

Judged on Love

1 Corinthians 13 · John 21:15-19 · Matthew 25:31-40

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that love is both the greatest gift and the final exam, hears St. John of the Cross's evening-of-life saying as the study's summary, and is commissioned like Peter: loved, questioned, and sent.

Catholic Touchstone. Judged on love (CCC 1022; CCC 1826-1829): at the moment of death each of us comes before Christ, and, in the words of St. John of the Cross quoted by the Catechism, at the evening of life we shall be judged on our love.

What You Need to Know

The last session is a commissioning, and its center of gravity is a single sentence the Catechism itself borrowed from St. John of the Cross to describe the particular judgment: at the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love (CCC 1022, citing his Sayings of Light and Love). Twelve sessions of Carmelite doctrine funnel into that line: the call was to the perfection of charity (S1), detachment freed the heart for it (S2), the castle housed the Lover (S3), prayer befriended him (S4), the deserts and nights purified love of its counterfeits (S5-S6), the water and the Song and the vine and the flame were all love arriving (S7-S10), and Martha-with-Mary was love overflowing (S11). Tonight: love examined, love final.

Guard the tone: judgment on love is Gospel, not threat, and the room should leave commissioned, not scared. Two features of tonight's texts secure that. First, 1 Corinthians 13 is not a wedding decoration; in context it stands between chapters 12 and 14 as the more excellent way that outranks every gift, and its portrait ("love is patient and kind...") is, feature for feature, a portrait of Christ: the love that judges us is the love that died for us. Second, John 21 shows how the Judge actually examines: over breakfast, by name, three questions for three denials, entrusting his flock to the very man who failed him, and ending not with probation but "Follow me." That is the exam: love asked for, wounds included, mission entrusted.

The final exercise ("the look back") needs the Take-Home sheets. Walk the group through their own stack: the Session 1 guess and what they answered after Session 6; the memory verses; the Live It practices that stuck. Have each person write one sentence to carry out of the study: what I now believe God wants of the rest of my life. Collect nothing. This is between the soul and the Bridegroom.

End with sending language. St. John Paul II closed the Jubilee by giving the Church two words from Luke 5:4, *Duc in altum*, put out into the deep, and told her to remember Christ's promise and trust him for the catch. It is the right final word for a study named from Psalm 42: the deep that calls to deep is also the deep he now sends us out upon.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The final exam was posted in the Torah: "you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5), and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18, from our first session). Jesus fuses them into the whole law's hinge (Matthew 22:37-40). Nothing about the criterion of judgment is a surprise; it was the syllabus from the beginning.

The prophets grade accordingly: "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6, twice quoted by Jesus); Micah's summary: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (6:8). Religious performance without love was the prophets' constant target, exactly as gifts without love are Paul's.

And the Song, one last time, states love's scale: strong as death, unquenchable by many waters, beyond purchase at any price (Song 8:6-7). A judgment on love is a judgment by the only measure that outlasts death, which is why Paul ends: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13): the one that abides is the one we are measured by, and the one we get to keep.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John of the Cross

The saying the Church chose to describe our meeting with Christ at death: at the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love. In its home among his maxims, the counsel continues in substance: learn to love as God desires to be loved, and leave your own way of acting. It is the entire Carmelite doctrine in a sentence: everything, the nada, the nights, the flame, was only ever about learning to love; and the God who will examine us on love is the same who spent our whole life teaching us the subject and supplying the answers.

Sayings of Light and Love, as quoted in CCC 1022.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Teresa of Avila

Teresa's last counsels in the Interior Castle are startlingly practical: the Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done; do what lies in your power, and fix your eyes on the Crucified, and everything will seem small to you. She dismantles every excuse of littleness: if love is the measure, then no life is too small for greatness, and the sisters' hidden duties, done with great love, weigh more than famous deeds done without it. The judgment on love is, in her hands, the most democratic doctrine in the Church.

The Interior Castle, Seventh Dwelling Places, ch. 4, summarized.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Paul II

Closing the Great Jubilee, St. John Paul II gave the Church her sailing orders in Christ's words to Peter: Duc in altum, put out into the deep (Luke 5:4). Remembering that word, he said, we are called to trust the Lord's promise and lower the nets. The apprentice of the Krakow tailor, formed on St. John of the Cross, ended his letter not with a program but with a Person to be contemplated and a deep to be dared. For a study named Deep Calls to Deep, it is the destined last word: the depths of God that have been calling to our depths now send us out upon the deep.

Novo Millennio Ineunte 1 and 58, on Luke 5:4.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1022 teaches the particular judgment: each of us receives our eternal recompense in the immortal soul at the very moment of death, in a judgment that refers our life to Christ; and it seals the paragraph with our saint: at the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.

CCC 1826-1829 give charity its rank and its physiognomy: without love, everything else is nothing (1826, quoting 1 Corinthians 13); charity is superior to all the virtues, the form of them all (1827); its practice, says 1829, is joy, peace, and mercy; it is friendship and communion. The exam and the prize are the same thing.

