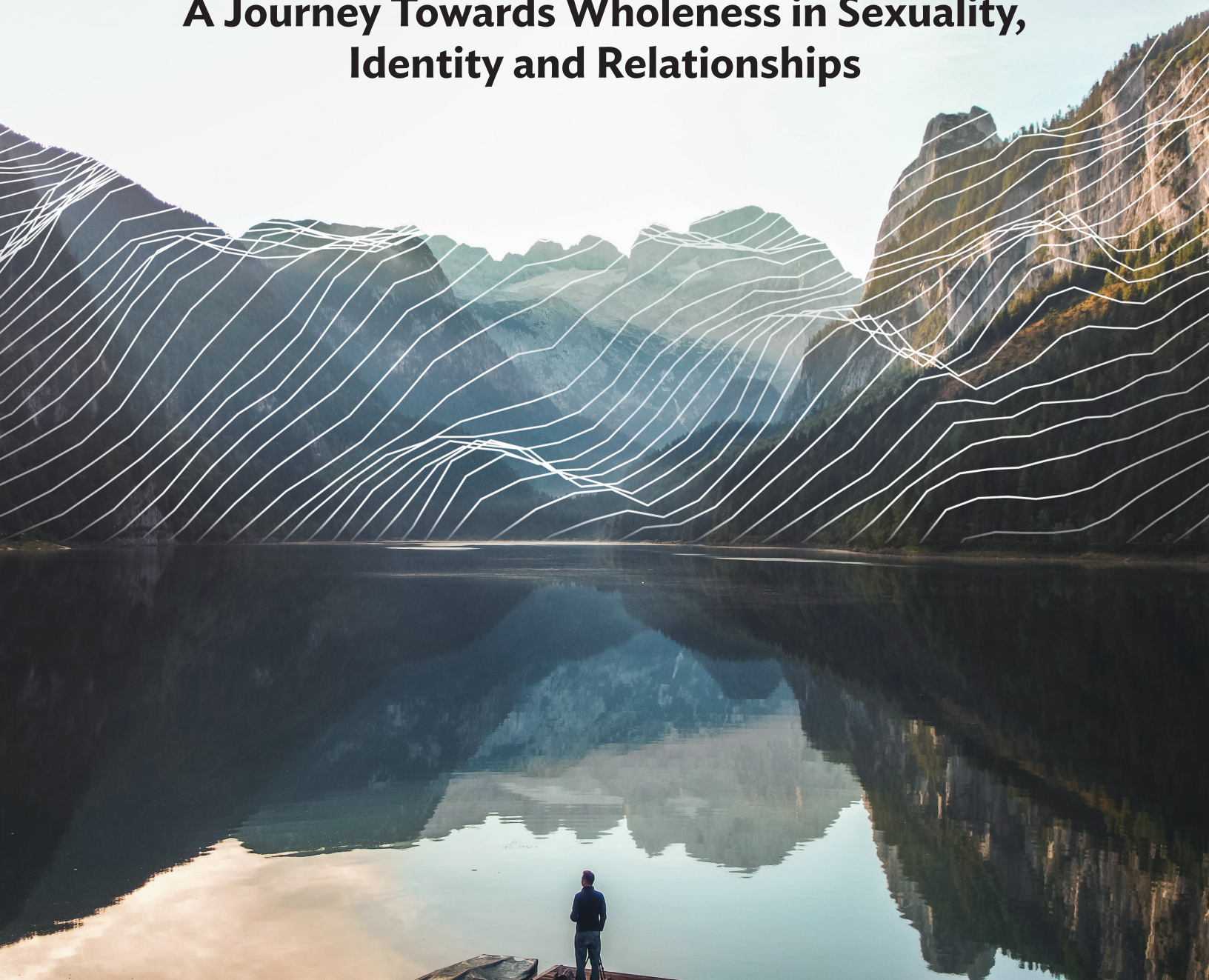


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Welcome to *In God's Image*

WE ALL WANT TO BE SEEN, KNOWN AND LOVED FOR WHO WE ARE.

Unfortunately, in this search for belonging, we sometimes may feel unsure of our identity, or become overwhelmed when we look for affirmation. In a culture that tells us to follow our hearts to whatever feels right, where do we look when we want to know what is true? And how do we find freedom and community when our instinct is to hide the deepest parts of ourselves and our most painful experiences?

