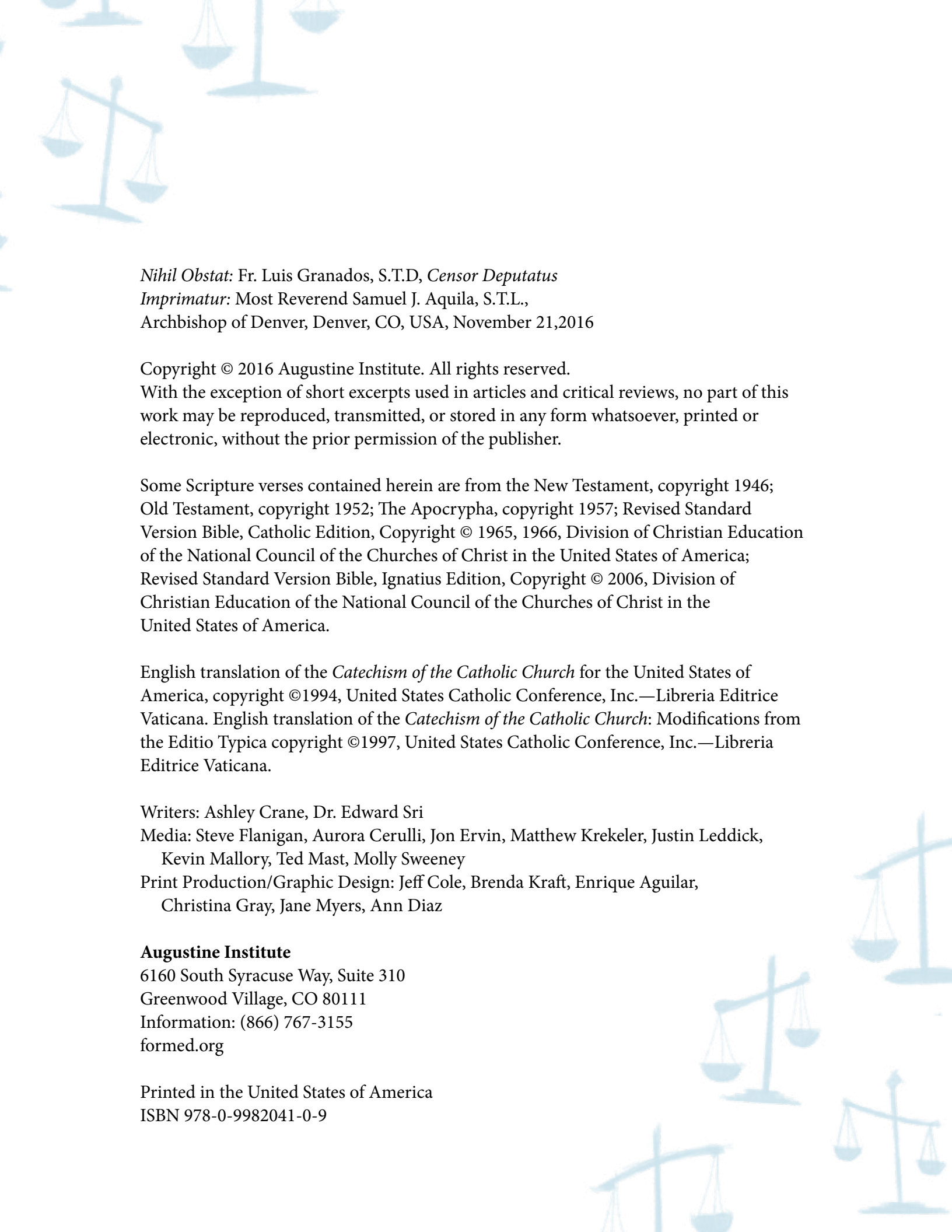


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 1

Don't Impose Your
Morality on Me!

The background of the page is decorated with several faint, light blue icons of scales of justice, scattered across the top and right sides.

Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
Archbishop of Denver, Denver, CO, USA, November 21,2016

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SESSION 1 Don't Impose Your Morality on Me!

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

This session looks at some of the challenges of—and opportunities for—talking about morality in a relativistic age. It also lays the foundation for you to begin having more open, respectful but also meaningful conversations with relativistic friends. Before we can even begin to show the shortcomings in a relativistic worldview, we must first understand the differences between the modern way of approaching morality and the classical (and Catholic) view of morality. As we explore the classical view of morality, we will find that it's not merely a set of guiding principles for theoretical situations—it is an entire way of life.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Recognize some of the main differences between the modern view of morality and the classical view of morality.
- Recognize the three key features of a classical view of life and ethics.
- Understand that ethics address the question of how to achieve one's purpose.

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 8. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false,
and does not swear deceitfully.
He will receive blessing from the LORD,
and vindication from the God of his salvation.
Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
Amen.

—Psalm 24:3–6

INTRODUCTION

What is “right” and “wrong”? Is what’s right for you right for me? Is there a right and wrong for everyone, all the time?

These are difficult questions to discuss in our culture. We live in a society that supports the opinion that each person should make up his or her own morality—that there is no moral truth that applies to everyone.

Many of us have been affected by the relativistic outlook that pervades the modern world. Maybe some of us wonder whether there really is an absolute right and wrong for everyone. Or maybe we accept that there is a moral standard for all, but we don’t know how to explain our moral convictions in a convincing way. Maybe some of us are afraid of saying something is immoral because we’re afraid of offending others or of being labeled intolerant. How do we talk about morality in a relativistic world? That’s what we begin to explore in the opening sessions of this study.

STEP 2: CONNECT

Discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session’s topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

Imagine the end of your life. What would you want people to say about you at your funeral? For what qualities do you want to be remembered most?

(Answers are likely to fall into two categories: people generally want to be remembered for the good qualities they exhibited, such as kindness, generosity, honesty, loyalty, etc., or for the relationships that were important to them, such as being a good husband, wife, parent, friend, etc.)

DIGGING DEEPER

“The truth is like a lion; you don’t need to defend it. Let it loose; it will defend itself.”

—St. Augustine

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 30 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

- I. Challenges in talking about morality in a relativistic age: businessman example
- II. Benedict XVI—dictatorship of relativism
 - A. Relativism: there is no truth to which we are all accountable
 - B. “Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism” (Benedict XVI)
 - C. To say that there is absolutely no truth is itself an absolute truth
- III. Modern view of morality is a question of “what”
 - A. What should I do in some abstract situation?
 - B. What should society do?
 - C. Thinking of issues, not how I personally live my day-to-day life
- IV. Classical view of morality is a question of “who”
 - A. Who do I want to become? What kind of person do I want to be?
 - B. Ethics, from the Greek *ethikos*
 1. “Pertaining to character”
 2. Character is the disposition to live a certain kind of life
 - C. Three features of a classical way of looking at life and ethics
 1. Man-as-he-is
 2. Man-as-he-could-be-if-he-fulfilled-his-*telos*
 1. *Telos* is Greek for “end” or “purpose”
 2. What virtues do I need to live out my relationships as I should?
 3. Ethics = getting from man-as-he-is to fulfilling our *telos*¹

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 52-53.

DIGGING DEEPER

“Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be ‘tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine,’ seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.”

—Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Homily for the Mass for the Election of the Supreme Pontiff*,
St. Peter’s Basilica, April 18, 2005

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time—a new insight or a new way of thinking about morality for you?

(The differences between the modern and classical views of morality may be a new idea for many participants, especially the contrast between the question of “what” and the question of “who.”)

2. Do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable talking about morality with people who disagree with you? Why? In your experience, what are some reasons that these conversations can be so difficult?

(Sometimes we are uncomfortable talking about morality because we are afraid of being labeled “judgmental” or “intolerant.” Sometimes it is difficult to discuss morality because of a lack of common understanding or experience. And we often experience discomfort and difficulty when we don’t know how to articulate or explain our position. If some participants say they feel comfortable talking about morality, even when people disagree with them, encourage them to share what makes those conversations easier—possibly a close relationship that enables them to have the difficult conversation, a confidence in their position, etc.)

3. Let’s go back to the funeral example. Think about those qualities for which you want to be remembered most when your life has ended. What’s one thing you could do this week to become even more the kind of person you desire to be?

(A person might work on becoming the kind of person he or she wants to be this week by picking one way to invest more in important relationships; suggest these ideas if no one else does: call your parents, take a friend out for coffee to catch up, do something special for your spouse, make extra time to read to your kids, etc.)

STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 11 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share their experiences the next time the group meets.*

Society is full of messages about choosing our own destiny and being whatever and whoever we want to be. But according to a Catholic understanding of morality, we already have a specific purpose. This end or purpose to our lives—our *telos* in Greek—is relationship. God made us for love. He made us for relationship with him and with the people he has placed in our lives.

Morality begins and ends with love. Throughout this study, we will see how the drama of the moral life is played out in these relationships. **What are the most important relationships in your life? Which relationships are you living well? Which ones could use some work? What's something you can do this week to strengthen one of these relationships?** This week prayerfully reflect on the opportunities God is offering you to grow in love.

DIGGING DEEPER

“You know well enough that Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.”

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Letter 40*



STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *Relativism is itself an absolute claim.*
- *The modern and classical views of morality are very different: the modern view is a question of “What should I do?” while the classical view is a question of “Who do I want to become?”*
- *Telos refers to man’s goal or end, and ethics refers to the character or virtues needed to get from where we are to where we want to be.*

Lord Jesus Christ,
You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
Guide us in the way of your perfect love,
that we may fulfill your command to love one another as you have loved us.
Open our hearts and minds to understand your truth,
that we may be the light of the world and the salt of the earth,
a city on a hill shining for all to see.
Keep us ever close to you, that by your grace at work in our lives
we may bear fruit to the glory of your name,
who lives and reigns in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1691–1729

Peter Kreeft, *Making Choices: Practical Wisdom for Everyday Moral Decisions* (Servant: 1990).

Peter Kreeft, *The Journey: A Spiritual Roadmap for Modern Pilgrims* (IVP Books: 1997).

Edward Sri, “Part I: The Challenge” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 2

Recovering the Basics:
Virtue and Friendship





Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
Archbishop of Denver, Denver, CO, USA, November 21,2016

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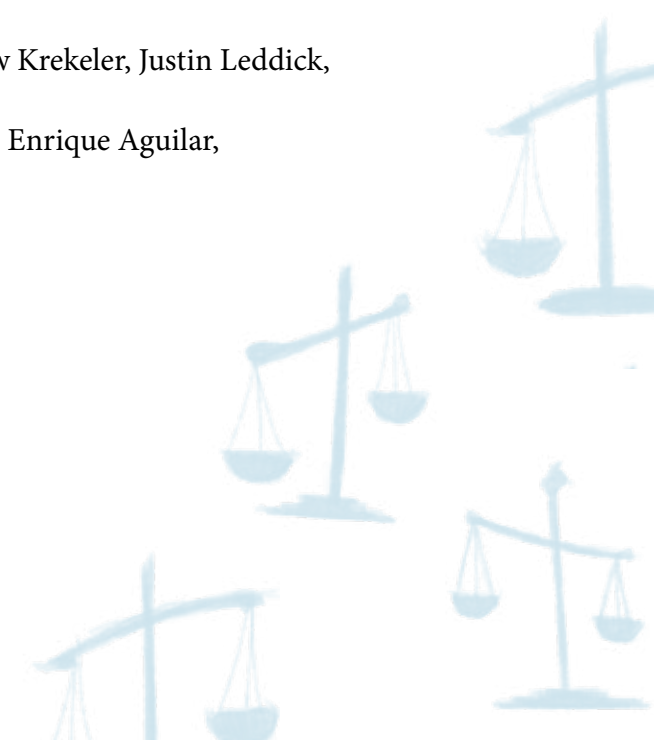
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SESSION 2

Recovering the Basics: Virtue and Friendship

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

In the last session we began to look at a crucial question that arises from a classical understanding of morality: who do I want to become? We saw that morality, in this view, is about getting from *who-I-am-now* to *who-I-could-be-if-I-fulfilled-my-telos*. For each one of us, our purpose in life involves love.

