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AUGUSTINE INSTITUTE
UNDERSTAND, LIVE, AND SHARE YOUR FAITH

WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 1

Don't Impose Your
Morality on Me!



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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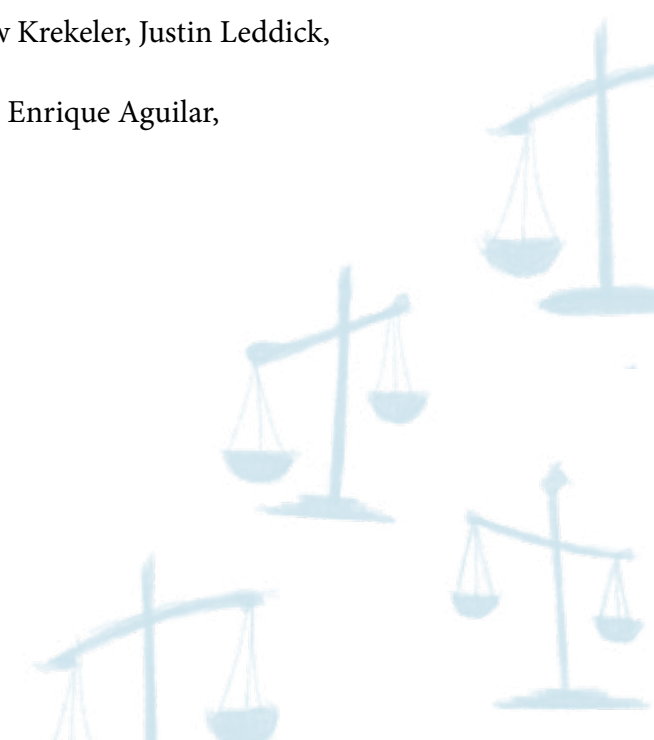
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SESSION 1 Don't Impose Your Morality on Me!

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

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?

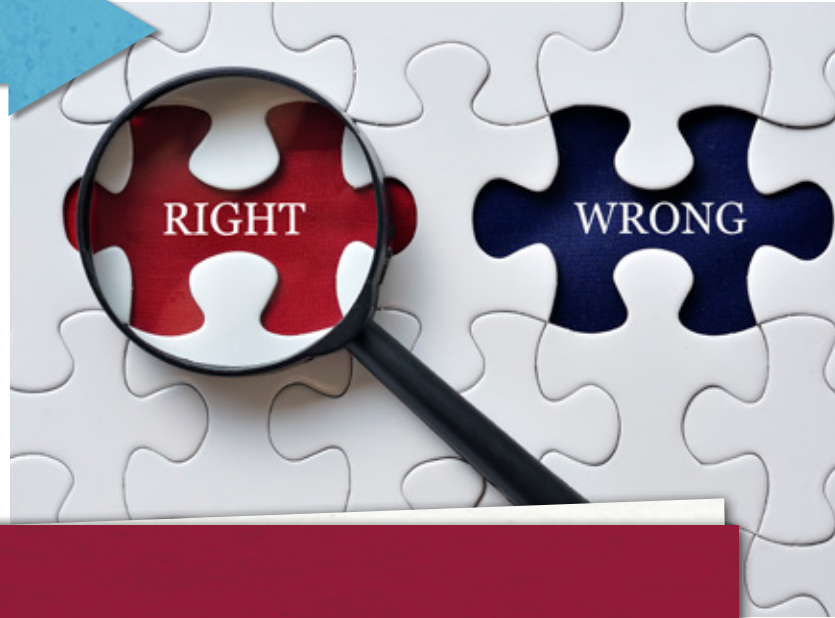
These are difficult questions to discuss in our culture. We live in a society that supports the opinion that each person should make up his or her own morality—that there is no moral truth that applies to everyone.

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

**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?**

Magnifying Glass On Missing Puzzle piece
© Tuan_Azizi / shutterstock.com



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

- 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

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

- 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?

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

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?

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?



STEP 5: COMMIT

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*

Family holding hands
© STILLFX / shutterstock.com



STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

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).

