

Session 13. When the Cross Comes

Movement V. The Home and the Destination

Passages: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 1 Samuel 1:1-18; Job 2:9-10; Luke 2:41-51; John 19:25-27

Part 1. Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. That the group looks at marriages in Scripture that suffered, names what carried them, and can distinguish forgiveness from reconciliation, from restored trust, and from the absence of consequences.

Catholic Touchstone. The bond is permanent. That does not mean anyone is obliged to remain in danger. The Church recognizes legitimate separation while the bond remains, and she does not ask a spouse or a child to endure violence for the sake of the sacrament (canons 1151-1155; CCC 2383).

SAFEGUARDING NOTE (LEADER ONLY, READ BEFORE THE SESSION)

Read this before preparing the session, and act on it at any point in the study, not only tonight.

Say it in the room. No one is obliged to remain in a dangerous situation. The Church recognizes legitimate separation, permits civil divorce where it is the only way to secure protection, and does not ask anyone to endure violence for the sake of the sacrament.

If there is any indication of immediate danger, contact emergency services. Do not wait, do not consult the group, and do not seek the other spouse's side. In the United States the National Domestic Violence Hotline is available at 1-800-799-7233 or by texting START to 88788.

Mandatory reporting. If you are a mandated reporter under your state's law or under diocesan policy, you must follow those obligations, and knowing whether you are is your responsibility before the session rather than after a disclosure. Any suspicion of abuse or neglect of a minor or a vulnerable adult is reported to civil authorities according to that law and to the diocesan safe environment office.

Confidentiality has limits, and you must say so before anyone discloses. Tell participants at the start of this session that you will hold what they share in confidence except where safety requires otherwise or the law requires a report. Do not promise absolute confidentiality. You cannot keep that promise, and offering it makes the situation worse.

Do not investigate. Do not interview, do not contact the other party, do not gather evidence, and do not attempt to assess whether an account is accurate. That is not your role, and doing it can endanger the person and compromise a later inquiry.

Do not mediate or counsel. Refer to the priest or deacon, to the diocesan safe environment office, and to qualified professional help. Then stay available and stay warm.

Note for a leader who is a priest or deacon. The seal of confession is absolute and nothing here qualifies it. Be clear with yourself and with participants about when a conversation is sacramental and when it is not.

What You Need to Know

Read the safeguarding note before you prepare anything else in this session, and prepare that part first.

This is the session that will be remembered in ten years. Your couples are a few months from a wedding, everything around them is bunting and seating charts, and tonight somebody tells them the truth. Do it warmly. Do not perform gravity.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13 AS WHAT IT IS

It is on every wedding program in the Western world, which has nearly destroyed it. St. Paul did not write it for weddings. He wrote it to a congregation that was fighting about status, and it is a rebuke.

Read it slowly with the room and notice how much of it is negative: not jealous, not boastful, not arrogant, not rude, does not insist on its own way, not irritable, not resentful. That is a description of how somebody behaves when they are being provoked. Verse 7 is the one to carry: bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

That is not a description of a wedding day. It is a description of year eleven.

THE FOUR CROSSES TO NAME

Do not attempt all four in depth. Name all four, and go deep on whichever your room needs.

- **Loss and infertility.** Session 11 gave the teaching; tonight give the grief its due. Scripture does. Hannah weeps and will not eat, and nobody in the story tells her to be grateful for what she has.
- **Illness, including mental illness, and addiction.** In sickness and in health is in the vow. Most couples imagine cancer at seventy. It is at least as likely to be depression at thirty two, or a drinking problem that arrives slowly enough that nobody names it.
- **Betrayal.** Adultery, financial deceit, a hidden life. The prophets of Session 3 are the frame, and they are unsparing about what it costs the faithful party.
- **Abuse.** Physical, sexual, emotional, or financial. This one differs in kind from the other three, and the Church's answer differs in kind. See the safeguarding note and say it out loud in the room.

SEPARATION, STATED ACCURATELY

Couples are often astonished that this exists, because they have absorbed a version of Catholic teaching in which the bond obliges endurance of anything.

