



Lent is springtime in the Church, the 40 days when those who seek baptism into the Christian community make their final preparations. The season calls all Christians to deepen our participation in the mystery of Jesus' self-giving death and life-giving resurrection. It's a time to break harmful habits and practice holy habits.

PRAY Let us...

Fast from social media

Feast on real connections

Fast from fights with my siblings

Feast on appreciating them

Fast from video games

Feast on being outside

Fast from jealousy of others

Feast on loving myself

Fast from laziness

Feast on enthusiasm

Fast from seeing the negative

Feast on seeing the positive

Fast from staying in my group

Feast on including others

Fast from always wanting more

Feast on being grateful

Fast from thinking of myself

Feast on volunteering

Fast from gossip

Feast on giving compliments

Fast from anger

Feast on patience

Fast from hate

Feast on love



by Anonymus

For us, it was always about pressure. Never about being happy, or having fun. Just pressure. Him pushing me, me pushing myself for him. Pushing the boundaries and almost making a game out of how much it would take for me to break.

The boy in question, Ben, was truly one of the most popular boys in our school. He was the boy that played soccer and ran track, that sang in the choir and was a youth group leader at church. The boy that everybody knew and respected.

I, on the other hand, wasn't exactly the textbook definition of the kind of girl Ben would seek out. I'm the girl that wears organic t-shirts and drinks black coffee. Not at the top of the social ladder as Ben was, but popular enough to get by.

But for some reason, he chose to fall for me. I'll never understand why—maybe some things are better left unknown.



We were in our school's spring musical together when I was a freshman and he was a sophomore. I knew of him, of course, but had never talked to him. When a friend told me that he liked me, I was convinced she was joking. Seriously, Ben? Mr. Golden Boy? Likes me??

Of course I said yes when he asked me to be his girlfriend. Opportunities to date people from such lofty realms only come around once in a blue moon. So we started spending lots of time together that summer. We walked around our small town and played Guitar Hero. The first couple of months we spent together passed in simple, on-the-surface sorts of dates.

The next fall things started shifting. We were still seeing each other every day at school and most evenings he swung by for a couple of hours, but something seemed different.

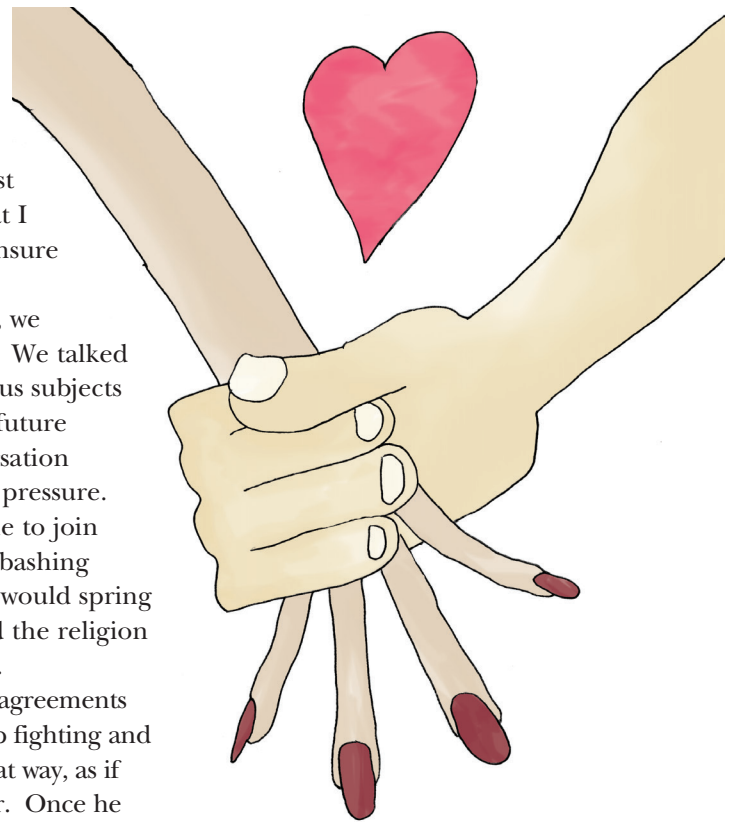
I guess you could say that the shift began when he first said "I love you." We were at a surprise party for a friend, and towards the end of it, Ben said that he had something to tell me. Finally he whispered in my ear those three words. I, barely 15 at the time, had never heard that phrase from a boy before and I wasn't quite sure how

to react. I just replied with the same words and he left, leaving me wondering why I had just told this strange boy that I loved him when I was unsure what that really meant.