NOTES


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.,
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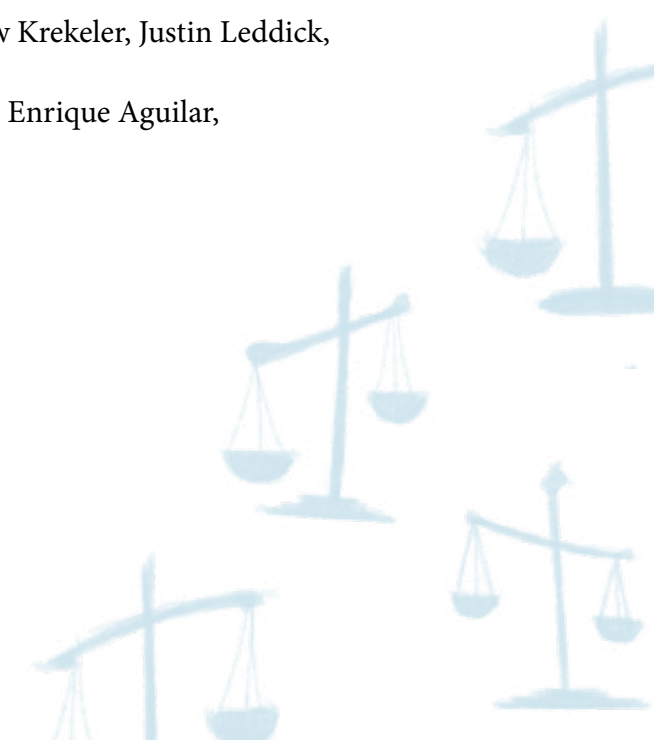
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SESSION 2

Recovering the Basics: Virtue and Friendship

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

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 37:2–7, 39–40

A piece of aged, yellowed paper with a torn edge, resting on a dark wooden surface. The paper contains a quote in a typewriter font.

The greatest
virtues are those
which are most useful
to other persons.

Aristotle

Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle quote
© Oleg Golovnev / 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

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?

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

- 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

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

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?**

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?**

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



STEP 5: COMMIT

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 good 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

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).

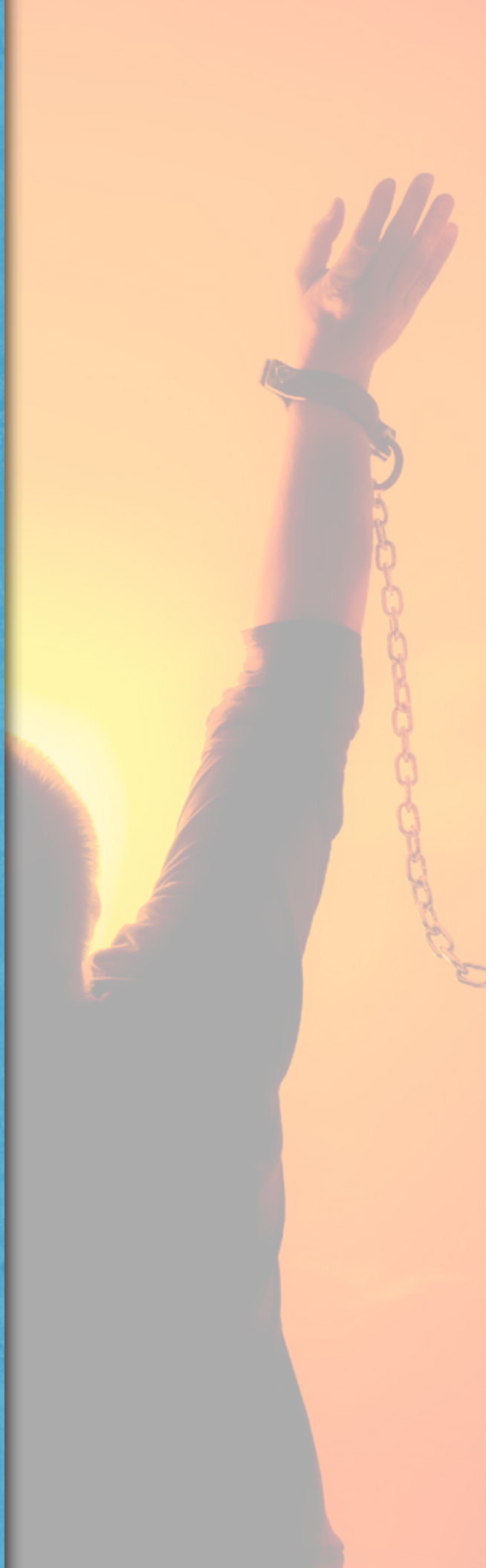
Edward Sri, “Chapter 3: But I’m not Hurting Anyone” and “Chapter 4: Friendship and Virtue” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 3