The Church's law holds that spouses have the obligation and the right to maintain their common life unless a legitimate cause excuses them, and it recognizes such causes: canon 1152 recognizes a right of separation for the innocent spouse in cases of adultery, subject to that canon's conditions, including that the innocent spouse has not condoned it; and grave danger of spirit or body to a spouse or to the children, or conduct that renders common life too hard, are recognized grounds. In urgent cases a spouse may separate on their own authority (canons 1151-1155). The bond remains, neither party is free to remarry, and nobody is required to keep living in the same house.

The Catechism also recognizes that civil divorce may be tolerated where it is the only possible way to secure certain legal rights, the care of children, or the protection of inheritance (CCC 2383). Where the issue is danger, the ground is the separation law, canons 1151 to 1153.

Say it in plain words, because a woman somewhere has stayed in a dangerous house believing the Church required it: the sacrament is not a reason to be hurt.

FORGIVENESS, AND WHAT IT IS NOT

This is the most practically useful teaching of the night. Separate four things that get collapsed together.

- **Forgiveness** is the release of the debt, and it is commanded (Matthew 6:14-15). It is an act of the will, it can be given before the feelings follow, and it usually has to be repeated.

- **Reconciliation** requires two people. Forgiveness can be unilateral. Reconciliation cannot.
- **Restored trust** is earned over time by changed behavior. Forgiving someone does not mean handing them the credit card again next week.
- **The absence of consequences** is not part of any of this. A person may be genuinely forgiven and still face the results of what they did.

A couple that knows these four distinctions is better prepared than a couple that has been told to forgive without ever being told what the word means.

THE WINE THAT RAN OUT

Tonight is where the Cana thread arrives at its lowest point. Say it explicitly: this is what it looks like when a marriage has no wine. Not a rough patch. Nothing left in the jars.

Then say the thing they will need: the story does not end at verse 3. Somebody notices, somebody says it out loud to the only person who can act, and the servants are told to do whatever he says. Session 14 finishes it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- 1 Samuel 1:1-18. Hannah's grief, and a husband who says the wrong thing while trying to help. Verse 8 is worth reading twice.
- Job 2:9-10. A wife at the end of her endurance, and a husband who does not condemn her. Handle her with sympathy; she lost the same ten children he lost.
- Hosea, from Session 3. Betrayal, and a covenant kept from one side.
- Luke 2:41-51. Even the Holy Family loses a child for three days, and the text says plainly that they did not understand.
- John 19:25-27. Mary standing at the cross. The word woman returns, as the group discovered in Session 5.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: STS. LOUIS AND ZELIE MARTIN

Louis and Zelie Martin married in 1858, had nine children, and buried four of them. Zelie ran a lace business and carried much of the family's income, and died of breast cancer in 1877 while the children were young. Louis raised the surviving daughters, suffered a severe decline in his final years, and died in 1894. They were canonized together in 2015, the parents of St. Therese of Lisieux.

They are here because they answer the suspicion that holy marriages are the ones that go well. Four dead children, a business, a long illness, and a widower's decline. The Church looked at that and said: this is what a holy marriage looks like.

Historical summary. Canonized together in October 2015.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. MONICA, WITH A NECESSARY QUALIFICATION

St. Monica prayed for the conversion of her husband and of her son for decades. Her son, St. Augustine, records in the Confessions that her husband was difficult and that she persevered, and that both were eventually baptized.

Now the qualification, and say it in the room. Augustine also reports counsel she gave other wives about enduring difficult husbands, and the Church today does not counsel anyone to remain in danger. What is worth taking from St. Monica is the perseverance of her prayer across decades, not a model for handling a

violent household. Say both halves or leave her out.

Confessions, Book IX, on Monica and Patricius. Note for the leader: read the qualification above before using this voice.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH ON SEPARATION

The Church's law holds that spouses are to maintain their common life unless a legitimate cause excuses them, and it recognizes such causes: adultery, subject to the conditions of canon 1152, grave danger of spirit or body to a spouse or to the children, and conduct that makes common life too hard. In urgent cases a spouse may act on their own authority.

The bond remains and neither is free to remarry. Nobody is required to stay in the house.

Summary of the Code of Canon Law, canons 1151-1155. Note for the leader: a legal text; consult the current text for exact wording.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1642 describes the grace of the sacrament as strengthening the spouses to bear one another's burdens, to forgive, and to love with a supernatural love.

CCC 1615 acknowledges directly that the teaching on indissolubility can seem impossible, and that it is livable only by grace.