We are all created for relationships. The whole Law and the prophets, Jesus said, can be summed up in loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Matthew 22:36–40). So a moral life is one in which we live our relationships well. After all, no one sets out to be a poor parent or a lousy friend. But *wanting* to succeed in our relationships is not the same thing as actually excelling in them. It's not enough to simply desire to be a loving spouse or a loyal employee or a diligent student, just as it isn't enough to just want to be a doctor or a musician or a star athlete. Rather, we must have the necessary skills in order to actually fulfill those roles. In the case of our relationships, the necessary skills are more than knowledge or natural talent. We need virtue to live out our relationships well.

This session examines the idea of the virtues as the skills required to live a moral life—a life where we live out our relationships well. Virtues make us capable of becoming the kind of person we want to be; they enable us to fulfill our *telos*. A great society cannot be forced into existence by legislation or peer pressure. It must be built one relationship at a time, by men and women of virtue.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Recognize that morality has both an internal and a social component and that social harmony is built on internal harmony.
- Understand that we cannot live our relationships well without the necessary skills.
- Recognize that virtue means doing the good—consistently, easily, and with joy.

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 16. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Trust in the LORD, and do good;
so you will dwell in the land, and be nourished in safety.
Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD;
Trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your vindication as the light,
and your right as the noonday.
Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over him who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!

The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
he is their refuge in the time of trouble.
The LORD helps them and delivers them;
he delivers them from the wicked, and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

Amen.

—Psalm 37:3–7, 39–40



Two sailboats on still waters
© De Visu / shutterstock.com

INTRODUCTION

In the last session we heard that each one of us is created for love. The good news is that we don't have to figure out how to live up to this purpose on our own. There really is a set of skills that will make us capable of living our relationships well and eventually building up a great society: the virtues. These are the skills we need for life.

STEP 2: CONNECT

*Before you proceed, briefly discuss with the participants how they followed through on the **COMMIT** section from the previous session.*

When you're ready to continue, discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session's topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

What are your greatest or most important skills—whether for work, family, hobby, sports, etc.? What would your life be like if you didn't have these skills?

(Important skills may relate to someone's job, such as a skill for computer programming, public speaking, writing, teaching, accounting, etc. Participants may think of interpersonal skills, such as being a good listener or resolving conflicts. Some people may focus on other skills such as music, drawing, or playing a sport. In every case, the participant's life would almost certainly be very different without that skill. They may not be able to hold the same jobs, pursue the same dreams, enjoy the same hobbies, etc. Their lives would be more difficult and their relationships would be impacted.)

This question sets the stage for understanding the importance of having certain skills to live out our relationships well. Without those skills, our lives would be very different—and often much more difficult.)

DIGGING DEEPER

"All of us can attain to Christian virtue and holiness, no matter in what condition of life we live and no matter what our life work may be."

—St. Francis de Sales

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 27 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

- I. Man is made for relationships
 - A. Love God and love your neighbor
 - B. Virtues give us the skills to live a relationship well

II. Social harmony and internal harmony

- A. C.S. Lewis—analogy of a fleet of ships
 - 1. Don't let your ship collide with other ships
 - 2. Make sure your ship runs properly
- B. Laws are not enough to ensure social harmony if we don't have the skills (virtues) to enable us to keep them
 - 1. Social harmony is only built on internal harmony
 - 2. Individual men and women of great character lead to a great society
- C. "What I have failed to do"
 - 1. We can hurt people directly through our words and actions
 - 2. We can also do great harm when we fail to give the best of ourselves
- D. Questions of morality always need to be put in context of the bigger picture: who do I want to become?

III. Virtue

- A. We are called to something better than just not sinning
- B. Values are not the same as virtues
- C. Virtues are the skills we need to live our relationships well
- D. "A habitual and firm disposition to do the good" (CCC 1803)
 - 1. We do the good consistently
 - 2. We do the good easily
 - 3. We do the good with joy
- E. How do I grow in virtue?
 - 1. Learn about the virtues
 - 2. Practice
 - 3. Seek the grace of the sacraments

DIGGING DEEPER

"The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God."

—St. Gregory of Nyssa

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

(Some new or striking ideas may be the distinction between social and internal harmony and the necessity of the former to the latter; that virtues are skills for living out our relationships; or the summary of virtue as choosing the good thing consistently, easily, and with joy.)

2. Think about C.S. Lewis’s analogy of ships at sea.

A. What skills for life (virtues) do you think are necessary to make sure our “ships” are running properly so that we avoid collisions with others?

B. What happens when we try to maintain social harmony without these skills and internal harmony?

(Love is likely to be at the top of the list for many people, but every virtue is going to contribute to internal harmony. When we try to maintain social harmony without virtue, we see bad habits like selfishness, pride, greed, etc., poisoning our relationships and disrupting social harmony. We might intend to do the right thing, but without the virtue/habit of doing the right thing, we will often fail.)

3. In the video, Edward Sri said that we long for love, not just co-existence or tolerance.

A. What is the difference between tolerance and love?

B. How might a society built merely on tolerance look different from a society built on love?

(One response might be that love seeks the good of the other, while tolerance doesn’t interfere. This is a huge difference because when we truly want the best for someone our love might call us to speak up if they’re doing something that isn’t good for them. Another response might be that we love what is good, but we would never say we merely tolerate what is good. We only need to look around us to see what a society built on tolerance looks like. There might be an attitude of “live and let live,” but that also means that nobody is anybody else’s responsibility. A society built on love would be a society where people take care of each other. People would put the interests of others above their own interests. Other virtues would flow out of that love. This kind of society would lead to greater happiness—personal fulfillment in our relationships, as well as the happiness of others in being loved.)

STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 20 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share their experiences the next time the group meets.*

The *Catechism* lists four particular virtues as pivotal or “cardinal” virtues (from the Latin *cardo*, meaning “hinge”) because all the other human virtues hinge upon these four: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

- Prudence is “right reason in action,” according to St. Thomas Aquinas. It means recognizing the right thing to do as well as the right way to do it. The *Catechism* calls prudence the “charioteer of the virtues” because it determines how we live out all the other virtues (CCC 1806).
- Justice means giving each person his or her due. This virtue starts with God—in justice we give him our love, worship, and obedience. Justice toward other people means respecting their rights and keeping in mind the common good.
- Fortitude could also be described as courage. It means doing the right thing even when it’s hard. Having the virtue of fortitude doesn’t mean we’re never afraid—but it does help us to conquer our fear and choose the right thing anyway.
- Temperance is the virtue of moderation. It is good to take pleasure in the many gifts of God’s creation, but the virtue of temperance keeps us from overindulging or becoming overly attached to created goods.

Which of these four virtues do you think you struggle with most? What’s something practical you can do this week to help you grow in this virtue? Make a commitment to pray to God each day this week, asking him for help to live this virtue more.

DIGGING DEEPER

“To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul and with all one’s efforts; from this it comes about that love is kept whole and uncorrupted (through temperance). No misfortune can disturb it (and this is fortitude). It obeys only [God] (and this is justice), and is careful in discerning things, so as not to be surprised by deceit or trickery (and this is prudence).”

—St. Augustine, quoted in CCC 1809

STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *We are all created for relationship.*
- *The difference between social harmony and internal harmony: social harmony must be built upon internal harmony.*
- *Virtues are the skills we need to live our relationships well.*
- *To live virtuously means to choose the good—consistently, easily, and with joy.*

Heavenly Father,

You have created us for love,

and we find our happiness in loving you and loving our neighbor.

Help us to grow in virtue, that we may have the skills we need to love others well and live lives that glorify you.

We ask especially that you strengthen in us your gifts of faith, hope, and love.

May these virtues bear abundant fruit in our relationships and in our every endeavor.

We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus.

Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1803–1845

Donald DeMarco, *The Heart of Virtue: Lessons from Life and Literature Illustrating the Beauty and Value of Moral Character* (Ignatius Press: 1996).

Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* (Ignatius Press: 1992).

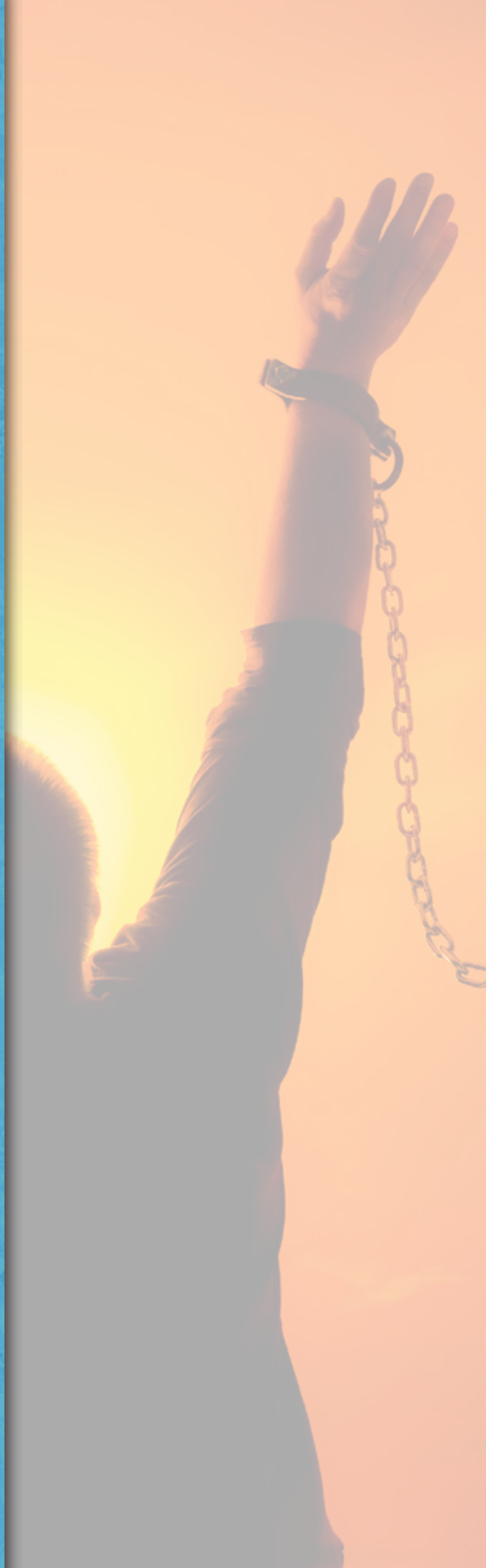
Edward Sri, “Chapter 3: But I’m not Hurting Anyone” and “Chapter 4: Friendship and Virtue” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 3

Real Freedom,
Real Love





Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
Archbishop of Denver, Denver, CO, USA, November 21,2016

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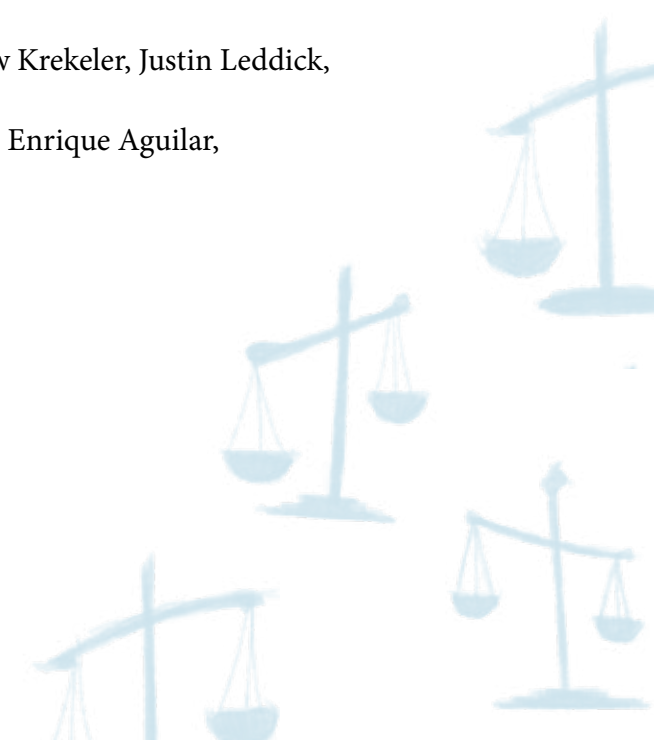
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SESSION 3

Real Freedom, Real Love

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

We all want freedom. We want to live lives free from fear and oppression, free from debt, free to exercise our freedom of speech and freedom of religion, and so on. These kinds of freedom are good, but they are all examples of freedom *from* something—oppression, debt, restrictions, etc. This is the modern understanding of freedom. I’m free if no one is forcing me to do something I don’t like and nothing is preventing me from doing what I want. Having this kind of freedom to choose is good, but it is not enough.