It can feel overwhelming to share our story. That's why we are so glad you have joined us for an honest conversation as a group leader.

Welcome to *In God's Image*, a video series created by Focus on the Family Canada and The Union Movement. Over the course of six sessions, we will look to the Word of God for truth on matters of identity, gender and sex, marriage and community, temptation, shame, and restoration. Together, we will explore the good news of Jesus and how he impacts the core of our identity.

No matter where you have been or what you have experienced, this is your invitation to discover what it truly means to be made *in God's image* and create a safe space for participants to do the same.

How to lead your group



GROUP DISCUSSION

To best facilitate each session with your group, we recommend watching the respective episode in advance; this will give you time to become familiar with the subject matter and prepare for questions and comments that may arise. Your group may run out of time before getting through all the discussion questions. Look over the discussion questions ahead of time, and prioritize the remaining topics you think will be most beneficial for your group.

Each session has conversation starters to help group members connect at a deeper level with each other. Discussing these topics may require some vulnerability, but our hope is for participants to discover comfort and support as they walk through these sessions in a safe group. We recommend having pencils or pens available for those wanting to take notes. If you need more help facilitating discussion, we've also suggested a relevant follow-up resource in each session that may give you more ideas.

As a group leader, you may face resistance in group participation, or a member may wish to confide about something deeply personal. To lead your group effectively, we encourage you to be sensitive to the following:

- Before, during and after each group session, pray continually and invite the Holy Spirit to protect your group and ask for wisdom and sensitivity in leading the conversation.
- Each member has a unique story, history and temperament, and will respond differently to the video series.
- Most groups have one or two talkative participants. As the group leader, do your best to steer the conversation back to the topic and create space for others to speak, especially if a significant amount of time has been spent on one question.
- As you feel led, consider answering appropriately and vulnerably first when it comes to more personal discussion questions in order to give others permission to feel comfortable about sharing in turn.
- If there are quieter participants, encourage them to reflect on the personal questions.
- This may be the first time a member has discussed these topics in a group setting and may not be ready to vocalize their thoughts. Don't be discouraged by silence – they may be absorbing the material and working through it privately.
- Certain topics are highly sensitive and may trigger an emotional response due to a traumatic experience. If you sense someone is struggling, you can remind the group you're available for one-on-one support after the group session.

How to lead your group

- If you don't know the answer to something, that's fine! Nobody has all the answers, and it's wise to acknowledge our limitations. Always be willing to admit if you're drawing a blank. Make it a goal for the entire group to look into the unknown topic: "I don't have an answer on that, but I will connect with someone qualified to get their thoughts and bring them back to our next session."

More than anything, remember to pray for your group members as they navigate this deeply personal subject matter.



PERSONAL REFLECTION

While there is so much to gain from honest conversations around big questions, we recognize that not everyone is comfortable sharing, and that some of these topics may be deeply personal to group members – or it could be the first time that certain feelings or emotions are brought up. Remind your participants that they should not feel obligated to share anything they're not comfortable with in the group, but encourage them to use a journal to work through any personal reflections.



HELP GUIDE THEM TO EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Some of the sessions include sensitive content, and it's important that group members don't feel they need to walk alone. However, part of the responsibility as a leader is discerning our own limitations regarding the level of support we can offer.

For example, a team member could come to you with the following:

- "I'm not sure about my sexual identity."
- "I think I could be a different gender."
- "Someone I know has been abused, but they haven't told anyone else."
- "I have been abused."

There are some conversations where we encourage participants to talk at a deeper level with a mentor or trusted leader in their life. If a group member wishes to speak with a counsellor, they can reach out to Focus on the Family Canada for a free one-time phone session or to be connected with a local registered Christian counsellor. You can invite them to call **1.800.661.9800**.

How to lead your group



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

There's no better place than God's Word when we're looking for answers. Each session will highlight key portions from the Bible that will be helpful in your journey to understand God's design for identity, marriage, sexuality, community and his heart for our wholeness in these matters.



PRAYER

God is always ready to hear our prayers, especially when we bring him our deepest hurts, hopes and questions. Encourage your group members to pray on their own, with each other and with a trusted leader.