CCC 1821 (worth reading aloud as a blessing): we hope for the grace to persevere to the end and obtain the joy of heaven as God's eternal reward for good works accomplished with the grace of Christ. Judged on love, and even the love was grace: the last word of the doctrine, as of the study, is gift.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Both threads are resolved; tonight only harvests. In the look back, name them once each: the tailor (what hidden love can do) and water-to-flame (what the Gift does in a soul).

The sealed-guess arc completes in the look back: have people set their Session 1 guess beside their post-Session 6 sentence and read both silently. Ask only: what has God done between those two pieces of paper?

Practical send-off: have information ready tonight for what comes next (the parish's adoration schedule, confession times, the next study, and one recommended first Carmelite book for those who want the sources: a good starter is *Story of a Soul*, then *Teresa's Life*).

Session Goals

1. Read 1 Corinthians 13 in context: the more excellent way that outranks every gift, portraying Christ himself.
2. Watch the Judge examine Peter (John 21): love asked, failure absorbed, mission entrusted.
3. Complete the look back across all twelve sessions and the sealed-guess arc.
4. Commission each person: judged on love, therefore sent to love; Duc in altum.

Time note (75-90 min). Win 5 min; Build 45 min; look back 20 min; Send, Live It, and closing 15 min. Nothing after the look back should be rushed; if pressed, trim Q2 and the Dig Deeper discussion time, never the look back or John 21.

Judged on Love

1 Corinthians 13 · John 21:15-19 · Matthew 25:31-40

Opening Prayer

Father, you have taught us all these weeks that you are love, that you dwell within us, and that you will meet us at the evening of life with love's own question. Gather now everything you have done among us, seal it in our hearts, and make our last session a sending. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN

W1. Twelve weeks ago you described what came to mind at the word "saint." Answer once more tonight: what comes to mind now?

BUILD

Q1. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Paul lists the most impressive spiritual resume imaginable: tongues of angels, prophecy, all knowledge, mountain-moving faith, total philanthropy, martyrdom itself. What is his verdict on each without love, and why is this passage aimed at church people rather than pagans?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The verdicts: a noisy gong, nothing, nothing gained (13:1-3): "but have not love, I am nothing." Every item on the list is religious achievement; Paul's target is Corinth's gifted, competitive church life (chapters 12-14), not the world outside. The move should sober twelve weeks of Bible study: knowledge of Carmelite doctrine, completed workbooks, even sacrificial service can all be had without love, and count for exactly nothing. Then let 13:4-7 stand as the syllabus: patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, not irritable or resentful, bearing, believing, hoping, enduring all things. Read it once replacing "love" with "Jesus": it fits perfectly. Read it once with your own name: that gap is the rest of our lives, and grace intends to close it.

DISCOVERY MOMENT · Q2

Read John 21:15-19: the risen Jesus examines Peter over a charcoal breakfast. The scene is built to echo an earlier one. Have the group hunt for the connection: where else in John does someone stand at a charcoal fire (the Greek word *anthrakia* occurs exactly twice in this Gospel)? Count the questions here and the denials there. Then ask: what kind of judgment is this, and what does Jesus do with Peter's failure?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The echo: John 18:18, the charcoal fire in the high priest's courtyard where Peter warmed himself and denied Jesus three times (18:17, 25-27). Jesus rebuilds the scene: same fire, three questions for three denials, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter is grieved at the third asking (21:17), feeling the arithmetic. Now the verdict: no penance assigned, no probation; each confession of love is answered with commission: feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep, then a prophecy that Peter will glorify God at last by the death he once fled (21:18-19), and the words from the very beginning: "Follow me." This is how the Judge judges those who love him: he asks for love, absorbs the failure into the asking, and entrusts what he loves most (his flock) to the forgiven. The judgment on love, previewed at breakfast: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (21:17) is a sentence a restored failure can say. It may be the best single sentence to bring to the evening of life.

Q3. Read Matthew 25:31-46. The King's criteria at the last judgment are six concrete mercies, and both sheep and goats are surprised (25:37-39, 44). Set this beside CCC 1022's "judged on our love": how do Matthew's hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and prisoner keep tonight's doctrine from floating into abstraction? And what does "you did it to me" (25:40) reveal about where Christ has been all along?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Matthew supplies the exam's practical section: love's evidence is bodily mercy to the least, and the surprise of both groups ("Lord, when did we see you?") shows the judgment reads what love actually did, not what religion thought it was doing. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (25:40) is the last of the study's indwelling texts: the Christ we sought in the inner room (S3), the vine (S9), and the flame (S10) was also, all along, in the neighbor at the door. Judged on love therefore means judged on Tuesdays: meals, visits, patience, mercy. And note the coherence with 1 Corinthians 13 and John 21: not love as feeling, but love as fidelity with hands.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: JUDGED ON LOVE, OR JUSTIFIED BY FAITH?

