



## SESSION 21: PATHWAY

**TOPIC:** Morality

### GOAL

The goal of this session is to introduce the concept of morality as defined by Christ and guarded by the Church, while offering the teens practical ways of living a moral life through the lens of vice and virtue.

### KEY CONCEPTS

Morality is objective and defined by God alone. Since God created us, God knows the best path to our happiness. Jesus is the definitive revelation of God's moral teaching.

The Church guards the teachings of Christ, including His moral teaching. The Church cannot change these teachings but is required to interpret them for our modern situation. The Church has the authority, given by Christ, to define morality.

We live a moral life by growing in virtue and avoiding vice. When we become deficient or lack a particular virtue, we tend to engage in vice and fall into sin.

### KEY TERMS

**Morality:** Referring to the goodness or evil of human acts. The morality of human acts depends on the object (or nature) of the action, the intention or end foreseen, and the circumstances of the action.

**Vice:** A habit acquired by repeated sin in violation of the proper norms of human morality.

**Virtue:** A habitual and firm disposition to do the good.

### SCRIPTURE

Mark 7:20-23

John 13:34

Romans 13:8-10

### CATECHISM

1965-1966

1970

2052-2055

2196

### ABOUT THIS SESSION

The Gather is a large group game that challenges the teens to think about various moral situations and how they would respond. The Proclaim introduces Christ's moral teaching, the Magisterium of the Church, and the concepts of virtue and vice. During the Break, the teens process virtue and vice in small groups. The Send concludes the session with a praying of the rosary for various moral causes.

### MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

Life Teen: "Guardrails" (Life Support: *January 2015*)

## **GATHER**

### *Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)*

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Welcome them to the session and begin in prayer.

### *What Would You Do? (15 min)*

Gather the teens in the main meeting space and instruct them to remain with their small groups. Read a sample scenario aloud and then have the small groups discuss what they would do if faced with that situation. After a few minutes, have one of the groups share their response. Read the next scenario and have a different group share their response after they have had a few minutes to discuss. Continue this process for as many scenarios as time allows. Use the following as a starting point and be sure to add other scenarios that are specific to the challenges of your teens:

- You recently transferred to a new school and a group of students invite you to eat lunch with them. You do not want to eat by yourself and you do not know anyone else, so you decide to sit with them. Another new student tries to sit at the table, but the group will not let him sit down. They then begin making fun of him and take his lunch. What would you do?
- You are filling up your gas tank at the gas station. The person at the pump next to you pays at the pump and puts the hose in the tank. She then goes inside to purchase a snack. While she is in the store, someone removes the hose from her gas tank and begins pumping the gas into a canister. What would you do?
- You are waiting for the bus. Across the street you witness a man steal someone's wallet. He then takes the money and gives it to a homeless woman. What would you do?
- Your parents are taking you out to dinner at your favorite restaurant. When you arrive, you overhear a conversation between the manager and a customer. The customer is being denied service because he is Latino. What would you do?

### *Guardrails Video (5 min)*

Play the video "Guardrails" to transition into the teaching.

## **PROCLAIM**

### *"Pathway" Teaching (15 min)*

#### **Guiding Light**

How do you determine what is right and wrong? How did you make the decisions you did in the opening game? What principles did you use to guide you?

*Allow a few teens to answer these questions. It is likely a variety of answers will be shared. Use these as examples through the next piece of the teaching.*

When we are presented with a decision that has some weight to it, we rely on an internal set of rules to determine how we act. We call these rules our "morals." When we talk about how we determine "right" and "wrong" more broadly, we call that "morality." The moral code that people follow might be impacted by all kinds of things — we may keep the same moral code as our parents because we admire them or actively go against their moral code because we want to rebel against them. Life experience may have formed our morality, and we may share the same morals as our friends.

Is there a right and a wrong, though, when it comes to morality? We used various standards to judge each situation and sometimes they led us to the same action, while other times they led us to a different action. Was any person wrong in their decision?

Some decisions have no right or wrong answer; when we talk about our preferences, there is not a right answer — everyone can be “right” in their own way. But when we talk about more important things like how we treat other people, ways in which we respect life, and what laws are good and just and what ones are not, there is a right answer and a wrong answer.

This might be difficult to hear; morality increasingly seems to be something we believe we can “personally define,” and to be clear, we do need to personally choose how we live. The question is not if we can choose our own moral code; the question is how we determine the best way to live. This is a big question. Our morality determines how we act and the kind of person we are. If we want to live well, our morality matters.

### **The Moral Code of the Teacher**

As followers of Jesus, we have a morality that we can choose and that was defined and given to us by Jesus, Himself. Our moral code as Christians is written throughout the Gospels and is clarified and applied by the Catholic Church. Our job, as disciples, is to understand that moral teaching and apply it to our lives.

There is no small number of people who question why we should live the moral teaching of Christ and the Church, especially when it seems contrary to what is culturally acceptable. Jesus, as the Son of God, has the authority to make definitive teaching about the best way for us to live. This teaching is guarded by the Church, which Christ gives authority to interpret His teachings for each era of human existence.