OVERVIEW

So, what does it mean to be human? If you're wrestling with this question, we have good news for you: you are made in God's image. In this first session, we learned that the phrase "Imago Dei" means "Image of God" and it differentiates humans from all other aspects of creation. As an image bearer, nothing about you is an accident.



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to be created in the image of God? How did this video change what you thought of the phrase "Imago Dei"?
2. Some people experience a sense of disconnect between their spirit and the body they have, or that perhaps something is not how we think it should be. What value is there in looking at ourselves as being made in the image of God?
3. In the video, Bonnie and Bryan explain that we don't just have a body, but that we are a body – and that our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to make your body a temple for the Holy Spirit?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. How do you feel about your identity as an image bearer of God after watching this video?
2. To what extent do you feel fearfully and wonderfully made? If you struggle to believe this, how can you invite our compassionate God into that question?
3. How does it feel to hear that God designed you and loves your body?



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:26a)



PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for creating me. I know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Help me to cling to the truth that I am made in your image, and that you love me just as you created me. Thank you for making me on purpose.

Amen.

What Does It Mean to Be Human?

Leader note: If you sense that someone in the group would like to talk through their experiences or questions with a counsellor, remind them they can reach out to Focus on the Family Canada for a free one-time phone session or to be connected with a local registered Christian counsellor. They can call **1.800.661.9800**.



To learn more about what it means to live as God's image bearer, scan to read this article from Focus on the Family Canada.

OVERVIEW

Advertising and entertainment often glorify sex as the highest human experience. But how often do we actually have honest conversations about this topic? Some people rarely feel free to ask real questions that would equip them with real wisdom. And for those of us who have experienced deep pain, confusion or regret in the realm of sexuality, we often keep things private, which in turn produces shame around something God designed to be anything but shameful. Here's the good news: nothing, *nothing*, we do or experience can separate us from God's perfect love (Romans 8:38-39).

Before we continue, it's important to differentiate between shame and guilt. Guilt is the feeling that you *did* something wrong whereas shame is the feeling that you *are* wrong.

Guilt: Guilt can be constructive in our lives. It may stem from things we've done that are wrong, sinful or hurtful to others. It can also be the result of self-reflection. Guilt can also be an emotion we feel when the Holy Spirit nudges us, when we read Scripture, and/or when our inner God-given conscience brings something to mind. While shame whispers (or shouts!) "You're unworthy" or "You're no good," guilt is a healthy and useful experience that can help us make positive changes.

Shame: Shame is nasty and outright lies about who you are. It tells you you're unworthy, unlovable, not good enough, and so on. It then implores you to keep quiet about it. Shame can be sneaky too – you may not even realize where the feelings are coming from. Shame thrives in the darkness and secrecy. And when we give in to the temptation to stay silent about our shame, we close ourselves off to the perspective of loved ones and professionals. We don't even know the lies we're believing because we're too ashamed to tell anyone how we feel.



To learn more about the difference between guilt and shame, read this article by Focus on the Family Canada.



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. After watching this video, what stood out to you most?
2. What are some of the messages you see and hear in today's culture about sex?
3. "Sex is not bad, sex is not everything, and sex was never meant to cause that kind of pain." How do you interpret this statement? What questions does it raise for you?
4. The word "intimacy" is often thought of as sexual intercourse. After this session, what other meanings does this word have for you?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Bryan shares about how God brought something beautiful out of something that once was so shameful for him. What is an area in your life where you want God to bring about beauty?

2. In the video, Bonnie and Bryan each share about their experiences and perceptions of sex and how it led to sorrow, shame and confusion. Did either of their stories resonate with you? How so?
3. Are there areas of your life – whether it’s sexuality or some other part of your identity – where you feel shame? How might bringing that shame into the light of God’s love bring healing?



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17)



PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for being a God of intimacy. Help me to remember that your design for sex is not to keep something from me, but to keep something for me. Help me to lean on you for strength to keep my heart pure in a world that tells me to follow what feels good. And thank you for being a God who heals brokenness and hurt, both for things I have done and for things done to me.

Amen.