After that, it seemed, we became a "real couple." We talked idealistically about serious subjects and about our possible future together. As the conversation went deeper, so did the pressure. He began to pressure me to join his church, vehemently bashing Catholicism whenever I would spring up to defend myself and the religion I'd cherished all my life.

Soon the constant disagreements wore me out, so I gave up fighting and just let him talk to me that way, as if my opinion didn't matter. Once he knew that we were too deep into our relationship to back out, he realized that he had the upper hand.

That fact showed itself in our relationship. Obviously he always had the last word in arguments, and I was always the one running back to apologize after a fight even when I wasn't in the wrong. But his dominance began showing itself in new and scary ways in the early winter.

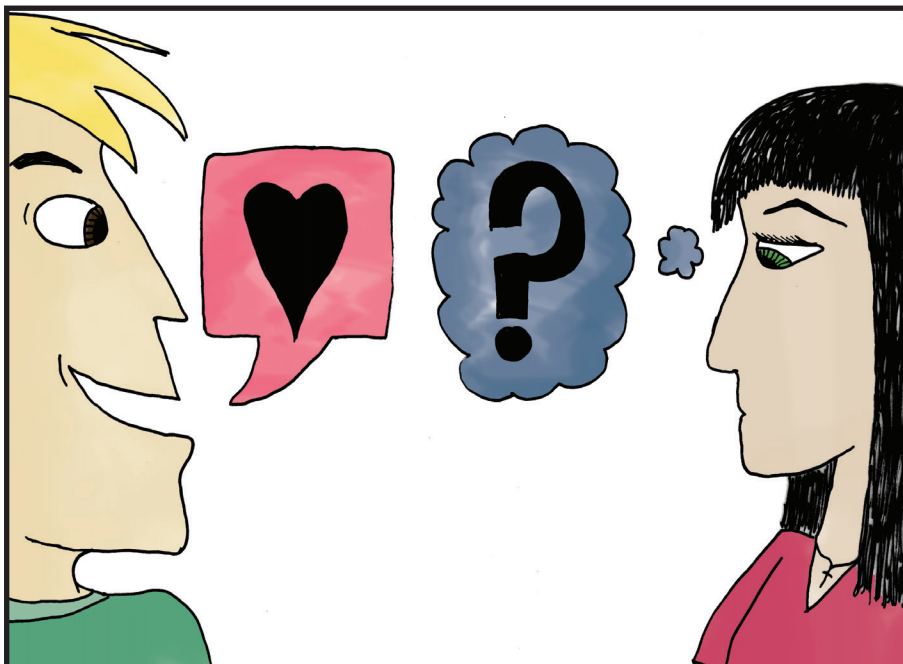


After all of the religion talk began, we started to progress physically. We spent a good portion of nearly every date just making out, even though I didn't always want to. Soon Ben was dissatisfied with only kissing, and he started asking for more. He told me things like "If you really loved me, you'd want to do this," or "It would make me really happy. You want to see me happy, right?"

I heard those phrases on a weekly basis and I wasn't equipped properly to handle them. Nobody had ever told me that people who seemed so perfect on the surface were capable of inflicting such strange and personal forms of harm.

I was simply too scared to say no. Scared of making him angry, scared of losing him, scared of causing him to cheat on me. I never let it escalate to sex, but I knew that it was what he wanted.

After a few more long and arduous months, Ben broke up with me, saying lies like "I don't have the time it takes to commit to you anymore." It wasn't about time at all; it was about the fact that we were mismatched in the first place and about how he believed I was



SUNDAY GOSPEL

1st Sunday of Lent

The desert tests Jesus.

NARRATOR 1: Immediately after his baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert.