Real Freedom,
Real Love





Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
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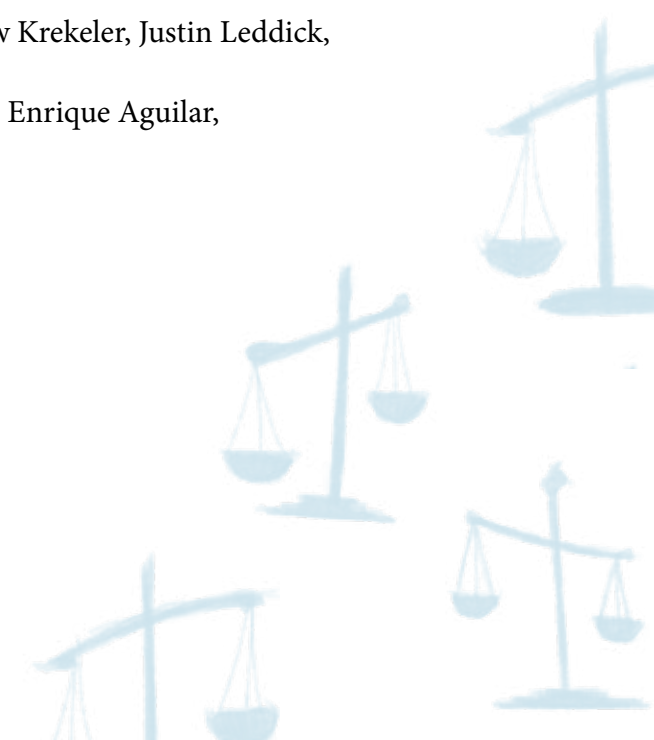
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SESSION 3

Real Freedom, Real Love

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

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

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?

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

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

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

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?

2. 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.

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?



STEP 5: COMMIT

“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.catholicanswers.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

Lantern in hands
© Africa Studio / shutterstock.com



STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

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).

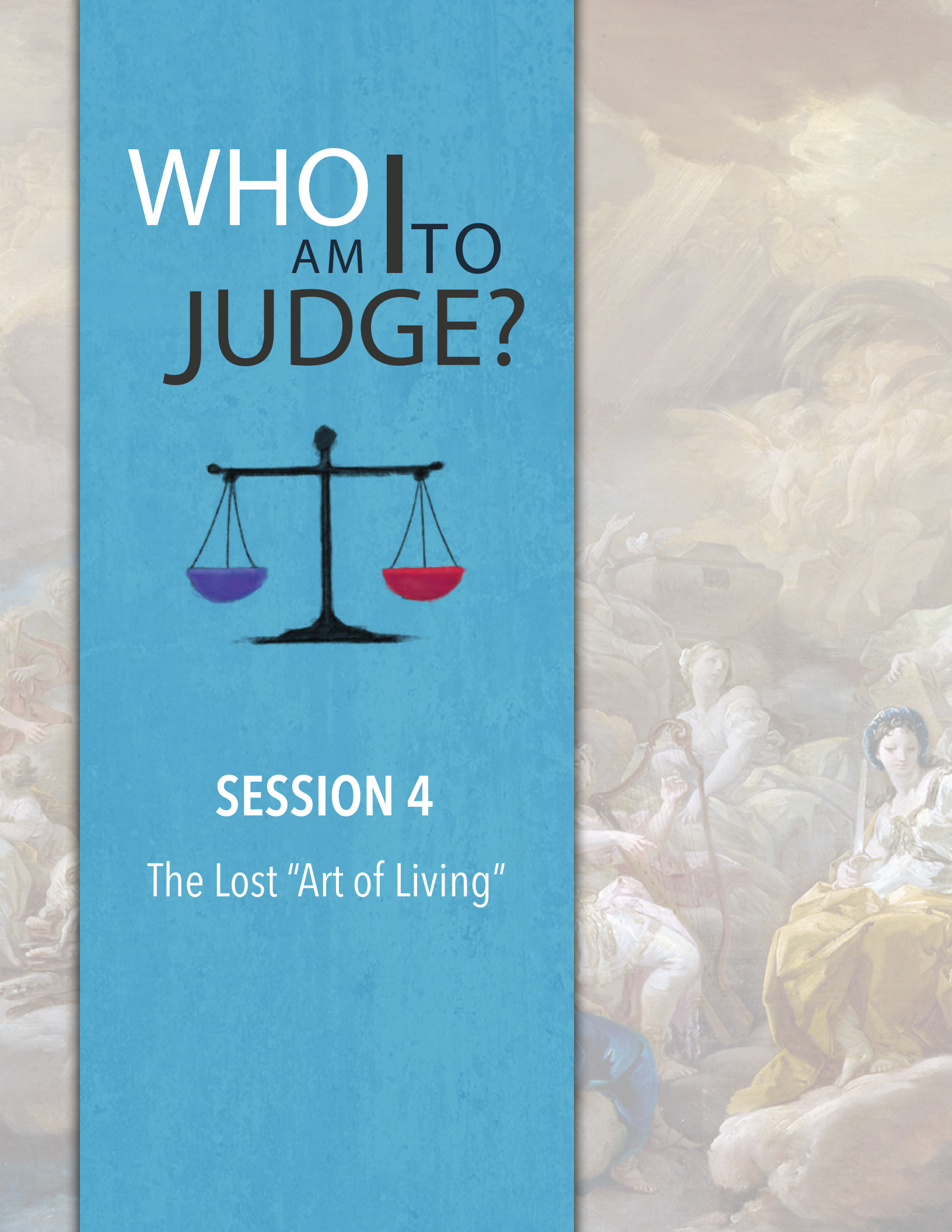
Edward Sri, “Chapter 5: Getting Freedom Right” and “Chapter 6: Law and Happiness” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 4

