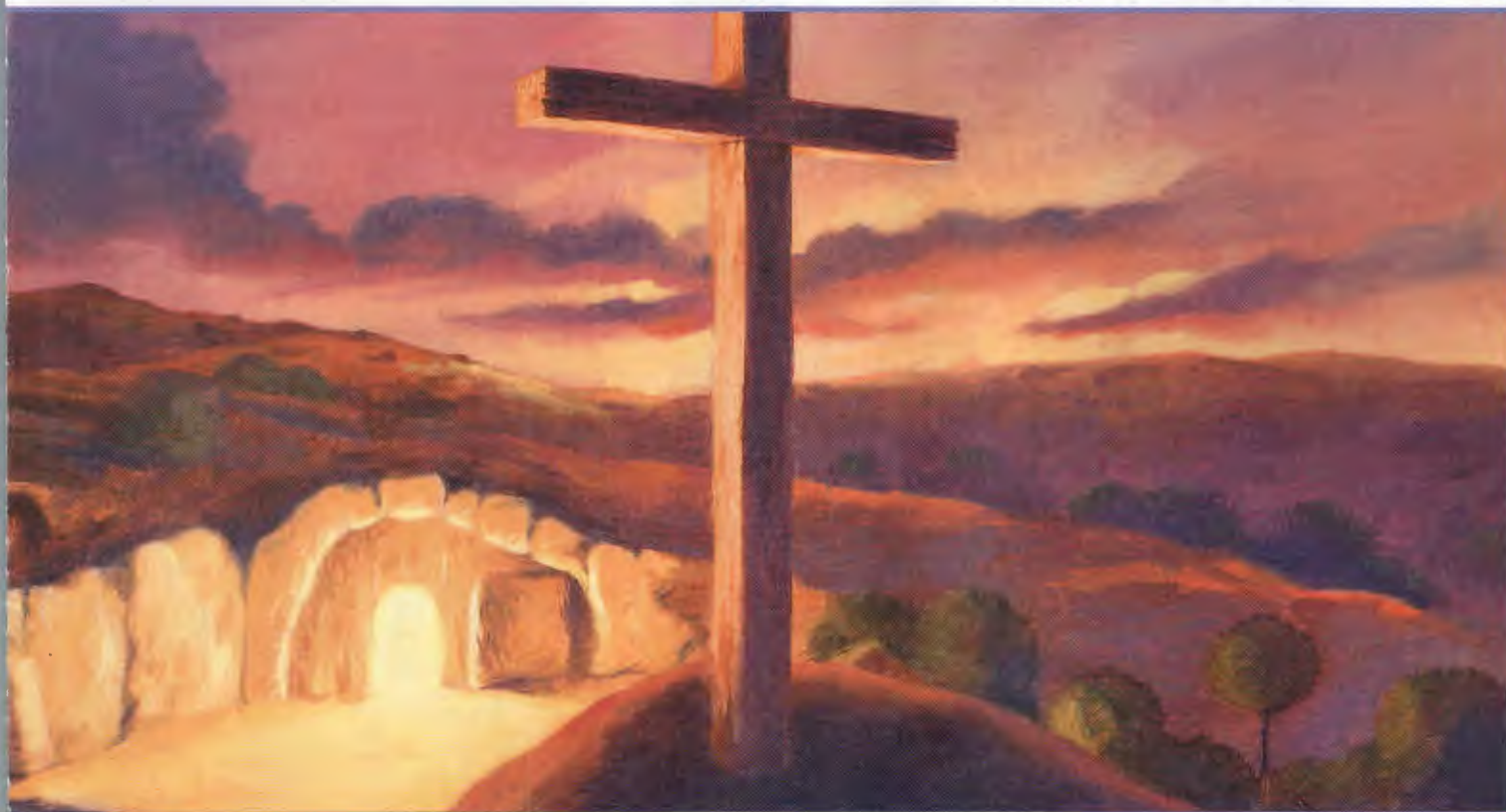


# ALIVE IN CHRIST

GRADE 7

Jesus Christ and the New Testament

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**Our Sunday Visitor**

# MORALITY



*Why are practicing the virtues and developing a well-formed conscience necessary?*

## CHURCH HISTORY TIMELINE

- 34 Death of Stephen, first Christian martyr
- 81 Domitian persecution begins
- 1870 First Ecumenical Vatican Council clarifies papal infallibility
- 1962 Second Ecumenical Vatican Council convenes