The classical understanding of freedom is much deeper. Freedom is meant to be used for a purpose—doing certain things with excellence. This kind of freedom requires more than just the ability to choose between various options. It requires particular skills. In the last session we examined the virtues as the skills needed to live our relationships well. A man is free to play the violin with excellence only when he possesses the skills of a violinist. A woman is free to speak fluently in Chinese only when she has acquired the skills of conversing in that language. And we are free to live our relationships with excellence only when we have the virtues that enable us to love the people in our lives. To the extent we lack virtue, we are not free to love.

In this session we will examine what the fuller form of freedom—freedom for excellence—looks like. And we will consider one gift God has given us to help us discover true freedom and happiness: the moral law. This isn’t a set of rules to control us or test our obedience; rather, it’s a gift from our loving Father that shows us what we need to do and what we need to avoid if we want to live our relationships with excellence.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Distinguish between the classical understanding of freedom (freedom for excellence) and the modern understanding of freedom (freedom of indifference).
- Understand that we are truly free to do something only when we have the skills necessary to do it well.
- Recognize that God’s moral law is not meant to control or test us, but rather to lead us to happiness and human flourishing.

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 24. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Blessed is the man who walks
not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
Amen.

—Psalm 1:1–3



Silhouette of man against the sunset sky © pryzmat / shutterstock.com

INTRODUCTION

Do you think that you are free to live your life to the fullest and achieve ultimate happiness? In the last session we examined the virtues as the skills necessary to live our relationships well. These same skills make us truly free. In this session we'll look at what real freedom means and discover what kind of instructions God has given us for living in that freedom.

STEP 2: CONNECT

*Before you proceed, briefly discuss with the participants how they followed through on the **COMMIT** section from the previous session.*

When you're ready to continue, discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session's topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

Think of something you've purchased recently—a new phone, microwave, computer, car, etc. How carefully do you read and follow instruction manuals for products like these? Why?

(Some participants might read instruction manuals for very complicated products, but perhaps not for simpler or more familiar ones. Some people will read the whole manual carefully before attempting anything, and others might use it only as a reference when something goes wrong. Whether or not we read the manual probably depends on our confidence in our own skill or knowledge. But in most cases we can agree that the purpose of the manual is for our benefit, to have the best possible experience with the product. This question sets the stage for describing the moral law as an instruction manual for life.)

What are some freedoms that you have in your life? Which one is most important to you? Why?

(Answers will vary.)

DIGGING DEEPER

"Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought."

—Pope St. John Paul II, Homily, Camden Yards, October 1995

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 27 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

I. Review

- A. Ethics is about living life with excellence
- B. Virtues are the basic life skills we need

II. Two different views of freedom (Servais Pinckaers)

- A. Freedom for excellence (classical and Catholic understanding)
 - 1. The ability to perform actions of high quality
 - 2. Virtue makes us free for love/friendship
 - 3. Lack of virtue prevents us from loving others well
- B. Freedom of indifference (modern understanding)
 - 1. Ability to choose from different options—no right or wrong choice
 - 2. Free from the decisions or control of others
- C. The ability to choose is good, but it is not the fullest form of freedom

III. Moral Law

- A. Why is there a moral law?
 - 1. Not as a random test of our obedience
 - 2. Not to control us
 - 3. To protect us and help us to be happy
 - i. The same reason any loving father creates laws (rules) for his children
 - ii. God's law flows from his love for us
- B. Instruction manual
 - 1. God made us and knows how we work
 - 2. "Your word is a lamp to my feet" (Psalm 119:105)

DIGGING DEEPER

“The natural law . . . is written and engraved in the mind of every man; and this is nothing but our reason, commanding us to do right and forbidding sin . . . It follows, therefore, that the law of nature is the same thing as the eternal law, implanted in rational creatures, and inclining them to their right action and end; and can be nothing else but the eternal reason of God, the Creator and Ruler of all the world.”

—Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas* (1888)

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time—a new insight or a new way of thinking about morality for you?

(The idea that freedom is more than just the power to make a choice will probably be new to some participants. Others may never have thought of the moral law as something that flows from God’s love and is meant to help us find happiness and fulfillment. The comparison of the moral law to an instruction manual may also be a very helpful idea for some.)

3. Describe a time when you weren’t free to do something that you wanted to do because you lacked the skills to do it well—for example, with a sport, a project at work, or fixing something at home or with your car, or something in your family life.

(Some participants may relate to the musical example in the video—they may want to sing or play an instrument, but they don’t know how. Someone might want to get good grades but have difficulty in school, and so they don’t feel free to be a good student. Another example would be wanting to be financially secure but not having the money management skills to save and pay off debt.)

3. Share about a time in your life when you didn’t follow the moral law well—for example, in the way you treated someone, in not making God a priority in your life, in a certain behavior, in the way you spent your time, in the way you spent your money, etc. How did that go for you?

(NOTE TO LEADER: It would be best for you as the leader to open up and answer this question first. By sharing something from your own failures in following God’s moral law, it will help others feel more comfortable discussing their own weaknesses. In your own sharing, try to reinforce the connection between the moral law and happiness: share how your not following the moral law left you unhappy, restless, frustrated, or empty.)



STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 27 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share their experiences the next time the group meets.*

“Rules.” That’s how people tend to view the moral law—as some random rules from religion. At times the moral law might even seem arbitrary, controlling, or totally out of touch with modern man. Not understanding the “why” behind God’s law can sometimes lead us to resent or even disregard his moral law—and when that happens, we miss out on a great gift from our loving Father.

The moral law flows out of God’s love for us, and the entire purpose of the law is to ensure our happiness by showing us how to live life the way God created us to live. The law isn’t there to control us; it’s there to protect us. It isn’t a set of arbitrary rules; it’s a coherent guide for how to live a happy, fulfilling life. And the consequences for breaking God’s law aren’t vindictive punishments dealt out by a God who is angry at being disobeyed. The consequences are the natural results of trying to live in a way contrary to how God created us to live.

What are some examples of how God’s moral law protects us and helps us to be happy?

How does considering God as loving Father rather than arbitrary law-giver affect the way you view the moral law?

Is there a particular moral teaching from the Catholic Church that you have questions about? Spend some time this week talking to God about it in prayer. Tell Jesus that you want to trust his plan for our lives . . . that you believe he knows what is best for us, even better than you do. And if this particular issue is a big mental roadblock for you, you can also honestly tell him of your difficulty. You can say to Jesus what someone in the Gospels said to him: “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). Having this humble disposition before God is a crucial first step in exploring a teaching that perplexes us. Then you can take time to learn more about “the why” behind the teaching, perhaps by visiting a good Catholic resource such as www.catholicsanswers.com or www.ewtn.com.

DIGGING DEEPER

*“How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.”*

—Psalm 119:103–105

STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *The classical understanding of freedom is freedom for excellence.*
- *The modern understanding is freedom of indifference.*
- *God's moral law is meant to protect us and help us be happy.*

Prayer to God the Father

Almighty God, my Eternal Father,
from the fullness of my soul I adore you.
I am deeply grateful that you have made me
in your image and likeness,
and that you ever hold me in your loving embrace.
Direct me to love you with all my heart,
with all my soul,
and with my whole mind.
Direct me to love all your children as I love myself.
O, my Father, my soul longs to be united to you,
and to rest in you forever.
Have the Holy Spirit touch my soul
so that I may love you as he does,
and as your Beloved Son Jesus does.
Amen.

—catholic.org/prayers

FOR FURTHER READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1730–1748 (“Man’s Freedom”) and 1950–1986 (“The Moral Law”)

Servais Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001).

Edward Sri, “Chapter 5: Getting Freedom Right” and “Chapter 6: Law and Happiness” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).

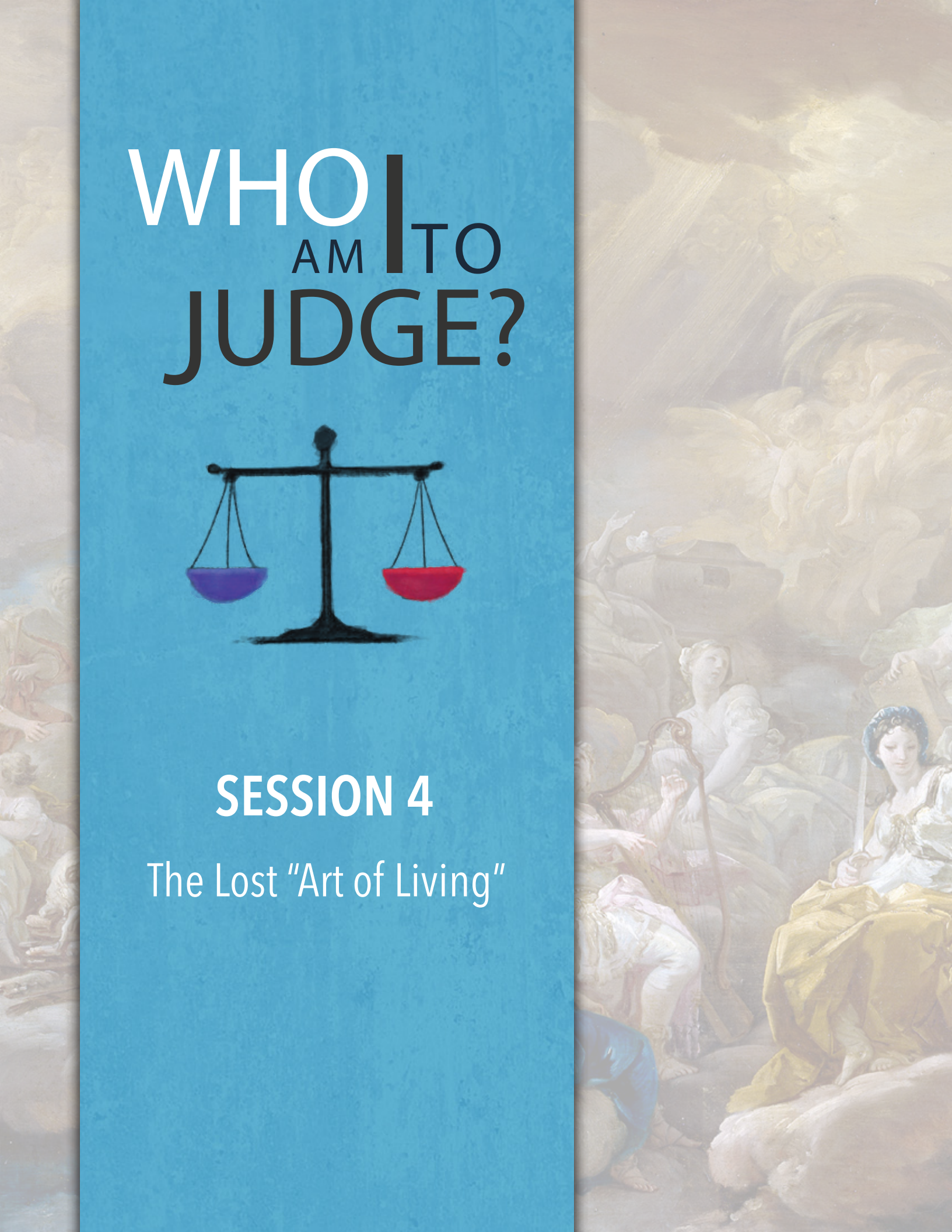
NOTES


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 4

The Lost "Art of Living"





Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
Archbishop of Denver, Denver, CO, USA, November 21, 2016

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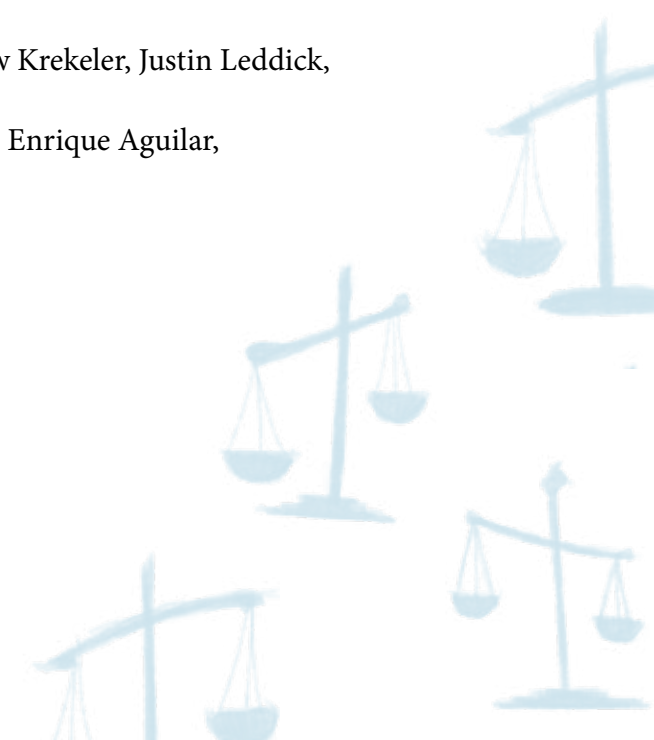
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Writers: Ashley Crane, Dr. Edward Sri
Media: Steve Flanigan, Aurora Cerulli, Jon Ervin, Matthew Krekeler, Justin Leddick,
Kevin Mallory, Ted Mast, Molly Sweeney
Print Production/Graphic Design: Jeff Cole, Brenda Kraft, Enrique Aguilar,
Christina Gray, Jane Myers, Ann Diaz

Augustine Institute
6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310
Greenwood Village, CO 80111
Information: (866) 767-3155
formed.org

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SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

How can I be a good friend, a good boyfriend or girlfriend, a good spouse, or a good parent? Living out these relationships well is an art. And to excel in any craft, we need to learn from a master. A young boy who desires to become a skilled carpenter, for example, needs talented artisans who can share their knowledge and skill with him. And the same is true with what Pope Benedict called “the art of living.” If we want to be good parents, spouses, friends, and Christians, we can’t do that on our own. We need to learn from the great tradition of the art of living.

As we have seen in the previous sessions, God has created each person with a *telos* or a purpose. That purpose involves living our relationships with excellence. Each of us is made to know and love God and neighbor. Living these relationships with excellence requires skills—virtues—which are best learned from someone who has already mastered them. Just as with woodworking, music, or any other art, the art of living is meant to be learned through tradition and community, and not just through our own trial and error.

This is another element of the classical view of morality: the whole process of how we get from where we are now to where we can be when we live our relationships well is an art—one which we can learn from those who have gone before us.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Recognize that we are created to know and love God and neighbor with a total, self-giving love.
- Understand that there is an art to living life well and it is learned from tradition and community.

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 32. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy,
who have made all things by your word,
and by your wisdom have formed man . . .

give me the wisdom that sits by your throne,
and do not reject me from among your servants.
For I am your slave and the son of your maidservant . . .

With you is wisdom, who knows your works
and was present when you made the world,
and who understands what is pleasing in your sight
and what is right according to your commandments.
Send her forth from the holy heavens,
and from the throne of your glory send her,
that she may be with me and toil,
and that I may learn what is pleasing to you.
For she knows and understands all things,
and she will guide me wisely in my actions
and guard me with her glory.

Amen.

—Wisdom of Solomon 9:1–2a, 4–5a, 9–11



The Glory of the Saints by Giaquinto
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INTRODUCTION

What do you do when you want to learn how to do something really well? Do you get along by trial and error, with nothing to help you except your own determination to succeed? Or do you find someone to teach you, read books on the subject, or perhaps watch a tutorial? We generally learn best when we have a worthy example to follow. The same goes for the art of living. God has created each one of us for love, and we learn how to truly live a life of love from others who have gone before us and already mastered the necessary skills.

STEP 2: CONNECT

*Before you proceed, briefly discuss with the participants how they followed through on the **COMMIT** section from the previous session.*

When you're ready to continue, discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session's topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

Who is your favorite teacher of all time? Why?

(This might be a teacher from school, a coach from a sport, a music teacher, a religious education teacher, etc. Perhaps they were particularly effective, very understanding or kind, or made learning fun—any number of reasons.)

DIGGING DEEPER

“You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working, and just so, you learn to love by loving. All those who think to learn in any other way deceive themselves.”

—St. Francis de Sales

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 27 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

- I. Counterfeits
 - A. Someone is trained to recognize a counterfeit by studying what is authentic
 - B. Part of the problem in talking about ethics is that as Christians we don't really understand the classical worldview of morality
- II. We are made for love
 - A. Every single person is made in the image of God
 - 1. “God is love” (1 John 4:8)
 - 2. We are created for total self-giving love—this is what will ultimately make us happy

- B. Intellect and will
 - 1. Knowing and choosing to love are what separate humans from animals
 - 2. The *telos* of human life is to know and love God and other people
 - C. Relationship and virtue are at the heart of ethics
- III. The Art of Living
- A. There is an art to living life well
 - B. Learned in tradition and community
 - 1. Apprenticeship—we learn how to live life with excellence from those who have gone before us and mastered it
 - 2. Enlightenment (Kant) rejected this idea for the goal of being an “independent thinker”
 - C. We need to learn the art of living so that we can communicate it to a world that doesn’t know how to live life any more

DIGGING DEEPER

“He alone loves the Creator perfectly who manifests a pure love for his neighbor.”

—St. Bede the Venerable

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time—a new insight or a new way of thinking about morality for you?

(Many participants may relate to wondering “Why didn’t anyone ever tell me this?” in relation to the art of living and virtue and morality. The idea of learning how to live life well as an apprenticeship—something we must learn in tradition and community—may be new or may resonate strongly with participants.)

2. Think about some important insights about life, relationships, or virtue that you have learned from other people, for example, from a coach, a boss, a priest, a teacher, a mentor, or a friend. How would your experience have been different if you didn't know that person and you had to teach yourself those same lessons?

(Many of us learn our first lessons from our parents and other family members—lessons like how to show hospitality, how to share with others, how to care for the poor, and how to love unconditionally. We also learn lessons from mentors, teachers, and friends—watching them live out particular virtues or seeing how they have cooperated with God's grace in their lives. We also look to the saints as models of excellence and love. In some examples we might be able to work out the same lessons for ourselves, but in many cases the lesson was clearer, easier, or more impactful because it was taught by someone who had already made progress in that area. We are wired to learn by example.)

3. In the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant challenged people to become “independent thinkers” and throw off the “yoke of tutelage,” separating themselves from the wisdom of others and the long tradition in the human family about how to live life well. This suspicion of tradition has invaded nearly every aspect of our modern culture. Do you feel that you have missed out on a fuller formation in the Faith—morality, virtue, marriage, parenting, friendship, etc.—because you were not exposed to the wisdom of tradition? What do you wish you would had been taught earlier?

(People's experience of missing out on the wisdom of the Catholic tradition might range from the difficulty of doing the extra work of trying to learn virtue or morality for themselves instead of being taught to suffering severe consequences of broken relationships or other personal difficulties because they were never taught about marriage, parenting, virtue, etc. In sharing what they want to learn from tradition—what does the Church say about being a good parent, or what saints have written about love and friendship—you can remind participants that it is never too late to start learning wisdom of the tradition and to give others a head start by sharing it.)



STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 35 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share about their experience the next time the group meets.*

We are made for love. But not just any love—we are made for the kind of love that is expressed in a complete gift of self and modeled by Jesus Christ. Nothing else will fully satisfy or fulfill us. This is our purpose in life, but it doesn't come easily to us. In fact, it requires a lot of hard work to learn to love like this.

What is one challenge you find yourself facing in trying to live life with excellence? We aren't meant to do this on our own. Instead of reinventing the wheel as we try to figure out everything for ourselves, we can look to those who have gone before us and benefit

from their experience. We might find these masters of the art of living among our own family or friends, and we also find a vast array of them among the saints.

The saints of the Church come from a variety of backgrounds. There are men, women, children, martyrs, religious, priests, married people, single people, doctors, lawyers, teachers, kings and queens, missionaries, doorkeepers, soldiers, and scholars—just to name a few. Some of them lived devout lives since childhood, while others converted much later in life. They had all different personality types, different hopes and dreams, different likes and dislikes. The one thing they all had in common was love of God and love of neighbor. They lived each with excellence.

Choose a saint for this week and ask for his or her intercession in mastering the art of living. Whether this saint is an old favorite or a new-to-you patron, find some aspect of life that he or she lived with particular excellence and try to imitate this skill throughout the week. Practice makes perfect!

DIGGING DEEPER

"Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."

—*Gaudium et Spes*, 24

STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *Every single person is made for total self-giving love.*
- *We are each made to know and love God and neighbor.*
- *The art of living with excellence is meant to be learned in community and tradition.*

Grant me, O Lord my God,
a mind to know you, a heart to seek you,
wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you,
faithful perseverance in waiting for you,
and a hope of finally embracing you.

Amen.

—St. Thomas Aquinas

FOR FURTHER READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1877–2051

Joseph Ratzinger, “The New Evangelization.” Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists, December 12th, 2000. Text available on http://www.ewtn.com/new_evangelization/Ratzinger.htm

Edward Sri, “Chapter 7: The Art of Living” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).

NOTES


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 5

Engaging
Moral Relativism





Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
Archbishop of Denver, Denver, CO, USA, November 21,2016

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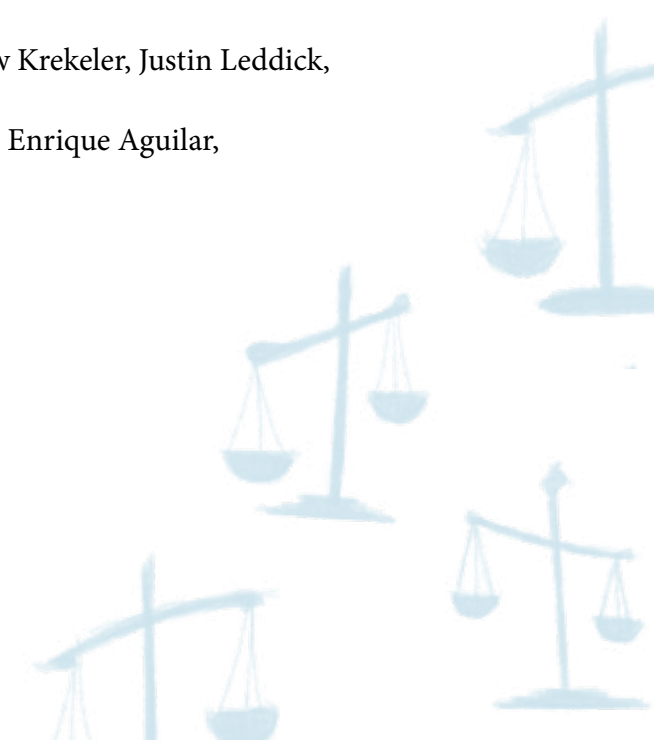
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Augustine Institute
6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310
Greenwood Village, CO 80111
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SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

As we heard in the last session, in order to be able to spot a counterfeit, we need to study the genuine article. In the previous sessions we have examined the classical understanding of morality and contrasted it with a modern view of morality. This familiarity with a genuine, classical, Catholic moral worldview gives us a foundation for engaging moral relativism with confidence.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul reminds us that we are to “[speak] the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). It’s important to know the truth and be passionate about it, but if we try to share it without love we are likely to do more harm than good. The first key to engaging moral relativism is mercy. We are not setting out to conquer enemies—we are seeking open, respectful dialogue with fellow children of God. We want to share a beautiful message of hope and healing. The goal is not just to win arguments, but to win hearts and minds so that souls may be drawn to give their lives more to God and his plan for them.

