


# WHO AM I TO JUDGE

*Responding to Rejection with Logic and Love*

EDWARD SRI

## LEADER GUIDE



*Nihil Obstat:* Fr. Luis Granados, S.T.D, *Censor Deputatus*  
*Imprimatur:* Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L.,  
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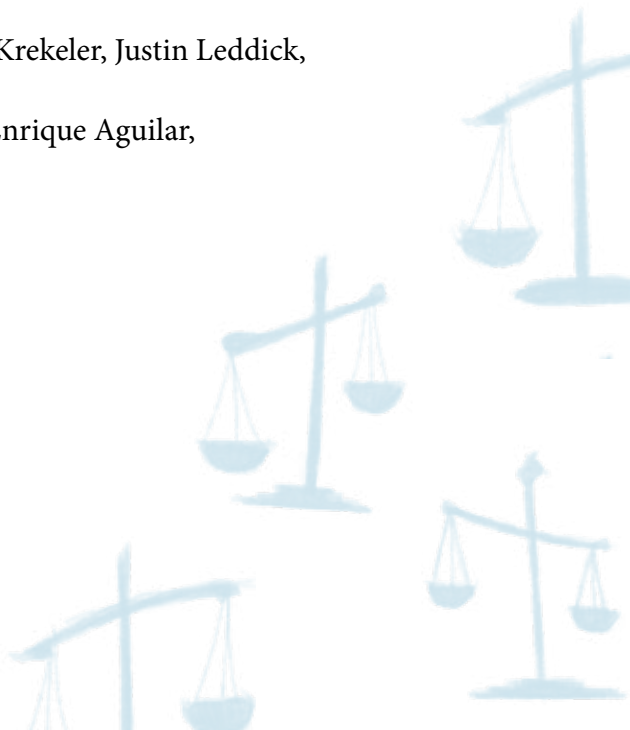
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Writers: Ashley Crane, Dr. Edward Sri  
Media: Steve Flanigan, Aurora Cerulli, Jon Ervin, Matthew Krekeler, Justin Leddick,  
Kevin Mallory, Ted Mast, Molly Sweeney  
Print Production/Graphic Design: Jeff Cole, Brenda Kraft, Enrique Aguilar,  
Christina Gray, Jane Myers, Ann Diaz

**Augustine Institute**  
6160 South Syracuse Way, Suite 310  
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# WHO AM I TO JUDGE?



## SESSION 1

Don't Impose Your  
Morality on Me!



# 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*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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).

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