The Lost "Art of Living"





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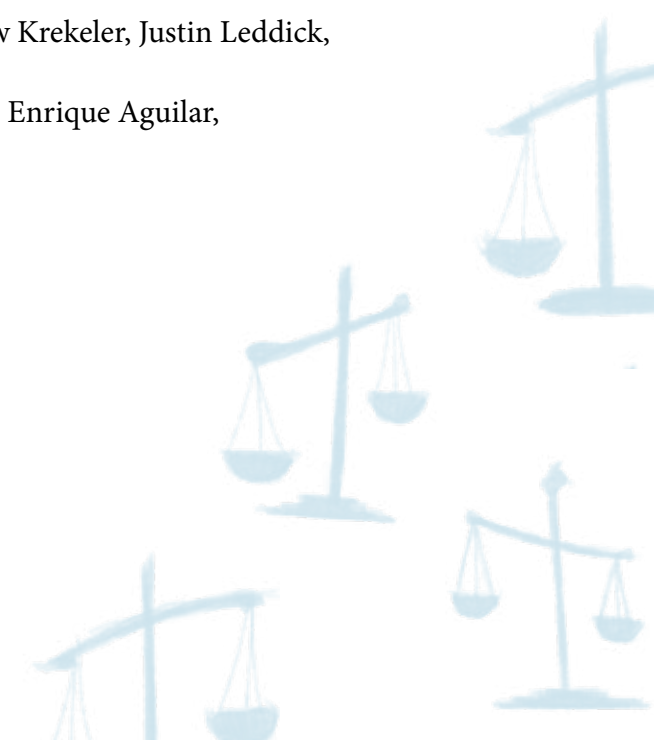
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STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

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



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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.

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 2: CONNECT

Who is your favorite teacher of all time? Why?

STEP 3: VIDEO

- 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

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?



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?

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?



STEP 5: COMMIT

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!

The Glory of the Saints by Giaquinto
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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

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, 1877–2011.

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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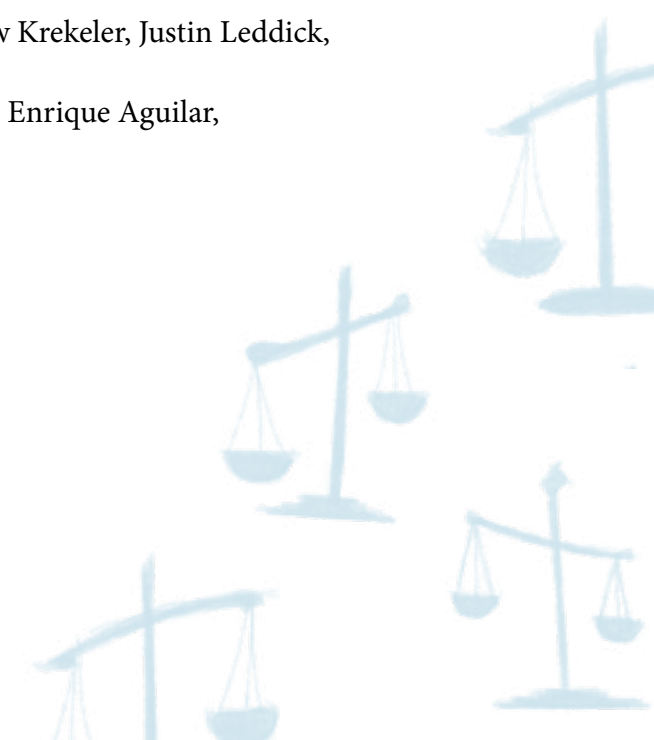
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STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