This goal leads to a second key to engaging moral relativism: contrasting the classical and relativistic worldviews. A dialogue comparing these two views of life and humanity has much more potential for respectful, clear communication than merely a diatribe about the abstract logical errors of relativism. If people can see more clearly what Pope Francis has observed—that “relativism wounds people”—that will go a long way in helping people be more open to a different view of life, one that is much more attractive than anything relativism can offer.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Understand that the first key to engaging moral relativism is to lead with mercy.
- Recognize that relativism wounds people.
- Be able to compare and contrast the classical and relativistic worldviews in order to present the truth and beauty of Christian morality.



STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 40. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with mercy and compassion,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward those who fear him
as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

Amen.

—Psalm 103:1–5, 8, 11–12, 22

INTRODUCTION

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul reminds us that we are to “[speak] the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). If we try to share the truth without love, we are very likely to do more harm than good. When we set out to engage moral relativism, the goal is to share a beautiful message of hope and healing, not just to win an argument. The first two keys to doing this are to lead with mercy and to contrast the classical and relativistic worldviews so that each can be clearly seen for what it is. When we are able to do both of these, we are well on our way to a respectful, open, and honest dialogue.

STEP 2: CONNECT

*Before you proceed, briefly discuss with the participants how they followed through on the **COMMIT** section from the previous session.*

When you're ready to continue, discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session's topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

Share about a time you tried to have a conversation with someone who completely misunderstood your point of view. How did that misunderstanding make you feel? How did it affect the conversation?

(Most of us have experienced conversations that were hindered by misunderstanding. When someone completely misunderstands your position or point of view, it is very difficult to have a helpful, meaningful conversation about the topic because we end up talking past each other. The other person is attacking something we don't even believe in, and our explanations make no sense to them because they assume we think something we don't. A clear understanding of the other person's position is essential to open, respectful dialogue. This is a component of the second key to engaging moral relativism: contrast the worldviews.)

DIGGING DEEPER

"There are not over a hundred people in the United States who hate the Catholic Church. There are millions, however, who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church, which is, of course, quite a different thing."

—Venerable Fulton Sheen

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 30 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

- I. Lead with mercy
 - A. Pope Francis: "Relativism wounds people"
 - B. We need to address these wounds first

C. Two key pillars to mercy

1. Forgiveness
2. Healing power in God's mercy

II. Contrast the worldviews

A. Nietzsche—best way to attack Christianity is to frame its moral way of life as repressive and incapable of bringing happiness

B. Benedict XVI—we need to contrast the truth and beauty of Christian morality with the secular, relativistic way of life

C. Life

1. Classical worldview—life is a story
 - i. We are all characters striving toward a goal in a conflict-filled plot
 - ii. Our choices matter—they affect other people for better or worse
2. Relativistic worldview—life has no plot
 - i. No right or wrong choices
 - ii. Your choices don't affect other people

D. View of self

1. Classical—intrinsically connected to others
2. Relativistic—blank slate, defined by detaching myself from others

E. A Good Person

1. Classical—someone who fulfills his *telos* and lives his relationships well
2. Relativistic—someone who does whatever he wants

F. Justice

1. Classical—my responsibility to others (what do I owe others?)
2. Relativistic—my rights (what do others owe me?)

G. Freedom

1. Classical—freedom for excellence, virtues make us free
2. Relativistic—freedom of indifference, my choices don't matter

DIGGING DEEPER

“Humanity is wounded, deeply wounded. Either it does not know how to cure its wounds or it believes that it’s not possible to cure them . . . Relativism wounds people too: all things seem equal, all things appear the same. Humanity needs mercy and compassion.”

—Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy* (2016)

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

(The idea that relativism wounds people and the importance of leading with mercy and contrasting the worldviews may be new. And although we have been discussing a classical view of morality for the last several sessions, the details of what the classical worldview says about life, the self, a good man, justice, and freedom may also be new.)

2. Pope Francis once said that “relativism wounds people.” How might people be wounded by relativism?

(As Edward Sri said in the video, our telos lies in relationship, and relativism says we have no telos, so the primary way people are wounded by relativism is in their relationships. We see this in many different ways, where people don’t experience the love they need and don’t learn the necessary skills to love in the way they were created to love. We see people chasing happiness in things and choices that cannot make them happy because they are not directed toward love of God and love of neighbor.)

3. What are some specific ways we can lead with mercy when engaging relativistic friends?

(We can lead with mercy by first loving the person we’re talking with, not just trying to prove them wrong. We should always share the joy and hope of the gospel message that God loves us and wants us to be happy. Most of all God wants to forgive our mistakes and heal our wounds and bad habits. We can talk about this explicitly, but we can also communicate this by showing love, mercy, and forgiveness in the way we treat other people.)

4. Consider the contrasts between the classical worldview and relativism. How would you describe the kind of life that a classical worldview encourages and how is that different from the kind of life relativism supports?

(The classical worldview gives the picture of a life lived with purpose—and each of us with the potential to be a hero and make a difference—lived for and with others, and lived

in the freedom for excellence. The relativistic life ultimately is one empty of purpose and isolated from others. According to this view we might get to choose whatever we want, but our choices don't really make a difference. When they are laid side by side like this, the classical worldview of life is exciting and full of potential. The relativistic life looks empty and somewhat meaningless. This kind of comparison should help people to recognize the truth and beauty of the classical worldview.)

STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 44 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share about their experience the next time the group meets.*

Before we can share the message of God's loving mercy with our deeply wounded world, we need to encounter God's mercy in our own lives. We can't give what we don't have, and sometimes we need to be reminded of how much God loves us and wants us to be happy and fulfilled in life before we can share that good news with others.

The two pillars of God's mercy are forgiveness and healing. God not only wants to forgive our sins, he wants to heal the wounds caused by sin and the weaknesses that keep us from fulfilling our *telos* of love. In what area do you most desire healing? Take time in prayer this week to ask our Lord for healing and for an abiding confidence in his love and mercy.

Prayerfully also consider what one thing you can do this week to share God's mercy with the people you encounter. Perhaps think of someone you know who needs to know the good news of God's mercy or someone close to you who needs your patience and compassion more.

DIGGING DEEPER

"For there are three ways of performing an act of mercy: firstly, the merciful word, by forgiving and by comforting; secondly, if you can offer no word, then pray—that too is mercy; and thirdly, deeds of mercy. And when the Last Day comes, we shall be judged from this, and on this basis we shall receive the eternal verdict."

—St. Faustina (*Diary*, 1158)

STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *Relativism wounds people.*
- *The first key to engaging moral relativism is to lead with mercy.*
- *The two pillars of God's mercy are forgiveness and healing.*
- *The second key to engaging relativism is to contrast the classical worldview of a purposeful life lived for others with the relativistic worldview of an isolated life full of meaningless choices.*

I will sing of your mercies,
O LORD, for ever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your
faithfulness to all generations.
For your merciful love was established for ever,
your faithfulness is firm as the heavens.

Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance,
who exult in your name all the day,
and extol your righteousness.
For you are the glory of their strength;
by your favor our horn is exalted.
For our shield belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

Amen.

—Psalm 89:1–2, 15–18

FOR FURTHER READING

Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy* (New York: Random House, 2016).

Edward Sri, “Key 1: Lead with Mercy” and “Key 2: ‘Relativism Wounds People’” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).

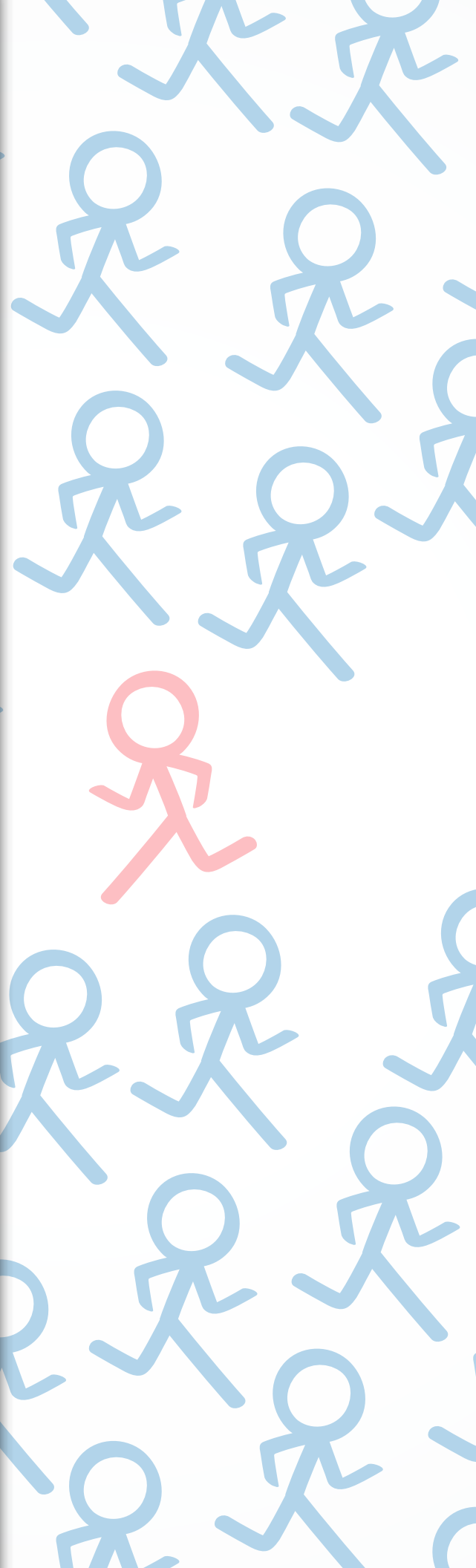
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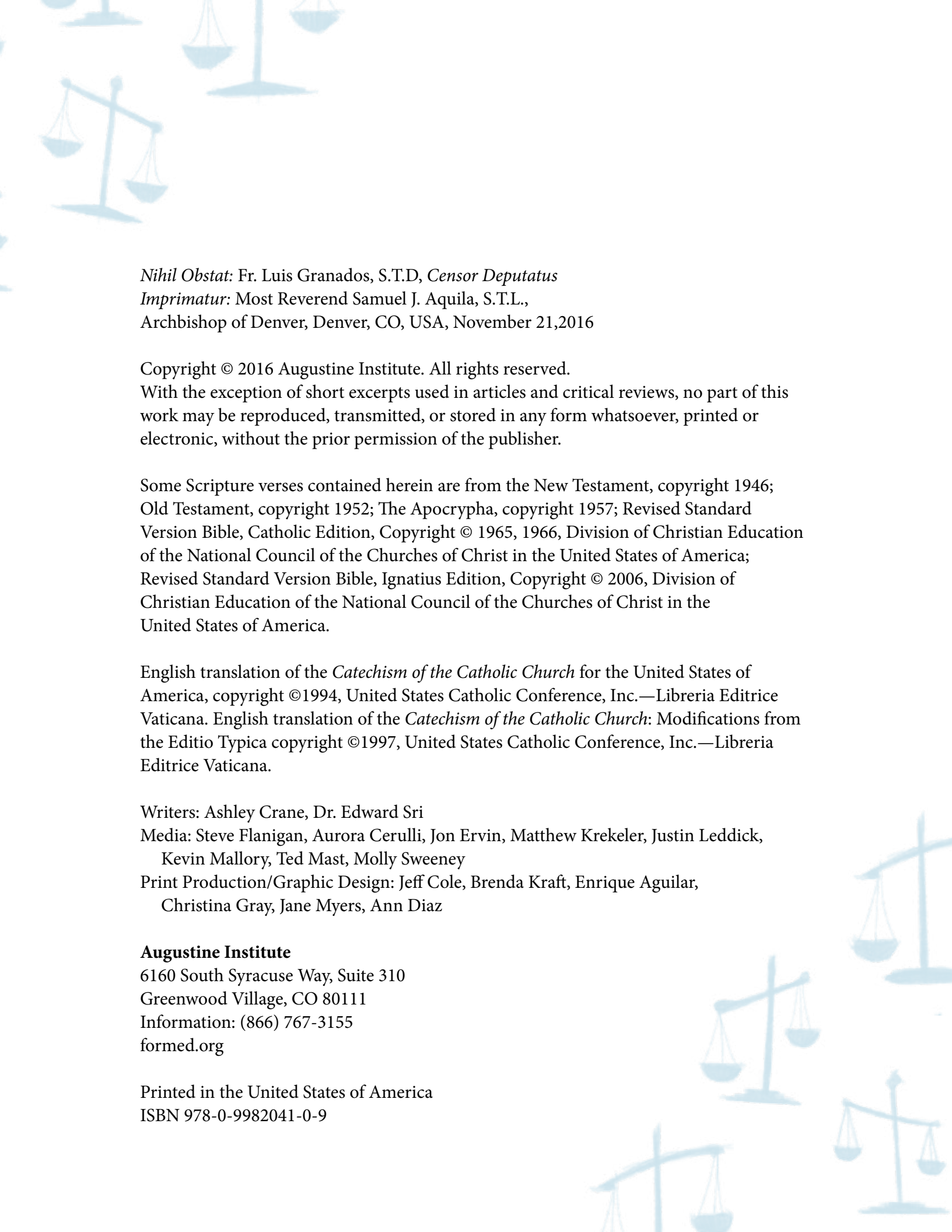
WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 6