The group of people who guard this teaching is called “the Magisterium.” It is made up of bishops who prayerfully discern how to apply the teaching of Christ to modern day issues. Jesus did not speak on some of the things we deal with in modern society, not because they were not important but because people would not have understood what He was teaching. Instead, Jesus preached using universal images the Church is able to apply to modern moral situations.

Jesus’ teachings are the foundation of the Church’s moral teaching. The Church does not have the authority to change the teachings of Christ; she only has authority to apply them as new social and moral situations arise.

### **Virtue and Vice**

There are many moral situations the Church speaks in to. The Church also identifies broad areas of positive and negative moral living. We call positive moral behaviors “virtues” and negative moral behaviors “vices.” There are seven classic virtues and seven classic sins that can help us understand Christ’s teachings and the ways in which the Church calls us to live.

The seven virtues are love, hope, faith, justice, temperance, fortitude, and prudence. The seven vices are pride, gluttony, sloth, lust, greed, envy, and anger. We can view much of our morality through these vices and virtues.

Virtue is a moral quality that we work on with God’s grace. When we live the virtue of love, loving God and our neighbor, we make decisions that bring us in alignment with Jesus’ teaching. One way we would practice the virtue of love is by serving those who experience poverty. Love is self-sacrificial, so by giving up time on a Saturday to serve at a shelter for

people who are homeless we love our neighbor well. At the same time, we also combat the vice of greed — instead of being selfish, we are self-less.

Vice often happens when we become deficient in an area of virtue. When we fail to love, we can become greedy, lustful, envious, or angry. When we fail to have hope, we become slothful. When we fail to practice temperance, we become gluttonous.

Vices and virtues are practical ways we can view morality. We need to remember, though, that all virtue is rooted in the grace that Jesus gives us and is clarified by Church teaching.

So, take the virtue of love. If someone is doing something sinful but we do not want to call them out on it because we think it would not be loving, we are not living the virtue. Likewise, in our romantic relationships, we can confuse the virtue of love with the vice of lust by telling ourselves that sexual intimacy with our partner is morally OK because we “love them.” When we examine that feeling against Church teachings, though, we see that we are actually engaging in a vice rather than a virtue.

Jesus calls us to live moral and upright lives. He calls us to be disciples who follow Him and His example. The Church guides us along that path, which is ultimately freedom. Each person here is called to that same freedom, but it is up to us to cooperate with God’s grace in order to truly find it.

## **BREAK**

*Virtue and Vice (20 min)*

Divide the teens into their Confirmation small groups. Give each teen a pen and a copy of the *Virtue and Vice* handout, and instruct them to complete it silently. Once all of the teens are finished, use the following questions to facilitate a discussion:

- Which marks are you most surprised by?
- Think about the three virtues you have the most. What specific kinds of choices do you make that help you cultivate these virtues?
- Think about the three virtues you have the least. What choices lead you away from virtue? What specific kinds of choices can you make to help you cultivate those virtues?

## **SEND**

*Rosary (15 min)*

Have the teens remain with their Confirmation small groups. Assign each group an intention for which they will pray a decade of the rosary. Some intentions include:

- The unborn
- Those enslaved by human trafficking
- An end to euthanasia
- Refugees
- The homeless
- An end to gun violence
- Growth in a chaste culture
- Those experiencing racism
- Strength in discipleship to uphold life’s dignity

If the teens are unfamiliar with this form of prayer, provide a brief explanation before beginning.

## HANDOUTS

### Handout Title: Virtue and Vice

Virtues are traits or qualities that are morally good and are, therefore, valued as the foundation of a good life. With each virtue, determine if you are deficient, have excellence, or are in excess, and mark this on the handout. As you go through the list, choose at least three virtues you live well. Circle these. Then choose three virtues you struggle to live well. Draw a star next to these.

Deficient	Excellence of Virtue	Excess
Cowardly	Courage	Bravado, Rashness
Does not enjoy or take pleasure in the created things of life	Temperance: Has moderation or self-restraint when enjoying things	Gluttonous, overindulgent
Stingy: Reluctant to share what one has	Generosity	Wasteful
Dark, vulgar	Disposition of Joy: Has an authentically radiant and joyful way of living	Has an overly positive and shallow attitude
Downplays or diminishes oneself and one's accomplishments	Proper pride in oneself	Vain, arrogant
Indolent: Lazy, avoids working hard	Proper ambition	Overambitious, overworking
Fearful	Patience	Impulsive
Dishonest, deceitful	Truthfulness	Over shares, tactless
Boorish	Wittiness	Facetious
Reluctant to share oneself or connect with others	Friendship: Being a true friend to someone	Desperate to be liked, tries to reach deep friendship with every person
Fickle: Changes frequently, especially in regard to one's loyalties, interests, or affection	Loyalty	Gullible: Easily taken advantage of
Intolerant	Tolerance: Appropriately accepts others and their differences	Taken advantage of
Permissive: Grants permission for people to do anything	Justice: Knows, does, and advocates for what is right	Legalistic: Adheres excessively to law or formula