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 high 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

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?

DIGGING DEEPER

“There are not over a hundred people in the United States that 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

- 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

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?

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

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

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?

Businessman in the middle of a maze © PHOTOCREO Michael Bednarek / shutterstock.com

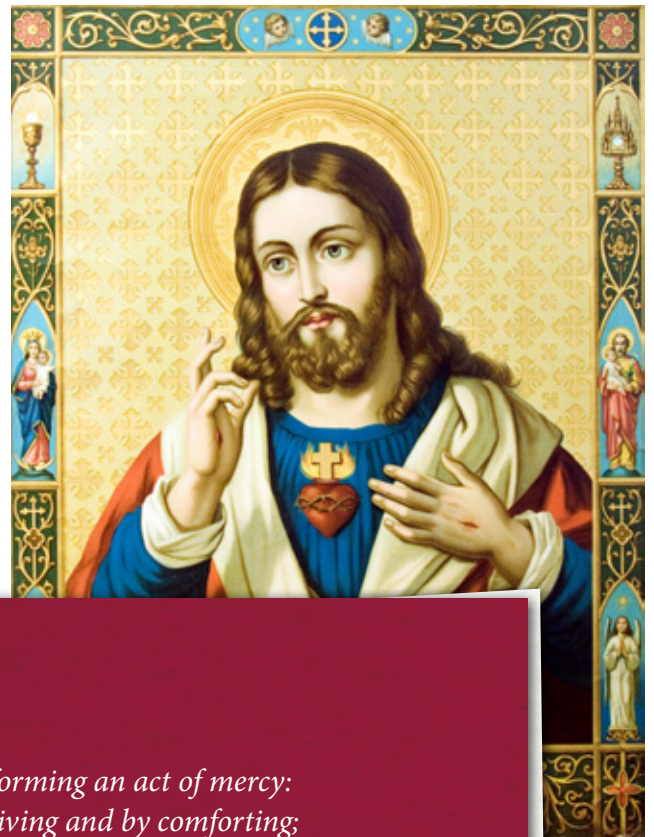


STEP 5: COMMIT

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

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).

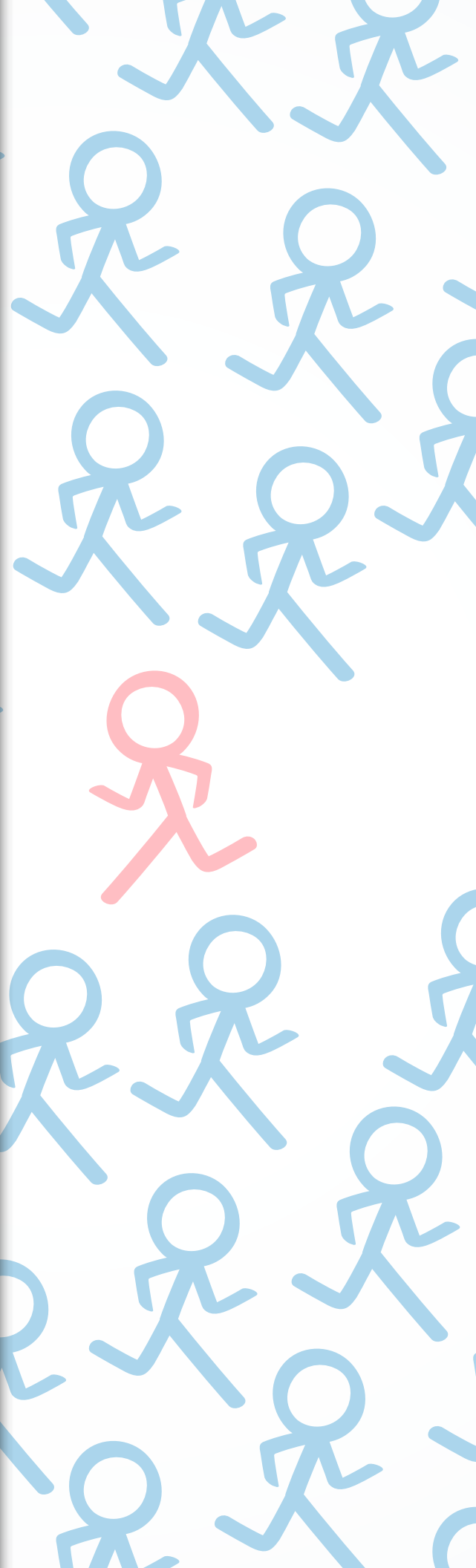
Edward Sri, “Key 1: Lead with Mercy” and “Key 2: ‘Relativism Wounds People’” in *Who Am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love* (Ignatius Press–Augustine Institute: 2016).


WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 6

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





Nihil Obstat: Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*
Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,
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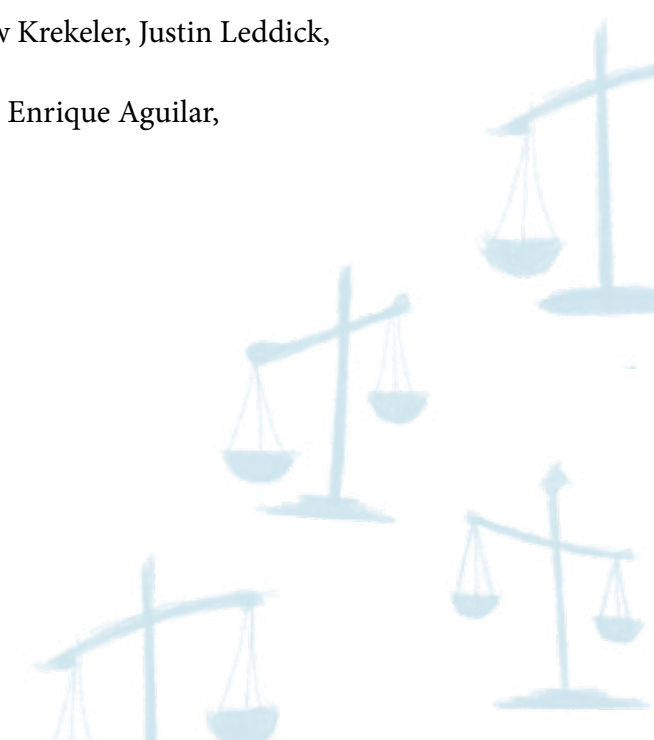
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SESSION 6

“I Disagree” Doesn’t Mean
“I Hate You”

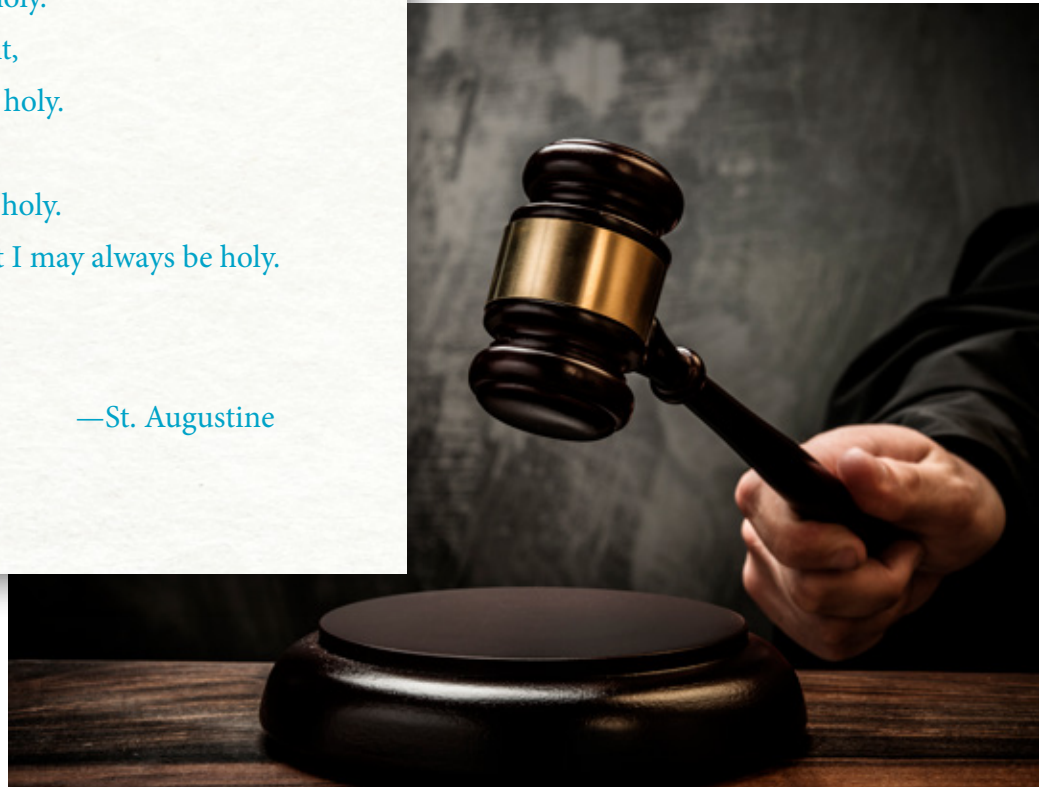
STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