"I Disagree"
Doesn't Mean
"I Hate You"



The background of the page is decorated with several faint, light blue icons of scales of justice, scattered across the top and right sides.

Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
Archbishop of Denver, Denver, CO, USA, November 21,2016

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Augustine Institute
6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310
Greenwood Village, CO 80111
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SESSION 6

"I Disagree" Doesn't Mean "I Hate You"

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

Is it possible to disagree with people and still respect them?

Absolutely. Just because we don't agree with someone's ideas or behavior doesn't mean we hate them. We can be compassionate, loving people without having to compromise our convictions. Unfortunately, such interactions are not common today. After all, how often do you experience honest, meaningful conversations about things that matter most in life—who is God, what is love, what is marriage, what is life all about—with people you disagree with? Any kind of disagreement on these important matters is often interpreted as a personal attack or as intolerance. When this happens—when people feel like they are not respected or valued for who they are—dialogue breaks down very quickly.

In the last session we began looking at some tools for engaging moral relativism. The first two keys were to lead with mercy and to contrast the two worldviews. In this session we will examine three other keys that will be particularly helpful for our dialogue with relativistic friends.

- First, we must show how whatever moral issue we're discussing relates to love—how it flows from God's love, how it helps us to grow in love and to experience love, and how sharing the truth about this particular matter is the most loving thing to do.
- Second, we must help our friends see that there's a big difference between making a judgment that something is wrong and judging a person's soul. We can disagree about what is right and wrong without in any way making a judgment about the person's standing in God's eyes. Indeed, we can still respect the person with whom we disagree about a moral matter.
- Finally, we must demonstrate how relativism is not an open-minded, neutral position. It's actually a certain point of view—a particular way of looking at the world—that is being imposed on other people. The Christian has a framework for respecting the dignity of all people, even people with different worldviews. Relativism, however, often leads to intolerance. Anyone who believes in truth, who doesn't ascribe to relativism, tends to be shunned, marginalized, or looked down upon.

These keys will help us to communicate our love and respect for other people when having a dialogue about moral issues—and also to guard against the relativistic worldview being imposed on us.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Recognize that the Church teaches everything that she does because of love and that the moral law is meant to help us grow in love.
- Distinguish between judging an action and judging a soul.
- Understand that relativism is not neutral and that we need to guard against the imposition of a worldview with which we disagree.

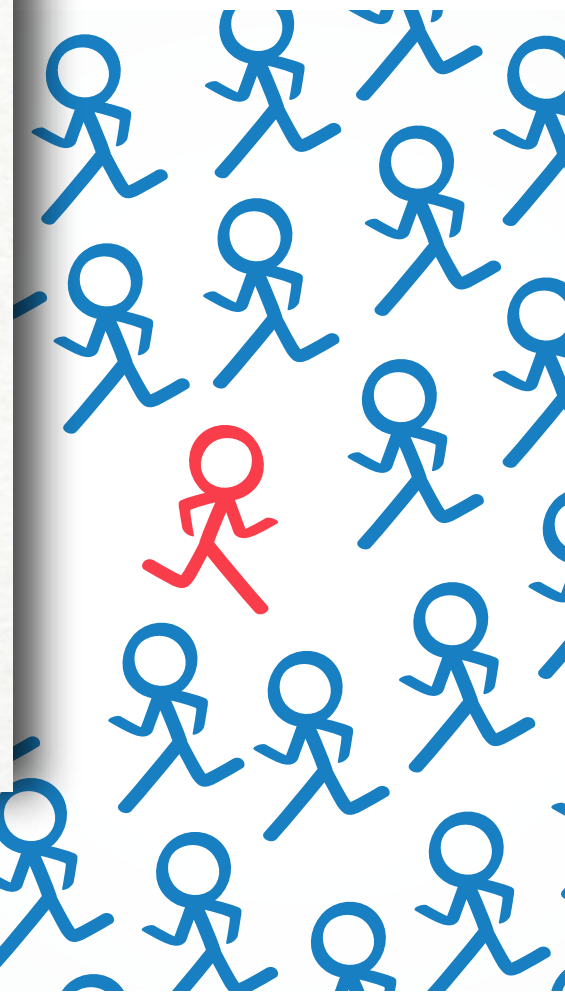
STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 48. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Move in me, Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Attract my heart, Holy Spirit,
that I may love only what is holy.
Strengthen me, Holy Spirit,
that I may defend all that is holy.
Protect me, Holy Spirit,
that I may always be holy.

Amen.

—St. Augustine



INTRODUCTION

When we love people, we want the best for them—we don't want them to make choices that will lead to them getting hurt or being unhappy. But how do we find the right balance between expressing concern and sounding judgmental? And what can we do when someone accuses us of being intolerant just because we disagree? In the last session we began looking at some tools for engaging moral relativism. In this session we will examine the next three keys to help us communicate our love and respect for other people when having a dialogue about moral relativism—and also to resist having the relativistic worldview imposed on us.

STEP 2: CONNECT

*Before you proceed, briefly discuss with the participants how they followed through on the **COMMIT** section from the previous session.*

When you're ready to continue, discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session's topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

Share about a time when either someone accused you of being judgmental, intolerant, or not open minded, or you feared they would think that of you.

(Answers will vary.)

DIGGING DEEPER

“Spread love everywhere you go: first of all in your own house. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next door neighbor... Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.”

—St. Teresa of Calcutta

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 32 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

- I. Law = love
 - A. The Church teaches what she does because the Church loves people
 - B. Bring everything back to love
 - 1. Love is to will the good of another
 - 2. The moral law comes from God's love for us
 - 3. The moral law is there to help us grow in love
- II. Making a judgment vs. judging a soul
 - A. "You don't have to compromise conviction to be compassionate"
 - B. Difference between using our mind to judge an action or choice and trying to make a judgment about someone else's situation before God
- III. Relativism is not value-neutral
 - A. Relativism is portrayed as the "moral Switzerland"—doesn't take sides
 - B. Benedict XVI—relativism is the new dogmatism
 - C. It pushes us to think, act, and live in a different way (doesn't just tolerate our way of thinking)
 - D. We need to guard against the labels of being judgmental and intolerant

DIGGING DEEPER

"What is the mark of love for your neighbor? Not to seek what is for your own benefit, but what is for the benefit of the one loved, both in body and in soul."

—St. Basil the Great

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time—a new insight or a new way of thinking about morality for you?

(Some participants may have never heard or realized that the Church's teachings and the moral law are all based on love, and these laws are in place not just because God loves us but because they are meant to help us grow in love. The difference between judging an action and judging a soul may be an "aha" moment for many people, as this is something we tend to know intuitively but it may be difficult to put into words or discuss with other people. And the idea that relativism is not neutral may be a very new idea because it goes against the general assumption and claim that relativism is inherently nonjudgmental.)

2. How might bringing everything back to love change the conversation about morality? What are some examples you could use to explain that "law equals love" when engaging moral relativism?

(It can be very easy to equate any kind of criticism with a personal attack—especially when it comes to morality. Simply stating the truth that Church has each person's best interest at heart can begin to establish a foundation of mutual respect for having difficult conversations. Some people might assume that the Church is judgmental and hates people who don't follow her rules simply because that's the lie that they've heard. Others might believe it because they have had a bad experience with another individual. But we have the chance to frame the whole concept of morality in a totally new way for many people when we remember to bring it back to love. It won't necessarily convince people to give up moral relativism and embrace the Church's teachings, but at the very least it might help them see that the Church is not hostile to them and that there is a good reason behind the Church's teachings. And that is a very important first step. One example of "law equals love" would be how the Church's teachings about sex and marriage are intended to build strong families and provide the best possible situation for both spouses and any children they have to fulfill their telos of love.)

3. What are some specific things we can do to communicate love and compassion even when we disagree with someone's ideas or choices?

(Some responses to this question may be very personal, so you can encourage participants to share only a very general answer if they feel more comfortable. Most of us can probably relate to taking criticism or disagreement too personally, and many people will have experienced criticism that was intended to be personal and harsh. Many participants will be able to relate to an experience of being accused of judging or hating a person when that was not their intent at all. If they don't have a personal experience of it, they can probably relate to the way society at large often assumes Christians to be hateful or fearful of people they disagree with. We can all understand how hurtful this is, and how it makes dialogue very difficult when we don't feel valued or respected as a person. One way to communicate love and compassion might include starting the conversation with a simple statement of "I love you" or "I want you to be happy" and then explaining why I'm concerned that the other person's actions might lead to harm or unhappiness. Like the principle of leading with love, this frames the conversation in terms of love, respect, and happiness without compromising on morality.)

STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 51 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share about their experience the next time the group meets.*

Moral relativism is often presented as a neutral and tolerant position. At first glance this may seem like a reasonable assessment: relativism claims that all points of view are equal and we should tolerate everyone's position and pass no judgments. Nobody is right and nobody is wrong—we all just need to be open-minded and get along.

But relativism is not as neutral as it claims to be. The relativist claims to be tolerant and open-minded, but the viewpoint that there is no absolute right and wrong is itself an absolute claim. And to argue that we must all tolerate and accept all views as equal is imposing the worldview of relativism on people who don't agree with it—the exact thing that relativism says we aren't ever supposed to do.

This is why Pope Benedict referred to moral relativism as the “new dogmatism.” While it claims to be impartial and tolerant, it has no patience with a worldview that will not submit to its relativistic perspective. Relativism does not “live and let live.” It pushes us to see the world from a particular point of view and to act accordingly—and those who will not give in are labeled “intolerant” or “hateful.”

Have you ever felt pressured to think, act, or live in a different way or be silent because of the claims and demands of moral relativism? How did you respond to that pressure?

What can you do to guard against the imposition of a relativistic worldview?

DIGGING DEEPER

“In recent years I find myself noting how the more relativism becomes the generally accepted way of thinking, the more it tends toward intolerance, thereby becoming a new dogmatism. . . . It prescribes itself as the only way to think and speak—if, that is, one wishes to stay in fashion. Being faithful to traditional values and to the knowledge that upholds them is labeled intolerance, and relativism becomes the required norm. I think it is vital that we oppose this imposition of a new pseudo-enlightenment, which threatens freedom of thought as well as freedom of religion.”