Leader note: If you sense that someone in the group would like to talk through their experiences or questions with a counsellor, remind them they can reach out to Focus on the Family Canada for a free one-time phone session or to be connected with a local registered Christian counsellor. They can call **1.800.661.9800**. Let this be an invitation toward healing, restoration and freedom.

Leader note: Depending on the questions or comments that come up, be sure to reflect back on the section titled “How to Lead Your Group” on page 4.

OVERVIEW

“Is it a boy or a girl?” This is usually the first question people ask when a baby has been born – a declaration that we are either a son or a daughter. The masculine and the feminine each demonstrate a unique aspect of the nature of our Creator, and God blessed his creation as good. But as the book of Genesis shows, sin tainted the perfect balance and beauty of God’s creation.



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In this video, Bonnie talks about male and female and, separately, masculine and feminine. How are these different?
2. Have you ever seen how gender stereotypes have been used to harm others?
3. What does it mean to show honour to one another? Conversely, what does it look like to dishonour one another as men and women? How do you imagine God feels when he sees his creation disrespect itself?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Do you feel that masculine and feminine qualities are mutually exclusive to one’s biological sex? How might your understanding of that affect how you see yourself?
2. Where do you feel you fit on the cultural spectrum between masculinity and femininity? What might God say to that?
3. Have you personally experienced any harmful or hurtful messages around masculinity and/or femininity? How has this affected you?



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

“The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.” (Psalm 145:8-9)



PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

I thank you for making me exactly who I am. Thank you for giving me the perfect blend of qualities and strengths that are a gift to the world. As I look on myself with compassion and love, help me to extend that same compassion and love to my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Amen.



Made for Each Other: Singleness, Marriage and Community

► SESSION FOUR

OVERVIEW

As followers of Christ, we were made to have a relationship with God, but we were made to have relationships with each other, too. Feelings of loneliness are not a defect; rather, it's an indication that we were designed for community. But because of the loss of community-based ways of living, a lot of unsustainable weight has been placed onto potential romantic relationships. It's important to note, though, that Scripture does not treat marriage or singleness as more holy than the other.



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. People who are single *and* people in relationships can feel lonely. Why do you think so many people struggle with loneliness in their lives?
2. The Bible calls us to build healthy friendships but hurt from past experiences and relationships can often lead to isolation. What do you think are qualities of a safe friendship?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Whether you are single or in a relationship, how can you honour God with your life?
2. What are some ways you can strengthen your relationship with Christ?
3. If you have witnessed the pain and hurt of a marriage falling apart because of broken promises, it's understandable to not want to get married as a result. How might the question "Why do I feel this way?" provide some insight?



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)



PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Thank you, first and foremost, for loving me as your child. Thank you for creating me to be in relationship with others, as well. Whether in marriage or in singleness, thank you for giving me the capacity to reflect your unconditional love to those in my path. Because you have forgiven me, please equip me to forgive those who have hurt me in the past so that I don't isolate myself from others, and lead me to a pure community of mature relationships.

Amen.

► SESSION FOUR



Leader note: Before you start the video, give a warning that it will discuss the topic of pornography and sexual temptation. Assure your group that resources and support will be shared after the episode finishes.

OVERVIEW

In this video, Bryan reminds us of the three ways humans face temptation: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). When we follow the pattern of how Jesus overcame temptation, we experience the same overcoming power in our lives. How amazing that we can live in the full abundant life that he purchased for us!



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Hebrews 4:15b says, “But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.” Knowing that Jesus understands what it’s like to be tempted, how can it empower us to draw on him for strength?
2. In this session, Bryan shares that God’s commandments are not meant to rob his children of joy, but to protect us from harm. How does this perspective influence how we respond to temptation?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Satan waited to tempt Jesus in the desert when Jesus was well into his fast, experiencing a natural human desire for food. Looking at your own life, in what circumstances do you feel vulnerable to the temptation of sin?
2. Bryan says that when our identity is rooted in Christ, the pride of this life doesn’t have an access point. How can this truth empower us to say “yes” to Christ instead of “no” to temptation?
3. Who is a trusted adult or leader you can go to about temptation to sin, or questions about sexuality?