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

Judge holding hammer © Nejron Photo / shutterstock.com



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 issues—and also to resist having the relativistic worldview imposed on us.

STEP 2: CONNECT

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.

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

- 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

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?

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?

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



STEP 5: COMMIT

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.”

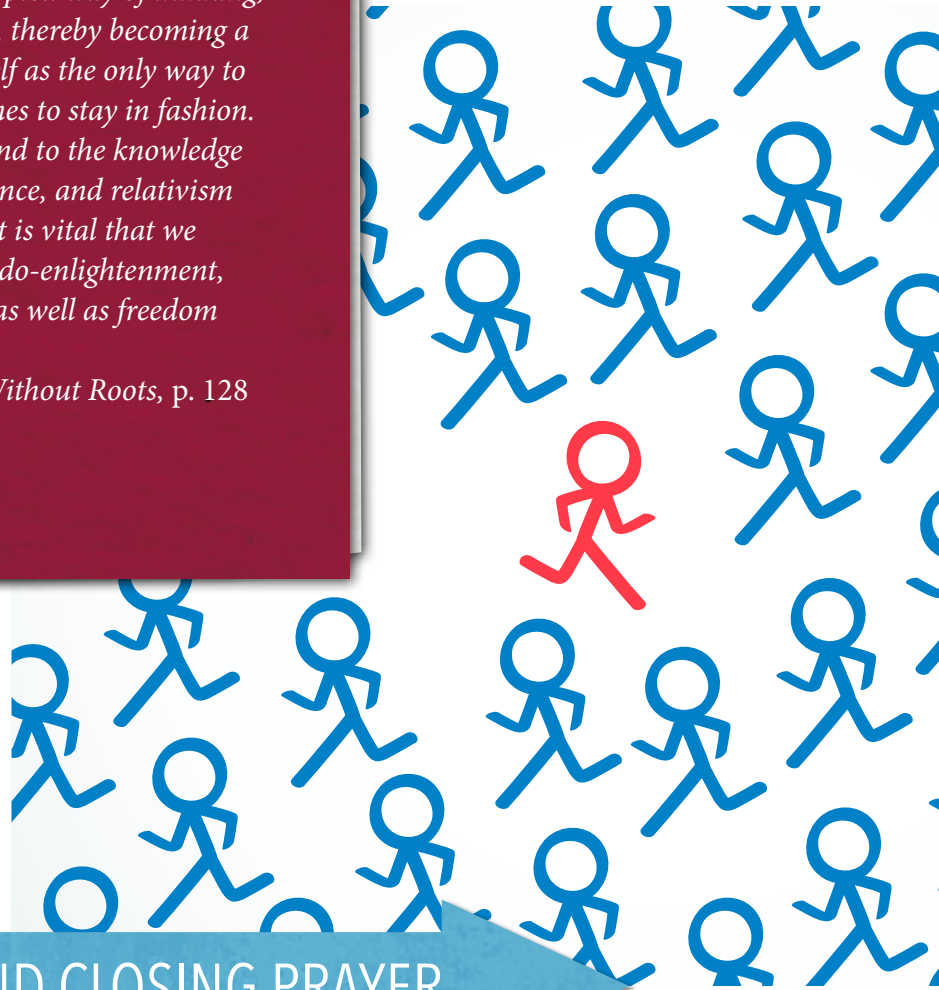
Have you ever felt pressured to think, act, or live in a different way or be silent because of the claims and demands of moral relativism? How did you respond to that pressure? What can you do to guard against the imposition of a relativistic worldview?