CCC 2383 recognizes that separation may be legitimate, and that civil divorce may be tolerated where it is the only way to secure certain legal rights, the care of children, or the protection of inheritance. It does not use the language of protecting an endangered spouse; for danger, cite canons 1151 to 1153.

CCC 2373-2379 covers infertility, the suffering it causes, and the Church's support for research and for the fruitfulness of charity.

CCC 2842-2845 treats forgiveness, including the honest admission that it is not in our own power and requires grace.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

They Have No Wine reaches its lowest point tonight, and this is the payoff of planting it in Session 5. Use the phrase directly. Then hold the resolution for next week.

The Bridegroom is present at the cross, which the group found in Session 5. If someone raises it, affirm it and hold.

Watch everyone. This session surfaces more than any other: family histories, a parent's drinking, a participant's own past. Plan to stay afterward, have the priest's number in your pocket, and make no other commitments that evening.

IF A COUPLE IS IN AN IRREGULAR SITUATION (LEADER ONLY)

A participant who discloses abuse in their family of origin. Receive it, thank them, do not probe for detail, and follow the safeguarding note. Ask what support they already have. Do not make it the room's business.

A participant who discloses something concerning about their own relationship. This is the most

serious thing that can happen in a marriage preparation study, and it does happen. Do not evaluate the relationship. Do not tell them to call off the wedding, and do not reassure them either. Get the priest involved this week, and if there is any indication of danger, act on the safeguarding note immediately.

A couple carrying a recent loss. A miscarriage, a parent's death, a serious diagnosis. Ask them privately beforehand whether this is a session they would rather sit out. Giving them the choice is a kindness. Making them explain in front of the room is not.

A participant whose parent had an affair. The betrayal material will hit them hard. Watch for it, follow up privately, and do not assume you know which parent they blame.

Anyone who says they will simply never let any of this happen to them. Be gentle. Many couples do not expect these hardships to touch them. Say it once, kindly, and move on.

Session Goals

1. The group reads 1 Corinthians 13 as a description of behavior under provocation rather than as a wedding sentiment.
2. The group finds marriages in Scripture that suffered, and can say what carried them.
3. Every participant knows that legitimate separation exists, that the bond remains, and that no one is asked to remain in danger.
4. Every participant can distinguish forgiveness, reconciliation, restored trust, and the absence of consequences.
5. Every couple names, out loud, the two people they would call at two in the morning.
6. The safeguarding information is stated in the room, plainly, whether or not anyone appears to need it.

Time Note and Pre-Chosen Cuts

Ninety-minute plan. Opening prayer, 4 minutes. Win questions, 8. Reading 1 Corinthians 13 aloud, 5. Live discovery moment, 14. Build questions 1 through 4, 22. Separation and forgiveness material, 20. The steelman, 12. Send and Live It, 3. Closing prayer, 2.

Seventy-five minute plan. Cut Build question 4 and the Dig Deeper box. Never cut the separation material and never cut the four distinctions about forgiveness.

Do not schedule anything after this session. Stay in the room. The conversations that matter tonight happen while you are stacking chairs.

Part 2. Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

OPENING PRAYER

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord Jesus, you did not promise us an easy road and you did not leave us on it alone. Tonight we are going to talk about the hardest things that happen to people who love each other. Give us courage instead of fear. For anyone here already carrying something heavy, be close to them. And teach us now, while it is calm, what we will need to know when it is not. Amen.

Win. Getting Started

Open questions. No wrong answers, no answer box. Let every couple speak once before anyone speaks twice.

- A.** Tell us about a marriage you know that went through something hard and came out the other side. What did you actually see?
- B.** Who is the person in your life who shows up when things go wrong, and what do they do?

Build. Into the Text

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 aloud, slowly. Ask the room to listen for how many of the descriptions are negative.

- 1.** Count the negatives in verses 4 through 7. What does that tell you about the situation St. Paul is describing?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Not jealous, not boastful, not arrogant, not rude, does not insist on its own way, not irritable, not resentful. Most of the passage describes what love refrains from doing.

You only need that list when you are being provoked. This is not a description of a wedding day. It is a description of somebody keeping their temper in year eleven.

Note the context if it helps: St. Paul wrote this to a congregation that was fighting about status. It is a rebuke before it is a poem.