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9)



PRAYER

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for dying for me so that I might have eternal life. Thank you for knowing exactly what it means to be tempted. Give me strength to say yes to your truth and help me to see sin for what it really is: something less than I deserve as your child. Thank you for your commandments that are meant to protect me from harm, not rob me of joy.

Amen.

Leader note: This episode may have resonated with some of the participants. Pornography is a common area of temptation, and someone in your group may want to develop healthier habits but they might struggle to break addictive behaviours. Fortunately, they don't have to struggle alone. Focus on the Family Canada has a big selection of resources and support around pornography and temptation, they're all free and available for you.



Scan this QR code to access these resources.

If you sense that someone in the group would like to talk through their experiences or questions with a counsellor, remind them they can reach out to Focus on the Family Canada for a free one-time phone session or to be connected with a local registered Christian counsellor. They can call **1.800.661.9800**. Let this be an invitation toward healing, restoration and freedom.



To learn more about the problem with pornography and dealing with temptation, scan to watch this free video series from Focus on the Family Canada counsellor Luke Campbell.

Leader note: Before you start the video, give a warning that it includes sensitive content and addresses the topic of abuse. Assure your group that resources and support will be shared after the episode finishes.

OVERVIEW

Whether from decisions we made or things done to us, we all have experiences in our lives that caused some level of guilt and shame. While guilt (“I did something bad”) can be a helpful tool that nudges us to make amends, confess and repent, shame (“I am bad”) is an unhelpful and damaging self-narrative that often leads to isolation and pain. But God never intended us to live under the suffocating weight of shame. He desires us to experience freedom through him.



GROUP DISCUSSION

1. After watching this session, how would you differentiate between guilt and shame? How does the above definition help you see the difference between “I did something bad” and “I am bad”?
2. In this session, we hear again about “vertical confession” in which we confess our sins to God, and “horizontal confession” in which we seek healing through accountability from brothers and sisters in Christ. What qualities would you look for in someone who can be your “horizontal” support?
3. “Purity is not about the history of your body, but the direction of your heart.” How does this statement resonate with your own understanding of purity?



PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. In the book of Genesis, we read that God sought out Adam and Eve when they were hiding in their shame. He pursued them even when they were hiding. How have you felt God pursuing you?
2. Has shame distorted the way you see yourself? How can you reclaim your identity in Christ?
3. Who is a trusted adult in your life you can turn to for support? What is holding you back from sharing this part of your story?



SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (James 5:16)



Thank you for your great love. Even in my brokenness and my sin, thank you for not giving up on me. Please help me separate my history from my heart so that I can see myself as you do: loved and redeemed.

Amen.



To learn more about God's gift of confession and repentance, scan to read this article from Focus on the Family Canada.

What's next?

Thank you for walking through the *In God's Image* series with us. We hope that it has ignited questions that bring you closer to your community, and into a deeper relationship with Christ.

You can encourage your group members to get the most out of this series with the following suggestions:

- Bring your full, unguarded heart to God in prayer
- Reflect back on the different sessions
- Journal through your thoughts
- Find at least one person who can be part of your “horizontal confession” community so you don’t have to walk alone
- Seek out a trusted mentor for guidance, counsel, encouragement, prayer and support
- Explore the blogs and articles on The Union Movement and Focus on the Family Canada websites for further reading
- Reach out to Focus on the Family Canada for prayer and a one-time counselling session – all free of charge

Most importantly, remind them that the Spirit of God is forever faithful, and if there are still areas that they know need more time, more confession, more forgiveness, or more understanding, they can ask for his help in that. Focus on the Family Canada is here with resources and support every step of the way.

ABOUT FOCUS ON THE FAMILY CANADA

Since 1983, Focus on the Family Canada has offered help and encouragement to millions of families as they build their lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ. As a charitable organization, we are committed to strengthening Canadian families through trusted, biblically based resources and programs, personal counselling, prayerful support, and much more. We aim to be *the* place Canadian families turn to for trusted help and encouragement!



FocusOnTheFamily.ca

ABOUT THE UNION MOVEMENT

The Union Movement exists to help people find wholeness by presenting a gospel-centred, holistic approach to the topics of identity, sexuality and relationships. We develop resources, speak at events, and support local churches and leaders who desire to cultivate healthy cultures.



TheUnionMovement.com



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