NARRATOR 2: He was in the desert for 40 days, tested by Satan. He was with wild beasts, and angels ministered to him.

NARRATOR 1: After Herod arrested John the Baptist, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.

JESUS: The time has come. God's reign draws near. Change your attitude and believe this good news.

Mark 1.12-15

By the forty days of Lent the Church unites itself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.



Catechism of the Catholic Church #540

never giving enough. He overlooked the fact that I had sacrificed all of my free time and mental energy to him. I gave up my famously strong will, my personal convictions, and my right to say no all at his demand. I had spent eight months giving in to the temptation that was Ben.

But, of course, things had to get worse before they could get better.

About a month after our split, Ben contacted me again. He said that he missed me but wasn't ready to have a relationship with strings attached again. So he proposed that we become "friends with benefits."

I said yes unthinkingly, once again giving in to the temptation of being with Ben. In hindsight I realize that it was a stupid mistake, and knowing what I know now, I would never have said yes.

the school play to make out. I wasn't happy doing it; I felt horribly guilty about not telling my parents and friends about what was going on. Regardless, I still let him boss me around.

One day Ben asked if he could come over while both of my parents were at work. I knew what that meant. He wanted to have sex. I thought long and hard about what to do. If I said yes, it would mean that we would still be able to have a future together. If I said no, everything would be over for good. We'd never be able to be together again.

I agonized over the decision; I was desperately afraid to be alone but at the same time it was starting to dawn on me that I had evolved into nothing but an object to him.

Finally I had to say no. Finally, deep within I found the courage that had evaded me through the long winter and I stood up to him, rejecting the fruit tempting me and opting to start all over. He had pressured me consistently about religion, about books and emotions and sex and what to do on our next date and when to say "I love you." (I still have misgivings about that phrase.) I was done saying yes blindly and though it nearly killed me to do so, I broke it off entirely with Ben.

But at that time, I was lonely, hurt, and dazed after the ending of my first real relationship.

Those feelings swirled around my head every day, clouding my judgment.

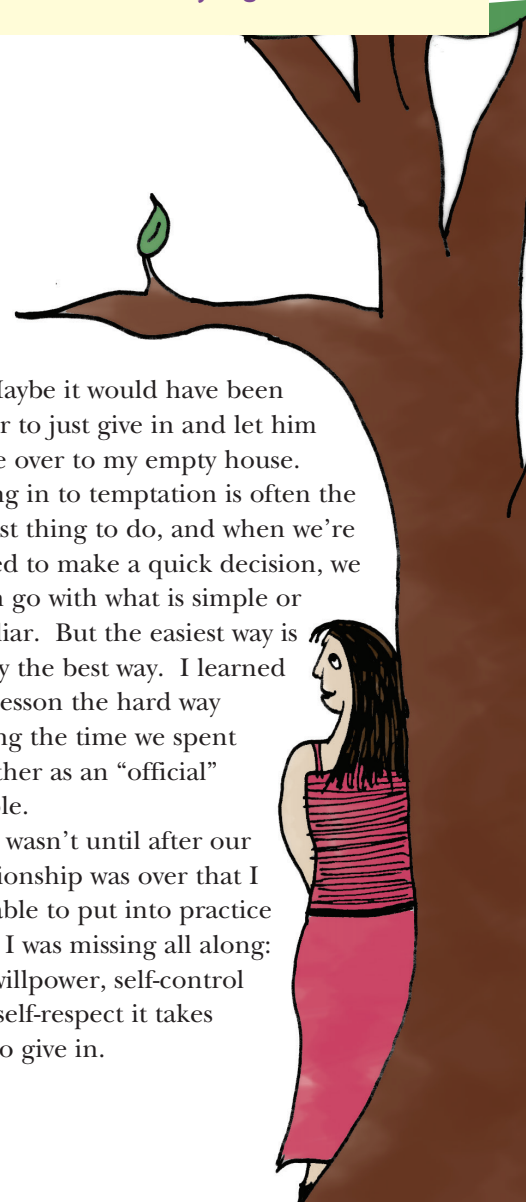
So we started seeing each other again, sneaking off during breaks in rehearsals for



QUESTIONS 1 Why does the author let Ben dominate? 2 What seems valuable about conflicts you have experienced in relationships? 3 What tempts the author to stay in the relationship? 4 What does it mean to say I love you? 5 What do you think must have been valuable for Jesus about time alone in the desert? How does his time alone prepare him for giving back? 6 How will you give back this Lent?