Go to page 348 for more



### Our Catholic Tradition

- God made us with a free will, an intellect, and a soul, and we are responsible for our choices. A well-formed conscience—and the help of Christ’s teachings, the Church, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and wise people—will guide us to do what is right and good. (CCC, 1711, 1783)
- All human life is sacred and a gift from God. All people possess the human dignity that comes from being made in God’s image. We have a responsibility to honor and protect life at all stages, from conception to old age. (CCC, 2319)
- Virtues are good spiritual habits that strengthen us and help us make good moral decisions and guide our conduct. The Theological Virtues make the moral (human) virtues possible. (CCC, 1803)

### Our Catholic Life

- Morally good actions require that their object, intention, and circumstance be good; the end does not justify the means. (CCC, 1750–1756)
- We respect the dignity of the human person by respecting the rights of others, taking care of ourselves physically and emotionally, not abusing ourselves or others, and by not leading others into sin. (CCC, 2288–2290)
- The Cardinal Virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance can help us respect ourselves and others and act with integrity. Learning about and practicing the virtues can help us live truthful, faith-filled lives. (CCC, 1804–1809)

# Freedom and Responsibility

## ♥ Let Us Pray

**Leader:** Wondrous God, you have given us the awesome gift of freedom. With that gift comes the responsibility to make choices that show our love for you, each other, and ourselves.

“What is man that you are mindful of him,  
and a son of man that you care for him?  
Yet you have made him little less than a god,  
crowned him with glory and honor.” **Psalm 8:5-6**

**All:** Jesus, we want to do what is right. Show us. Teach us. Be with us as we discover how to love you well.

## ✚ Scripture

“God in the beginning created human beings  
and made them subject to their own free choice.  
If you choose, you can keep the commandments;  
loyalty is doing the will of God.  
Set before you are fire and water;  
to whatever you choose, stretch out your hand.  
Before everyone are life and death,  
whichever they choose shall be given them.”

**The Wisdom of Ben Sira (Sirach) 15:14-17**

### Have you ever thought...

- Why did God create us with the freedom to choose?
- How are freedom and responsibility connected?

# Getting Started

In this chapter you will gain a deeper understanding of human free will and responsibility for choices and actions, and explore how you can make morally good decisions. You will also learn about forming and informing your conscience.

## Catholic Faith Words

- soul
- intellect
- conscience
- mortal sin
- venial sin

In the chart below, record synonyms for "freedom" and "responsibility." With the class, discuss the connection between the two words.



Freedom and Responsibility	
Synonyms for Freedom	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
Synonyms for Responsibility	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____

## WRITE

**Everyone's Doing It!** Imagine a situation where someone your age is feeling pressured to do something wrong that the group they are hanging out with is about to do. On the lines below, describe that situation.

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What might be going through the person's head as he or she decides whether or not to participate?

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## Living is Thinking and Doing

### How can you make good choices?

Every day, you are faced with choices that require decisions. Some decisions seem more important than others, and you might not know how to make the more difficult ones. Just remember, you've been given some important tools to help you.



### Scripture

"Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets." **Matthew 7:12**

### Your Decisions

Sometimes other people make decisions for you because they have authority over you. But all those decisions that you make freely are your own responsibility. Something that you decide to do (or not to do) is a decision that belongs to you alone and no one else.

Why is this important? You are not morally responsible for decisions that you have not voluntarily made. Your intentional thoughts, decisions, and actions are yours. Morally, you are responsible for your freely-made decisions, and the action or inaction that comes from them.

### Made to Choose

You have the ability to choose to act in a variety of ways. Why? Because God made humans unique from all other creatures.



You have a **soul**—the spiritual part of you that lives forever; **intellect**—that which makes it possible for you to think, reason, and judge; and free will—the God-given freedom and ability to make choices on your own without being forced to choose or act in a certain way. This unique combination makes you an image of God. You are created with the tremendous ability to seek what is good and true, and therefore reach happiness with God in Heaven.

God gives you another important gift to help you make decisions: your **conscience**. Your conscience is like an inner voice, part of your ability to reason, that helps you to judge whether actions are right or wrong.

Conscience is what moves you to know and follow the moral law, to do good and avoid what is evil. It is important for us to know God's laws so our conscience can help us make good decisions. You are called by God to develop an informed conscience.

## Choices That Lead You from God

Listening to your conscience leads you along the path that keeps you in the right relationship with God and away from sin—any deliberate thought, word, or action that goes against moral law and offends God. Sin is a deliberate choice to disobey God. It's not a mistake or an accident.

