Livy Dunne is a highly educated woman studying to become a professor of archeology at the end of World War II. When a one night tryst with an army soldier leaves Livy pregnant and alone, her preacher father gives her no other choice but to get married as quickly as possible. Through her father’s connections, a rustic farmer in rural Colorado agrees to marry Livy. However, Livy feels the marriage will lead to an end to her educational and professional dreams.

Unappreciative of her husband’s quiet ways and the slow life on the farm, Livy finds her new marriage stifling. The closest town with a library is miles away. Livy still longs for the soldier who broke her heart, even though she knows he didn’t love her. She writes letters to him in secret, hoping he will return to rescue her from what she thinks is a miserable life. When two Japanese-American sisters find their way from the internment camp onto Livy’s land, Livy befriends them. Through their stories, Livy learns about the hard life they are forced to lead in the internment camp and the girls swap dreams of college and their futures.

Livy’s new husband, Ray Singleton, does his best to make her happy. Ray agrees to marry Livy because he thinks it is God’s will for his life. He doesn’t understand what brought Livy into his life, but he trusts in God that everything will turn out well in the end. Livy does not realize that Ray has fallen deeply in love with her until it is almost too late to save their marriage.

LIFE THEME: DECIDING TO LOVE

When Ray marries Livy, he chooses to love her and her baby as his family, accepting Livy’s past. Through the support of Ray, his family, Rose, and Florence, Livy begins to see her baby as a miracle. At the beginning of the film, Livy believes that her baby and marriage signal the end of her academic aspirations. As a result of her friendship with Rose and Florence, Livy learns to explore her passions wherever she is, even if she can’t pursue her academic dreams.

So many women today, especially women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, falsely believe that marriage and family life bring an end to a career or their educational opportunities. But, as Livy learns,
marriage and family open doors to the beautiful vocation of motherhood, one of the most important jobs in the world. Women shouldn’t have to give up their careers or sacrifice time with their family. Just as Livy learns how she can still pursue her love of archeology as a wife and mother in rural America, today many women discover that their jobs as mothers are not incompatible with their careers or interests.

As a society, we are so caught up in seeing children and motherhood as a bad thing that we can forget the joys of family life. Instead of looking down on mothers, we should applaud them. They not only find time to take care of their children, but also contribute to the good of society through their careers, in the teaching of their children, through volunteering, and in staying active in their communities. Society has a duty to make this balance even easier for women. Just as Livy’s community supports her and her decision to choose life for her baby, our society must reach out to all pregnant women who feel scared, ashamed, or unable to care for their children.

**HOW CAN I APPLY THIS TO MY LIFE?**

In our society, it is easy for us to criticize others for the decisions that they have made in their lives, especially decisions with which we disagree. The culture of death tells us that pregnancy is a disease and that children will only get in the way of careers and dreams. We must not forget that every life, born and preborn, is a gift from God. A child coming into the world heralds changes in family life, but those changes do not have to be negative or limiting. For women facing an unplanned pregnancy (especially one outside of marriage), the feelings of loneliness and shame can overwhelm them. We need to reassure them that they are not alone and that we will be with them every step of the way to support them and their children.

Love is a decision, not just a feeling. In order to bring Christ’s love to women in difficulty we have to decide to love them. With each person we meet, we should ask ourselves, How can I show Christ’s love to this person here in front of me today? Smiling, praying for her, encouraging her, or just being her friend often gives a mom the courage she needs to care for her preborn child. She might feel scared or ashamed. Judging her won’t help her get into a better situation, but actively walking with her every step of her journey can help her continue toward her dreams.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. **How does Livy’s father treat her and her child?**
   Livy’s father forces her to leave his household and live far away from her family, even though she is still grieving the death of her mother. He treats her pregnancy as a visible sign of an unforgivable sin. Because he is a minister, he feels that her pregnancy puts his own reputation at stake. He is more concerned about himself and the neighbors’ gossip than he is about helping his own daughter embrace her baby and God’s plan for her life.

   What should he have done instead?
   As a minister, Reverend Dunne knows the power of forgiveness and unconditional love. Instead of being concerned for his own reputation, he should have forgiven Livy and accepted her and his new grandchild into his life. Instead of forcing her to leave her family in such a difficult, emotional time, Rev. Dunne should have left the decision to marry Ray up to Livy herself.

2. **How does Ray treat Livy?**
   Even though Livy’s reputation is disgraced, Ray treats her with dignity and respect. He realizes that every life is a gift.
How do Ray’s neighbors treat Livy?
When Livy worries that Ray’s neighbors will gossip about her, Ray assures her that they all only want the best for the new couple, so they won’t say anything. Still, Ray doesn’t mind bearing some of the gossip on Livy’s behalf.

How should we treat young, unwed mothers? Why is it better to show compassion rather than anger for others’ difficult situations?
We are all sinners, and have all failed in some way. With the loving mercy of God, we are able to get up and try again. We need to treat others with that same loving compassion. Remember that we should hate the sin and love the sinner. We should never judge other people, including women who have children out of wedlock or even women who have had an abortion. Instead, we should show them Christ’s love and help them see that He is waiting with arms opened wide.

3. How does Livy’s life experience prepare her to befriend the Japanese interns, Florence and Rose?
Livy feels unwanted after her father forces her to get married, so she understands the isolation that the girls feel. Like Florence and Rose, Livy also had to abandon her academic pursuits. The women form a friendship on the commonality of shared intellectual interests.

What injustices do Rose and Florence have to endure because of their ethnic background?
Rose, Florence, and their family left San Francisco with almost nothing while they watched their home being sold to someone else.

4. Livy’s marriage is arranged by her father and is one of convenience rather than love. How does this affect Livy’s relationship with Ray at first?
At first, Livy resents Ray because she has been forced into a life she did not want. When Livy gets to know Ray, she begins to realize how lucky she is to have him as her husband.

Some cultures still practice arranged marriage. Are there any benefits? What are the drawbacks? Answers will vary.

CATHOLIC CONNECTIONS
Read Matthew 1:18-25.

How did St. Joseph respond when he found out the Blessed Virgin Mary was pregnant?
Matthew says that Joseph was a just man and someone who did not want to expose Mary to shame and humiliation. Knowing that she would be ostracized or even punished by the Jewish community, he decided to “divorce her quietly” so that she could escape disgrace.

What did Joseph do after the angel appeared to him in a dream?
Realizing the part he had to play in God’s will, Joseph immediately accepted Mary into his home to protect her and her child. Joseph may not have fully understood God’s plan, but he still leapt at the chance to be fully obedient to God.

What does St. Joseph’s example teach us about how we should treat unwed mothers?
Joseph treated Mary with reverence and compassion. He tried to do what was best for her and the child. God called upon him to take her into his home and care for her and her child, so that’s what he did.

Like St. Joseph, Ray Singleton accepts his new, pregnant wife into his home because he believes it is God’s will. Both of these stories show us that pregnant women (married or unmarried) need our help and support to bring life into the world. Motherhood is not an easy job.

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