—Cardinal Ratzinger, *Without Roots*, p. 128

STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *We need to relate everything back to love when engaging moral relativism.*
- *The Church teaches everything that she does because of love.*
- *Following the moral law causes us to grow in love.*
- *Judging an action is very different than judging someone's soul.*
- *Relativism is not neutral because it pressures us to think and act in a particular way.*

Lord Jesus Christ, living Word of God,
guard and guide my thoughts, my words,
and my actions with your love,
that everything I think, say,
and do may be motivated by love of you and of neighbor
and may be offered in service of you who are Truth and Love.
May my life be all for the greater glory of you,
my Lord and my God.

Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* (Basic Books, 2006).

Edward Sri, “Key 3: Law = Love,” “Key 4: Making Judgments vs. Judging Souls,” and “Key 5: Relativism Is Not Value Neutral” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 7

Exposing the Mask:
What Relativism Is
Often Covering Up





Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
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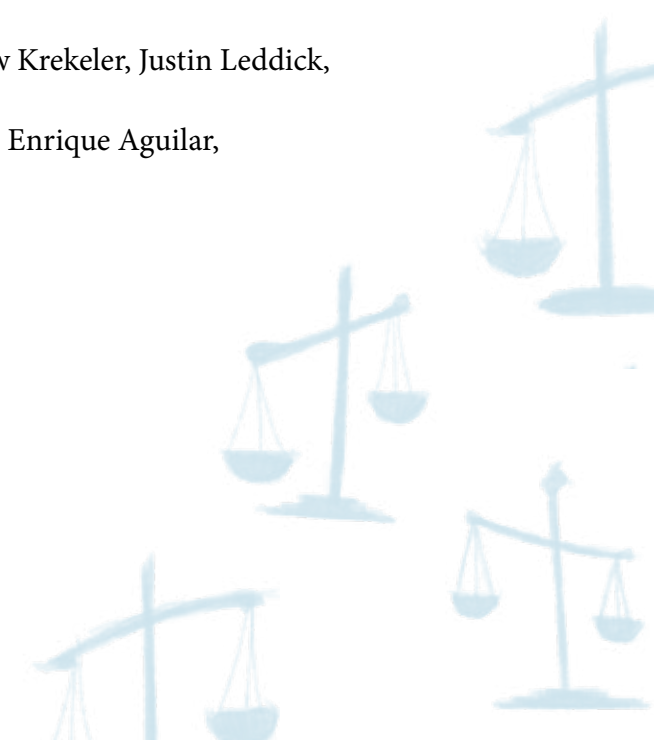
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Augustine Institute
6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310
Greenwood Village, CO 80111
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SESSION 7

Exposing the Mask: What Relativism Is Often Covering Up

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

When talking with our relativistic friends, we must realize that the real issue needing to be addressed isn't always the particular moral topic we're debating. We might be talking about sexual ethics, abortion, or the environment. But we should keep in mind that some people hold relativistic positions because they need a way to deal with mistakes they've made in their own personal moral lives. Their relativism is not primarily an intellectual problem, but a sin problem.

When we do something that we know is wrong, we find ourselves in a very uncomfortable situation. We're not at peace with ourselves. Our conscience bothers us. So in order to feel good about ourselves again, we need to either change our behavior or change our thinking. And it's much easier to change our thinking, to decide that something is actually okay for us to do, than it is to stop doing what we want.

Remembering that relativism is often a mask covering sin and guilt is the sixth key to engaging moral relativism, and it leads us directly to the seventh and final key: taking on the compassionate heart of Christ. People need to know not just the moral truth. They also need to know how much Jesus loves them and wants to help them. Engaging moral relativism effectively entails showing people how much Jesus loves them, showing them that he is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) for everyone, not just "for me."

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Recognize that moral relativism is often a mask hiding guilt over personal sin and making us slaves to our own desires.
- Understand that in order to engage moral relativism we must take on the compassionate heart of Christ.
- Recognize that we can know the truth about God because he reveals himself to us.

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

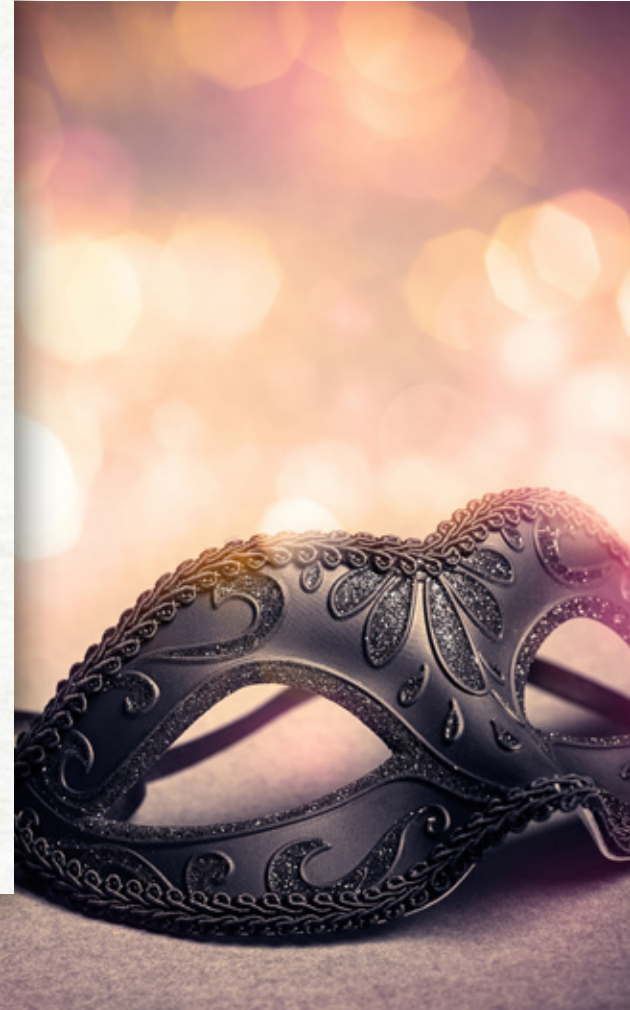
*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 56. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Let my cry come before you, O LORD;
give me understanding according to your word!
Let my supplication come before you;
deliver me according to your word.
My lips will pour forth praise
that you teach me your statutes.
My tongue will sing of your word,
for all your commandments are right.
Let your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen your precepts.
I long for your salvation, O LORD,
And your law is my delight.

Amen.

—Psalm 119:169–174

Carnival mask © BortN66 / shutterstock.com



INTRODUCTION

Over the course of this study we have explored the classical view of morality and compared it to a relativistic worldview. But it's one thing to lay the philosophies out side-by-side for comparison, and it is quite another thing to be in the midst of the difficulties and brokenness of this world trying to deal with temptation and sin.

As we will see in this session, many people are relativists not because they have impartially compared classical morality and relativism and decided to adopt relativism as a comprehensive worldview, but rather because relativism gives them a way to cope with sin and brokenness in their own lives. The alternative to relativism is not just an alternative worldview—the real alternative is God's love and compassion. Engaging moral relativism is all about showing people how much Jesus loves them—he is “the way, and the truth, and the life” for everyone, not just “for me.”

STEP 2: CONNECT

*Before you proceed, briefly discuss with the participants how they followed through on the **COMMIT** section from the previous session.*

When you're ready to continue, discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session's topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

Do you think it's easier to have patience with your own weaknesses or with those of other people? Why?

(There are probably some people who always get on our nerves, and we have very little patience with them. But for some of us, we likely find it easier to be patient with weaknesses and forgive faults in others—especially our loved ones—than it is to forgive those faults that we find in ourselves. While it is good to always work to correct our faults, we need to come to terms with our own faults and weaknesses and trust in God's mercy both for ourselves and for others. Very often an overly critical attitude toward ourselves will spill over into how we think of other people.)

DIGGING DEEPER

"The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it emotionally."

—Flannery O'Connor

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 30 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

- I. Recognize that relativism is often a mask
 - A. Benedict XVI—dictatorship of relativism—the real dictator is one's own ego and desire
 1. Relativism enables us to do what we want without feeling bad
 2. Makes us a slave to our desires

- B. Moral relativism is a way of dealing with cognitive dissonance
 - 1. We feel guilty when our actions don't match our beliefs
 - 2. Deal with that guilt by changing our beliefs so our actions are okay
- II. Take on the heart of Christ: compassion
 - A. We need to be careful not to set ourselves up as judges over others
 - B. Many great saints struggled with the temptation to judge others
 - 1. St. Catherine of Siena—that would be me without God's grace
 - 2. St. Thérèse of Lisieux—what we see as negligence is often heroic in God's eyes
 - B. Often when we have a critical spirit toward others it is because we haven't come to terms with our own weaknesses and faults
- III. Conclusion: What is truth?
 - A. Can I really know it? How can I know it?
 - B. Even relativists nearly always live with some recognition that there is some kind of truth outside of our own selves (a brick wall is a brick wall, even if I say it isn't)
 - C. God is ultimate reality, and our minds need to conform to him—not vice versa
 - D. We can know truth because God seeks us out and reveals himself to us
 - 1. Jesus is different from any other prophet or religious leader/founder
 - 2. He claims to be God, not just to have a message
 - 3. We have a fundamental choice: is Jesus who he says he is? And if so, what am I going to do about it?
 - 4. We cannot say we want Jesus but reject his Church
 - E. If we say Jesus is only a Way “for me” and not the Way (for everyone), then we are not truly following him

DIGGING DEEPER

“We will either accuse ourselves or excuse ourselves.”

—St. John Vianney

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time—a new insight or a new way of thinking about morality for you?

(Some new ideas may include the fact that relativism often masks guilt over sin; that we need to show compassion to ourselves in order to be able to offer it to others well; or that if we follow Christ as the Way “for me” but not necessarily everyone, then we are not truly following him.)

2. The video presentation discussed how relativism is often a mask, cover-up, or a justification for one’s own sin. How should this possibility guide our conversations when we are talking with relativistic friends?

(When people are using relativism to deal with guilt or woundedness over some sin in their own lives—or perhaps with fear or confusion over sin in the life of someone they love—we are not going to be effective in engaging them in meaningful dialogue if we approach relativism only as a comprehensive philosophy or worldview. When there is such a personal reason for holding a relativistic worldview, we need to lead with mercy and take on the heart of Christ’s compassion more than ever. We need to respond to the person’s fear and guilt with the glorious truth of God’s love and mercy—not just with intellectual arguments, no matter how true they might be. Remembering that relativism is a mask should shape our conversations around the other person as a beloved child of God in need of healing, not as a mind to be changed. We need to offer them God’s mercy as an alternative to relativism.)

3. Think about the people in your life. How do you respond when you notice someone’s faults—something that frustrates you, something that hurts you, a weakness, or a sin? Without approving of any wrongdoing what can you do to respond with more compassion and not judgment?

(NOTE TO LEADER: It might be helpful for you as leader to share first in order to make others feel comfortable discussing something personal if they should so desire. Try to draw out themes from the video presentation: when we notice a person’s fault, we might not see the whole picture: how hard they might be trying, the wounds they carry, etc., and how we should imitate God who is so patient and merciful with our own many sins and weaknesses.)

STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 59 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share about their experience the next time the group meets.*

“Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

Just as Jesus's Apostles had to answer that question and then choose how to act accordingly, each one of us needs to figure out our answer as well. Do we believe, like St. Peter, that he is “the Christ, the Son of the living God?” (Matthew 16:16). Do we believe his own claim to be “the way, and the truth, and the life?” (John 14:6). Either way, what are we going to do about it?

In the video, Edward Sri laid out the question according to C. S. Lewis's classic formulation in *Mere Christianity*. In the Gospels, Jesus clearly claimed to be God—so clearly that the Jewish leaders accused him of blasphemy on several occasions and finally handed him over to the Romans to be executed because he “made himself the Son of God” (John 19:7). With claims like this we only have three choices. If Jesus wasn't actually God then he was either deliberately lying or he was simply crazy. Neither a liar nor a lunatic makes for a reasonable Way to follow, even if it's only the Way “for me.”

The only other option is that Jesus was telling the truth about himself: he is in fact God, as he claimed. And, if this is the case, Lewis concludes, there is no other option but to fall down and worship him as Lord.