### Catholic Faith Words

**soul** the spiritual principle of a human person that is individual, created by God, and will exist forever

**intellect** the God-given ability which makes it possible for humans to think, reason, and judge

**conscience** the God-given ability that helps individuals judge whether actions are right or wrong

**mortal sin** a grave (very serious) sin by which someone turns completely away from God and breaks his or her relationship with God

**venial sin** a sin that weakens, but does not destroy, a person's relationship with God

There are two types of personal sins for which someone is responsible. **Mortal sin** breaks a person's relationship with God. The effect of mortal sin, without repenting and being forgiven, is total separation from God forever. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be met:

- the matter involved must be very serious;
- the person must know the action is serious and sinful (called sufficient reflection); and
- the person freely chooses or agrees to commit the wrong anyway (full consent of the will to do what is wrong).

The Commandments specify gravely serious matter. But not all sins are gravely damaging or mortal. Less serious sin, called **venial sin**, weakens a person's relationship with God, but does not destroy it. Venial sins lessen the love of God in your heart and make it more difficult for you to resist sin. Venial sins arise from not using moderation or acting without full knowledge, and can sometimes lead to mortal sin.

## NAME AND DISCUSS

Name three things someone might do to become more aware of his or her conscience.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

How would someone know if his/her conscience has been well formed?  
Discuss your answers with a classmate.

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## The Sources of Action

### What determines whether an action is good?

How do you know if what you are doing is morally right? Three things determine the morality of a human action:

- the object, which characterizes the action in and of itself.
- the intention, which is the immediate end or purpose the person intends to achieve through the action.
- the circumstances, which surround the action.

“A morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the circumstances together . . . One may not do evil so that good may result from it” (see the *Catechism*, 1755–1756).

Consider this situation: Your older brother is driving Grandma to the doctor using Dad’s car with his permission. The *object* of this action is to drive his grandmother to the doctor.

A bike rider loses control and swerves in front of the car. Your brother makes a snap decision and turns the steering wheel, causing the car to jump the curb. There are no pedestrians at the curbside. The object of his action and his intention are to avoid hitting the biker. Your brother’s *intention* is not to break the rules of the road or to put pedestrians in danger, but to avoid hitting and hurting the bike rider.

The *circumstances* are that no pedestrians are at or near the curb and that your brother only drove on the curb long enough to avoid the biker. In this case, the immediate object of the brother’s action was to avoid the biker. This too was his intention.

The circumstances permitted him to do this without hurting anyone else. Even though he technically violated the law by going off the road, the immediate object of his action was to avoid hitting the biker. The object, intention, and circumstances were good. His was a morally good act.





### Go to the Source

Read Matthew 6:2–4 to find out more of what Jesus had to say about good deeds.

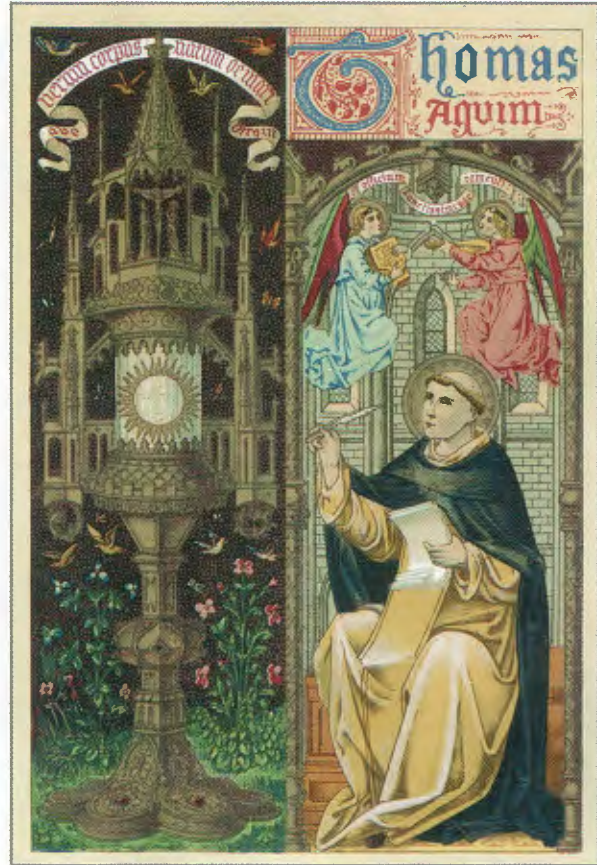
When making a choice, you have to consider all three elements: what is the action or object itself; why are you doing it, or not doing it; and what are the pressures, environment, or issues surrounding it that might be affecting your judgment.