Maybe it would have been easier to just give in and let him come over to my empty house. Giving in to temptation is often the easiest thing to do, and when we're forced to make a quick decision, we often go with what is simple or familiar. But the easiest way is rarely the best way. I learned this lesson the hard way during the time we spent together as an "official" couple.

It wasn't until after our relationship was over that I was able to put into practice what I was missing all along: the willpower, self-control and self-respect it takes not to give in.



Great Flood The flood story comes from Israel's pre-history. It dates back 3,000 to 4,000 years before Jesus and comes from the first 11 chapters of Genesis, where the Hebrew scriptures preserve stories of the world's beginnings.



4,000 B.C.

First Faith Abraham and his wife Sarah are the earliest of Israel's ancestors. The *Ab* in Abraham means *father*. Abraham and Sarah are the first ancestors of all Jewish and Christian believers.



2,000-1,500 B.C.

Exodus, Covenant Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament, tells how the Hebrew slaves escape from Egypt, their wandering in the desert, and their covenant with God at Mount Sinai. The ten commandments are the terms of this covenant, a contract between God and the people. God agrees to be Israel's God and the people of Israel agree to live by the commandments.

1,250 B.C.

Jeremiah Prophesies a New Covenant

The prophet Jeremiah spoke for God during the last years of Israel as an independent kingdom before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and took most able-bodied folks captive into exile. Jeremiah promises God will make a new covenant, one written in our hearts.



580s B.C.

Exile Ends Cyrus, the king of Persia, ancient Iran, destroyed the Babylonians' rule in the Middle East about 540 B.C. He allowed the people of Israel, whom the Babylonians had taken into exile in 587 B.C., to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple.

540 B.C.

We remember our history.

Most families keep albums full of photos that tell stories of their trips, holidays, birthdays, relatives. In its first readings on the Sundays of Lent, the Christian family opens its earliest album—the Old Testament. In the first readings for Cycle B, we remember moments in our holy history.

This 1st Sunday of Lent we hear an old story with a contemporary message. Noah's story tells of a threat to the existence of human life on earth.

The flood story is common among ancient Middle Eastern peoples. They must have felt as vulnerable to great floods as people today do to global warming or nuclear weapons.

Ancient people imagined their world completely surrounded by water—up, down, all around. They thought the world was flat with waters below ground from which springs of water came. A dome called the firmament topped their world and held back the waters above, the source of rain.

In the Noah story the flood waters bubble up through the springs from below and rain pours through the heavens from above. "The fountains of the deep burst forth; the floodgates of the sky opened" (Genesis 7.11).

Extinction threatens as waters rise above the mountains and the ark floats close to the dome.

Noah, his family, and pairs of all living creatures float in an ark God commands him to make. When they enter the ark, they close the ark's one window to seal out the rain. The ark becomes an enclosed floating coffin.

For 40 days of darkness, Noah, his wife, his children, and the pairs of living creatures live inside the ark, not knowing if they will survive the flood waters. Day after day rain pounds the wooden ark. Finally the rain stops and Noah opens the window.

The waters take weeks to recede. Noah sends out a raven, then a dove to look for dry land. Both birds fly back and forth across the water but return to the ark. Noah waits another week and sends the dove out, which returns with an olive branch in its beak. The dry land reappears, a repeat of the third day of creation. Noah welcomes the rainbow, God's promise never to destroy Earth again. The name *Noah* means *settler*.



istock photo: John Woodcock

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Read Genesis 9.8-15 to discover the covenant God makes in setting a rainbow in the clouds.
- 2 Pray together for ethnic groups, cultures, and animals threatened with extinction. Name them and your worries about them. Use God's promise to Noah as a response, "I set my bow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."
- 3 Create a giant olive branch poster or bulletin board display that shows in each leaf who the teens are in your group, or name on each leaf a contribution teens make to parish community.

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