Imagine that Jesus is standing before you asking you, “Who do you say that I am?” How will you answer him? What will you do to live out your answer?

DIGGING DEEPER

“God is Truth itself, whose words cannot deceive. This is why one can abandon oneself in full trust to the truth and faithfulness of his word in all things. The beginning of sin and of man's fall was due to a lie of the tempter who induced doubt of God's word, kindness, and faithfulness.”

—CCC 215

“God is also truthful when he reveals himself—the teaching that comes from God is ‘true instruction.’ When he sends his Son into the world it will be ‘to bear witness to the truth’: ‘We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding to know him who is true.’”

—CCC 217

STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *Relativism is often a mask covering guilt over sin.*
- *We must take on the compassionate heart of Christ when engaging moral relativism.*
- *We can really know truth because God reveals himself to us.*
- *God is ultimate reality and we must conform our minds to him.*
- *If Jesus is only the Way “for me,” then I am not fully following him.*

Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty,
my memory, my understanding and my whole will.
All that I am and all that I possess you have given me:
I surrender it all to your love and your grace;
with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more.

Amen.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola

FOR FURTHER READING

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*


Edward Sri, “Key 6: Relativism Is a Mask” and “Key 7: Taking on the Heart of Christ” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).

WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 8

What is Truth?
Answering Common
Questions



Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
Archbishop of Denver, Denver, CO, USA, November 21,2016

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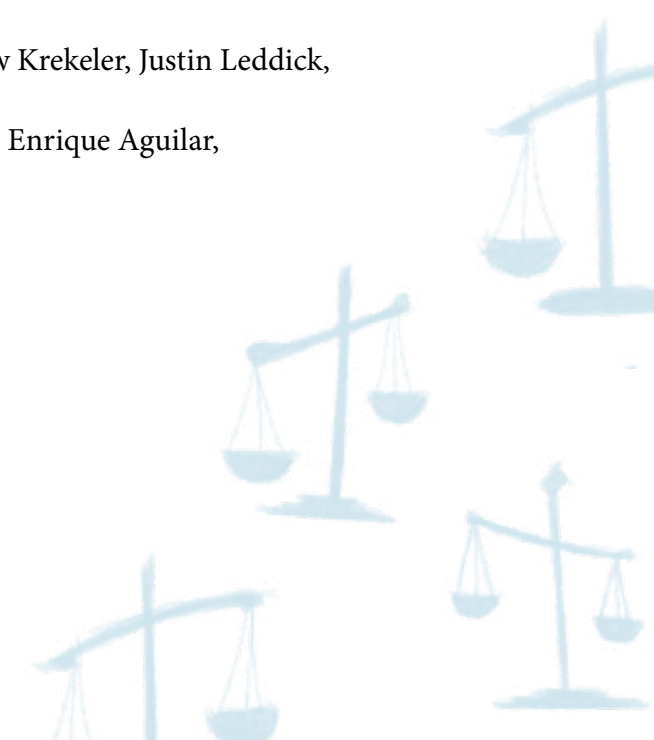
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Writers: Ashley Crane, Dr. Edward Sri
Media: Steve Flanigan, Aurora Cerulli, Jon Ervin, Matthew Krekeler, Justin Leddick,
Kevin Mallory, Ted Mast, Molly Sweeney
Print Production/Graphic Design: Jeff Cole, Brenda Kraft, Enrique Aguilar,
Christina Gray, Jane Myers, Ann Diaz

Augustine Institute
6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310
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Information: (866) 767-3155
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SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

Talking about morality in our relativistic culture poses many challenges. But with a clear understanding of the classical view of morality and the importance of virtue and friendship, a picture of what real freedom looks like, and a vision for learning the art of living, we are well on our way to being able to address the issue of moral relativism.

We have also looked at seven keys for engaging moral relativism. These tools will help us to have open, meaningful, and respectful conversations about morality with others. The guiding and unifying principle for every encounter must be love. Love not only guides what we say and how we say it—it is our reason for saying anything at all.

In this final session we will look at several common questions about moral relativism and how we talk about it to others, including: How do we talk to people who think they are happy in relativism or content with mediocrity? How do we learn the art of living? Is the Church really necessary? And is perfection really attainable? These questions will help us to reflect on what we have learned in the study and begin to tie it all together in order to go out and engage moral relativism.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Be confident that classical morality is freeing and offers happiness in a way that moral relativism can't.
- Recognize that we can begin to share the art of living with others while we are still learning to master it, and that perfection is possible.
- Understand that the witness of radically caring for others is an eighth key for engaging moral relativism.

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 64. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Act of Love

O Lord God,
I love you above all things
and I love my neighbor for your sake
because you are the highest, infinite and perfect good,
worthy of all my love.
In this love I intend to live and die.
Amen.

Too many question marks
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INTRODUCTION

Challenging our relativistic culture is not easy. We must have a clear understanding of the classical view of morality and the importance of virtue and friendship, a picture of what real freedom looks like, and a vision for learning the art of living. And most importantly: the guiding and unifying principle for every encounter must be love. Love not only guides what we say and how we say it—it is our reason for saying anything at all.

In this final session we will look at several common questions about moral relativism and how we talk about it to others. These questions will help us reflect on what we have learned in the study and begin to tie it all together in order to go out and engage moral relativism.

STEP 2: CONNECT

*Before you proceed, briefly discuss with the participants how they followed through on the **COMMIT** section from the previous session.*

When you're ready to continue, discuss the following questions to get participants engaged with the session's topic. Use the information in parentheses to support the conversation as appropriate.

What is the biggest insight you've taken away from this study? How will this impact your life?

(Answers will vary.)

DIGGING DEEPER

“My opinion is that all those who lack knowledge of God are those who refuse to turn to him. I am certain that they refuse because they imagine this kindly disposed God to be harsh and severe, this merciful God to be callous and inflexible, this lovable God to be cruel and oppressive. So it is that wickedness plays false to itself, setting up for itself an image that does not represent him.”

—St. Bernard of Clairvaux (*Sermon 38 on the Song of Songs, 2*)

STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 22 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching.

- I. How can we talk to friends who think they are happy while living out a relativistic worldview?
 - A. Have the confidence that what they are experiencing is not true happiness: our hearts are restless until they rest in God
 - B. Model true happiness, joy, and genuine love for them—pray that it opens the door for further conversation

- II. How do I learn the “Art of Living” so that I can tell other people about it?
- A. You don’t have to be an expert—start to share with the little you’ve already received
 - B. Learn more
 - 1. Seek out an education on the virtues
 - 2. Surround yourself with like-minded people seeking the same thing (small group studies, etc.)
 - 3. Look for someone to learn from—a priest or spiritual director, a married couple, or someone a little older—to ask questions and just “catch what they have”
 - 4. Read about the virtues
- III. How do we communicate to people that a classical worldview of morality is freeing and not restricting?
- A. Goes back to the question, “Are you really happy?”
 - B. Might not want to change behavior, but what is the ultimate goal? Is this behavior leading to true friendship or not?
- IV. Relativism is not value-neutral. Is this intrinsic to relativism as a philosophy, or is it the application of the philosophy?
- A. Most people haven’t thought their worldview out that well and don’t realize that it isn’t neutral
 - B. Asking the question can lead to a conversation
- V. What do we say to people who are content with mediocrity?
- A. Many great saints were here at one point
 - 1. St. Augustine: “Lord, give me chastity, but not yet”
 - 2. Intellectually convinced, but not wanting to make the change
 - B. This is why we need to engage both heart and mind
 - C. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: Why are there so many people who don’t turn to God? “Because they imagine this kind and gentle God to be severe. . . . They think that God can’t help them.” Jesus is in the business of freeing prisoners.
- VI. What do we say to people who think that perfection is unattainable (the Church offers something perfect, and there is nothing perfect)?
- A. The fact that we desire perfection indicates that perfection must be possible
 - B. We experience hurt and we don’t like it—this indicates that we weren’t made for hurt

- VII. How do you respond to a humanitarian relativism that says we don't need the Church because others will do the work?
- A. Look at what the Church has actually done in history
 - B. Many people criticizing the Church aren't actually doing the work of encountering and serving the poor
 - C. Relativism can't require anyone to take care of others—Christian morality does
 - D. An eighth key to combat relativism might be the prophetic witness of the radical generosity of caring for others

DIGGING DEEPER

“Anyone who seeks truth seeks God, whether or not he realizes it.”

—St. Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross)

STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in parentheses below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

(One new idea might be that we can and should challenge people to consider whether or not they are truly happy with a relativistic worldview. Another might be that although we haven't yet mastered the art of living, just knowing about it makes us “qualified” to begin to share it with others even as we continue to work on it. Participants may also feel encouraged when they are reminded of all of the amazing humanitarian things the Church has done throughout history.)

2. What do you think is the greatest difficulty in engaging moral relativism? Why?

(For some people, the greatest difficulty may be in having the courage to speak up. Others may find it challenging to remain charitable and mercifully compassionate when they are accused of being a hateful bigot for disagreeing with someone else's moral choices. Some people may still be wrestling with their own relativism or with a desire to feel okay about someone else's choices. Encourage the participants to continue taking these difficulties to God in prayer.)

3. How has this study affected the way you think about and approach moral relativism?

(Some participants may feel more confident and knowledgeable in engaging moral relativism. Some people will have heard the classical view of morality laid out for the first time, although they have already been living by it and believing it without being able to describe or explain it. Some people may have entered into this study with many relativistic ideas and attitudes and had those ideas challenged. Perhaps they have changed their mind about relativism; at the very least they may have a better understanding of what classical morality really is. Hopefully everyone has been reminded and encouraged to always lead with mercy and take on the compassionate heart of Christ when they engage in dialogue with relativists in their lives.)



STEP 5: COMMIT

*Have participants turn to page 68 and encourage them to look over the week's **COMMIT** assignment and be prepared to share about their experience the next time the group meets.*

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). This abundant life that Jesus offers us is one in which we imitate him and live in his love. In Christ, we grow in the virtues we need to live out our relationships well and find our happiness. It is a life of purpose. It is a life where we are free to live with excellence and fulfill our *telos*.

What is one way this study has inspired you to love more and to be a better person—a better friend, spouse, parent, neighbor, or child of God? Ask God to help you live out these inspirations: he is always near you and his grace can help you do what you could never do on your own. Take some time to pray with the following passage from Deuteronomy and journal your reflections below.

"For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."

—Deuteronomy 30:11–14

DIGGING DEEPER

"We do not really want a religion that is right where we are right. We want a religion that is right where we are wrong. We do not want, as the newspapers say, a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world."

—G.K. Chesterton (*The Catholic Church and Conversion*)

STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session together and then end in prayer.

Key Points:

- *Classical morality offers happiness in a way that moral relativism can't.*
- *We can begin to share the art of living with others even while we are still learning to master it.*
- *Morality is freeing and not restrictive, perfection really is possible.*
- *The Church offers many things that moral relativism can't—especially a requirement that we care for the poor.*
- *This care for the poor is another key for engaging moral relativism.*

Father, your truth is made known in your Word.
Guide us to seek the truth of the human person.
Teach us the way to love because you are Love.
Jesus, you embody Love and Truth.
Help us to recognize your face in the poor.
Enable us to live out our vocation
to bring love and justice to your people.
Holy Spirit, you inspire us to transform our world.
Empower us to seek the common good for all persons.
Give us a spirit of solidarity and make us one human family.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

—Prayer based on Pope Benedict XVI's
2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*

FOR FURTHER READING

Msgr. William Smith, *Modern Moral Problems: Trustworthy Answers to Your Tough Questions* (Ignatius Press: 2012).

Peter Kreeft, *A Refutation of Moral Relativism: Interviews with an Absolutist* (Ignatius Press: 1999).

Charles E. Rice, *50 Questions on the Natural Law: What It Is and Why We Need It* (Ignatius Press: 1999).

Edward Sri, “Conclusion: Should We Even Talk about the Elephant in the Room?” and “Postscript: What Is Truth?” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).

NOTES