➤ **Why is the brother's action described earlier as a morally good act?**

### Consider This

A good intention—such as wanting to help your sister—does not make an object or behavior that is morally wrong—such as lying to your parents—good. A bad intention—such as the desire to boast—can make an object or behavior that is good—such as donating money or time to a worthy cause—morally bad. As Jesus said, “[But] take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people might see them” (**Matthew 6:1**).

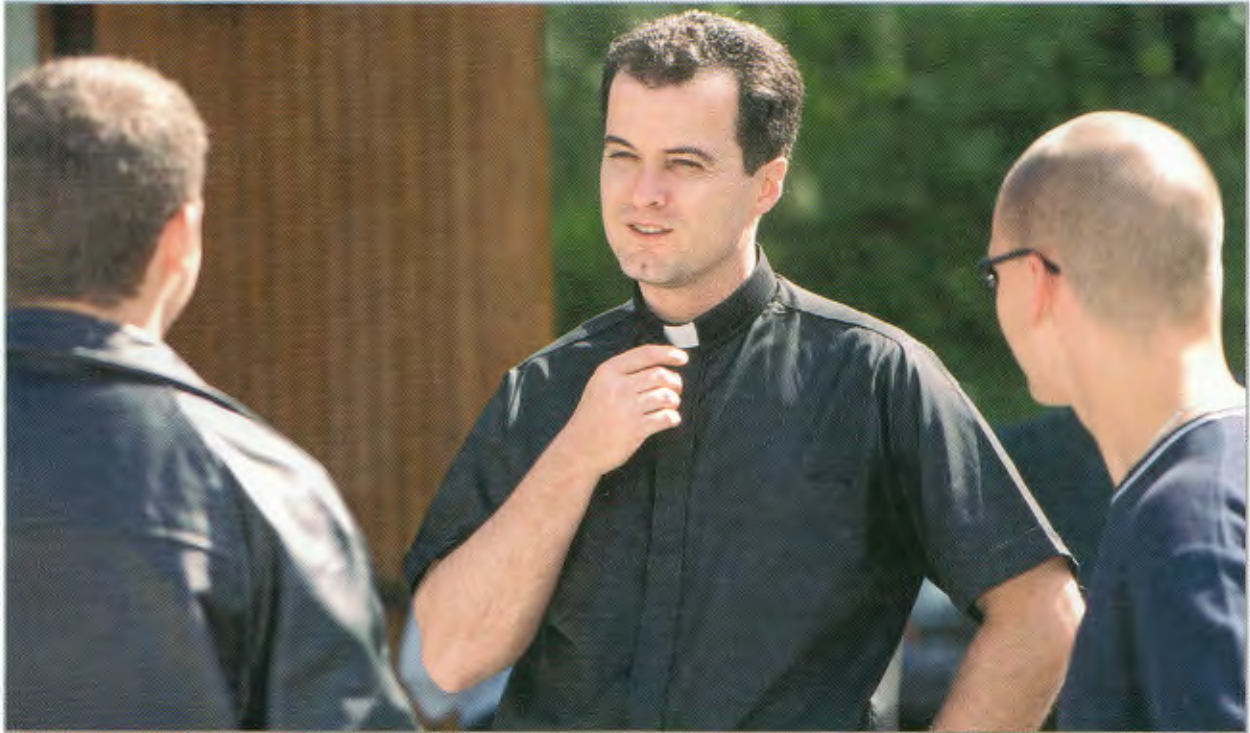
Saint Thomas Aquinas argued that whether an act is good or evil depends on the end result of that action. Human acts are good if they promote the purpose and honor of God. Aquinas taught that by repeating a good action, people develop a moral habit, which allows them to do good easily. He wrote, “An evil action cannot be justified by reference to a good intention.” Today we say, “The end does not justify the means.” In an extreme example of this belief, if asked what to do in a situation where killing one person would save one hundred other lives, a Catholic person's answer is that murder is wrong no matter how many lives it saves.



The circumstances of an action can increase or decrease the moral goodness of the action. Factors such as fear, ignorance, and pressure are some examples. But circumstances cannot change whether an act is morally good or not, only the degree of its goodness or evilness. Some acts, such as murder, are always wrong no matter the intention or the circumstances because choosing them entails so great an evil that they are against the natural moral law.

### THINK AND WRITE

Think about a moral decision you are currently dealing with, or have dealt with recently. Write about the act, the intention, the circumstances, and what your conscience tells you.



“Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may eventually become wise” (Proverbs 19:20).

## Formation for Doing Right

### How can a well-formed conscience help you?

Athletes know that if a person wants to build up his or her body, he or she has to work at it. He or she has to establish a routine involving exercise and the right food.

Building and shaping a conscience is similar. If you want to make good decisions through life and do the right things, then forming a conscience is critical. If a conscience has been formed well, it will lead you to what is truthful and just. It will help you make sound, rational judgments and follow what is good.

When you have a moral decision to make, your conscience will move you to make a right (morally good) judgment that follows reason and God’s law. Or it can lead you to make an incorrect (morally bad) judgment that does not follow reason and God’s law.

## Conscience Formation

Someone who wants to become a better pianist will seek out a teacher who can introduce skills and guide the student to feel the music as they play. The person will spend a lot of time practicing, and accepting the fact that their development will be ongoing; if you don’t use the skills, you’ll lose them. The same holds true with building up your conscience. There are a few important ways to do this:

- **Scripture:** What does the Bible tell you?
  - **Church teaching:** What does the Church say about it?
  - **Getting advice:** Ask for input from family members or trusted adults, study the facts of the situation, and look at the standards of society (e.g., is the action legal?).
- **How can taking one or more of these steps help you?**

When you use these resources to inform your conscience and find that there is a conflict between some of these sources, rely on the wisdom found in Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church in Sacred Tradition.

## Vices and Virtues

You've probably heard that practice makes perfect, but have you ever thought of it in the reverse? What happens when you keep repeating the same negative, sinful behavior over and over? You create in yourself a vice, a habit or tendency to be more sinful. The Church uses the term *vices* to refer to the seven capital sins that tend to produce other sinful behavior. Vices incline us to actions that are harmful to ourselves and to others. Traditionally, the Church has identified seven capital sins or vices: pride, covetousness, envy, anger, gluttony, lust, and sloth or laziness.

Fortunately the Cardinal Virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are good habits within us that, when strengthened and practiced, help us counter these vices in our daily lives. Virtues help us respond consistently to the situations we face, guiding us to make morally good decisions. The more we intentionally practice the virtues, the more we can rely on them to guide us.

Underline which step you tend to rely on most when making a moral decision. Circle one that you could do more often.



### Steps in Making a Moral Decision

<b>Think</b>	Take time to consider your options and the possible consequences to yourself, others, and your relationship with God. Take time to hear what your conscience might be saying.
<b>Compare</b>	How do your options compare to Jesus' Beatitudes, his New Commandment, the Ten Commandments, and Church teachings? If an option contradicts any of these, then it's not really an option anymore.
<b>Talk</b>	Find someone who can understand the situation you are in. Tell him or her what you are thinking and why. Ask for advice.
<b>Pray</b>	Turn to the Holy Spirit in prayer, asking for guidance to make the right decision.
<b>Act</b>	Make your choice and be confident that you have made the right one based upon your conscience.

## IN SUMMARY Catholics Believe

We are free to choose, responsible for our choices, and guided in our moral decision-making.

- God made us with a free will, an intellect, and a soul. Our conscience works with these gifts so that we can choose to do good and avoid sin.
- Morally good actions require that their object, intention, and circumstance be good; the end does not justify the means.
- A well-formed conscience will guide us to do what is right and good, and with the help of Christ's teachings, the Church, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and wise people, we can make good decisions.

## Our Catholic Life

Your conscience is meant to be maintained and used to guide you in doing what is right and good. You can **inform and strengthen your conscience** by listening with your heart and mind to the Word of God, the teachings of the Church, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. You can also seek guidance from parents, teachers, and mentors when making big and small choices. You can practice informing your conscience by ending each day with a prayer and an examination of conscience like the one on the next page to think about how you might have helped or hurt others that day, and how you might do more or better the next day.