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

Stick figures, crowd running opposite direction
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STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

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).

NOTES


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*
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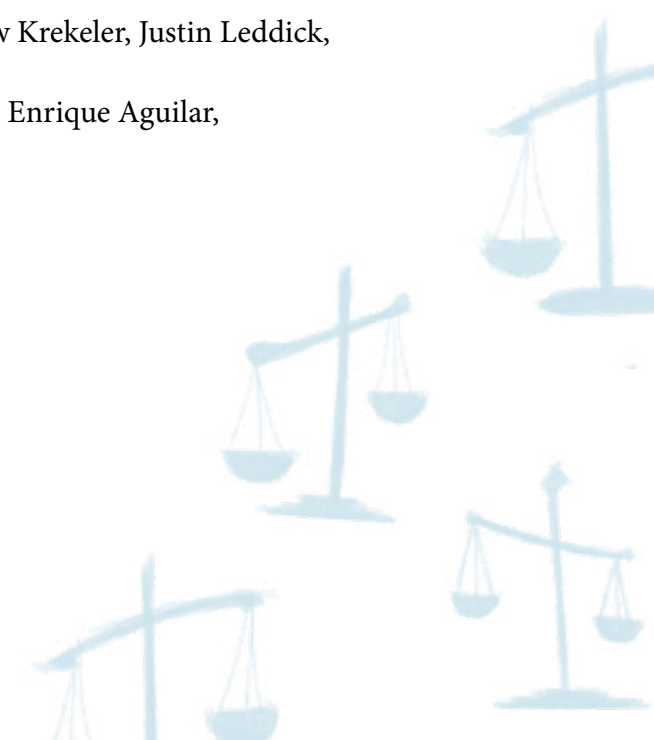
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SESSION 7

Exposing the Mask: What Relativism Is Often Covering Up

OPENING PRAYER

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” (John 14:6) for everyone, not just “for me.”

STEP 2: CONNECT

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

DIGGING DEEPER

"The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it emotionally."
—Flannery O'Connor

STEP 3: VIDEO

- 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

C. 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

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?

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?

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?



STEP 5: COMMIT

“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?

TRUTH

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

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).


NOTES

WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



SESSION 8

What is Truth?
Answering Common
Questions



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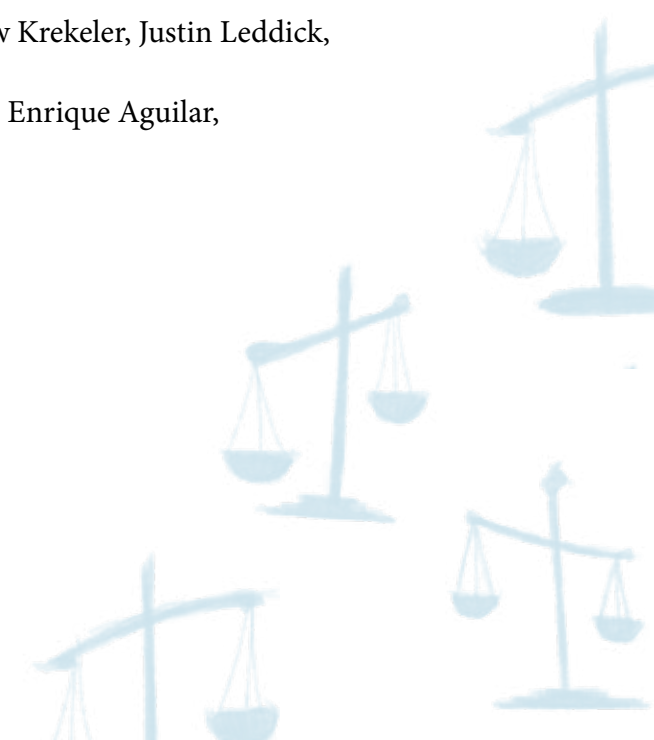
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SESSION 8

What Is Truth? Answering Common Questions

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

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

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

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

- I. How can we talk to friends who think they are happy?
 - 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
- II. How do I learn the Art of Living so that I can tell other people about it?
 - A. 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
 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

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

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

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

STEP 5: COMMIT

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

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

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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).

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