LIVE DISCOVERY MOMENT

The instruction: find marriages in Scripture that suffered. Any kind of suffering. Write down what went wrong, and what, if anything, held.

Twelve minutes, in pairs. Do not give them references.

What they will find: Abraham and Sarah, waiting decades and handling it badly in between. Elkanah and Hannah, where verse 8 has a husband saying something well meant and useless. Job and his wife, who lost the same ten children he did. Hosea and Gomer, from Session 3. Zechariah and Elizabeth, old and childless. Joseph and Mary, who flee a country and later lose their son for three days.

Then ask two questions. First: does Scripture ever present a marriage that suffered as a failed marriage? Second: what actually held, in the cases where something held?

Expect these answers: God's promise, prayer, and time. Expect somebody to notice that in most of these cases the couple never received an explanation.

2. Look at 1 Samuel 1:8, where Elkanah asks Hannah whether he is not more to her than ten sons. What is he doing, and how does it go?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He is trying, and he is minimizing her grief while trying. He wants her to be consoled by him rather than to be sad.

The text does not condemn him, and it does not say it worked. She goes to the temple and weeps bitterly, which is what she needed to do.

Practical lesson, said plainly: when your spouse is grieving, the instinct to fix it by offering yourself as compensation is well meant and does not work. Sit with them instead.

3. In sickness and in health is in the vow. What kinds of sickness are you actually likely to face?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Most couples picture cancer at seventy. They are at least as likely to meet depression at thirty two, a chronic pain condition, an anxiety disorder, an addiction that arrives slowly, or a parent's dementia that lands on both of them.

Ask the room whether they have discussed mental illness as a live possibility rather than as an abstraction. Most have not.

Then say the useful sentence: the vow already covers it. Nothing will need renegotiating. What they will need is to know where the help is.

SEPARATION, AND WHAT THE CHURCH ACTUALLY PERMITS

4. If the bond cannot be dissolved, is a spouse obliged to keep living with the other no matter what?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

No, and this surprises most Catholics. The Church's law holds that spouses maintain their common life unless a legitimate cause excuses them, and recognizes causes including adultery, subject to the conditions of canon 1152, grave danger of spirit or body to a spouse or to the children, and conduct that makes common life too hard. In urgent cases a spouse may act on their own authority (canons 1151-1155).

The bond remains and neither is free to remarry. But nobody is required to stay in the house.

The Catechism also recognizes that civil divorce may be tolerated where it is the only way to secure certain legal rights, the care of children, or the protection of inheritance (CCC 2383). Where the issue is danger, the ground is the separation law, canons 1151 to 1153.

Say the sentence directly, because somebody's grandmother believed otherwise: the sacrament is not a reason to be hurt.

BUILD THEN PRESS: PERMANENCE TRAPS PEOPLE, AND THE CHURCH KNOWS IT

Build it at full strength.

Build it honestly. This is the humane version of the objection and it deserves better than a slogan.

Whatever the theology, the practical effect of teaching that marriage cannot end is that people stay in situations they should leave. Women in particular have been counseled to endure, told to offer it up, told that their suffering was redemptive, and told that leaving would scandalize the parish. The Church may formally permit separation, but the formal permission is invisible next to the constant emphasis on permanence, and the message people actually receive is the one that keeps them in the house. If a teaching's predictable effect is that vulnerable people remain in harm, the teaching bears some responsibility for that effect regardless of its intentions.

Then press.

Concede the whole first half, and concede it without qualification. That counsel was given. It was wrong. It was not the Church's teaching, it was given by people who spoke for her, and the harm was real. Do not defend it.

Press first on the remedy the objection implies. If the bond were dissolvable, the person in danger would not be safer tonight; they would have a different legal status. What makes someone safe is leaving, help, and money, all of which the Church's own teaching permits, and which her ministers should actively help a person reach through civil, diocesan, and professional channels. The failure here has been pastoral rather than doctrinal, and the fix is pastoral: say the permission out loud, constantly, which is exactly what this session is doing.

Press second on what the permanence protects. The same permanence a violent man could exploit is the reason a woman whose husband has a stroke at forty is not quietly replaced. Any safeguard can be turned into a weapon by someone determined to do so. The question is what the arrangement does across the whole range of cases.

Do not overclaim. Do not say that no one was ever harmed by bad counsel, and do not claim the Church has fully reckoned with it. Say that the teaching permits separation, that failing to say so loudly has been a real fault, and that in this room it is being said loudly.