- **What is on your mind that an examination of conscience might help or make clear?**

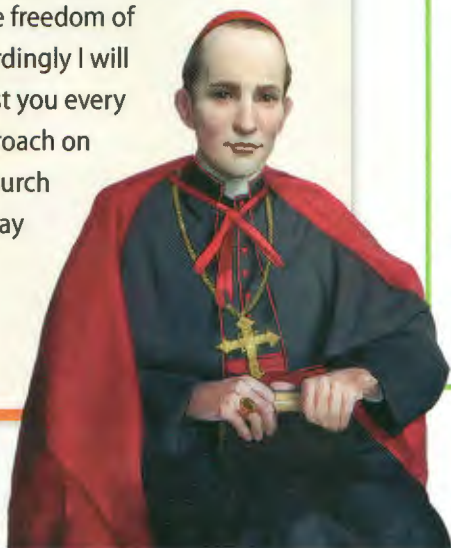


## People of Faith

### Blessed Aloysius Stepinac, 1898–1960

Aloysius Stepinac was ordained as a priest after World War I, and eventually was appointed Archbishop of Zagreb. During World War II, he raised his voice against the Nazi tyranny. After that war, during the pro-communist regime of Marshal Tito, Stepinac was imprisoned. He was released after five years on the orders of Tito, who wished to meet him. At their meeting, Stepinac told Tito, "I am for the freedom of the people and accordingly I will raise my voice against you every time you should encroach on this freedom." The Church celebrates his feast day on **February 10**.

For more, go to [aliveinchrist.osv.com](http://aliveinchrist.osv.com)



## PRACTICE

Choose a tough issue you are dealing with in your life and practice informing your conscience by consulting these four resources.

What does God tell you in the Bible?

What does the Church teach?

What do respected and wise figures in your life say?

What are your community's laws and values?

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## Examination of Conscience

**Leader:** Jesus, we know that you came into the world to cast out the darkness of sin, ignorance, and death. You are the Light of the World. As your followers, show us how to reflect your light. Let us take a moment to reflect on the times we have not been a sign of your light in the world, and ask the Lord for his mercy and his forgiveness.

**Reader 1:** Did I take God's name in vain?  
Did I curse or use bad language?

**Reader 2:** Did I miss Mass on a Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation without any serious reason?

**Reader 3:** Did I obey my parents, teachers, or trusted adults?

**Reader 1:** Was I selfish in how I treated others?

**Reader 2:** When have I forgiven others?  
When have I refused to forgive?

**Reader 3:** Did I look at indecent pictures or videos?

**Reader 1:** Did I steal or damage another's property?

**Reader 2:** Did I tell lies?

**Reader 3:** When have I stopped people from gossip? Did I gossip or make fun of someone through my words, texts, or social media?


**Leader:** Let us now pray the Act of Contrition as a way to show that we are truly sorry for our failings.

**All:** My God,  
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.  
In choosing to do wrong  
and failing to do good,  
I have sinned against you  
whom I should love above all things.  
I firmly intend, with your help,  
to do penance,  
to sin no more,  
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.  
Our Savior Jesus Christ  
suffered and died for us.  
In his name, my God, have mercy.  
Amen.

Rite of Penance

**Leader:** Lord, teach us to be persistent, to be strong, and to be courageous. Nourish in us a practical desire to build up rather than tear down; to reconcile instead of polarize. Send your Holy Spirit to enlighten us and show us the way.

**All:** Amen.

 *Sing or play "Be Merciful, O Lord"*

 Go to [aliveinchrist.osv.com](http://aliveinchrist.osv.com) for an interactive review.

**A Work with Words** Complete each sentence with the correct term from the Word Bank.

soul	free will
moral law	intention
conscience	circumstances
sin	intellect

- \_\_\_\_\_ is a God-given ability that helps you judge whether something is right or wrong.
- Conscience moves you to know and follow the \_\_\_\_\_, which directs us to do good and avoid evil.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is any deliberate thought, word, action, or omission that goes against moral law and offends God.
- Every human action is composed of three elements—the object, the \_\_\_\_\_, and the circumstances.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ of an action can increase or decrease the moral goodness of the action.

**B Check Understanding** Circle the letter of the choice that best completes the sentence.

- Your \_\_\_\_\_ is the spiritual principle in humans that is created by God and exists forever.
  - intellect
  - free will
  - soul
  - conscience

- Your \_\_\_\_\_ is the God-given ability to think, reason, and judge.
  - intellect
  - free will
  - soul
  - conscience
- The effect of \_\_\_\_\_, without repenting and being forgiven, is separation from God forever.
  - venial sin
  - mortal sin
  - free will
  - moral law
- \_\_\_\_\_ weakens, but does not destroy, a person's relationship with God.
  - Venial sin
  - Mortal sin
  - Free will
  - Moral law
- If a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ has been formed well, it will lead you to what is truthful and just.
  - intellect
  - conscience
  - free will
  - soul

**C Make Connections** Write a one-paragraph response to the question. What types of decisions are people your age currently facing? Write about the process of making a moral decision using the steps *think, compare, talk, pray, and act*.

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