The Reformation's central objection, at full strength: "Scripture could not be clearer: a person is justified by faith apart from works of law (Romans 3:28); by grace you have been saved through faith, not because of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Gospel's comfort is precisely that my standing before God rests on Christ's finished work received by faith alone, not on the quality of my love, which I know to be flawed. A final judgment on our love reopens every anxious ledger: how much love is enough? It sends the dying back to their own resources at the very hour they most need to rest on Christ's. Love is the fruit and evidence of saving faith, gladly; but make it the basis of judgment and you have traded the Gospel for the treadmill."

This is the most consequential steelman of the study; present it with complete respect, and let its pastoral concern (the anxious deathbed) be felt.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Begin with the vast agreement, which four centuries of caricature have obscured: salvation is by grace from first to last; no one earns the love of God; faith is the foundation; and the Catholic Church condemns the idea that we merit justification by our own resources (grace precedes, accompanies, and completes everything; CCC 1821's formula is good works accomplished with the grace of Christ, and St. Teresa's empty-handed heir, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, in her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love, expected to appear before God with empty hands). Then let Scripture speak where the objection is selective: the same Paul who wrote Romans 3:28 wrote tonight's chapter, whose verdict on faith-without-love is explicit: "if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2), and elsewhere: "the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6 in substance), and it is Jesus, not a medieval theologian, who stages the last judgment on works of mercy (Matthew 25) and James who writes that faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 24). The Catholic resolution refuses the false alternative: we are not judged on love instead of saved by grace; we are judged on what grace, received by living faith, has actually done in us, because, as the Church teaches, justification is not only a declaration but also an interior renewal: God's love poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5) so truly that it becomes ours to live; and the classical Protestant, who grounds the verdict in Christ's real finished work, deserves that stated fairly. And the anxious-deathbed concern gets the tenderest answer in the Gospel: watch the actual Judge at the charcoal fire. He does not audit Peter's ledger; he asks, "Do you love me?", accepts a failure's honest yes, and hands him the flock. The one who examines us on love is the one who died to give it and taught it for a lifetime; he judges the love his own grace has formed in us, remaining himself, as St. John of the Cross never tired of saying, both the Judge and the source of the charity he looks for. That is not a treadmill. It is a wedding.

DIG DEEPER: AGAPE: THE WORD PAUL REACHED FOR

Greek love vocabulary was rich: desire (*eros*), friendship (*philia*), family affection (*storge*), and *agape*, the word the New Testament writers took up and filled with the cross: love as deliberate, self-giving benevolence. The terms overlap in ordinary Greek; the New Testament's meaning comes from its use, not from a fixed lexicon. In John 21 the vocabulary shifts inside the dialogue (*agapao*, *phileo*): some hear Jesus meeting Peter where he is, others John's habit of varying near-synonyms; the dialogue's weight rests on what is undisputed, three questions, three commissions, and Peter's appeal to what Jesus knows. Ask: after twelve weeks, define *agape* in one sentence of your own, without using the word love.

Q4. The look back. Spread out your Take-Home stack: the Session 1 sealed guess beside your after-Session 6 sentence; twelve memory verses; the practices that stuck and the ones that did not. Take ten quiet minutes: what has God actually done in you across these twelve weeks? Then write the one sentence you will carry out: what I now believe God wants of the rest of my life. Share only if you wish.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Protect the silence; resist the urge to fill it. If sharing follows, receive everything without grading. Close the exercise by naming the arc once, briefly: called to holiness, freed by detachment, at home in the castle, befriended in prayer, led through desert and night, given water, sung to, grafted in, set aflame, sent as Martha-and-Mary, and now judged, which is to say awaited, by Love. The sentence each person wrote is their real Take-Home; everything else was packaging.

SEND

S1. Peter's sentence at the fire: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Can you say it tonight, as you are? Say it to him before you sleep.

S2. Duc in altum: put out into the deep. What is the deep water Christ is pointing your boat toward as this study ends, and what is the first stroke of the oar this week?

Live It This Week

- Keep the fifteen minutes for life. It was never a twelve-week program; it was the door of the castle, and it stays open.
- Do one of Matthew 25's six mercies this week, in person, and let it be your closing act of the study.
- Choose your next step tonight (adoration hour, the next study, Story of a Soul or Teresa's Life) and tell one person in this group, who is allowed to ask you about it.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, deep calls to deep: from the depths of your heart you have called to the depths of ours, through call and desert, night and water, song and flame. At the evening of life we will look on your face and be judged on love. Teach us to love as you desire to be loved; keep us faithful to the appointment; and when you ask us Peter's question, let us answer with his: Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you. To you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory for ever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 13:13

"So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Judged on Love

Every passage used, in order

Passage	Where it is used
1 Cor 13:1-13	Q1 and steelman: the more excellent way; faith without love is nothing
John 21:15-19	Discovery: the charcoal-fire examination; feed my sheep; follow me
John 18:17-27	Discovery answer: the first charcoal fire and the three denials
Matt 25:31-40	Q3: the six mercies; you did it to me
Rom 3:28; Eph 2:8-9	Steelman: justification by faith at full strength
Gal 5:6; James 2:17, 24; Rom 5:5	Steelman answer: faith working through love; love really given
Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Matt 22:37-40	OT Roots: the syllabus posted from the beginning
Luke 5:4	Send: Duc in altum