Then read the safeguarding information aloud, including the hotline number, whether or not anyone in the room appears to need it.

FORGIVENESS, AND THREE THINGS IT IS NOT

5. Distinguish forgiveness from reconciliation, from restored trust, and from the absence of consequences.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Forgiveness is releasing the debt. It is commanded (Matthew 6:14-15), it is an act of the will rather than a feeling, and it usually has to be repeated more than once for the same offense.

Reconciliation takes two people. You can forgive alone. You cannot reconcile alone.

Restored trust is earned by changed behavior over time. Forgiving somebody does not mean giving them the passwords back on Tuesday.

The absence of consequences is not part of any of it. A person can be genuinely forgiven and still lose something because of what they did.

Say why it matters. Couples who have never been given these distinctions either withhold forgiveness because they think it means pretending, or grant it and then feel obliged to act as though nothing happened. Both are avoidable.

DIG DEEPER: THE WINE THAT RAN OUT

Session 5 planted a phrase. Tonight it lands. When a marriage has nothing left in the jars, that is not a failure of planning and it is not proof that the wrong two people married each other.

Notice the sequence at Cana. Somebody noticed. Somebody said it out loud to the only person who could do anything. And the servants were told to do whatever he said.

That is the whole pastoral strategy of this study: notice, say it, and do what he tells you. Next week finishes the story.

COUPLE CONVERSATION (JUST THE TWO OF YOU, NOT THE ROOM)

Just the two of you. This is the practical heart of the session.

Who are the two people we would call at two in the morning? Say their names. If we cannot name two, that is the thing to fix this year.

What is our full financial picture, including every debt, loan, and obligation either of us has? If either of us has not disclosed something, say it tonight.

What is the hardest thing in my family history that you should know before we marry? Both of you answer.

6. In John 19, Mary stands at the cross. What is she doing, and what is she not doing?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

She is standing there. She is not fixing it, not explaining it, and not being spared it.

The group found this scene in Session 5 while tracing the hour. The woman from the wedding at Cana is at the cross, and he speaks to her with the same word.

Say the application plainly: much of what a spouse will be asked to do in the hard years is to remain present at something they cannot fix. That is not failure. In that passage the center is Christ's self-offering, and her faithful presence is a profound witness of persevering love.

Send. Carrying It Out

Open questions again. No answer boxes.

Y. What is the one thing from tonight you most hope you will remember in fifteen years?

Z. What would you want your spouse to do for you, specifically, on the worst day of your life?

Live It This Week

- **Name your two people, and tell them.** Call the two you would ring at two in the morning and ask them, out loud, to be those people. Most will say yes and be honored that you asked.
- **Full financial disclosure this week.** Every debt, every loan, every obligation, both directions. Sit down with actual numbers rather than summaries.
- **Write down where the help is.** Your parish's number, a counselor your parish recommends, and the domestic violence hotline. Put them in both your phones now, while nothing is wrong.

- **Read Revelation 19:6-9 before the last session,** and read Ephesians 5:31-32 one more time alongside it.

Closing Prayer

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you know exactly what it costs to keep a promise that hurts. You did not come down, and you did not stop loving us. Give us that kind of steadiness. Prepare us now, while things are good, for the days when they are not. Where anyone here is already in the dark, be there with them. And when our wine runs out, make us the kind of people who notice, and say it, and do whatever you tell us.

Sts. Louis and Zelie Martin, pray for us. Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:7

Part 3. Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. The session text, read as a description of behavior under provocation.
- 1 Samuel 1:1-18, especially verse 8. Hannah's grief and Elkanah's well meant answer.
- Job 2:9-10. Job's wife, handled with sympathy.
- Luke 2:41-51. The Holy Family loses a child for three days.
- John 19:25-27. Mary at the cross. The group met this in Session 5.
- Matthew 6:14-15. Forgiveness commanded.
- Canons 1151-1155. Separation while the bond remains.
- Revelation 19:6-9 and Ephesians 5:31-32. Assigned reading before Session 14.

Catechism Paragraphs Used

CCC 1615, 1642, 2383, 2842-2845. Code of Canon Law, canons 1151-1155.

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 19:6-9 before Session 14, and read Ephesians 5:31-32 once more alongside it.